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Fragments against Ruins: *The Waste Land,* Adunis and the Modern Arab Imagination

A.K. Muneer

Abstract

One hundred years on, T. S. Eliot's 1922 modernist magnum opus *The Waste Land* continues to intrigue and baffle readers. For all its mind-boggling elusiveness—or rather precisely because of it—the poem has travelled apace across continents as well as enjoyed a phenomenal and enduring afterlife, thereby serving as a formidable progenitor of what might be termed "global literary modernism." At this centenary moment, this article takes the opportunity to elucidate how Eliot in general and his ground-breaking poem in particular have captured the imagination of modernist Arab poets, with a focus on the oeuvre of the influential modernist Syrian-Lebanese poet Ali Ahmad Said, better known by his pen-name Adunis (Adonis). In so doing, the article shall illuminate not only how *The Waste Land* has influenced modernist Arabic poetry but also how the poem's afterlife has equally been shaped and transformed by its reception and creative "dislocation" by modernist Arab poets, among others.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot; *The Waste Land*; Adunis; Arabic modernism; New Poetry

Introduction

"These fragments I have shored against my ruins," so goes that punchy yet sonorous iambic pentameter raging towards the end of T. S. Eliot's legendary modernist masterpiece *The Waste Land*.[1] These pregnant words have come to signify not only the very internal architecture of Eliot's poem but also a general feature of modernist poetics. Fragments shored against ruins do not come to the poet as naturally as leaves would to trees—as John Keats would rather want it.[2] Such "shoring" which has given birth to a poem like *The Waste Land* could happen, as Eliot himself put it in his rave review of the Metaphysical Poets, only through a "forc[ing], [or even] disloca[ting], of language into…meaning" ("Metaphysical" 65). In other words, a modernist poem owes its birth to the painful and violent labour—on the part of the poet—of beating the "individual talent" out of "tradition" in a way that does

not reduce the one to the other. No wonder, then, that Eliot is a flamboyantly "difficult" poet who made a virtue out of courting difficulty and fashioning poetry out of broken images and fragmentary experience. His de-romanticization of "simplicity" in favour of a revitalizing of "difficulty" entailed a deep distrust of "emotion recollected in tranquillity," "spontaneity" or "naturalness" as the wellspring of creative spirit. The reasoning behind his conviction is unexceptionable in itself:

> Poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity…must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning (Eliot, "Metaphysical" 65; original emphasis).

Notably, instead of regarding difficulty as a problem to be solved, Eliot here confidently confronts it head-on and flaunts it as the very condition of possibility of modernist poetry. This notion of difficulty as a positive good which enables rather than disables creativity in the face of the variety and complexity of the modern experience is a much-needed corrective to a facile, at times vulgarized, understanding of style as simplicity. As Jacques Derrida observes in a different context—in a manner which is redolent of Eliot's principle of difficulty:

> One shouldn't complicate things for the pleasure of complicating, but one should also never simplify or pretend to be sure of such simplicity where there is none. If things were simple, word would have gotten around. (as quoted in Salmon 127)

Along with the notion of difficulty, the question of "tradition," no matter how counterintuitive that might sound to modern ears, is highly crucial to the formation of the "individual talent," as Eliot sees it—where the past and the present exist in a productive tension with each other and where the personal and the impersonal are enmeshed with each other such that the one gets transformed by the other in an agonistic rather than antagonistic fashion. As Eliot puts it, again:

> No poet…has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists…What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. ("Tradition" 38)

Thus, even as *The Waste Land* depended for its creation on tradition, it also enriched and enlarged that tradition simultaneously, and, by the same token, it seemed that it was only a matter of time before *The Waste Land* in turn would become the "tradition" from which subsequent modernist poetry was to draw inspiration and sustenance. Such work which involves dislocation of language into meaning or shaping of the individual genius on the anvil of history is not easy or does not happen as business as usual. In a letter to Geoffrey Faber written in 1936, Eliot proudly states that *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*—another monument of "high modernism" which was also published in 1922—belong to that

class of works which only a lifetime's worth of labour can bring forth and upon which the fame of their authors and of their age rests:

> "There is something an author does once (if at all) in his generation that he can't ever do again. We can go on writing stuff that nobody else could write…but the Waste Land and Ulysses remain the historic points." (as quoted in Bacigalupo 257)

Ever since its publication in 1922, *The Waste Land* has attracted a groundswell of scholarly-critical attention, having both "enchanted and devastated" generations of readers, to borrow Edmund Wilson's words (as quoted in Cuda 194).[3] According to Jewel S. Brooker and Joseph Bentley (3), the career of interpretations of *The Waste Land* is marked by roughly three "dispensations." The first period extending from the 1930s through the 1950s was dominated by the so-called New Critics, many of whom knew Eliot personally, admired him intensely and acknowledged his status as a pioneering modernist poet. The second period extending from the 1960s to the 1980s was characterized by a reaction against the first in that the period saw figures interested primarily in "literary theory" abandoning the New Critical "close reading" for "metacritical discourse" and an awareness of the open-ended nature of *The Waste Land*. Around the same time, an interest in Eliot's early philosophical writings caught on, and with the publication of the original drafts of *The Waste Land* under Valerie Eliot's supervision in 1971, a new dispensation of Eliot studies—which flamboyantly took the linguistic turn—emerged in the eighties.

Admittedly, "dialectic" is woven into the warp and woof of *The Waste Land*—in a way that symbolizes the very mode of thinking undergirding modernity as a condition, wherein unresolvable internal contradictions flourish (Ellmann and Feidelson, v-ix). For example, the poem is both personal and impersonal[4]; it is a modern poem standing on the shoulders of tradition[5]; it is about life, death, decay and resurrection—all at once; and it assembles fragments against ruins but also "shores" them in order to bolster and stabilize the ruination which it finds itself in—and force, or even dislocate, the ruins and waste into sense and meaning—thereby bringing into sharp relief the contingency of poetry and language.[6] As Helen Gardner (98) notes, "At the centre of its spiral movement," *The Waste Land* has simply "'the abyss', 'the void', or 'the overwhelming question', the terror of the unknown, which cannot finally be evaded." Yet, "its ending is not despair"; the poem draws to a close, cutting (the modern) man down to size and leaving him to confront the final possibility: "the beginning of wisdom is fear."

As a trailblazing modernist poem, *The Waste Land* has travelled beyond the Anglophone world, shaping literary modernism—or stirring the roots of dormant modernism— in various literary cultures of Asia and Africa. In what Simon Gikandi (420) calls an irony, postcolonial literatures have been made possible through "the emulation of high modernists, such as Eliot…, as formal models," even as postcolonial studies have regarded modernism as "the site of Eurocentric danger, a threat to the assumed authenticity of the cultural and literary traditions of postcolonial polities." In the rest of the article, I focus on one prominent site of

such influence that Eliot and his poetics—particularly *The Waste Land*—has commanded: modernist Arabic poetry. More specifically, I try to show Eliot's ground-breaking poem has captured the imagination of modernist Arab poets, with a focus on the oeuvre of the influential modernist Syrian-Lebanese poet Ali Ahmad Said (b. 1930), better known by his pen-name Adunis (Adonis). In so doing, my purpose is to illuminate not only how *The Waste Land* has influenced modernist Arabic poetry but also how the poem's afterlife has equally been shaped and transformed by its reception and creative "dislocation" by modernist Arab poets, among others.

The Modern Tradition and *The Waste Lands* in Arabic

The oxymoron "modern tradition" well captures the aporia at the core of modernity: as an "untraditional tradition," modernity defines itself against tradition and the past from which it draws its sustenance and *raison d'être* (Ellmann and Fiedelson vi). The modern as a historical category places itself in the past ambiguously. It is new, present, and contemporary; yet its newness, presence and contemporaneity also unfold in time and become history in their own right. Inasmuch as modernness is an index of modernity's extension, renewal and continuity of the past, it also gestures towards a break, disjunction or rupture with the past. This aporia exacerbates the vagueness and ambivalence hovering around the concept of modernism, although the same can be viewed as a resource as well. For example, Eliot exploits the practice of "quotation" in his poetry as a way to navigate and negotiate his relation to tradition. Quotation presupposes an ambivalent relationship to the past in that in it the past is both something that is to be preserved and deferred to and something that can be parodied, distorted and even violated. Thus, quotation may imply a deference to the authority of tradition as well as a challenge to, or subversion of, that authority by emptying it out through the very act of copying or imitating it. And Eliot typically quotes from tradition such that it becomes difficult for us to tell the difference, i.e., deference or challenge. The words of Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (vi) could not be more pertinent here:

> The paradoxical task of the modern imagination, whether liberated or alienated, has been to stand both inside and outside itself, to articulate its own formlessness, to encompass its own extravagant possibilities.

It is on the strength of its paradoxes and through its dialectical relationship to the past that modernist literature has been able to express the "modern mind" with imaginative authority as *The Waste Land* amply illustrates. However, the modern mind does not occupy a historical vacuum. We may come up against the "'dilemma of the modern mind'" at the beginning of *The Waste Land*, yet we find before long that in the poem "the modern dilemma is the historic dilemma," too, as Gardner (88) has pointed out. Thus, treating of an "ageless" subject, she adds, the poem demonstrates through a whole panoply of contrasting styles and historical references that "beneath both beauty and ugliness there lurks *in all classes and in all ages* boredom and terror…" (88-89, emphasis added).

Western influences on the Arabic modernist movement in the 20th century have been real rather than apparent, although the history of Arabic modernism cannot be reduced to such influences alone.[7] Clearly, modernism anywhere should not be understood as a monolithic phenomenon with fixed origins and trajectories. Rather, it is an ongoing, dynamic process "cutting through chronology" (al-Musawi 60), or, as Ellmann and Fiedelson (vi) note,

> A "modern tradition" […] reaches well back [into time]. And the more we extend our perspective in time, the less inclined we are to see this tradition as narrowly literary. What comes to mind is rather something broadly imaginative, a large spiritual enterprise…

It was around the late 1940s that modernism in Arabic poetry appeared on the scene on the initiative of a group of poets, foremost among whom were the two Iraqi poets Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (d. 1999) and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (d. 1964) and the two Syrian-Lebanese poets Adunis (b. 1930) and Yusuf al-Khal (d. 1987).[8] The two cities that witnessed this modernist outburst are Baghdad and, most importantly, Beirut.[9] By the mid-1950s, the latter rose to become the centre of Arab intellectual life, attracting exiles and émigrés from across the Arab world. And of the magazines and journals which served as the nerve centre of Arab modernist movement, *Shi¿r* stands out. Called simply "Poetry" in a minimalist and austere way—after the American magazine *Poetry*—this flagship magazine was launched by Yusuf al-Khal in Beirut in 1957, defined the problematic of modernism for the Arab poet and even gave birth to the so-called "*Shi¿r* poets" who included the preeminent Arab modernist poet Adunis as well (Creswell, *City of Beginnings* 1-4).

These Arabic modernists, also known as the "Free Verse poets," all shared the need for writing poetry in opposition to a tradition, dismantling old poetic principles and introducing new poetic standards. Their verse turned more and more metapoetic, drawing attention to the very act of poetic craft and they exploited the possibilities of prose poetry against the awe-inspiring genre of the Arabic qasida as they sought to "force," or "dislocate," tradition into meanings relevant to their times. And in the process, they were holding "a mirror up to the established canon of Arabic culture," to use Huda Fakhreddine's (*Metapoesis* 22) words. Notably, all the dialectics and aporias constitutive of European modernism mentioned earlier were writ large in Arabic modernism, too. In this regard, one important, if not exclusive, source of Arabic modernism had been the Western influence as the modernist movements in France, England, and the United States inspired the theoretical framework for the Free Verse movement in Arabic (Fakhreddine, "Two Projects" 40; Creswell, "The Man" 15). In Adunis's own words,

> The cultural background of Arab poets and critics has derived from two divergent traditions: that of the self (ancient, traditionalist) and that of the other (modern, European-American). These two traditions blur or blot out the values of modernity and creativity in the Arab literary heritage. (as quoted in Iskander 11)

Among such Western influences at the centre of Arabic modernism, Eliot and his modernist masterpiece *The Waste Land* are remarkable—an influence which the Arab literary critic M.

M. Badawi (224) has described as "strangely powerful."[10] It was the Egyptian poet Luwis Awad (d. 1990) who introduced Eliot to the Arabic reader in 1946 in a long article published in *al-Katib al-Misri*—an article which was intended to "'create' the Arab reader who would appreciate a 'new poetic method', which is 'obscure', 'allusive' and 'does not conform to the familiar patterns of the traditional verse…'" (Badawi 224). The influence of Eliot is not simply one that concerns the structure and style, the use of myth and allusion and of the interior monologue in modern Arabic poetry, however. As Badawi (224) notes, Eliot also instilled an anti-romanticism in younger generation of Arab poets who sought to develop "a pregnant style more capable of expressing real-life experience in all its complexity and harshness"—much like the poetic credo that Eliot wanted to establish in his famous essay on the Metaphysical Poets.

One significant way Arabic modernism flourished and sustained itself was through translation—including an "internal translation" of (Arab) tradition as well as a translation of European and American poetry (Creswell, *City of Beginnings* 15). Such acts of translation self-consciously sought to radically reorganize the Arabic literary field by "making it new" in modernist, cosmopolitan vein. *The Waste Land*, translated into Arabic by the pioneering Arab modernists themselves, have exercised a huge impact on modern Arabic poetry such that the Arabic language boasts multiple "*Waste Lands*." The poem, as Ghareeb Iskander (12-13) suggests, has struck a powerful chord with modernist Arabic poetry both thematically and stylistically. Of Arabic translations of *The Waste Land*, mention may be made of the two which were published in the ground-breaking *Shi'r* magazine: the translation by Adunis and Yusuf al-Khal was published in 1958, whereas Luwis 'Awa

's translation came out in 1968. An obituary of Eliot, probably penned by al-Khal and Adunis together, was published in *Shi'r* in 1967, two years after the poet's death, wherein we read: "*We were badly in need of Eliot, because the renaissance of Arabic poetry needed the things that we learned from him*…" (as quoted in Iskander 27; original emphasis). This statement serves to stamp Eliot's formidable legacy on modernist Arabic poetry unmistakably.

In a way that best captures the "fragments against ruins" motif at the core of *The Waste Land,* the title of the poem in these translations has been rendered into Arabic as *Al-Ard al-Kharab*, where "*kharab*" strongly connotes "ruination." The Adunis-Khal translation was better received than other translations and their collaboration also bore a striking resemblance to the Eliot-Pound collaboration that gave us *The Waste Land* in the first place. For all its flaws, their popular translation made an effort to recreate *The Waste Land* in Arabic and thus offered the young generation of Arab poets an influential model for "New Poetry" in Arabic, which upended the qasida form by eschewing the two hemistich verses ("*bait"*) and producing the Free Verse poem beyond the strict parameters of poetic form and structure.

"Broken Images" and "Tatters of History": *The Waste Land,* Adunis and the Contingency of Language

The preeminent figure of Arab modernism upon whom Eliot has exercised a "strangely powerful" influence is the Syrian-Lebanese poet Ali Ahmad Said writing under the pseudonym Adunis (Adonis), which he adopted in the late 1940s after the Greek-Phoenician vegetal deity of death and resurrection (Creswell, "The Man"). Born in the Syrian village of Qassabin, near Latakia in 1930, Adunis graduated in philosophy from the Syrian University in 1954 and already found himself in the thick of hectic political activity as he had joined the Social Syrian Nationalist Party as a teenager. Fearing political backlash and having already spent a year behind bars, Adonis fled Syria for Lebanon in 1956. The Lebanese capital of Beirut was, for Adonis, "a city of beginnings" (*madinat al-bidayat*) as well as "a city of inquiry" (*madinat al-bahth*) where he found himself reborn as an Arab avant-garde poet (Adunis 1993, 31-32). Adunis who left Syria at the age of twenty-six was haunted by the feeling that he was nothing but "a ruin": […] "broken, disappointed, close to despair" (as quoted in Caswell, *City of Beginnings* 21). When he set foot in Beirut, as he himself put it in his memoir *Ha Anta Ayyuha al- Waqt* [There You Are, O Time], he learnt that it is a city that was "an open and unfinished project" (*mashru' maftuh la-yaktamil*)—much like the modernist project, one might be tempted to add—and "a world getting away from the history in which it grew up…, moving in the direction of another history, not the one written for it, but one that it would write for itself" (Adunis 32-33). Beirut, he continues, was "like love: eternal beginning" and "like poetry: whose newness is ever new" (32).

