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Power and Performativity in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Characterization of Draupadi

Saumya Sharma

Abstract

Focussing on Divakaruni's characterization of the 'fiery' princess Draupadi, born of fire and volatile by disposition, **t**his article is an attempt to analyse the precise operations of power in Draupadi's life, her rebellious streak despite continued subordination and the ambivalence of her subjection, being intertwined with her 'masculinization' and desire. The article argues that through the workings of power, she re-embodies and reconstitutes her subjugation, shifting between a femininized, normative identity and a masculinized gender role. This is made graphic and vibrant by Divakaruni's masterly third person narration that allows the protagonist to articulate her gendering and desire, causing writers to envisage her as a powerful, feminist figure.

Keywords: power, performativity, Draupadi, masculinization, desire

Introduction

Scholarly writings on the timeless epic Mahabharata (that recounts the struggles and triumphs of the close-knit Pandava brothers against the cruel machinations of the Kauravas) highlight broad schools of thought that have contributed an extensive body of research on it. The tale has been scrutinized from several perspectives ranging from synchronic views to diachronic studies about its origins, influences and historiography (Proudfoot 1979). The epic has also been probed from the point of view of heroic literature, dharma and the socio-cultural aspect (Brockington 1998; Hiltebeitel 2001) and in recent years there has been an emerging interest in issues of identity, gender, sexuality and narrative (Brodbeck and Black 2007).

Apart from studies on the entire text, micro studies have also been done on particular characters, their relationships with others and their roles in the story, especially the women

characters as Kunti, Gandhari, Satyavati and Draupadi to name a few. Some of the earlier works in this area focus on the customs, beliefs and practices of women in relation to the socio-cultural milieu of those times (Jayal 1966; Shah 1995). Bhattacharya's (2006) exposition of the *panch-kanya,* including Draupadi and Kunti, sheds light on the power and force of these ladies who can become guides for modern women. In addition, Dhand's work explores the sexuality of these and other women characters in relation to the *nivritti* and *pravitti* dharma and the myths and stereotypes about sexuality, claiming that women's sexuality was a "source of anxiety" for religion (Dhand; 2008: 19). Yet others examine the speech of the women characters, kinship and marriage together with how the women became heroes in their own right (McGrath 2009) while the issues of rape, marriage and seduction are the subject of analysis in Doniger's work (2014). Brodbeck and Black's (2007) edited volume too carries analysis of the women characters along side the men and transsexuals. However, one of the main methodological problems facing the researcher of the text is its multiple versions including the modern day retellings of the story in fictional form, hence any form of analysis calls for a delineation of the main text under study. In this article, I focus on the identity of Draupadi as written in Chitra Baneerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. The character of Draupadi has constantly fascinated scholars and in some of the traditional or modern renditions (see Badrinath Chaturvedi 2006; Sawant 2017; Rajgopalachari 2010; Karve 2007 among others) she is portrayed as an intelligent, beautiful and 'fiery' woman who follows the patriarchal norms of the times despite her polyandrous marriage and whose disrobing acts as a catalyst for the annihilation of the entire Kuru clan. The focus invariably is on her suffering and/or feminist leanings. Unlike these and the other works that I will discuss shortly, in this article I do not claim that she is a powerful, feminist character. On the contrary, through the lens of Judith Butler's writings on power and performativity, I attempt a reading of Draupadi's subjection to power and its consequences on her gender identity and desire and this I argue make her a forceful character in Divakaruni's story.

Review of Literature

The plethora of work on Draupadi signify the academia's relentless interest in her life, actions and beliefs as depicted in various texts. Since my focus is on Divakaruni's text, I will briefly discuss some of the works on Draupadi in general and specifically on Divakaruni's novel. One of the most extensive studies of her character has been done by Hiltebeitel (1991) in his now famous work the *Cult of Draupadi* that examines the myths, festivals, rituals, temples and oral performances related to her against the backdrop of the Mahabharata story, Vedic literature and religion, which is part of the broader project on Indology studies. A different perspective on idealized womanhood and the extent to which Druapadi conforms to it in relation to the laws of Manu has been discussed by Mukherjee (1994) and Gupta (1994), throwing light on her historical and socio-legal position. Alternatively, Luthra (2014) examines the retellings of the epics, particularly the revisionist narratives of Sita and Draupadi and how they help to question dominant ideologies and beliefs.

In recent years, scholars have also worked on Draupadi characterization in Divakaruni's tale for instance the manner in which she has suffered, the injustices done to her and how she resists them. Studies explore how Divakaruni's version dismantles the dominant religious discourses and the essentialist stereotypes of femininity through the figure of Draupadi (Garćia-Arroya 2017). Likewise, Draupadi agency and power and the interaction between gender and politics becomes the focus of Hoydis' work (2012) who explores how Divakaruni through her narrative style imbues feminist leanings in her Draupadi, even though she is painted through multiple hues as wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc. Yet others explore her role as a historian, in Divakaruni and Pratibha Ray's story, who interrogates the events of the Mahabharata from her perspective (Suresh 2019) in her quest for meaning and a higher self. As Draupadi performs her multiple roles, she develops from being a victim of patriarchy to developing higher consciousness. Alternatively, some have analysed her relevance in contemporary times (Bhattacharya and Srivastava 2018), however the focus in most of these writings is invariably on her roles, her perspective, her victimization and how she resists male domination to tell her story.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

As mentioned earlier, my article is a departure from the above-mentioned writings in that it does not claim Draupadi to be powerful but it traces the origin and trajectory of her power, her continued existence due to it, asserting the ambivalence of her subjection which is intertwined with her masculinization and her desire. In this work, I use the term 'gender' in the sense of a binary – feminine and masculine identities – in relation to Draupadi though I show that Draupadi is not polarized to either one.

Analysis

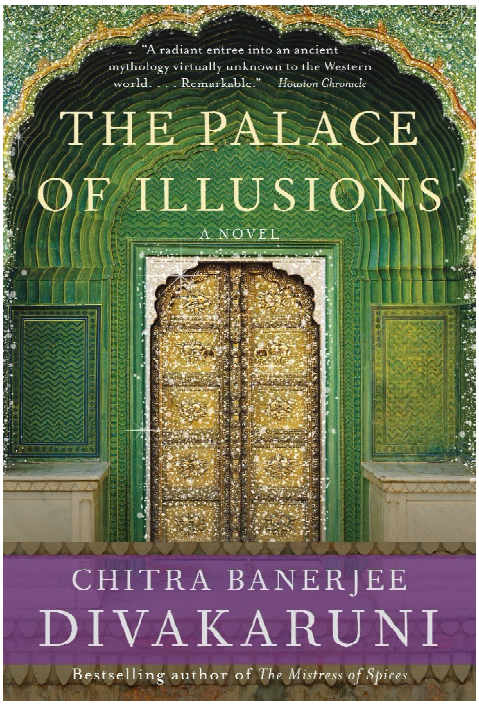
Judith Butler's seminal writings (1990, 1997) have changed the fabric of social thought by challenging the stability of gender and emphasizing the ubiquitous presence of power in a society's social structure. Drawing on Foucault's notion of power (1972), she argues for the constraining and reproductive nature of power in the everyday lives of individuals. More importantly, the trajectory of subjection created through the operation of power and its continued effect on a person's gender identity becomes visible, linking the social to the psychological. Power thus "forms the subject" and their desire (Butler, 1997:2). Moreover, even though it appears external, it is interiorized and psychically maintained.

The earliest operations of power can be seen in naming and the use of language that interpellates the individual to a subject position/site. In Divakaruni's text, Draupadi is named so after her father Drupad, showing her subordination to him but she has other names too that signify the operation of power in different ways: her names *Krishnaa* shows her dependence on Krishna while *Yagyaseni* shows that she draws her ferocity from fire as she is born from it. From the beginning she depicts a desire to survive, even though she is subjugated to the patriarchal norms of her father's palace and the culture of those times. Yet she is neither fully subordinate nor fully compliant which causes several writers (discussed above) to claim her as a feminist. However, I argue that the creation of the precise conditions for her subjection give her power and help to recreate her gender identity.

Power is transitive in the sense that it both acts upon the subject and is acted by the subject; it is both responsible for agency and the cause of subordination (Butler 1997) and the source of it can be found psychologically. From her childhood, Draupadi yearns for her father's love. A telling scene from the text is when after the birth of his children, Drupad walks towards them, holding out his hand for Dhristadyumna, "for my brother alone" (Divakaruni, 2008: 6) as Draupadi states but because the siblings clutched each other, Drupad was forced to pick up both and acknowledge his daughter as well! Herein, we see the first seed of rejection which, though ably masked by Drupad, is astutely gauged by his daughter. Growing up without a maternal influence, expect her Dhai ma (nanny), Draupadi often feels stifled within the confines of her stately palace and her repetitive insistence on wanting to hear how she was born and the prophecy at her birth, is a reminder of her need for recognition and love. The fact that she clings on to her brother is another sign of this, accentuated by her realization that the servants, Drupad himself and his young wife Sulochana maintain a safe distance from her. Her subjection is, thus, rooted in her desire to survive and to be accepted and this pattern continues even after she is married, as she longs for the love of Arjun who despite winning her hand in the *swayamvara* ceremony, is embittered because he has to share her with his brothers as directed by their mother Kunti. Thus, her subordination to patriarchal norms such as accepting her marriage to the Pandavas, the performance of her wifely duties, maintaining the sanctity of the marital vows by being devoted to each of her husbands is because of her need for love, acceptance and survival, both in her own eyes and in front of others, yet it bespeaks of possibilities for her.

Butler explains that the process of subordination is not linear but ambivalent as resistance to power is simultaneous with its recuperation; "the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination" (Butler, 1997: 13) making the person both an agent of change and subjection. It is here that I would locate Draupadi's gender identity and the role of performativity, linking it to the notion of power. In her landmark work *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler proposes the fluidity of gender and its iterative performance that is a "corporeal style" that is both "intentional" and "performative" (Butler 1988: 522). Due to repetition, over time, gender is congealed to give a solid appearance when it is no more that a "cultural fiction" (Ibid.) constructed and practiced for survival. Thus, a person's gender is culturally

and historically constructed and reconstructed, bearing the mark of temporality. Being a woman, Draupadi's feminine identity can be understood not only through her body (her dark complexion and sheer beauty) but also through instances when she consciously performs her femininity, like when she is taught by the sorceress the art of seduction as a prerequisite to marriage– "how to bite, slightly, the swollen lower lip…how to make bangles ring…how to walk the back swaying" (Divakaruni, 2008: 62). Similarly, when Kunti admonishes her for her style of cooking, insulting her for her pampered upbringing, she respectfully addresses Kunti requesting that she be permitted to continue cooking to ease Kunti's chores. Linguistically, she addresses her as "respected mother, being so much younger, I know my culinary skills can't equal yours. But its my duty to relieve you of my burdens whenever possible" (Divakaruni, 2008: 110). The honorific term of address, the act of acknowledging Kunti's wisdom and skills in comparison to hers and the act of requesting to help, all demonstrate her role as an eager, duty-bound and submissive daughter-in-law even though she knows its a ploy for her survival. The fact that the food cooked by her is relished by her husbands and her telling statement "both she and I knew that I'd won the first round" (Divakaruni, 2008: 111) highlights that Draupadi's femininity is a conscious performance, a willing subordination to patriarchal power for recognition.



Butler (1988, 1990) argues that gender performativity is polarized by the two genders and is heteronormative, excluding the queer community. This echoes Beauvoir's famous injunction about how women are made in society (1952) but Draupadi's gendering and performativity in this fictional tale is different. Not only does she perform her feminine identity but there are strong shades of masculinity in Divakaruni's characterization of her, which I would call as the masculinization of her character. Draupadi is not just subjected to power but also challenges and resists it, resignifying her role in the epic tale or what Butler would call as "the subject's 'own' power" (1997: 15). Not only does Draupadi conform to her feminine identity for her survival and need for love but she often portrays a more masculinized self in resisting the cultural norms and ideological beliefs of her time. It is not a simple case of a woman being oppressed and going against patriarchy as is evident from her curse on the Kuru clan after her infamous disrobing but of displaying attributes and characteristics that are often associated with boys and men such as assertiveness,

outspokenness, rebelliousness, independence, pride, leadership skills and taste for intellectual knowledge/ impersonal topics (Tannen 1990). Hence, her masculinization is a trope used by Divakaruni to retell the story and restructure her identity. Another aspect that is not in consonance with her femininity is her oft-repeated desire for Karna which I will discuss later.

In terms of her education, Druapadi acknowledges that though she is taught womanly skills of sewing, embroidery, painting and music, "the lessons were painful both for my teachers and me" since her drawings were "blotchy…and full of improvisations" (Divakaruni, 2008: 29). She is, admittedly, better at intellectual skills of writing and solving riddles, poetry and "responding to witty remarks" (Ibid.), the latter showing her outspokenness and interest in activities not deemed suitable for women. The bluntness of her speech can be understood from another incident when she realises that in marrying Arjun she is not getting the love she longed for but is merely a pawn for a strategic military alliance. Angered, she states to her brother that she and her brother are "pawns for Kind Drupad to sacrifice when it's most to his advantage" (Divakaruni, 2008: 58) and that Drupad will sacrifice his son to get his revenge from Drona. Her belligerent nature comes to the fore when she removes the curtain and smiles at her brother's teacher who is stunned by her beauty and leaves the room immediately, and when asked why she did so, she states that she is irritated by his constant assertion that women are the source of all the trouble in the world. Here again, she consciously performs a feminine act of smiling to avenge the insult on her gender, highlighting that she is not the submissive, quiet type.

Her strength and independence is visible in her interaction with sage Vyasa when disguised in ordinary clothes she stealthily leaves the palace for the sage's hermitage to enquire about her future. Seeing the spirits rising from the smoke, Draupadi is shocked and scared but undeterred, she boldly eggs the sage to ask the spirits whether her heart's desire will be fulfilled. When he addresses her as 'child', she retaliates by saying, "I'm no child, and I do know what I want! I want to leave a mark on history, as was promised to me at my birth" (Divakaruni 2008, 39). Here, Vyasa appreciates her strength and tenacity and does so again, when he secretly foretells Parikshit's doom to her. Another aspect of her masculinized personality is when her husbands, particularly Yudhishthir, ask her for advice on matters of governance and her confession that though she bore five sons yet she was soon tired of maternal cares, only to be rescued by Dhai ma who looked after the children. In fact, one can state that her polyandry is a case of subjection and resistance to power. She marries because of the dictats of society but her peculiar marital status bestows her power, winning her the loyalty of her husbands as she undergoes the trials and tribulations of life along with them. Divakaruni's Draupadi is, therefore, quite unfeminine at times, bordering on being a male character in a woman's body. Initially confined as a young girl to a male-dominated social structure, Divakaruni delineates Draupadi's masculinization at several points in the story. However, it is important to note that the shift from a feminine to a more masculine self and vice-versa varies throughout the narrative.

Yet another piece of evidence that goes in favour of this argument is her desire for Karna. Draupadi's fascination for Karna and longing for him begins when she sees his portrait, and then him in person, as part of the suitors in her *swayamvara*. Even though she is married to the Pandavas, yet she continues to long for him, often thinking how different her life would have been if she were his wife. From admitting that she "wanted to be the reason for his smile" (Divakaruni, 2008: 69) to feeling that "Karna would not have let you down like this" (Divakaruni, 2008: 109) when Arjun did not speak against polyandry, Draupadi continues to love Karna, even though she loves her husbands. Wanting to return his warm greetings at Hastinapur but not doing so because of the presence of Kunti and later feeling happy when Indra gives him a boon for his generosity, Draupadi nurtures her adoration for him and this even overshadows her hatred for his behaviour at the disrobing and finally culminates into joy on being united with him after her death. Though her wish is unspoken to other characters yet by repeatedly articulating her desire for another man Divakaruni demonstrates her deviation from ideal womanhood. Rather, the iterative articulations strengthen her bold image, as if a man is speaking of his love for his beloved.

Butler (1990) is of the view that in their relationships to society, individuals are constantly negotiating their desire with themselves, governed by what others want and expect from us, yet Divakaruni's Draupadi not just becomes what others desire but also expresses her own desire, uncommon for women in that context. Her agency to act exceeds her subordination and her performance of gender depicting both feminine and masculine aspects can be traced to the operation of power in her life. The shift in gender performativity is complex and textured, showing the multiple points where she chooses one of the gender identities to re-narrate history from her perspective.

Conclusion

The origin of gender is artfully concealed by the performance of gender (Butler 1988). Moreover, a subject can only speak about itself in third person narration (Butler 1997) and this has been ably demonstrated by Divakaruni's storytelling style where she constructs a Draupadi whose gender identity can be traced back to the ambivalence of power in her life. Draupadi is not just acted upon by power but is an effect of power, created by resisting, challenging, supporting and following it. While her own tenacity highlights her agency to act and speak in a masculinized way yet the pressures on her cause her to submit to patriarchal practices. Through the operation of dominance, she re-embodies and reconstitutes her subjection, shifting between a femininized, normative identity and a masculinization of her gender and vice-versa. It is because of the operation of power, masculinization of her gender and her desire that writers often claim that she is a powerful, feminist character, seeking justice.

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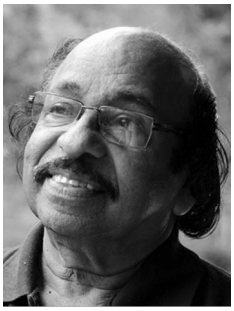
Before We Took Over

K. Satchidanandan



Before we took over,
Earth was ruled by humans.
They had flesh and blood and bones.
They thought, they were sad,
They laughed, sang and even wrote books.

One day humans, using their intelligence,
Killed one another,
Leaving earth to us.

Since we don't have hearts
We don't love, and have no brain
No thoughts too.
We have neither the memories of the past
Nor visions of the future.
We don't want anything to change.
Since we don't know what justice is,
We don't even recognise injustice.
We believe what we hear and
Obey orders with total unconcern.

There are people who still think
We are humans.
They are just stupid optimists.
There will be no more humans.
They will only remain as a topic
Of research for our offspring.

A House Called Sorrow

Sorrow is a house,
its walls painted yellow
and ceiling green with fungus.

It has many rooms, from melancholy
and pain to anguish and depression
Darkness and chill go on growing
as one moves from room to room

There are doors from one room to another,
like from autumn to winter, but
there are no windows, only small
casements for sighs to pass.

The last room opens to a deep well.
Even the screams of those who
step out of its door never come out.

Some are tenants in this
house, but some stay here forever,
until a catastrophe liberates them
into eternal darkness.

Those who dwell there do not even know
there is a garden of pleasure outside it
The loud laughter and the hisses of kisses
from the garden strike those yellow doors,
shatter and fall on the moist earth below.
Sweet scents return to their sources
fluttering their spotted wings,
scared of the darkness within.

Those hurrying along the road in front
must have sometimes had a glimpse
of that house; but those people struggling
to survive hardly find time to stay there .

The fairies guarding that house at times
invite me too to stay there; but the choked
screams I had heard from the neighbouring
rooms and the chewed bones flung
from them during my short stay there
in the past keep dissuading me.

Even my language had left me then.
Silence covered me like a termites' mound.
And when I broke out of it
there were three flags in my hand:
one green,
one blue,
one red.

Between Seventy and Seventyfive

There is a dark place between
Seventy and seventy five: broad
Like memory, deep like death.
Those trapped there have no return.
They roam about in the childhood bushes
Or fall headlong into the well of decrepitude.

Be warned if those between seventy and seventy five
Behave like the young: for, they *are* young.
They can love, can dance to music, and if need be
Even lead a war or a revolution. In fact
They are not dead, like most young are.

Those between seventy and seventy five
May suffer from delusions: at times they want
A horse-ride; at times want to fly above oceans and mountains
On the back of an eagle, wander along deserts
Looking for water that is not there, stand naked
In the rain, or read a poem no one has written yet. There
Are times when they feel history is retracing its step,
And feel like crying aloud, screaming, almost.

The solitude of those between seventy and seventy five
Is sepia, like some early morning dreams or
Like the friendships in old albums. When they
Laugh, sunlight retreats into village lanes.
Their sweat smells soft like sesame flowers.
Their walk is like the descending scale of *saveri (1)*
And their lilting speech is littered with *gamakas (2)*

You wonder, why, this is all about men. Yes,
Women do not pass at all between
Seventy and seventy five; invisible to us,
They just glide along on a tender rainbow of affection,
With the soft feet of fairies fragrant like heaven
And the smile of oleanders, an invitation to salvation.

Saveri : A raga in Karnatic music
Gamakas: embellishments done on a musical note

Hamdi Hameed Youssif

Islamic Platonism: Ingress to Social Orientation in *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles* III

Hamdi Hameed Youssif
Oliver Scharbrodt
Haider Ghazi Jassim AL.

Abstract

The most paramount target of the study is to manifest the roots of the Islamic Platonism and its impact on the social orientation in both *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III*. Thus , there are two sections ; Islamic Platonism and Social Orientation and Social Orientation into Application, the first comes as theoretical and the second as practical. As a matter of explication, it is hypothesized that the Islamic Platonism in general and the Miskawayh ethics in particular contribute many ethical touches and much depth to the Husseinist theatre theory and the futuristic play as it endeavours hard to guide man to enlightenment and prosperity. Moreover, it is hypothesized that the social orientation, being in the serving others, goes socially higher in the saddle nowadays. In doing so, the study develops an eclectic model to explicate certain excerpts from the selected plays to trace the sense of the social orientation after crystallizing the theoretical side in section one. The two plays yield themselves to the social orientation and prove that the pivotal characters sacrifice everything for the sake of faith and the others. After all, the eclectic model employed in the study could be applied to explicate modern novel and poetry in light of the social orientation. The conclusion results in these two plays cuddling and emphasizing that confronting death does nothing in the face of a man with a freedom-loving soul or with a beneficence-trying hand. Future studies of the Islamic Platonism and access to social orientation are desperately needed to fathom and show how man should respond to life fraught with hectic daily challenges.

Keywords: modern verse drama, social orientation, Platonism, Islamic Platonism, Islam passion play, futuristic play , cathartic effect , self-knowledge

Section A: Islamic Platonism and Social Orientation

Platonism as a concept concerns itself much with bits of liberation of man from mundanity and human desires into the bits of wisdom (Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton 32) and salvages man from loss and being " scattered " (210) as much as it advocates the pillars of being and existence. Man thirsts for reason and intellectuality (Walter Pater 127) and for "a more perfect justice, a more perfect beauty and "a more perfect condition of human affair" (126-7). Calling for perfection, peace of mind, security and prosperity tends to be an essential necessity at all times, that is why literature reflects such a propensity for more platonic ideas and visions in its genres. Most of the writers; Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden and Iris Murdoch, exploit such platonic images in their artworks to perceive the world. For them, Plato, is ingress to fathom the surroundings and to respond efficaciously to life (Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton 2).

As a corollary, Platonism confronts a state of ebb and flow throughout ages. In the medieval age prose and poetry revert into platonic ideas, in the Renaissance it works in tandem with humanism and lurks in the love poems of the Elizabethan period. Then in the seventeenth century the religious aspects are coalesced with the platonic prismatic colours, yet the eighteenth century shows no patina of Platonism, and in the nineteenth century it emerges more ostensibly as "secular and scholarly". In the twentieth century Platonism is employed more vehemently to scrutinize a society (xiv). That is to say, Platonism as a catalyst for both "creativity and poetic imagination" (12) proffers a kind of reason and spirit to shield humanism from "social fragmentation" (271). The eternal realities lie in " the good, love and truth " that grant identity, "meaning and value to human life "(271).

What is more, Islam as a religion believes in peace and prosperity and nourishes man how to tame nature for the best levels of felicity in alignment with ethics and morality. For adequate betterment, Islamic Platonism is better observed and evidently traced in Miskawayh, Abu 'Ali Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ya'qub Miskawayh (932–1030), Islamic ethical thinker and the "Third Teacher", after Al-Farabi the "Second Teacher" and Aristotle the " First Teacher" (N.G. Al-Dīn 132), who gives much shrifts to ethics in particular and to Platonic principles in general than Al-Kindi does (Majid Fakhry 40). Even the term of the Islamic passion plays as related to HTT emanates from the Miskawayh impact on the Islamic Platonism:

The foregoing clarifies, to a great extent, how Miskawayh remained one of the Muslim thinkers most devoted to Greek philosophy, for he distinguished between reason and faith, or between philosophy and religion. Supreme happiness is a human happiness, one which is neither imposed nor withheld by anything outside the scope of people's will, and issuing from an intellect greater and stronger than their own Miskawayh discussion of the training of young men and boys is placed within this framework, and his viewpoint on the matter of training must be understood according to the age-group he is addressing. (N.G. Al-Den 136)

The study in question, Islamic Platonism: Ingress to Social Orientation in Eviternity Ash and King Charles III, takes hold of the Islamic Platonism and Social Orientation in these

two modern verse dramas to capture mind , logics , heart and reason under the "artistic persuasion "paraphernalia, ethos, logos and pathos appeals (Peter Thompson 7). These help the reader peruse a text and act as a permanent rapport between the reader and the text:

On the ethical and social side Humanism sets up service to all humankind as the ultimate moral ideal. It holds that as individuals we can find our own highest good in working for the good of all, which of course includes ourselves and our families. In this sophisticated and disillusioned era Humanism emphatically rejects, as psychologically naïve and scientifically unsound, the widespread notion that human beings are moved merely by self-interest. It repudiates the constant rationalization of brute egoism into pretentious schemes on behalf of individuals or groups bent on self-aggrandizement. It refuses to accept the reduction of human motivation to economic terms, to sexual terms, to pleasure-seeking terms, or to any one limited set of human desires. It insists on the reality of genuine altruism as one of the moving forces in the affairs of human beings. (Corliss Lamont, p. 16, 1997)

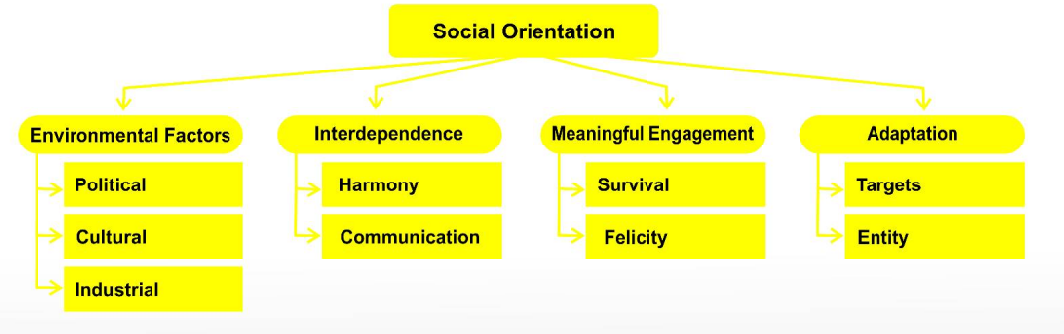
"working for the good of all" sounds resonant in the Islamic principles and wisdom literature ; the wisdom artworks , *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III*, belong to the HTT, Husseinist Theatre Theory , advocates to promulgate a kind of humanitarianism , interfaith dialogue and philanthropy man could resort in time of despondency and frustration . It is a kind of Platonism to prod "aphoristic literature", moral sagacity "and "uprightness" into the Islamic ethics the HTT exploits in its artwork (Majid Fakhry 40). Humanism or ethical principles is / are traceable throughout ages since literature acts as a surrogate for religion and vice versa in guiding him into self-identification , self-knowledge and affinity with other people in the world, nations and nature . That is why self-knowledge takes precedence over other humanism manifestos as it is the "chief part of wisdom" (Robin Headlam Wells 2005) finding great ground in the HTT manifestos that proffer certain remedies for various sophisticated problems. Husseinist dramas convey a kind of wisdom cosmopolitan, universal, moral, and beyond provincialism:

> If self-knowledge, meaning both awareness of your individual strengths and weaknesses and an understanding of humanity in general, was 'the chief part of wisdom', as Erasmus put it, literature could help you to acquire that wisdom... the arts of poetry and drama could help you to understand your 'human-kindness'. (Robin Headlam Wells 2005)

As a consequence, a trenchant critical view could fathom the root of social orientation in these two dramas in focus, arbitrate whether a text corrupts or edifies, truck the setting shifts, themes variety, techniques diversity to rationalize the theme beyond their se mise en scene devices and delve into the contour of the texts, literary or linguistic, moral or poetic, social or philosophical to have certain principles, doctrines and norms observed. Still further, literature in general or drama in particular gains momentum and credence in having great cathartic effect on the interlocutors and the readership as much as it attaches vinculum with every day life troubles and choices man confronts and transpires what really he thinks of. From time immemorial, man takes refuge in himself, nature and other people for the sake of peace of mind and tranquility. That is why, the social orientation, heaves into view to fathom

the social propensity of the pivotal characters in *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III*. Here cultures ramify into various types in concordance with their social orientation. A culture with an independent social orientation tends to certify the self and solitude, yet a culture with an interdependent social orientation tends to be more engrossed in harmony and "emotion". The former engages felicity and the latter disengages it, it is a matter of being lone or dovetailed to achieve the purpose in focus. (Michael E. W. Varnum et al .9).

For surety, the societal and environmental factors take so great a role to stern the prow of the social orientation, for instance, politics could impose the shape and soul of the social orientation of a nation as it calibrates the level of communal interactivity, connectivity and the system of industrialization (12). From another vantage point, the social orientation could be a way of survival as much as one exerts himself to be a part integral to his community:



(SO diagram 1)

Under the shade of the social orientation, man could improve his skills and bring his ambitions into effect as much as he serves the community. In doing so, he will grow as an essential mesh in the social orientation productivity concatenation and none could do without his presence, mentality and social achievements. Missing someone designates missing something crucial others need desperately and working shoulder by shoulder does working for the best of all, to all and by all.

Section B: Social Orientation into Application

Being in the others is one of the most salient trench marks of the social orientation and elevates man into the peerage of humanity and into the Miskawayhian Islamic Platonism ethics ; angelic aspirations to sublimity (Majid Fakhry 49) , to live with dignity . In this regard, man should be in the mould of his surroundings to cull his entire purposes and goals, entity and existence (Andreas Langlotz 22). In respect to these prerequisites, the social orientation could be applied to these two verse dramas, *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III*. As a historical verse drama *Eviternity Ash* penetrates more profoundly and resonantly the psyche of the villains to expose the human intricate machinations to usurp and intimidate;

it is a tale in the human history and chronicle that man should be man in all that struggle. The dramatist erects his two contradictory poles and paves the way first to man versus man conflict and second to man versus himself conflict to delineate the rationale the martyr Zeid Ibn Ali, the protagonist, holds to the last in the light of punitive satire void of levity. Exuding all the precepts of self-confident and self-abnegation to confront the iron-and-fire authority, he holds mundanity cheap and falls martyr in the road of the free. Much to the regret of humanity and his adherents: he ascends and flutters into eviternity as a platform of sacrifice and struggle, as a citadel of persistence and sapience and as a trumpet to the free to be themselves for ever, though the despots dominate such an iron-fire- authority. To be a trumpet and a trumpeter to his nation, whether breathing or crucified, on a palm tree for years spews the adrenaline of volition and determination : in tongue presence he exerts himself to strike a note of revolution at the expense of his life, his being and his glory as a fighter and as a reformer; the dramatist does his best to convey the portrayal of the breathing or tongue trumpeter and the crucified trumpeter , people imbibe knowledge and sapience from him in life and in crucifixion phase though they run into reticence and intimidation, none dare utter a word of change or revolution or insurrection .Then the formulae changes since the stranger acts as a social, moral and doctrinal scruple .

As quite reputed in literature in general and drama in particular, an old man or woman, a traveler at midnight, a fugitive, and so forth comes to the fore to unknot the knotted tales in a drama. The stranger, here, is exploited, as a folklore character, to plunge into the scene with great perception of religion and humanity to be a clarion sound to people and rocks mind into thinking and rethinking. Why not burying the crucified Zeid? Isn't it of Islam to bury a dead one? Isn't he pertinent to the abode of the infallibility? All these issues find existence in the structural trinity; prosimetrum, humanity and narrativity to cast some scruples into the human mind. Verily being crucified then burnt measures evergreen revolution in the human soul to change and to reform; the stranger instigates the faith stamina in people and ensconces the seed of Zeid the martyr in the hearts of the free and the revolutionaries palpitating with life and eviternity: "One who fears death will never do anything worthy of a living person" (Shadi Bartsch 181).

Not only does man find subsistence, but he could revert into literature, theatre, for nourishment and edification. For the fact that "any utterance in a piece of drama as in any ordinary communication is said for a certain function" (Majeed Al-Maashta 34). For the words that "have power to influence humans and their relationships", (Rjaa M.Flayih 19) .For the task of salvaging man is a sole and essential one, none gives loose to the starting point of theatre, Gilgamesh, whose impact on the nowadays drama begets certain conditions and manifestos. In a sense, a protagonist dies for a noble target and sacrifices all his treasures and pleasures in the face of insurmountable forces. In the *Eviternity Ash* there is parallelism with the Gilgamesh nodal character; a man breathes in the bud of pearls and ecstasy, all people gird him with love and veneration, no need for anything; mundane desires and the like, no hardship in life he confronts. Relinquishing some principles designates losing some to

other some! It is a formula or a bargain one takes in time of tumult and chaos, in time of oblivion. The events of the play apply themselves bit by bit to revelation as the dramatist , Al-Khafaji, with highly cultivated poeticism, manipulates free verse to portray his noble character, Zeid the martyr more profoundly and ostensibly , that is why simplicity of diction and transparency of ideas work in tandem with the social orientation components :

(SO diagram 2)

Thy stances lead no to a fair solution,

Thy policy emanates from power!

From swords, malicious and traitorous.

Be informed and attentive

Such a nation never tends to be reticent,

So we do resolve to fall martyr, free and brave,

for the sake of justice. (Haider Al-Moosawi 39)

There should be a shout at the face of despotism; a freedom fighter never dies in a land spurning all forms of oppression and coercion. Zeid the martyr as a pivotal character finds that there is no way to live in dignity unless he bears arms and gains freedom. That is, the political situation stipulates a candid social orientation to revolt, there is no choice, no benefit of dying glorious deaths and the masses accrue less freedom, or rather they have nothing:

Nobody ever gives an ant an order. Yet, by picking up a single grain of sand and carrying it away, the ant helps dig the nest in the desert. The secret freedom fighter is like the ant. Working without instruction or orders from anyone, he follows his natural instincts, fighting the oppressor whenever and wherever he can. Yet in a freedom-loving society, he will not be working alone. Others, hopefully hundreds and thousands of others, will also be operating, acting without direction or order. The total sum of thousands of individual acts will give the appearance of a massive organization. That's what the oppressor will think he is facing-an organized rebellion. (Jefferson Mack 8)

The ember of revolution in the "freedom-loving" land fights being smothered to demise in a battle or a corpse, chopped and dismembered! It is a volition in the heart, one does hate all the walking-cannibals, talking-tails and proxy war protégés at the expense of a striped and a robbed man, it is enough, no move, no breath, no luster he maintains:

It is another night, another nightmare

gnawing me and devastating all my ecstasy.

I wonder if Zeid Ibn Ali shows me quarter

or leave me. (going to and fro)

It is to unshackle myself from such a dilemma,

a nightmare clung to my chest.

years pass,

the corpse crucified in Kufa and the gruesome nightmare gnaws me. (Haider Al-Moosawi 66)

The internal focalization, monologue, unveils the great success and marvelous harmony people gain to disturb the rhythmic stratification of the tyrant. On the scale of interdependence the masses triumph and the despots sway to topple:

It is the time of the faithful and chosen prophets

Earth, everyday, breathes its hectic agony

Bleeding from the very outset.

Earth needs much blood, sacrifice, the time of seduction

Still seeps to lure the servile. (Haider Al-Moosawi 72)

In the best interests of a community, man operates to cull the highest values of the social orientation; it is a stance for survival to cull felicity in line with the Miskawayh angelic aspiration to sublimity (Majid Fakhry 49). Earth needs much blood, sacrifice, the time of seduction "enrolls in the meaningful engagement of the social orientation, to survive dignity and freedom intact stipulates being in a harmonious sapient engagement. Then "It is the time of the faithful" designates that man adapts and modifies his potentials and volition to achieve his ultimate mission in life; entity.

From a self-abnegated martyr to a philanthropist king, the existence through the others and for the best interests of them is the core locus of the *King Charles III* of Mike Bartlett that ramifies into two main plots, the first comes as political and humanitarian, and the second does as romantic and hierarchic, to lay importance on the humanity pole of such a historical verse drama. What is to the point is that the interpreter should abnegate his accumulative experience from the text and considers it as a part of reality to trace facts and reasons. The king refuses to be a factotum to the government and truly desires to change the status quo of the quack king scepter and to give the press more rights for the sake of legitimate surveillance over the abuse of the government authority on the political and humanitarian measures. Thus, he buttresses the affair between Harry and Jessica when being in a moral scandal.

As a futuristic drama savours of "speed and dynamism" (Günter Berghaus 6), the past and the present, edification and experience, as its saga unfolds a common ambition to the readership. A heir waits for his position as a king after his mother queen Elizabeth II. Then he is catapulted into the throne to pass a bill restricting the press but the uncorronated king decides not to comply with the government and persists in having certain emendation. The more he grapples with emendations, the more his entourage sets certain machinations to

pass. Everything in the street is exploited according to the modern " street policy "to cajole the public mood into a particular state man, logically detests or rejects as Alex Gottesman, in his Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens and David C. Brotherton and Luis Barrios in their The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation: street politics and the transformation of a New York City gang argue:

we think that this alternative sociological construct can have continuing relevance as we enter a new and vitiated culture of street politics, particularly as more and more youth reject and are rejected by mainstream politics and the bankrupt morality of our contemporary capitalist democracy becomes painfully apparent. (339)

Consequently the protest processions and family detention lead to his expected abdication in favour of his son William. It is quite convenient that the play tackles pivotal viewpoints of volition, existence and the acts of extrapolation that are "bounded only by current notions" (Paul Alkon 7). Albeit tradition and trodden leeway, the play sheds light on the life of the monarchy under no shade of constitution, that is why patronage, precedent and traditions tend to be the cornerstone of the political and social life. There are specific spotlights on democracy coping with the desire of suppression, phone surveillance wreaking havoc on the freedom of privacy, thus, perversion grows momentum in the age of domination and usurpation. So "the setting of a future social or political condition"(7) is quite evident in the play. As the political isle heaves into horizon as essential to expose the social orientation of the king:

Your bill concerning privacy, that sets

Restriction on the freedom of the press.

I understand it's passed the House and soon

Will be the British law, is that correct? (King Charles III 25)

"Restriction on the freedom of the press" flirts with both the political and cultural orientation the king determines to achieve in pursuit of thorough interdependence. As a king, he wants to practice the perquisite of his position and to give force to the traditional portrait of the monarchical authority:

Sometimes I do confess I imagines if

My mother happened to die before her time,

A helicopter crash, a rare disease

So at an early age I'd be in charge-

Before me years of constant stable ryle.

But mostly I have hoped she'd keep in health

That since for most, outrageous dreams and hopes

Are all they ‘ii ever have, and yet their life is full,

So I am better Thoughtful Prince than King.

Potential holds appeal since in its castle walls

One is protected from the awful shame

Of failure. (King Charles III 15-6)

In the orbit of functionality, “So I am better Thoughtful Prince than King” designates that rights protection and communal prosperity are the best services a king could do for his multitudes. For him, a prince with authority to serve is more effective and influential that a quack king drained of deeds . Here ,harmony surges as an essential ingredient a pivotal character , king Charles, targets to be a part in his society , though adapting to dissolve the parliament but in vain. Thus, to survive is to be a real king , unless otherwise stated , he is dust :

Harry .None of my friends are talking to me. Every second people recognize me and laugh. And I never wanted any of it . I don’t be famous and I don’t want anything to do with that. Or you. Not any more.

HARRY.

You mean that ?

JESS.

Yeah. Just… go home.

HARRY.

But I don’t... I don’t know what to do without you . (King Charles III 89)

The love subplot terminates in failure and fiasco as the new king, love dictator, decrees that there is no place for a commoner, a working class girl in the palace . Harry acts upon the edict without a mutter , so he adapts such a policy to take the monarchy privileges under his wing , yet Jess adapts a policy of departure with dignity as a posture of entity . To the detriment of any compendium of the social orientation, domination and usurpation prevail and conquer man , flora and fauna under different banners , William prevails , conquers all his rivals and compromises on the street and palace troubles to lay a cornerstone of “realistic future setting” (Paul Alkon 246) that comes true in reality . The king Charles as Zeid the martyr gives loose to mundanity and takes hold of more angelic factors of sublimity in life: They cuddle the pearls of their soul and mind tight more than do other characters. For them social orientation is existence and for the antagonists it is real perdition:

Not like a Thief, shall Thou ascend the mount,

But like a Person of some high Account;

The Crosse shall be Thy Stage; and Thou shalt there

The spacious field have for Thy Theater. (Paul H Fry 1)

Conclusion

Throughout the two sections of the study the main focus falls within the remit of the Islamic Platonism and social orientation application. The first section, Islamic Platonism and Social Orientation, tackles Platonism as a concept in general and the Islamic one in particular and delineates the major components of the social orientation to be a parameter to explicate the plays in question. The second section, the practical side of the study, Social Orientation into Application, trucks the propensity of the pivotal characters for preferring the interests of others to theirs and applies the social orientation components to certain excerpts from the plays, *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III*.

As inferred from the explication and social orientation application to *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III* the Islamic Platonism gives nourishment to the social orientation in these two dramas. In particular, the Miskawayh factor, angelic aspiration to sublimity angelic sublimity, looms larger in the events to show how the pivotal characters, Zeid the martyr and King Charles, spurn everything mundane for the sake of principlism and find their real; existence in serving a cause. The utopian elements are brought into effect and surpass reality , so the platonic ideas in these plays palpitate with life and take acts of commencement: Zied the martyr calls for freedom and falls victim to the despots and the king Charles does not comply with the machinations of the government to sign more restrictions on the press. Chief among the contributions of the study is that the Miskawayh factor, angelic aspiration to sublimity angelic sublimity, is evidently traced in *Eviternity Ash* and *King Charles III* and the social orientation is found in the main characters to convey humanitarian missions in the face of despotism and human desires, treasures and monarchical privileges.

The study, here, offers an attempt to manifest the vital role of the modern verse drama in addressing the most critical crises in the world with a poetic style. On the basis of theses concluding insights and remarks, it is recommended that the Islamic Platonism in modern poetry and novel deserves to be explicated in light of social orientation and being in the other could be traced in modern genres in light of wisdom literature.

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Enlightenment, Modern Urban Space and Predicament of Living: A Reflection on Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*

Ashish Kumar Pathak

Abstract

Fyodor Dostoevsky's novella *Notes from Underground* anticipates multiple themes and concerns of modern literature. It shows the predicament of living in modern urban space which embodies the essence of enlightenment and seeks to create a universal model of attaining happiness in life based on certain formulae such as two twos are four. In this very determinism Dostoevsky sees the core of banality and boredom which turn out to be an intolerable experience for human beings. They will reject such wisdom of altruism and choose to do evil and earn suffering just to prove that they exist by virtue of exercising their free will. To demonstrate it he alludes to the history of war and evil which men have gone for out of sheer caprice and thereby critiques the lopsided view of life propounded by theories of enlightenment. He demolishes the way of thinking about good and evil in binaries.