A stunningly prolific writer, Adunis has published several volumes of poetry, including *Leaves in the Wind*, 1958; *Songs of Mihyar, the Damascene*, 1961; *The Book of Metamorphosis and Migration in the Regions of Day and Night*, 1965; *The Stage and the Mirrors*, 1968; and *A Time between Ashes and Roses*, 1970 (Badawi 232). He also produced manifestos championing "New Poetry" and the prose poem (which he was one of the first to introduce in Arabic), using *Shi'r* as his mouthpiece—a magazine he had helped establish in 1957 with Yusuf al-Khal. His critical views on contemporary Arabic poetry were brought together in one volume in 1972 under the title *The Time for Poetry* (*Zaman al-Shi'r*). The first essay of this collection titled "Exploring a World Constantly in Need of Exploration" articulates many of Adunis's influential pronouncements on Arabic modernism and the question of its relation to tradition and the past. The essay also captures the dialectic that defines Adunis as the quintessential Arabic modernist poet: he is the avant-garde and the conservative, the experimentalist and the revisionist-all at the same time. Adunis opens his essay thus:

> …New Poetry…is a vision…[A] vision is a jump outside the present concepts…, a change in the order of things and in the way of looking at them. Thus…New Poetry appears to be a rebellion against the forms and methods of old poetry, a rejection of its attitudes and styles which have outlived their usefulness. (as quoted in Badawi 232)

He goes on, noting:

> [New Poetry] issues from a metaphysical sensibility which feels things in a revelatory manner suitable to their essence and true nature for these cannot be apprehended by reason

> and logic but by imagination and dreams. [Thus]…New Poetry is the metaphysics of human existence. (as quoted in Badawi 233)

Adunis in this essay takes to the task the kind of Arabic poetry which is solely concerned with expressing the personal feelings or psychological problems of the poet. For him, the New Poet is on a mission to poeticize feelings which are at once subjective and objective, personal and universal. He is not a person who has something to express but the one "who creates his things in a new way." To this end, New Poetry seeks to rescue words from their ordinary, familiar sense and forces language "to say what it has not been taught to say", thereby making poetry into a rebellion against language. New Poetry thus holds a mirror onto our modern life, in all its "absurdity and dislocation," and thrives on the absence of logic, the presence of seemingly senseless imagery, and the violent yoking together of images and symbols. As he puts it rather paradoxically, "To enjoy poetry, one need not fully understand it" (Badawi 233).

Are we not getting to see an "Arab Eliot" here? It may be recalled that Eliot posits the need for shoring the fragments and broken images against his ruins and for forcing, or even dislocating, language into meaning by way of coming to grips with the complexity of modern experience in all its constitutive paradoxes—of which perhaps *The Waste Land* is the best example. Likewise, Adunis underscores the contingency of language and how New Poetry feeds on that very linguistic vulnerability in its relentless attempt to render the complexity and sensibility underlying modern life. Also, Adunis's rebellion against language entails a rebellion against tradition, which he has most forcefully enunciated in a lecture he delivered at the Rome Conference on Modem Arabic literature in 1961. In that lecture entitled "Arabic Poetry and the Problems of Innovation" (available in *The Time for Poetry*), "traditional mentality," traditional Arabic poetics and the timeless exemplarity of ancient Arabic poetry feel the full brunt of Adunis's spirited assault, and he consequently grounds the 'modernness" of New Poetry in artistic form, language and civilization. He says,

> [For] the New Arab poet to liberate himself from [the] static values in poetry and language, [he should] free himself also from these values in the whole of Arab culture…[The] modern Arab poet...should reject the static values in his ancient poetic heritage… [in order] to be able to create poetry that reaches the standard of the civilizational movement in which he lives. (as quoted in Badawi 234)

This rebellion against tradition notwithstanding, Adunis, like many modernist poets, including Eliot who saw the "individual talent" in relation to "tradition," derives his own literary authority from the very tradition he decries or at least finds inadequate to the demands of New Poetry. His poetic career can be best described as a lifelong argument with his culture—a culture which also enabled his poetry in the first instance. As Fakhreddine (*Arabic Prose Poem* 68) notes, even as Adunis has come to represent for the Arabic literary tradition "the move forward, away from the 'traditional' towards a more 'modern' and in many ways 'westernised' vision of poetry," it is "his upbringing in classical Arabic poetry and the Quran" that Adonis

himself invokes when he looks back on his cultural formation and the influences on his poetry. His exposure to Western influence—which obviously informed his understanding of, and engagement with, his own tradition—existed alongside or against his grounding in the Arabic literary and linguistic tradition, and he never ceased to be entranced by such classical Arabic poets living in the first few centuries of the Abbasid age as Abu Nuwas (d. 813), al-Mutanabbi (d. 915) and Abu Tammam (d. 1016), who in their turn were fashioning "new poetry" in the *badi'* style for their times and are known as *muhdathun*, i.e. "moderns" (Fakhreddine, *Arabic Prose Poem* 68-69).[11] Indeed, his three-volume *Anthology of Arabic Poetry* (*Diwan al-Shi'r al-Arabi*, 1964-68) and four-volume work of criticism *The Static and the Dynamic* (*Al-Thabit wa al-Mutahawwil,* 1974) seek to reconstruct a "modernist" counter-movement lying buried within the classical Arabic tradition itself (Creswell "The Man").

True to type, Adunis, the chief exponent of the prose poem in Arabic, has crafted increasingly self-reflexive and metapoetic verses. Consequently, the contingency of language in the face of the paradoxes of modern experience—that is, questions as to how language both enables and disables, both empowers and deprives, or how it is both adequate and inadequate at once—figures predominantly in his poetry. This, as noted earlier, has been a central motif of *The Waste Land* as well. Let us now turn to a few of Adunis's poems by way of illustration.

Of his prolific oeuvre, Adunis's 1961 volume *Songs of Mihyar, the Damascene* (*Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi*), arguably his masterpiece, revolves around the legendary figure of Mihyar, the medieval Arab poet, who is moving adrift in a ruined landscape and proclaims a new way of being. In the poem "The New Covenant" (*al-'Ahd al-Jadid*) from this collection, we read about Mihyar:

> He does not know how to speak this speech.
> He does not know the voice of deserts.
> For he is a seer, stony-slumbered.
> For he is freighted with far-off tongues.
> There he is, advancing under the ruins
> in a climate of new letters,
> offering his poetry to the melancholy winds,
> rough and enchanting like brass.
>
> For he is a tongue roiling among the masts.
> For he is the knight of strange words. (tr. Caswell, *City of Beginnings* 96)

In the prose poem "The Magician of Dust" (*Sahir al-Ghubar*) from the *Songs,* we come up against what Gardner (84) calls the "sense of the abyss" lying at the heart of *The Waste Land*:

I carry my abyss and I walk. I erase the lapsing paths and I open pathways long like the air and the soil. Of my steps I create enemies of mine enemies that are my equals. My pillow is the abyss, and the ruins are my intercessors. I am death, truly. (tr. Fakhreddine, *Arabic Prose Poem* 79)

Such "abysmal" motifs are very prominent in Adunis's poetry in general. And, once again, the "linguistic turn" and "metapoesis" find their most forceful expression in a long prose poem titled *Singular in Plural Form* (*Mufrad bi-Sighat al-Jam¿*), first published in 1977—a poem which is "an exposition of poetry in its plurality, in all of its proliferations," a poem where "transgression" reigns supreme, "overstepping boundaries and coming out into a space open unto all possibilities (Fakhreddine, *Arabic Prose Poem* 84-85). The poem which presents the very body of language is made up of four main sections. Writing which is "wound" in Adunis's scheme of things penetrates the "body" which is language and strives to build it anew. In the fourth section "Semiology" (*Simiya'*),

The earth was not a wound
It was a body
How is it possible to travel between wound and body
How is it possible to settle?

The wound began to transform into words
And the body to become a question '!
..and a blade of grass broke, from which a butterfly emerged
from whose head a bud the colour of lust emerged (tr. Fakhreddine, *Arabic Prose Poem* 94-93)

The wound at long last "transforms into words," having disturbed and cut deep into the surface of things. One might ask: What better *shoring* of *fragments* against *ruins*?

Conclusions

Finally, it would be advisable to end where we began. We may conclude our peregrinations through Adunis's poetry—which are bits and pieces picked up from the unending abyss and the perennial ruins constitutive of modern life—with a quick look at the poem "Time" (*al-Waqt*), where we return to Beirut, the city, which, once called a "city of beginnings" by Adunis, now resembles an "unreal city"—not unlike London in *The Waste Land*—in the wake of a bloody and devastating civil war. This poem from *The Book of the Siege* (*Kitab al-Hisar,* 1985) reads like an "urban drama" whose protagonist is the "walking poet" who finds himself on the bleeding streets of the besieged city of Beirut (June 4 - October 25, 1982), assaulted as he is by a barrage of warring images and sensations:

Carrying the seeds of time my head a tower of fire:
what is this blood sinking deep into the sand, what is this decline?
Tell us, O flames of the present, what shall we say?
The tatters of history in my throat

on my face the victim's scars
how unavailing has language become how narrow the alphabet's doors. (tr. Amyuni 173)

The only muses that the poet could turn to in such a horrible and maddening situation are the "flames of the present," and with the "tatters of history" in his throat, he is made to see the contingency of language and how narrow "the alphabet's doors" have been all along. Yet, right from the "ruins" and "the dark abyss"—as "darkness" and "madness" rage about him—the poet feels the need to pull himself together and break open the "narrow alphabet's doors" in order to forge new beginnings:

Thus I draw wisdom from its source
I shout: welcome my remains welcome my defeat
tomorrow death will extinguish me but I won't die
tomorrow I shall go forth from light to another light.
True, weaker am I than a thread yet nobler than a god.
Thus I begin (tr. Amyuni 178)

Once again, the fragments have been shored against ruins. The "flames of the present" have been channelized towards the refashioning of futures. As Mona Amyuni (182) has suggested, "dismembered Beirut is transformed into the launching-pad of the poet who walks on it for a while, to heat up his brain, his nerves, all his senses, in preparation for taking off." Both Eliot and Adunis in their different ways bring home to us how modernist poetry is an act of contingency—of cobbling together the fragments populating the modern lifescape—perhaps the only redeeming feature of which is that such repair takes place in the manner of *bricolage*.

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Footnotes

[1] Part of the title of my article, "fragments against ruins," is adapted from this line (*The Waste Land,* l. 430).

[2] Keats famously said, "If poetry comes not as naturally as leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all" (Letters, To John Taylor, 27 February 1818).

[3] For an overview of contemporary responses to *The Waste Land* and a history of its reception in the twentieth century and beyond, see Cuda, "Coda". For a study of *The Waste Land*'s production, transmission and reception, see Rainey, *Revisiting*.

[4] Cf. "Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, as an important bit of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling," Eliot, Epigraph to *Facsimile.*

[5] Cf. Eliot, "Tradition".

[6] Cf. l. 430, *The Waste Land*. [7] Critiquing any simplistic account of Western influence and emulation, Huda Fakhreddine (*Metapoesis*; "Two Projects") has persuasively argued that Arabic modernism can be best appreciated through a juxtaposition of twentieth century Arab modernist poets (the Free Verse poets) with the earlier Abbasid *muhdathun* (modern) poets in that both these generations of poets were negotiating in different ways with the formidable tradition of the Arabic qasida (ode) and introduced new styles and idioms.

[8] On modernism in Arabic poetry, see Badawi, *Critical Introduction* and al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry*.

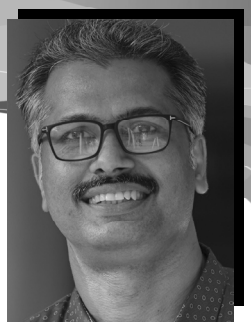
[9] On Baghdad and its place in the career of Arabic modernism with a focus on TS Eliot's influence, see Jawad, *Eliot in Baghdad*; on Beirut as the nerve centre of the Arab modernist movement, see Creswell, *City of Beginnings*.

[10] Also see al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry.*

[11] For a contrasting yet identical account of how tradition was viewed by both Eliot and Adunis, which also points up the paradoxes of modernism, see Nsiri, "Question of Tradition".

Aijaz Ahmad and the Myth of Marx's Orientalism

Babu Rajan P.P.



Abstract

This essay written in the wake of Aijaz Ahmed's demise while trying to take stock of Ahmed's contribution to literary and political theories, zeroes in on one key idea, namely Marxist Orientalism. It understands that Aijaz's criticism of Said is one of the substantial critiques of Orientalism. It then through Aijaz tries to argue that Said's critique of Marx as an orientalist is nothing much more than a rhetorical flourish to add heft to his outstanding theorization of orientalism. It also throws light on Said's later sloppy and supercilious rejoinder to Aijaz's argumentation, which only served to confirm the validity of the Aijaz's critique.

Keywords: Marxism, Orientalism, Marxist Orientalism, Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmed.

Aijaz Ahmad who died on 9 March 2022 at Irvine in California was one of the distinguished political and literary theorists from India. He was Chancellor's Professor in School of Humanities, Department of Comparative Literature at University of California, Irvine. Chancellor's Professor is a title of distinction used by the university for only the most outstanding scholars and researchers. Prabhat Patnaik, the economist and his friend, remembers him "as an outstanding Marxist thinker of our time." "He was what can only be described as a classical Marxist who strongly resisted efforts to import what he considered to be alien and incompatible concepts into Marxism, in the name of making it more realistic, thereby creating eclectic admixtures." As Akheel Bilgrami in a commemorative talk said Aijaz's death is a tremendous loss for both the Indian Left and the international Left.

Aijaz's scholarship encompassed several disciplines like literature and literary theory, philosophy, history, politics and political economy. The important works of Aijaz are *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992), *A World To Win: Essays on the Communist Manifesto* co-authored with Irfan Habib and Prabhat Patnaik (1999), *Lineages of the Present:*

Ideological and Political Genealogies of Contemporary South Asia (2001), *On Communalism and Globalization: Offensives of the Far Right* – (2002), *Iraq, Afghanistan and the Imperialism of Our Time* (2004), *In Our Time: Empire, Politics, Culture* (2007). Of these the first one, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* is considered to be his most distinguished work. The work was initially published by Verso in 1992 in its Radical Thinkers Series and later by Oxford University Press in 1994. This year is the thirtieth anniversary of the book as well. According to Georges Van Den Abbeele, Dean of the School of Humanities, University of California, Aijaz was one of India's leading intellectuals and a world-recognized theorist of contemporary culture and politics, adding "We are thrilled to have such a respected public intellectual join our school."