Keywords – boredom, spite, enlightenment, isms, uniformity, suffering, evil

Widely admired and critiqued in the 20th century, Fyodor Dostoevsky seems pressingly relevant to the most immediate concerns of the present time. His works such as *Notes from Underground, Crime and Punishment,* and *The Devil* look so much more like the world we live in than any described by Tolstoy or Turgenev. Dostoevsky's position among the realists has always been unique for his capacity to penetrate deeper into the mind of characters for exploring the causes of their actions. More often than not, he comes closer to the 20th century psychological realists than 19th century social realists as he portrays the underlying structures and the innermost details of life beneath the surface of existence. Dostoevsky's writings, painstakingly, delineate the rejection of heroic materialism, scientific progress, utilitarianism, rationality, romantic ideal of reaching out to others, all interwoven in an anti-deterministic narrative. He has been hailed by Albert Camus as the prophet of 20th century existentialism. But among all these fascinating dimensions of his works what I find particularly

engaging and impressive is the acceptance and affirmation of the seamy and sinister aspect of human soul. According to Dostoevsky the most fundamental right of human beings is the right to act in accordance with free-will. And this sense of right springs out of an inevitable feeling of boredom, ennui and caprice. Despite all wisdom of altruism, rationality, love and welfare, human history has been the history of war and struggle. So, to choose an action, consciously, which will lead to suffering is an innate tendency of human beings. And this can be the best backdrop to understand the existential crisis of citizens dwelling in the modern urban spaces. In this article I seek to understand the predicament of urban city life and the project of enlightenment in the light of Dostoevsky's impressive novel *Notes from Underground*.

Contemporary urban space, enabled as well as crippled by the forces of globalization and technological advancement, instils a sense of cut throat competition among the people to gain all sorts of material benefits. This urge towards material aggradizment tends to drive people towards a state of homogenization. This is a force from the inside which induces them to conform to the already formulated laws of well-being while the social and political institutions tend to impose a dreary uniformity from the outside. There is an evident emphasis on oneness and sameness of language, culture, dressing, curriculum and ways of thinking which reduces the scope for diversity and differences. It is perhaps relevant here to quote from 'The Unknown Citizen' of W. H. Auden:

> Both Producers Research and High Grade Living declare
>
> He was fully sensitive to the advantages of the Instalment plan
>
> And had everything necessary to Modern Man,
>
> A phonograoh, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
>
> ……..
>
> He was married and added five children to the population
>
> Which our Eugenist says was a right number for the parent of his generation.
>
> And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
>
> Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
>
> Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard (*Selected Poems* 85).

This is what people become in the modern urban space which entraps all in the snare of uniformity. They are reduced to numbers with every trace of individuality effaced. This predicament of living in cities which writers such as Kafka, Eliot and Auden observed in the first half of the 20th century was meticulously featured by Dostoevsky almost a century earlier in his novels. These internal and external drives are likely to make individuals 'piano keys', to use Dostoevsky's phrase. But human beings resist this probability and refuse to

yield to such mathematical calculations of social wellbeing. Despite all given laws of wellbeing and enlightened philosophies of goodness, truth and virtue, human behavior is naturally prone to doing evil which leads to suffering and makes them believe that they exist by virtue of exercising their freedom of choice. Another typical instance of modern city dweller is the typist girl portrayed by T. S. Eliot in *The Wasteland.* She is also a victim of the monotonous, mechanized and insipid life in a metropolis. She is bored by the tedious routine of her life to such an extent that she copulates like a machine with the 'young man carbunclar'. This terrible uniformity and monotony is capable of boring men to sin and evil, as Eliot writes:

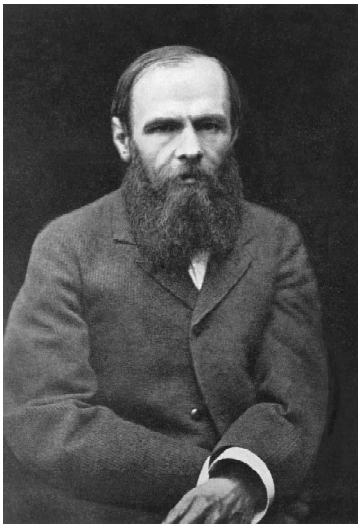
> At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
>
> Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
>
> Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
>
> ……
>
> The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
>
> The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
>
> Endeavours to engage her in caresses
>
> Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
>
> Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
>
> Exploring hands encounter no defence
>
> His vanity requires no response,
>
> And makes a welcome of indifference. (*The Complete Poems* 68)

The typist girl is a 'deskilled' human being who finds her life unbearable and to solve this problem of monotonous living she invites anything with indifference. After this act of mechanical union with the 'young man carbuncular', she is reminded of some classic examples of guilty conscience but even that fancy of guilt is only a superficial thought which will die down soon and she would do the same act again in a disgraceful manner. This point, that human beings are prone to do evil, has been elaborated by Dostoevsky in his novel *Notes from the Underground*. In this way Dostoevsky anticipated much of the 20th century literary sensibility.

Dosroevsky explored with great artistry the human psychology involved in the gratuitous commitment of crimes and the consequent sufferings and distresses. One is reminded here of Eliot's caution, "Go, go go, said the bird: human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (*The Complete Poems* 172). Dostoevsky witnessed in his time the erosion of traditional spiritual values by burgeoning capitalism, heroic materialism and industrialization. However, he thought that the world would be saved by Russian Christianity. Quoting George Steiner on Dostoevsky's popularity, Leatherbarrow writes:

His novels and tales appear to capture, in both their thematic content and their narrative forms, the fluidity and instability of existence as experienced by most in an age when confidence in enduring political, social, spiritual, scientific and intellectual certainties has retreated in the face of relativism and a craving for immediacy and short term intensity (4).

Notes from Underground (1864) is a novella that Dostoevsky wrote after a couple of years of his return in Russia in 1859 having faced trial, imprisonment and order of death punishment for his alleged association with the Petrashevski Circle, a revolutionary group of socialists. On his homecoming, after a decade of exile, Dostoevsky finds the Russian society swept over by the import of scientific temperament from the west. This new reductive science of human behavior and nature with its finite and fixed truths, emphasized 'self-interests' and utilitarianism which stripped man of free moral choice. Meanwhile, the experience of exile, imprisonment and escaping death punishment at the last moment had brought a profound transformation in the personality and worldview of Dostoevsky. After this, one can easily notice the resurgence of religious faith and spiritual consciousness in context of his art and Christianity. He is of the view that freedom is the basic psychological and spiritual need of men and its suppression can have tragic consequences.



Fyodor Dostoevsky

This novella is divided into two parts. The first part 'Underground' is a long ranting of a government servant against the doctrines of enlightened 'self-interest' and utilitarianism propounded by thinkers such as Adam Smith, Bentham and Mill. It is a critique of philosophies, right from the time of Plato to the romantic theories of the 19th century, which had sought to articulate formulae of rationality, goodness, virtue, liberty, fraternity equality etc for the welfare of humanity. While the second part entitled, 'Apropos of Wet Snow' portrays how an underground man who has imbibed and lived up the philosophies and 'isms' mentioned in the previous part suffers and adds to the suffering of others around him such as the prostitute Liza. It evidently shows the utter failure of 'romantic sentimentalism' which keeps a man under the illusion of reaching out to others and helping them.

At the time of its publication it appeared a baffling work to the readers who were unable to decode the hidden meaning and intention of its author. It is a satire written in first person narrative and in a style akin to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* in which swift suggests that the best way for the English to deal with the Irish people is to have Irish parents raise their children to be eaten by the English. Similarly, to understand the complex meaning of *Notes from Underground* a high degree of intellectual agility is demanded of the readers. The novel opens with the following description of the underground man:

> I am a sick man…I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I believe my liver is diseased. However, I know nothing at all about my disease, and do not know for certain what ails me. I don't consult a doctor for it, and never have, though I have a respect for medicine and doctors. Besides, I am extremely superstitious, sufficiently so to respect medicine anyway (I am well educated enough not to be superstitious, but I am superstitious). No, I refuse to consult a doctor from spite (455).

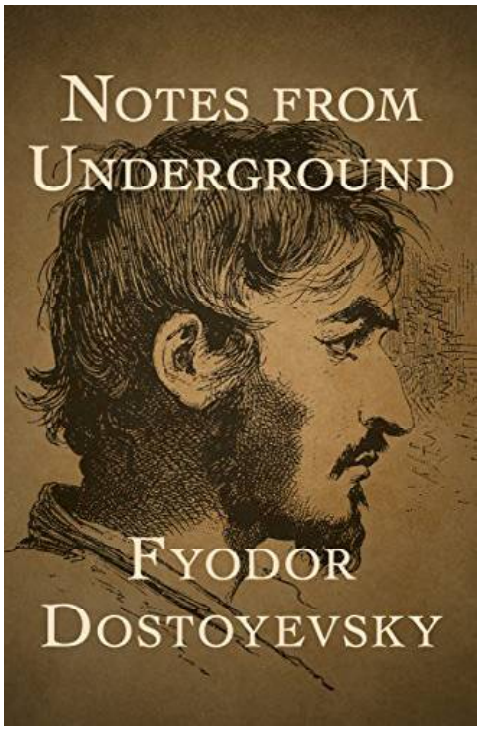
These lines set the morose mood and satirical tone of the entire novel. 'Spite' is a word denoting existential defiance which might have shocked the readers of his time. The underground man is sick but he doesn't want to see a doctor and hurts himself. He confesses that when he was a civil servant, he used to tyrannize the petitioners and his clients. He says, "When petitioners used to come for information to the table at which I sat, I used to grind my teeth at them, and felt intense enjoyment when I succeeded in making anybody happy. I almost did succeed" (456). So, we find that he is a man of conflicting impulses, torn between 'self-interest' and egotism. Such contradictions prevent him from behaving in a normal manner and he is neither a hero nor an insect but a purely characterless man. He says, "I want now to tell you, gentlemen, whether you care to hear it or not, why I could not even become an insect. I tell you solemnly that I have many times tried to become an insect. But I was not equal even to that" (458). In this way the underground man is an exemplar of an anti-hero — a reverse of conventional hero – who stands in an adversarial relation to the values of his culture. This culture is created by various waves of 'isms' coming to Russia in the nineteenth century. He can't help being what he is because once you accept the laws of nature, which is the core of all 'isms' (such as optimism, socialism, utopianism, liberalism, utilitarianism), all human choices become impossible. Dostoevsky, thus, questions the validity of these principles.

This attempt to question the world's prevailing logic is also reflected in the second principal theme of the novella which has to do with examining the value of reflective consciousness. This kind of consciousness centers around the quasi moralistic evaluation of ourselves and others. This is where the motif of being underground or buried emerges. Dostoevsky's protagonist, known simply as the underground man, tells us that he feels like a mouse buried in the refuge of his own internal reflective consciousness, myriad thoughts and judgments. He says:

> I swear, gentlemen, that to be conscious is an illness—a real thorough-going illness…. Though, after all, everyone does do that; people do pride themselves on their diseases, and I do, may be, more than anyone…. But yet I am firmly persuaded that a great deal of consciousness, every sort of consciousness, in fact, is a disease. The more conscious I was of goodness and of all that was 'sublime and beautiful', the more deeply I sank into my mire and the more ready I was to sink into it altogether (458).

This is, pointedly, an indictment of the philosophical speculation of the enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Kant who instructed human beings to be conscious of their existence and contemplate upon the aesthetics of human existence which tends to be 'sublime and beautiful'[1]. The underground man proves the failure of this project of enlightenment as it

excludes the man's capacity and inclination to contemplate irrationally and do evil. The underground man wants to take revenge by slapping one of his colleagues who doesn't get along well with him. But for many years he has not been able to do so because of his thinking too much about a slap. This very thinking eats him away from within. In contradistinction to all of this the underground man describes the real normal men or men of action whose energies and consciousness are directed outwards but they have shallow intellectual capacity. Thus the underground man tells us that he feels a deep ambivalence about his subterranean world of hyper-intellectual consciousness. On one hand he feels an acute envy for the man of action simply because they are free of all doubts, resentments, and questions that have doomed him. But on the other hand he finds a kind of solace in his sense of perceptual and intellectual superiority. In this way Dostoevsky's treatment is roughly parallel to, but certainly not identical with, Nietzsche's later distinction between master and slave moralities. Comparing the hyper-conscious 'mouse' and men of action Dostoevsky states:



> For through his innate stupidity the latter looks upon his revenge as justice pure and simple; while in consequence of his acute consciousness the mouse does not believe in the justice of it…the luckless mouse succeeds in creating around it so many other nastiness in the form of doubts and questions, adds to one question so many unsettled questions, that there inevitably works up around it a sort of fatal brew, a stinking mess, made up of its doubts, emotions and of the contempt spat upon it by the direct men of action who stand solemnly about it as judges and arbitrators, laughing at it till their healthy sides ache (461).

As we notice in the second part of the novella, practically all of the underground man's reflective consciousness just circulates around the theme of his superiority and inferiority with respect to the people around him and he spends an extraordinary amount of energy in concocting elaborate fantasies about what people are thinking of him. He is living in a kind of hell constructed of his own internal ruminations especially how he stands hierarchically with respect to other people. So, he is presenting a vivid illustration of the paranoia, resentment and suffering that arises out of an overtly structured life according to the paradigm of hierarchical quasi moralistic judgmentalism.

Thus, prejudiced and too conscious about his superiority, he feels deeply humiliated in a farewell party of one of his colleagues and, in turn, he takes revenge for this by humiliating a prostitute Liza, physically as well as intellectually, whom he visits after the party. He preaches to her for the whole night using many romantic phrases which testify to his wide reading of romantic writers such as Balzac, Hugo and Pushkin. He intends to assert his superior nature to that simple uneducated girl and Liza, being too young and naïve, is deeply impressed and moved by his speeches. He offers to rescue her, in that flight of euphoria, from the mess of prostitution. But, next morning, when he gets home he feels apprehensive that she might take up that offer and appear before him any day. He realizes now that he had not the intention of doing that, he was simply carried away by his own rhetoric. He is terrified expecting her visit for he lives in a dirty and squalid flat. He is not worried about how he would help her; but how he would look when she comes. For many days after this when she doesn't turn up, he is relaxed and again lost in his fantasies. He imagines taking her out of streets, educating her, making her respectable in the eyes of others, she would be a refined lady one day, they would fall in love with each other, then he would say that he had been doing all that only to take her out of this mess. While he was lost in his utopian vision, one day he had a terrible argument with his servant and Liza appeared at that very moment. He scolds her for coming to him and being naïve and stupid, but he himself breaks down. Here Liza emerges as typical Dostoevsky's heroine and consoles him by taking him into her arms. Now, the underground man feels triply humiliated and he tries to pay her a five–rouble note for her services but Liza refuses to take that money and leaves.

This is a satire on romanticism that projects a fantasy of helping out others but it fails at the practical level. Here we find that the underground man loses himself in those utopian illusions and fails to do even a simple human act. This failure of the underground man is the failure of all those 'isms' and romanticism which have gone into his making. The underground man utterly fails to gauge the strength of Liza's character and deludes himself into believing that he would emerge as her savior. Ann W. Astel writes, "In the moment of his hasty retreat from her presence, she leaves the crumpled five-rouble note on the table. The young woman who walks out of his home into an uncertain future, into the falling sleet, is no longer a prostitute and refuses to be his" (191). This is also a moment of emancipation for the underground man's ego-ridden soul, but after this he feels more humiliated and eternally confined to his hell as Liza emerges as heroine and he, a 'mouse' again. However, the underground man thinks that he has done Liza a favor by insulting her because suffering in his way will purify her soul. The irony is that he deliberately chooses his own suffering and humiliation as we see in the beginning his resolve not to go to a doctor for treating his ailment. This choice of suffering and humiliation is to prove that men can never tolerate the intolerable uniformity i.e. always making good and happy choices. Mocking Plato's philosophy of knowledge of good and virtuous conduct the underground man remarks:

> Oh, tell me, who was it first announced, who was it first proclaimed, that man only does nasty things because he doesn't know his own interests: and that if he were enlightened,

> if his eyes were open to his real normal interests, man would at once cease to do nasty things, would at once become good and noble… he would see his own advantage in the good and nothing else, and we all know that not one man can , consciously act against his own interests, consequently so to say, through necessity, he would begin doing good? Oh, the babe! Oh, the pure innocent child! (*Notes from Underground* 468).

Hence, the principal theme that emerges in *Notes from Underground* has to do with the nature of human freedom and especially with respect to the idea that the human world is reducible to our quest to find happiness in more or less rational ways. Are we really free if all we choose is what optimizes our advantage in life? In other words what seems like the most sensible thing that offers us the greatest likelihood of our experiencing, pleasure and happiness? For the underground man the answer is no, because for freedom to be real, it must necessarily involve the broad spectrum of human possibilities as real choices. Otherwise what we call our freedom would in actuality be nothing more than a pre-ordained and mechanical will to pleasure which would work something like a piano key or like a mathematical 'calculus of felicity'[2] as the British utilitarian philosophers put it or a modern 'artificial intelligence' program.

Consequently, Dostoevsky's underground man places a special priority on the choices that we make to defy any such 'calculus of felicity' and we choose the negative what is disadvantageous for us or others. Here Dostoevsky is not talking about the difficult choices that we make to get some advantages but about the negative choices that we make out of pure caprice, for no good reason at all. These kind of choices are important for Dostoevsky as they allow our freedom to pass beyond the confines of any possible 'calculus of felicity' and hence allow our freedom to become real, a matter of independent choice rather that anything that is pre-ordained. Dostoevsky calls them the most advantageous advantages. Or these disadvantageous choices confer on us the most advantageous advantage of all,that of being genuinely free human beings. Being bored with always choosing good men will choose the evil. Charles Baudelaire, the French poet of the 19th century, also acknowledges the power of ennui or boredom in directing men towards evil in his masterpiece *The Flowers of Evil*. The conclusion of the very first poem, 'To the Reader', reads:

> One creature only is most foul and false!
>
> Though making no grand gestures, not great cries,
>
> He willingly would devastate the earth
>
> And in one yawning swallow all the world;
>
> He is Ennui![3] (7).

'Spite' then is a sort of mood or attitude in which we defiantly assert our most disadvantageous advantage against all of the myriad enticement of seductions to do otherwise. 'Spite' is about defiantly laying claim to our freedom and hence for humanity against all odds. This kind of analysis obviously finds confluence with the modern science of psychology- the Jungian 'shadow' or Freudian 'Thanatos' drive for instance. Infact, although it can be hard

to admit, haven't we felt an urge to smash up things without any particular reason? For Dostoevsky, these moments, may be, are the most deeply human moments. And isn't the opposite vision of life- always having to be nice, always being good, always being politically correct- ultimately and incredibly dull? Aren't our negative, painful, stupid destructive moments make life interesting, so strange, so beautiful, so worth living in the first place. The underground man will not always be happy by looking at the 'Crystal Palace'[44] In 1851, the Crystal Palace was built in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition. In Nikolay Chernyshevsky's

What is to be Done? it is portrayed as a symbol for the perfect world that socialists can build together. Dostoevsky, like Charles Dickens was in severe disagreement with any such illusion about the Crystal Palace as a symbol of human progress and prosperity, and one day pick up a stone and throw at it which may smash it down to the ground. Dostoevsky maintains, "Man is not born for happiness. Man earn his happiness, and always by suffering" (*Notebooks* 188).

Therefore, evidently, it is a critique of the promise of enlightenment i.e. greater human rationality leads to greater human progress and happiness through science, industry and technology. Dostoevsky maintains that this view of life is only a fractional view of the deeper reality of life which inescapably excludes all that the enlightenment vision neglects or even tries to erase. Questioning this kind of lop-sided view of life the underground man asserts:

> What is to be done with the million of facts that bear witness that men, *consciously*, that fully understanding his real interests, have left them in the background and have rushed headlong on another path, to meet peril and danger, compelled to this course by nobody and nothing, bus as it were, simply disliking the beaten track, and have obstinately, willfully, struck out another difficult, absurd way, seeking it almost in the darkness. So, I suppose, this obstinacy and perversity were pleasanter to them than any advantage… Advantage! (*Notes from Underground*, 468).

So, Dostoevsky is in favor of a view which lays claim to our full humanity and for this evil, sin, suffering, wrong choices have to be acknowledged. There is no special need to appeal to human history to prove this. The Trojan war, the Mahabharata, World Wars, Vietnam war, Korean war, Afghan war, Slavery, Auschwitz, Gulf wars, and recurrent genocides testify to that fact that man cannot exist without doing evil or committing cruelties. When an Indian citizen says about choosing the government that he/she has no other choice or when an Indian parents say about educating their children that they don't have any choices other than sending their ward to private convent schools or when they say that they have no other alternative than sending their wards to 'parroting' based model of educational institutes or when we find middle class Indians aspiring for driving the same SUVs, eating in the same restraints, watching the same cinema, visiting the same grocery store, buying the same brand of clothes, we realize that an oppressive kind of uniformity is internalized by it under the illusion that this is a rational way to happiness. Hence, in doing so they illustrate those laws of nature against which the underground man revolts. In the underground man emphasizes

that men will keep selling their souls to devil and debauchery as Doctor Faustus and Dorian Gray did, and keep enjoying freedom as a license for acts of devastation. The way Dostoevsky refuses to valorize good over evil and argues strongly for the coexistence of the two and acceptance of the latter, he is perhaps close to the thinking of postmodernists such as Foucault and Derrida.

Endnotes

[1] The reference is to Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764). Kant claims that tranquil picturesque nature is beautiful and that stormy, majestic nature is sublime. The underground man repeatedly uses the 'sublime and beautiful' phrase ironically.

[2] Originally the 'felicific calculus' is an algorithm formulated by utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1747-1832) for calculating the degree or amount of pleasure that a specific action is likely to cause. The underground man resists this sort of quantification of human experience.

[3] Ennui is frequently translated into English as 'boredom'. But 'boredom' seems not forceful enough for what Baudelaire intends. 'Ennui' in Baudelaire is a soul-deadening, pathological condition which the underground man is in

[4] In 1851, the Crystal Palace was built in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition. In Nikolay Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* it is portrayed as a symbol for the perfect world that socialists can build together. Dostoevsky, like Charles Dickens was in severe disagreement with any such illusion about the Crystal Palace.

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Integrating Trauma Studies with the Pursuit of Learning: The Psychoanalytical and Feminist Underpinnings

Nadia Shah

Abstract

The 1980s witnessed a cross-fertilization between humanities and psychology resulting in the emergence, in Western scholarship, of a vigorous and interdisciplinary area of trauma studies. Its foundation has been firmly established across multiple disciplines and fields ranging from American studies, history, and psychoanalysis to cultural studies, sociology and anthropology. Today in the domain of literary theory and criticism, trauma and trauma studies have gained a huge significance. Writers delve into their historical pasts as individuals and also into the historical pasts of their communities to face the ghosts of their traumatic pasts. Once the ghost is faced and liberated, there is an anticipated change. The paper aims at evaluating the significance of the theory of trauma studies in the curriculum and the overall teaching learning process in the backdrop of learning outcome based curriculum framework by integrating the theory with the principles of psychoanalysis and feminism. Psychoanalysis remains the founding theoretical paradigm behind trauma theory and other literary schools have only added to it or demonstrated its validity at multiple levels. This paper approaches trauma theory through feminism and gender studies in order to define the political value or relevance of the school of trauma. Trauma theory is not just a theory with implications of producing knowledge, it is also a technique of reading. Therefore, feminist theory of trauma first reformulates trauma theory with principles of feminism in the background and then offers a possible method to read feminist texts and the texts that are seen as subverting women's rights.

Keywords: curriculum, feminism, historicism, psychoanalysis, trauma literary theory.

In 2019 a guideline was issued by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India, a statutory body charged with coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of

higher education in India, regarding the implementation of Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum, LOCF, with an aim to challenge the traditional model of teaching-learning process whereby a teacher would merely deposit his knowledge in the learner and the learner would be a passive recipient of the knowledge deposited. LOCF, therefore, guarantees active learning by making the teacher a dynamic facilitator who prepares the students not only for the term end examinations but for the life as a whole. Moreover, the outcomes of a programme would be evaluated on the basis of the skills, knowledge, employability, values, attitudes and many similar attributes that the programme would ingrain in the learners.

For the sake of reference and for making it easily comprehensible, an analogy could be drawn to Bertolt Brecht's German epic theatre in the domain of the study of English and English literature regarding the idea behind outcome based and goal oriented teaching-learning process. In an epic theatre the play would be executed in such a manner that the audience would never remain a passive spectator. The actors would involve the emotions of the audience in such a way that they would not suspend their disbelief and enjoy art for the sake of art. Instead, the audience would be encouraged to see the world as it is by not presenting to them an alternate reality. Moreover, the audience would never stop at merely reacting emotionally to the performance, rather, the audience would be compelled to react in the direction of bringing about a constructive change in the real life situations. LOCF works on a more or less similar pattern. The learners in an LOCF guided environment would be actively engaged in the process and pursuit of learning with a substantial goal in mind.

The above mentioned 2019 UGC-LOCF guidelines for English Literature (B.A. Hons.) undergraduate programme 2019 state:

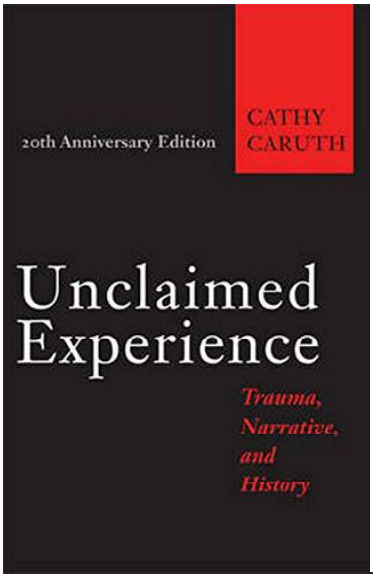
"… in today's world in the light of exponential changes brought about in science and technology, and the prevalent utilitarian world view of the society… Humanities has ever been in crisis in the West… the resultant utilitarian society likes to invest in science and technology because it takes care of provisions for life. Literature, on the other hand, takes care of vision… its impact is intangible and immeasurable in terms of quantity… the function of literature is to bring the questions of values - human and literary - in focus."

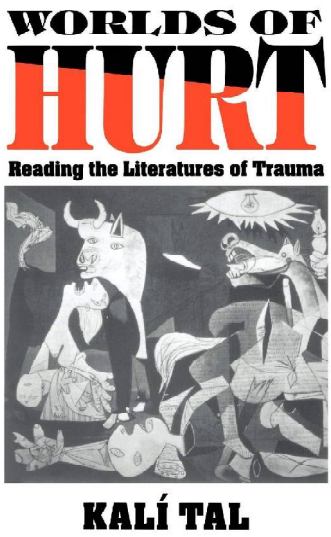
Since times immemorial, the practical 'utility' of literature has remained a subject of debate and discussion and every epoch has responded to this debate in its own unique way. Consequently, teaching of literature as a fruitful endeavour also came under scrutiny, especially from the advocates of scientific education. It is a subject of debate primarily because apparently, the study of literature comes across as theoretical and derivative. However, it has a huge role to play in building values and contributing to the available corpus of knowledge. Therefore, practical applicability of literature cannot be neglected. In addition to values, it provides a proper attitude to the way one conducts oneself in life by genuine sensitization and humanization. It instils feelings of empathy and fellow feeling among the learners and consequently becomes a bridge to the world. Literature takes the learner both into the realms of the concrete and the abstract, imaginative as well as real and intuition as well as

rational. The teacher of literature then has to adopt such teaching methodology that ensures that the learning has outcomes such as these in focus. Under LOCF, no component of the curriculum is a part of the curriculum for the sake of it. In drafting a goal oriented curriculum for a course, the expert or the committee has to first evaluate the relevance and subsequent utility and saleability of every entry that is made.

Literature is vast and hence comprises multiple branches which a learner is taught from time to time. One important school of literature and literary theory is the school of trauma studies, the relevance of which to the school of life cannot be refuted. This paper proposes first to understand the genealogy of this school and then try to evaluate its relevance in the pursuit of learning.

Originally, the Greek word for "wound", trauma, defying boundaries, has gone beyond the physical and refers also to the emotional injuries persisting long after the physical wound, if any, has healed. This remarkable shift in the meaning from the physical to the psychological could be traced back to the rapidly changing and emerging nineteenth century Victorian ethos. Both Victorian modernity and the developments in neuro sciences contributed to this transition. Consequently, "in the 1870s and 1880s, a whole new range of what the historian Ian Hacking calls 'diseases of memory'- mysterious conditions seemingly independent of the physical condition - began to be investigated seriously for the first time." (Luckhurst 498) Later, in 1893, two young Austrian psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breuer proposed and theorized in an essay, "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena" how physical symptoms of hysteria, multiple personality, amnesia, mood swings and so on have roots in traumatic experiences of the past, thereby sealing the physical and psychological interpretation of trauma. However, interestingly, they suggested that it is the 'memory' of the traumatic accident rather than the accident itself that contributes in stimulating and then manifesting the symptom. Freud explains the equation in his own words as, "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences." (*qtd*. in Erdelyi 25) And it is this





aspect of memory that explains to a large extent the bearing trauma has on literature and literary theory.

Academic trauma theory originated in the early 1990s from a relatively small group of scholars including Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman from Yale University, famous for its deconstructionist approach following Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. This development corresponded on the one hand with the development of a postmodern and poststructuralist idea of a fragmented self, and emergence of Holocaust Studies on the other. The year 1996 witnessed the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kalí Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, that gained for the field of trauma studies a significant attention in the domain of literary criticism thereby making trauma, as Roger Luckhurst would call it, "a privileged critical category" (Luckhurst 497) in his essay "Mixing memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Trauma Theory."

Today, the domain of trauma studies encompasses fields as vast as philosophy, ethics, psychology, aesthetics, psychoanalysis, cultural studies and many others dealing with the questions they raise about the nature and representation of traumatic events. Works of fiction based on trauma come very close to becoming historical fiction narrated in the first-person by any fictional or fictionalized survivors. The accounts of trauma they narrate enter the public consciousness for the consciousness to take it as historical memory. Such works express how trauma intensely thwarts the self's emotional make up and the way external world is perceived as a result of that. Cathy Caruth categorizes trauma as:

"a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive, hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviours stemming from the event…" (*Trauma* 4)

In the literary world of theory and creative writing, trauma and trauma theory have found a place among elements which explain the origination of literature. Similarly, by the same virtue, trauma theory has sought and then gained for itself a substantial place as a subject of study in the teaching learning process. Trauma studies investigates and explores the impact trauma has on literature and society by analysing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance thereby being practically 'useful' to the learner. The school of trauma studies draws its resources from divergent critical schools like Freudian psychoanalysis, feminism, new historicism, deconstruction and so on making it an interdisciplinary school and discourse.

The simplified idea behind trauma studies is that trauma pushes the psyche into a damaged but irreversible position thereby creating a void that defies an unambiguous linguistic expression. The function of literature then seems to make this void a central focal point and emphasize the extent of profound suffering from an external source, whether that source is an individual perpetrator or collective social practice that has resulted in trauma. Having said that, the inherent contradiction in trauma theory is a continuous tussle between the

inexpressibility of the traumatic experience in language and the dire need to find a linguistic equivalent to that experience. Teaching and learning of trauma studies brings forth, then, the possibilities of analysing how language can accommodate and communicate extreme experiences, how important a role literature can play in a violent world and how sufferings can shape and alter individuals as well as communities.

On the basis of these broad based concerns, this paper attempts to evaluate how trauma studies could be integrated with the principles of learning outcome-based curriculum framework, LOCF with reference to psychoanalysis, feminism and gender studies and the phenomenon of ideological omissions across repressed historical narratives. Incorporation of trauma studies in the curriculum serves a political purpose of breaking the stereotypes and sensitizing the learners. Further, it enables them to go beyond the text and bring out what is not very obvious. Therefore, it builds the taste for research and revision.

Psychoanalysis explains and theorizes trauma through memory and subjectivity and studies how both trauma and subjectivity are shaped by trauma. The concept of trauma began to occupy a central place in the psychoanalytic thought after Freud and Breuer presented their research on the study of hysteria. Their research attempted to focus not so much on the trauma as caused by external events but as generated by forces from within. Freud's work, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" is central to any discussion of trauma. Though Freud doesn't use the term trauma but his concept of 'traumatic neurosis' sets the basis for what today has become one of the fastest growing schools of analysis. Further, Freud introduced the concept of a fractured sense of time for the subjects of trauma, ultimately leading to a fractured sense of subjectivity. Though psychoanalysis remained preoccupied with traumatic experiences yet it successfully laid the basis for the study of drives and dreams of the psychic world embodied in literature and literary theory.

In trauma literature and trauma literary theory, interestingly, psychological principles are juxtaposed with linguistic principles in order to bring about a synthesis of a work of trauma. Michelle Balaev describes the situation as the "marriage of psychological laws that govern trauma's function to the semiotic laws that govern language's meaning." (Balaev 2) Literary criticism then studies trauma as a subject that brings forth the possibility of studying the relationship between language, psyche and behaviour. A comprehensive understanding of their relationship and the resultant knowledge of human conduct and behaviour becomes one of the pivots on which lies the justification of trauma as a subject of study in a classroom. In terms of LOCF, the sought after outcome here is a proper attitude and conduct.

The nature of trauma is repressive, repetitive and dissociative, as seen by the psychoanalytic approach, and trauma literary theory and literary texts utilize the same. Cathy Caruth aptly describes the equation in *Unclaimed Experience*,

> trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it is precisely *not known* in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on (Caruth 4)

Interestingly, trauma has an inherently ethical, social, political and historical dimension which comes across as a very relevant and handy attribute when seeking an answer to the value of teaching trauma. Therefore, we cannot limit it only in the psychological studies. Feminism could be credited with giving a proper model and proper political platform and context for a suppressed community to express multiple forms of sexual and physical oppression and trauma. Feminism evaluates and showcases lived experience of trauma that are individual and simultaneously collective. The school of feminism, gender studies and other allied schools document problems which are a part and parcel of our daily life, such as rape, domestic violence, childhood sexual abuse, discourses on slavery, refugees, incest, human trafficking, war-time sexual violence, adoption and other kinds of trauma in order to deflate social constructs about race, gender and class that the perpetrators of violence misuse to justify their acts of violence and trauma and simultaneously push the victim into believing that they have architected and therefore earned the pain and suffering. Moreover, the act of politicization brings forth the bearing dominant culture and power sources have on the symbols and acts of trauma and also on how the same culture impacts the reception of trauma.

Judith Herman traces the history of modern trauma research and its relationship to movements motivated by social justice, particularly feminism in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Violence to Political Terror*. She observes that during 1960's and afterwards, women's private experiences were bought into public spaces thereby politicizing the personal with the aim of exposing the dominant ideology. Further, feminism identifies common patterns of systematic abuse from a study of multiple individual narratives in order to seek an organized and collective response and action. This is achieved by viewing trauma as a tool of dominance and oppression. The appropriate reaction then is a complete refusal to remain silent and discontinue to remain a victim for life. The study of trauma then becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the learner to identify and combat the gender hostile forces in the literary and the physical world.

What seems today as a natural response to sexual and domestic abuse of women has come into existence as a result of huge fights and battles fought over women's rights and the consciousness of the abuse and the determination to fight it has been made possible through a systematic study of idea of trauma theory. To accomplish the task, women had to present convincing evidence to counter the existing powerful belief systems and produce nothing less than a major cultural shift. The problem for a feminist in the first place was to register violence against women as a recognized and ironically approved category of trauma as against the elite masculine trauma faced by men in wars and other related accidents. For example, Laura Brown, the feminist psychotherapist, raised questions against 'prioritizing' sufferings and pain of the masculine gender resulting out of events such as war over the common and day to day acts of domestic violence faced by women and coloured people. A similar struggle of recognizing domestic abuse as an act of trauma can be seen in the Bollywood feature film, *Thappad*, translated as 'slap' directed by Anubhav Sinha released

in February, 2020. The film tries to categorize violence against women which has been normalized to some extent, as an aberration and further seeks a disclaimer for domestic violence. Ironically, films showing violence against animals and use of tobacco substances display disclaimers and seek viewer discretions but in *thappad*, a slap is shown as a routine affair. Therefore, there are instances such as above in which trauma theory is being incorporated into the business of cinema and movie making to bring home a point highly relevant to the day to day business of life. This is precisely what LOCF based learning demands.

There are instances of employing the model of trauma narratives to suit the double purpose of first voicing the pain and then to utilizing the same to empower the victim in order to seek a life that is completely opposite to the one that has produced the pain and suffering. It has been rightly said, "the resolution of the trauma is never completed; there is no full recovery in the sense of a return to the previous self." (Hunt 77) The survivor then has to reconnect with life by coming to terms with the previous past. Margaret Atwood's work, for instance, is replete with illustrations of pain and suffering of female characters in order for them to gain self-knowledge and self-confidence. Works such as these when taught as a part of syllabus go a long way to bring about the same effect as they produce on the psyche of the characters.

Traditional literary histories have been found guilty of silencing free thinking and non-conformism through a propagation of ideologies springing from repressing historical narratives. Feminism revisits such historical narratives to present a sort of counter-memory in order to broaden the readers' awareness of the past as a complex construct filled with multiple but deliberate gaps and omissions. Caruth's assertion, "trauma is never simply one's own" (Caruth 24) aims at building a connection between an individual, a society and the historical past with an understanding and a realization that revisiting and reconstructing the past has political consequences for the present. Having said that, trauma literature implicitly argues that the past cannot be laid to rest; instead, it keeps haunting the present in a variety of forms. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a significant instance to support this argument.

Leigh Gilmore's recent study, arguing that "the age of *memoir* and the age of trauma have coincided" (Gilmore 16) doesn't come as a surprise especially in the context of the writers' urge to retell their past stories of oppression and in the process correct the past. The difference however lies in the claim to truth and authenticity by the two. If *memoirs* have direct claim over the truthfulness of their narrative, the trauma narratives present the truth in the fictionalized form, finding an excuse from any test of authenticity and truthfulness. All the same, telling the truth is a crucial element in all the trauma narratives.

Literary texts cultivate a diversity of values that bring forth individual and cultural interpretations of the self, memory and society. It is therefore almost impossible to conceptualize and compartmentalize trauma in a single mould because literature depicts it in many and almost contradictory forms. The school of literary trauma therefore has branched

into as many divisions as the domain of human thinking allows. However, trauma has a psychological origin and any study of trauma, be it in postcolonial studies, war narratives, postmodern fiction and theory, slave narratives, children's fiction and so on, has necessarily to be centred on psychoanalysis.

However, notwithstanding the dire need to goal-based learning, pedagogy and curriculum framework collectively brought under the acronym, LOCF, the essential role of literature and its varied branches like trauma studies is in producing knowledge and building the huge corpus of theories of value cannot be gainsaid. Teaching and learning trauma studies means integrating social needs and teaching practices in a manner that is responsive to the need of the community. Indeed there is an acute need of chiselling the practical skills of the learners but no skill is more vital than the skill of living life based on values.

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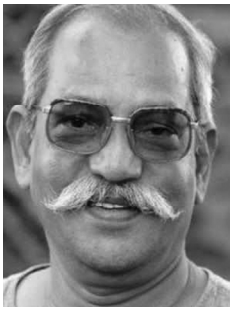
The Way Things Happen

N. Muthuswamy
Trans. C.T. Indra



N. Muthuswamy

They said I was three when I first fell into a well. It is thirty years now. I have much experience in falling into wells. There is a difference between falling into a well without an apron but one with a plank across resting on loose bricks and having a plunger-pole, and a well with an apron over it and a pulley with a rope hanging down. I have had both the experiences. In the latter there is less danger. Should one fall in, the rope will roll down the pulley without impeding the fall. One will have ample space to fall into. The plunger-pole on the other hand is not pliable. The bridge plank will reduce the width of the well. To make it worse there may be the bailing bucket hanging from the tip of the plunger-pole.

At the age of three I fell into a well which had a rope hanging down. Perhaps like animals, the rope also could be tamed. They said it did not hurt me.

It was father who built the apron, it seems, when he remodelled this house after buying it. Before that it was just an old well with no apron. Who knows how many generations of people who lived in that house drew water from that well? They had not got the water-lift installed either. They might have drawn water by simply fixing a plank across the well. They had apparently stood on all sides for drawing water. With the pots repeatedly knocking against the lining, the edges of the steps had got blunted. The well seemed as one made of a single circular frame. It was so as far as my memory goes.

Bricks from some of the lining rings had got disengaged and fallen into the well leaving gaping holes. Sparrows had built nests in those holes at levels to which water did not rise for the greater part of the year. When the bucket entered the well, they would fly in fright above, dashing against each other. When the huge tamarind tree, which was uprooted during a squall and fell between the well and the haystack looking as if it had sent its roots in the sky, was split with gunpowder for making fuel for the kiln, two of the bricks slipped from a hole and fell into the well. The nest slid and the sparrows flew up. The fledglings which opened their mouths wide for grub, fell into the water and died. The nest floated on the water. Soft feathers too floated. On occasions, when trying to remove the crow-droppings

covered plants growing in the crevices, the bricks would also be dislodged in the process and wouldfall. On the top ring in one place the bricks had started crumbling and had become powdery. Lower in the well just above the reach of water, spiders' webs would be covered with powdered red brick. Those webs abandoned by spiders would hang like a threadbare red piece of cloth. There were no steps to go down and remove the webs. Nor was anyone interested in removing the cobwebs by some other means. They might have removed them while taking me out of the well. Although that could not have been the intention, they must have been disturbed in the cumbersome process of getting me out.

We could look upon the well only as a deep tub dug in the earth. In peak summer, its water level would sink to about a foot. After drawing water for the cattle tubs, the floor would begin to be visible like the hand-dug spring in the dry bed of Cauveri. We had to manage during the day time with the one foot of water that would collect overnight. Because the source of the spring got blocked in summer, we tried digging up to the base structure. The stones on one side started falling. The base structure got shaken. Digging further would have endangered the well itself. That effort was given up there and then. When I fell into the well, except for this change, it seems, the rest remained just as they are now.

It was summer when I fell. I fell when the evening was turning dark in the month of Chithirai [April-May] with its smell of the soil left dry after the day's heat, sultry with not even the dry breeze blowing, the trees standing still, dazed.

The maid had drawn water , filled the tub for the cattle, and was gone. The servant had pulled out enough hay from the rick for the cattle trough and was gone. He was not supposed to enter the second bay of the house crossing over the cattle shed. In the veranda inside, the calf that was still suckling was tied to the pillar and hay had to be provided for it. You couldn't tie it in the shed. The cattle might knock it down. Or the calf might unfasten the knot and suckle the milk dry. The cow may turn itself at such an angle as to enable the calf to suckle. That cow was also known as a wily cow.

Grandmother went to the backyard to fetch hay for the calf. Without putting herself to much trouble she could have gathered hay from the cattle trough itself. But in the shed, there would be the 'Mylai' bull with white and black patches, charging at the sight of a saree. Father considered it a matter of pride to have that bull in the shed. It was a point of special pride to have a bull which nobody else had in their shed, and that too, a bull with a unique temperament. When the bull stood in front of the house yoked to the cart, the women of the street would be afraid to go past the animal. This too had made father feel amused and proud.

It was precisely because of her fear of the bull that grandmother went to the haystack to fetch hay. I too ran behind her with a rag in hand. She had spotted me just as she was entering the enclosure for the haystack, opening the wicket gate. "Go away... get inside. There might be insects. Get inside", so saying she stood for a moment. It seems I did turn to go inside. Assured that I would be going inside, grandmother started towards the haystack.

Waiting for her to disappear, hiding behind the threshold I crossed over the step and came to the well.

The pulley had not yet been removed from the well and taken to the second bay of the house. It would be stolen if left at the well. It used to be removed and brought inside only after fetching hay for the calf. Grandmother would wash herself of the hay prickles sticking to her body, remove the pulley and take it inside.

C.T. Indra

The bucket was on the apron. It was not a round shaped apron, it was square. It had been constructed low and broad enough to sit on. The rope was lying in coils close by. Near the apron was the granite stone for washing clothes, which however, was not set but secured at the bottom with broken tile-chips. I wanted to soak the rag in my hand in the water in the bucket and beat it on the stone. I could not reach the bucket. Nor could I climb on to the rim. I guess I got up on to the rim stepping over the granite stone. Perhaps there was no water in the bucket. How to wash without water? I must have thought that at least I could play with the bucket. I got into the bucket. The bucket was big, big enough for a three-year old child to squat inside and be hidden. I did not want grandmother to know about my hiding when she returned from the haystack. May be, I peeped out to see if she was coming. The cement pillar meant for the crossbar to suspend the pulley must have obstructed my view. I must have leaned out further to see beyond the pillar to look for grandmother. Perhaps I held the rim of the bucket. The bucket tipped and fell into the well. I should normally have slipped from the bucket. But it didn't happen that way. The bucket descended into the well, carrying me. While falling perhaps I held on to the bucket tight. Till the bucket reached the water the remaining length of the rope had slid down the pulley and fallen over me. The full weight however did not fall on me; one half fell on me and the other on the water.

Memory now is fading even as the growing darkness of the evening makes it difficult to see the bottom of the well from above. They said they sent a lantern down and found me inside the well. Even that got put out half- way through when the flame shot up and went out. Then they searched with the help of a flashlight someone happened to have with him. It seems I was sitting inside the bucket holding on to the rope. It is not known if I was crying. I did not get scratched anywhere. Even though the bucket slipped down with force, it had descended without hitting the sides. As it hurtled down, my tender heart might have felt as if it were going up. In the night even when one unwittingly sets foot on a pothole that can barely hold a handful of water, mistaking it for level ground, the heart experiences a thud. The limb buckles,losing even the little energy that goes into our walking on level ground. The fall hits the brain. It feels as though the flesh underneath the skin is scratched with something with a rough surface. Who knows if a three-year old can have such a sensation?

I had once fallen into my neighbour's well when, in an effort to send down and immerse the bailing bucket, holding the plunger-pole, putting the energy of the hand over the pole and pushing it down with full force, I placed my foot in the well's hollow instead of on the plank across. It was then I felt the shock in my mind. It appears I was scratched. There was a series of such occurrences, each causing me to forget the earlier one.The plank across scratched the ribs. The bailing bucket that was pressed down slipped from the hand, rose up to hit the face and scratched it. While falling, on the way the head knocked against one of the rings. A piece of flesh with some hair got stuck there. I had then fallen into a well with plenty of water. The touch of water on the scratched skin gave a burning sensation. Since I was sitting in the bucket while falling, it did not cause any scratch. Even so the bucket must have hit hard the bottom of the well, when it fell with such force. The little water that had collected in the spring must have however prevented the full force of the shock from being felt. Notwithstanding, I might have felt the shock that was inevitable. I don't know, I might have been frightened by the gathering darkness in such a narrow place. Over me there was the weight of the wet rope. The water that splashed because of the force of the fall must have made the rope wet. Around me there was water though not deep. In shock I might have been lying unconscious. Or else, still conscious, shrinking in sheer fright, I might have been sitting trembling, holding fast to the bucket. It took a long time to pull me out. In fact, it took a long time to discover that I was inside the well. Even grandmother who was close by beside the haystack did not know that I had fallen into the well.

Grandmother, who was afraid of the'Mylai' bull, was in fact cornered by the very animal which was standing right there. Perhaps the servant had forgotten to tie it up or perhaps it had broken loose from the shed. The moment it saw her it came charging and chased her. She could not run back to the wicket gate. As the animal had been standing on the eastern side, hidden from her view, grandmother had started pulling out hay from the western part of the stack, unaware of its presence. On hearing the noise of hay being pulled out it moved to the southern side. Noticing her, it bent down its head, in fury, aiming to charge at her. Grandmother saw it and ran to the north. It chased her from behind. Grandmother was running round and round the haystack. Without access for her to the wicket gate in the south, the bull continued to chase her as if at play. Grandmother went up the hayrick clutching the threaded hay. It stood on the northernside gazing at her. Slowly and steadily moving over the hayrick she came to the southern side. The hayrick shook. The bull stood in the same place. Grandmother slowly slid down along the hay on the southern side. The hay too slipped and fell over her and covered her. The bull ran up and charged at her, covered as she was with hay. She was rolled up in hay. Fright had made her desperate and her very despair made her shed her fright. After all, what she had feared most was the bull attacking her. And it had now happened. It might continue. Instead of remaining in the same place and letting it happen she resolved that she would rather let it happen while running. The number of assaults might be less. It would reduce further depending on how soon she started running and at what pace she ran. At once she got up and ran,with hay all over her. The bull came running along charging. She ran out through the wicket gate and closed it. The bull could not

pull its whole body through the gate. It was caught in the middle. Leaving it there, grandmother ran passing the well. It took some time for the bull to extricate itself from the gate and come out. In the meanwhile, grandmother crossed over the backyard and bolted the door. She was gasping for breath.

"Sell it off, get rid of it, I had advised him, but he wouldn't listen, would he? Is he waiting for the bull to take someone's life?" So saying grandmother went and sat in the veranda. Mother, carrying a lighted lamp to keep in the pyol, passed her. "The boy has not yet returned. Stilla stripling and already he has started gadding about! God knows where he has gone," so saying mother moved on. She had not noticed my going to the backyard with grandmother.

Grandmother was piqued that mother didn't deign to notice her. " Very much taking after the father, even at this age," she said and made herself more comfortable by leaning back, with her hand on her head. She too believed that I might have been frightened by her warning me about 'insects', and that I must have got back into the house and gone out.

Mother set the lamp in the niche of the pyol and looked for me in the street and came back. "He is missing. God knows where he has gone", she said and turned to grandmother and asked, "Have you brought in the bucket from the well?" Even then, it seems, grandmother had no suspicion. She was much too shocked by the encounter with the bull to think of connecting me and the well. She was only angry with mother.

"How d' you expect me to bring it in? You know, that bull, the mount of Lord Siva which that husband of yours has brought into this house. In fact, it is standing guard by the bucket as if he were Yama's mount. Who's going to take away the bucket? No woman dare go there. Only a man might. For that it must grow darker still. Don't worry", said grandmother.

"Your son's also out. Let me see if anyone is passing by", mother said and moved to the front door.

Broker Kannusami was going eastward. He was closely involved with father in buying and selling cattle. He had hydrocele. He couldn't walk far. He went around everywhere with father in the cart.

"Kannusami, didn't you go with master to Sembanarkoil?" asked mother. This was another way of asking him to come in and attend to the job she was giving him.

He knew. "No there was some other business. Master hasn't come back yet", answering, he too came up the steps.

"A fine bull you've got, both of you, I say. The'Mylai' bull is standing near the well. Go, tie it up." She thus justified her giving him an odd job.

He came inside. "What Periamma, sitting in darkness?" so saying he entered the open yard.

Grandmother was sitting in the veranda in the shadow cast by the lantern suspended from the sloping end of the roof.

"I say, you get rid of that Yama and then enter the house. I warn you." she said.

"Periamma seems to be in great anger", said Kannusami laughing, standing in the open yard.

"Today it had almost done me to death, pressing me against the haystack. How'd you expect me not to be angry?"

He entered the veranda adjoining the backyard.

"While you're about it, bring a bunch of hay."

As he was crossing the second bay, mother called out from the kitchen, "Kannusami, remember to bring the bucket in too."

"I shall", and he was gone.

He tied the bull and brought some hay for the calf, rolled. "The bucket isn't there in the well. The pulley alone remains. Perhaps it has fallen into the well", he said.

It seems only then could grandmother connect me and the well. "Oh my God, the child has perhaps slipped into the well," horrified, she got up and ran. Mother, I am told, ran behind crying "Oh my darling". Kannusami followed with the lantern.

In no time the news spread all over the street. From the street it reached the road. Every one of them ran about in different directions spreading the news excitedly, claiming that he had known it much earlier. The fellow who had stacked hay in the cattle trough was standing at the road-side pan shop, buying betel leaf and bargaining for a stub of tobacco. Someone pushed himself forward and told him the news, "Your master's child has fallen into the pond". He thought that it was lucky that he was still there around, pestering for a tobacco stub. He ran towards Sembanarkoil to inform father. They said he informed father even before I was rescued from the well and that father arrived right when I was being pulled out. They were reeling off such stories in Punjai about that man's running so fast.

How fast can a biped human being run? He isn't a four-legged horse, is he? Or is he a wheel that can move faster than that? A wheel has several spokes. At the most he can make himself four-legged. He can use his two hands. He should turn them into the spokes of a wheel and not the limbs of an animal. Surely, he must do a somersault or cartwheel.

Even today I have a vision of him running. Like the blades of the table-fan, his arms and legs losing their contours, give the illusion of rotating backwards. The head alone looks like the hub whirling at the centre. The trees on the roadside jostle against each other and run like mad towards Punjai. The groves on the sides of the road revolve trying to change direction. Banana plants fade,falling into one green. With him as the axle, all the scenes rotate. The left and the right in a semi-circle, swinging in the opposite direction, go behind him and get set.

The pace at which he ran, it seems, made him pant like a dog. He could not even communicate the message. He had toiled for our family like a farm animal. He was loyal like a dog and his tongue clean like a dog's, unlike that of a human being. While panting, the saliva did not dribble from the tongue as in the case of a dog and the tongue became dry and hence, he remained a human being. With great difficulty, manoeuvring his tongue which was cleaving to the palate, he spoke.

"The child has fallen into the well."

"Where? Where?" father who was sitting in a shop, got up and came running.

Because he was panting, his ribs were going up and down. It was an effort for him to speak. Words got stuck in the parched throat. He tried to moisten his throat, but he could not salivate.

Father understood that he could not speak. "Hurry up, get the cart ready", said he.

He untied the bulls from the beech tree opposite the shop and yoked them to the cart. Father took up the ropes in his hand and got on to the cart. Without waiting for him, father drove the cart on the Kaveripoompattinam road in the direction of Punjai, going past the eastern junction.

Those were bulls selected by Kannusami. They were used to being driven by father. Perhaps they sensed his state of mind through the nose-curbs attached to the rope reins. They ran as if saying 'Four plus four eight legs. In addition, the spokes. We could run faster still; let us run'. They ran with the back of the hoof bent, spraying earth over the wheel. It was not the mark of a good breed, they thought, to hang the head down; therefore, they ran holding their heads high, the mouth frothing white.

It was not possible for Kannusami to run. He gathered the thick cord lying in the second bay of the house and slowly reached the well. He had already planned how to go down the well. He couldn't stretch his legs to the sides while descending. He decided to go down the well holding on to the cord. At the well grandmother and mother were screaming in frenzy. One could not see the bottom of the well merely with the help of the lantern. Asking mother to bring jute string and tying the cord in the centre of the crossbar from which the pulley was hung, he slowly let the loose end into the well. He was careful that the cord should not fall over me with its weight. In the meanwhile, mother brought the jute string. He tied the lantern to it and gave it to mother, instructing her to let it down gently, and himself went down slipping, holding on to the rope. The lantern also followed him into the well. Half-way through it went out and again darkness enveloped the well. In the meantime, quite a few people had gathered around the well. Someone who had carried a flashlight in hand, beamed it into the well. I was in the bucket. Kannusami too had reached the bottom of the well slipping down the cord. 'The child is alive… the child is alive", so shouting, it seems, he lifted me up. His hands had been cut by the cord. His blood dripped over me.

How were they to lift me up? Should they draw the bucket up with me inside, on the way I might again fall. Kannusami too could not come up on his own. Someone had to lift both of us up.

They brought a giant bailing bucket. They tied it firmly on its hooks on four sides and let it into the well. Kannusami seated himself at the centre of the bailing bucket without the least movement, lifting me up and setting me on his lap. On the four corners of the well's rim four people stood and lifted the bucket without any jerk. We came out.

Father too arrived from Sembanarkoil. He took me from Kannusami. It seems he was shocked to see blood running down on me.

"It's the blood from our brother Kannusami's hand, Sir", someone in the crowd seems to have said.

Looking at Kannusami, his hand dripping with blood and shaking, father is reported to have said, "Kannusami, you saved my child. So long as I am alive, I shall give you every month a *kalam* of paddy."

The people around had all praised father. Kannusami smiled weakly. Till he died he was never tired of telling me the tale of his descent into the well. There have been occasions when I avoided him to escape his narration.

[The Tamil story, with the title "Natappu", was published in 1968 in the magazine *Natai*.]

*Line of Control**

B. Hariharan

Silence is its own language
Caught in the throat;
Caught in loneliness.

Air raid sirens and bombings
Clean ethnic cleansing
For seventy-two days.
The world looks on:
Taut from throat to tongue
Pleated in darkness,
Hanging upside down.

The blindness of silence
Ripping through the uniform,
The searing bullets.
Somewhere in the glaciers
In lines out of control
The explosion
Churning snowcaps red.

Cartography of nations
Outgrowing the lines
Drawn in history:
The blood of silence
Is the line of control.

*The Kargil War

*The Silent Soldier**

Here is
The silence of silence.
I try the word
As though for the first time
To break the silence,
To end up
Breaking into different sounds.
The silence of silence remains.

There are so many silences up here,
More than the number of soldiers,
And infiltrators,
And whatever,
Soldiers create silence
By firing shells and bombs.
Even a repeater offers
It's version of silence.

My work here is silence.
I better be silent.

*The Kargil War

*Sonnet on Silence**

Silence erupts like sweat
To be wiped
On the shirt sleeve.

Unseen instruments
Orchestrate its presence
And I listen to the song.

Now it is eerie
Spreading across the slopes
Seeping through the boots.

Then surrounded
By mountains of silence
And mystery.

An overwhelming sweep down,
A benumbing burden.

*The Kargil War

A Waiting Game

It crosses
the mountains
and oceans

penetrates deeply the skin
irrespective of hues
and marks of civilization

invisible to the naked eye
plays its game of death
not letting us into the RNA of the game.

A deadly touch forces
nations and all facilities available
to play this game of death.

Death toll unabated.
Heads of states in hospitals,
while others not knowing what to say or do
wait for miracle of word.

Blood everywhere: the bourse, MNCs,
The social fabric built over two millennia.
This surely is no light and sound show!

The very rhythm of life goes for a spin
And yet must play to a different spin:

Touch and fall, it sings a different tune!
Oh, the irony of it: to remain untouched
we live without touching.

Now imprisoned
in the civilization of our own making
we wait thanatophobic

Shut up inside the tower of our vulnerability
we become Pareekshiths
trying to play it safe

Oh yes, we have played many games:
from war games to games of love
we are homo ludens.

Is this a waiting game?
A possible endgame?

The Great Flood

A sudden downpour: the clouds burst open
Above the ravished land, her wounds licked
By the urgent tongue, the sluice gates forced open.
It submerges her helpless highways that cut life's pathway.

How can the terrified puny creatures divert
The celestial deluge from their loosened soil?
And how can the settlements, laid in that muddy rush,
Ever feel the strange ululations of the great flood?

A shudder atop the hills engenders there
Many a landslide, uprooted lives and debris
And hundreds dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute force of the elements,
Did we put on nature's knowledge with its power
When the waters receded to rebuild a livable ecosystem?

Hockey Novel

Frozen words
skate
in
the
rink
Passing from here
to there
Reaching
and
not reaching
Resounding against
the hollow
of the roof the
boards

Hurt adam's apple
Wanting to let out

The fine tip
Figureskating
Traces a pattern
Right on

Puck

shot
at you

The Evolution of Feminist Theories: Politics and Encounter

Manoj S.

Abstract

Feminist theory has come a long way, since its inception in the eighteenth century, by encountering different ideological and critical concepts and theories of twentieth century and beyond. The theory incorporated into its framework a deep interest in analysing gender related complexities in the society. It has sought to present and define women's role in society from an exclusively women's perspective, analysing how gender is constructed and maintained as part of a signifying structure of human interrelationships which informs the totality of human experience. The recent mode of 'third-wave feminism' seeks to liberate feminism from the constraints of excessive theoretical concerns and rejects most feminist political movements. It occupies itself with the differences between women and the diverse means by which they negotiate their existence as women/feminists.

Keywords: feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, third-wave feminism, ideology, intersectionality.

Feminism which emerged as a socio-political movement in the late eighteenth century Europe, mostly by upper and middle class white women as a quest for political participation, demanding universal suffrage and equal rights, became a concerted movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and has since come to address and include the concerns of racially and geographically disparate female experiences across the globe. Feminist anthropologists have righty identified the relationship between politics and knowledge, and sought to reconstruct knowledge from a female perspective. They have researched how gender roles and relations were defined, enacted, manipulated, enabled, or negotiated in varying socio-historical contexts in the past (Margaret W. Conkey 125). Writing in 1992 Rebecca Walker, daughter of Alice Walker, feels that "to be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fibre of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of

systemic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women, when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them" (400). In her introduction to *The Essential Feminist Reader* Estelle B. Freedman points out that "… two features distinguish feminism from women's individual efforts to claim spiritual, familial, or political authority. First, feminism explicitly rejects the legitimacy of patriarchal rule. Second, feminism initiates social movements to alter laws and customs" (*xii*). Earlier feminists saw patriarchy as a social force which "silenced women's voices, distorted their lives and treated their concerns as peripheral" (Rivkin 527). But later feminism has diversified itself under different labels like radical feminism, feminisms of women of colour, psychoanalytic feminism, postmodern feminism, eco feminism etc., encountering, assimilating and resisting critical theories of the 20th century onwards, developing a strong theoretical basis for its arguments. For later feminisms one of the central concerns is gender related cultural complexities existing in the society, rather than political discrimination which was the concern of earlier feminism. The contemporary attempt is to present and define women's role in society from an exclusively women's perspective, analysing how gender is constructed and maintained as part of a signifying structure of human interrelationships which informs the totality of human experience. This position enriches contemporary critical theory in the sense that it analyses the social meaning of gender in a comprehensive way. An engagement with the social meaning of gender forms a chief problematic aspect of contemporary critical theory. The sociologist Raewyn Connell even connects gender to a proper understanding of class and race: "we cannot understand class, race or global inequality without constantly moving towards gender. Gender relations are a major component of social structure as a whole, and gender politics are among the main determinants of our collective fate" (Connell 256).

Early feminist writings were influenced by liberal humanist ideology as evident in works like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, arguing for the progressive need for an egalitarian society ensuring an equal place for women. The early decades of the twentieth century brought the much sought out political equality for women in the form of the right to franchise, being established in most countries in Western Europe and North America, which later became the new normal in the rest of the world too (Hekman 96). But this political change did not improve the situation of women, or liberate them politically, socially, economically or legally. It was apparent that liberal theory did not solve the problem of inequality. The feminist movement gathered force and momentum in the latter half of the twentieth century when women began a more concerted effort for the abolition of discriminating laws, and for employment in hitherto banned fields. Liberal feminists felt that women's inferior status rested, in particular, with political and legal inequality. But the general questionable stance, that the inferiority of women is a direct implication of their political and legal status, led them to an impasse as suggested by their inability to define or correct the inequality women faced in the so called structure of 'political equality' that they 'achieved' (by gaining the right to franchise). Betty Friedan's passionate cry in the 1963 America truly represents the later twentieth century women's agony and dissatisfaction:

> Each suburban wife struggled with it alone ... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—"Is this all?" For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfilment as wives and mothers. Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. (Friedan 11)

The liberal feminist position progressed to the next level of political evolution with its encounter with Marxism, assimilating the idea of power and its relation to economic production – the overthrow of capitalist systems of production will liberate women. The idea was suggested in Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* which was published earlier in 1845. Marx's theories were used by feminist writers in the twentieth century to formulate a Marxist feminism. Juliet Mitchell, a prominent writer of the period, expounded the 'dual-systems theory' pointing out the double oppression that women faced from capitalism on the one side, and patriarchy on the other. Hence, the writers upholding the theory felt that liberation of women will come only by dismantling the structures of both these systems. In this context, another feminist author of the time Nancy Hartsock successfully developed an approach which she called a 'feminist standpoint', and took the position along with Mitchell of attacking both capitalism and patriarchy simultaneously to achieve liberation. The theory led to a more elaborate understanding of the cultural mores of women's oppression by revealing the underlying structure of patriarchy that oppressed women in multiple ways. Nevertheless, the limitation of focussing exclusively on the perceivable structure of society still remained to be addressed before the feminist movement could fully develop itself as a critical theory of society.

In the latter half of the twentieth century intellectual women engaged in critical theory began to notice the structured absence of gender perspective and 'woman' in critical discourse. In Britain a women's study group at CCCS came up with a collection of essays *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination*, taking objection to the absence of women's work in the intellectual work happening at the centre, and ensuring women's presence there. This was one of the earliest engagements of feminist interest in the emerging field of cultural studies, initiating an investigation into the material conditions of women's life under the capitalist social structure, taking inputs primarily from Marxist theory (Balsamo 54). Later feminist literary critics began to bring in a broader cultural context in their readings of literary texts, contributing to the area of feminist cultural studies. The intellectual scope of feminist theory broadened as it encountered major twentieth century theoretical advancements.

The feminist movement came of age when it came under the influence of poststructuralist, postmodern, psychoanalytical and cultural theories, and started exploring, from diverse standpoints, the formation of women identities. Finally, feminist theorists were able to go beyond an exploration of the legal and political structures of society to the serious business of analysing how gender is constructed and sustained in all locales of society and human

experience. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published in 1988, marks this paradigm shift when she emphatically proclaims that, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295). A broader theoretical understanding of how everyday women's life is constructed was possible as a result of the encounter with other theories. Feminist thinkers now started to look into the deeper structures of meaning production related to gender in relation with the inferior position of women in society. The hitherto unexplored areas of women's role in reproduction, mothering, nurturing, sexuality, gender roles etc. came under the radar of feminist studies. Women's roles in these aspects of human life were held as defining and perpetuating their inferior status, subordinating themselves to men. Capitalism was also seen as perpetuating women's subordination, as Gaye Rubin notes "if sexism is a by-product of capitalism's relentless appetite for profit, then sexism would wither away in the advent of a successful socialist revolution" (Rubin 159).

Radical feminists like Shulamith Firestone, Mary O'Brien, Adrienne Rich and Kate Millett have problematised and debated motherhood as an important social role of women, which is central to their identity formation, and a fatal role, for Firestone, which to an extent defines their inferior position. Firestone, particularly took the stance that the responsibility women shoulder for raising children keeps them in a secondary position vis-à-vis their male counterpart. For her, motherhood keeps women at a subordinate level; even if all other barriers to women's liberation are removed, they will still be inferior to men because of this single social role assigned to them. Firestone wanted women to abandon the role of mothering altogether, which she believed would help them attain emancipation. But when she propounded artificial reproduction as a solution to the problem, even hard-core feminists found it weird and unacceptable. Nevertheless, the question of reproduction and sexuality remained a central area of exploration for the radical feminists as they proceeded to reverse Firestone's position to embrace motherhood as an integral part of the female identity, reiterating the need to assert it as a positive act. They realised the vital need to take control of the process of reproduction, liberating it from traditionally established patriarchal power structures, as pointed out by Mary O'Brien in her much debated work *The Politics of Reproduction* published in 1981. Meanwhile, authors like Adrienne Rich projected motherhood as a uniquely feminine activity that women should affirm rather than deny; as an inherently positive role played by women in the construction and sustenance of human society, while at the same time admitting that the institution of motherhood, as perceived by patriarchy, has been degrading and damaging to women: "motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities" (Rich 13). Consequently, the argument that motherhood is a source of women's inferior position was rejected, and attempts were made to redefine motherhood as a positive and life-affirming activity which defines the female identity. The central thesis of radical feminists was that it is the cultural process which goes into the construction of the female identity which necessitates women's subordination, rather than biological discrepancy, or the influence of different structural forces that are at work in the society.

While liberal and Marxist feminism have focussed on the objective structures of society – law, politics and economics – radical feminists shifted the focus to the production of meaning in society, bringing about a focal shift from the idea of equality to the idea of difference. In a sense the liberal and Marxist approaches privileged men; women were to rise to the standards set up by men. Radical feminism in contrast, affirmed that women are rather different from men, but in a positive sense. They wanted to address the problem of women's subordination without erasing the emphasis on their difference from men. This perspective brought all aspects of human behaviour and social life under scrutiny, and a large body of literature was produced exploring the nuanced processes of cultural production which constructed the notion of the female. The study of structures, institutions and power are central:

> … the critical agenda of feminist cultural studies extends beyond the by now familiar arguments for canon revision. It's probably fair to say that feminist cultural studies subsume the study of literature under the broader study of culture, where textuality may be the medium of analysis, but the study of structures, institutions, and relations of power are the horizon of feminist scholarship. (Balsamo 56)

Nancy Chodorow

It was pointed out that literature is often permeate with sexual meanings which belittle women (Kate Millett); the patriarchal structure of the church was viewed as playing a major role in supressing women (Mary Daly). Thus, in spite of several controversies the radical feminist movement has played a decisive role in the development of feminist thought and theory.

Many feminists, towards the close of the twentieth century, turned to psychoanalytical theory as a useful framework to explore the aspect of women's difference from men. For this, Freud's foundational work on the psychological differences between men and women was explored, but rejected later as he held that women could not successfully resolve the Oedipus complex, a failure which Freud posited as the root cause for problems related to women's mature sexuality. But feminists tried to comprehend the problem from a peculiarly female standpoint. Feminist theorists Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow believed that women differ from men not because of inherent psychological reasons/differences but because of sociological and cultural grooming methods practised by mothers related to the upbringing of the girl child in a family. They noted significantly different sociological behavioural patterns being employed for raising boys and girls respectively, which are extreme opposites. Consequently, men and women have diverse mental make-ups when they grow up, and hence have different psychological problems to address. Men struggle with maintaining

proper relationships and controlling emotions, while women cannot handle competition and find it difficult to attain autonomy. Chodorow proposes the practice of 'dual parenting' as a solution to this problem, where both parents are encouraged to play a balanced, equally involved constructive role in the upbringing of children.

While enquiring how subjects are ideologically constituted in relation to different discourses, Stuart Hall notes that the psychoanalytic framework was relegated as falling in the feminist pole as it is a question about the "insides" of people as against the Marxist (male) pole which is "about" social relations and production (*Cultural Studies 1983* 135). Feminist psychoanalysts have taken note of this male-constructed dualism in their work. Psychologists like Carol Gilligan, while attributing women's passivity to the suppression of their sexuality, has also studied the mental processes underlying women's moral decisions and found that for women the immediate context is of great concern, while men are concerned more with universal principles (when it comes to taking moral decisions). For her women "need to silence false feminine voices in order to speak for themselves" (Gilligan x). While such studies underlined women's difference with men, it also projected women's way of moral reasoning as equally valid with that of men, rejecting the idea that women are deficient because of their relational and contextual approach. Psychoanalytic feminism has successfully challenged the founding assumptions of Western metaphysics in this context and argued that women are different but equal; they tried to bring in social and cultural explanations in the place of biological and essentialist explanations. The human psyche for them is a social product, and hence women's 'difference' is a social product. But differences between women were obscured by the approach, as the idea of women presented was a monolithic one.

It is in this context that women of colour began to protest against a discourse dominated by white middle-class women privileging a 'biased' definition of woman without recognising diversity, defining all other women as 'different' and hence deficient. They began to form their own organisations as early as the 1980's to resist the domination of the white women; this movement was political in nature and involved minorities and different ethnicities from around the world including African-American women, Asian-American women, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders. They sought to found theories that addressed their specific situations and experiences, and which rejected universal ideas, acknowledging the differences of race, ethnicity and sexuality between women. The turn of direction has strengthened the feminist movement in the sense that it has prompted an exploration of race, ethnicity and sexual orientation as socially and culturally constructed and thereby challenging traditional and patriarchal structure of societies and the meanings associated with these categories.

Postmodern feminism took up the theme of 'differences' inspired by the works of postmodern psychoanalysts and philosophers like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault, and has coursed the direction of contemporary feminist thought. The tradition of modernist dualistic thought privileging the gendered masculine was challenged, particularly by a group of French feminists – Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous, to foreground a

Julia Kristeva

pluralistic epistemology that defies dualisms. Irigaray advocates a feminine writing, *ecriture feminine*, to counter and overcome the phallocratic, dualistic discourse that characterises modernism. Julia Kristeva's approach is psychoanalytic and makes use of Lacan's concept that in the phallocentric language woman is not only the 'other', but also a lack; she is obliterated in the male discourse. For Kristeva this external/outside position of women equips her with the potential to disrupt and transform the male dominated discourse. Cixous takes a different position which equips her for an attempt to escape masculine dualism with what she calls a 'feminine imaginary'. But it is Judith Butler who brought postmodern feminism into the forefront of the feminist movement with the publication of her book *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Postmodernist thought had problematised the concept of identity, terming it as fiction; consequently, if women's identity itself is a fiction then the cry for women's liberation makes little sense. And hence, Butler questioned the viability of feminist identity politics, a politics which is built around women's identity. She questions the very concept of constructed individual identities:

Judith Butler

> And how do the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible identity? In other words, the "coherence" and "continuity" of "the person" are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility. Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (Butler 23)

If the concept of 'woman' is shaped by social practices and structuring styles of discourses, then, the act of subverting such practices and discourses will destabilize that identity. Butler advocated such acts for practicing feminist politics. For feminist theorists, this marked the

prioritisation of language and meaning formation subverting the earlier engagement with biology and essences. For Butler the idea of 'woman' is a fiction produced by social structures that constitute gender. But it was pointed out that this position is dangerous, as it will negate the case of women's liberation itself. Contemporary sociologists like Vicki Kirby have brought the framework of cultural studies to question the effect of nature/culture dichotomy in the construction of the concept of gender:

> This analysis will draw on one of the genetic markers of a certain style of feminist and cultural criticism, namely, the critique of Cartesian thought and the political inflections that pivot around its binary logic. Theorists of gender, sexuality, and race, for example, have found that Nature/the body is routinely conflated with women, the feminine, the primordial, with unruly passion and "the dark continent" – all signs of a primitive deficiency that requires a more rational and evolved presence (the masculine/whiteness/ heterosexuality/ culture and civilization) to control and direct its unruly potential. (Kirby 215)

But the recent mode of 'third-wave feminism' seeks to liberate feminism from the constraints of excessive theoretical concerns and rejects most feminist political movements. It occupies itself with the differences between women and the diverse means by which they negotiate their existence as women/feminists. The emerging idea is that rather than considering women's case as essential and universal, each individual's case should be considered as unique and should be confronted independently. The 'new materialists' too have positioned themselves against postmodern feminists, critiquing that the postmodernist stance has totally negotiated the discussion of the material and focussed only on language as the element constituting reality. It is not language alone that constitutes human reality; the material, particularly the female body should be brought back into the discussion, according to them. They discuss women's body as taking the brunt of environmental disintegration, and also the effects of modern medical practices and toxic wastes produced by modern ways of living.

More recent feminist thought has been influenced by the concept of intersectionality. The intersection of gender with influencing factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and ableism are analysed as major factors constituting gender (Hekman 105). How gender structures these factors are also taken up for serious study, and consequently these intersecting factors throw light on the nuanced structure of the society itself. Feminist theory and aesthetics, thus, have always been in a state of fluidity, transforming and widening its scope down the ages.

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Socio-Cultural Perspectives: Chindus as Performing Artistes in Dalit Community in Telangana State

J. Bheemaiah

Abstract

Chindus are one among several dependent castes within the Dalit community in Telangana State. Basically, Chindus are artistes being patronized by the Madigas, a patron community. Distinguished by their artistic skills in their performance,Chundus are treated as inferior even within the Dalit community. They narrate folk stories and perform Yekshaganam or Bagotham representing the Madiga culture. Chindu is a Telugu word which serves as a synonym for Natyam, Nritam and Natakam (dance and drama). 'Chindu' is the other name for performing art. It would mean 'a vibrant step'[1] which is a unique patterned expression that looks like a dance. It would also mean 'jump'. The performance of the Chindus is interspersed with leaps and jumps. The paper explores patron-client relation between Chindus and Madigas and they glorify the past on par with the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. It would also examine how art performance has been commercialized for the sake of livelihood for want of patronage from the Dalit community.

Keywords: Chindus, Madigas, Yekshaganam, Bagotham, Patronage, Natyam.

'Origin of Chindu'

There was no earth, no water, no light, no wind, no sky, and no Brahmha, no Vishnu and Maheshwara. No stars, no sun and Moon. There was nothing, nihility all over, pitch darkness" At that time, 'OM' was the only sound that existed. Masku originated out of 'Onkara' and rain originated out of Masku, Rain fell into the sea. A mass of rain created numerous water beds. A bubble originated out of water beds. A whirl was formed out of the bubble. A conch emerged from the *sudi* and from the conch primordial Jambavantha was born. Primordial Jambava, danced singing several kinds of songs. That dance is called 'Chindu'. We understand that the origin of 'Chindu' is as old as the birth of Jambavantha.

> Mohan Rao, in his book *ChindulaYellamma*, builds a very interesting argument saying that "the study of legends like Jambapuranam helped the scientists like Darwin in their research. He says that the birth of Jambavanth and Darwins theory of evolution share similarities. According to Darwin's theory of evolution, the entire universe was covered with water. A moss came out later. It had water creatures like fishes, frogs. Then the monkeys came. There was an evolution of human beings from the monkey family. The evolution of human being is akin to the birth of Jambava. Jamabapurana is the source of all the scientific aspects in the world (36).

Thus it has acquired the name of ChinduBhagavatham. We have historical sources on this performing art. Chindus are those who perform *yakshaganas*.The Madigas were/are treated as one of the outcastes living outside the Varna system. They are also called *Panchamavarna* and hence untouchables. Their principal occupation is disposal of the dead carcasses, which involves them in skinning and tanning to make leather goods to fulfill the needs of society.

Chindus

Apart from the already existing records about the Baindla community, a field based study was conducted to explore the current socio-cultural status of the said community. The Chindus live predominantly in five districts of Telangana viz Siddipet, Karimnagar, Nalgonda and Warangal. Tukkapuram village in Togutta Mandal of Siddipet district has only one Chindu family comprising three members. Mr. K. Sanjeev of the Chindu family is a dedicated artiste who joins the ChinduMela from other districts. Besides this, he also involves himself in agricultural labour.

Desaipalle village of Sericilla district has three families. There are three artistes representing three families. They visit other villages to mobilize artistes. On some specific occasions they do performances and most of the time in a year they also do agricultural labour. Their earning from the Chindu performance is meagre. But they are firm about continuing this hereditary occupation not for the sake of money but for the sake of art. The embedded sense is that they are poised to enliven the Chindu art.

Pochampally village in GurrampuduMandal, Dharveshpuram in KalagalluMandal, Nermettu village in ChanduruMandal, Nakkalapally village in NarketpallMandal, Gudipaka village in MallepallyMandal and Nampally village in Nalgonda district, comprise the major Chindu population. About 68 Chindu families are located in all villages of the district. Of these families, 42 artistes are active in their performance. In response to the invitation from the Madiga community, they visit the Madiga villages and give performances during festive seasons. The participant performers are paid *Kattadi*[2] or annual honorarium *by* the Madiga community. They also suffer crisis of remuneration for performance due to little Madiga patronage. The expected patronage is not extended all times. So the Chindu performers are not busy throughout the year. They find it difficult to earn every time. That is why, the Chindu youth also do labour along with other earnings.

Nermettu village in ChandurMandal of Nalgonda district has sixteen Chindu families. Of these sixteen families, three families are associated with shoemaking. It is the rarest of the rare case that some Chindus who have not shown interest in the hereditary occupation have switched to truck driving and shoemaking. On enquiry about the occupation they opine that their elders who were performing artistes did not encourage them much in that direction. Their unwillingness is another reason for disassociation with Chindu performance. They claim that they are able to make a pair of shoes with a design in a day. They do this occupation much better than their patron class. They name the shoes Kanpur foot-wear, which pulls a lot of customers for its purchase. They are proud of this occupation because once they made a pair of Kanpur foot-wear for Late Rajasekhar Reddy, the former Chief Minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh. They were handsomely paid. They narrate this experience with pride.

Besides shoe-making Chindus take up selling vegetables in the market. They eke out their livelihood through other means too as their performance is not a yearlong activity due to poor response from the public ceremonial activities. Some others take to other occupations like repairing footwear in the village as they are not promised with the Chindu performance. Moreover, the traditional performance hardly feeds their families. They also supplement their shoe-making with vegetable selling for their livelihood. It is learnt that the Chindu performance loses its ancestral sheen and glory of performance for lack of patronage either from the Madigas or from the general public. This situation is clearly visible in BanagaruGadda village of Nalgonda District in Telangana.

5.1. Myth of Madigas

As per the Madiga myth, Madigas are destined to do menial and polluting jobs by taking up skinning the dead animals in villages. This could be a regular course construed as a curse for polluting the sacred feast of gods. The Madiga Caste myth enumerates eighteen Yugas (ages) unlike the classical version of four Yugas. Jambavamuni is the direct ancestor of Madigas. He was said to have been born in the *Athbhutha Yuga*, the fourth of the eighteen yugas. In the *Bhinnaja Yuga,* the ninth yuga, Parabramha, the creator, was keen to perform the marriage of Trimurthees. On this occasion, Parabramha created PanchaBramhas to produce material required for the wedlock. PanchaBramhas are assigned the work of melting the mountains of gold, silver, bronze to make ornaments, vessels etc., for the marriage occasion.

Manu Brahma, the eldest of the PanchaBrahas approached Jambavamuni as per the directions of Parabrahma for a leather bagpipe to melt the mountains of gold, silver and bronze. Jambavamuni was in dilemma on how to procure leather without killing an animal. He was suggested to create Yugamuni from his right rib. Acting on Par Brahma's advice, Jambavamuni killed Yugamuni and made a leather pipe from his skin. While dying, Yugamuni cursed Jambavamuni to become an outcaste. Jambavamuni pleaded that he was innocent and was forced to kill him (Yugamuni) as a sacred duty. Then Yugamuni reduced his capital punishment

to a curse to be effective for five thousand years. The validity of the curse affected the posterity of Jambavamuni, which became outcastes.

The Panchbrahmas made all the required paraphernalia out of metals by using the leather pipe as furnace to melt the mountains. The marriage of Siva and Parvathy was performed with pomp and glory. In VanaVihara, Parthi got hurt in her thigh. She removed a bit of thigh flesh and threw it on cow dung. Chenaiah was born out of it. Parvathi created a divine cow namely 'JamiliKamadhenu[3]or Jamiligangigovu'. The milk of the cow was so tasty and Chennaiah thought that the flesh of the cow could be more tasteful than milk. On hearing this news, Kamadhenu committed suicide in front of the hermitage of Siva. The devatas (gods) then tried to remove the carcass but failed. Then they asked Chennaiah to go to 'JambalapuriPatnam' to call Jambavamuni for his advice. Chennaiah addressed Jambavamuni as "O tata,Maha *Digira or* come down instead of calling *Madigira* because of *VishaVaakku* (evil spirit) in his tongue. That is how the term Madiga came into vogue because of Chennaiah's tongue twister (Gurram115).

Besides this profession, the ChinduMadigas do menial jobs relating to purity and pollution. They were/are victims of social injustice. In fact, they are not associated with skin-based occupation. They eke out their livelihood from the Madiga community through their artistic performance for which some honorarium is paid. In the past, they would go from one village to another with their artistic performance and would collect *Thyagam* (traditional honorarium paid by the patrons). They are stationary in their habitations now as they do not find handful work. But they visit other villages where they require giving performance and come back to their village.

Gaddam Sammaiah claims that:

> Performing Chindu troupes keep a picture of Goddess Yellamma before them and move around the villages to collect whatever the villagers give, be they clothes or food. Generally they avoid performances in monsoon season. When not performing, they work as farm labour or do fishing and rope making (96).

For propagation of Government's welfare schemes and other programmes which include environmental protections, sanitation, family planning, literacy, awareness of TB, AIDS, the services of Chindus are used. These messages are incorporated in their *Yakshaganam* for entertainment. In Sammayya's words, "We are able to survive because of the remuneration the government gives us for this" (96).Thus Government comes to their rescue in funding purchase of necessary costumes and accessories. But such assistance may not be same to all the performing Chindu artists of the state. It is because the dominant group within the community enjoys the benefits.

5.2. Chindus and Madigas

The Chindus are caste-children of the Madigas. The Madigas are patrons of the Chindus, who play a parental role in social relations." Within the Madiga community, a sect considered

itself 'PeddaMadiga' (Big Madiga) and another sect that was living on begging performing yakshaganas, as 'ChinnaMadigas' (Small Madigas).'In fact, in the past these ChinduBhagavathas were not permitted to perform outside their own community. The Chindus, as dependent caste, are in the service of the Madigas who would offer paddy, clothes and cattle in return for their artistic performances.

Honorarium paid to the Chindus is called in different names like *Katnam, Thyagam, Mera, Mirasi,Vanthana* and *Vathanu.*[4]**.**Each Chindu family chooses a few Madiga households from the respective villages earmarked for their traditional patronage. In this, they visit each Madiga village in a year with a sojourn and collect their honorarium paid for performing *Yakshaganam* and *Bagotham* which may last more than a week. The entire expenditure is borne by the Chindus for the performance at first hand. After completion of their performance, they leave the village and move to the other village for a short stay. Thus they seek patronage from the Madiga families to meet their expenditure related to performances. Their expenditure is reimbursed by the Madiga families.

5.3. The Myth of Chindu*Yekshaganam*

The Chindus are one of the sub-castes among Harijans. They depend upon the Madigas for their living. While seeking pittance, they give artistic performance over *Yakshaganam* and *Bhagavatham*. They play musical steps during their performances. Thus they are known as Chindus by virtue of their rhythmic steps. They are also known as Chindu artistes or ChinduMadigas. The *Yekshaganam* that they perform is called Chindu*Bagotham* or Chindu*Bhagavatham*. In their performance, they create aesthetic pleasure from the stories taken from the *Bhagavatham*. The myth of ChinduBagavatham is as follows:

> With his son Jambavantha goes to the world of gods. All the gods watch yakshagana of Yekshas in trance. Knowing Jambava's coming, Yaksha salutes and addresses him as Munidra, Your visit is a happy one and you are the one who has offered bhikhsa or pittance to our yekshaganas. You received applause from one and all to your Sindhu dance. I wish to watch Chindhu dance once. Please don't say'no'.Jambavanth blesses his son Jimahamuni as he is unable to dance due to the mountain being stuck in his mokaalu or calf. Yakshas and gods who were stunned with singing and dancing skill give big claps. Then yeksha appreciates the singing and dancing skill of Jinmhamuni and blesses him saying that 'may you become famous on earth in the art of chinduyekshagana' (Kistaiah 13: Translation is mine).

Generally, Chindus perform their*Yakshaganas* during the day times. Though most of them are illiterate, they provide feast to the eyes of the public through their marvelous performances over the legends,. Thus the performers are called *pagativeshagallu* or matinée idols. The reason for their performance during the day is attributed to poverty. They could not afford to buy even oil for night lamps. The Chindu population is mostly concentrated in several districts of the Telangana state. The ChinduBaghavatham which is a living art has been performed for centuries. Characters perform their respective roles by singing and dancing.