Aijaz was born into a rich landed family at Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh in 1941. In an interview, he nostalgically remembers having been hoisted on his uncle's shoulders as India's flag was unfurled on Independence day in 1947. His parents were not in favour of either the Muslim League or India's partition and "they were sort of Nehruvian Congress." They stayed into the mid-1950s in India, but by that time they felt isolated because of the "pressure of communalization." In his interview with Tariq Ali he remembered the Hindu right becoming dominant in the politics of Uttar Pradesh and Nehru's complaint that no one in the party listened to him and that the whole of the party in Uttar Pradesh became communalized. Under those kinds of pressures, Aijaz's family left India for Pakistan leaving Aijaz in India for two years to finish his matriculation. Aijaz remained in Pakistan involved in politics and other things but somewhere in the 1980s he got fed up with the situation there and wanted to return to India. As Aijaz himself said he was one of the very few who could claim both India and Pakistan as his country. For that he had to surrender his Pakistani passport and receive US passport and he lived in India for around twenty years teaching in Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Milia and at last Asian School of Journalism at Chennai. After the 2014 elections when BJP came to power, he felt uncomfortable with the situation in India and moved to US in 2016 when University of California invited him with a full time teaching position.

When one takes stock of Aijaz's contribution, his analyses of capitalism, political systems, Hindutva and other communalisms, fascism, secularism, role of the Left, significance of Marx are all important. His text *In Theory,* now in its thirtieth anniversary is significant in multiple ways. It is an analysis of and argument against major positions of colonial discourse like Orientalism and critiques concepts like "Third World," "Third World Literature" and "Indian Literature." Besides this work is an incisive, though not detailed, critique of elitism and apoliticism of high theory since the nineteen sixties from a classical Marxist point of view. It in short is a discussion of class, nation and literature as it appeared in a few seminal and defining positons in contemporary literary theory. Among other things *In Theory* is also a defence of Karl Marx in relation to Orientalism and, linked to this, his positon on India with a chapter on "Marx on India, a Clarification." This clarification is very important because this is part of the propaganda against Marx, as a political philosopher, from both the right and

liberal circles, which to some extent even influenced public consciousness, especially in places like India. That is probably why Terry Eagleton asks "Was ever a thinker so travestied?" in his *Why Marx was Right* (239). Said was one of the flagbearers of the trend of reading Marx as a racist. This clarification is necessary because "Said's position on this matter is both authoritative and influential . . ." (223). This paper is intended as an exposition of Aijaz's defence of Marx, which of course has nothing dogmatic or idolatry about it. In this exposition it is, as suggested earlier, Edward Said who is at the other end, whom Aijaz is critiquing. Said, as it appears in *Orientalism*, treats Marx who is a very profound thinker and complex writer in a very offhand way, as a mere Orientalist lumping him together with "nineteenth century . . . writers as Renan, Lane, Flaubert, Caussin de Perceval . . . and Lamartine" complaining about their "generalization about 'the Orient' " (231). Just for one thing, unlike Marx, many of these authors wrote significant disquisitions on the Orient like Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (15).

Marx, for Said is to invoke and reinvoke conveniently only to be dismissed repeatedly beginning with the epigraph, or put differently "he detaches a certain passage from its context, inserts it into the Orientalist archive and moves in different, even contradictory, directions," as Ahmad says (223). Said with his first of the two epigraphs to *Orientalism*, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" from Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* already achieves the "cheering effect" that he wants his prospective reader to have even before venturing into the book. The phrase germanely comes from Engels writings on scurrilous polemics – of which the intention is to have cheering effect alone — against Marx from the book *Marx and Engels On Literature and Art* (113-14). Besides this deployment of Marx is crucial, he could not have foregrounded a more famous thinker than Marx, to vindicate his thesis of Orientalism. Said on the whole mentions Marx around two score places in *Orientalism.* But the main thing that he returns very often is Marx's statement in *The Eighth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Said's only real engagement with him is in the second chapter "Orientalist Structures and Restructures" spanning two to three pages, and to this is directed the core of Aijaz's rejoinder.

Let me put aside, for the time being at least, my analysis of the book *Orientalism* vis a vis Marx's "Orientalism" and discuss Aijaz's critique of the so-called "Marxist racism," ("racism Said ascribes to Marx" Ahmed 225) imputed mainly by Edward Said, though Said never used that phrase as such in *Orientalism*. Aijaz reminds us that most of the scholarship until 1970s in anti-imperialism was by Marxists themselves or by those who were ready to accept their Marxist affinities, which anyway continued. But the mainstream scholarship either ignored this or branded it as simple-minded or propagandist. However, the poststructuralist critic would do this in an equally strident way but with a different language, ". . . one now declares that the work of that kind was too positivistic, too deeply contaminated with empiricism, historicism, the problematics of realism and representability, the metaphysical belief in origin, agency, truth" (221).

Recognizing Said's achievement in bringing the question of cultural imperialism to the centre of the ongoing literary debates Aijaz says the "notable feature, underlying all the ambivalences, is the anti-Marxism and the construction of a whole critical apparatus for defining a postmodern kind of anti-colonialism. In this Said was certainly among the first, and a setter of trends." Aijaz continues:

> For buttressing the proposition that Marxism is not much more than a 'modes-of-production narrative' and that its opposition to colonialism is submerged in its positivistic 'myth of progress', it is always very convenient to quote one or two journalistic flourishes from those two dispatches on India, the first and the third, which Marx wrote for the *New York Tribune* in 1853 and which are the most anthologized on this topic: 'The British Rule in India' and 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India'. That Said would quote the most-quoted passage, the famous one on 'the unconscious tool', is predictable, and there is no evidence in *Orientalism* that he has come to regard this as a representative passage after some considerable engagement with Marx's many and highly complex writings on colonialism as such and on the encounter between non-capitalist and capitalist societies. This is certainly in keeping with Said's characteristically cavalier way with authors and quotations, but here it gains added authority from the fact that it is by now a fairly familiar procedure in dealing with Marx's writings on colonialism. (222)

The key Indian historians had said very crucial things about Marx's cryptic writings on India and Said in his dismissive hauteur was indifferent or possibly ignorant of them. This omission becomes very crucial for Aijaz, for one source one is to look for a discussion of that sort of Orientalism is very superb anti-imperialist Indian historians. Aijaz is not addressing the whole issue of Marx's writings on India but he is only examining Said's cursory way of dealing with this complex and highly contentious matter.

Aijaz very rightly points out the odd one out status of Marx in a host of other writers who were English and French literary travellers, among whom Said pigeonholed Marx, including Edward Lane, Nerval, Flaubert, Lamartine, Burton and others. These writings are relevant as testimonials while Marx's writings cannot have any such claims, nor had he ever visited any place south of France. For Aijaz, Said's contribution was "that he fashioned a rhetoric of dismissal" (224) and in that rhetoric there was no accommodation for other complexities of Marx's thought.

Aijaz reproduces the following two famous passages quoted from Marx in *Orientalism*:

> Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. . .(sic)

> England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.

He then goes on to make a detailed analysis of what Marx writes here in these passages. Marx's denunciation of pre-colonial society in India was only matching to his denunciation of Europe's feudal past, or of its absolute monarchies. Marx's characterization of caste system in the Indian villages as "restraining the human mind with the smallest possible compass, making it an unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies," Aijaz reminds us, were a virtual paraphrase of his comments on the European peasantry as being mired in the idiocy of rural life. Ambedkar wrote about caste system as a "diabolical contrivance to suppress and enslave humanity". Besides whether humankind could fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia though "objectionable to the postmodern mind" is derived from the decent traditions in the Enlightenment with its belief in the unity, universality and the actual possibility of human liberation (225). For Marx the certain progressive role of colonialism was linked to the progressive role of capitalism itself, when compared to what preceded that, which he wanted Germany to achieve. Even Rammohan Roy had recommended the settling of British farmers and insertion of British capital in India's economy to enable the constructive role British colonialism could play. From a historical point of view Marx's journalistic writings on India were conjectural and speculative rather than theoretical. These speculations were strengthened both by the positivist faith in an always-progressive role of science and technology and historical experiences from United States where a powerful capitalist society was emerging out of a colonial situation. Marx's critique of Indian situation need to be viewed against the whole range of these complexities, though, Aijaz concedes, his understanding of the Indian society was on some crucial points factually incorrect (225-27). Aijaz quotes form a letter that Marx wrote in 1881, that is towards the end of his life, to Danielson where Marx talks about the extreme economic exploitation of India by Britain in which the value of commodities that India had annually send over to England amounted *"to more than total sum of the income of the sixty million of agricultural and industrial labourers of India."* For Marx this was "a bleeding process with a vengeance" (228). Between the dispatches of 1853 and the letter of 1881, the great Rebellion of 1857 took place and Marx welcomed it as a "national revolt" (229).

Edward Said wrote an Afterword to the 1995 edition of his book and this came out three years after the publication of *In Theory*. If Said dismissed Marx wholesale in his *Orientalism* as a mere orientalist, Aijaz the one who pointed out this was subjected to a more severe negligence and sloppiness:

> I was either upbraided for not having paid closer attention to Marx (the passages in my own book that were most singled out by dogmatic critics in the Arab world and India, for in-

> stance, were those on Marx's own Orientalism), whose system of thought was claimed to have risen above his obvious prejudices, or I was criticized for not appreciating the great achievements of Orientalism, the West, etc. As with defenses of Islam, recourse to Marxism or "the West" as a coherent total system seems to me to have been a case of using one orthodoxy to shoot down another (*Orientalism* 339).

It is obvious from the above passage, the only words kept apart and deemed fit for Aijaz's critique, that Said was not in a positon to creatively engage with the critique by Aijaz. Said instead further engages in rhetorical flourishes against Marx and could not even differentiate Marx's so-called "obvious prejudices" and the outstanding intellectual project of Marxism, probably misunderstanding it as a theory for everything, characterizing it as "one orthodoxy," — misinterpreting or even misunderstanding it as a monolithic discourse — even as he dismisses Aijaz without even naming him, and defining him with the totalizing and disparaging appellation, "dogmatic critics." One needs to recall here what Said's own intellectual guru, Foucault – "to whose work I am greatly indebted" says Said (23) — says about Marx. Marx for him "is not simply the author of *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital*," but one along with only Freud established "the endless possibility of discourse" (Leitch 1405). Foucault therefore calls Marx and Freud as " ' initiators of discursive practices' ." "The distinctive contribution of these authors [Marx and Freud] is that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts" (Leitch 1404). They "not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly they made possible certain number of differences. They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their "own, which nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated" (1405). "Finally, there are no 'false' statements in the work of these initiators: those statements considered inessential or 'prehistoric', in that they are associated with another discourse, are simply neglected in favour of the more pertinent aspects of their work" (Leitch 1406).

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Reinstating Romantic Poetry: Geoffrey Hartman's Hermeneutic Adventure with William Wordsworth

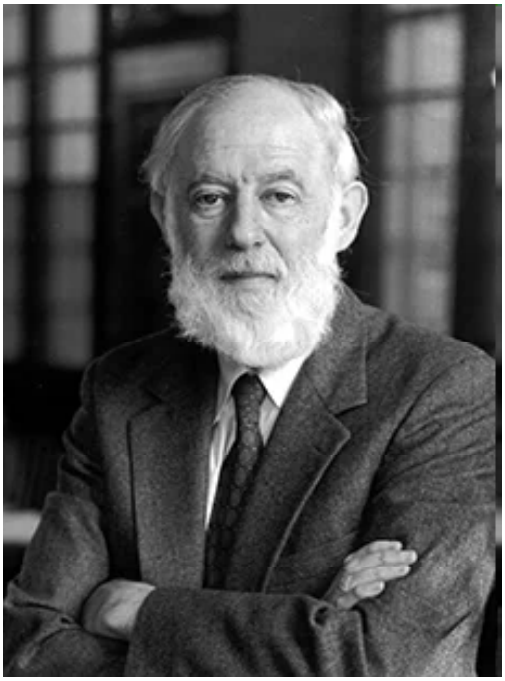
Manoj S.

Abstract

Geoffrey Hartman played an important role in the reinstatement of Romantic poetry in the second half of the twentieth century. Hartman's work on Romantic poetry helped to shift critical opinion towards a more positive view of the Romantic poets and their work. At the time Hartman was writing, Romantic poetry was often dismissed as overly emotional and lacking in intellectual rigor. William Wordsworth occupies a central place in Geoffrey Hartman's hermeneutic criticism. Hartman has written extensively on Wordsworth, devoting two, full-length books to him besides a long chapter in *The Unmediated Vision*. Hartman links the poetry to the poet's philosophical significance and establishes the view that Wordsworth's poetry has the radical power to alter our thinking. He identifies Wordsworth's faith in what he calls "the principle of generosity" as being central to the poet's experience and vision. Hartman has abandoned the familiar approach and phraseology of traditional Wordsworth criticism characterized by terms such as pantheism, nature-worship, sublimity and eloquence and has substituted them with the terms imagination, cognition, perception, "the dialectic of mind and Nature," "the principle of generosity" and reciprocity between man and the external world. Hartman's sustained use of this new set of critical terms is the result of his attempt to blend a philosophical approach with literary analysis. Hartman's attention is steadily fixed on the way the poet's self-consciousness develops on the basis of a conception of the interactive relationship between mind and nature. Hartman investigates this relationship not in abstract intellectual terms, but in terms of poetic embodiment manifested in the poem's verbal texture and coherence of form. Hartman's hermeneutic genius is revealed at its best in his study of Wordsworth's poetry.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, anti-formalism, anti-modernism, phenomenology, philosophy.

Geoffrey Hartman the American literary critic and scholar in his book *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* offers a view of romantic poetry that emphasizes the relationship between the poet and the reader. According to Hartman, romantic poetry is characterized by a crisis of representation, in which the poet struggles to find a language that can adequately express his or her experience of the world. Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, were concerned with the relationship between the self and the natural world, and sought to create a poetry that could capture the immediacy of experience. Hartman argues that romantic poetry is fundamentally dialogic, in that it invites the reader to participate in the poet's struggle to find a language for experience. In Hartman's view, romantic poetry is not simply a reflection of the poet's inner experience, but is shaped by cultural and historical forces. The romantic poet is both an individual and a product of his or her time, and the poetry reflects both the particularity of the poet's experience and the broader cultural context in which it is produced. Hartman's view of romantic poetry emphasizes its complexity and dialogic nature, and sees it as a form of literature that invites active engagement and interpretation on the part of the reader.



Geoffrey Hartman

Geoffrey Hartman played an important role in the reinstatement of Romantic poetry in the twentieth century. Hartman's work on Romantic poetry helped to shift critical opinion towards a more positive view of the Romantic poets and their work. At the time Hartman was writing, Romantic poetry was often dismissed as overly emotional and lacking in intellectual rigor. However, Hartman argued that Romantic poetry was a sophisticated and complex form of literature that required careful analysis and interpretation. One of the key contributions that Hartman made to the study of Romantic poetry was his emphasis on the role of language and representation in the poetry. Hartman saw the Romantic poets as engaged in a struggle to find a language that could adequately express their experience of the world, and he showed how this struggle was reflected in their poetry. He saw the poetry as an invitation to the reader to engage in a process of interpretation that was both personal and communal. Hartman's work helped to shift critical opinion towards a more positive view of Romantic poetry, and his emphasis on the complexity and sophistication of the poetry helped to reestablish Romanticism as a major literary movement in English literary history.

No poet has engaged Hartman's imagination and critical intelligence so profoundly and consistently as the romantic poet William Wordsworth. The largest section in Hartman's first book *The Unmediated Vision* is devoted to a study of Wordsworth and his poetry from a remarkably fresh point of view, and one of his later books *The Fateful Question of Culture* contains a central chapter on Wordsworth as a cultural icon. In between, Hartman has published two full-length works of major importance on the poet – *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* and *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*. In the early 1950s Wordsworth had been an undervalued, largely neglected poet and the existing body of criticism on his work was mostly concerned with his romantic ideology, his nature-worship, his transcendental pantheism as well as with controversial issues like his insularity, his moral consciousness, his anti-modernism, the causes of his poetic decline, or his political apostasy. Hartman examines Wordsworth in an altogether different critical frame, seeing his poetry as the expression of a dialectical interaction between self and nature, between self-consciousness and imagination, between the thinking subject and the object of its contemplation. This is essentially a philosophical position, influenced by Husserlian phenomenology, but in extending it to literary commentary and elucidation Hartman is guided by his perception of the textual quality of Wordsworth's individual poems as well as the quality of the poet's work as a whole. Hartman's critical procedure was akin to the contemporary (twenty first century) literary critic Vincent B. Leitch whose approach "blends close reading, ideology critique, and cultural critique with intimate critique and pleasure reading … for balance, range, and relevance" (33).