The band of *Bhagavatha* performers are known as '*BhagavathaMela'*. Each Chindu family becomes a band of *Bhagavatha* performers. They themselves form *Melas* or troupes. Each Mela or band comprises 12 to 30 artistes. Each of them plays either an instrument or performs a role. They do not allow others from outside to join their *Mela*. All these artistes share the villages for their performances. Performers of one village will not transgress into the other. They also live on the Dalit Street and accept (literature) provision for cooking given by the patrons. They give first two or three performances free of honorarium for Madigas, they charge further performances. "Most of the stories narrated are from '*Bhagavatham'*Gaddam Sammayya, a leader of the performing troupes, claims that Chindu*Bhagavatahas* trace their origin to Jamba Mahamuni, and believe that their clan is the most ancient sect". Sammaiah further says that because of this reason most of their dramas open with the invocation of '*Jambapurananam.*

In the opening *pallavi*, he says:

'Ekkuvani Mari Palukabokumura,

EkkuvevvarumariTelisiPalukumura(Rao 95-96)

(Don't speak of being high, speak with knowledge as to who is higher).

Several Chindus are scholars in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Telugu from their community. Some of them can speak Urdu also and some others have written in Sanskrit. There are Chindus who have preserved *Jambapuranam,* other puranas and ideas of household remedies through *taalapatra leaves*.

Apart from performing different roles in formal costumes, they also sing openly on contemporary social problems related to rural life. A song was sung by the Chindu youth depicting the situation of the post migration of the village. The song is the depiction of a pathetic condition of the village and its potters, goldsmiths/blacksmiths, farmers and other craftsmen of productive classes/castes.

5.4. Myth of Yellamma, the Local Goddess

Folk legends speak about the birth and fury of Yellamma, the village goddess. The emergence of Yellamma is a marvelous episode in both the *Goudapurana* and the *Jambapurana*. *Adisakthi* emerges and dies of the wild effect of Siva's third eye *Gosangipurana*. Her burnt ash is collected into four parts. Of these four, Sarasvathi, Parvathi, Laxmi and Yellamma are born. While forming the earth, Yellamma, with her furious emotions, creates havoc. Jambavantha, the great grandfather of the Madigas, wears a nicker laced with jingling bells, his feet fixed with braces, wields a curved sword. He appears with his red-eyes and elegantly combed moustaches amidst percussions, propitiates the furious Yellamma. Jambavamuni or Jambavantha is endowed with such a power which could propitiate the irate gods and goddesses. The Chindus perform the *Gosangipurana*. They also narrate *Jambapuranam* as well. "*Jambapuranam* is performed as *Yakshaganam* by the Chindus, while *Pattam Katha* or Reading maps comprising various pictures by *Dakkalis*. It is performed as a

Proclamationby the Madiga guru (Jayadheer 46). The Chindus narrate *Bhagavatham* and *Ramayanas*, and also the stories of *Ankamma* along with *Jambapuranam*. They are associated with the performing art. Unlike the past, they choose to perform the *puranas* in the heart of the village to attract all castes as audience for their performance.

5.6. YellammaVesham and Ritual Performance

Vernacular literatures discuss myths of local goddesses like Yellamma who is popularly known as ChinduYellamma. Her autobiography mirrors the culture of her own. Chindus never stepped into the village without the permission of the Madigas. It was a traditionally embedded in the caste norm. First they would perform for Madigas and next for other sections of society. They pray to the trough, a huge vessel in which hides are soaked in lime water for fifteen days. Chindus makea prior agreement with the Madigas on their honorarium. It is called the fixation of remuneration. On the occasion of anniversary rituals of any family in the village, they perform a play called *ChinduBhagotham or ChinduBhagavatham*.

On the day of the performance of the role of Yellamma, village elders visit the Madiga Street with a goat for sacrifice. They believe that goddess Yellamma resides in the trough. Yellamma goes dancing to the tune of the drum-beating. She is carried to the *acupacchanipandiri*or green pandal. She wields a sword in one hand and a few branches of neem leaves in the other hand, and slips into possession by Yellamma deity.

She dances in rhythmic steps displaying her ferocity. Then she tumbles down to indicate the departure of the spirit from her. The woman is woken up amidst songs. After she comes back to her senses, the goat is taken around her. Again she goes in possession by the goddess.A Chindu magician asks the permission from the villagers whether the goat should be sacrificed. He executes it with the consent of all the people. He fiercely bites the goat as per the ritualistic tradition. Thus they propitiate the goddess by breaking coconut and cutting off lemons. Then the goddess cools down with the ritual performance. Potharaju, who lashes whips the individuals of the community, gives blessings to each of the houses while walking down to the temple. He lifts the head of a sacrificed goat in public display to make sure that the goat is sacrificed. Thus rituals are performed on public occasions. Animals are sacrificed to the goddess across the Telangana villages reflecting strong devotion and belief of the masses in the local deities.

Conclusion

Chindus or ChinduMadigas known as dependent caste within the Dalit community are affiliated to Madiga sub-caste. In changed circumstances, most of the Chindus who were performing artistes by conducting dramas on Yeskshaganas are now detached from the ancestral occupation for want of Madiga patronage. Their performing art has become commercialised that they are set to perform for government populist programmes. Their art is not for the sake of society but for the government which uses the band of Chindu artistes to spread the populist schemes which they claim as source of livelihood. Not all the Chindus have got such opportunities but a dominant group which could lobby with the government are accessible

for such opportunities. Most of the Chindu population engages in occupations other than their performances. Despite the change in their profession, they still remain as untouchable caste within Dalit community and outside it.

Notes

1. One view is that a section of people within the Madiga community have taken to dancing as profession. They are called ChinduMadigas; Cindu means a dance step. The other view is that the word Chindu is derived from 'Sindu' that means ocean. The Chindu dancers and movements of their steps look like the waves of the ocean.

2. Palm leaf manuscripts, a primitive method of recording ancient knowledge on such leaves.

3. Jamili Kamadhenu: cow namely "Jamilikamadhenu (or) *Jamili*gangigovu'\ the milk of the cow was so tasty that Chennaiah thought even the flesh of the cow could be tastier than the milk. Kamadhenu heard this and committed suicide in front of the hermitage of Siva.

4. *Kattadi, Katnam, Thyagam, Mera, Mirasi, Vanthana and Vathanu*: all these terms would mean the same. An annual honorarium is paid to dependent castes as a tradition for their performances eulogizing and valorizing the greatness of patron culture and its place in society.

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Caste, Aesthetic and Dalit Activists as Modernity's Dialogist

Amandeep

Abstract

The present paper seeks to explore the poetics of aesthetics, and also tries to explain the shifting panorama of marginal aesthetics. It focuses on the role of history particularly from the time of medieval *bhakti*-movements onwards in the making of dalit consciousness and aesthetics. The paper also analyses the neglected role of the Indian dalit activists that has made a major contribution to Indian literature. There are certain works written by dalit writers themselves and they are designed to be debated so as to forge a new identity for a new genre of dalit literature. One partinent question is to what extent these writings have succeeded in transmitting their messages to those who are unfamiliar with the language of modern social discourse or social fabric into the mainstream. It was commonly assumed that devoid of literacy and publication, dalits were essentially a part of just the oral tradition. Their representation was considered to be confined to orality alone and the memories contained in it were expected to become fossilized and static when confronted with an ever flowing cultural stream. The literatures of the untouchables have been constantly knocking at the door but have always been refused entry into the amphitheater of the established and academically recognized arena of articulation. The distinct category of dalit literature, as its corpus increases, would soon become an integral part of mainstream literature as a whole.

Keywords: caste, aesthetics, dialogist, *bhakti*, amphitheater, arena

The core of this paper constitutes a reading and analysis of an unorthodox genre of writing on caste. The paper comprises three structural breaks. In the first I briefly trace the genealogy of the term 'caste' and mark its emergence in the late twentieth century as a powerful conceptual category in the ever-expanding lexicon of political modernity. In the section that

follows I discuss the politics of aesthetics and shifting perspectives of dalit aesthetics. In the final section, I trace the emergence of the dalit activist as modernity's interlocutor par excellence. Through their writings and print media dalit writers now started to counteract the entire Brahminical modality, from the Vedas and the Puranas to modern writings. Their desire to awaken from the slumber of the past necessitated dalit intellectuals to capture the present by exposing the 'misdeeds' of the elites, and construct a 'new consciousness' that paves the way for them to assert their demand for social respect from which they had remained deprived since centuries.

Caste: An Overview

The supremacy of caste composition that appears in the beginning of Indian history continued till the emergence of British rule in India. Buddhism as a religion was encapsulated by Hinduism in its own fold through the scholasticism of Hindu philosophers and the ruling class was too intransigent to allow the ideology of the movement to convert itself into an ideology of mass upliftment, although its philosophy succeeded in building self-confidence amongst the deprived sections to an unimagined extent, so much so that its contents were incorporated heavily into the liberation ideologies of the dalits in the twentieth century and its impact is visible in twenty-first century as well as in the voice of contemporary dalits, their leaders and intellectuals.

Gail Omvedt's claim that caste continued to impinge on class in colonial india, and it continues to inform in a crucial way relations of production in postcolonial india, has, however, been based on a pragmatic empiricism, rather than on theoretical rigour. (Ganguly, 102). Similarly, the quintessential aspects of the philosophy of the Bhakti movement influenced the lessons of quality of human beings on account of their origin from the same ontological source. But this too could not bring structural metamorphosis. It succeeded in articulating successfully a contrasting tradition challenging Brahminical orthodoxy in most easily accessible parlance. Lower caste *sants* Kabir, Ravidas, and others did not belong to the mainstream religious orthodoxy, and they, by conveying their philosophy through folk languages, demolished not only the cultural edifice but turned upside down the entire structure of knowledge required for a respectable status in society. Obliterating sociological division of knowledge, they sculptured a model in which each had the same substratum for ontological operation and achievement. This was an axiological revolution of immense social significance, specially in its invitation to all and exclusion to none. But obdurate Brahminism refused to allow it to be absorbed in the interstices of society, thus retaining the seeds of discontentment, to sprout in the future. Ghanshyam Shah writes:

> the effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu public is his caste (94).

Ambedkar explains that mainstream society like other societies was essentially a class system. However at the same time in History, the priestly class socially detached itself from

the rest of people and through a closed - door policy became a caste by itself[1]. It is relatively difficult for the dalits to shake off their baggage of inferiority in the social environment of pervasive caste prejudice.[2] Teltumbde writes:

> castes tended to rise up the hierarchy with their economic strength and in reverse faced degradation, with their immiseration the number of sub castes within the populous dalit castes alludes to general economic decline of the caste society (6).

Dalit Aesthetics

Bhakti poets were discontent with the mainstream rituals and they rejected all orthodox practices. Since these poets were social reformers, for long they were not reckoned as poets at all by the Hindu orthodoxy. A renowned *bhakti* poet Kabir is famous for his iconoclastic outpours. He asks:

> Tell me, O pandit,
> what place is pure –
> where I can sit
> and eat my meal?
>
> (Trans. Dharwadkar, 124).

Reference to Eklavya, a tribal boy in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, occurs recurrently in Dalit writings. Eklavya was born in a lower caste and had cut off his thumb at the order of his guru, the ace archer Dronacharya. From *Ramayana* the character Shambuk is chosen in Dalit literature as he was killed for his offence of studying the Vedas.There are references to Buddha and his disciples like Angulimal. Characters of the Buddhist period are specially selected for their ceaseless struggle against Brahminical hegemony and misrule. In one of his poems Waman Nimbalkar's alludes to Buddha (who was also called Tathagatha) and also to Eklavya.

> *Gathering the sky in my eyes.*
> *I cast my glance forwards,*
> *- and so on to Tathagatha.*
> *On the horizon I will erect*
> *the rainbow arch of mankind.*
> *I am conscious of my resolve.*
> *The worth of the blood*
> *of Eklavya's broken finger – This is my loyalty.*
> *I will not barter my word.*
> *I stand today at the very end*
> *of the twentieth century.* (qtd in Shah, 218)

Thus, there is an unmistakable trend in Dalit literature towards locating such historical characters who have been shown to be of marginal significance, and to restore to them a place of honour and recognition. Hence, they highlight Karna (*dasi putra*) as an upright

character, Eklavya as a loyal disciple from a Shudra community and Shurpanakha as a devout tribal woman. Dalit writers attempt to vindicate the innocence and commitment of these historical characters, in contrast to the dishonesty and duplicity of the rulers who degraded and victimized them.The dalits who suffered most at the hands of orthodox Hindus also sought to gain from this reform movement. Pamphlets, newspapers, and missionary propaganda had brought about a change in literary aesthetics in general. Dalit aesthetics, which still was struggling for its own autonomous space, succumbed to pressures of printing press and its prose-centered poetics. It is in this crucial phase that in Maharashtra Jotibha Phule[3] emerged as a leading dalit activist. He is the mainstay of dalit aesthetics as it shaped itself before the emergence of Ambedkar on the scene. So within the rubric of pre-Ambedkarite aesthetics, the focus of attention is singularly on the reforms suggested by Phule.

Dalit Activists

The first entry of dalit intellectuals in the print world is the publication of a poem composed by Heera Dom in *Saraswati*, published from Allahabad, and edited by Mahabir Prasad Dwivedi. The poem entitled 'Achut Kee Shikayat' (The Complaint of the Untouchable) reads as follows:

Babhne ke lekhe hum bhikhiya na mangab ja
Thakure ke lekhe nahin lauri chalaibe
Sahua ke lekhe, nahin dardein hum marav ja
Ahira ke lekhe nahin gaiyya charabee
Bhatha ke lekhe nahin kavit hum jorab ja
Pagrin bnandhikai, Kachaharee nahin jayibe
Aapne pasinva ke paisa kamiab ja
Ghar bhari mili juli, baanti choti khaebi
Dom jani hamanee ke chuye se deraylee.

This poem published in the year 1914 was the first description of alienation and subordination in written form of dalit society, governed, as it was, by Brahminical laws. The second most significant step was the publication of a newspaper *Achut* by Swami Achhutanand, himself a dalit and a man of great erudition and enthusiasm, a man who was the leader of the Adi-Hindi movement in north India and architect of an anti-Brahminical philosophy based predominantly on the Bhakti movement, an indigenous construction for dalit emancipation.

The heroes of the oral culture were transferred to the written page and networks of certain exalted qualities were woven around them. Also, the important personalities of the past, present and medieval period in history were highlighted in these booklets in a manner designed to eclipse all other heroes belonging to the non-dalit communities. Some important and popular booklets are: *Ambedkar ka Jeevan Darshan, Mool Vansa Katha, Bheem Pacheesa, Buddh Ke Baad, Achut Virangana,* etc. In most of these booklets the neglected

and defiled are defended and elevated to the position of heroes of that period on account of their suffering from Brahminical conspiratorial designs. The new emerging consciousness, so anxious to form its identity and counterpoise its own heroes against the heroes of the Brahminical order, accepted these interpretations enormously. The writers of these texts belong to the dalit community and are political activists. They were new intellectuals who were organically linked with the people at the grass-root level of society. Unlike the books written by elite dalit writers, these booklets are published from small publication units, often located in small and medium towns or in the periphery of the big cities but hardly in cosmopolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi or Kolkata. Ambedkar Mission Prakashan was established in Patna in 1978 and Sagar Publishers in Era in 1991. Bharti Prakashan is located in Mathura, Anand Sahitya Sadan in Aligarh and Periyar Lalayee Singh Charitable Trust at Jhakarkati, G.T. Road, Kanpur. Similarly, Bodhisattva Prakashan, which at present is publishing a weekly and various books, is situated at Rampur, Uttar Pradesh. These books are not written by scholars of national-international repute nor by professors of universities known for specialization and academic recognition, but by those educated people of the dalit community who are committed to transmit the desired messages and are aware of the cognitive pulse of the audience. To these writers, power was the exclusive parameter of status or identity. Their concept of power has hardly any resemblance to the Marxist, Weberian or Russell's notion of power. Power is not an instrument but an end that fulfills all other ends. Power, identity and status are clubbed together. Its basic purpose is to be recorded in society and history and when accomplished, it shall, through its own intrinsic nature, create a respectable place for those ignored in the past by civilization.

In the late 19th century, a Mahar poet, Pandit Kondiram, was the first to give a call for burning the Brahminical scriptures. Manusmriti was actually burnt in 1928 at the Mahad conference of the Depressed Classes. Anguish and anger against the Hindu religious scriptures preaching social ranking and subordination of some castes to others has been a recurrent theme of many Dalit poets. Most Dalit writers believe that the material changes that have occurred in India during the last 100 years have marginally altered the cultural veneer of this society. The mainstream mindset is essentially casteist and full of vengeance and disregard for the lower castes including the ex-untouchables and their basic needs. Religious scriptures, in their view, condition and manipulate the behaviour of the people and help to perpetuate the forces of oppression and unfreedom. Daya Pawar, one of the leading Marathi Dalit poets, went to the extent of saying that it was better for him that he did not get his university degree in Marathi. He feared that through college education he could have been overpowered by the high-flown social imageries of the main-stream society, full of deceit and distortions, hiding the truth rather than revealing it.

Though Dalit writing is slowly extending its boundaries and accepting within its ambit representatives of other castes and communities, even today it is largely dominated by the ex-untouchables and, within them, Mahars and neo-Buddhists. Mahars emerged distinctly as an assertive and militant group. And one must not always willingly subject oneself to an

oppressive social system or its culture. One must also muster courage and enter the battlefield with the determination to conquer, as the Dalit writers urge. Baburao Bagul writes:

> *Those who by mistake were born here*
> *should themselves correct this error*
> *by leaving the country! Or making war!*
>
> *(Zelliot , 281)*

A review or survey of literature related to dalits reveal that it is divisible into three parts. There are certain books highly popular among the readers but the thematic parameters of these books belong to a quite different order. These books, scholarly in content, conceptualize the aetiological, sociological and economic historicity of dalits and are devoted to a large extent to the historical exposition of the structural boundaries. The writings of Gail Omvet, Lata Murugkar and others, although socio-historical in explanation belong to the same category to which the literature of Premchand, Nirala, Amrit Lal and Nagarjun belongs. It suits the academic taste of a privileged few who find pleasure in leisurely discussion and scholastic exploration of the social reality and ambiguities among dalits. This is a literature which acts like an image of social realism, i.e. it is a reflection of the shadow of reality rather than depiction of the solution to reality. Secondly, there are books written by dalit writers themselves, and these occupy the amphitheatre of modern discussion centering on the growth and evolution of dalit literature or communities. They are designed to be debated so as to carve out a new identity for a new genre of dalit literature. Books authored by Mohandas Naimishrai, Shyoraj Singh Bechain, Om Prakash Valmiki, and Dharamveer are moving rapidly toward the centre of intellectual discussion on the basis of their methodology, language, contents, historical discourses, etc .

The important question is, to what extent these books have succeeded in transmitting their messages to those who are unfamiliar with the language of modern social discourse or whether they contain significant messages for the common man who yearns to see the real social transformation of his image. Had it been so, these books would have been available in the rural areas, *melas* (fairs) that are held there or in the bookshops designed to popularize dalit identity, portrayed in the most common language narrating their reality in the most uncommon way. The book on Kabir by Dharamveer exhibits an unconditional epiphenomenalist methodology of putting every interpretation of Kabir under the banner of Brahminical interpretation, oblivious of the fact that no personality in medieval India has advocated so vehemently the existence of plurality of understanding as Kabir, and none has challenged so vociferously the monistic dominance of a specific faith or ideology. Moreover, how exposition of the Brahminical mode of interpreting Kabir is going to help a community that is yet to liberate itself from the complexes of outsideness in his psyche is left unexplained.

Thirdly, there are various booklets available with the shopkeepers in the towns, district headquarters and other locally important places written in a manner that is easily understood by the common man which successfully awakens his desire to act for self-assertion. It

explains his past that has been glorious but subdued. However, here too there are certain exceptions. For example, *Bheem Pacheesa* written by G.P. Prashant fails to offer an alternative place to the marginalized section of this society. *Achuta Veerangana* by Rajavaidya Mata Prasad, *BSP ke Geet* by Sheo Prasad Dohre, *Kanshi Ram Press Ke Samne*, and *Buddha Ke Baad* are some other booklets available but not received by the audience of this class. Identity formation for them demands an alternative intellectual and historical space and this space is made available through the characters contained in the epics or through total reconstruction of history. In the popular mind, there is no sharp distinction between mythology and history. Rather, mythology bears greater significance for them. Iconoclastic literature, i.e. literature which successfully and arduously negates the existing hero in the Brahminical order is received with greater enthusiasm. The popularity of such booklets was ascertained from the shopkeepers who measured it in terms of saleability of the books in a year. Also, information authenticating it was collected from the distributors (very few in numbers) and the publishers. An analysis of the three corroborated the veracity of the statement regarding the saleability of these booklets.

These booklets have come to form an alternative source of knowledge, as their sale is not governed by the economies of the library, review of academic critics, beauty of language, coherence of logic, status of the publisher, and quality of the production. Being nearer to folk language and folk mode of epistemological transmission, the scope of receptivity stands enhanced. Folk literatures' popularity among the untouchables cannot be denied by any stretch of imagination. Such literature is in abundance among Ravidasis, Kabir panthis, and Satnamis and has also ecumenic popularity. Similarly, the poems of certain sufis are equally acceptable and popular to the extent of transcending the boundaries of caste and creed. But what is special about the dalit popular literature is that it is acceptable among dalits only. It is a literature for the dalits, by the dalits and of the dalits. This literature is not meant for solace of the mind weary of the present, but an immediate and axiomatic device for identity formulation and formation. No doubt, these are also meta-narratives which communicate a meta-narrative that is a negation of the meta-narratives of the Brahminical order. Hence, it would not be an exaggeration to call these alternative writings, as these are an alternative writing with a new epistemological purview.

As regards the role of these booklets in providing an alternative conception of history, it would not be proper to either equate or contrast this with other acknowledged paradigms of history, eg. Marxist history, cyclical history of Toynbee or Spengler or the nostalgic history of the Roman Empire written by Gibbon. These booklets also do not possess subtle historiographical nuances of the post-Enlightenment period, in which history was constituted by the principle of rationality or the post-modernist notion of end of history. Local histories appeared as alternative spaces providing alternative historical symbols. In north Indian rural society, the dominance of the epics and scriptures was countered with folk histories. That is the only space for a dialogue with dominant history. But such space as existed in the epic

texts was not sufficient, and attempts were made to find local roots, especially in the Hindi region which, in the past, had developed various models of protests.

On 22 December, 1994 at the public gathering to commemorate the one hundred and sixty-fourth birthday celebration of Virangana Jhalkaribai at Gandhi Bhawan in Jhansi, it was claimed that great personalities of dalits are not given due respect in contemporary history writings. So Indian history must be written afresh. This was previously echoed in the booklet *Buddh Ke Bad* as early as in 1985.

It is unfortunate that history of the nation has not been written in a systematic way. The brahmanical caste system and the vision that emerged from it is the main cause of this flaw. Aryans entered India, defeated Anaryans, made them slaves and dispossessed them of the rights of the Vidyarijan (learning and education). Today when shudras are being educated, they should make attempts to know, understand, and write a history of their own.

Manu's philosophy dominates all the meta-histories in the form of epics. Puranas and *itihas*. Therefore, they counterpoised Shambook against Ram, Eklavya against Dronacharya, Jhalkaribai against Jhansi Kee Rani, Ambedkar against Gandhi and Buddhism against Hinduism. Their discovery and invention of history proceeded in a parallel way and, thus, many booklets written on cheap paper, involving a minimum cost, were published and sold to the members of the Sudra community, with results that are too obvious to escape the attention of members of the dalit community, desirous to locate themselves in the social structure, and to gain access to the citadel of political power.

Meta-narratives have existed since long in India but they had a definite teleology to subserve the needs of the Brahminical ascendancy, and was thus confined to a small section of the population. In some of these narratives the past has been used to interpret the present and prepare the future. They have been constructed in a way that the reader is at the centre and not the author, so it has many local idioms for universal effect in the mind of the recipient of the contents of these booklets. They aim at creation and mobilization of judgments in the minds of those who had lost the psychological dimension of evaluation of their role.

Biographies serve the purpose of focusing on individual personalities, his/her actions and ideologies in specific contexts. In dalit writings, it assumes further significance as these personalities are made the ideals of community, a community which has been denied its own heroes.

Conclusion

Although abundant in literature containing self-expression of the dalits, North India lacks in producing an established mode of dalit literature acceptable to the educated and professionally well placed population in the same segment of society. The social and intellectual dynamics have to their inclusion in the discourse concerning evaluation and prohibited cognition of dalit mobilization. Further, in the oral tradition, dalit expressions have assumed many forms, for example, songs, drama, caste-oriented history, but their acceptance too, has been

discouraging. Literature of this kind has been constantly knocking at the door but has always been refused entry even into the amphitheater of the established and recognized areas of literary expression. The terrain of Hindi literature is so well tailored and designed that unless writing corresponds successfully to its demands, it has no chance of inclusion; iconoclastic forms are seldom encouraged. As the political events of the recent past reveal, the dalits have achieved some measure of success in developing their own culture, influencing the political behavior of the members of their community. Their urge for identity formation and expression has led to the formation of a political group which, if not at the centre, is always in a position to have its effect felt there. No vote bank in North India has succeeded in immunizing itself to the Brahminical political culture. As Huggo says, "Dalit activists insist that hitting back against the upper castes in word and deed affirms that they too are human beings" (Gorringe,144).

Notes

1. See Vasnt Moon, ed. *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing and Speeches*, vol. 1, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2014, p, 18.
2. Oliver C.Cox, 'Race and Caste: Distinction,' *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol 50. 5 March 1945, pp, 366.
3. Phule, a dalit himself, chose to work among the dalits and his main accent was on female-education. Born into a Shudra family in 1827 in adherence family in Pune, educated from Marathi school married Savitrabai in 1840 and in 1848 he established the first school for shudratishudra in India and in 1851 he established girl's school for downtrodden girls. In the 1860s, he joined the widow remarriage a campaign. The best-known of his works *Gulamigri* (Slavery) was published on 1 June, 1983 and followed by Satyashodhak Samaj (Society of the Seekers to Truth) on 24 September 1873. He worked as a member of Pune Municipal Council during 1876-82. His last work was *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (The Book of the True Faith) which was published in 1889. He died on 28 November 1890 after a prolonged illness.

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Desire and Denial:A Critique of Female Body and Food Consumption in *301,302* and *The Vegetarian*

Praseetha P

Abstract

Women in food literature and food films are usually presented as care givers who spread love and grace through nurturing and feeding others. Rarely does it address the need of a woman to be nurtured and fed. The present paper tries to address the appetite of women, how it is subjugated, controlled and silenced in a patriarchal culture and how women subvert such creation of docile bodies. The body denotes separation between self and social body; food and sex can be seen as metaphors for communication between body and society. In an oppressive patriarchal society, the first step of resistance is owning one's body and what is allowed into it . The primary texts selected are *301, 302,* (1995) a South Korean movie and *The Vegetarian* (2016), a Korean novel by Han Kang.

Keywords: anorexia, appetite, cannibalism, vegetarianism

As primary caregivers who have been restricted to the kitchen during the larger part of human history, women have a very prominent role in the production and distribution of food. Yet when it comes to consumption, women tend to be strongly ambivalent towards food which manifests in multitudinous possibilities ranging from extreme self restrictions to binge eating. Food strongly mirrors the power structure of genders and women often make use of food, the easiest and most accessible tool available to them as a path to power. Food can be used as a tool to manipulate men by controlling the food choices or to evoke powerful feelings of being needed by generous servings of rich food. The universal archetype of a nurturing mother who finds pleasure in feeding others is deeply rooted and yet it is unacceptable for a woman to find pleasure in feeding herself. Appetite in a woman is scorned as unfeminine, undesirable, and downright sin as evident in the celebration of fasting in the early medieval age to the fashionable thinness of the twenty-first century. Appetite, either for food or sex, is a sin or wantonness that needs to be tamed. Thus the ideal female is one who finds

happiness in giving pleasure to others while denying herself the very same, born to whet the appetite of everyone except herself. And women often reject and rebel against this ideal feminine by either celebrating their appetite or through extreme denial, starving themselves to death thereby taking control of their body. This paper attempts a look at the complex subtext of desire and denial that underlies women's relationship with food and how the female body itself becomes a site of subordination and rebellion.To this end, the primary texts selected are *301,302*, a 1995 South Korean movie, and *The Vegetarian*, the 2016 Man Booker Prize-winning novel by Han Kang.

Han Kang

In his book *Regulating Bodies*, sociologist Bryan Turner introduced the concept of somatic societies that exerts power by regulating bodies, thereby turning bodies into a site of political and cultural contestation. While the control of church over bodies has declined, that of the law and medicine has increased. Foucault developed this idea further in *Discipline and Punish*, analyzing how disciplinary practices exerted constant surveillance and control over bodies as a technique of social regulation. Cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her study of the symbolic body argued that the body belongs to both the self and social order and the boundary of the body can symbolize the separation of the self from the society. To quote Douglas, "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived" and "there is a continuous exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other." The result is that "the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression" (Douglas xiii). Penetration of body either orally or sexually can then be seen as an encounter between the individual self and social order that can be nourishing or punishing. Both eating and intercourse are instinctive needs, and as Freud has noted, they carry strong metaphoric connections to each other. It is in this context that the female body can be read as a site of confrontation, a battleground between self and social order. A woman's greatest rebellion can be taking control of her own body by controlling what is permitted or not permitted into her body.

Richard O Connor in his essay "Demedicalising Anorexia: Opening a New Dialogue" takes a biocultural approach towards anorexia commenting that self-starvation of anorexics is directly related to virtue and grace rather than beauty. The extreme self asceticism of anorexics was simply exaggerated self-restraint and deferred gratification, an extreme version of self-discipline expected from women and eerily similar to the medieval female saints worshipped for their extreme fasting. Connor recognizes three predispositions common to anorexics: a performative disposition revealed by superior performance and exceptional achievements, an ascetic disposition that translates to extreme self discipline and a virtuous disposition as model individuals. Only when all the three dispositions are carried to the extreme does it translate into an eating disorder and as such anorexics can be viewed as women who became too good at performing femininity as perfect, virtuous self-effacing women.

Women's complicated relationship with food and how women attain power or express themselves through food can be manifested in multiple ways. A few good examples from literature would be Samuel Richardson's 18th-century classic novel *Clarissa* where the eponymous heroine, after being raped, punishes herself and regains her virtuousness by slowly starving herself thereby transforming into divine Clarissa. An even earlier example is Thomas Heywood's 1603 tragic play *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in which Anne, the unfaithful wife starves herself to death thereby earning forgiveness for her sin. While Clarissa and Anne attain grace and spirituality through denying their fleshly appetites, Mrs. Waters in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* uses food as a metaphor for sexual appetite as she ravenously feasts on crabs, meats, and fruits in one of the famous seduction scenes. A more contemporary example would be Margaret Atwood who uses symbolic hunger to represent the mental state of her female characters, especially in novels like *The Edible Woman* and *Lady Oracle*.

301,302, a Park ChulSoo film that was South Korea's official selection to the Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language Film is considered a cult classic for its innovative narrative style as well as for its dark depiction of women's appetite. The movie revolves around two women Song Hee of apartment 301 and YoongHee of apartment 302,who are two representatives of the Cartesian duality of mind and body. Song Hee is a chef, the neighbor that has newly moved into 301 and a woman with a voracious appetite while YoongHee is the Apollonian counterpart, a writer of sex columns yet unable to accept food or sex. The movie takes a look at the twin dimensions of desire and denial, feasting and fasting that the appetite of a woman can evolve into as defiance against strict patriarchal rules. Song Hee used to be the perfect woman: a gorgeous wife who loves feeding and pleasuring her husband. But instead of being adored, her husband finds her too perfect. Song Hee whips up more and more elaborate meals while maintaining her desirable slim figure, constantly desperately asking her husband if it's delicious. As her husband rejects her and her food, Song Hee gradually nourishes her own appetite, gaining weight in the process and eventually gets divorced.

When Song Hee first encounters YoongHee both are critical of each other as they judge and are disgusted by the other's body. Song Hee tries to introduce herself to her neighbor by delivering her a plate of food only to be rejected. An angered Song Hee controls her appetite, loses weight and is bent on taking her revenge by cooking food for YoongHee, making her fat. After realizing that her food was rejected into the garbage bin and vainly trying to force-feed YoongHee, Song Hee finally realizes that YoongHee does not eat or cannot eat. YoongHee is her polar opposite, living among books, with absolutely no appetite for men or sex. Permanently damaged by the sexual abuse from her stepfather, YoongHee has rejected appetite, sexuality, and her own body.

301,302 is a chronicle of two victims of a patriarchal system that tightly regulates what is expected of women and any slight aberration will be treated as an abnormality. Both women take opposite routes to rebellion, Song Hee by obsessing about her pleasure and YoongHee by completely purging herself of it. Both women have a tortured relationship with their own bodies, imprisoned by the pressure to play the part of a normal woman. When they first meet, Song Hee is jealous of YoongHee's mannequin-like body and wants to feed her animal fat. For her, the ultimate act of revenge against a woman is to make her fat. YoongHee on the other hand is disgusted by her neighbor's voluptuousness as "her breasts could feed a thousand men". Neither of them can come to terms with their appetite; Song Hee can't find new ingredients to cook anymore and YoongHee simply can't eat. In a finale that finally breaks the ultimate taboo YoongHee suggests to Song Hee to feed on her. As the movie ends YoongHee lives on through Song Hee.

Structuralists like Claude Levi Strauss have emphasized the nature/culture, raw/cooked dichotomy and how the process of cooking can turn raw food into a cultured, edible cuisine. Proper, moderate eating is symbolic of order, restraint and culture as opposed to voracious eating which can represent uncontrollable animalism. The penetration of the body through food and sex requires the transgression of the boundaries of body and self which then becomes one with the intruder. It is the ultimate communication between self and society; the self can satisfy its instinctive needs only by following socially sanctioned regulations. A woman often has very restricted choices on what goes into her own body, as the coercive feminine ideal is that of a passive, submissive woman whose self-restraint shows her virtuousness. Taking back the control of one's body will mean first of all taking control of what is permitted to enter the body and in this sense both Song Hee and YoongHee can be considered as rebellious

rather than damaged. Both of them use their body to dissent, albeit in completely different ways. Song Hee not only eventually takes control of her appetite but starts to experiment with ingredients, eventually breaking the social rules one by one, ultimately leading to cannibalism. YoongHee, on the other hand, considers her body dirty; her body physically rejects everything except water and vitamin pills. In a flashback, it is shown how her butcher stepfather stuffs meat into her reluctant mouth as "food is everything" and later crawls into her bed to rape her. In the ultimate act of female sisterhood,YoongHee can only live and eat through Song Hee, as a part of Song Hee.

It is curious that Song Hee finally goes cannibalistic through a woman and not a man. Female hunger as sexuality is frowned upon, for the one who initiates, indulges in, and ultimately devours is the woman, something that makes man the object of desire, the object to be consumed. Song Hee's husband is overwhelmed by the perfect wife who is gorgeous, a great cook, and a woman who enjoys pleasure. His rejection of her appetite shows through his rejection of her food. The only human being YoongHee is able to trust, depend on, and surrender her body to be a woman and Song Hee's appetite can be sated only through a woman who completely accepts Song Hee to the point of surrendering her whole self. Both 301 and 302 can be seen as the Dionysian and Apollonian sides of a woman, the chef and the writer, and their strategies of indulgence and denial, the two conflicting yet powerful ways of reclaiming the body.

The Vegetarian by Han Kang similarly deals with the decision of an ordinary woman to stop eating meat and eventually stop eating altogether after having a nightmare. The central characterYeongHye, described as "an utterly unremarkable woman in every way", suddenly stops eating meat or any animal products to her husband's horror and this gradually escalates into complete abstinence from food of all kind. She vaguely explains that "I had a dream" but realizing that no one will even try to understand her, never explains it.YeongHye starts to break social norms one by one by rejecting animal products, sleep, sex, clothes, and eventually food altogether. Towards the end of the novel, institutionalized and abandoned YeongHye completely rejects the food, envisioning herself as a tree.

The novel is divided into three sections and narrated through her husband, brother in law, and her sister in Hye, leaving Yeong Hye voiceless except during a few monologues about her nightmare.Voiceless and oppressed under a tyrannical, abusive father and an uncaring husband who marries her solely for convenience, the only way YeongHye can voice herself is through her own body. All three narrators recognize in her a complete and utter rejection of her sexuality that was never hers to begin with. In a strictly patriarchal society that demands complete submission and passivity from women, YeongHye embraces the passive feminine ideal to the extreme as the ultimate resistance. To this end, she imagines herself slowly transforming into a tree, the ultimate symbol of passivity and non-violence, completely free of blood.

Her panicked family gets together to cure her of her stubborn disobedience and rejection of wifely duties by confronting her, trying to force-feed meat. All the male figures in the novel expect complete submission from the female characters as if it is the norm and pushes their version of normalcy on YeongHye, mostly by violence and coercion. The conservative, patriarchal father found his docile second daughter YeongHye a perfect victim for his violent temperament and her brother is no different. Her husband married her for her mediocracy which means she will be an undemanding, low maintenance wife.The husband is even more outraged when she attends one of his office parties without wearing a braand humiliates him by refusing to partake in meat. Her brother in law uses her to escape his dissatisfactory marriage and for her doctor she is just a mental patient whom he must cure and ensure survival, forcing her to take medication and stabbing her with needles,without ever listening to what she has to say.

No one, not even In Hye tries to understand or listen to YeongHye. For her husband she is an inconvenience, to her parents a scandal that brought them shame, to her sister a responsibility to be taken care of and to the doctors a pathology to be cured. It is this lack of agency, this voiceless existence that forces YeongHye to say,"Why, is it such a bad thing to die?" (93). In this state,YeongHye might as well turn into a voiceless plant, devoid of flesh, blood and agency. It is the apathy of her family, their insistence on her total obedience that eventually drives YeongHye to negate her own existence.

Both YeongHye in *The Vegetarian* and YoongHee of *301/302* are victims of abuse whose body and self were infiltrated, judged and governed by the men around them and the only way they could resist is to close their body to everything, even food. This voluntary starvation, just like a hunger strike, is a form of dissent, of reiterating autonomy, sometimes the only way to achieve autonomy. The body and the sexuality which is regulated, surveilled and disciplined constantly becomes a prison and the only way to escape it may be to negate the body altogether. In Hye wonders: "IsYeongHye trying to turn herself back into a preadolescent? She hasn't had her period for a long time now, and now that her weight has dropped below thirty kilos, of course there is nothing left of her breasts. She lies there looking like a freakish overgrown child, devoid of any secondary sexual characteristics" (90).

Caroline Walker Bynum in her essay *Fast, Feast and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* studied how food behavior was largely regulated by Christian beliefs and concludes that extreme austerities including starvation were widespread among female saints. One of the reasons for such extreme abstinence could be the symbolic connection of food with lust and hence through starvation women were rejecting sexuality and protecting their chastity. Citing the examples of Margery of Kempe, Bonaventura, and Rita of Cascia, Bynum suggests that many medieval young women rejected food to manipulate, coerce and punish profligate male behavior. Many medieval women practiced fasting and asceticism as a way to control and escape sexuality, even marriage rather than to submit unconditionally to male desire. The starvation of the protagonists in

301, 302 and *The Vegetarian*, in this context, can be read as the only choice women have when faced with total subjugation of self. If the medieval religious context framed this ascetic practice as spirituality and purity, the modern medical profession, endowed with scientific knowledge marks such choices as "deviance" that needs to be treated back to normalcy.

The only person who truly realizes YeongHye's choice is In Hye, who plays the part expected of her by enduring everything silently. After watching the doctors trying to force-feed YeongHye violently, In Hye realizes "It's your body; you can treat it however you please. The only area where you are free to do just as you like. And even that doesn't turn out how you wanted" (102). As the novel ends, In Hye realizes that her sister has freed herself from all the restraints and soared above while she is still stuck in her prison, fighting insomnia and on the verge of instability.

A major symbol in both *301,302* and *The Vegetarian* is meat, as both YeongHye and YoongHee abhor meat as a nightmare. Carol Adams in her influential book *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory* associates meat consumption with a patriarchal system that treats both women and animals as absent referents, mere meat to be consumed. Meat-eating is associated with power, violence, masculinity, and desire which consumes animals and women as faceless consumable commodities. *301, 302* has a lot of visuals of meat being cooked and eaten, especially by Song Hee, who is shown frying chicken breasts, skewering meat, gutting fish and oysters, making whole chicken soup, and sausage mignons which she loves. In fact, most of the food that she cooks is meat. There is a lot of close-up shots of YoongHee's butcher stepfather cutting and slicing chunks of raw meat, followed by shots revealing YoongHee's rape. At the family table, laden with different kinds of meat dishes, there are close-up shots of mouths of father and mother stuffing themselves and chewing meat. The father forces meat into the mouth of a hesitant YoongHee, urging her to eat and in the next shot he forces himself on her. The only place YoongHee can hide to escape from her father is in the meat freezer, among big chunks of meat, while her mother is busy counting money. YoongHee herself is like raw meat, bartered by her mother for money and consumed by her father, reducing herself into a piece of meat. Visuals of Song Hee cooking and consuming meat is shown a bit more tastefully, as the meat is transformed by complicated cooking techniques into sophisticated food. Although both Song Hee and the stepfather love meat, their appetites differ as Song Hee's consumption is shown as sophisticated, cultured as opposed to the raw desire of the father. In *The Vegetarian*YeongHye's rejection of meat is triggered by a nightmare, filled with blood and carcasses of animals previously consumed. YeongHye is haunted by this dream and constantly feels a lump in her chest, a reminder of all the animals killed and consumed. Maybe YeongHye identifies herself as an animal feminized for consumption by patriarchy. By rejecting meat, YeongHye is rejecting the meat-eating patriarchal culture and her own status as a piece of meat for consumption by men. By identifying herself as a plant, YeongHye reconciles herself to nature, yet another consumable commodity for patriarchy.

In Hye, the sister of YeongHye and Song Hee of *301,302* were both ideal wives, submissive and dutiful yet their perfection was also rejected by their husbands. Song Hee and YoongHee in *301,302* and In Hye and YeongHye in *The Vegetarian* are representative of the only two options faced by women either to submit completely to the feminine ideal or to utterly rebel against it. But both submission and rebellion only cause pain and disintegration for women as none of the women find happiness or comfort, even between themselves.

Celebrated food movies like *Babette's Feast* (1987), *Like Water for Chocolate*(1993), *Waitress* (2007), *No Reservations* (2007), and *Julie and Julia* (2009) have women solving their problems, communicating, and finding happiness through cooking, feeding and consuming food. But *301,302*, as well as *The Vegetarian*, present a grim scenario where, when completely stripped of agency, the only resistance women can offer is by taking to the extreme their status as mere bodies to be consumed, either by celebrating through the body or by denying body altogether. Food is a mediator between self and society and by rejecting food, social intrusions and control can also be rejected. Like the protagonists in *The Machinist* (2004) and *Dans Ma Peau* (2002), the central character's lack of connection and isolation disrupts their appetite. Subversion is possible only by taking objectification of the body to the extreme.The protagonists of *301,302* and *The Vegetarian* are victims of patriarchy who fight back radically by shedding their docility and taking control of their bodies, shutting down any social intrusion through food or sex. By denying meat, by denying sexuality, they refuse to be identified as sexualised meat , ready to be consumed.

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Sleep Through the Rains

Darlington Chukwunyere

When whirling winds snarl at your roof, baring fangs like angry hounds.
When ice balls and thunder storm barks at you with utmost malignance.
When light gives way to darkness and it all seems the roof over your head may soon yield
to the menacing threats of lightening spikes and heavy downpour,
and then the warms in your bowels seem to have joined forces with your foes,
clawing your intestines, urging you to flee asylum and attend to nature's call.
When night thickens with obscurity, oblivion calling at your door,
When it seems that morning may never return from exile, Just breathe.
Shut your eyes and savor the silence beneath the echoes of your sorrows.
You might sleep through the rains, and when you awake, it will all seem like a dream.

Super Hero

He's a true hero, a man of all seasons
He is called super hero for a reason
He knows the pangs of motherhood and understands the woes of a struggling father
He knows it's easier to scatter than to gather
He's a lover of love and hater of hate
He's a keeper of time and dates
I hear he'd rather remain last than jump the queue
I also hear he's naïve and without clue
He's neither a clueless or timid beast
He sure knows when to use his fist from when to call a feast
He is first to give and last to take
He knows there's a thin line between love and hate
He knows after crawl comes stride
He strives for peace at the expense of fear, valor and pride
To many, he is zero
To me, he is a hero
Some say he lives next to hell
Some say he's a steaming gunpowder and bombshell
Many times they prophesy his dooms
Many times he sparkles and booms
He's a man of many wives
He's a cat of nine lives
He's a love story of a billion success stories
He's the voice behind the African moonlight stories
He's the unseen eyes that told the tales of Persia, Rome, and Troy.
He remains immortal.
He's you and me.
Super hero.

Ajoche

Ajoche, every child's nightmare.
The worst fear of every adult.
They said it was the devil's best friend.
Ajoche was no friend of mankind.

Ajoche preyed on the old
He preyed on the young
He preyed on the weak
Ajoche even preyed on the strong

Ajoche ruled the world, until he lost his grip.
Achoche lost his reign when people learnt his ways
When people panicked, he grew stronger.
When people panicked, they made mistakes.
When people panicked, they lost their lives.
When people ran even without being chased,
Ajoche took the glory.

Ajoche is here again.
He wears a new cloak.
He goes by a new code
Ajoche has never conquered humanity
Ajoche will never conquer humanity.

A Prayer House

Jaydeep Sarangi

I fall
From miscalculations.

I fear
For roses.

I articulate
My hunger.

I live
With my bones.

I am
Just here.

Blood oozes out
In the rain forest.

My voices go in and out
I make the room for sleep.

I try again
Arrange my sleep.

Sleepless night
Rolls on my pillow

I see
A sharp blade of love.

After the dream
A prayer house.

My Last Resort?

Sanjhee Gianchandani

When all else has failed and far away have I trailed
When roads seem foggy and perspectives blurred
life only seems to be moving, not in actuality
a decoction of stagnating ideas and propitious design
will you then hold my hand and help me resign?
For this chaos is the prelude to concord;
it will usher in dense correspondences as a reward
departed souls, bygone eras, and memories unrecalled
persist somewhere in the corners of my mind space
like the violent reaction of NaOH and $KMnO4$ diluted
the plot of my life has become convoluted
Will you cruise me across meandering streams
and reduce me to orbits undisclosed?
At a time when skies are inky blue
with the complete absorption of light
Would you be able to pull me out with all your might?
In all the fragile quandaries that I'm caught
would you help me abscond to yourself and
thereafter be my last resort?

The Local-Global Synergy in A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry

Rekha Verma

Abstract

The present paper aims to look at A.K. Ramanujan's English poetry, which portrays the dichotomies of modern outlook and traditional ways of life, the attachment and detachment with oriental and occidental cultures. Ramanujan is seen as a poet who lived in many spaces at once, Indian and western and wrote with equal ease about the domestic and the foreign. He was never happy when terms like exile and alienation were attached to him; he always stressed that he was living in two worlds. He was aware that being a citizen of the modern world, one cannot always have a stable identity. The poet is local- global, and a bridge builder between India and the west. Ramanujan's rendering of his experiences turns out to be unique as his vast knowledge across the west and the east functions as a modernizing influence on his sensibity.

Keywords: Indian, tradition, two cultures, local and global, oriental and western

> When A.K. Ramanujan's *The Striders* (1966) was published by the Oxford University Press and won further recognition as a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, he stabilized his position as one of the most talented of the 'new' poets (671).

The above comment made by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out that A.K. Ramanujan's position as an acclaimed modern Indian poet was achieved gradually and he was a forerunner in many areas of Indian English Literature. Today, Ramanujan holds a status very difficult to match in the Indian literary world. Though Ramanujan lived and worked as an academician in the United States he kept his connections with India alive and maintained that he always lived in two cultures, physically and emotionally.

Ramanujan left for the United States as a Fulbright scholar towards the end of 1960s, and there he joined the University of Chicago as an assistant professor of linguistics, Tamil and

Dravidian languages. But his ties with Tamil and Kannada continued to be intact and developed further. His visits to many major Universities in Europe, America and his marriage to Molly – a Christian brought up in Aden – exposed Ramanujan to western culture and decisively influenced his sensibility and outlook on life.

The multiplicity of worlds he himself possessed is abundantly explicit in his poetry. Diversity of experience was not something alien to Ramanujan. He has said in an interview that his father was both Indian and European in his clothes and intellectual life, he would just as easily talk about the old Sanskrit texts as he would about Leibniz or Euclid or non-Euclidian geometry. His father would just as easily talk about atheism and Bertrand Russell as he would about the Bhagwat Gita. Bruce King has commented on Ramanujan's talent to accommodate the diverse and the dissimilar, the oriental and the western:

> He reads widely and his poetry echoes or alludes to an unusually large body of phrases from oriental and western texts, as his mind senses some similarity between, say an idea of Freud's and a concept in the Upanishads. Ramanujan's physical dislocation made him conscious of the Indian which he believed was tangible to him because of this displacement, as he said one needs 'the other' to find 'oneself' (71).

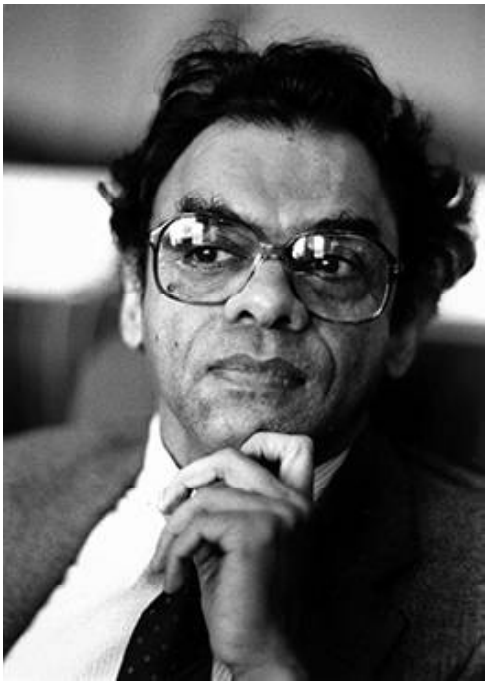
With time Ramanujans' poetry shows a gradual movement in its content which he seemed enjoying rather than complaining. Ramanujan might be a depository of multiplicities, but he was a poet who wrote with equal ease about native and alien cultures. Sharda Prasad remarked after Ramanujan's death:

> When thinking of Ramanujan it is a puzzle to me how a person who did not belong to the front rank of the writers in his language came to be in the front rank of the country's literary and cultural figures. I think the secret is his eminence as a translator as a folklorist and explorer of oral traditions, as an interpreter and mediator between cultures and civilization (15).

Ramanujan was never happy when terms like exile, alienation or deracination were attached to him. He always stressed that he was living in two worlds and his poetry displays the amalgamation of the East and the West. His poetry consists of both Indian and global elements which tend to project the image of a multilingual and multicultural poet. His poetry is a symbiosis of two cultures as is exemplified by his poem "Extended Family" which has the family as the central motif. It shows the poetic self to be happy in an alien situation and surrounding as he has acquired some habits like his grandfather and his father, and is satisfied equating chlorine water to Ganges and Chicago bulb to the Vedic sun:

> Yet like grandfather
> I bathe before the village crow
> The dry chlorine water
> My only Ganges
> The native Chicago bulb
> a cousin of the Vedic sun

slap soap on my back
like father



A. K. Ramanujan

Though Ramanujan physically kept travelling from east to west, he had the rare capacity to blend the real with the imaginary, the local with the global. His Indian past and American present complemented to each other in moulding and refining his poetic sensibility.

He chooses subjects for his poetry from Indian mythology, the past history of his family, Hindu religion as well as from issues of global importance. Surjit S. Dulai has commented perceptively on the shaping influence of cross-cultural experiences on his poetic imagination, although his south Indian experience is central to his vision:

> Ramanujan's poetry neither stays in one place nor leaves its vision remaining constant and the circles of this vision constantly growing –Ramanujan's poetry reflects the vast range of his experience and learning. Ideals with the multifarious aspects of life as he has seen and studied them across many cultural boundaries, although the core of his imagination and creativity remains deeply rooted in his south Indian experience. By far the largest number of Ramanujan's poems are concerned with subjects drawn from life in South India. Aspects of South Indian reality also predominated as a reference or as poetic ingredient in other forms in the treatment of subject derived from elsewhere. But his poetry is not circumscribed by his Indian background (151).

The poem "A Report" presents an ironic and tragic vision of a society as well as of history. The poet says that autocrats like Hitler, Stalin and Lenin are dead while virtuous leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King appear only on coins, notes and calendars. There is no hope from the current leaders, as they act like hunters. The poor have acquired unfair habits and girls and kids are not safe. At the end of the poem the poet wonders if by being a poet he can do something to bring about changes in the world. The poet refuses to plunge in and loose his mental peace. Although he is in Chicago, he likes to dream of the blue Mysore house back in India.

Yet what can I do, what shall I do, O

god of death and sweet waters under or next
to the salt and flotsam what can I do
but sleep, work at love and work, blunders,
sleep again refusing, lest I fall asunder
to dream of a blue Mysore house in Chicago?

The poem "Saturdays" represents his characteristic method of fusing his intimately personal experience in India with his sensitive impressions of his life in the west. It shuttles between his past in India and present in the United States. He recounts the death of his mother and brother in India which took place on Saturdays, and imagines that one such Saturday death will take possession of his own life:

Not on Thursday, not in Paris
at night fall,
not in a local train as you'd like
but on a day like this,
three weeks into a garbage strike,
a Dutch elm dying against a red brick wall
that you'll remember but not know why
looking into a saw tooth, sky in a sequoia forest.

The poem refers to the incident of his wife's Syrian Christian ancestors leaving Rome due to adverse circumstances. Ramanujan makes an allusion to god Shiva who when unhappy opens his third eye located on his forehead and destroys the unwanted. Though there is a dent on his wife's forehead she does not have any such powers and her deep anguish is apparent on her face.

a wife's always clear face
now dark with unspent
panic, with no third eye, only a dent,
the mark marriage leaves on a small forehead
with ancestors in Syria, refugees
from Roman Saturdays.

The poet evokes his personal fear, anxiety or anguish by linking it with the experiences of his family members while at the same time incorporating the western ambience in the poem by referring to Paris, the local train, Dutch elm and sequoia forest.

In the poem "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" Ramanujan presents the sharply contrasting pictures of a village and city. The first picture represents the happy girl playing with her cousin, whereas the second picture evokes the atmosphere of urban loneliness. The girl seems happy living in a joint family in the first picture but the modern city does not offer her the happiness which she enjoyed in a small village with her family members around:

When she was four or five

she sat on a village swing
,……
Now she looks for the swing
in cities with fifteen suburbs.

Ramanujan who had lived in different states in India and had visited various countries recognized the importance of diverse cultural, historical and geographic contexts which vary from state to state and region to religion. His poetry reaches across cultural boundaries for its substance in terms of vision, imagery tone and texture. There is a local-global synergy in his poetry based on the interaction between the oriental and the western cultures and literary texts. This is precisely what distinguishes him from most of the other Indian English poets of his time such as Nissim Ezekiel, Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy or Kamala Das. Exposure to an alien culture does not lead, in his case, to psychological dislocation or the fragmentation of the poetic self. It strengthens his poetic sensibility and gives it a refined poise derived from the mingling of memories, impressions and perceptions related to diverse cultures, especially Indian and American.

Ramanujan has written a number of poems recounting his American life. "Death and the Good Citizen" visualizes the treatment the dead body is given in the eastern and western cultures. The poet is concerned about environment and is happy to note that the human waste in his city is taken away in the morning by the municipal vans and is used for gardens. He is discontented with the way the Christians bury the dead body, as he feels that it would be better if the dead body could decompose and mingle in the soil, so that it would infuse life in plants and trees and would thus be useful to mankind. Ramanujan mentions about organ transplantation of the dead which is not very common in India. He expresses his belief that if his body is entrusted to his family members, they will cremate it following the Hindu customs. The poem also contains an ironic critique of the western ethics regarding the use of the organs of the dead for transplantation:

Eyes in an eye bank
to blink some day for a stranger's
brain, wait like mummy wheat
in the singular company
of single eyes, pickled,
absolute.

The Hindu belief which does not allow removal of any organ from the dead body also finds direct expression in the poem:

Hidebound, even worms cannot
have me: they'll cremate
me in Sanskrit and sandalwood,
have me sterilized
to scatter of ash.

Dr. Ramakrishna has rightly commented on the continuity between tradition and modernity in Ramanujan's poetry:

> Despite its rootedness in Indian Cultural traditions, Ramanujans' poetry can be read on its own as English Language poetry with modern themes and forms. Thus he achieves a rare blend of the ancient and the modern, the Indian and the American idioms. As in T.S. Eliot, in Ramanujan too, there is continuity from tradition to modernity, a continuity between his poetry translations and scholarship (99).

Ramanujan's scholarship, his abiding interest in the Indian and western cultures and his spirit of self-questioning and introspection have been highlighted by KN Daruwalla.

Daruwalla writes recalling Ramanujan's visit to India:

> He got all the magazines from South India that he wanted. He never felt cut-off from home. From a personal pre-occupation, his interest in two languages grew in to a professional concern. He emphasized 'the double resource to be in two cultures', but pointed out the tension of living in such a state as well that led to 'self-questioning' (18-19).

Although some of the Indian diasporic characteristics such as nostalgia, identity crisis and a sense of anonymity are present in Ramanujan's poetry his basic approach to his experience is that of mediating between the oriental and the western, the regional and the global. "Prayers to Lord Murugan" which is one of his acknowledged masterpieces takes after ancient Tamil bhakti poetry, but it does not project the image of the poet as a religious hindu in search of spirituality. It is, ironically, a prayer to the god to cure the people of prayers:

> Deliver us O presence
> from proxies
> and absences
> from sanskrit and the mythologies
> of night and the several
> round-table mornings
> of London and returned
> the future to what
> it was.
> ……..
> Lord of answers
> cure us at once
> of prayers.

The poet further incorporates global experiences and reminiscences to the texture of the poem by means of references to the Bible, to Solomon, to the round table conferences in London etc.

…….. I hear it
running like an underground Ganges
under my feet, over my head,
like leaky taps upstairs and downstairs,
purring at my side like the kitchen fridge,
inside me like tummy gurgles,
Always running from me
water tables under a Tantalus
forever thirsty.

Ramanujan ends the poem referring to the European mythology of Tantalus being cursed by the Gods. Tantulas was made to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches having fruit ever eluding his hands and the water below receding before he could drink. As Tantalus, who stands in water but is unable to drink it, the poet also is helpless as 'it' is 'always running from me'.

Ramanujan's poetic sensibility is simultaneously Indian and western. He reaffirms continuity and connection at the local and global levels. There are numerous references in his poetry to western mythology, world history, wars, traditions and cultures. He refers to the prehistoric monuments in Wiltshire, England, and the Neolithic and Bronze age monuments. He talks about Hitler and Stalin and about Germany's gassing of millions of Jews, about the atrocities in Bosnia and Biafra. He talks about drugs that addict the young of Europe and North America. For Ramanujan his past continuously interpenetrates with his present and consequently he does not feel alienated. When Ramanujan writes about India he does so from a truly analytical perspective. He does not necessarily wish to return to India although his soul is deeply rooted in Brahmnical traditions and his mind observes and criticizes his roots with reasoning power. In the poem "One More on Deathless Theme" he comments with ironic humour on the changes occurring in the modern society:

even
a four-armed androgyne like our god
who used to be everywhere but is now housed
in the kitchen.

The poem "Still Another View of Grace" depicts the poet's dilemma about the values two different cultures present before him. Though the poet is a confident Bred Brahmin who has no reason to know a temptation which street woman wants to offer he is reminded of his traditional family members who sing hymns and follow the tradition he has inherited. His Tamil roots are strong enough to provide strength to withstand the anxieties of an exile.

And I have no reason to know your kind,
Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns
I shudder to the bone at hunger that roam the street
beyond the constable's beat.

Bruce King has clearly defined the exact position that Ramanujan holds between that of a traditionalist and a modernist and the key role of memory in the constitution of his inner self:

> Ramanujan is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is a product of both and his poems reflect his personality conscious of change, enjoying its vitality, freedom and contradictions, but also aware of the memories which form his inner-self, memories of unconscious 'namelessness', which are still alive at the foundations of the self (212).

Ramanujan resists categorization as a traditionalist or a modernist, as an orientalist or an advocate of the west, as a conservative or a revolutionary in sensibility, vision or poetic craft. This in a way accounts for the peculiar strength of his genius. He responds creatively to experiences which are apparently dissonant or dissimilar because of their rootedness in different cultures, myths, reces, geographical locations or periods of time. These experiences achieve a new synthesis in his poetry which impresses us by its flexibility of tone, incisive irony, arresting imagery, rhythmic energy and inclusive vision. Thus the local-global synergy in his works provides the key to an understanding of his poetry and its significance for the creation of a liberal society.

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Transcendentalism and East West Intertexts: A Cross-sectional Analysis of Indian and Western Literary Criticism

Sujarani Mathew

Abstract

Roland Barthes' dictum, "every text is an intertext" reflects the range and wavelength engendered by each literary work. The exchange of outlook, philosophy as well as worldviews, becomes the end product of this phenomenon of crosscultural exchange. Indian philosophy and literary criticism, based on ancient Sanskrit knowledge, has undoubtedly influenced the Western literary circles throughout history. This paper is an attempt to make a cross-sectional analysis of the wide range of influence that ancient Indian philosophy as well as Barata's *Natyasatra* has exerted on modern western literature and criticism. It focusses on Transcendentalism and the influence of the Eastern thought on Emerson, the Romantic poets and the modern writers. It also attempts a comparison of Barata's concept of *Rasa* with Aristotle's *Catharsis* and Longinus' *Sublime* and traces its relation to the modern concept of 'affects'. The significance of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is also examined for an understanding of the interaction of multiple voices involved in East-West influence in the domains of thought, culture and literary aesthetics.

Keywords: intertexuality, transcendentalism, dialogism, navarasa, affects

The theory of intertexuality has come a long way from Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and Kristeva coining the term in the 1960s. Roland Barthes' dictum 'every text is an intertext' brings on a poststructural relevance to the concept as interconnectedness and influence give way to discursivity and dismantling of the text. But beyond these paradigms, the vortex of cultural nuances and evolution of new cultural practices that new and revolutionary intertexts provide also need to be examined. The historical metamorphosis through invasion and assimilation between nations from B.C. era to the present, the

momentous changes through colonisation and translation in literature, the adaptations of culture and resulting hybridity and finally globalisation and the resultant transformation of the world have given rise to a new concept of World Literature in the twenty-first century. The unique quality of each culture and its aesthetics has undergone transition with a constant anxiety of influence from other cultures that has shaped the theory and criticism of Western and Eastern art and literature. The transitions as well as the exchange of points of view between the East and the West have also been subjected to study. Indian civilisation, being the cornerstone of the ancient East, deserves closer scrutiny in this context.

A constant exchange of Indian knowledge seeped into the Central Asian cultures like Turkish, Persian and Arabic with trade contacts and commerce in the first millennium of the Christ Era. It is interesting to note that Byzantium (the seat of the Eastern Roman Empire) was the window of knowledge for the Western world in the Medieval period as immortalised by the poems of W. B. Yeats in English literature. Even the literary movement of Transcendentalism, now believed to have originated in America, has its roots in Indian philosophy, especially in Upanishadic thought. The transcendentalism inherent in the philosophy of Indian literature was borrowed by the founder of the concept in America, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), as is evident from his poem *Brahma* which appeared in the year 1857, the year of *Sepoy Mutiny* during British colonialism.

The Transcendentalists believed that the phenomenal world is a reflection of God and that it is a doorway to the spiritual world. They held that feeling and intuition are superior to reason and intellect and consequently there is a pervasive sense of mysticism in their writings which influenced modern authors such as W. B. Yeats, T S Eliot and Hermen Hesse.

W. B. Yeats (1865-1939), the visionary poet of Ireland, in his Byzantium poems *Second Coming* and *Meru,* endorses the Eastern outlook on life and civilization. In his *Second Coming* the text from the Biblical *Revelations* which features the Antichrist is morphed into the *avatar* of Nara-simha/Vishnu- a Doomsday Beast approaching Bethlehem (Bedlam) since the values of love and innocence of the Christ child has been rejected by mankind (Lal). Again, T. S. Eliot ends his momentous work *The Wasteland* with a triple benediction like an *Upanishad*. The triple advice of *data, dayadvam* and *damyata* given to the three categories of *manava*, *asura* and *deva* (ie, give, be compassionate, be self-controlled respectively) is taken from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.

The British Romantic Movement (1785-1830), was also considerably influenced by Indian thought, particularly its emphasis on a cosmic spirit inhering in and transcending the material world. Harish Trivedi cites John Drew's work, *India and the Renaissance* to point out the "permeation of newly discovered Indian texts into the works of Coleridge and Shelley for example" (123). Emerson himself was influenced by Wordsworth and he

finds the immanent spirit in the natural world around, be it the forest or the river, the dawn or dusk – an echo of the Vedic outlook which was intensely sensitive to the external world.

As Namita Bhatia puts it, "Upanishadic thought extends the savouring of the world to the savouring of its transcendental origin" (Bhatia 11). This is evidenced in Wordsworth's own version of pantheism in his works celebrating Nature. Wordsworth experienced a trance like state in his contemplation of nature which he has described memorably in his *Prelude*. This is the kind of transcendental experience which "moves him from the world of distraction to concentration and the state of meditation" Bhatia (11). Keats too has experienced the spirit of transcendentalism while meditating on the possibilities of Art. According to *Natyasastra*, considered the 5th Veda, 'the creation of aesthetic pleasure is the aim of literature'. An aesthetic creation, just like a beautiful object in Nature is savoured in its essence and this experience is similar to the sage's feeling of transcendental joy. Upon reading Keats' 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever' and the deeply philosophic lines in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn',

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

and

"Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought

As doth eternity..."

which immortalises Art and expresses the transcendental effect upon contemplating Art, one is impressed by the influence of Indian philosophy on Western literature.

Indian philosophy has long fascinated thinkers of the West. There have been intertexts between the divide – both conscious and unconscious – which reveal the exchange of ideas between cultures globally. Yet the cosmology of Indian and Western civilizations differs radically from each other. The Western mythology based on Good and Evil and the Indian mythology based on the concept of Karma can be considered to be 'two parallel lines that meet in infinity.' P. Lal has highlighted this point in his article 'Indian Influences on Western Literature'. According to him, even the concept of prayer differs in both: while the West pray to attain wishes, the Hindu prayer is one of thanksgiving. According to Indian thought, yearning to get what one desires may get your wishes granted with counterproductive results. Sex, fame, money and power are dreadfully counterproductive.

Intertexuality informs the process by which every text is a product of prior texts. As Bakhtin has said, the dialogic properties of the text ensure that many and diverse notes are heard within a text with various origins and they are transformed and recreated into a new

text. The discursive nature of the text has been explored in detail by theorists like Fairclough. In *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) Fairclough examines the hidden discourses involved within each text and the hegemonic process involved in marking the power relations in society. It was Julia Kristeva who popularised the term 'intertexuality' which represents the manner in which texts build on other texts and discourses (1986). She also identifies two types of intertexuality – horizontal and vertical. Horizontal intertexuality is the manifested intertexuality in works, clearly stated by means such as quotation marks, whereas vertical intertexuality or constitutive intertexuality is the merging of prior texts into the new text "which may assimilate, contradict or ironically echo them" (Fairclough 102).

We can see both these modes of intertexual elements in the Indian aesthetic concepts and theories. It is interesting to note the similarity and differences involved in the aesthetic criticism of the East and the West from the 3rd century BC. Informed discussions on Art and Beauty were a part of philosophical studies in the classical civilizations of both India and Greece. It is important to recall that Aristotle belonged to the 3rd century BC and Longinus and Bharatamuni to the 3rd century AD.

Aristotle in his *Poetics* postulates 'Catharsis' – the purging of emotions through pity and fear – as the end result of tragedy upon the spectator. Indian aesthetic criticism, based on Barata's *Natyasastra*, sets forth the theory of the *Navarasas* or the nine basic human emotions that encapsulate a vast spectrum of human experiences. Drama (or any art form) produces aesthetic experience in the audience, upon evoking these emotions or *rasa* in them. ie, poetic experience is in essence a rasa experience – similar to and yet different from Aristotle's 'catharsis'. The aesthetic criticism of the ancients possesses certains characteristics which have a universal appeal although they originated in geographically remote parts of the world.

The later Greek theorist Longinus expounded the theory of the 'Sublime' in which he ascribes 'greatness' in literature to five qualities: grandeur of thought, capacity for strong emotions, exalted figures of speech, nobility of diction, and dignity of composition. The first two are the innate gifts of the genius or the artist and the last three are related to the elements of the art. Both art and the artist contribute to the effect of the *sublime*.

Upon reading/hearing the literary work, the reader attains a state of ecstasy and the emotions of the speaker are aroused in the reader. This sublime text 'pleases always and pleases all.' Baratamuni's concept emphasizes that it requires a 'sahrdaya' to attain the state of bliss upon reading/watching an artistic work. Just as it requires a sensitive spectator to feel *rasa*, according to Longinus the effect of the sublime can be generated only in persons of sensibility and literary experience. *Rasa* (or flavour – etymologically) is to be relished by the spectator and the theory of rasa focuses on the effect upon the receiver

than on the act of creation. Similarly, 'sublimity' is the quality of literature whereby great works aspire to please and raise the audience to the level of ecstasy and transcendental delight.

As Bhatia has argued, "Art mediates between the experiences of this world and the experiences of the transcendental" (11). Transcendental delight is again the essence of aesthetic beauty as *Upanishadic* principle correlates the world to its transcendental origin. Art forms the bridge between the 'Original Word' (the transcendental Supreme in both Indian and Western theology) and the World. The elevation of the self to the realm of supreme bliss is called self-realisation in the West and *'Ananda'* in the Eastern philosophy. Indian thought asserts that when the *'citta'* or the creative centre of man is in union with the *'hridayakash'* or the innermost core of one's being, one attains aesthetic (spiritual) bliss or *'ananda'*. Art has the capacity to transport the reader from the external world and reach out into a state of concentration and meditation. Krishna Chaitanya in his work *Sanskrit Poetics: A Critical and Comparative Study* says that *rasa* in *Natyasastra* "stands for the supreme reality of the universe, the self-luminous consciousness which when realised results in transcendental bliss" (91).

It is not only in Western literary study that one finds the influences of the *rasa* theory. The neuroscientists as well as theorists of the 21st century, also focus on emotions or as latterly called 'affects' and its influence on individual and social wellbeing. The concept of 'affect' is used by social scientists and psychologists like Brian Massumi and Silvan Tomkins. While Indian aesthetics theorizes on the appreciation of literature, Western philosophy tries to make sense of society and culture by means of these 'affects'. Interestingly, Brian Massumi, the political philosopher, argues that affective elements more than logic apply to human and societal relations and that it also determines culture formation. Cultural practices are formed by the intensities of emotion or affect. In other words, habituation resulting from intensities of affect rather than rationalism and knowledge gives birth to cultural practices.

The psychologist Silvan Tomkins describes 'affects' as 'non-intentional bodily reactions.' It refers to the intense and unconscious bodily reaction to emotion. Upon closer scrutiny, affect/feelings/reactions are found to be closely related. In his work *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1962), Tomkins relates affect to "the biological portion of emotion" which is 'hardwired, pre-programmed genetically transmitted mechanism' that exist in each of us and which, when triggered, precipitates a 'known pattern of biological events' (wikipedia). As in the case of Barata's *Navarasa*, Tomkins cites nine primary affects by their physiological expression: 1) Enjoyment/Joy 2) Interest/Excitement 3) Surprise/Startle 4) Anger/Rage 5) Disgust 6) Dissmell 7) Distress/Anguish 8) Fear/Terror 9) Shame/Humiliation. These nine affects and their physiological detailing bear striking resemblance to Barata's

Navarasas: 1) *saundarya* (eroticism/beauty) 2) *hasya* (comic) 3) *karuna* (pathos) 4) *raudra* (fury/anger) 5) *vibhatsa* (disgust) 6) *adbhuta* (marvellous/awe) 7) *bhayanaka* (terrible/odious) 8) *vira* (heroic) and *shanta* (peaceful/silent).

These *rasas* or emotions inspired as a result of artistic contemplation, according to affect science, is similar to moods and the creation of empathy. Affective psychology is indicated by one's attitude to another person as reflected in interpersonal communication. The sharing or empathetic reaction to members of one's community (for instance, in sharing of grief in communal sorrow or laughing at the nation's politicians upon being affected by a troll message) is also suggestive of 'interpretive communities' in Reader Response criticism. Our aesthetic judgement follows empathetic response which is largely dependent on 'identity group divisions' according to affective theory. This is again similar to the *sahrdaya*/men of sensibility concept that one finds in ancient Indian and Greek literary theory expounded by Barata and Longinus.

The ancient Indian literary and critical writings, the Central Asian cultures and the Chinese knowledge interacted with one other since 900 AD (Trivedi 124). Indian literary and philosophical texts were translated for European readers during the period of colonial expansion. Both the French and the English excelled in prolific translation of Sanskrit texts during the 1780s. This aroused wonder and admiration throughout Europe as these were subsequently translated into other European languages. Such was the initial impact of these newly translated texts that it seemed, according to Raymond Schwab, to have caused in Europe nothing less than an 'Oriental Renaissance' (Trivedi 123). With the strengthening of colonialism, the tide of Orientalism turned to Occidentalism and the centering of the Western civilization. This led to the prominence of Western art and culture in the East in the 19th and 20th centuries. Art forms of the West as well as Western philosophy and criticism gained ground even in the East. The counter-influences of cultural studies, modernist and postmodernist studies in literature, have taken root in the Indian academics. This 'influence' or the existence of '*prabhav*' in world literature has been closely studied by the Hindi writer and critic Bharat Bhushan Agrawal:

> In one sense, of course, each thought or sentiment is [an example of] influence because, by definition, each thought that arises or is born in the mind cannot come into existence without some impact of the external world, yet there is a sufficient difference between the two even if of a subtle kind... Thus, there is a marked element of reaction in influence… And the reaction may not always be positive, it may also be negative.
>
> A second characteristic of influence is that it is by its very nature not whole but partial.
>
> A third characteristic of influence is that it is not obligatory but optional. … If there is no reaction at all, it is not possible for influence to exist (qtd. in Trivedi 128).

Agrawal has considerably expanded the scope of influence studies by arguing that the way influence functions can be partial, optional and causing not only positive but also negative reactions. It is also important to note that even in the modern times there need not be any close correspondence in time between the origin of cultural and literary ideas and their actual influence in another country or civilization. The dialogic criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin of Soviet Russia in the 1920s and 30s, came to be influential in the West only in the 1980s. Bakhtin formulated the view that a literary work is a site for dialogic interaction of multiple voices and that the different voices are fully incorporated into the text. The modernist as well as poststructuralist thought has utilised his theory and has emphasised the existence of plurality of voices in literary texts as well as in culture, ruling out the pre-eminence of monologic truths. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is immensely helpful to understand the forces at work in the world of cultures. The East-West influence from the classical times to our own in thought, culture and literary concepts has the effect of producing multiple voices which make the cultures of both the East and the West equally vibrant and accommodating.

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Performing Digital Domesticities: Emerging Trends in Malayali Women's Gendered Representational Practices

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Abstract

The paper attempts a visual-discursive analysis of Malayali women's engagements with the online platform of *YouTube* through the digital representational practice of cooking vlogs. For this purpose, the vlogs of three Malayali women- Lekshmi Nair, Rehana Fathima and Veena Jan - placed at separate locations of digital visibility and regionally mediated gendered conventionalities, will be analyzed. Against this contextual terrain, women's visible engagements with social media will be conceived as conscious, reflective performances curated for 'particular publics'. By placing regionally mediated ideations of the Malayali wife and mother as strategic nodes, the paper hopes to map the rhetorical paradigms within which these digitally engaged women, their 'publicness' and the unique femininities they represent, gain valence in the digital-visual terrain of *YouTube*. The female body subject would be analyzed alongside her adherence to or transgression from the norms of gender socialization, sartorial morphologies and region-specific imaginations of maternal femininity. Furthermore, a central concern of the paper would be to uncover the larger tropes that govern the response of a vocal online audience to these women and their mediated representations. The paper also hopes to explore how these digital representative practices- precariously placed at the intersections of the 'domestic-intimate' and the 'visible-virtual'- engender novel cyber mediated terrains that allow for the performance of traditional femininities (like Veena Jan) alongside the visibilization of counter aesthetic articulations (like Rehana Fathima). The analysis would be informed by feminist theories of representation, readings on postfeminist digital cultures and theories of discourse analysis.

Keywords: digital self representation, particular publics, vlogging, subversion, digital publicness

The paper attempts a visual-discursive analysis of Malayali women's engagements with the online platform of *YouTube* through the digital representational practice of cooking vlogs. For this purpose, the vlogs of three Malayali women- Lekshmi Nair, Rehana Fathima and Veena Jan- placed at separate locations of digital visibility and regionally mediated gendered conventionalities, will be analyzed. *Veena's Curryworld* - a YouTube channel specializing in cooking vlogs- is owned and run by Veena Jan, a non-resident Malayali (living in the Middle East). Focused on making traditional "Kerala recipes", and with over 1.5 million subscribers, she is one of the leading Malayali women who have succeeded in gaining popularity through monetizing what was largely conceived of as an immaterial domestic labour. Unanchored on any previous engagement with media publicity, she was introduced to the online audience in 2015 through her channel, that bears the visual-discursive filter of a traditional Malayali woman emphasized through her focus on 'nadan' recipes, sartorial morphologies and the continued invocation of her position as a wife and mother who is committed to making food her family loves. Exhibiting a mild contrast to *Veena's Curryworld*, stands Lekshmi Nair's channel (simply titled Lekshmi Nair) with 599K subscribers and over two hundred videos. Her engagement with the online terrain must be viewed as being differentiated from that of Veena's in that Lekshmi Nair was not unknown to the online publics before the launch of her vlogs. Ever present in media spaces, Lekshmi Nair emblematized the neoliberal imaginations of the financially capable woman whose 'choice' to publicize her commitment to and expertise in a 'domestic vocation' was premised as 'agentic'. Over the years Lekshmi Nair has invited media attention due to the controversies and complaints that questioned her role as an educator, which effected in a temporary negative sway in public opinion against her favour. However, this has not hindered the sustained support of online Malayali publics that appreciate her 'maternal', 'familial' and 'entrepreneurial' positions when engaging with her cooking vlogs as commentators. However, these responses are not so overwhelming in media sites that screen her travel vlogs.

Disrupting the dominant desirable ideations of Malayali femininity that thematize cooking vlogs in Malayali cyber spaces, stands Rehana Fathima's online content in YouTube. With only 93 videos and 36.5K subscribers Fathima's cooking vlogs however receive a significant viewership owing to the transgressive idioms that she employs and the controversies that surround her digital engagements. Marked by a conscious disavowal of traditional feminine modesties, Fathima's vlogs serve to embody and repackage the ritual defying transgressive femininity as a subversive narrative directly addressed at digital patriarchal publics. However an analysis of her vlogs must be prefaced by the knowledge that, Fathima like Lekshmi Nair has been a media-visible figure but gained media attention for her controversial political commentaries and unconventional ('culture' defying) practices. Against this contextual terrain, women's visible engagements with social media will be conceived as conscious, reflective performances curated for 'particular publics'. By placing regionally mediated ideations of the Malayali wife and mother as strategic nodes, the paper hopes to map the rhetorical paradigms within which these digitally engaged women, their 'publicness' and the unique femininities they represent, gain valence in the digital-visual terrain of *YouTube*.

This analysis will initiate from the assumption that the culinary vlogging practices of the three Malayali women subjected to study are gastro-political narratives aimed at 'particular publics'. I employ the term 'gastro-politics' within this context not as conceptualized by Appadurai but to refer to a practice wherein food is extracted from its common place locales in everyday social discourse to deploy it as a motif to negotiate with existing cultural assumptions and ideologies. This assumption is undergirded by two factors. Firstly, the primary language used is Malayalam (both in narration, commentary as well as titles). While admittedly a few of such videos also come with English subtitles, the thumbnails, descriptions and titles often display the Malayalam script thereby evincing that all three channels are primarily focused on Malayali publics. Secondly, while all channels under study are aimed towards Malayali publics, a second level of differentiation in choosing the target audience is evidenced through the content dealt with in these vlogs. *Veena's Curryworld* explicitly states that she will focus on Kerala recipes in her channel description and her content largely restricts itself to traditional, conventional food that are popular only in Kerala. However, the ingredients used are foreign (due to her residence in the Middle East) thereby also enabling an active participation from Gulf Malayalis who are active in the digital terrain. The conventionality followed in her choice of recipes is also reflected in her self-representational agendas. In contrast to *Veena's Curryworld,* Lekshmi Nair's vlogs are not restricted to Kerala cuisine but take on a more cosmopolitan approach through videos dedicated to making non-indigenous desserts (like caramel sponge cakes, puddings etc) in addition to traditional recipes. By giving due credit to recipes that a Malayali would tag as foreign or 'modern' her vlogs would hold an appeal to Malayali publics, who, like her, have been in contact with neoliberal consumption practices. Rehana Fathima's vlogs-which deal with familiar region-specific delicacies-are either consciously yet tacitly posited as secondary to her sartorial and discursive presentation of the vlog or re-encoded as a narrative of critique and resistance aimed at particular patriarchal publics in a way that upsets their entrenched regressive notions on culture and gendered hierarchies.

The links between domesticity, publicness and the visual-discursive codes of gendered digital self-representation must now be analyzed to uncover rubrics that engender new sites of resistances in the Malayali cyber terrain. Cooking vlogs when viewed as a mode of digital self-representational practice, must be premised as being precariously placed at the intersections of the 'domestic-intimate' and the 'visible-virtual'. While the feminization of the Malayali digital terrain is by no stretch of the imagination restricted to or effected by cooking vlogs, these gastro-political practices have a pivotal role in shaping, expanding and restricting women's online mobility in techno-social spaces. The image of the educated Malayali wife who deploys her skills in service of her familial members in the domestic realm has been ever present as a desirable idiom in the annals of Kerala's modernity. With the emergence of a visible virtual domain in the form of social networking sites, this image has been re-signified through novel codes of 'publicness'. These codes assured- with a few exceptions- that the monetization of immaterial domestic labour was effected without

decontextualizing it from the essentialist regional imaginations of Malayali femininity. However, the three vlogging channels subjected to analysis would evince that these mediated spaces also attempt to categorize these online gendered subjectivities into traditional, neoliberal and deviant positions which in turn are contingent on their submissiveness to or subversion of offline hierarchies. The female body subject, therefore as placed in these vlogging practices, is marked by her adherence to or digressions from the norms of gender socialization, sartorial morphologies and region-specific imaginations of hegemonic femininity.

As mentioned earlier Veena Jan, Lekshmi Nair and Rehana Fathima exist at varying levels of 'publicness' in the digital terrain. Veena Jan's cooking videos (each of which receives more than one million views) is characterized by a short introduction to the recipe (lasting about 3 minutes) after which the video immediately moves away from herself and onto the actual cooking in which only her hands are visible to the audience alongside the food being cooked. The video often ends with a few sentences from Veena asking an imagined audience if they liked the recipe or sometimes cuts to short segments in which her family (a husband and two sons) gathers around to taste the food. Three aspects of Veena's vlogs must be looked at, to comprehend how she curates her publicness. Firstly, she limits her screen time and digital *tete a tete* addressal to a few minutes- tacitly assuring her publics that her digital engagements are more focused on her vocations as opposed to any attempt at self-indulgent publicity. By doing so, she is also able to re-inscribe without any significant permutation, the desirable idiom of the home bound housewife who makes no detrimental attempt at transgressing into the public realm (and in the case, into the realm of virtual, cyber mediated publicness). Secondly, in the few minutes that visibilise her image before the online audience, she is careful to hold fast to sartorial modesties that are found desirable by offline patriarchal publics in Kerala. Though geographically located in the Middle East, she presents herself attired in south Indian sartorial repertoires and specializes in cooking 'nadan' (indigenous) Kerala recipes thereby latching onto familiar desirable idioms that were ever present in Kerala's aesthetic imaginations of femininity. For example her most popular videos are titled *Nadan Kerala* Sambar, *Nadan Kozhi Curry, Thattukada Style Parippu Vada, Kerala Christian Marriage Special Pacha Manga Curry* etc.Thirdly, the concluding segments that show her family happily consuming the food that has been made while also engaging in casual conversations or witty dialogues is significant in that it also serves in affirming favourable imageries of domesticity. The overwhelming support received by Veena Jan could thus also be premised on the fact that her publicness does not threaten regional imaginations of femininties and existing gendered heteronormative hierarchies embraced by digital patriarchal publics. Furthermore, the number of subscribers for *Veena's Curryworld* and the viewership it has invited over the years far exceed that of Lekshmi Nair's (as well as Rehana Fathima's) channels even though Nair has been a dominant presence in the field for over a decade and Fathima was familiar to media publics preceding her vlogging practices.