The New Critics who judged poetry in terms of its metaphysical quality, intellectual toughness, impersonality and tonal variation did not accord a high place to Wordsworth in their poetic canon. They saw him as representing an anti-modernist tradition in British poetry. Their facile identification of romanticism with the subjective, the sublime, the abstract or the inspirational also prevented them from gaining a full understanding of Wordsworth's achievement either as an individual poet or as a poet of a particular historical moment. Hartman does not seek to defend Wordsworth against the strictures of the New Critics either by using their own terms, or by using their method of verbal exegesis. He adopts a positive approach to Wordsworth by linking him with modern poets and Continental philosophers on the one hand, and by tracing his poetic antecedents through Milton to Spenser and the Renaissance, on the other. It is this basic perspective which combines philosophy with literary criticism that gives unity and coherence to the large body of Hartman's writings on Wordsworth over a period of more than four decades.

In *The Unmediated Vision* Hartman abstains from referring to the philosophic basis of his criticism, especially in the early chapters, where he is engaged in an "experiment" in confronting poetry directly. In chapter V, however, while discussing the identity between perception and creativity, he dwells at length on the ideas of Descartes, St. Thomas and Valery to show that the desire for perception "need not in the modern poet involve a denial of the necessity of sense experience or the reality of sense object" (153). The notion of unmediated vision, the theoretical premise on which the whole book is based, is derived from Hegel's *The*

Phenomenology of Mind, although Hartman does not make particular mention of phenomenology in the chapters dealing with Wordsworth or the other poets. In *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* his phenomenological position becomes more explicit in his categories of thinking and mode of analysis as well as in his critical vocabulary. By the time Hartman publishes *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* he comes to see the philosophical significance of Wordsworth's poetry much more clearly. He links the poet's originality with his philosophic significance – "So startling yet undramatic is Wordsworth's originality that it is hard not to see him as an inaugural figure for both modern philosophy and poetry." (xxvi). He goes on to add that if the intellectual climate changes, "Wordsworth could be taken seriously by a philosopher" and that a deep study of his poetry would make a difference in our thinking (xxvii).

This approach, which in the absence of a more appropriate term can be called "philosophical," distinguishes Hartman's hermeneutic commentary on Wordsworth from the works of F.A. Pottle, Northrop Frye and M.H. Abrams who strove to revive Romantic poetry immediately before Hartman and Harold Bloom came on the scene. Characterizing Hartman's approach as philosophical does not mean that he brings a set of external criteria to the reading of the poetry. It is his sympathetic, sensitive and lingering response to Wordsworth's poetry that prompts him to realize its radical power to alter our thinking. For Hartman reading the poetry and thinking about it are not different acts. As Donald G. Marshall has accurately stated in his "Foreword" to *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*, "one simply wants to say he [i.e., Hartman] is *thinking* with and about the poem. Reading and thinking are here one and inseparable" (ix).

Hartman finds a peculiar delight in the very act of interpretation – interpretation which is textually justified. His own testament in this case is important:

> Then I began to eat of the tree of knowledge, so that my eyes were multiplied, and where I had seen but a single *text* I now perceived the formidable legion of variant, if not discordant, interpretations […] Having tasted these multiple modes of interpretation, I fell in love with the art of interpreting and could not return to my original state. (*The Unmediated Vision* ix)

Hartman's interpretation of Wordsworth's poetry constitutes a major part of what is most original and brilliant in his hermeneutic practice. In fact, with his work on Wordsworth he has brought hermeneutics to the centre stage of literary criticism. His interpretive commentary of the poetry of Keats, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens and Valery is no less important, but it lacks the scope and comprehensiveness of his writings on Wordsworth.

In *The Unmediated Vision* Hartman links Wordsworth with Hopkins, Rilke and Valery as poets expressing the dilemma of modern poetry which "results from an almost total break from Judeo-Christian traditions" (xi). Each of these poets attempted a pure representation "distinguished from that of Jewish or medieval Christian thought in that its motive and terminal object is identified not with the God of the Testaments, but with Nature, the body or human consciousness" (154). Wordsworth, like the other poets associated with him, perceived

the immediate experience of the world unmediated by the Christian theology (as in the case of the Renaissance writers). The fact that Wordsworth has chosen "to stay bound by experience" is an important consideration for Hartman (xi), as it shows that the poet does not use his imagination for the celebration of the abstract or for the idealization of the apocalyptic impulse.

Hartman's method in his study of Wordsworth has been to reveal "a unified multiplicity of meaning" in the text (45). He moves from an exposition of the literal meaning of the text to an unveiling of the deeper levels of its significance, illuminated by the poet's own theory of imagination, creativity and perception. Hartman demonstrates that Wordsworth's concepts "of the imagination as creative and of the poem as creation reveal a consummation at once mystical and commonplace" (26). By this means he opens up the possibility of reading Wordsworth in new ways. He has abandoned the familiar approach and phraseology of traditional Wordsworth criticism characterized by terms such as pantheism, nature-worship, sublimity and eloquence, and has substituted them with the terms imagination, cognition, perception, "the dialectic of mind and Nature," "the principle of generosity" and reciprocity between man and the external world. Hartman's sustained use of this new set of critical terms is obviously the result of his attempt to blend a philosophical approach with literary criticism in his analysis of Wordsworth's poetry. In his study of Hopkins and Valery the terms vary in response to the thematic and rhetorical concerns of the individual poets, but the critical approach is essentially the same.

Hartman's interpretive method shows a marked departure from the traditional method of Wordsworth criticism. He starts with a chosen individual poem or the vital part of a poem, moves on to the rest of the poet's work, the poet's sources, the influence on his works, his relations with previous poets and then returns to a full interpretation of the original poem with a deepened insight, perception and sensitivity, both literary and intellectual. In the process he also throws new light on the general characteristics, the persistent concerns and the peculiar strength which distinguish the work of the poet as a whole. For instance, he underscores "the radical unity of Wordsworth's great works, of the great Ode, "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude* (*The Unmediated Vision* 40), and draws attention to "the pervasiveness of the concept and imagery of continuous revelation in Wordsworth" (*The Unmediated Vision* 30). He dwells on "Wordsworth's vision of the earth as an ocean at ebb tide" and points out the centrality of the sound and image of water in his poetry (*The Unmediated Vision* 32).

It is worth noting that Hartman does not mention in the body of his essay any British or American critic of Wordsworth except Coleridge (Dr. Johnson, Basil Willey and Wilson Knight find a place in the "Bibliography and Notes"). The range of intellectual ideas which has determined his attitude towards Wordsworth is mainly European. Perhaps Hartman's is the first important study of Wordsworth within the frame of European thought and epistemological categories. This is one of the distinctive factors which account for the remarkable freshness and originality of the work. Another noticeable feature of the Wordsworth

essay, and indeed of the whole book *The Unmediated Vision*, is the sheer delight Hartman finds in the act of interpretation, the spirit of *élan* with which he pursues it. *The Unmediated Vision* records Hartman's youthful and pioneering hermeneutic adventure.

William Wordsworth

Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814, which came out ten years after *The Unmediated Vision*, carries on the preoccupations of the earlier work on a larger and more comprehensive scale. Some of the germinal ideas and insights contained in *The Unmediated Vision* are now further developed or reformulated with greater precision to provide an intellectual and aesthetic framework for the elucidation of almost the entire body of Wordsworth's poetry. Hartman is now conscious of the philosophical assumptions underlying his perspective on Wordsworth and overtly refers to his interest in phenomenology as a method of describing, analyzing and interpreting an author's work. Throughout the study he maintains a clear focus on Wordsworth's poetic account of the growth of his mind and on the poet's consciousness of his own consciousness. The emphasis on the dialectic of mind and Nature and on the reciprocity of man and the external world is also continued as being crucial to an interpretation of a large number of poems. But Hartman makes it repeatedly clear that Wordsworth was careful in emphasizing the essential autonomy of both the individual mind and Nature, in spite of their reciprocal relationship.

A significant new aspect of Hartman's preoccupation now is with the centrality of Wordsworth's concept of imagination, and with the peculiar difficulties involved in exploring its relation to his poetry. John Jones in his influential book *The Egotistical Sublime* has focused on the nature and history of Wordsworth's imagination, viewing imagination as being superior to the objects on which it is employed. Hartman, on the contrary, examines the dialectical manner in which imagination and nature interact upon each other, and identifies the particular periods in the growth of the poet's mind when he achieves his ideal of imaginative consummation. Further, Hartman lays consistent emphasis on Wordsworth's attempt during different periods of his development to humanize his originally transcendent imagination.

Another significant feature of *Wordsworth's Poetry* is that Hartman relates his judgment of the existing body of criticism on the poet, in the form of assent, disagreement or refutation. This is critically important because despite his use of continental philosophical ideas, in the matter of practical judgments he works within the context of an Anglo-American critical

tradition on Wordsworth, to which his own work is a major contribution. This is why, writing in 1970, John Purkis described the book as "the high peak of recent work" on Wordsworth (*A Preface to Wordsworth* 195)

Keats's famous phrase "egotistical sublime" strikingly expresses a fault related to what has been described as Wordsworth's "mental bombast," variously pointed out or condemned by Anna Seward, Jeffrey, Coleridge and Hazlitt. Hartman argues that Wordsworth's egotism is inseparable from "something precariously 'spiritual' which was not exhausted by his overt choice of scenes from low or rural life" (4-5). He goes on to observe that "when Wordsworth depicts an object he is also depicting himself or, rather, a truth about himself, a self-acquired revelation" (5). The basis of his spiritual life was his contact with nature which was a source of renovation and self-renewal for him. It is true that there is sometimes a disproportion between Wordsworth's emotional response to a scene and the scene itself. Hartman holds that such a disproportion is natural to a man conscious of himself, and that it links Wordsworth's precarious condition to a self-consciousness that may appear egotistical. Thus in exploring the significance of Wordsworth's poetry Hartman shifts critical attention from the qualities associated with the poet's "egotistical sublime" to the nature and growth of his self-consciousness and its "actual or hidden relation to the possibilities of self-renewal" (6).

One not very insignificant contribution of Hartman to Wordsworth criticism is that he has illuminated the connection between Wordsworth's poetry and the epitaph as a genre. In doing this he has taken the clue from Wordsworth's own observations in his *Essays upon Epitaphs*. Wordsworth has spoken of man's "desire to survive in the remembrance of his fellows" and has said that a good epitaph "ought to contain some thought or feeling belonging to the mortal or immortal part of our nature touchingly expressed" (*Wordsworth: Poetical Works* 729-731). D.D. Delvin comments, writing on the subject in detail much later than Hartman, "The epitaph emerges as the quintessential poem, or as the epitome of what Wordsworth considers the truest poetry" (115). He adds pointedly, "An epitaph continues memory to posterity; it speaks of death and a continued life in memory and hope" (118). Hartman introduces the idea of the inscription in his commentary on the last verse of "Tintern Abbey" where Wordsworth addresses Dorothy:

> What could have been an inscription, written not far from a ruined abbey and addressed implicitly to a passing Stranger, is now directed to the person at his side, "Thou my dearest Friend, My dear, dear Friend." It becomes a vow, a prayer, an inscription for Dorothy's heart, an intimation of how this moment can survive the speaker's death. (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 28)

This provides a new insight into the essential nature of the poetic mode in "Tintern Abbey." In "The Solitary Reaper" too Hartman finds a variant of the epitaph as the harvest scene strangely reminds the poet of death, loss and separation. The image of the girl and her song bring the poet into the shadow of death; but death gives way to a sense of continuance as the poem progresses:

> That shadow is lightened or subsumed as the poem proceeds, and the usual image pointing like an epitaph to the passerby is transformed into a more internal inscription testifying of continuance rather than death. (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 12)

Hartman's response to "The Solitary Reaper" here shows a finely balanced perception of what the poem says and what it suggests. The analogy of the epitaph does not prevent him from grasping the complex development of the poem's theme. On the contrary, it enables him to keep track of the subtle variations in feeling, mood and image, which constitute the life of the poem. In "The Boy of Winander" the characteristic mode of the epitaph is much more explicit than in "The Solitary Reaper" or in "Tintern Abbey." The resemblance to the epitaph is clear in the last stanza of the poem where the death of the boy is mentioned and the poet gazes at the grave in meditative silence. Hartman appropriately describes the poem as "a beautifully extended epitaph" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 20).

The second chapter of *Wordsworth's Poetry 1784-1814* entitled "Via Naturaliter Negativa" expresses a strikingly unconventional approach to *The Prelude*. Hartman deliberately avoids discussing familiar issues such as the epic quality of *The Prelude*, the philosophical sources of the book in Hartley, Godwin or Rousseau, or the many textual revisions of the poem that Wordsworth made between 1805 and 1850. The main focus of Hartman's interest is in the growth of self-consciousness in Wordsworth as pictured by the poet in the various magnificently evoked episodes in *The Prelude*. Agreeing in principle with the position developed by John Jones in *The Egotistical Sublime* and Harold Bloom in *The Visionary Company* that the Romantic poets do not have a unified vision and that they are not fundamentally nature poets, Hartman pursues in close detail Wordsworth's experience of the precarious relationship between imagination and nature.

The sources of Wordsworth's creative power depend partly on his imagination and partly on his acknowledgement of the guidance of Nature. Hartman finds an opposition between these two sources of Wordsworth's creativity:

> An unresolved opposition between Imagination and Nature prevents him from becoming a visionary poet. It is a paradox, though not an unfruitful one, that he should scrupulously record nature's workmanship, which prepares the soul for its independence from sense-experience, yet refrain to use that independence out of respect of nature. (*WP* 39)

This carefully worded statement sums up Hartman's basic approach to *The Prelude* and the problems it raises for the interpreter. It relates to the conflict between the absolute dominance of Nature on the poet's mind and the claims of imagination which is intrinsically autonomous. Hartman distinguishes between Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature in 1790 and 1804. Before 1790 Nature had sovereign power over Wordsworth's mind and feeling, on his very being. But in 1790 during his crossing of the Alps, which is described in Book VI of *The Prelude* (the 1850 version), he was greatly disappointed with Nature, and began to feel that he had a separate existence of his own, a separate consciousness. In 1804, fourteen

years after the event, he has the revelation that the higher power which hides within him and which separates him from Nature is Imagination:

> Imagination–here the power so called
> Through sad incompetence of human speech,
> The awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
> Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
> At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
> But to my conscious soul I now can say–
> "I recognize thy glory." (*The Prelude* VI 592-99)

By saying that imagination which rises from "the mind's abyss" is like "an unfathered vapour" Wordsworth means that it does not issue from any external power such as Nature and that it nearly originates in itself. The poet comes to discover that imagination is independent of Nature and sense-experience and that it is an autonomous power capable of guiding him, "but this discovering, which means a passing of the initiative from nature to imagination, is brought out gradually, mercifully" (*WP* 41). The last part of Book VI of *The Prelude* was probably composed in 1799 and therefore Hartman holds that perhaps till that time Wordsworth thought nature his whole guide. After 1804 imagination moves the poet, at times through the agency of Nature. As a poet Wordsworth continues to observe and to respond to the life of Nature, but his actuating impulse is not mere love of natural facts or natural objects. He is impelled primarily by his experience of imagination. Hartman puts the point clearly:

> Wordsworth, therefore, does not adhere to nature because of natural fact, but despite it and because of human and poetic fact. Imagination is indeed an *awe*-ful power. (*WP* 48)

In examining his later poetry, it is difficult to decide at what stage he transfers his allegiance from Nature to imagination or back from imagination to Nature. The to-and-fro movement is a fluctuating one and is "bounded by some cyclical or dialectical pattern" (*WP* 67). A recollected event often represents the poet's initial, instinctive response to nature, but the meditation which follows after an intervening period of time shows his imaginative apprehension of the significance of that event. This pattern repeats itself in *The Prelude*. It is his imagination that takes the poet beyond Nature, to the infinity. Describing the power of imagination Wordsworth wrote in Book VI of *The Prelude*,

> In such strength
> Of usurpation, when the light of sense
> Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
> There harbours whether we be younger or old,
> Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
> Is with infinitude, and only there.
> (599-605)

Hartman's overt statement that Wordsworth is "an inaugural figure for both modern philosophy and poetry" represents an advance from the position taken in *The Unmediated Vision* and *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*. Hartman has only partially succeeded in vindicating his new claim for Wordsworth and that probably explains why *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* has had a less powerful impact on the readers than the two earlier works. Hartman seems to overstate the philosophical import of Wordsworth's poetry and this is probably a disputable position to take. However, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* does take Wordsworth criticism to new and challenging areas and proves that Wordsworth's poetry has an enduring and vital quality which makes it responsive to diverse critical approaches as Hartman himself has explored the poetry using the tools of deconstructive and psychoanalytic criticism. For Geoffrey Hartman, William Wordsworth is a poet who has the ability to capture and express emotions and experiences in a more natural and authentic way, one who has created a new language of feeling breaking away from the traditional language and style of poetry.