Lekshmi Nair's channel while not limited to cooking contents is largely focused on them. In contrast to *Veena's Curryworld,* the videos do not compromise on the presenter's screen

time. Her videos are characterized by lengthy explanations and commentaries on her recipes, during which time she looks directly at the camera and addresses her online publics. While her digital self-representation does not strictly adhere to traditional morphologies, they are not often controversial enough to serve as a vocal counter-aesthetic articulation. Exhibiting a neoliberal repertoire, her vlogs foreground her material agencies and is characterized by an inconsistency in self-curated images and sartorial choices. Perhaps the video that best emphasizes Nair's neoliberal agencies would be the one titled *Magic Oven-Behind the Scenes*. Magic Oven is the televised cookery programme that first introduced Nair to media publics and this particular video is one that allowed the audience to take a glance at the processes that go behind the production of this programme and the ways in which she curates herself to be 'presentable' before her audience. The video reveals the shops from which she chooses the clothes which she wears before the camera, her access to premier beauty salons and professionals who do her makeup in addition to a synoptic look at the creative processes that are included in the production and direction of *Magic Oven*. While some of her videos have invited hate comments to which she responds in yet another video, there has been an overwhelming support in favour of her content in which she is addressed as 'Lekshmi ma'am' owing to her secondary role as an educator in a law college. It would be possible argue that this online support has been influenced in part by the neoliberal repackaging of Kerala modernity's partial acceptance of the working woman engaged in vocations that emphasized her womanly roles as 'nurturers' or 'instructors' (i.e vocations like nursing or teaching as well as positions as midwives and school inspectress). The image presented before the online audience of Nair's cooking vlogs is that of an educator who also finds time to engage with and monetize through her 'womanly' expertise in a domestic vocation like cooking while being careful to invoke her familial roles as wife, mother and mother in law by including them in her videos sometimes. Familial consent and support for her entrepreneurial endeavors in addition to a narrative of the 'labouring' woman committed to her vocations as much as her family, become legitimizing tropes that substantiate the overwhelming appreciation she received online. This is also substantiated by the fact that Nair does not receive the same degree of appreciation for her travel videos (where she is unaccompanied by family members and sponsored by a third party channel) in which her appearance and sartorial morphologies lean more towards the liberal and the westernized in addition to the fact that her travel is marked as an explicit spatial transgression from the domestic private domain of the family to more visible public spaces. Thus, Lekshmi Nair's cooking vlogs while disturbing and addressing offline hierarchies through her inconsistent self-representational modes and an unfiltered exhibition of her material agency and neoliberal affordances nevertheless revert to familiar desirable ideations of the familial and the maternal.

Of the three content creators subjected to analysis Rehana Fathima's culinary videos occupy the most complex location in Malayali cyber media spaces. Often uploaded with the conscious aim to critique and anger particular patriarchal publics, her videos best subvert and/or parody all known desirable imaginations of ideal Malayali femininities. The uniqueness

of Fathima's digital self-representational exercise through culinary narratives is her deployment of transgressive idioms to defamiliarize idealized, sensitive and familiar images from Kerala's cultural memory. This transgression is primarily manifested through a blatant disavowal of sartorial 'modesties', sarcastic commentaries and free movements within the diegetic terrain. However, any analysis at mapping the subversive potentials of Fathima's digital self-representational practice must initiate from her cooking vlogs' emphasis on her unique sartorial morphology effected through the publicization of partial nudity. This exercise aligns with postfeminist "cultural sensibilities that frame sexual objectification as chosen and agentic" which in turns agrees with Gill's proposition of "sexual subjectification" (Gill 100). In other words, sexual subjectification visibilizes "desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so" (Gill qtd in Dobson 29). Previously involved in controversies that originated through her vocal political stances that emphasized a disregard for ritual bound religious conventions, Fathima has been a much criticized, media visible, woman. The comment section of her cooking vlogs are mostly negative reviews of 'haters' who disagree with her political views as well as her practice of partially exposing her nudity before an online audience. Fathima, is also careful to combine and address both these disagreements into her vlog- a verbal ridiculing of 'sacred' ritualistic motifs as well as sartorial counter aesthetic articulation that upsets a good majority of male digital publics who are visually engaged with her content. An apt example would be her cooking vlog titled *Gomamsam Ulathiyathu* in which she refers to the beef as 'gomatha' (a sacred motif in Hindu religious ideology that gained media traction in recent years). Her audience reacted in the comments section with threats of violence and filing FIRs, while engaging in sexually connotative diatribe with reference to her modern attire. Perhaps the video that became most controversial since the inception of her channel was her video titled *Chaala Curryum Parinjeel Varuthathum* (Sardine Curry and Fish Egg Fry) in which she introduces the recipe while hinting that she is partially nude. A few seconds into the video, looking at the camera with a direct addressal to her online audience (especially the ones who vehemently criticize her lack of modesty due to her choice of clothes that expose her skin) says, "Let me dress myself since you might find it distressing if I am not dressed" (00:00:20). After articulating thus, with her back towards the camera she covers herself partially with a small length of cloth. With over 2,06,441 views and more than 1200 comments, the response from the audience was explicitly vitriolic and sexually connotative. A good number of such videos also reveal her digressions from popular cooking vlogs by a conscious choice to use minimal or negligible makeup to emphasize that she wouldn't engage in a labour with the hopes of receiving audience approval. Ironically her vlogs, like that of Veena Jan and Lekshmi Nair makes no efforts to obscure its embeddedness in the domestic, the maternal and the familial by allowing for glimpses of her family members and their engagement with the food she cooks. While many such videos were vehemently criticized since it unequivocally disturbs familiar images of the modern monogamous Malayali family undergirded by patriarchally inflected virtues, one notices a change in the audience's response in her later videos wherein a greater amount of screen

time is allotted for her husband. Her cooking vlog titled *Egg Fried Rice Veetil Thayarakkam* (trans: Egg Fried Rice can be Made at Home) is one such instance wherein a few commentators appreciate the chemistry she has with her husband, their seeming compatibility and even attempts to posit that she must be appreciated for being a good wife and mother. It goes on to reveal how even a tokenist invocation of the familial and the domestic extends and reflects the offline immunities onto online spaces.

Vlogging engenders novel cyber mediated terrains that allow for the performance of traditional femininities (like Veena Jan) while simultaneously creating critical sites that visibilise counter aesthetic articulations (like Rehana Fathima). It is also clear that the larger tropes that govern the response of a vocal online audience to these women and their mediated representations, is unequivocally latched onto the creation or subversion of "desiring constructions of sexuality" (Dobson 23). However, what is also evinced through such media texts is that, while Malayali women's attempts at deploying cooking vlogs as a self-representational practice is yet to be de-anchored from images of the domestic and the familial. This analysis has evinced that, even in Fathima's vlogs- which perhaps best epitomizes how the monetization and digital publicization of immaterial household labour can be deployed as a narrative of resistance- they nevertheless latch onto the familial as both a visual tool that triggers audience approval as well as an apparatus of ideological legitimation.

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Literary Legend Speaks: An Interview With Raamaa Chandramouli

Palakurthy Dinakar

Raamaa Chandramouli

A versatile genius and a gifted writer, Raamaa Chandramouli hails from Warangal, Telangana. His literary output includes poetry, short stories, novels, book reviews, scripts to movies and television. His works reflect his multi-faceted personality as a writer and express a distinct voice through a style that is had many engaging traits. He has published 32 novels, more than 340 short stories, 12 volumes of poetry and 4 collections of literary essays in Telugu. He was honoured with world famous *Nmaji Naaman Literary Prize* 2019, a life time achievement Award among the 2386 entries across the globe. His other awards include 'Telugu University Poetry Award' (2007), *Golden Nandi* (2011) and *Kalaratna Puraskaram* (2018), *Swarna Lekhini Puruskaram* (2018).

You have produced a large body of novels, short stories and poems. What first made you think of becoming a writer?

Well, when I was a school boy there used to be a small library (there was only one wooden almirah) in each class room of our school. I was in charge of managing that library which comprised of almost 100 books. The books included poetry, prose, short stories, novels etc., of very senior writers. Those books introduced me to the world of literature which later awakened in me a passion for writing. The books which I read with intense interest inspired me to write.

Would you specifically mention some of the writers from whom you have learnt the art of story writing?

I have learned a great deal from the writings of Raachakonda Vishvanatha Shaastri which helped me to develop my own style of writing. I was fascinated by the works of Chalam, Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao, Mallaadi Ramakrishna Shastri and Beenaa Devi. I was particularly impressed by their subject matter and the way they were influencing the readers with their narrative art which deeply influenced the minds of the readers. None of them wrote 'time pass stories' in their entire career as story writers. I started believing that the stories I write should exalt the mind of the readers and enhance their personality. Later, at the age of 50 I met the renowned Tamil short story writer, D. Jayakanthan, Jnaanapeeth Awardee. I have never met such a great fiction writer in my life.

How do you assess Jayakanthan's influence on your fictional writing?

Jayakanthan as a friend told me, 'your story must be consistent from its title to the very last sentence.' The title of one of his stories is *'Kotta Cheppulu Karustaayi'*. This title itself makes the story fascinating to the readers. I too started working on the same lines, and one of my stories has the title '*Digadaaniki Kooda Metlu Kaavaali*'. In the last 15 years particularly my stories have been very different from my earlier stories in their content, rendering, style and ending. This phenomenal change in my writing defines the nature of Jayakanthan's influence on me.

You have a long writing career of about 60 years as your first short story was published in 1962. It is known that there is a gap in your writing career. Could you please tell me why you withdrew from creative writing for a certain period of time?

Yes, I'll come to that. I worked in Telugu film industry as a script writer from 1979 to 1984. I struggled very hard to do my best as a script writer. But, both in the field of Telugu literature and in cinema industry, there was at that time a culture of flattery, syndicating, casteism and other unhealthy practices which did not suit my taste. I got deeply frustrated. I felt, 'I am not fit to the system' and went into long solitude. I withdrew myself voluntarily from writing fiction and from working for the film industry for almost 20 years. But I do not rue this now, because during those years I wrote 6 textbooks for my students of Mechanical Engineering. One of those books titled 'Engineering Drawing' went into 28 editions and it was felt to be very useful for the teachers and the taught.

So far you have written 32 novels and around 360 short stories. Which of the two genres do you like more, the short story or the novel?

See, basically I think of myself as a poet. But at the same time I have worked on a large scale in producing short stories and novels. It is because of the range of subject matter and ideas which I wanted to communicate to my readers. I strongly believe that the form of a literary creation is not optional but mandatory. The subject itself chooses its form, shape, style and structure and emerges either as a poem, novel or a short story. The subject matter

which sometimes appears as a short story may not get communicated effectively as a poem. Therefore any writer, I think, will select the genres depending upon what he wants to communicate with the readers. Because of this uniqueness of all my works, I could get appreciations from my readers in all the genres. Most of my works are translated largely into English for International readers and into other Indian languages as well. For example, out of my 13 volumes of poetry 8 of them are being translated into English by very eminent Translators. Ultimately I like writing poetry which gives me great contentment.

Besides novels and short stories your literary output also consists of poetry, articles and scripts to movies and television. Which one among these you have found most difficult to write?

Palakurthy Dinakar

It is not the question of difficulty or facility in writing. What matters is how one creates and presents his work in the most effective way. For instance I wrote a story called '*Bhoomi Dukham'*. As a short story it secured the best story award from the renowned weekly 'NAVYA'. Later it was produced as a Tele-film by Dooradarshan, Hyderabad. Then it secured 'SWARNA NANDI' and was selected as 'Best Tele-film of the year 2011. Later it was produced as a stage play and exhibited about 43 times at various places of Telugu states. Out of 43 presentations it bagged 'Best Play Award' 39 times. It is all because of the powerful subject and its treatment of the contemporary problems agitating the minds of multitudes of village people. I am in fact comfortable with different genres of Telugu literature.

Your stories express your deep anguish over the erosion of human values in the society. Would you comment on it?

A writer's social consciousness is an index of his concern for the society. I believe that a creative writer should be able to record the radical changes that are taking place in our society. Creative writing both reflects and moulds our cultural history. I find a lot of decline in the moral and ethical values of people when I compare the present age with that of my teen age. The people of the past used to attach great value to a person's character. Now, most people, particularly the youth, are only career conscious. They want to make quick and easy money somehow. They want maximum luxuries with the least sincere efforts. In the scamper for luxuries they disregard the ethical or moral values and resort to all inhuman practices. People have become self- centered, intolerant and grossly ambitious in their nature. I strongly believe that unless the basic human values are reinstalled, 'peace' cannot exist in the present day society. Without peace, nothing is sustainable.

Let me come to a particular problem related to your style. Some of your characters in your fiction speak in dialects. How far is the use of dialects justified in fiction?

Though language is one, the dialect and pronunciation vary from region to region in a multilingual country like India. In Telugu, pronunciation changes dynamically from Telangana to Andhra and Andhra to Rayalaseema and so on. Here comes an important question: in a creative work like a story or a novel should the characters speak their own dialect. I think that even in a single work different characters can speak different dialects. That will give authenticity to the characters and justify their behavioral differences. But excessive use of dialects should be discouraged as it would spoil the readability of the text and doesn't justify the basic behavior of characters. I personally feel that always the characters should use their native dialect. In my works I have followed that dictum. I use the dialect when the situation and the character demand it. Otherwise it creates difficulty for the readers of other regions.

Are you satisfied with the translation of your works into English?

Many of my poems, short stories and novels have been translated into English. Getting one's works translated into English gives an author access to a large reading community across the world. So I am happy that my works have been translated into English by eminent translators such as Sri Sri, Vegunta Mohanprasad, V.V.B.Ramarao, Ramateertha, U.Atreyasharma, Prof.K.Purushotham, Prof. Laxmanamurthy, Prof. Indira Babbellapati, Prof.Kalluri Shyamala, Prof.C.L.L Jayaprada, and many others who are all distinguished for their skill in translation.

There is a critical consensus that *Kaala Naalika* is your greatest novel. What is your comment on it? What is your own assessment of the work?

I share your perception regarding that novel. It is indeed my favourite novel. It is in a sense unique in its subject and span of time covered, involving a lot of research work and contemporary socio-political analysis. It depicts 80 years of long Telangana freedom struggle from 1937 to 2017 which encompasses the state affairs of Nizam, the Razaakars movement, Telangana Armed Struggle, First liberation movement of Telangana, and second phase Telangana non-violent freedom struggle from 2001 to 2014. It depicts the condition of the people in separate Telangana state till 2017 dreaming for ' Bangaru Telangana'. *Kaala Naalika* presents living characters and ongoing political issues which could be controversial. Critics have described it as an 'Epic'. I have in fact designed it as a contemporary epic in prose.

Which are your favourite short stories?

It is very difficult to answer this question because I like many of my stories equally well. All India Radio, Warangal, has broadcast 13 of my selected stories by Prasara Bharati in a series. While they were broadcast, I received enormous response from the audience. Particularly on the day of broadcasting the story 'Bhoomi Dukham' There are also other stories like 'Ateetam', 'Nagara Veedhullo', 'Dukham Sukhamu Kannaa Sukhamaa?' and

'Ajnaatamuu.. Rahasyamuu' which are my favourites, and which have drawn very faourable response from the audience.

There is a criticism that your poetry dominates your fiction. How do you feel about it?

I really feel happy about that comment. I wish to think of myself as basically a poet. I derive more pleasure in writing good poems than writing anything else. Poetry is a very powerful medium through which I can translate my ideas into words. I strongly believe that ultimately 'Life' is nothing but a handful of great memories and feelings which we can gather as the 'Ultimate' in life. Poetry speaks about that most intricate phase of any one's life. That is perhaps the reason why poets are greatly honoured and respected throughout the world.

What message do you want to give the society through your writings?

I would like to bring to the notice of my readers the erosion of human values, the decline of human ethics, cultural anarchism, growing indiscipline, lack of concern about fellow citizens, lack of national spirit, anarchic behaviour of the media, and the corrupting politics of the country. I have tried to unravel in my works the untold sufferings of the people, their anguish and misery. I have been an unsparing critic of social evils and degrading practices. On the positive side, I wish the people to develop an awareness of the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of human existence.

Religion in Modernity/Modernity in Religion: Sartorial Aspirations of Women in Nineteenth Century Travancore

Arya A.

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to discuss women's engagements with religion and religious conversions during the nineteenth century female dress-reform movements in Travancore. The period of nineteenth century in Kerala which experienced a burgeoning wave of nascent modernity, wherein projects of social reformation disrupted the ethos of caste sanctioning, allowed for a shift from collective caste organization to that of a gendered social and personal ordering. The dress reform movements that occurred in Travancore anticipate this suggestive interplay of gendered personal desires of women while puncturing the matrices of caste-hierarchical privilege in the region. The paper attempts to problematise this re-sartorialisation of lower caste women and the subsequent re-signification of gendered habitus in Travancore. The paper by focusing on the sartorial aspirations of women, their vocational agency and subsequent economies of societal mobility will also attempt to engage with the constituent formation of a proto-modern desiring self of women in Travancore.

Keywords: sartorial politics, religion, modernity, gender, desire

Nineteenth century Travancore was a remarkable period in history owing to its anticipation and experience of shifting assemblages of individual identity within the old order of *Jaathi-dharmam*. Its unique position within the annals of colonial history and missionary interventions perpetuated a public space where the negotiation of complex intermediaries of identity manifested itself in everyday practices like that of the sartorial conventions. In 1828-29 and later in 1858-59 Travancore witnessed one of the most crucial outbreaks of caste based resistance and violence through the dress-reform movements of *Shannar* community. At the center of this revolt was the sartorial appropriation of upper-cloth/*melmundu* by converted Christian women, a style then associated solely with the caste identity of *Nair* women. The

subsequent altercations between the newly converted S*hanna*r women and the upper caste *Nair* men of the region, as well as the role played by Christian missionaries are relatively well documented and have since then inspired multiple narratives and counter narratives. It was an incident that changed the very fabric of individual identity and autonomy of the people, opening discourses on modernity and caste oppressing and even basic human rights, in the larger region under Madras Presidency. The paper by focusing on the regional imaginary of sartorial conventions will attempt to negotiate varying aspirations behind sartorial re-organization as proposed by the missionaries and as negotiated by the *Shannar* women.

The erstwhile kingdom of Travancore, from its genesis in 18th century has had a unique experience with ritualisation and religion, indicated by the legacy of its ruler Marthanda Varma's *Trippadidanam* (the dedication/bequeathing of the entire region) to Padmanabha Temple under the ritual act of *Sarvasvarpanam* (Ganesh 212). Religion in Travancore operated under the aegis of its particular kinship systems engendered by its rigid caste-based social and political stratification of the society. Religious ritualisation was instrumental in the legitimization of caste and gender specific modalities maintained via obedience and consent generated by negotiating a series of sacred and profane pollution conventions in the region. The history of Protestant missionaries in Travancore began with the arrival of Wilhelm Tobias Ringeltaube in 1806, who managed to establish "… a small Christian community of about thousand members" (Kooiman 60) constituted almost exclusively from the untouchable groups of toddy tappers and indentured labourers. Following the 1813 Charter Act, the Church Mission Society and London Missionary Society became instrumental in the deployment of strategies that reorganized many caste-based quotidian practices of the region (Kusuman, 1973; R.N. Yeshudas, 1975; Kooiman, 1989). They managed to advocate the right of access to public roads, education, exemption from extracted unpaid labor and tax and a regular day off from work to observe the Christian Sabbath for their converts. Thus the 'deliverance from evil' that the gospel provided for the lower caste and non-caste communities in Travancore was also a sense of social mobility that was previously denied to them by the ritualistic traditions inculcated in the region. Subsequently the ethnographic history of religious conversions to Christianity in nineteenth century Travancore reveals an idiom of upward social mobility and cultural aspiration engendered by the early lower caste and non-caste converts.

The accounts of missionaries like that of Samuel Mateer, admit with much consternation that the motivations of early converts were not entirely spiritual (93). Majority of missionary archives indicate that the LMS Christian congregation of early nineteenth century in Travancore was mostly made up of slave castes who approached the mission with completely specific designs, demanding protection against caste oppression, mediation with the authorities and help in finding sustenance and employment (Kooiman 61). As Sanal Mohan articulated in his *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* (2015) the negotiations between slave castes and Christian Missionaries/Christianity at large, was indeed a series of premeditated agential "bodily practices that were crucial for

modernity" (9). Ensuing emergent modernity could produce and sustain interactive spaces of vernacular engagements, which could problematise the neat duality of missionaries and converts, as well as complicate the narrative of conversions as strategies deployed for community advancement. Such dialogic formations open up the complex dynamics of categorical coercions, collusions and cooption of religion in Travancore and its subsequent vernacular revolutions in religious and gendered performative habits.

Sartorial Re-organisation of Converted Christian Women

Christian missionaries of nineteenth century Travancore are attributed by historians as often straddling conflicting tendencies of an "impulse to convert and temptation to civilize" (Kent 67). As 'mass conversions' in Travancore led to interactions of converts with their identities as persons of Christian belief, engaging with a traditional caste society, the missionaries turned their gaze on to the caste inflected demarcations on the bodies of female lower caste converts. Early mission narratives and administrative reports on Travancore were dispersed with accounts of affronted modesty of women in Travancore. In Samuel Mateer's *Native Lives in Travancore* (1883), a book dedicated to the customs and habits of everyday life in the region, he writes "... one of the first signs of having entered Travancore territory is the sight of half nude Chogan (an untouchable caste) female…" (15), suggesting the relative absence of 'acceptable' clothing on the women's body. According to sartorial semiotics dictated by *jati-dharmam* in Travancore, the 'bare breast' was symbolic of the respect deferred to those considered to be of higher caste and/or status. While the lower castes and non-caste Hindus were forbidden from adorning upper-cloth/ *melmundu* by religious sanctions, the upper caste Brahmins who covered their bosom indicating their higher purchase and mobility in society, removed their upper-cloth only in salutation before a religious deity. The sartorial traditions of the region dictated that both male and females of the lower caste *Shannar* community, which constituted the early nineteenth century LMS congregation in Travancore, adorn a *mundu*, " a single cloth of coarse texture, to be worn… no lower than the knee nor higher than the waist" (Hardgrave 176). Finding this 'bare-breasted' attire immodest, the Christian missionaries sought for a radical re-sartorialisation and re-organisation of gender of the Christian women in Travancore by initiating discourses on their modesty.

C.M. Agur's *Church History of Travancore* (1901) record sanctions made by then Resident of Travancore, Colonel Munroe, that allowed the converted *Shannar* women to cover their bosom from as early as 1812 (935). Two years later in 1814, as a pursuance of the previous order, the *Shannar* women were given permission to wear jackets/ *ravukkay* as worn by the Syrian Christians and women from Muslim communities. Though re-sartorialisation of gendered sensibilities of women by British missionaries seem like an uncontested terrain, recent literatures by Emma Tarlo and Susan Billington Harper puncture such easy categorizations. Juxtaposing Tarlo's symbolic elaboration of clothing as inhabiting the borders of 'the self and the non-self' (16) to the vast scholarship on upper-cloth/dress reform movements in Travancore, the 'breast cloth' or *melmundu* evolves as a signifier of

social aspiration of the lower caste women. It both reflected and reinforced their abject position within the matrices of caste hierarchy. Such that, the jacket which was devised by Mead and Mault in 1820 finished with "… a long body and short sleeves, fastened in front with a string" (Kooiman 149) satisfied the norms of missionary modesty but failed to meet the sartorial aspirations of the *Shannar* women. While missionaries asserted to Travancore authorities that the breast-cloth meant nothing more than ensuring Christian women's desire for modesty, the caste practitioners of the region shared an understanding of such fashioning as a significant shift towards an upward social mobility.

Women's Negotiations with Re-sartorialisation

Religious conversions as engaged by *Shannar* women specifically produced and engendered fraught terrains of female-self fashioning among the lower castes. The discourse of 'modesty' that the missionaries sought among the lower caste Christian women in effect produced systems of intentions, desires, aspirations and practices that re-organised the lower caste vernacular gender habitus. The sartorial reordering sought by the mission had multiple points of infringements into the intimate and gendered habits of the region. It is particularly interesting that the mission used women's body and its sartorial conventions as a lynchpin for its 'discourse on respectability' and 'modest' Christian behavior. The 'liberation' that the mission offered was one that essentially put women at the centre of a gaze system that negotiated caste leniencies and societal mobility through assorted intimate body practices significantly gendering and re-gendering communal identities. It opened up categories of desirability and sexualities such that selective incorporation of performative engagements of *Shannar* women resulted in the creation of deferred, hybrid and unruly femininities emerging from the encounters between missionary and upper caste and lower caste vernacular dispositions. Though such hybrid formations of femininities gave its bearers a latent mobility and visibility in society, in retrospect it was essentially restrictive and delimiting and presupposing systems of disciplining that would become detrimental to the 'free-will' and autonomous identity of women in the later times. But in relation to the specific socio-temporal experiences of the region, such negotiations were imperative to challenge their apparent socio-cultural, economic, and even sexual delineation sanctioned by rigid hierarchies of *jathi-dharmam*.

In the larger sartorial imaginary of the region, the Christian jacket/*ravukkay* was seen as an object of transgression not just by the upper castes (as evidenced by the violent breast- cloth uprisings) but also by the lower caste women. In the literatures on the breast-cloth uprisings by Bernard Cohn, Dick Kooiman, Gladston and Hardgrave, they argue that the *ravukkay* designed for them were vehemently resisted by the women in favour of a *melmundu* as styled by the upper caste *Nair* women. Charles Mault wrote that the converted women often looked upon the *ravukkay* as "an invidious badge of distinction from which the people turned away with as much abhorrence as respectable farmers in England would from a badge worn in a parish workhouse" (qtd in Kooiman 158). LMS records suggest that such specific reticence from older generation of women stemmed from an impression that

such sartorial practices were an infringement to the existing mores of Travancore. But from a vernacular sensibility it can also be explained away as the cultural association of the jackets/ *ravukkay* with the Muslim women of the region as well as the de facto lower caste position of early Christian converts who adorned it.

Samuel Mateer in *The Land of Charity* (1871) would argue that the bared torso of the lower caste women in Travancore was in fact a 'mark of their degradation' (41). In a society ordered by visual reminders of one's location in the ritualistic matrix of *jati-dharmam*, the exposed breasts of the lower caste women, their unstitched coarse *mundu* and their bare foot were signifiers of societal disciplining of a body perched outside the realm deemed 'respectable'. Subsequently, the covered breasts of lower caste women in Travancore generated multiple meanings. To missionaries, it implied a 'newly' negotiated sense of Christian 'modesty'; to upper castes it resonated as disrespect and disregard of the *jati system* and their superiority; to the *Shannar*'s, it was a means of defiant self-assertion transcending systems of inequality and injustice. Even in their choice of a sartorial means to cover their breasts, the women chose *melmundu* over the *ravukkay* that the missionaries preferred, articulating agential self-fashioning, as symbolic destabilization of upper caste sartorial monopoly in intimate spheres. From the accounts of missionary narratives it can be assumed there were women from other caste factions, like the Catholic fisher women of the *Mukkuvar* caste, who covered their breasts drawing their coarse *mundu* higher up. But they did not engage with such emulations. Instead, when the *Shannar* women aspired for a better station within the societal fabric of the region, they aligned themselves with new systems of power within the colonial order, but never completely simulating its semiotic or sartorial symbols. As a mark of their resistance to the unequal conditions imposed by the *jati* system, they encroached into its own sartorial territories to fashion a convention, appropriating styles that were prohibited, to generate autonomous assertions.

In a fascinating retelling of a domestic anecdote of his mother-in-law, Mrs. C.V. Kunjiraman, wearing a blouse in late nineteenth century, C. Keshavan's autobiography records her mother furiously chastising her, asking if she wanted to "… walk around in shirts like muslim women?'" (qtd from Kumar 247). It also provided an insight into two conflicting categories of women, one desiring the blouse and the other who views it as an infringement and transgression. He records the exchange as:

> … I also liked the blouses, and wore one at once. It looked good, but I felt ticklish wearing it… brimming with enthusiasm, showed it to my mother. She gave me a stern look and said, 'Where are you going to gallavant in this? Fold it and keep it in the box.' She did not look cheerful in the least….. Twisting and turning, I looked at myself; how lovely it looked… Suddenly I heard her break a piece from a coconut branch. When I turned around, she was behind me, fierce and furious. 'Take it off, you slut!'… If my mother did not like it, my husband liked it. During the day, I did not wear the blouse, but the night was mine. (qtd in Kumar 247-248)

Though Keshavan's autobiography gazes at the intimate and domestic spaces occupied by women from a 'male gaze of a vernacular reformer' (Devika 463, 467), the anecdote is revealing in its articulation of a solipsistic episteme of desiring female self. The text when read in conjunction with Rev. F. Baylis' inference that the elderly women resisted sartorial change on the basis of their suspicion of any new custom (qtd in Kent 211), what it provides is a glimpse into the coexisting and mutually deferred hybrid femininities tempered by sartorial aspirations and fashioning. The use of *melmundu* for attiring the upper body hence is contingent on its value as an object straddling the category of desirability presupposed in the acts of prohibition and transgression.

The dress-reform movements in Travancore intricately redefined women's experiences of desire, shame and modesty creating multiple and co-existing categories of hybrid femininities. It placed female-self assertion in the interstices of shared sartorial boundaries between inter caste and inter religious sanctions. The domestic engagements with shame and desire attained plural configurations, necessitating a transition into a proto-modern episteme of desiring self/selves. Such re-sartorialization of the *Shannar* women in Travancore would have lasting effects in the understanding of gendered identities and gendered practices of the region.

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Aagneya: Dance of the Divine Feminine Elements of Feminine Spirituality in the Folk Art Form of *Theyyam*

Mallika A. Nair

Abstract

The word *Aagneya* comes from Sanskrit to symbolize the "fiery" and that which is "fire-like". In this paper, it is used to signify the ritualistic folk-art form of *Theyyam* popular in the North Malabar districts of Kerala, namely, Kannur, Kasargode and Waynad. What makes *Theyyam* so different from the other folk traditions is that it amalgamates the different strains of Dravidian civilization and culture to evolve into its present form. The present paper attempts to analyze a few *Theyyam* performances that specifically foreground elements of Feminine spirituality. *Theyyam*, while reaffirming itself as a voice of feminine power as in the Mother- Goddess cult or Kali/ Bhagavathy worship, also negates itself by abstaining women from the role of performers. Therefore, the dance of the divine feminine can mean two things - it is either the dance of liberation or it can also represent the dance of destruction. Like the fire, that is both, destructive as well as constructive, at the same time.

Keywords: folklore, Kali worship, symbolism, culture, feminism

The night is dark and shrouded in the mysteries of the unknown. Then, gradually, from the silence of the deep night is heard the tinkling of anklets and in the dim glow of the shadowy beacon of light, there emerges the mystic beauty of the *theyyam* performer. Intoxicated by the mythopoesis of a culture steeped in myth and folklore, the *theyyam* dances its fire-dance, retelling the ancient tales of colossal injustice and oppression, of heroic valor and courage that, in time garnered the essence of human alchemy, transforming mundane men and women to God-men and Goddesses.

Theyyam is a ritualistic folk art form performed in the North Malabar districts of Kerala, namely, Kannur, Kasargode and Wayanad. This ancient art form harbingers a season of festivities and celebrates a community's tryst with time. The rituals associated with *Theyyam*

foregrounds the social and political milieu of its origin. Each *Theyyam* performance thus speaks of a particular person around whose life the story invariably revolves. The persona of the *theyyam* performer amalgamates into the character he portrays and whose mouthpiece he eventually becomes. Thus, every performance becomes symbolic of a human life transformed through loss and pain to that of a higher dimension of existence. They become narratives of resistance thereby manipulating discourses of cultural images.

In *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Eliade speaks of symbolic thinking as being "… consubstantial with human existence, it comes before language and discursive reason" (qtd. in Dorairaj 70).

Although *Theyyam* is performed only by men, it is interesting to note that the performers adorn themselves as Goddesses and enact the lives of women transformed into Goddesses. The persona himself is transformed into a Mother Goddess, who comes every season to bless her children, the village folk, with bountiful health and prosperity. A similar act of spiritual transformation is seen among the Shamans of the Siberian tundra, where the man has to "become" the 'Woman' to communicate with the higher realms of mystic forces. So, what is it that makes these men play the 'God- Mother' role? And why is it that, while many a *Theyyam* performance bespeaks of magnificent women-characters, the women themselves never get to perform, but is sadly pushed to the fringes of the arena as mere audience? These questions can best be addressed only through a thorough analysis of the art form of *Theyyam* itself.

An enquiry into this art form takes us to the very roots of man's primeval existence on earth. *Theyyam* traces its origins to the primordial beginnings of the social fabric where every stone and tree, fire and rain, thunder and lightning wrought in man the ancient fear of the unknown. Gradually, the art form evolved even as society moved towards its anthropomorphic present. Much of the ritualistic tradition of *Theyyam* owes its genesis to the Dravidian custom of Kali worship or the Mother-Goddess cult in ancient India. This is made evident through the performances like, the Bhagavathy Theyyam, Makkam Theyyam, velarkottu Chemmarathy and Eramathu Chamundy and many others. Each of these narrates the story of iconoclastic female characters whose lives are later transformed into narratives like the *Theyyam* performance. They are symbolic of strong women whose legacy is kept alive through a community's folklore and cultural practices. But even as many of these performances can be seen as a dedication to the individuality and integrity of some of North Malabar's outstanding female characters, they can also be deciphered as narratives of racial and sexual dominance in a community's evolution.

Let us explore some of their stories to know how and what makes the transformation of these women into Goddesses possible. It is important that we understand the concept of Mother-Goddess worship in this context. The Indian Culture, right from the Ganges in the Himalayas to the tip of the Ocean in Kanyakumari venerates the Feminine energy and power within the Woman. This creative energy which is the source of life is embodied in the

physical or material universe too, manifested in the flora and fauna of the land. This feminine power is best expressed in the seasonal regeneration of food that sustains all life on earth and in the fertility rites that define child birth, growth and regeneration. In the Sangham period these complex ideologies got intertwined into a sophisticated poetic tradition that established a conventional language of signs to decipher the cultural matrix of a particular time and place. Through these intricate patterns of animate and inanimate correspondence was born a vast storehouse of rich folklore creating a pulsating and living vocabulary of symbols. The pattern of feminine spirituality in *Theyyam* thus exemplifies this folk art form as a living form of symbolic hermeneutics.

Theyyam

Every narrative is symbolic of the social milieu in which it is born. And nowhere is it as evident as in the folk representations of the period. Yet, these traditions evolve to accommodate itself to the changing social facets of human civilization. The art form of *Theyyam* abounds with many women-centered discourses that speak of the plight of women in those times. The "*Thottam Pattu*" or the musical narrative sung to the accompaniment of the performance retells the tales of pathos of many such women.

Muchillottu Bhagavathy Theyyam

The *Theyyam* takes its name from the folklore of a young maiden named Uchila of Perinjallur, in a place called Rayaramangalam. This young maiden was the talk of many a wise and learned men of her time through her brilliance and mastery in the sacred texts. As the patriarchal multitude became blind with jealousy, she was called to a battle of wits, intended to defame the young maiden. She was asked to name the most ecstatic as well as the most painful experience that a woman could experience in her life. Uchila answered that the most ecstatic experience would be the bliss of orgasm while the most painful were the throes of childbirth. This answer, coming from a maiden, infuriated the men who immediately charged her with voyeurism and stamped her as defiled and forward. They decided to exile her from the land and divested her of all claims to land and property. Thus, although born into the Brahmin caste, who were regarded the custodians of all knowledge; Uchila was brought down for being a woman of wisdom. This folklore evidently foregrounds the

mitigations of the patriarchal dictates of the times. The women were supposed to stay within the boundaries of patriarchal dictums and to stray out of them were to invite the wrath of society, and sometimes even death. Knowledge and power were the monopoly of men and women were supposed to bear him children, feed and keep his hearth warm.

The exiled Uchila then arrives at Karivalloor, where she learns the art of farming. She toils day and night to make the barren land fertile. She also extracted oil from seeds. But the life of an exile becomes too much to bear for a young lass and with the oil that she had gathered, Uchila commits suicide by lighting herself aflame. But before she lit herself, Uchila had given away what was left of the oil already churned to a castor. After the maiden's death, the man to whom she had sold her oil finds his pots brimming over with oil, never to let the pot be empty. These were the first signs of Uchila's ascension to a Spiritual dimension. The man's wife then dreamt of the water in the well in the courtyard boiling-over in huge waves, accompanied by the rhythms of an anklet. These were, indeed, taken as symbols of Uchila's resurrection as Muchillottu Bhagavathy, also known as Muchillottu Pothy or Muchillottamma. She is now the Omnipotent and benevolent Mother, who returns to this earth, year after year, to make it fertile. Her return ensures that the land and its people are blessed infinitely, rejuvenating them with renewed hopes of a better tomorrow.

But the practice of making or recreating the woman as "Goddess" only makes it all the more problematic. Laura Mulvey calls this tendency to recreate the woman as a "Goddess" as Fathaeism. (Mulvey 1975) Between the patriarchy's voyeuristic and Fathaeistic tendencies lay the real woman. For, as the saying goes, life is neither black nor white; it lies in the grey between them. Although *Theyyam* depicts the gender discriminations prevalent in the history of a people and community, it also speaks of caste discrimination and Brahminical monopoly over the concept of God and religion. One of the finest examples of this could be the Thottungara Bhagavathy Theyyam.

Thottungara Bhagavathy Theyyam

The lore takes us to a time in history when a woman was brutally de-breasted for having read The Ramayana, the Holy Scripture of the Hindu religion. The woman did not have children and belonged to the lower caste. She believed that reading the scriptures would bless her with children. But although reading the Sanskrit scripture of the Ramayana, identifies her as being knowledgeable, her head was shaved, her breasts mutilated and she was forced to leave the village, naked. She too was exiled for having known too much of the Brahmin's tongue and his books. Thottungara Bhagavathy Theyyam reminds us of many such tales of injustice and discrimination wherein, the fundamental rights of a human being seem to have been questioned time and again. "Kerala was a land that suffered from one of the most oppressive caste hierarchies in south Asia prior to Indian Independence. 'Untouchable serfs' could be punished for merely approaching too close to a Brahmin."(Caldwell 243-244)

Neeliyaar Bhagavathy Theyyam

The woman and her body have always been the instruments of patriarchal dictates. The Neeliyaar Bhagavathy Theyyam speaks of the woes of a *Pulaya* or lower-caste girl, who refused to accept the advances of the feudal lord of the land. She was branded a whore and murdered at the hands of her own father. She was later rekindled as the aggressive and revengeful Neeliyaar Bhagavathy. Legend has it that, a shrine was anointed by the feudal lord in her name, to appease the wrath of her anger. The concept of female virginity and passion has long been a patriarchal weapon to harness her individuality and freedom. Neeliyaar Bhagavathy is often seen as a symbol of female protest to the male's claim to her body and a woman's self-assertion of her own sexuality and passion.

Kaapaalathy Theyyam

Racism and sexism are mighty evils in their own spheres. But when the two intertwine, they can escalate into devastating heights of barbarism. The caste hierarchy is structured into an intricate social system wherein it permeates into the very fabric of an individual's social life. It then dictates its own terms of existence, thus evaporating all possibilities of independent choice and thought. The institution of marriage in India, is one sure way of feeding the caste system right through its roots. The kapaalathy *Theyyam* was born out of one such unfortunate choice where the forward-caste woman, decides to marry according to her choice, incidentally, a man who belonged to the lower-caste. She was mercilessly beaten-up and while pregnant with child was burned to death in her seventh month, by her own brothers. Women's sexuality is many a time controlled by patriarchy to sustain the myth of pure-blood, especially in terms of the higher-caste communities, to control the twin headed serpent of wealth and power. Kaapaalathy Theyyam resurrects herself as a champion of their victimization.

According to Sarah Caldwell, the gender roles in Bhagavathy rituals can psychologically be explained as meaningful expressions to vent-off suppressed emotions of trauma (Caldwell 230). Most *Kali* / Bhagavathy worships relate to a sacrificial ritual where blood is spilled to appease the deity and bring in prosperity. A study into the genesis of most *Theyyams*, wherein women play the pivotal plot, would definitely justify the use of blood. It signifies the deep trauma that these women characters had to undergo in the process of their transcendence into *Theyyam*.

Yet, even in this closed sphere of ritual practices, men seem to dominate the cult by marginalizing women as mere audience, devoid of the rights to perform. Thus, even a visual narrative like *Theyyam* while expostulating on women's experiences, in fact, keeps them from self-expression. The whole history of patriarchal dominance is painted to suit the male performer, while the women witness the drama of their life unfurling, as seen from the male point of view. The ritualistic folk art form of *Theyyam* could then be perceived as a symbol of Patriarchy's double-dominance over women - first destroying her life through a denial of

freedom and then her claims to her identity as a woman, by again depriving her right even to narrate her own trauma. She stands frozen in time, a witness to her own victimization.

Thus, Feminine spirituality in *Theyyam* is not the spirituality born out of a deep reverence for the ideal woman as the "Madonna" in society. It is one which steadfastly roots itself in its own identity. The woman here is either seen fighting for her rights, for knowledge, for integrity, or for freedom of choice, or she dies fighting for it. It is this fight that resurrects her to the sublime, and it is this feminine attribute that is celebrated through *Theyyam*.

She is not "like" fire, but is fire itself – the '*Aagneya*'; the fire that destroys all that is evil, yet, the ashes of which can regenerate life. In other words, each *Theyyam* through its performance represents the cycle of life and death. Even as these strong women die away, they are born into a higher dimension of existence as Goddesses. The image of the fierce Goddess is recreated in the subconscious of the female spectators, if only for a short time, as a form of empowered identity, that makes them feel psychologically powerful, refusing to take abuse and making them feel strong enough to fight injustice.

And as the night gives way to a new dawn, the tinkling of anklets recede into the calm stillness, till the echoes are heard no more, until the next fire- dance burnishes the memories of another tale that celebrates the Woman and through her, the *Kali*.

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Crisis of Child Sexual Abuse and Exigency of Incest in *Thirty Days in September*

R. Devanand

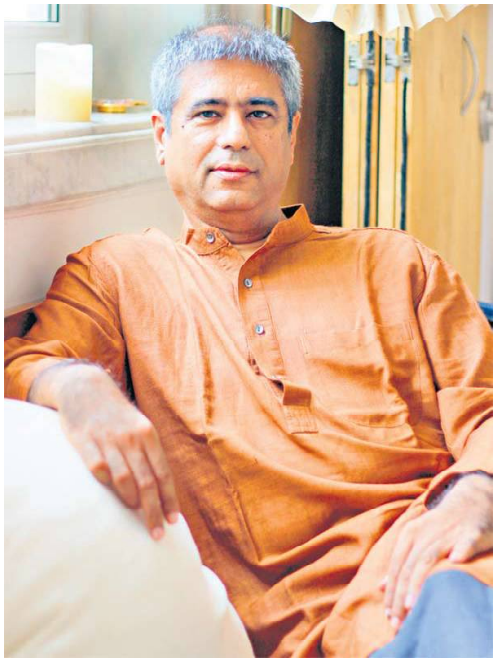
Abstract

Thirty Days in September (2001) is a powerful and popular stage play by Mahesh Dattani which dispassionately deals with the twin social problems of CSA and incest. Sexual abuse of childhood depicted in this play breeds a sense of guilt consciousness. The play explores the vicious severance of the link between the adult and the child. A mother finds out the truth about her daughter and that disturbing discovery sets both of them on a disquieting psychological journey of self-realization about their pathetic lives and their traumatic past. It depicts the multifarious horrors of child sexual abuse while simultaneously critiquing the issue of incest. The mother-daughter relationship is further strained by the sin committed by their family member, who betrays the familial harmony. Empty shell families seem to be more vulnerable to such kinds of domestic disturbances. Dattani employs a simple narrative yet succeeds in probing the deeply disturbing social problem. This paper explores how the inherent tension of the play is informed by the narrative techniques used.

Keywords: child sexual abuse [CSA], social problem, narrative, family, betrayal

Thirty Days in September is a poignant play on an unusual and rarely chosen, rather deliberately avoided theme of Child Sexual Abuse, while simultaneously critiquing the issue of incest. Mahesh Dattani wrote this play after he was commissioned by RAHI (Recovery and Healing of Incest), a Non-Governmental Organization. The playwright got an opportunity to showcase the ugly face of a social malady like child sexual abuse in this play. Being sexually abused by one's own family members can be truly traumatic. The title of the play has been imaginatively used to convey a sense of he child's innocence which is violated by the worst form of cruelty perpetrated by an adult. While uncle Vinay was abusing Mala, he used to ask her to sing a school song - "*Thirty days has September, April, June and*

November, February has twenty-eight. All the rest have thirty-one." This rhyme was kept singing by child Mala until Uncle Vinay stopped his sexual act. This song made Mala become aware of the experiences of child sexual abuse, which psychologically strangulated her. This paradoxical situation of innocent song coupled with incestuous act heightens the dramatic impact on the audience in sensitizing them towards the child sexual abuse. This song constantly reminds her of childhood horrors, helplessness and restlessness. It's like William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* reminding gloomily one of the later *Songs of Experience* where the two worlds contradict each other. The title of the play has a haunting ironic resonance and deepens the dramatic crisis as these social evils continue to damage the fine fabrics of the familial institution.



Mahesh Dattani

The sexual assault on Mala in her childhood and the betrayal at the hands of her mother deeply affect her psyche. The play begins with Mala talking to an imagined counselor while recording her words, not being self-conscious of the act of recording. The very opening of the play sets the tone of self-confession, guilt consciousness and helplessness. Child sexual abuse often evades easy and early detection and may continue unnoticed for a long time. Perpetrators of such heinous crimes easily escape because they often happen to be the victims' reliable family members, friends, neighbors, acquaintances, or trustworthy professionals. This is the worst part which makes the problem of child sexual abuse extremely difficult to address and to tackle at the right time. CSA is a universal problem. As Mannat Mohanjeet Singh and Sraddha S. Parsekar have rightly ovserved,

> A chief concern in India is the dearth of good monitoring of various juvenile residential institutes and there is no punishment for institutes that do not follow the laws. Institutions fear they will lose their dignity if incorrect information is disclosed. Hence cases are not reported and are settled within the institution.

The psychological repercussions of sexual abuse are enormously dangerous and vitiating. When incest is discovered, obviously family members feel, shocked and anguished, and pass through a terrible emotional crisis. The helpless parents have the guilty feeling that they were not able to guard their children. Perpetrators may lose everything, including social status. Well-knit families may turn out to be empty shell families. Children who are the

victims of CSA have to live with the ill effects and shame of the abuse. They may be estranged permanently from the offending family members. Children want sensitive and responsive care to develop themselves in healthy ways. Sensitive care givers have to emotionally support children and instill a sense of self-respect, self-esteem and confidence in them to bounce back to lead a normal life. The report on Evidence Review commissioned by UNICEF to support the work of the Child protection, clearly highlights this problem:

> Identifying children living with sexual abuse and exploitation is a notoriously difficult task. Challenges include: barriers to disclosure by children, especially social stigma; lack of awareness, understanding and recognition of sexual abuse and exploitation among parents and the wider public.

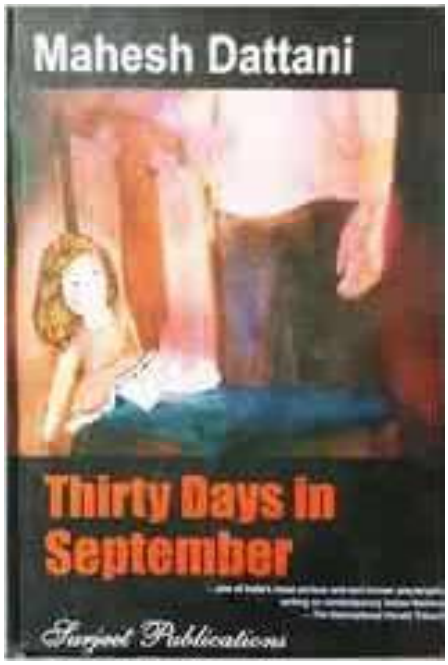
Racheal Bari and Ibrahim.M. Khalilullah, in their essay, "Reading Datani: A viewpoint" comments on the contemporary themes of the play:

> Now what makes Dattani relevant and important to an individual who has seen today and is more interested in knowing what it means and why is it so are the issues in his plays… Issues of sexuality, hijra, homosexuality, child sexual abuse, hypocrisy about aids, religious intolerance, gender bias, social stereotyping or even what constitutes the contemporary Indian family. You name it, it is there: our modern social problems. For the modern Indian, this familiar: one is on comfortable ground. What remains is the need to know why" (59-60).

The feverish tide in Mala's childhood life is sensitively portrayed. The play was first staged at Prithvi Theatre of Mumbai, on May 31, 2001. It centres on the issue of incest in the lives of Mala and her mother, Shanta. It is a saga of love and infidelity. It explores the vicious severance of the link between the adult and the child. A mother finds out the truth about her daughter and that disturbing discovery sets both of them on a disquieting psychological journey of self- realization about their pathetic lives and their traumatic past. Mala lives with the poignant reminiscences of her sexually abused past. Her uncle becomes an irritating part of her unconscious and hounds her memories. He has already damaged her normal growth, making it extremely difficult for her to seek her love interests beyond the traumatic thirty-day period. She cannot remain normal as an adult any more after the kind of sexual abuse she underwent in her childhood days.

Mala shrinks under the psychosomatic tension caused by the abuse even as her mother watches silently, living her helpless life of pain and suffering. Even though Mala's boyfriend Deepak helps her to deal with the trauma, she fails to get back to normalcy intially. Perpetrators hardly ever think of child sexual abuse as exploitation at all. They believe sexual abuse is love, affection, play, comfort, a thrill or even a teaching moment as in the case of Vinay where Mala has become a scapegoat. Child Sexual abuse is not just a physical act, but a psychologically distressing experience, where the abused ones are severely hurt and terribly confused. Fear, discomfort, embarrassment, shame and confusion are the psychological consequences of Child Sexual abuse.

The play's title, '*Thirty Days in September'* also represents Mala's incapability to sustain relationships. Mala remains deeply distressed and confused when her boyfriend Deepak refuses to break up with her at the end of thirty days. Deepak wants to help her to deal with the problems she is facing. Mala's possible liberation should ideally come from empathy and understanding from her beloved ones which could ultimately instill in her a sense of safety and self-confidence.



The tension and hostility existing in Shanta's family find expression in her daughter in the form of wayward and often errant behavior. Her empty-shell family has become an effortless target for her own brother. The incestuous relationships breed fear, contempt, helplessness and emotional turmoil both in the mother and the daughter. R.D. Laing, a phenomenological psychiatrist, in his book, *The Politics of the Family* shows how the family can be a destructive and exploitive institution. However, this play cannot be read merely as an instance of domestic violence. In the play, the position of both mother and the daughter is extremely vulnerable as they are gullible and cannot resist sexual exploitation for different reasons. Mala, since she was abused as a small girl, remains deeply affected and finds it difficult to lead a normal life as her tender feelings were thwarted by her maternal uncle. This traumatic childhood experience manifests as distorted views about relationships and life which restrict the development of her natural 'self'. When a child enters into the system of language, it essentially begins the stage of socialization. As Lacan has suggested this phase is linked with certain prohibitions and restrictions as it enters the new order of *the Symbolic.* This stage associated with the figure of the father is a deeply troubled one in the case of Mala.

Mahesh Dattani, depicts the multifarious horrors of child sexual abuse and incestuous relationships. The mother-daughter relationship faces sexual abuse from the same person. Mala is regularly molested by her maternal uncle, Vinay. He also happens to be the exploiter of his own sister, Shanta. Whenever Mala tried to tell her mother, Shanta, about the physical abuse, Shanta would naively divert her attention either with her favorite alu parathas or by asking her to take support from Lord Krishna. This cannot be viewed merely as an instance of the failure of maternal responsibility. However, this failure on the part of Shanta strains her relationship with Mala. Thus one can see an almost unbridgeable gap created between Mala and Shanta. This estrangement is the result of the trauma they have suffered at the

hands of Vinay. Shanta preferred escapism to fulfilling her daughter's emotional expectation of giving her strength. Mala is right in blaming her mother for the painful and shameful life she is living. She feels that only her mother could help her to avert or overcome the agony she is undergoing. She reveals that she too had been molested by the same person, Vinay, her real brother, for ten long years. She is tongue-tied all these years. Shanta could not protect herself against the abuse. How could she ever have saved Mala? She deciphers the meaning of her enigmatic silence now. Thus the mother-daughter relation is fatally affected and deeply disturbed. They share a similar sexual abuse which has an irreparable impact on their emotional, psychological, and social lives.

The play also highlights the mother's unpardonable quietness against her daughter's exploitation resulting in an awkward conflict between them. The play ends with the mother's disclosure that she herself was molested by the same person in her childhood. Both daughter and mother were the victims of child sexual abuse and the perpetartor of the crime was the same person. Arens in his well-known work *The Original Sin: Incest and its Meaning* has tried to trace the anthropological and cultural connotations of this historically ignored taboo-incest. Sexual servitude is a virtual childhood death sentence for Mala. Mahesh Dattani in a discussion with Anitha Santhanam has observed:

> It's the silence and the betrayal of the family that affects me the most. Like in this case, the mother knew that her daughter was being sexually abused by her uncle, but still chose to keep quiet. It's the silence that makes the abused feel betrayed (12).

In his earlier plays such as *Tara*, *Final Solutions*, and *Bravely Fought the Queen* Mahesh Dattani has explored the theme of guilt consciousness, which is also a significant theme of Thirty *Days in September*. Guilt consciousness manifests in various ways in the behaviour of Mala and her mother. When her mother tries to set things right for Mala by trying to get her married to Deepak, Mala herself is angry and resentful towards her mother and is often utterly confused and wayward in her behavior, particularly in social situations. Ram Ahuja has commented on the behavioural patterns of sexually abused children:

> The sexually abused child may appear withdrawn or retarded, may have poor peer relationships, may be unwilling to participate in activities, may indulge in delinquent behavior, may run away, or may display bizarre or unusual sexual knowledge (220).

The play ends with mother and daughter trying to reconcile with the unbearable trauma that they have undergone as the stigma of child sexual abuse can potentially damage the very notion of self in the victim. This humiliation of physical abuse has left a deep psychological scar on both of them. Like gender and sexuality, rape has a history that is very disturbing, diverse and complex. It is a crime against not just a human being, but against a female child's or a women's very existence that disrupts her sense of a dignified individual identity. Child sexual abuse is still an unresolved social malady that needs to be understood and countered at many levels – psychological,social, familial and cultural. Dattani's *Thirty Days in September* deepens our understanding of the traumautic experiences of the victim and

the damaging psychological impact of these experiences on the development of the victim's personality as a normal human being.

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Madonna and Whore: Woman in the Metafictions of John Fowles

Premkumar R.

Abstract

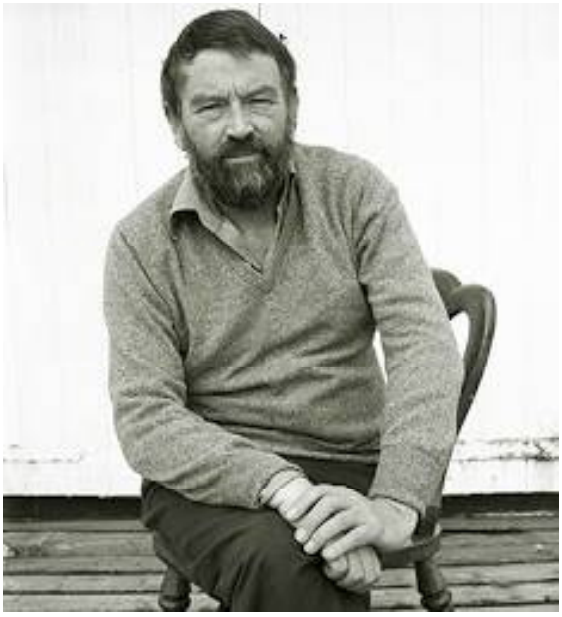
This paper examines the relationship between the sexes in the fiction of Fowles with particular focus on his first three novels. Fowles has always glorified the feminine principle but his sexual politics has been attacked by many feminists. His novels have the structure of an ironic *bildungsroman* where a young man who is leading a false life is taught the meaning of real love and freedom by either an old man or by a young woman. The male protagonist suffers from schizophrenia and classifies a woman as either a Madonna or a whore and hence finds it difficult to establish a normal relationship with a woman. Heroines in the fiction appear enigmatic creatures. They are anima figures for the hero.

Keywords: schizophrenia, madonna/whore complex, enigmatic woman, anima

John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and *A Maggot* (1985) have been recognised as paradigmatic postmodern texts. Such novels that break with and rewrite official history are labelled, in Linda Hutcheon's term, historiographic metafiction (5). *The Collector(1963),* Fowles's first published novel became a best seller. This was followed by *The Aristos (*1965), a non-fictional work containing his personal philosophy. *The Magus* which came out in 1966 became a cult novel in America. His only venture into the short story *The Ebony Tower* which came out in 1974 contained four original stories and a translation of a medieval romance by Marie de France. *Daniel Martin*, considered his most realistic novel appeared in 1977. In 1982 he published *Mantissa,* an intensely metafictional work whose action takes place in a novelist's head. Apart from this he has written numerous essays on literature, art, society and nature over the years which have been collected in *Wormholes – Essays and Occasional Writings* (1998).

Fowles is a paradoxical figure and has been called "an enigma in broad daylight" (Butler 62). He is a scholarly and didactic writer whose novels have been best sellers on both sides

of the Atlantic. He has been obsessive about freedom but is critical about the abuse of freedom in the contemporary society. He has stated his belief in democracy, socialism and liberal humanism numerous times but in his novels he has revealed his affinity for the philosophy of Heraclitus which advocates a kind of elitism. Fowles has apotheosised the feminine principle and spoken of his partiality for the female of the species on many occasions but his sexual politics has been attacked by many feminists. He has written stories of erotic quest which do not present fully reciprocated sexual relationships. He is a self-proclaimed atheist but whose last novel seems to favourably advocate Shakerism, an extreme form of Christianity in the 18th century. He has proclaimed his desire to be part of the great tradition of realism but his novels reveal his fascination with the romance and postmodern metafiction.



John Fowles

There are several themes which recur in the fiction of Fowles such as the Few and the many, the domaine, the evil of collecting, freedom, love and man-woman relationships. Fowles believes in Heraclitus's division of mankind into a moral and intellectual elite, the Few (the *aristoi*), and the many (*hoi polloi*). Fowles believes that a just world is possible only when the Few recognize that it is their responsibility to educate the many, but he also affirms that "the dividing line between the few and many must run through each individual, not between individuals" (*Aristos* 10). He thinks of *The Collector* as a parable about the confrontation between the Few and the many. *The Collector*, as the title indicates, may also be seen as the strongest statement against what is identified as the masculine vice of collecting. The domaine refers to a secluded, green retreat into which the action of Fowles's narrative characteristically withdraws from the opening and the move is reversed in the final pages. This sort of a natural retreat is most important in *Daniel Martin* which has been studied as an eco-fiction.

Almost all his novels, though different in form and narrative technique, share a uniform inner pattern. They have the structure of an ironic *bildungsroman* where a young man who is leading a false life is confronted by one of the Few. The male protagonist, as in the case of Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus,* is a collector of women who is confused between love and lust and between fiction and reality. There appears a stage in his life when he becomes conscious of the fact that he has been hiding his real self. This self-awareness is accompanied

by an encounter with a magus figure or a wise person who offers him the potential of a real self. This teacher figure is sometimes a woman but on other occasions an old man who may be accompanied by one or two women. As a result of this encounter the male protagonist undergoes an ordeal which is referred to variously as "a godgame" (*The Magus: A Revised Version* 625; further references to the work will be cited as *Magus*), masque or metadrama. The godgame consists of a number of psychodramas which present the shortcomings of the hero and, as Rackham puts it, simulates life as a new art form in which "the telescoping of various illusions facilitates a recognition of personal values" (94).

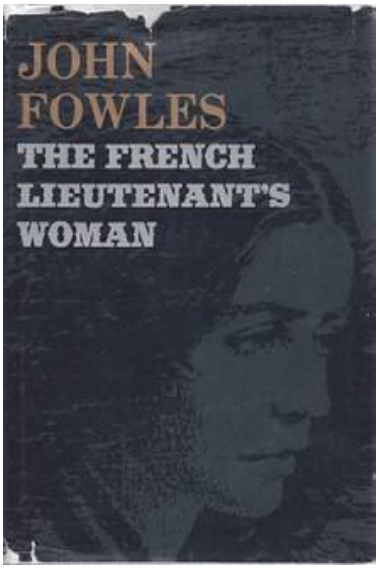
Most of the male protagonists of Fowles have lost their mother in the early stage of infancy and are driven by an oedipal yearning to be reunited with the vanished mother of infancy. It becomes difficult for the Fowlesian hero to achieve a normal, healthy relationship with a woman because he projects on to her the image of the ideal woman who exists only in his imagination. Among the women he meets, only very few come under the category of the ideal woman and the majority who are to be treated as whores must be used. Thus the hero is typically a schizophrenic who suffers from the "Madonna/ whore complex" (Lever 90), a common disease of the 20th century western male. The purpose of the masque is to make the young man distinguish between reality and fiction. He has to learn the difference between love and sex and understand the meaning of real freedom.

Sex plays an important role in the godgame as the hero is motivated by an erotic quest resembling the pattern of medieval romance but very often the hoped-for-consummation is endlessly delayed leading to violent sexual frustration as in the original version of *The Magus*. In *The Magus: A Revised Version*, the hero succeeds in consummating sexual love. Whenever sexual union takes place, it is far from satisfactory as the woman is usually a passive participant and the post-coital disappearance of the woman acts as a shock to the male hero. There are variations to this model in *The Collector, A Maggot* and 'The Enigma,' and 'The Cloud,' two of the stories of *The Ebony Tower.* An authentic person knows that while sex "is an exchange of pleasures," love "is a giving without a return" (*Aristos* 175). At the end of the novels, most of the heroes are shown to evolve into more honest and more courageous men.

This paper seeks to examine the relationship between the sexes in the fiction of Fowles with particular focus on his first three novels. Though all his works reveal his high regard for women, he is not a proper feminist. The women in his fiction are superior beings than men and he says women "know more about human nature, more about mystery, and more about keeping passion alive" than men. (*Aristos* 90). His female characters are like muses to the male protagonist and thus associated with imagination, creativity, intuition and the "right feeling" (*Daniel Martin* 246). Fowles is fascinated by "the extraordinary half-maternal, half-mysterious aspect of women" (Singh 190). One part of a woman is always willing to protect and comfort while the other half lures and tempts man to danger and seduction and this sort of the quality of the oxymoron is used in the descriptions of the female characters. The Fowlesian heroine is an enigmatic creature whose actions are shrouded in mystery and

this is achieved by the simple technique of denying access to their minds. Fowles has confessed that he "owe[s] a great deal to Freud and Jung" (Tarbox 188) and refers in particular to the Jungian theory of anima and animus.

The Collector deals with the abduction of Miranda Grey, a young and beautiful art student from a middle class family by Frederick Clegg, a clerk from the lower class who wins a lottery. Clegg's first-person narrative contains and envelopes Miranda's tale which takes the form of a diary kept secretly during her captivity and discovered by her captor after her death. Towards the end of the two month imprisonment culminating in her death, Miranda becomes aware of her inauthenticity. He writes in his narrative that "having her was enough. Nothing needed doing. I just wanted to have her" (*The Collector* 95). She records in her diary that "he was looking for the mother he'd never had" (*The Collector* 121) and that she "knelt by him and told him not to worry. *Mothered him*" (*The Collector* 242, emphasis added). Clegg's mother was a whore and thus he is able to see Miranda only in a mother-son relationship and he cannot change mother into lover. Clegg's apparent lack of sexual desire for her confuses and frightens the chaste Miranda as the expected rape never materialises. As she is unable to identify his motive in keeping her a prisoner, she attempts to seduce him hoping that sex will foster better communication with him and ultimately secure her freedom. Her action shatters his concept of her angelic purity and he transfers her from the category of the mother to a whore. He writes: "She was like all women, she had a one-track mind. I never respected her again" (*The Collector* 102). Clegg fails to evolve.



The Magus (this paper uses *The Magus: A Revised Version* of 1977) is structurally divided into three parts: the first and third parts which are realistic take place in London. The second part which deals with the bizarre experiences of Nicholas Urfe takes place in Phraxos, an island in Greece where there is only a thin line separating the real from the unreal. Nicholas who suffers from "congenital promiscuity" (*The Magus* 264) is a typically inauthentic middle class youth who is confused between fiction and reality. Alison Kelley, an Australian air-hostess, enters the life of Nicholas on the very day he applies for the job in Greece. Alison who possesses a pretty body, an interesting face and candid grey eyes, is used to casual affairs. As they start living together, Alison who is honest in her relationships falls in love with Nicholas. Despite her vitality, he perceives Alison as coarse, and is unable to appreciate her fully because of her sexual availability. She shares moments of pure physical pleasure with Nicholas who is aware that this affair is unlike any other he has gone through.

One day, while she leans against him, he has a feeling that they are "one body, one person" but thinks of this "terrible death-like feeling" (*The Magus* 37) of love as lust. Alison is ready for marriage and motherhood but he feels that the actual pleasure she gives him is blocking a potentially greater pleasure. During the first seven months of his stay in the island of Phraxos, he thinks of Alison on several occasions and aches for her body beside him; the memory of "moments of tenderness and togetherness, moments when the otherness of the other disappeared" (*The Magus* 56) comes back to him but instead of accepting this as love he thinks that he is only sexually frustrated. A few months after his arrival in Greece, he becomes conscious that he has been leading an inauthentic life.

Conchis, the Magus figure tells Nicholas about the importance of hazard in the life of a person and explains that there is a point of fulcrum in the life of every man when he must accept himself and try to become the "existentialist author" of his life (Eddins 204). Conchis himself suggests the word "masque" to describe his activities and it is a metaphor for reality which is intended to upset, baffle and disorient Nicholas so that he sees through the endless succession of roles he has played in life. When he sees Lily with her latent sexuality he thinks of her as an ideal woman unlike Alison who has a natural aura of sexuality. The glorified picture of Lily has no connection with the reality and she is really only a fantastical projection of what Nicholas wants in a woman. While Lily who satisfies his nostalgia for the enigmatic woman entices him into wanting love, her bikini-clad, near naked sister Rose who is a whore according to the classification of Nicholas, arouses him sexually. Despite Conchis's telling him that Lily always does exactly what he wants and ignoring the real possibility that Conchis and the girls are acting together to gull him, Nicholas dreams of a future in which a marriage with Lily enables him to possess her sister as well.

When Nicholas meets Lily in Bourani, she involves him in a skilful sex tease but shows her reluctance for the sexual act and Nicholas experiences a violent sexual frustration. When Nicholas finally succeeds in consummating his love for Lily in *The Magus: A Revised Version*, she reminds him of Alison and her reality and it is obvious that Lily has beautiful sex with Nicholas because she wants to teach him the difference between sex and love. Immediately after the sex act, Lily tells him that she's going to the trial following which a group of people appear and drag him away by force. This group which includes Conchis and Lily introduce themselves in the trial scene as an international group of psychologists and diagnose Nicholas as suffering from "an only partly resolved oedipal complex" and "an ambivalent attitude towards women" (*The Magus* 508). At the end of the scene Lily is tied to a flogging frame, fully exposing her bare back. The leader of the group who hands over a whip to Nicholas asks him to judge them and tells him that he has absolute freedom to give her up to ten strokes. At his fulcrum moment he perceives that his freedom is in not striking her, whatever the cost and returns the whip.

Nicholas who has a feeling of "being free again, but in a new freedom . . . purged in some way" (*The Magus* 533), grasps that Alison who really loved him is "a mirror that did not lie" and that her supreme virtue is "a constant reality" (*The Magus* 539) and becomes

aware of the false, inauthentic life he led. He classified Alison as a whore earlier but now recognises her as a unique person who defies his classification of women. A period of waiting is necessary for Nicholas to absorb the lessons of the godgame during which time he has to accomplish a transition from the world of art to the world of reality. He realizes that he has to wait for Alison to come to her. Gradually Nicholas becomes conscious of a new feeling that haunts him and this agonized longing to see Alison has "nothing to do with sex". He craves for "something else" (*The Magus* 632) which Alison alone is capable of giving him and learns to distinguish between love and sex for the first time in his life. Nicholas realizes that love is "more a capacity for love in oneself than anything very lovable in the other person" (*The Magus* 601). The novel has an ambiguous ending but it is possible to read it as a reunion of lovers.

The French Lieutenant's Woman which has been acclaimed as a typical a postmodernist work focuses on the life and manners of the Victorian age from a contemporary perspective. It narrates a love story with its hero, Charles Smithson, having to choose between two women: the rather shallow, conventional Ernestina Freeman with whom he is already engaged and the social outcast Sarah Woodruff. Existential authenticity is one of the key issues in the novel, and in choosing Sarah over Ernestina and thereby defying the rigid conventions of the Victorian society, Charles is depicted as being on his way towards achieving authenticity. One day while searching for fossils of extinct species in the Undercliff, he comes across Sarah, a new and unclassifiable species, who lay "in the complete abandonment of deep sleep" (*The French Lieutenant's Woman* 64; further references to the novel will be cited as *FLW*). Sarah is the book's central enigma, the mysterious woman who is always dressed in black and mentioned as "a living memorial to the drowned, a figure from the myth" (*FLW* 9).

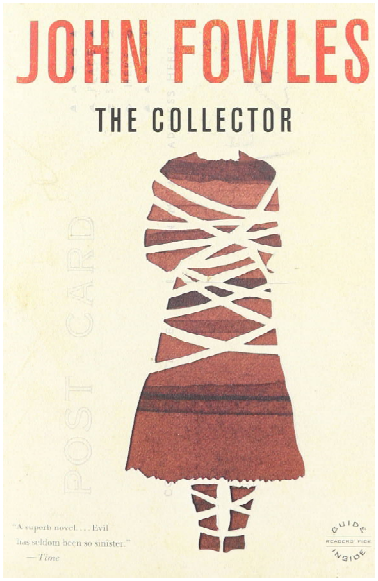
The omniscient narrator's attention throughout the novel is focused on Sarah's hair and on her eyes, with their intensity and their power. Her unforgettable and tragic face unsettles and haunts Charles by "calling to some hidden self he hardly knew existed" and makes him "aware of a deprivation" (*FLW* 130) as she represents a different set of values based on honesty and integrity. With her uncanny perception Sarah notices that he has the potential to become existentially aware and tries to show him the way out; her godgame is aimed at making Charles aware that he has a destiny over which he has control. She communicates with meaningful looks and gestures rather than words and Charles discerns in her eyes "a truth beyond his truths, an emotion beyond his emotions, a history beyond all his conceptions of history" (*FLW* 224). She explains to Charles why

she gave herself to Varguennes: "I did it so that I should never be the same again. I did it so that people *should* point at me, *should* say, there walks the French Lieutenant's Whore" (*FLW* 152, emphasis in original). She confesses that she "married shame" (*FLW* 153) and what has kept her alive is her shame, her knowledge that she is different from other women. She makes Charles a voyeur to her relationship with Varguennes as Charles imagines himself simultaneously as Varguennes enjoying her and the man who appears to protect her. Sarah involves Charles in a relationship beyond the limits of propriety and makes it difficult for him to return to his former life thereby forcing him to suffer the burden as well as the exhilaration of his freedom. In effect, "she makes him walk in her shoes" (Tarbox 72).

Sex is the climactic moment of Sarah's metadrama. She skilfully engineers the seduction scene by appearing in a green night gown and by revealing fully her luxurious hair for the first time. She takes no active part in the sexual encounter when a violent sexual desire overcomes Charles but the sex is as brief as it is explosive, lasting "precisely ninety seconds" (*FLW* 304). Charles feels that he is worse than Varguennes and responsible for what happened. She admits that she also wanted it and hence seduced him but adds that he cannot marry her. But he is shocked when he finds out that he has mated with a virgin. Thus the woman who is referred to as a whore is revealed to have been a virgin. She confesses that she did not sleep with Varguennes and his awareness that all her conduct in Lyme is based on a lie bewilders him. Admitting that she has loved him from the moment she saw him for the first time, she says that she cannot explain her conduct. Sarah systematically destroys the false assumptions and codes of conduct by which he has so far lived. By revealing to him the fictional nature of her godgame she reminds him of the false life he has led.

Sarah absconds from the scene even as Charles breaks his engagement with Ernestina. He searches extensively for her all over England but later travels to several European countries and America before finding her two years later. She is now living in the home of Dante Gabriel Rossetti as an assistant and appears a "New Woman" (*FLW* 379) who looked at least two years younger. Charles is unsure whether she is "Eve personified, all mystery and love and profundity" or "a half scheming, half-crazed governess" (*FLW* 367). His association of her with Eve suggests that he is anxious that Sarah may not be the saviour who guarantees his freedom but rather the temptress who takes it away. The novel is famous for its twin endings in the first of which the lovers are united. In the final ending Sarah reveals that she does not wish to marry and Charles who finds in her a spirit prepared to sacrifice everything to safeguard its integrity walks out of the house. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* ends with Charles as an outcast, occupying the position of Sarah at its beginning, ready to choose and suffer everyday his cruel freedom as he discovers "an atom of faith in himself, a true uniqueness" (*FLW* 399). It is to hoped that he would desist from classifying a woman as either a madonna or a whore in the future.

*A Maggo*t is different from the previous novels of Fowles. It is the story of the evolution of its female protagonist Rebecca Hocknell from a sinner to a saint. When the novel begins she is a prostitute but at the end of the novel she is a woman who claims that she has seen Christ. Thus she emerges the most authentic woman with a definite vision of a society where everyone is equal. She is dragged into a quest by Mr. Bartholomew who also seems to have been engaged in his own quest, a quest in which he is, probably, successful and then disappears from the scene. Mr. Bartholomew reminds Rebecca that she is a whore in what appears to be a cruel manner on some occasions but on other occasions she is treated with kindness and later she understands that he was cruel to her for her own good. His dumb servant Dick Thurlow who is more of a brother to Mr.Bartholomew is passionately attached to her. Ayscough the barrister who is in charge of the investigation into the disappearance of Mr.Bartholomew looks upon Rebecca as a prostitute but is forced to give some grudging respect to her in the end.



It is evident from this analysis that the schizoprenic male protagonists of Fowles always look upon their women as either a virgin or a whore. The woman in Fowles is almost always treated as an enigmatic creature. The woman appears mysterious to the hero probably because their creator wants it like that, not because of anything inherent in the woman. *The Collector* and *A Maggot* are different because it is the women who evolve into better persons.

From the moment Miranda tried to lose her virginity by trying to seduce him for her freedom, Clegg treats her as a whore even though she remains a virgin literally. Alison is treated as a prostitute by Nicholas due to her sexual availability but he later treats her as an ambiguous madonna when he is forced to recognise the real meaning of love and freedom. On the other hand Lily who is regarded as a virgin by Nicholas is found to be a person who does not attach too much importance to her chastity. Sarah is regarded as a whore by the society because she wanted it and Charles also thinks of her as a fallen woman. It is exactly at the moment when Sarah lost her virginity that she gives the impression of being a chaste virgin for the first time.

Diana in 'The Ebony Tower', the lead story in *The Ebony Tower* is treated as a virgin while her friend Anne appears to David as a whore. Later he feels that he was wrong in his assessment about Anne. Diana comes close to sex with David but there is more focus later in the narrative on what is wrong with David and hence her status as a virgin survives with him. Isobel in 'The Enigma', one of the stories in *The Ebony Tower*, is not categorised under these labels by Jennings as he falls in love with her at their only meeting in the story. Peter in 'The Cloud', one of the stories in *The Ebony Tower*, looks at his girl friend Sally, his friend's wife Anabel and her sister Catherine as sex things to be used but takes advantage of the opportunity offered by Catherine.

Daniel, the middle aged eponymous hero of *Daniel Martin* who has had numerous casual affairs has a reasonably long relationship with the film star Jenny but treats her as an object to be used. His approach is different only with Jane who is constantly treated as a madonna figure probably also due to the fact that she was the wife of Anthony, his surrogate-father and mother of two teen-aged children.

Rebecca is a prostitute literally. But even in her life as a prostitute she played the role of a coy maiden to please her customers. After her maggot vision she is so transformed that she observes celibacy even though married to the carpenter Lee. When she becomes the mother of the child who would be known as Mother Ann Lee she becomes the ultimate madonna figure in the fictional world of Fowles. She effectively combines and neutralizes the roles of the madonna and the whore.

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The Deified and the Defiled: Women as Agents of Change in Malayalam Poet Kumaran Asan's Narrative Poems

Asha M.

Abstract

The poems of Kumaran Asan, the renowned Malayalam poet, articulate his powerful social criticism of the caste system, untouchability and gender inequality. They are the poetic statements of the vibrant spirit and ideals of the renaissance which altered social consciousness in the early twentieth century in Kerala. Love becomes a potent theme that subverts the prevailing norms of gender in his poems. Asan's female protagonists gain superiority over their male counterparts by breaking free from tradition and subservience. They also become the mouthpiece of the poet in a male dominated society and defy the taboos of the social system so as to transcend the binary of the deified and the defiled.

Key words: gender relations, celibacy, caste system, untouchability, sexual relation

Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), the foremost Malayalam poet of his time and one of the greatest in the entire canon of Malayalam literature, has offered in his works a radical critique of the caste system and its pervasive dehumanizing effects, Asan was a highly original poetic genius and a true social reformer who could converse with his readers, sensitizing them to their issues by being one among them. His poetry expresses his revolt against the deep-rooted social evils, anarchy and social injustice which prevailed in Kerala in the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of caste hegemony.

Asan's passion for revolt is born out of his protest against the oppressive conditions in which the Dalits and the lower castes lived around him and the inhuman customs and taboos which they were compelled to follow. In his narrative poems Asan created characters who express his own spirit of revolt and radical idealism. The Malayalam critic Joseph Mundassery has emphasized that Asan's characters and outlook were shaped by his response to his own experiences in life:

> Like Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, Kumaran Asan had taken care to structure his characters with their firm roots in the fertile soil of human existence. And to achieve this, he has made appropriate use of the knowledge and experience gained from the environments in which he lived and worked (*qtd*. in Govindan 207).

This paper argues that Asan's critique of caste discrimination and social inequality in his poetry has its focus on his treatment of male-female relationship which subverts the notions of gender norms prevailing in his time. Orthodox caste system regarded the women of the untouchable classes as 'defiled' while the upper caste males were extolled as 'deified'. Any relationship of love between the two was thought to be profaning and was therefore socially forbidden. Asan's female protagonists defy this categorization and assert gender equality, thereby becoming agents of social change.

Kumaran Asan found that humans beings who were ostracized as outcastes were living a life worse than that of slaves in a political system of domestic colonialism. He raised his voice against the system of caste-based segregation scripted by ancient Vedic authority. People, who were deprived of fundamental human rights by birth were supposed to be defiled, whereas people, named *bhoosuraas* meaning 'gods of the earth', were deified and considered as the master race. They possessed the right to subject the outcasts to the worst kind of brutality known in human history. As T.K Raveendran writers,

> In literature as well as in life, decadence had eaten away the vitals and Kerala was groping in the darkness of medieval feudalism. It is evidently an anachronism that even in the twentieth century, feudal order held the ground. A close examination of the period will yield ample evidence to the existence of the shadow of the monster in all walks of life of the people. The system of Government was markedly feudal; the worst form of feudalism which reduced most of the people to the condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water to their lords. The lower castes who formed the majority of the people, were subjugated to ignominious treatment and were suffered to live in hovels and work for the upper caste masters. They enjoyed no right to personal safety and freedom of any kind. (5)

The Vedic authority that sustained the caste-based domestic colonial power structure imposed two laws of segregation: untouchability and inapproachability. The low castes were forbidden to touch the people of the upper caste because of the belief that it would defile the latters' body. This state of impurity caused by being touched by the low caste was termed *asuddham*, and *ayitham*. Another law was that of inapproachability imposed by the hierarchal caste system. It was a system of hierarchical social distancing practiced between various castes, with prescriptions of distance to be observed by each caste in keeping with social gradation. The particular distance that a man of inferior caste would keep from a person of superior caste was termed *theendalppaadu*. The curious principle behind *thodeel* and *theendal* (untouchability) was *ayitham* or *ashuddham* attributed to low caste people who were termed as *panchamas* (the fifth in order) as they were kept outside the four varnas. As Nizar and Kandasamy state, "The caste system reached its peak in Kerala through

keezhvazhakkam, *keezhmaryada* and *nattunadappu* (social norms created and imposed by the high caste) which included an effective control of all the resources by the 'upper' castes" (8).

Kumaran Asan's narrative as well as short poems are cast in a philosophical, political and aesthetic frame, expressing his rebellion against *ayitham* or untouchability at the social level and at the level of male-female relations. In "Chinthaavishtayaaya Sita" ("Sita, Immersed in Thought") Asan strikes at the root of the issue when he equates the *paadaja* or slave with the female. S.Sudheesh has argued in *Kumaran Asankavitha: Sthreepurusha Samavakyangalile Kalaapam* ("Kumaran Asan's Poetry: The Revolt against Male-Female Equation") in Asan's narratives we find a male -female duo as recurrent motif that raises the complex issue of the acceptability of the female to the males. His contention is that in a male-female relationship where the male is an ascetic celibate, sexual love is impossible because for him the female body is untouchable. It is *asuddham* or *ayitham* or unholy according to the ascetic tradition. The female protagonists in Asan's narrative poems make a claim of love that confuses the very sanctity of asceticism. Even a city prostitute punished for criminal offence begs for love at the moment of her death, and not for *moksha* (salvation), from the handsome Buddhist ascetic youth ("Chandalabhikshuki"). The poet exhorts the ascetic male to leave the path of nirvana and come down to serve his life on earth that is infernal to the female of the lowest caste. If ascetic celibacy of the male is all that great and if female body is rejected as untouchable and unholy, does it not justify the Vedic theses of untouchability and inapproachability? This is a question that haunted the poet Kumaran Asan who had been leading the life of *Chinnaswaamy* (the young monk) for a long period till he got married in 1918.

Kumaran Asan

A male aspiring to spiritual heights had to exclude the female from his life since it was believed that sexual love might degrade him to the 'profanity' of a common human being. So, for a spiritual celibate, a female represented an unholy body that he should not unite with. Man-woman love is an unholy affair or *ayitham*. The stronger his rejection of feminine love/partner, the greater his spiritual achievement is supposed to be, as in the case of Sree Rama. Asan counters this view by representing his women characters as being persistent in their love, proclaiming the inseparability of spiritual and physical love as in "Nalini" where the eponymous protagonist shows the boldness to assert her love towards the young ascetic. Later in one of his last poems, "Oru VanaYathra" ("A Forest Journey"), the poet rebuffs the

notion of the harmony of ascetic life in aggressive terms. In "Oru VanaYathra" he says that the persons who conceal themselves in the caves of lone contemplation and who are incapable of addressing the world with love do not deserve to be born as human beings. In all the great narratives of Asan there is a poignant struggle where the rejected female asserts her faith in the power of sensuous or worldly love. She proclaims that everything in human life despite the supposed glory of luminous spirituality, is inferior to love that is associated with the body and worldly existence.

Kumaran Asan's poems best exemplify the feminist concept that gender is distinct from sexual identity, and that male-female relationship is conditioned by moral and social laws. Asan's female protagonists explore the question of gender in relation to male asceticism. The libidinal urge is no sin but a force that could be transformed to the fueling power of monogamous love. Male celibacy is self-castration glorified by the ancient Vedic power structure which demands the exclusion of females from man's path of glory. Asan's female protagonists Vasavadatha, Mathangi, Nalini and Leela rebel against Upaguptan, Anandan, Divakaran and Madanan, who seek to alienate women in order to pursue their ascetic life. This is exemplified by Vasavadatha and also the widow Leela who goes on a hazardous journey in search of her lover living in the wilderness .The male ascetics forget or reject the reality of prakrithi and purusha which demand to be joined by the force of sexual love. But the women protagonists like Nalini exhort them not to neglect the vital reality of earthly life while pursuing eternal spiritual glory.

In "Duravastha" ("The Tragic Plight") Kumaran Asan selected a Dalit as the principal male character, a daring experiment by which he put an end to the upper caste heroic male presence in Malayalam narrative poetry. Asan proved that one can write a long narrative poem with an outcaste male in the leading role. "Duravastha" is written against the background of the Moplah Rebellion of August-September 1921 in Malabar, the northern province of Kerala. 'Chathan', an outcaste youth is inspired to live a life of love by Savithri, a Brahmin girl, the female protagonist in the poem who detests caste discrimination and keeps the fire of love aflame in her soul. Through this poem Asan tries to arouse the consciousness of the Dalits against caste-based feudal oppression. Feudalism which prevailed in Kerala, especially in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar in the beginning of the 20th century had deprived the serfs and the Dalits of their basic human rights. Their pathetic condition is portrayed in the beginning of the poem where Asan describes the old mushroom-like thatched huts, devoid of any structural design or specific pattern which is symbolic of their own life situations. Asan presents Chathan, a Dalit male, as being subservient to the system of caste hierarchy. The question of freedom does not occur when one is not allowed to walk freely on a public road, when one cannot take drinking water from a public well, when one cannot get into an educational institution or enter the premises of a temple. Asan realized this to the full extent and joined the renaissance battle as a follower of the great spiritual teacher and social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. Asan wanted to uphold the doctrine of Guru namely "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man" (Rajkumar 436) which was against *chathurvarnya*, the Vedic four-fold social hierarchy based on caste by birth. In "Duravastha," more than in

any other poem, Asan made a formidable attack on the irrationality of the four-fold caste hierarchy and the inhumanity and falsehood it involves.

In Asan's poetry love is a pervasive theme that tends to subvert the ideological basis of the social system of his time. There was a persistent assumption that Dalits do not have the psychological maturity to experience emotional pleasures. Kumaran Asan's depiction of Chathan shows that the repressed emotional potentials could be released with a touch of genuine love. As a result of the 1921 rebellion, Savithri was thrown out of her house and found asylum in the lowly hut of Chathan. During the course of her stay there Savithri develops an emotional attachment with Chathan and even initiates him into the lessons of love. K. Sreenivasan observes in his book *Kumaran Asan, A Profile of Poet's Vision*,

> "Duravastha", was indeed an open challenge to orthodoxy and religious prejudice. Further, it was a warning and a spirited exhortation to break away from the status quo. Sita provoked by retrospective musing; Savithri threatened with premeditated deeds. A high caste Namboothiri (Malayala Brahmin) girl boldly decides to marry a Pulaya (Chandala) youth. If Sita's strictures on her godly husband were blasphemous, Savithri's swayamvara was a sacrilege. (120)

In "Duravastha" Asan's protest against caste hierarchy is so fierce that he asks whether the same God has created both the Brahmin and the outcaste. In the poem Savitri symbolizes true love that transcends caste distinctions and also embodies the potential spirit of social reform. She takes initiative to love Chathan and imparts education to his community.

Kumaran Asan's "Chandalabhikshuki" has often been described as a sister poem to 'Duravastha'. The story is set in the Buddhist period. The Buddhist ideology was sternly opposed to the *varna* system and it extended the greatest freedom to women. In "Chandalabhikshuki", Mathangi is projected as a symbol of the oppressed section of society. She is Dalit as well as female. So, the question of the freedom of the Dalit and the female occupies cental interest in this poem. Here also a major issue is that of love. Asan creates a female outcaste whose experience of love runs counter to the concept of spirituality. The chandala girl, Mathangi, is shocked when Ananda, a Buddhist disciple, asks for water from her during his tiresome journey, and then she asks whether distress has made him forget his caste. But as Ananda takes water from the Dalit girl, there is a sudden emotional transformation in her which prompts her to follow the footprints of the monk. She becomes the inmate of the monastery. It is an instance of the freedom and equality extended to women by the Buddhist monk. Asan is here dealing with aspects of male-female love which transcends the physical because of the all-embracing spirituality of the male.