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Submissive and Dissenting Dalit Voices in two plays *Munivahana* and *Daham (Thirst)*

D. Murali Manohar

Abstract

The plays Kolakaluri Enoch's *Munivahana* and M. Vinodini's *Daham (Thirst)* deal with the concept of caste discrimination based on the theory of purity and pollution. On the one hand we have religious discrimination – Dalits considered polluting people based on *Manusmriti*-and social discrimination – one that has become very 'popular' during the pandemic period 'social distancing'- on the other.

Keywords: untouchability, Dalit, caste system, hegemony, purity, pollution, human dignity

The Indian caste system has been practiced and is being practiced for centuries together based on *Manusmriti*. It gives a clear license to practice untouchabililty on the lower castes such as scheduled castes. According to *Manusmriti* there are four Varnas which is also called Chaturvarna such as the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishhyas and Sudras; and Athi Sudras who are called Harijans, panchamas, untouchables, Dalits in the broad sense; parayas in Karnataka and Kerala, pallars in Tamilnadu, Mahars in Maharashtra, Mala and Madiga and other castes in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and others in the regional context.

On the contrary, *Bhagavadgita* which is also a sacred text according to Hindu religion does not talk about Athi Sudras but it does talk about four castes. This is one of the contradictions of Hindu religion. Are Dalits part of Sudras or not? Are Dalits also part of Sudras? There is no clarity according to *Bhagavadgita*.

Who are Dalits?

In my theory Dalits are Scheduled Castes of this country. Dalit Panther Movement has been the oldest organization among Dalit groups. They had also given a political colour to it and tried to get benefit from all. The Dalit Panther Movement called Dalits as all those people who are destitute farmers, neo Buddhists, women, tribal and others who have been

socially, politically, economically and religiously oppressed, suppressed, discriminated against humanity. Kancha Ilaiah calls them 'Dalit Bahujans' which also consists of backward castes and scheduled castes together form 'Dalit Bahujan'. I would consider it as a political motif rather than a religious idea. Across the country there have been groups consisting of SC/ST/ OBC and Muslims. All these groups are fighting for political power both at the state and central level of democracy.

Role of Theatre in highlighting Dalit problems

So far one has seen different genres being used to highlight Dalit problems such as poetry, autobiography, memoir, fiction, short story and recently there have been a few short plays that have projected Dalit problems. I have chosen two plays that have been written by Dalit writers. They are Kolakaluri Enoch and M. Vinodini. Both of them deal with theory of purity and pollution in their respective plays. Whether it is religious or social both of them attract the concept of caste discrimination based on the sanction of *Manusmriti*.

Enoch confines to the sanction of *Manusmriti* whereas Vinodini questions the hegemony and makes the non-Dalits depend on the Dalit woman for the breastfeed of infant. One is conventional and the other is radical in the portrayal of Dalit problems.

SubmissiveVoice of Tiruppan and Dissenting Voices of Dasu, Souramma and Others

The Dalit is prevented from entering the temple for darshan despite the lord's order on the chief priest of the temple in Kolakaluri Enoch's *Munivahana* (2002). The priest believes that he is more important than the lord and the casteism practiced, discrimination showed, hegemony displayed. How did the playwright use this situation in the play? The conversation between Sri Ranganatha, the lord and Loka Saranga Muni, the priest of the temple enabled the characters in highlighting the discrimination. The lord Sri Ranganatha says that the devotee Tiruppan Alwar is an untouchable yet he should be provided darshan whereas the priest refuses to allow the untouchable to have darshan because he is an outsider of the caste system. To go deeper into this is that one of the reasons why Dalits move out of religion is that this kind of religious discrimination. The mindset of upper castes especially the Brahmins is unchangeable even if god were to intervene on behalf of the Dalit. God is not fighting on behalf of all Dalits but only on such Dalit who is an ardent devotee of Sri Ranganatha. Has god appealed to provide darshan in general? No it is a specific case for which the god himself appears. The playwright has effectively used his literary talent and genre for showcasing the attitude of the upper castes towards Dalits. Historically the priest is so happy to provide the darshan of Lord Ranganatha due to ardent devotion of Tiruppan for whose sake the lord appears and appeals to the chief priest to provide darshan. On the command of lord the priest goes in search of the untouchable. When the priest runs after Tiruppan, he runs away from him to escape beatings from him. In fact the priest is running after him to persuade and take him inside the temple to provide darshan. The Brahmin has been given this gift of seeing and blessings of the lord Ranganatha. After he catches Tiruppan he explains to him that he has been assigned to personally carry Tiruppan on his shoulders and provide darshan. Tiruppan

is so blessed to know that Lord Ranganatha would like to provide darshan to him through the priest.

However, there is a twist here. Even in the real story which goes back to 8th century AD, the story is that when Tiruppan steps are touched on the floor, it may be polluted. Thus Tiruppan is carried on the shoulders of the priest so that his feet do not touch the premises of the temple. Thus the practice of untouchability and purity of the temple is intact. In real story there is no debate between the priest and the Lord. It is created by the playwright. It is created in such a way that in spite of the Lord's request the priest adamantly argues that the lord is only a statue which has no power whereas the priest who has the ultimate power to decide who is to be allowed and who is not. The religion has sanctioned such power. That has been carried out by the priests since time immemorial.

Tiruppan is a Dalit who has not used his brain at any point of time. When he is stoned by the priest for being an obstacle on the way to Kaveri river, he does not question the priest. He moreover apologizes to the priest and leaves with submissiveness and humility. In a way he accepts the discrimination and oppression meted out to him. The societal conditions were such that he had no courage to question. Nor does he have any intention of questioning.

The play has the same characters as they have been the realistic people. In addition to these real people, the playwright has added two imaginary characters: Devadatta and Vedavedya. It will be an interesting play if it is acted on the stage.

On the other hand we have another play entitled *Daham (Thirst)* (2012) -originally written in Telugu language*, one of the South Indian languages, translated into English by K. Suneetha Rani- written by the Dalit woman playwright M. Vinodini who is also an Ambedkarite in which one finds totally contrasting characters Dasu, his uncle and other young boys who question the system, society, individuals along with submissive older generation Dalits such as Tata and Pedda Mala. Most importantly Souramma the wife of Narsaiah is the protagonist of the play who rebels against the upper caste women in defying the dictum of wait, plead, request, appeal for getting a pot of water. Above all she also puts the rope on the well to draw water, which is not allowed, is also equivalent to committing a crime. The plot of the play revolves around this incident. The action which is motioned in the opening of the play continues till the end of the play. This incident also becomes base and victory for the entire Dalits in the village.

The upper castes – mainly Reddys in this play – are one of the peasant communities called Reddys of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In both the states Reddys are dominant castes from village level to city level. The reason being financially they are sound and caste-wise they fall under Sudra community according to *Manusmriti* and *Bagavadgita*. The characters are namely Pedda Reddy, Chinna Reddy, unnamed sister-in-law. They also practice untouchability on the Dalits which has been sanctioned though caste system based on *Manusmriti* which is the reason why they consider themselves as upper castes and they look down upon the untouchables. Two generations of Dalits have different perspective on the

life style. The older generation representing Tata, Pedda Mala, Narsaiah have submissive nature like Tiruppan Alwar who do not question conventions and accept the fate of their lives. On the other hand, we have a younger generation which Dasu, Chandraiah, Raju, Dibbadu, Ganga, Chinnenkati and others who raise their dissenting voice against the hegemony of upper castes such as Reddys in this play.

The playwright has effectively used the device of creating a situation of Reddys depending on the Dalit woman. The situation is that Chinna Reddy has a son from his wife who has been unnamed and called daughter-in-law who has no breastmilk to feed the infant. Dasu's wife goes to Reddys family to breastfeed the infant out of humanity. The younger generation of Dalit, Dasu takes this situation as an advantage and tries to resolve the water problems for the community. Given the situation Dalits try to collectively fight on behalf of Dalitwada. Dasu and his wife refuse to breastfeed the infant and will do so only on certain conditions. The conditions are that until and unless the fifth pulley has been allowed for Dalitwada to draw water from the village well, apologize to Souramma for abusing, shouting and beating her up, Ganga will not breastfeed the infant. The situation is such that the Reddys have almost begged the Dalits for saving the life of the infant.

In the beginning I had said the whole play revolves around the village water well and the pulley with which the villagers draw water where Souramma breaks the dictum and draws water on her own for which there was an objection and fight among them. The upper castes had also ordered Souramma to pay ten thousand rupees as fine by next two days. If the family fails to pay, Souramma would be paraded naked in the entire village for abusing, beating and shouting at the upper caste women. In fact this condition infuriated the entire Dalit community and the younger generation revolted and dissented and raised their voices. In a way it is the beginning, the middle we have seen the younger Dalits forming unity to fight against the Reddys and the end which resolves the water problem for the Dalits which is also like fulfilling the poetics of Aristotle. Aristotle theorizes the play should have a beginning, a middle and an end. The solution is that the Dalits can put the fifth pulley on the well and draw water for drinking purpose. In fact Subba Reddy the father of Pedda Reddy proposed that the well needed to be dug by all the villagers irrespective of caste. In practice it was the Dalits who dug the well and politics played by the upper castes in the name of superstitious and ill omen; the Dalits were deprived of drawing water from the well.

Conclusion

The two plays that I have sampled are to show how the upper castes such as the Brahmin priest Loka Sarangamuni and the Reddys namely Pedda Reddy and Chinna Reddy and their women practise untouchability on the Dalits. In the first play one can see Tiruppan accepts the rule of law of his time and becomes a submissive model. On the other hand we have the dissenting voices such as those of Souramma, Dasu, Ganga and others who encash the opportunity of getting approval for the fifth pulley on the village well so that they can draw water without any waiting. Thus their thirst is quenched.

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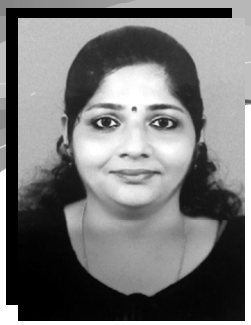
Notes:

*The misrepresentation of the playwright's language and the play is to be corrected in the article entitled "Observe, Revolt, Win – The fight against Untouchability in Vinodini s "Thirst" by Dhaval Kataria published oin *IOSR Journal Of Humanities and Social Science* (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 22, Issue 10, Ver. III (October. 2017) PP 28-32. The plays have been written in Telugu language and translated from Telugu to English not in Kannada.



Beyond the Gender Dynamics : Understanding Sexuality and Gender in *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi*

A. Gopika Raja and Indu B.

Abstract

Sexuality and gender are comparatively novel terms that gained wide popularity in the late nineteenth century especially when anthropological and scientific studies had taken new turns in Europe and America. Sex and gender are often defined in terms of repression and exclusion but the extent to which the terms have gathered social, political and cultural attention highlights the relevance of gender studies in the current critical paradigm. In Tony Purvis's account sexuality is no longer an aspect of identity or an act of sex alone but rather a system of power relationships which ultimately govern the formation of cultural and social identities. The paper titled "Beyond the Gender Dynamics : Understanding Sexuality and Gender in *A Gift Of Goddess Lakshmi*" proposes to discuss power relationships and identity formation in Manobi Bandyopadhyay's *A Gift Of Goddess Lakshmi* .Identities are traditionally differentiated social constructs, the truth of which has to be put into cultural and social visibility.

Keywords : Sexuality , Gender , Identity , Power , Culture.

To the vague question 'What is sexuality? ' the answer might seem , at the first instance, simple and precise. A deeper anatomy of the term sexuality leads to more complicated conclusions. The word sexuality has , over the centuries, gained many possible and ambiguous connotations. The most common and colloquial interpretation of the term points to sexual activity in general and the male-female binary in particular. On retrospection, the term acquires an equivocal meaning-defining and re-defining the physical and the material phenomena in human anthropology. Sexual desire and sexual identity mark the two prominent critical approaches to sexuality. However diverse the implications of the term sexuality are, there seems to be little concurrence on how the concept has been interpreted by many leading critical theorists across the globe. Joseph Bristow, the editor of the *Journal of Victorian*

Culture , raises a few fundamental questions in his influential work *Sexuality : The New Critical Idiom* :

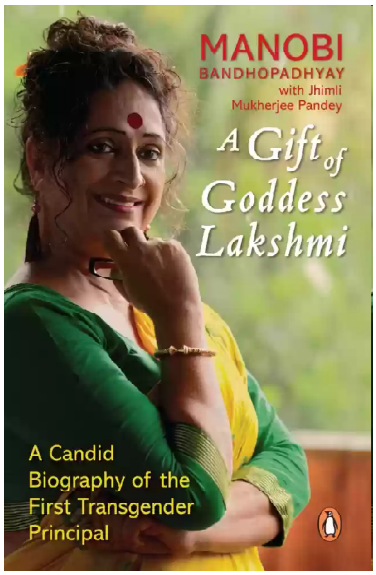
> Why is it that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an unending fascination with distinctive types of erotic behavior? What are critics seeking to discover when devising elaborate theoretical models to understand sex? And why have modern thinkers reached such contradictory conclusions about the meaning of sexuality in our everyday lives? (2).

To get answers to these fundamental questions, it is necessary to have an in depth comprehension of the nature of sexuality and its diverse implications in literature and philosophy. Sigmund Freud's study on sexuality and the sexual drive in his seminal work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* questions the conventional belief that "the desire for opposite sex relations emerges at puberty and leads to its natural consequence : reproduction"(67).Freud goes one step ahead and observes that there are certain facts which do not fit into this narrow framework of conventional thinking. The ideology of human sexuality extends beyond the scope of conventionality in female reproductive capacities. The widespread privileging of the concept of homosexuality and the need to consider the sexual needs of the third gender or rather the queer have always become one of the prominent topics of discussion in the critical and academic scenario. Across human psychology, the male-female distinction is forcefully taken for granted as the biological platform on which gender is socially inscribed. The sex/gender distinction has always been a key ingredient in feminist psychology since its inception in critical studies.

Butler remarks in her monumental text *Gender Trouble* : " If sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow that to be a given sex is to become a given gender" (46).The convention follows that everyone shall either be a male or a female. There is no room for those who are between the male-female binary. The idea of heterosexuality is normal and homosexuality is deviating from that norm or the idea that there are only men and women. Inspired by thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault , Butler`s works deconstruct the several biased notions of gender identity. Butler proposes a new understanding of gender Performativity.She questions the usefulness of the sex/gender binary and suggests heterosexuality as the perceived outcome of the construction of gender.

Gender is produced through time , through a set of practices which are constantly repeated over a period of time. Gender is not intrinsic but an acquired condition .Gender is culturally and historically negotiated and keeps changing from one era to the next. The current paper aims at a deconstructive reading of the sex - gender dichotomy prevalent in trans writing.The paper also attempts to bring out conspicuous instances of gender discrimination evident in Manobi Bandyopadhyay , the trans activist's memoir *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi.* The gender disparity latent in trans writing , in general , alludes to the long standing tendency of privileging the dominant and suppressing the subservient now explicit in queer writings. Assigning gender forcefully stops one's ability to live in the world freely and comfortably and this condition foresees the probable gender related repercussions in a trans individual's life.The

transpeople,thus,encounter the crisis of identity and choose to operate on their genitals for a permanent transformation risking their very existence itself .They try to fix their biological body in terms of the constructed concept of gender.Longing for a sense of belonging in society, many problems - physiological and psychological - creep in the lives of the transpeople.



A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi, the honest memoir of India's first transgender Principal, Dr Manobi Bandyopadhyay, unravels Manobi's personal and social confrontations in quest for a stable identity. The narrative unfolds the moving tale of Manobhi's transformation from a man to a woman. The youngest and the only son to his parents , Somnath was indeed a golden trophy to his father. Chittaranjan Bandyopadhyay proudly presented Somnath to a few of his friends who very often teased him for not being able to father a son. The question of identity is often complex and perplexing .Chittaranjan nurtures the irresistible demands of patriarchal tastes in a typically conventional social space.Being the father of a son was something that the society craved for though not Chitaranjan.This addresses the basic assumptions that involve the ideology of gender blurring in Chitaranjan's traits as a dominant father.The proud father in Chittaranjan succumbs to the irresistible demands of a typical male dominated power structure to profess the masculine authority by becoming the father of a male child.The tendency of sticking on to the prescribed social norms was expected of a woman but in the current context Chittaranjan is forced to celebrate his parenthood only by his ability to father a son which gains ground to the prospect of gender blurring in trans narratives.

Deconstruction presupposes the indefinability or rather the undecidability of situations within the text.More than nurturing the genuine feelings of fatherhood, Chittaranjan considers his only son as a trophy to flaunt off to his kith and kin. Like every woman in a conventional society, men too are compelled to figure out certain pre-conceived ideologies which later generate certain irresistible demands in a gender biased society . Going by the words of Julian Wolfreys in his seminal work *Deconstruction : Derrida* :

> Deconstruction may be nothing more or less than the response necessitated by the text ; it may be nothing more or less, than taking responsibility for the act of reading, rather than seeking to avoid that responsibility in the name of some institutionally approved method of interpretation. In either case, 'it' is not something which we can lay out like the components of some engine in order to assemble a 'deconstruction-machine' which churns out reading after reading in exactly the same manner. We need to avoid precisely such a temptation (15).

The third child, a boy, hailed as the invaluable gift from Lord Shiva was named Somnath. After the baby‘s arrival in the family , Somnath‘s father who had been groping in the dark to make both ends meet got into a better profession which led to a lot of celebrations and festivity at home. “People joked that usually girls bring good luck to fathers, but this time it was a boy who had proved to be lucky. They said , ‘Chitta, this is a boy Lakshmi‘(4) .The statement “girls bring good luck to fathers”(4) evokes radical, skeptical and explanatory criticism from androgynous discourses. But what precedes the statement - the phrase ‘People joked‘ - is a cliché‘ attempt at tarnishing the utility of whatever is feminine thereby unfolding the extra pound of privilege attached to masculine discourses. The social and political supremacy of the masculine is structured in language in such a way that what is irrelevant and insignificant is feminine and what is not is masculine.

The usage “People joked that usually girls bring luck to fathers” (4) is a conspicuous instance of gender discrimination evident in trans discourses. The conviction that girls bring good luck to fathers, though in proverbs and maxims, is still a rich man`s joke. Discriminatory statements and judgments categorizing women as victims of gender generalisations are profound in trans writing. The feminine nomenclature ‘Lakshmi’ traditionally interpreted as the goddess of prosperity gathers sensible verisimilitude only when the gender tag `boy` is tied to it.To state the words of Christopher Norris from his influential work *Deconstruction* :

> The appeal to ‘ordinary language‘, with its implicit sanctions and conventions, is seen as a more sensible way of coming to terms with the arbitrary nature of the sign. Structuralism - it might be argued - is fixated on the age old delusion which , in one form or another , has always preoccupied philosophy. This gave rise to those attacks on ‘realist fiction‘(by Barthes among others) which seemed to assume that author and reader were incapable of telling narrative verisimilitude from straight reportage. The rift between sign and referent became a high point of radical theory; it was forgotten that fiction has always been more or less aware of its own fictionality ,even if the symptoms were not always there on the surface, as in some post –modernist texts(128-129).

As Manobi recollects it was some kind of a premonition of things to come. It was the initiation into a long process of metamorphosis. The beginning of the metamorphosis commences with Somnath‘s love for the long printed skirts of his sisters which he used to put on whenever he got a chance. The delicate looks and curly hair of Somnath prompted the bigger boys of his class to call him a girl. Since he was delicate and weak, he was the target of all the mischiefs of the other boys. He was often bullied and made fun of by the other boys of his age.Recollecting the words of Manobi in *A Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* :

> When I walked into the classroom, some boys bigger in size and mostly bullies came running towards me, tugged at my scarf and called me a girl. I was slim, delicate and had curly hair. The boys kept saying that though I wore pants, I must be a girl because I had a veil on my head (7).

When Manobi joined the high school in Naihati,some of the boys rushed to him and called him a girl. The metaphor ‘slim, delicate with curly hair‘ , from a logocentric point of

view, indicates the fragility associated with women. The expression 'some boys bigger in size and mostly bullies' point to the binaries "strong and big" for men and "slim and delicate" for women. These instances of male / female bifurcation - strong and weak - are symbolic of the propelling physical and emotional prowess that define sex-gender dichotomy within the framework of trans narratives.The combination of the feminine and the masculine in the third gender are in fact testimonies of a balanced gendered identity which unfortunately the third gender are unaware of. Thus transindividuals are coerced to sail through the rough currents of what is termed as the natural attitude towards the third gender – a constructed sense of decrepitude and displaced identity.

The uncertainties encompassing the gendered identity of a trans individual anticipate the cultural , physiological and political diversities of sexual subcultures defining , in narrow framework , the seemingly limitless possibilities of queer culture. In most cases ,the decision to undergo Sex Reassignment Surgeries is seen as something specific to the trans individual.In spite of the various counseling sessions that the trans people go through before the surgery, they remain reluctant to change their decision to undertake the surgery.This reluctance is a kind of resistance – the reluctance to accept what others (the heteronormative system) consider as the standard and the normal version. People perceive the choice of a trans individual to become a man or a woman as the first step in the formation of a stable identity. Ironically enough, the transformation never takes them to a complete process of metamorphosis. The real crisis - the trauma of physical and emotional transformation including the post surgical risk factors –finally ends up in worse confrontations resulting in many tormenting internal psychic encounters.

The moment the report of the Sex Reassignment Surgery reaches Manobi's hands , she makes the most devastating statement in the height of ecstasy that she claims herself to be in : "I was beside myself with joy when I described my victory to Dr Khanna.The report that was drafted a few days later upheld Dr Khanna's surgery and called me a transwoman. It was finally proven that I was capable of being raped by a man"(155).The most daring statement "I was capable of being raped by a man" (155) is how Manobi describes her fate following the surgery. A deconstructive reading unfolds the basic social tendency of body fragmentation and commoditization apparent in queer writing.

In the light of Manobi 's statement, a deconstructive reading unveils an increasing tendency to perceive women as objects of pleasure. The commoditization of female bodies is evident when the author, the transwoman , addresses her transformation as the privilege to be raped by a man. Such deconstruction of body boundaries reflects the political hegemony of the masculine subjects to overrule whatever is feminine wherein the equilibrium between consent and coercion, in Gramsci's words ,is shielded in the interests of the male subjects.

The wide tendency in queer writings to destabilize the feminine and the insatiable desire of the trans individual to become a woman reconstruct the images of women as agencies of social revolution.In Gramsci's words , only the dominant group that has the consent of the

allies or the oppressed can trigger a revolution which means the political and cultural hegemony of the dominant requires the consent of the proletarian to establish the oppressor- oppressed dichotomy. For a trans individual , the consent - coercion equation is the real struggle in the strict sense as the oppressor (male) – oppressed (female) dichotomy is within the same psyche – the trans consciousness.

However diverse the findings and researches on queer writings are , the basic principle remains the same – women as domestic servants and bearers of children and men as the harbingers of power and authority. The same tone of discrimination is evident in queer writings where homogeneity is described as the suppression of the feminine and the sustenance of the masculine. Though the buzz phrase revolving around transgenderism is identity crisis , a deeper anatomy of transgender discourses reveals misogynist tendencies that tend to suppress the feminine in the male female dichotomy evident in transwriting.

After passing the tenth grade with flying colours , Manobi finally had to make a choice between science and humanities for higher studies.Being a boy , Manobi had no choice but to opt science instead of humanities. What might have been the potential connection between being a boy and taking up science instead of humanities for higher studies? Male and female, in a larger state of differentiation, exhibit diverse sequences of thoughts that can be distinctly labeled as feminine and masculine – the ideal antithetical absolutes. Otto Weininger in his influential work *Sex and Character* writes :

> The incongruity between the man and the woman depends, in a special measure, on the fact that the contents of the thoughts of the man are not merely those of the woman in a higher state of differentiation, but that the two have totally distinct sequences of thought applied to the same object, conceptual thought in the one and indistinct sensing in the other (35).

The term identity gained due attention soon after the second World War and eventually emerged in different disciplines including those of humanities ,political and social sciences. The concept of identity, though used widely across different disciplines,is essentially considered as something deeply linked with an individual's personal and collective standpoints. Individuals' perception of their own identity gets unique and rigid over the generations and this sense of identity provides them with a vision of their dreams, needs and aspirations. The distinction between personal and socio-cultural identity has widened ever since the outbreak of World War II. Going by the words of Jari Kupiainen in his influential work *Cultural Identirty in Transition* :

> Although the concepts of personal and cultural identity are nowadays in common use in the humanities and social sciences , they are , as such , rather problematic concepts which are used and defined in different ways. For example , the distinction personal/cultural has often been associated with the distinction individual/social. On this basis, the personal identity of a human being has been understood to consist of the properties that distinguish him or her from other people and which make him or her a unique person. The cultural or social identity of individuals would then consist of the properties which they share with different groups and collectives (5).

Nevertheless , it is the social or rather the cultural identity of individuals that has gained undue prominence in the recent theoretical literature. There always seems to be a rigid distinction between what the individual and the society crave for in the case of the third gender community. The needs of a transgender person are chiefly defined in terms of the "do`s and don`ts" of a social group. The tendency to stress the disparity between the individual and the society of which he/she is a part is in fact the primary concern confronted by the transgender community.Similarly people seldom segregate their personal selves from those of the group memberships of which they are part of in a social structure. No civilization or culture has been free from the marginalization of trans community. Only recently have such topics gained prominence and become topics of debates and discussions in the public arena. It is equally important for the society, the government and the public to come forward and convince the transgender community that they are an integral part of the society and the fundamental rights cannot be denied to them under any circumstance.

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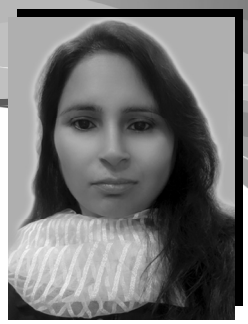
Individuality Combined with Entrepreneurial Spirit: Breaking Patriarchal Codes in Prabha Khaitan's *A Life Apart*

Shalini Yadav



Abstract

Writing about 'self' as an autobiography became an elite device in the hands of many Indian women post independence who wished to write about their lives and exerted strenuously to break the restrictions imposed on them within the 'four-walled peripheries' to construct their own identity and exhibit their individuality in various fields such as sports, business, film industry, defense, and in various other professions. They assertively voiced in the form of writing their life narratives to discard the burden of patriarchal dominance where with a prevalent sense of gender discrimination, they are considered feeble, inept or subjugated. This paper explores and cognizes the course of an inspirational and tear-jerking narrative *A Life Apart* crafted by a well-off industrialist and writer, Prabha Khaitan who flouted her community codes and stated against injustices and hypocrisies prevalent in the male-dominated society. It analyses how Prabha footsteps the arduous trail between the passion for love, work and independence and the pull of traditions and family restrictions to be her own woman creating her identity.

Keywords: autobiography; independence; individuality; traditions; restrictions; identity.

> Writing one's life is like a striptease act: you are exposed to hundreds of eyes watching you uncover your naked self. This may sound odd but it is also true that most of us take an exhibitionist's pleasure in doing so. (Khaitan 261)

Autobiographies or life narratives have progressively become an attention-grabbing genre; are used as a tool for writing the self and writing about one's life. Evidently, the "avalanche" of this genre reveals how people either writers or readers both categories are respectively concerned about exploring the questions of "autos" and "bios" (Shands et al. 7). Indian women writers are also not spared from the charisma of this escalating and multifarious sort

of writing to express "their gendered specificity", without "effacing the very real narrative authority, purposefulness, and perspectival control" (Brueck 1) of them in their writings; identical as their voices. While reading autobiographies of Indian women writers, one "must be especially attentive to the language" used in the text as a medium of expression sharing the experiences of their lives, furthermore, "understand how the relationality and collectivity of experience is not accidental or necessarily organic to a woman's view on her world, but is actively, politically, and consciously constructed in the course of a narrative" (Brueck 1). Prabha Khaitan is one of such courageous Indian women writer who recounts and shares her life experiences impudently in her life narrative entitled *A Life Apart: An Autobiography*. This chapter explores and cognizes the course of an inspirational and tear-jerking narrative of such successful entrepreneur and writer who defied the societal codes and asserted against prejudices and hypocrisies prevailing in the male-dominated society.