The abandoned, repressed female protagonist in Kumaran Asan's "Chinthavishtayaya Sita" questions emphatically the supremacy of her male counterpart while boldly asserting the fact that she has her own individual identity. Asan's Sita bids farewell to the celestial stars and beauteous wild space, but her death submerging her with the depths of the earth is not a separation from the external world, for her body is integrated with the earth and her mind is unified with the beauties of the earth. She knows that it is the pride of princely life

that distances Sree Raman from the genuine feelings of the human heart. Though Sree Raman is not a celibate, he denies Sita the right to sexual life. The woman is still rejected and she is made the object of scorn. In Kumaran Asan's last, and most touching narrative poem "Karuna" ("Compassion"), the sublimity of love portrayed transcends the physical. It deals with an account of a courtesan who falls in love with a young Buddhist disciple though the love remains unreciprocated till the end. In this poem, it is through the prostitute Vasavadatha that the ascetic youth Upaguptan comes to realize the extent of the sufferings in this world caused by carnal love and desire.

What Kumaran Asan seeks in his narrative poems is a resolution to the philosophical and biological issue of celibacy. The feeling of emptiness consequent to the negation of females is resolved by the determined battle raised by the females for male-female love. The female protagonists in Kumaran Asan deserve an elevated position as they impart knowledge to the male ascetics to descend to the earth and to realize the glory of earthly life and earthly passions. They hold that such an act is more sublime than the spiritual ecstasy in which one tries to find the meaning of existence. Kumaran Asan's persistent treatment of spirituality and asceticism has, to some extent, obscured his focus on gender relations in a social hierarchy determined by caste. His poetry, in effect, interrogates the notions of the deified and the defiled used to justify the practice of social discrimination. Asan's female protagonists defy this binary and show that it is possible for women to become agents of change not only in the sphere of gender relations but in transforming the entire social structure and its attitude to love, freedom and human dignity.

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Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of the Literary Work

Paolo Euron

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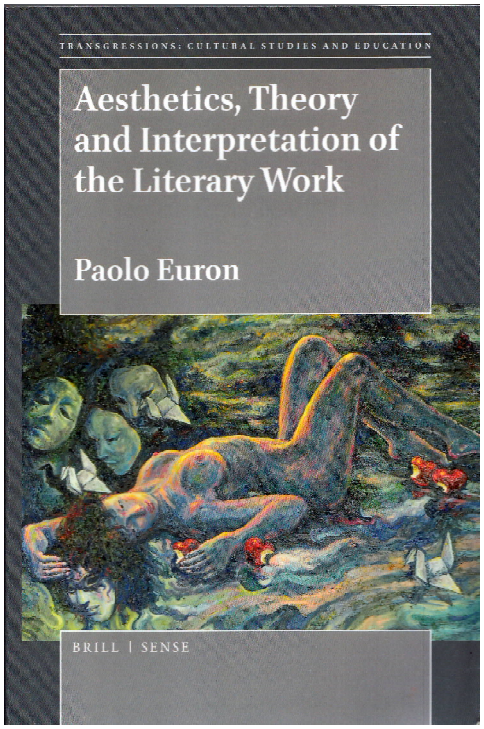
It is a refreshing experience to read a book on literary aesthetics that is free from dogmatic theoretical assertions and a specialized, esoteric or self-referential critical terminology. Paolo Euron's *Aesthetics, Theory and Interpretation of Literary Work* is such a book. Written in a lucid, flowing style, it surveys the entire terrain of western critical theory from Plato and Aristotle to Umberto Eco and Italio Calvino, tracing all the important landmarks and contours in the development of aesthetic concepts and literary debates related to the study of literature as a central humanistic discipline.

In a book of moderate length one can hardly hope to give a comprehensive and detailed account of so vast an area of critical theory and aesthetics. Nevertheless, without leaving out significant movements, personalities and concepts, Paolo Euron manages to present a coherent and compact history of western critical thought, retaining a sense of its magnitude and complexity and the indefinable course of its development over two thousand years. Two things distinguish his approach to this vast subject. First, he surveys the entire field of aesthetics and critical thought from the point of view of contemporary theoretical discourse, i.e., in terms of the key concepts, issues and debates that are central to modern literary theories. His interest is not that of a mere scholar or a chronicler of ideas and theories. The focus is on the way a coherent knowledge of the past achievements in critical theory can be turned to use for the interpretation of literary texts in our own time. Secondly, the whole terrain of western literary aesthetics and critical theory is mapped out and interpreted from a consistently historical and broadly humanistic perspective. A significant statement in chapter 6 establishes the rationale for the historical approach Euron has adopted:

> We are what we are because somebody before us tackled certain problems, discussed them, gave rational answers and wrote about them. We are what we are not exclusively thanks to divine revelation or blind tradition but because somebody before us argued and decided what is a human being, what is art, beauty, virtue and so on. In this way we

are a kind of "historical animal," deeply embedded in history and formed by our historical past (35).

It is the quality of this historical and humanistic vision that makes Paolo Euron's book lively and appealing and refreshingly different from much of the current professional work in this field. Of the 29 chapters which make up the book the first nineteen cover the period from ancient Greece to early twentieth century Europe and the remaining chapters examine the developments in the modern European and American critical scene. In each chapter the focus is on the works of one leading literary critic or philosopher who has made a specific contribution to aesthetics or in an overall critical movement which has altered the prevailing notions about art and its relation to creativity, knowledge and the human world.



As an introduction to the western tradition of aesthetics and literary theory the book opens with a chapter on what Euron calls "Plato's ontological criticism of art" since Plato's moral criticism of the poet or poetry is based on his knowledge of the true being of things. The emphasis in this chapter is not so much on Plato's condemnation of poetry on moral grounds as on his conception of beauty as 'symmetry and proportion' and as the upshot of reflection and thought, i.e., as something less immediate than sensory experience. Euron then connects this conception of beauty to that of Pythagoras and goes on to point out how beauty recurs as a central issue in Kant, in the romantic debate, in Hegel's theory of art and in the modern discourse on creativity. This method of tracing and defining the origin of a concept, a theory or an idea and then disclosing its essential connections, influences and transformations in the history of aesthetics and literary debates is the characteristic strategy followed by Euron in much of the work. As a result, despite its formal chronological presentation the book gives us a sense of the apparent simultaneity or contemporaneity of all critical activities from the time of Plato, Aristotle and Longinus.

Dante is taken as the greatest representative of medieval literature and Euron shows how Dante's concept of the literary work as a polysemous text has passed through the Renaissance and has become a pivotal concern in modern criticism. Petrarch, Marsilio Ficino, Pico and Leonardo da Vinci are the leading Renaissance figures whose views on art

and beauty are closely studied in an attempt to demonstrate the underlying relationship between art and humanism. The chapters on Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics take us to the difficult areas of epistemology and metaphysics and the way they are intertwined with the new concepts of art and beauty which contributed to the rise of the romantic movement.

Coming to the modern period, the range of topics and authors covered is particularly impressive. Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt school theorists find a place among the representative intellectual innovators of this period. In the British and American critical establishment Gramsci, Adorno, Walter Benjamin and theorists of similar ideological persuation are generally ignored while Barthes, Derrida and Lyotard are given excessive attention. Euron presents a balanced estimate (and a comprehensive one as far as possible within a single volume) of all the critical schools and theories that have gone into the making of the very complex body of modern and postmodern literary aesthetics and theoretical writing. Hermeneutics, structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, New Historicism, cultural materialism and other recent critical theories are examined and reassessed, maintaining the focus on their specific theoretical features as well as their influence on the strategies of reading and literary appreciation.

Euron's book is a highly readable and competent introduction to western literary criticism and the philosophy of aesthetics. It combines a firm grasp of the material with accuracy and rigour of analysis and clarity in presentation. What distinguishes it from similar works is its overriding interest in the use of theory in refining and enlarging the methods of reading the literary text and in relating literary experience to the larger issues of culture, human values and our project of living. The interconnectedness of theory, modes of reading and existential concerns has rarely received such balanced attention in a profesional historical work on aesthetics and literary criticism. The perspective seems to me to closely resemble Greenblatt's radical concept of "cultural poetics" which emphasizes "the integration of aesthetic and social discourse."

S. Sreenivasan

The Solitary Sprout: Selected Short Stories of R. Chudamani

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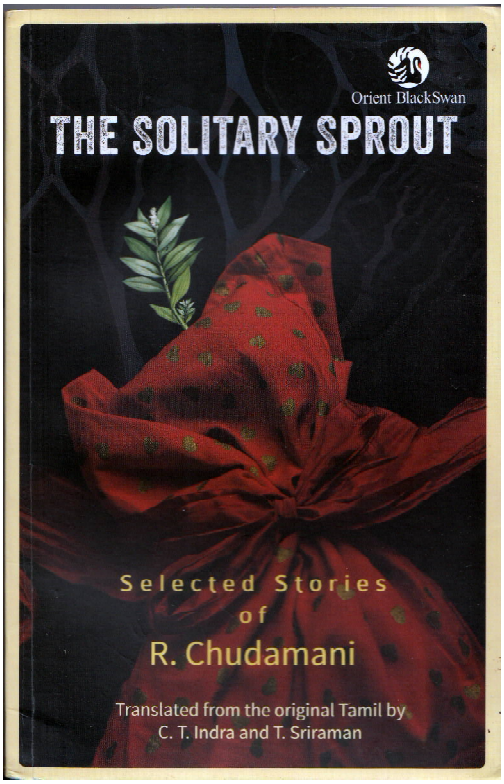
Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2019. ISBN 978-93.5287-690-7
The Delicate, the Subtle, and the Aesthetic of Atypical Types

The Solitary Sprout is a collection of twenty short stories written by R. Chudamani (1931-2010), a major Tamil writer of the second half of the twentieth century, and translated by C. T. Indra, retired professor and head, Department of English, University of Madras, and T. Sriraman, retired professor, Department of Literatures in English, School of Distance Education, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Chudamani is considered "an early feminist among Tamil writers" (x). She was a short story writer, novelist, and playwright, and has written over two hundred short stories and several novellas. The stories included in *The Solitary Sprout* were written over a span of forty years (1963-2003). The book is a delightful and rewarding read. Being chronologically arranged, the stories also lend themselves to the tracing of a temporal progression. While the earlier stories radiate an old-world charm, by the time we reach "Must Prop Up This Crumbling Edifice," the city of Madras has reverted to its old name, Chennai, and by the time the events of "Grandmother" occur, Star TV has arrived. Both the stories were written in the original Tamil in 1994, also the year in which the Santhana Bharathi-Kamal Haasan film noir *Mahanadhi* was released. The film features in the latter story.

On account of its compact form, the short story is a genre that can produce concentrated aesthetic effects. The effects are further heightened when stories endeavour to capture and represent a singular sensibility. The translators' "Introduction" to the volume opens with an account of the "modernist literary sensibility" and an oft-quoted statement of Virginia Woolf which articulates this sensibility:

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there.... (*Modern Fiction* 160).

The ordinary mind might be in agony. Or, it might have a crush on somebody. It might have wanted to say something but could not. The world may not lend its ears to what it wants to say. There is no recognition of this rich inner life. There is no recognition of what happens inside a man's (or a woman's) head. A straitjacketing social life is oblivious to it. So is, according to Woolf, the "apparatus" of conventional, realist fiction, represented, according to her, by H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy – the "materialists," as she called them. Writers including Woolf have attempted to salvage delicate realities of life through the medium of fiction. The act of salvaging requires a different aesthetic, an unconventional form, an alternative sensibility, and altered evaluative criteria for the works that capture elusive, delicate, subtle realities of ordinary existence (I have argued elsewhere that literature itself is a matter of *delicate epistemes*) – in the translators' words, an "alternative artistic finesse that creates a reality which is at once delicate and strong" (ix). It is this alternative artistic finesse which is the hallmark of Chudamani's literary achievement. The fruitful delicate-yet-strong paradox – in Woolf's idiom, "a thing you could ruffle with your breath and a thing you could not dislodge with a team of horses" – is indeed a characteristic of the short stories reviewed here. They also evince a modernist aesthetic sensibility – except perhaps for the telegraphic formal, verbal economy (of 'holding back') of Euro-American modernists, which Ezra Pound articulated, albeit with reference to poetry, as follows": "... it will be harder ... 'nearer the bone.' It will be as much like granite as it can be.... It will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it.... I want it austere, direct, free from emotional slither" (qtd. in Stock 12).



The above-described sensibility is also about the significance of non-events and commonplace discoveries, which though trivial in themselves have a cumulative value. As the translators point out, "Chudamani constantly recognises and celebrates the possibilities of the transformation of consciousness and perspective. Such transformations are brought about by people who see the world and people differently, and help others to see them as such" (xxii). For instance, in "Pride Takes a Blow" Kathiresan, who had asked his wife

(Vimalai) to sever all bonds with her folks, now "realises how profoundly he has impoverished himself by rejecting her fullness and reducing her to an image that he has fashioned for her" (xvii). The pivot of almost all the stories is an epiphany – in this context, a realisation that dawns upon the characters. In this and many other respects, the stories bear a striking resemblance to James Joyce's short story collection *Dubliners* (1914). "Pride Takes a Blow" has uncanny similarities to "The Dead," the last piece in *Dubliners*, a story about inter-subjective opacity. In the case of middle-aged Gabriel and Gretta Conroy too, the husband is unaware of the wife's intense inner life till she softly reveals her erstwhile love for a young tubercular boy, Michael Furey, who died after singing in the cold at her window. Though the epiphanic/revelatory insights pertaining to ordinary life situations form the crux of the stories in both cases, the 'build up' is worth relishing in itself. While the characters of *Dubliners* by and large cannot overcome what Joyce called a "paralysis" or "hemiplegia of the will" and escape the circumstances in which they are 'trapped,' in Chudamani's stories, one finds real transformations, or at least hints thereof.[1]

Of course, the cultural milieu and historical context out of which Chudamani's literary praxis has sprung is *totalement différents*. As for the nature and setting of Chudamani's fictional situations, they "are neither extraordinary nor bizarre, but commonplace ones familiar in a South Indian/Tamil milieu. Sometimes they are located in a typical brahminical family setting, sometimes in a non-brahminical milieu, and occasionally in the interstitial spaces between the two milieus" (xi). "Karmayogi," the opening story, explores the world view of a domestic cook. "Paths There Are Many" presents a couple who live out the empty nest syndrome. "Insecurity" explores issues involved in the meeting of cultures in the familial context, when a Tamil Brahmin family is visited by the son and his American wife. "Death, Be Not Proud" is an epistolary narrative, the letter being written by an affectionate terminally ill but life-affirming mother to her son, eventually completed by her daughter. "Forgive Me if You Can" is not only about the subtleties of polyamory but also about the fact that human consciousness can easily shift from one experiential mode to another. Life has a thousand, not fifty, shades of grey!

While the Western modernists such as Pound wanted the elusive, delicate content of existence to be hardened to chiselled granite, the steely strength of Chudamani's work is immanent to the specific life world(s) that the author endeavours to capture in all its subtle complexity. The strength is to be searched for in the delicate and subtle matters of a versatile everyday life. Pertinently, Chudamani presents at least a few characters endowed with what is often called 'literary sensibility,' for example, Natesa Iyer ("Paths There Are Many"), who "would speak comparing the loveliness of his wife or his child to a sunrise or the nicety of a lyrical composition" (151). Moreover, to take recourse to the Pound-like fastidious, formal alternative to depict a delicate reality or retreat to pure aestheticism would have been tantamount to breaking a butterfly on a wheel. At the same time, Chudamani's delicate art, with its uncompromising immediacy, evinces the capacity to "feel [a] thought as

immediately as the odour of a rose," the other modernist virtue, thus enabling her to unravel the psychology of the epiphany in a way grounded in the milieu of her fictional worlds.

Apropos Chudamani's take on social issues, as the translators accurately summarize in their "Introduction,"

> She is not an iconoclast, but she is no less radical in her approach to human/interpersonal relations, larger issues touching upon institutions, identity, the class divide and poverty, to name just a few. One does not expect Chudamani to be strident, loud or muscle-flexing in dealing with any issue. But her critique of entrenched institutions and of the attitudes that go with them is no less sharp, even revelatory often.... Chudamani explores these questions in her stories and captures the answers in moments of epiphany which are often unconventional, challenging received images and searching for a buried stratum of truth in knotty situations and relationships. (x-xi).

That the sphere of everyday praxis is the space where transformations should and can be achieved goes without saying. The grandmother's failed social revolution – asking the young servant boy to sit on a chair beside her – in the domestic sphere of "A Chair and a Death" is a case in point. The writer, nevertheless, has made her point in mounting a "delicate yet strong ideological critique of prevailing class consciousness" (xxi). The chair becomes symbol of a might-have-been state of affairs.[2] Other stories challenge similar hierarchies (e.g., those of gender in "Must Prop Up This Crumbling Edifice" and "Herself," those of physical ability/disability in "Mr Outlet") through little acts of self-assertion.

Though the situations are characterised as "neither extraordinary nor bizarre," the atypicality of the approach, one of the several qualities of the stories, deserves mention: "Sometimes the clichéd paradigm of extramarital relations is turned on its head, and all value judgments go awry [as in "Forgive Me if You Can"]; or a second marriage ["This Is More Important" and "Not a Stepfather," both nuanced portrayals of step-parenthood], for the man or the woman, is probed, making the reader reflect on what endures in a relationship, what love is" (xi). Stepfathers and stepmothers "are neither stereotyped nor idealised" (xiii). As opposed to ubiquitous possessive mothers, in "Adamancy, Thy Name Is Amma," Chudamani depicts a mother who "insists on leaving her newly married son and daughter-in-law to set up house on their own" (xiii). Chudamani puts words of profound wisdom in the mouths of unlikely people in ordinary walks of life, as is the case with the unselfconsciously innate species-wisdom of cook Bhagirathi in "Karmayogi," or facilitates an offbeat application of sublime religio-philosophical insights to ordinary life roles, as in "Paths There Are Many," here, in keeping with the Hindu recognition of a plurality of paths to liberation/ enlightenment/ fulfilment.

One cannot but admire the attention that Chudamani pays to detail. The details in her stories are vivid to such an extent that they seem to bridge for the reader any purported gap between mere knowledge and immediate experience. Every word does signify in Chudamani's stories, and thanks to the sensitive translation, perhaps even to a non-South-

Indian reader. In "Karmayogi," the author is not content merely stating that Bhagirathi, the new cook, is talkative; she gives a sample of the chatter. No wonder the stories evoke a world (or worlds) disproportionately larger than the verbal space consumed. The strength of the stories, above all, lies in the (bygone?) worlds of lived life that come alive through them (with Saint Vallalar's songs, the nine-yard sari, and colloquial Tamil vocabulary, there is 'local colour' aplenty). But the 'period' or Zeitgeist phenomenon is double-edged. A fastidious contemporary reader of the stories might note a change of aesthetic sensibility over the years since Chudamani began writing. Naturally, the sensibility of some of the older stories (e.g., "From Narcissist to Artist") might appear a bit obsolete for such a reader. From such a perspective, some passages (79) of older stories (e.g., "No Fury like a Mother's") might, likewise, sound a little didactic or preachy.

The humour of the stories, though sporadic (it could not have been otherwise), is gentle and remarkable. In "The Young Adult," conveying the state of mind of an adolescent (Vasu) innocently infatuated with his tuition teacher, the narrator says in a voice that melts into the "free indirect discourse" of his mother, Gomati: "These days his talk was all about Social Studies, that is, about the Social Studies teacher" (22). Again, "Vasu kept the bandage [which his dear teacher had tied] on his finger for a week even after the wound had healed fully, as if cherishing some sacred relic" (25). In "Grandmother" three-year-old Babu's music fills the verandah: "When the voice rose to a higher octave, it broke into a screech" (170). Sometimes, the author's comic sense borders on black humour. The promiscuous husband who feels kept away from his deceased wife's body thinks that all the people present "looked at [him] with anger and contempt, as though [he] had failed in some examination" (45).

The translators provide critical signposts for an in-depth interpretation of the stories, drawing ideas from Althusser, Freud, J. L. Austin and feminist theorists. Equally helpful are the narratological and genre-related clues (for example, *Bildungsroman* for "The Young Adult" and interior monologue for "Forgive Me if You Can"). The translators note that "A common feature in many of the stories is the presence of a character, in some cases the narrator, who functions as a kind of registering consciousness through whose eyes we watch and evaluate events and characters" (xxiii). The translators also discuss the author's androgynous, "gender-neutral imagination" (xi), which recalls Mary Ellmann's contention, in *Thinking about Women*, that there does not necessarily obtain two kinds of writing corresponding to the two sexes. The translators further draw attention to the intertextual affinities of the stories: for example, Robert Browning's dramatic monologues for "Forgive Me if You Can" (more suitable for "Litany," the monologue of a God who relinquishes claims to omnipotence and omniscience but abundantly clarifies that He [?] *can act* through the goodness of the human heart) and G. M. Hopkins's "Spring and Fall: To a Young Girl" for "A Chair and a Death." The affinities are formal in the case of "Forgive Me if You Can" and "Litany" and thematic for "A Chair and a Death."

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Footnotes

[1] In *Dubliners* and many of his later works, Joyce does suggest the possibility of using epiphanic insights, "epiphany" being his coinage in its secular version, as a trigger for real change in ordinary lives.

[2] Indeed ordinary objects have a silent socio-symbolic life. Cf. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

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Strategies and Methods: Relocating Textual Meaning

Murali Sivaramakrishnan

Adhyayan Publishers: New Delhi, 2018. Pp153. ₹ 295

Prof. Murali Sivaramakrishnan's book *Strategies and Methods: Relocating Txtual Meaning* offers a comprehensive introduction to Humanities in general and Literature in particular, explaining the major critical concepts and technical terms essential for a beginner who wishes to read a text seriously and with diligence. But more than that, the book is a tour de force illustrating the relevance of humanities. The author passionately recounts how humanities got pushed down the ladder and nearly got thrown out of the academic curricula, despite the prime position it enjoyed right from the times of Socrates and Plato.

The first chapter explains why humanities needs to acquire the centre-stage in education. While scientific and technological disciplines thrive on facts and information at large, humanities, especially literary studies, encourage critical thinking and creative imagination. Contrary to the popular belief that humanities lack system and rigour, it has a rigorous methodology for a systematic intellectual pursuit. Earlier, education as Aristotle had envisaged, centred around Logic, Rhetoric and Ethics. While Logic helped in understanding the reality and Rhetoric helped in expressing these principles, Ethics ensured that all study was directed towards strengthening the humanness of a human being. But as life became more complex, and science came to occupy the central position in a general pursuit for ease and comfort or material advancement, Humanities got relegated to a marginal or neglected position.

The second chapter "Literature and Humanities: Insight and Outlook on Imagination and Culture" is an exploration of a few basic ideas about literature: the pleasures and rewards of reading, the universal nature of literature and so forth. Starting with the two broad divisions of Fiction and Non-fiction, the author examines the conventions of the genres that come under these, including Autobiography, Biography, Fable, Folktale, Drama and the like. The entire history of western ideas is traced back to Socrates. Mankind progressed through radical movements such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. But it is recognised that a major transformation occurred with the advent

of the modern age. It was a giant leap forward for the entire mankind. Its all transforming power largely came not from scientific and technological advancements, but from the spirit of humanism and its ideals that flourished through learning. Later in the chapter, the principles of the aesthetic movement called Modernism are exemplified through the most celebrated texts of the age – *The Waste Land* and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This is followed by a close examination of some important theoretical systems such as postmodernism, postcolonialism and deconstruction. This chapter ends with the assertion that humanities do have a significant place now more than ever before. As the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum observes:

> "a declining emphasis on the study of the humanities could lead to a world filled with narrow, technically trained workers, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition and authority and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements" (33).

Chapter Three is exclusively on Language and Discourse. Tracing the evolution of English, the author takes a closer look at the idea of "correct language" and arrives at the conclusion that the prescriptive mode need be followed only at the elementary level and not at the higher level. It is a pity that creativity is seldom encouraged even at the higher levels of learning. The chapter also takes up for analysis certain key terms in Linguistics such as Semantics, Semiology, Signifier, Signified, etc. A language is a living system of signs that undergoes change as it grows. Language, at any point of time in history, is a reflection of the social and political order of that age. While writers like Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan used the colonial language to narrate their native experience, the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o refused to write in the colonizer's language and took recourse to his native tongue.

English language, the growth of which was accentuated by the growth of American Literature, Commonwealth Literature and a host of other factors, has undergone a sea change with the advent of "a market-economy-centred life" (59) in the twentyfirst century. The chapter ends with a detailed discussion on Discourse. "Discourse as per Foucault's perception, refers to ways of constituting knowledge together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which are inherent in such knowledge(s)" (71). The interplay between discourse and power is best perceivable in the Feminist and Marxist reading of texts. The chapter closes with a description of the Formalist's view of language and how it later influenced the structuralist school of thinking.

The fourth chapter focusses on narratology and shows how the narrative involves the interweaving of history, culture and personal imagination. It is particularly of interest because the study of narratives yields the primary ways in which we construct meaning in general. Narratology which studies narrative structures and literary theory describes the tools with which we read and understand literature. To equip the reader for a more sustained study of literary theory, the author discusses in detail the three influential movements – Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Feminism. It is followed by a critical exposition of all the significant

developments in the field of theory such as Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism, Postcolonial Theory, Gender Theory, Reader-Response Theory, Cultural Materialism, Poststructuralism and Ecocriticism. This section also contains brief critical discussions on Indian Aesthetics and Translation Studies.

Having covered the entire spectrum of literary theory, the author now proceeds to offer a hands-on training in applying theory. In the fifth chapter after outlining certain basic premises of literary theory, he explains theoretical terms such as the text and the context, and explicates two poetic texts composed in entirely different contexts, looking at them from different theoretical perspectives.

The next chapter begins with a postcolonial reading of *Dr Faustus*. Philosophy, the discipline that Faustus dismisses as odious and obscure, in fact, embodies the power of human thought to conceptualize and transform the world. We recognize that all knowledge at the higher level, whichever discipline it may pertain to, moves into the realm of philosophy. One of the basic differences between the western philosophy and its Indian counterpart is that while the former believed that "knowledge is power", the latter celebrated knowledge as leading to *Paramananda* – the ultimate spiritual vision that is nothing but pure bliss.

The Afterword sums up the spirit of the book. The author very strongly articulates his angst against a lifeless educational system that churns out graduates who complete three or four years of skill training rather than any real education or learning. He observes that the younger generation largely tends to trivialize everything and focus on the funny aspects of life. They have become rather incapable of any serious intellectual reflection. The growth and spread of global capitalism also have led to the prevalence of a hedonistic ideology that has become quite ubiquitous. The author's general attitude is that of the great educationalists and theorists of the humanist tradition who placed emphasis on the connection between human centrality and literary values.

Too much of critical theory can hamper one's response to the literary text. The proliferation of critical theories in our time is likely to misdirect, confuse or distort literary thinking and perception unless one can find one's way through the maze of theories to the heart of the text. Prof. Murali Sivaramakrishnan's book, by the lucidity of its style and exposition and by its masterly grasp of the theoretical field enables one to evolve one's own strategy of reading to gain access to the richness and multiplicity of textual meaning.

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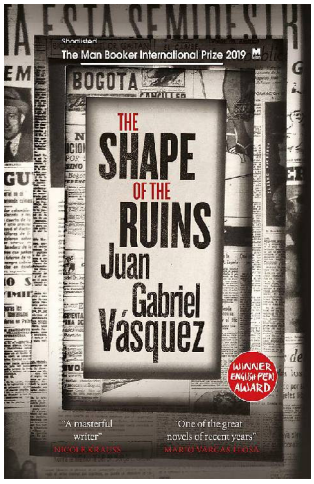
Juan Gabriel Vasquez. *The Shape of the Ruins*
MacLehose Press, 2018. ₹599. Pp. 505

The Shape of the Ruins: The History beneath History

Columbian writer Juan Gabriel Vasquez's novel *The Shape of the Ruins* strikes the attention of the reader for a variety of reasons, the most obvious being its erasing of the tenuous boundary between history and fiction. Though originally published in Spanish in 2015, it rose to international attention only in 2018 when MacLehose Press released its translation by Anne McLean in English. Its fame was further cemented when it was shortlisted for The Man International Book Prize in 2019. Many consider Vasquez to be the successor of Gabriel Garcia Marquez "as the literary grandmaster of Columbia." Yet, a cursory reading of this novel would convince the reader that Vasquez's style is in no way indebted to his predecessor. It not only throws fantasy and magicality of style to the wind, but replaces it with a stark political realism that would at times even tire the reader with the density of its factual details.

The Shape of the Ruins mourns the tragic fate of Columbia that is frequently ripped apart by political violence and murders. Focusing on the given history of two nationally important political murders of the past, Vasquez delineates a present that is haunted by their unresolved mystery. The first murder is that of Liberal politician General Rafael Uribe Uribe who was hacked to death at a public place on 15 October 1914 by two assailants who were soon apprehended and jailed. The second one is of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, yet another Liberal leader and former minister, who was shot dead in Bogota during his presidential campaign at a busy road in public view by a gunman on 9 April 1948. The gunman was lynched by the mob shortly thereafter. Gaitan's murder had triggered massive riots in Bogota, a happening that is known as *Bogotozo*. The novel is an exploration of conspiracy theories relating to these two murders. In 500 odd pages, it weaves alternate histories of these murders with meticulous details corresponding with documented reality, intertwining fact with fiction.

Set in a framework of Chinese box narratives, *The Shape of the Ruins* builds up its tension in a first person narration by the author Vasquez himself. Altogether bereft of any



in-depth characterization, the story however sustains character interest through Carlos Carballo, a forensic specialist. The conspiracy theories that suffuse the novel are his paranoid imaginings. Interwoven with the events in the personal life of Vasquez, the novel basically is about the various ways through which Carballo persuades him to write a book on his (Carballo's) finding on the 'real' reality behind Gaitan's murder. History says that the conspirators behind Gaitan's murder, and in this the CIA too has been implicated, could not be brought to light because of the killing of Juan Roa Sierra, the murderer. It is this lost link in history that Vasquez has sought to fictionally recreate. The novel may very well fit into the category of historiographical metafiction.

Carballo comes into contact with Vasquez through a common friend Dr. Francisco Benavides, a surgeon who treats Vasquez's wife during a complicated pregnancy. Benavides too is involved in the conspiracy theory through his father who was a forensic specialist and Carballo's professor. Carballo has made up an alternate history of Gaitan's murder through a long obsessive research. He wants Vasquez to use that material to write a compelling account, which would bring it to international attention. He chooses Vasquez for this because of his recognition as an author, and also because he himself does not have the talent to write. For the academic reader the novel thus also serves fodder by problematizing the contingencies and choices of writing. It is to ensnare a reluctant Vasquez into accepting his proposal that he introduces him to an unpublished manuscript by a certain Marco Tulio Anzola, a lawyer who had conducted a parallel investigation into the 1914 murder of General Uribe Uribe. Anzola's investigation brings to light several other conspirators who were involved in Uribe's murder, though he loses his case because of public antipathy. Two third of the novel consists of this text that Vasquez reads.

Despite extensively presenting dry historical accounts corroborated with material proofs in the form of real photographs of historical figures and events, the novel is a compelling read. The best achievement of Vasquez in this book might be the effective blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction. It inspires the reader to disbelieve in given history and makes her aware of the contingencies of representation. Often reminiscent of works by writers like Umberto Eco and Orhan Pamuk in the treatment of the subject, *The Shape of the Ruins* projects a vision of the undertows of power politics.

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Codes and Nodes

K. N. Pillai

Thiruvananthapuram: Authentic Books

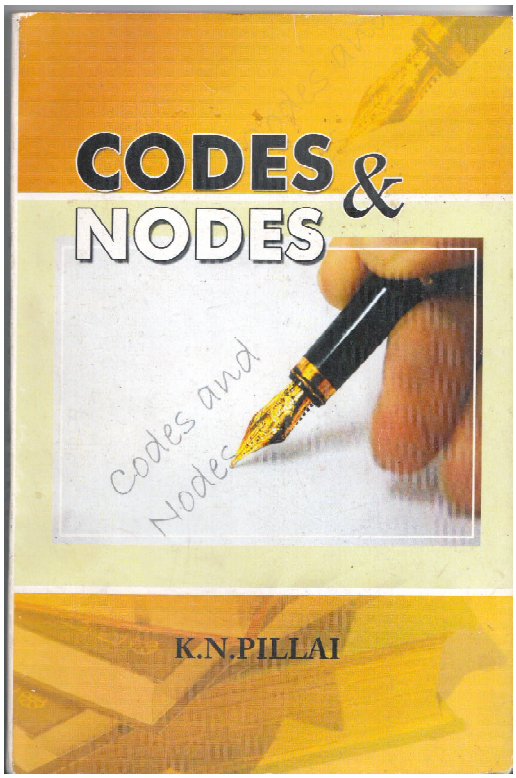
2011. Pp. 134. ₹150.00/-

Codes and Nodes is a collection of thirtythree delightful and poignant poems by K. N. Pillai who is a lover of English literature, a humanist and a literary activist. Written mostly in free verse, the poems articulate powerful emotions summoned up in tranquillity as well as some of the historical events that occurred in the turbulent epoch of the twentieth country and the poet's sober, often anguished, reflections on them.

The thematic range of the poems is really amazing. There are many interesting poems in the volume on the cat, the spider, the dog, the waif, arousing our sense of compassion and pathos as well as our sense of an intimate bond with nature and the animal world. On the other hand, there are poems on momentous public events, on the eventful history of Travancore and England, on the militant terrorism in Punjab and the horrible catastrophe of the second world war. The poem "The Titubant Mutons and His Synonym." presents the vivid memories of the poet's late father who took part in the Second World War and was captured as a prisoner of war by the Japanese forces and deported to Jawa, The poet's intimate sense of family unity and the highly exciting religious fervor prevalent in his home are also memorably evoked in this poem. It is also a saga of the former English teacher, his own grandfather, and the intense patriotic feelings which marked the pre-independence era.

Historical narration occupies a central place in K N Pillai's poetic *oeuvre*. Whether it is the local, the regional in the erstwhile Travancore kingdom, the Indian subcontinent or the world at large, one comes across an array of allusions and encyclopaedic information in the history related poems. In "Venad and the West and their Diadems and Scepters", former Travancore monarchs and their reigns are contrasted with those of their counterparts in Britain and Europe. Numerous other historical names are cited, both of the Royal Court and ordinary men who have stood for nationalism and supported the freedom struggle during the pre-independence era.

The portrayal of the horrid scenes of the second world war, with the East Asian countries fiercely engaged in the combat, is of central interest in the long narrative poem "War!? Peace?". It is a poem of 857 lines in which the events related to the Japanese occupation of South East Asia, the terrible human sufferings it caused and the final debacle of Japan are recounted with sustained narrative momentum.



One of the serious political unrests encountered by the country in the final decades of the last century was the militant insurgency in Punjab. K.N. Pillai has done extensive research and study on this issue which inspired him to write the brilliant poem "Punjab is Recouping". In this poem he authentically deals with Punjab politics and "Khalistan" terrorism and the daily massacres that used to be reported in the newspapers as he has firsthand experience of the whole turbulent times during his personal visit to the Indo-Pak border, the Golden Temple and Jallianwalabagh.

K.N. Pillai's poetry has been described as "cerebral and visceral." He has experimented with apparently recalcitrant material and has succeeded in turning it into richly sensuous poetry. His poetry is the expression of his quintessential life lived with sensitivity and involvement in a critical period in recent Indian history. The imagination, the narrative verve and the rhythmic control with which he has transformed history, politics and the personal into vibrant poetry call for wider recognition and appreciation.

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History of Modern Indian Nepali Literature
Jiwan Namdung
Sahitya Akademi, 2019, ISBN: 978-93-8846-858-9, 136, ₹150

Aims and Objectives. Namdung writes that the *History of Modern Indian Nepali Literature* is an outcome of many years of endeavour put together. Namdung undertakes this mammoth task of incorporating one hundred and twenty years of Indian Nepali literature within some hundred and thirty odd pages. Evident that such task is challenging and could contain shortcomings of its kind, the author reminds the readers that many events and writers will be mentioned in passing, rather than dealing with them in detail. This is exactly what the book does in some sections, where the author mentions names of almost all the Indian Nepali writers—poets, novelists, playwrights, critics, biographers and travel writers. However, he does not fail to mention the prominent writers and the works which play an important part in the making of the Indian Nepali literature.

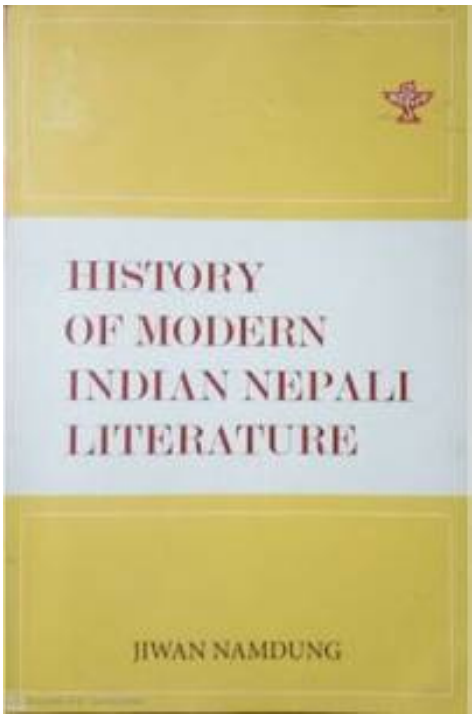
Namdung's book is the first of its kind, i.e. which talks of Indian Nepali writings. In 1984, Kumar Pradhan had written *A History of Nepali Literature*, published by Sahitya Akademy, but it dealt with "a history of Nepali literature than a history of Indian Nepali literature" (Namdung 2).[1]

So, addressing that concern, Namdung categorically lays down the purpose of his book at the very start: "The book attempts to point out the dividing lines between the Indian Nepali literature and Nepali literature from Nepal" (vii). He takes up this "humble step" towards this endeavour because the history of Indian Nepali literature has "not been written till now" and it is essential to delineate its set of "responsibilities, limitations, styles, rationale and justifications" to the interested readers (viii).

Contents of the Book. The book is divided into three chapters with sections in them. There is no uniformity in the division of the sections. The first chapter is divided into two sections: "The Beginning of Modern Indian Nepali Literature" and "Pre-Independence History of Indian Nepali Literature: (1893-1900)." At the start, he informs the shift of interest from classical literature to the popular literature among readers. Popular lyrical forms like "jhaurey,

lahari, sawai, silok, geet, kavita" (5) were recited/sung by people/labour class at work, during the British rule. Namdung also mentions that this was the intervention of modern/ity by the then standard.

The second chapter is divided in three time periods: A. 1900-1925, B. 1925-1950, and C. 1950-1975. In these sections, the author provides information about the gradual expansion of the Indian Nepali literature, publication of the first Nepali Grammar and Nepali Bible (11). He mentions about the significant role played by various newspapers and journals during the initial phase of the expansion of the literature like *Gorkhay Khabar Kagat* (1901), the first Nepali newspaper published from Darjeeling, *Chandra* (1914) and *Gorkhali* (1913) from Benaras, *Chandrika* (1918) from Kurseong; and *Gorkha Sevak* (1936-1938), a weekly published from Shillong. Namdung writes that the Indian Nepali literature was in the amateur state during World War I, but by World War II it had taken a professional lead. A literary organization like Nepali Sahitya Sammelan was established in 1924. The author provides literary data like the publication of first Nepali novel (*Bhramar* in 1936), collection of short stories (*Katha Kusum* in 1938), first play (*Jiwan Leela* in 1931), etc.



The third chapter is divided into eight sections: 1. Modern Nepali Poetry, 2. Modern Nepali Short Story, 3. Modern Nepali Novel, 4. Modern Nepali Drama, 5. Modern Nepali Essay, 6. Modern Nepali Criticism, 7. Biography and Travelogue, and 8. Translation and Children's Literature. In each of these sections, the author has tried his best to incorporate all the names of the authors/ writers/poets who contributed to the development of modern Indian Nepali literature. He pinpoints the prominent figures in each of these genres and mentions his/her contribution. The list comprising authors/writers/poets are tediously long as the author endeavours to justify the cause of all of them in the formation of this literature.

Literature and Politics. While writing about the Indian Nepali literature, the author also brings to the limelight the struggle of Nepali language within the domain of reception, like be it in the inclusion of the Board curriculum and national academy of letters, Sahitya Academy or the Constitution of India. The Nepali language "andholan"/movement also brought all the Nepali speaking population in India together to a common cause. Nepali was incorporated as one of the national languages of India through Eight Schedule in the Indian Constitution in

1992. The book mentions the linguistic unity (besides other factors) which led to the demand of a separate state of Gorkhaland within the state of India in 1986.

Shortcomings of the book. Some of the information might seem repetitive though they might be written in different contexts. The repetition is there because the sections in the chapter division do not follow a uniform pattern of either period or classification. Though the author says that the book is going to be divided in its historical period—Pre-independence and Post-independence of India, privileging the "writings in relation to nation" than the "logic of classification or periodization" —there has been division on the basis of a modern and pre-modern period at places. Resultantly the era and genre division makes some overlapping of information inevitable.

Target Readers and Scope. The book is useful to the students, teachers, people who are interested to know about Indian Nepali literature and to those who want to learn about multicultural India. It is also useful to the research scholars who want to find all the information about the Indian Nepali literature in one book. It opens research scope to future scholars who want to explore in the individual genres, texts, and period/s. Keeping in mind readers from multifarious background, ranging from beginners of Indian Nepali literature to independent readers, Namdung writes the book in an easy/simple form. Namdung states that the need of this work was to introduce modern Indian Nepali literature at a national level to the non-Nepali speakers.

Endnotes

[1] All in-text citations are from Namdung's book.

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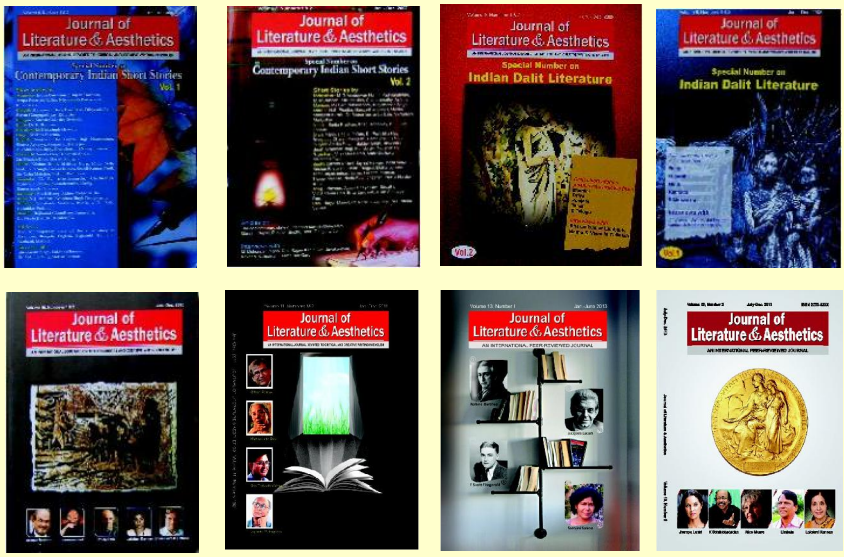

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