A Life Apart originally written in Hindi by Prabha Khaitan as *Anya se Ananya*, (2007), was later translated by Ira Pandey and got published in 2013. Namita Gokhale calls Prabha Khaitan "a woman of extraordinary spirit and determination" (Forward, v) who was born into a wealthy and well known traditional Marwari business family. Moreover, she is a renowned author of the novels like *Chinnamasta*, *Peeli Aandhi*, and *Apne Apne Chehre* etc. Apart from being an efficacious writer, she is a true inspiration for Indian women, who "made her own path and forged her own destiny" as an "entrepreneur and an astute business woman" establishing a money-spinning leather business. (Gokhale, 'Forward', v)

A Life Apart is an unsheathed narrative, where Prabha writes about her life how she "achieved a well-earned eminence" contesting 'space', constructing her 'self' and sustaining her individuality in "an overwhelming patriarchal society" (Gokhale, 'Forward', vi). She also weaves her experiences of leather trading in the international market into her writings since she is intensely versed in philosophy, economics, sociology, trade and commerce related to contemporary world. After reading world literature and being influenced by feminist writings of Simone de Beauvoir, she wrote on the exploitation of women, psychology and freedom struggle in Indian society. She wanted Indian women to be independent and respected. Vijay Shinde also advocates about women' rights and freedom in his blog and expresses that she is appreciated for her knowledge, perseverance and resolution not only in Hindi literature but also in Indian literature. (Rachanakar)

Being an able writer and a thoughtful woman, Prabha poured her heart and mind via "graphe" including her "auto" and "bio" on the paper. When her autobiography got published, she was applauded and criticized both for talking about her personal life with such truthfulness and courage. Though she was perceptually prepared for such denunciations, she penned down in her narrative emphasizing the reliability and authenticity of an autobiographer's life experiences,

> The truth lies in the eyes of the beholder on the one hand, and on the other in the reader's perception of the truth. The strength of an honest bit of writing has its own pull and this is

> probably why an honest autobiography has a longer shelf life than a work of fiction. One reason for this is that such a work becomes a bond between the writer and the reader and although an interpretation of the text may vary with each generation, the power of its narrative can never dim. (Khaitan 261)

Beyond accolades and criticisms, Prabha broke and shattered the frame of a traditional woman set by male-dominated society for its own benefits yet she had to suffer a lot while doing so. Her autobiography reflects contradiction in her life hence one side she was an independent and successful entrepreneur who earned respect of her peers and colleagues in the corporate world by setting her own business, and on the other hand, she was a 'second' woman in a long-term relationship with a married man whom she loved and devoted her life breaking all oppressive social rules. She starts her story by quoting Sati from Indian mythology,

> Sati - the consort of Shiva – is the embodiment of a woman who dedicated her whole life to a single man, and to him alone. I was always drawn to her and today, as I review my long life of over half a century and mentally bow to her, I also salute the remnants of the woman I once was. (1)

In her fifties, sitting alone on the steps of a store in New York, she recalls her past exhibiting respect for the committed woman inside her what she had been throughout her life after she fell in love at the age of twenty with a married man who was double of her age and father of five children. The narrative opens up with the depiction of an argument how Dr Saraf left her in Jackson Heights, New York just because she had purchased a costly canvas bag from Banana Republic to take it back to India as a sample for her craftsman to copy that design to add on her "repertoire of leather exports" (2). She "had been toying with the idea of including bags and fashion items to the industrial leather gloves and boots" (2) her company manufactured for export but Dr Saraf scoffed at her doubting her "business sense" and outshouting about it as an "arrogant attitude" (2). Further he "spat out in anger, hailed a taxi and drove off in a huff," (3) taking her passport and wallet with him without understanding her passion and dedication for her business. Dr Saraf undermines her corporate interests and capabilities because she is a woman. In the article "Women of the Ultramodern Era as Depicted in the Fiction of Manju Kapur," M. M. Dhalayat talks about inferiority of women in the society as "not a biological fact but a created one" (28). Dhalayat further continues,

> Civilization defines what is feminine, determines how women should behave, and perpetuates the oppression of women. The social positions and roles that civilizations have assigned to women have kept them in an inferior position to that of men. It is the patriarchal civilization that relegates women to the margins. (28)

Though an erudite doctor also sounds here like a typical man from "the unconscious dawn of the patriarchal India" (Dhalayat 28) considering Prabha as an inferior and incapable person who cannot decide what is good for her business. This shows the mentality of people in our society where women are taken as not fit for particular businesses. After all that humiliation, Prabha faced at a foreign land, she questions herself,

> What did I mean to him, I wondered? Lover, mistress or half a wife? I had spent twenty years of my life with this man but still had no adequate word to describe our relationship. (4-5)

Further she questions the role of a lover in a man's life defying the acceptable roles of women set in the patriarchal Indian society such as "a mother, a wife or a sister" (5). She feels dissatisfied with the inhibiting roles assigned to a woman and asks why "any woman who does not fall in these neat categories" can only be called "a mistress" even though she is not dependent on that man financially and has "her own income" (5). She further says that she was fully aware of his marital status but decided to love him all her life and devoted to him like Sati "the consort of Shiva" (1) pronounced in Indian mythology whose heart was pure and spirit fully clad with dignity and vigor. Here, these elevated lines truly describe the liberated and faithful lady existing in Prabha, "Being an emancipated and righteous lady/ She can utter loudly with assertion/ That she is not faulty and frail/ And nobody has a right to contradict." (Yadav 'Till the End' 40)

Prabha persisted, as a strong lady of words who once promised to remain committed to Dr Saraf, truly remained the same for whole life whatever humiliation and sufferings she had to face throughout her life, she stayed with him till his death. The lines written in the poem "Till the End of Her Subsistence," adds to the confession and commitment, how Prabha made,

> … a verdict about her love
> And put her words with elegance about the man
> Who resides sumptuously in her psyche.
> Neither she gossips nor does she turn her hands away,
> She concerns, loves, and desires to offer him all she can. (Yadav 'Till the End' 40)

Although all her life, she whirled at higher pedestal, "defying conventions, defying prejudice, and questioning choices" (Gokhale, 'Forward', vii) but at times when people questioned about her marriage and children, she "steeped in a perpetual state of guilt" and felt that they "were doomed to live together in a relationship" they could "neither own nor deny" (12). In such situations, they initially fought "...as warriors/ and barked up the wrong tree" (Yadav 'Betrayed' 17) but later rejoined each other. Many times Dr Saraf tried to handle her with love diverting towards her achievements of good education, successful business and her writings. Though her personal life with Dr Saraf was principally concentrated upon in the autobiography, yet her life narrative could be divided in the fragments- her business, her writings and her intimate relationship with Dr Saraf.

Being the new Indian woman, she exposes, questions and challenges the old-age traditions and prejudices in male-dominated society with her parallel feminine dilemmas, anxieties and sufferings. She fights for individualism above all her feminine restrictions and tries to "transcend the horizons depicting a revolutionary spirit" standing at "crossroads caught between tradition and modernity" (Dhalayat 28). However, in this course of identity creation, Prabha herself admits,

> I must devote some time to my business interests as well. Love and its problems takes up so much of our time that if women were to devote as much energy and dedication to their own work, what could they not achieve! (13)

Her struggle story had started at very early age when her own mother called her 'Chaumasa' that means "the sultry pre-monsoon season" (14) due to her dark complexion. The little heart of her started realizing the discrimination at very early age. When she was of ten and half years, her first periods came and she was not allowed by her mother to attend the annual death ceremony of her father who was a renowned industrialist in Calcutta. She was smuggled to "a remote corner of the terrace" (21) where no one could be polluted by her presence. In her own words,

> Why does my mother hate me, I asked myself? How I wished for a fairy godmother to come and change me into a delicate and beautiful girl! (21)

After her father's death, her family came into trouble. Though initially her mother was in favour of a girl's early marriage but after her father's death, she gradually understood "the importance of financial independence" and "her worldview regarding girls began to change" (20). Consequently Prabha reached to college after her schooling and began to foresee the possibilities of fulfillment of her dreams. She was determined neither to "grow up to become like her Amma" (26) nor to be a meek, submissive daughter-in-law" (26) like her brothers' wives. She said that none of her women relatives stimulated her "to follow their roles" (26). She found all those women "wallowed in their misery, swimming in ocean of tears" (26).

While *The Second Sex* was treated as Simone de Beauvoir's foremost theoretic support to feminism, in the 1960s and 1970s, Prabha also read it in her college days and later translated it in Hindi language for local readers. She was deeply influenced by the idea of Beauvoir "where she says that no woman is born helpless, society makes her weak" (38). Same she mentions in her autobiography that she argued at time with her college friends related to "the exploitation of women" (38) in Indian society having careless attitude towards their growth and treating them as a weaker section of the society. She read a lot about different philosophies including Marxist theory being an avid reader and a socialist relating that all with Bengal situations of her time. In her autobiography *A Life Apart*, she said that she enjoyed reading Marx and Beauvoir and could relate their writings to her own life and times. In her article "'The Great Passion of My Life': Simone de Beauvoir as a Reader of Women Writers," Tilde Sankovitch quotes

> Simone de Beauvoir says in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* that apart from her school work, reading was the great passion of her life and she went on to demonstrate that love of reading throughout the book, and indeed throughout her autobiographical volumes (15).

Through her autobiographies, particularly *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, The Prime of Life,* and *Force of Circumstance* that her feminist viewpoints were mostly engrossed and culture of resistance via writing life narratives became up-to-the-minute tool in hands of female autobiographers who wished to write about their lives' struggles. Therefore these

autobiographies of Beauvoir turned out to be a kind of an instructor or a guide for the shaping of a new type of feminine self such as Prabha Khaitan created her identity resisting the prevailing cultural roles. In the article "Adventures of Feminism: Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiographies, Women Liberation, and Self-Fashioning," Curthoys writes,

> Where *The Second Sex* had intimated that a significant aspect of human liberation lay in women not losing their identity or their sense of self in those of men, it was the autobiographies which suggested and demonstrated in great detail how this might be done. In them, the rejection of conventional marriage and children was no mere slogan, but the foundation of what seemed to young female readers to be a fascinating and challenging life. (3)

Facing the challenges of life, Prabha was "drawn to the nascent women's movement" when the rise of liberal Marxism was witnessed in the decade of the eighties. She felt that she was always on the "wrong side of patriarchy" (263) and had agonized throughout her life due to "its stifling conduct codes" (263). She shows this at very early stage of her relationship with Dr Saraf, a well-established doctor when she met him first time to get her eyes checked. They kissed and came closer in their first tryst. Though Dr Saraf said to her later that they would never meet again in the life but she said, "it is impossible for me to promise you that we will never meet again. I am not afraid of taking risks and nothing will ever intimidate me if you are with me" (50). She decided to spend a lonely spinster's life revealing that transgressing "barriers has its own pleasure" (51). She was bold enough to take the relationship at next level but Dr Saraf was timid. She shows her assertion when she defined their relationship as "an unorthodox relationship" which was "not all about desire and body" (56). She expressed that Dr Saraf "was reminded of an animal lacerated by the coils of a barbed wire fence he was trying to cross" (56). However, she was "fully aware that he was a married man" (5) and that she would "never have the love that his wife had" (5) yet she decided to love him all her life. She was a strong lady who could proclaim against social hypocrisies and stayed firm as a woman of words throughout her life. Further she detailed about her relationship in such deep painful words, "I had no sense of shame about us whereas he wanted to bury me in a dark, airless space where no one could see us" (58). She clearly expresses her feelings that about this illegitimate relationship giving her logic-

> since I had decided to give this man all I had, and he wanted to retreat into a shell rather than confront the reality of our relationship, we were on separate tracks. He fought imagined shadows whereas I was so deeply committed to him that nothing else mattered. The world was on one side and he was on the other. (58)

When Prabha became pregnant, Dr Saraf advised her not to utter a word in front of anyone. She expressed about that people with patriarchal mindset never be able to realize what "happens to the women who are forced into silence and doomed to suffer their pain alone" (78). She needed Dr Saraf's support at that time in the "cloak-and-dagger life" (79) situation. Finally she decided to abort the child though Dr Saraf was not in the favour of her decision. In hospital lying on the bed she thought people that what would they of her who is killing an

illegitimate child in her womb. She felt very low at that time. She expresses her grief, "What respect would they have left for me? In fact, I felt lowered in my own esteem that day…….I was the one who started this relationship, I was fully aware of the pitfalls it would have." (83) After that abortion her dependence on Dr Saraf increased and didn't remain "just a physical one it was a peculiar kind of sickness" (85) that she considered as "love" (85). Later he took his family for a vacation to Shimla for a month and that made her "sank into a depression" (85).

None in this world usually feels the pain of the other woman in one man's life hence everyone has genuine sympathy with the legitimate wife of a man. Therefore, with how much dignity, sensitivity and audacity, Prabha speaks about her inner feelings, the way she felt as the other woman. When she wishes she could be the only woman in her man's life, her agonizing moods as the other woman could be sensed with these poetic lines,

> How ardently I desire to be with you
> But I know the fact she is already there.
> It doesn't matter how I feel for you
> But I realize your absence everywhere.
> ……
> How can I act as if it doesn't bother?
> And literally it's not so painless to be fair.
> I wish for a place to be together
> Where I don't have to share. (Yadav 'Other' 31-32)

She further continues telling, "My present state became a horrible foretaste of what the future would be like" (85). She could "see no happiness ahead" (85). Subsequent to that trip, he underwent an operation and when she went to meet him, she met his wife there for the first time. After returning from there, she realized "what a small and insignificant part of his life" (85) she was. She wanted to be with him and for that she was even ready to take up a small job of his secretary in his office with a salary of Rs 300. When she told him that she wanted nothing from him, "no money, worldly goods, nothing" (86) and just wanted to be near him all the time. Dr Saraf gradually realized that "no one would give herself up so selflessly just to be able to be near him all the time" (85) and requested her never to leave him in the life. By loving and respectful words of Dr Saraf, she became mature and confident enough to handle the humiliation and sufferings she was about to face in future life due to patriarchal mind set of people towards 'second' or 'other' woman in one man's life.

Every time Dr Saraf asked her if she needs any materialistic thing or feels "the urge to travel and see the world" (89) or wishes to spread her wings for flying high, she assured him, "this is all I wanted" (89) in the relationship. Further she told him that she writes poetry and that gives her enough satisfaction so she doesn't need any materialistic thing like normal women. She just needs love from him.

Being the other woman in Dr Saraf's life, Prabha had to face "mind games, emotional manipulation, and deceit" (Devlin 2020) when her illicit romance was disclosed to his wife. While Mrs Saraf threatened her with her friend's help "to pack her bags and leave within a month" (91) or "to be ready to face the consequences," (91) she could neither sleep nor eat due to such humiliation and moreover when Dr Saraf tried to justify his silence, she says, "I went off to Pondicherry to the Aurobindo Ashram to get away from the sordid episode and lick my wounds in solitude" (92). Dr Saraf begged her to return and she too realized that she would have to take "the social censure that was bound to follow" (92). She admits, "Ours was not going to be a path lined with roses but I had decided to take the thorns that would inevitably lacerate my feet" (92). And she kept on contesting for 'space' in Dr Saraf's life being a second woman. When her friend Shanta warned her to keep the relation secret or to break it hereafter she could go to jail since adultery is a cognizable offence in India, Prabha, being unflinching and fearless, quoted the philosophers such as Sartre and Bertrand who also didn't believe in the institution of marriage above the supreme feel of love. She even didn't bother about her family and the community, which had the ghetto-like mentality and would never approve a relationship between a man and a woman without marriage as pure and morally correct.

Humiliation, anger, misery had become a part and parcel of her life. Prabha cathartically releases her pain in her autobiography through the lexis, "I had come prepared to be humiliated, to have salt sprinkled on my wounds for his demeanor and attitude had never promised any permanence" (61) though she had given her "body and soul" (61) in the relationship with Dr Saraf. Rosy Singh pronounces in her article, "'I' of an autobiography is not a frozen entity but is in a flux with changing existential conditions" (80). Therefore, Prabha keeps on expressing about her conditions whatever she went through throughout her life; the ways she kept on convincing Dr Saraf to stay together whenever he tried to be "a coward who runs away from facing the truth" (63). She describes the relationship with honesty, which she lived throughout her life breaking all social norms though she never got the kind of love what she really deserved. Prabha tells,

> Ours was not merely a physical relationship, although it started with love. Yet gradually, that love was overlaid with other feelings and the sharp sweetness of that first flush of love receded. What remained a sick dependence, a habit and - for me - a security blanket. My life was so completely tied with his that I could not even visualize my existence without him. He became a sort of sanctuary and even though I earned as much or more than him, the prospect of a life without him was so frightening that I turned away from the possibility of his absence. He and I shared a bond that I was never able to make with anyone before or after. (12-13)

In the techno-advanced era where social platforms are booming high, articulating or telling one's life story either personal or profession is "no longer left to men of letters; it has a mass appeal" (Singh 81). Prabha serves her entire personal and professional life in the platter for the readers with all her fairness and truthfulness that assists to touch the hearts of the readers. Her professional career was instigated when she gets an opportunity to go to America.

She reached there "with just $10 in hand" (95). To earn her daily bread, she worked in Duponts' house and stayed with Dr Dupont's secretary Eileen.

The sense of estrangement and nostalgia overpowered her at times while she stayed in America. She felt that there was so much she had to learn about that "strange new land and its customs" (112) as she found its speech cadences unfamiliar for her. Yet she was not intended to assimilate in the new land's way of life rejecting to "become like Americans" and felt proud of her "own individual cultural identity" (115). When Eileen called her "rustic and foolish" (115), her eyes "filled up with tears of humiliation" (116) and she swore to herself,

> I will show her and people like her what I am capable of. I will learn how to speak like them, have an office of my own but I will do all this in Calcutta, in my own land. I will always remain an Indian, who prefers to rotis instead of hamburgers and if rotis are not available, I'll have bread and boiled potatoes instead. But I will always remain proudly and unchangingly Indian, no matter what. (116)

Prabha never compromised with her self-respect as an Indian woman even at her stay in America. Once when Mareil brought cast off clothes of Clara Brown and said her to keep then saying that she doesn't have any fashionable clothes. She was outraged by the act and words and told Mareil not to treat her as a beggar who would gladly wear someone's cast offs. She further asked in anger,

> "Who do you people think we are? Our currency may have been devalued and be worth nothing to you Americans but do you think we Indians have no self-respect?" (156)

Prabha wanted to be independent and earn some money of her own so she did a diploma in beauty therapy from America. Before she left for America, her headmistress had asked her that after a degree in philosophy and dignified job of teaching, why she wanted to do a diploma in beauty therapy. She told that her society is money minded and "worth of a person is assessed on the basis of money alone" (125). According to Prabha, "a woman's independence stems fundamentally from her purse," (126) therefore she exerted and became a successful businesswoman in her life creating her "self" and that journey is well depicted in her autobiography. While learning art of beauty therapy, she found "a whole industry has grown out of this fad" of being "obsessed with the body and beauty culture" (137). Thereafter the idea of carrying some body-sculpting machines back to India to start up her own business came in her mind. Then she took a round of health clubs and beauty parlors to pick up some good ideas for a start up in India. She started a Health club called Figurette after her trip to America. Though people became skeptical when she started it that it won't bring her success but she could expand its size and brought a huge monetary achievement in 1970s.

Figurette gradually became her sanctuary and gave her economic independence whereas isolation became the reason for her freedom day by day. When she started living in the same building where Dr Saraf was living with his legitimate family, her friends counseled her not to live like the other woman in someone's life but Prabha remained adamant saying that she

could and would live as she wanted, not as society or her family wanted her to live. Gradually she realized that she didn't need any one to take care of her needs and for her. She writes

> the world was divided into two halves: on one side were all those women who drew their strength and social identity from the man they had married. Their home was their territory, their children their armour. On the other side was I, who had only her work and career, as well some money in the bank, but who had no social respect or protection. There was a deep, unbridgeable chasm between these two worlds yet I was often drawn into a dialogue with the other side. (176-177)

To fill the gap, Prabha, "trampled over her own pride and self-respect" (178) and took all the responsibilities of Dr Saraf's family from "decorating their house to putting together his daughter's trousseau" (178) or cooking for the guests to arrange the treatment facilities for Dr Saraf during his ailment, to please and earn the approval of his family. Although she did everything for Dr Saraf's family but still she was "the lone occupant" (178) of her world. She expresses it with pain that whatever success she "achieved in business was negated by this strange social boycott, every personal victory had its sheen rubbed away" (178-179). She treated her success as "a poisoned chalice," which brought "tension and complications instead of relief and joy" (179).

To retrieve her self-esteem and courage, she learnt driving a car treating it as empowering act for a woman in that period. She further told that it was the frustration and suppressed anger that fuelled her ambition to become a successful entrepreneur. Therefore she intended to start her leather export business and shared the idea with Dr Saraf. Dr Saraf wanted her to start the business with his son so that he can take up the full charge later. On the other hand, her brothers felt jealous yet she didn't step back. She surveyed shops for leather items; persuaded "poor artists lived in the most squalid parts of the city" to understand "the intricacies of the trade" (201). Dr Saraf with his male mentality, screeched at her that such "localities are not meant to visit by decent women" (201) and called his friend to support his argument who tried to demotivate her saying that Marwaris never did leather business. But she broke this taboo also like other taboos she had already broken giving her logic, "business runs by its own rules. Personal preferences, religious taboos have their place in individual lives, not in the world of trade" (202). She moved ahead with her idea, scoured the markets for samples and created her own impressive collection of designs but her sister's husband dismissed her collection saying that she doesn't "have an instinct for business" (203). She wept whole night after hearing such discouraging words, which was expected, in a male-dominated community where men can't digest women's progressive business ideas. However she didn't leave her passion and worked hard to set up a small factory. Breaking all Marwari community's traditional norms, she entered the charmed league of successful exporter of leather items.

Prabha lived her life on her own terms. Equally she did her business on her own rules. Since there were liberated young women with no unease about sleeping with a man for being successful at professional front, Prabha was the one who could be found everywhere in five

stars hotels meeting her foreign clients; draped in a sari maintaining her innate dignity. She learnt about the differences between business etiquettes and meeting gestures of India's tradition-bound business communities and western clients' fraternity moreover successfully applied the appropriate dealing strategies according to the clients. She writes,

> I had to accept that Indian business women have to be adept at handling all these spoken and unspoken codes…..Often, I wanted to break free and to smash all the codes that held us in thrall but it wasn't so easy. They are encased in layers and layers of social history. (211)

However, people with "grudging admiration" in their eyes, found it difficult to handle her success but she felt "a remarkable change" in the level of her self-confidence (211). She created a "distinct identity" (211) of her own as a businesswoman replacing her "timid, unsure side" of personality with "an outspoken and fearless boss" (212). Dr Saraf complained frustratingly that she has become like a man when she used to be busy dealing workers' issues. Repeatedly he doubted her character when she used to be out or dealt with men related to work, she still remained faithful to him tolerating all the allegations and never left him though she thought to break it many times. He sarcastically commented about her passionate involvement in business matters instead of praising her generosity that she had shared a third of her income with him and created a future for his son, making him a part of her business. She speaks about such men of conservative thinking, she was surrounded with,

> What many of them could not accept was the fact that I was a successful business woman, an inability to concede that a woman can succeed in a man's world was what lay behind all the mean and nasty barbs flung at me. Whether in the house or outside it, a woman's contribution is never generously acknowledged. She is constantly made aware of her surroundings and kept insecure and nervous. I was beginning to see the sexual politics of all this and it made stronger. (213)

Prabha writes about achieving success as a businesswoman, embedded with her lifelong relationship of love and dependency on Dr Saraf, in her stirring autobiography *A Life Apart* with candidness. The narrative exhibits that how Indian women footstep the arduous trail between the passion for love, work and independence and the pull of traditions and family restrictions.

Prabha Khaitan knitted her life narrative with a rare frankness through evocative and thoughtful lexis in such a way that one could feel the depth of pain when she speaks of her feelings, her sense of discomfort and unease at not being the 'legitimate' woman, moreover the struggle she did to defy the traditional codes and family expectations insisting on living her life as a single woman. Though suffered at both fronts including personal and professional due to social prejudices and patriarchal customs, she could rise above the traumas and inside-outside turbulences to become her own woman. She is a true inspiration for all those Indian women who wish to find their individual identity and respect.

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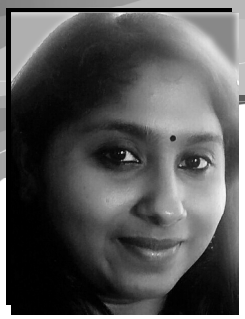

Male Guarding Women in Prison: Gender Violence and Sexual Assault in *Prisoner of Tehran* and *Mayada*: *Daughter of Iraq*

Chinnu Chandran P.

Abstract

The picture of prison depicted in literature and in the minds of people has been male oriented. The realm of female incarceration differs from that of male and is closely tied up with gender role expectations of family and sexuality. The outside identities and experiences of women influence their inside identities in prison. The article throws light on the imprisonment of women in Middle Eastern countries like Iran and Iraq where the penal system is controlled and monitored by the policies and ideologies of the state apparatus. A socio-political study of the respective Muslim countries give the readers a chance to understand the experience of women prisoners and the human rights violations they experience that occur from the disrespect and lack of dignity from the prison regime. The prison narratives of Mayada Al Askari and Marina Nemat in the notorious Baladiyat and Evin prison respectively, improve our understanding of the sexual assaults and physical violence women prisoners encounter in the hands of male prison officials during their incarceration. The horrific experiences of women lift the readers to a deeper understanding of how female prisoners make meaning and sense out of their carceral experiences through writing. The phenomenon of women in prison in the Middle East countries like Iran and Iraq offers many complex readings.

Keywords: women incarceration, human rights violations, sexual abuse, physical violence, male repression.

A deep analysis of the background of the prison history in the Middle East countries like Iran and Iraq delineates that the history of prison is imprinted with the silence and suppression of those who raise their voice either against the regime, the dictator or the theocracy. Women in prison as political prisoners under detention reveal the impact of the regimes that put great

emphasis on traditional gender role of women in society. Here the female body is altered, delimited and determined by the political dogmas imposed by the dictatorship. The women prisoners are denigrated as social deviants because of their participation in political movements going against their traditionally defined roles. Incarcerated women in such countries confront double forms of oppression reinforcing their secondary status in the society. The history of women's prisons involves subduing women's autonomy and agency and there is a deliberate attempt from the part of those in power to teach them to comply with their subservience. When the subservience is drilled into the women prison culture, she has to passively accept and follow the orders without raising her disagreement. She is taught to see herself as underserving of agency and power and has to remain silent with all dimensions of mistreatment and misconduct towards her because there is severe retaliation for her protest and demands. So she has no other way but to accept subservience and the omnipresent subtle forms of punishments.

For women in Iraq and Iran, imprisonment by the dictatorial regime under Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini, is the outcome of their public struggle. The public spectrum and the state mechanism of these Middle Eastern countries carry certain cultural and gender beliefs, especially regarding the involvement of women in National Socialism. This article tries to establish the interconnectedness between the subjugation of women outside prison and the disciplinary modes of custodial power in these countries. The penal system is controlled and monitored in these countries by the policies and ideologies of the state apparatus where the head of the correctional institutions are appointed by the tyrannical authorities confirming that they share the same ideological views of those in power. Here the entire prison administrative system - the male prison officials, guards and wardens, direct and manage the penal system transmitting the ideological beliefs of the male dictators into practice by employing the strategy of repression. The state sets an agenda for the control of particular class of women, especially those who raise voice against the arbitrary power structure.

Jean Sasson's biography *Mayada: Daughter of Iraq* (2003) describes the prison experiences of Mayada Al Askari in the Baladiyat prison, Iraq. Mayada was arrested in 1999 after having accused of producing anti- government propaganda against Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath party. Baladiyat was the headquarters of Saddam's secret police, which also served as a prison complex. She was charged with treason by the prison authorities. Treason was a serious charge in Iraq and it meant death sentence. She was trapped in cell number 52 of Baladiyat, along with other women whom she called shadow women because of their "pale and hopeless" (53) existence in the prison. Mayada explains the horrendous experience of confronting the cruel and suspicious prison guards. Her narrative on prison goes beyond individual stories to constitute a testimony to those of friends and comrades in prison. The biography of Mayada reveals the truth about living in Iraq through the eyes of these women in the filthy prison cells. The biography also captures "the cruel and capricious tyranny" (355) of Saddam as "the country's long nightmare" (356) that made the space a living hell on earth. The plight of the cell mates serves as a painful reminder of how many innocent lives

were cut short by the dictator regime of Saddam and his Ba'ath Party. For Mayada, Saddam, "the paranoid man" (102) "fashioned modern Iraq into hell on earth" (197).

The memorialization of prison horrors detailed by Marina Nemat in her memoir *Prisoner of Tehran* (2008) unveils the dark history of human rights violations in the most notorious prison Evin in Tehran during the 1980s.The memoir describes the physical abuses encountered by women in the dark cells of the Evin prison. The Iranian Revolutionary guards arrested Marina Nemat on January 15, 1982 on her suspected involvement in political activities against the Islamic government of Ayatollah Khomeini. She was arrested at the age of 16, along with a group of young students who were vocal about the arbitrariness of those in power.

Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-1989), the Islamic Republic Supreme Leader and his followers created new "Muslim" men and women as part of the Islamization of the ancient state system. The totalitarian government of Khomeini used gender as a source of legitimacy to establish its authority and manipulated the sexuality of women to consolidate power. Khomeini wanted women to play a seminal role in Islamizing the state and society by nurturing good Muslim children. Hence, control of women sexuality is considered a very decisive aim of the Islamic state. The new rulers imposed veil on women and gradually created a regime of gender apartheid where women became the 'other'. Women as citizens and political beings were subjugated to women as mothers. Thus the institutionalization of sexuality created a set of gender relations characterized by inequality and this was reflected in the gender hierarchy of prison administration also. Many political prisoners were physically abused, raped and tortured during the 1980s. The sexual abuse and physical tortures administered on women were a part of deliberate attempt made by the Iranian regime to discourage the public participation of women against the government. The patriarchal authorities regarded women political dissidents as threat to the building of a nation because they feared that these women may fail to perform their domestic role of nurturing. Hence they believed that their bodies had to be controlled and punished, even by death. The prison accounts by the formerly incarcerated women suggest that prison and its administrative system defined and controlled women's lives in absolute terms.

Foucault in his *The History of Sexuality* argues that sexuality and sex are concepts constructed through regimes of power and truth. He identifies sexuality as a broader strategy of power which involves the knowledge of government over the population as entity. Foucault says that "power is essentially what dictates its law to sex"(83). According to him, power prescribes an order for sex and sex is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to law. Power speaks the law and it later becomes the rule. The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive character. Foucault also maintains that, to deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a "law of prohibition"(84). The gender relations in Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran are contentious and volatile and those in power presented themselves as "agencies of regulation" for introducing an order and establishing a principle through "theories of law" (86). By

expressing themselves through the theories of law, the sovereign power made their mechanisms of power work in the form of law.

Tedious and long hours of severe interrogation sessions under the male prison officers and interrogators were the traumatic episodes in the lives of these political detainees of Baladiyat and Evin. Most of the sexual assault and abuse of women prisoners happened in the hands of male officers. Their mission was to maintain a rule-abiding environment in the prison. Marina was interrogated by two guards in Evin prison - Hamhed and Ali who stood as mouthpiece to Ayatollah Khomeini and his repressive political strategies against women. The interrogation finally led to her death sentence. Hamhed inflicted maximum torture on her body – whipping the soles of her feet with cable leaving her bruised. The gravity of the physical torture is expressed by Marina, saying: "If he lashes me, he won't stop until I'm dead" (113). Ali, the other guard who was impressed by her physical charms, saved her from execution. In return for her life, he asked her to marry him and convert to Islam by abandoning her Christian identity. He also threatened her to kill her lover Andre and arrest her parents. To save the lives of her lover and parents she was forced to spend her time in prison as the secret bride to Ali. She explains her horrendous plight as a sexual object to satiate the physical desires of Ali:

> … I hoped and prayed for Ali to get tired of me, but it didn't happen. My name was called over the loud speaker about three nights a week, and after spending the night with him in a 209 cell, I would return to 246 in time for the morning *namaz*. Most of the girls never asked me where I went at night, but if someone did, I said I had volunteered to work at the prison hospital. Three or four other girls from 246 were also regularly called at night. Like me, they usually returned before sunrise. We avoided talking to each other. I could only guess that their situation was probably similar to mine."(213)

In *Crime and Impunity: Sexual Torture of Women in Islamic Republic Prisons*, Shadi Sadr and Shadi Amin reports the prevalence of prison marriage between prison interrogators or prison officials and the female prisoners during the 1980s in the Iranian women prisons. In such cases, the consent of the woman prisoner is gained under threat, enforcement or harassment. Hence these prison marriages must be treated as forced marriage. Any sexual relation that stemmed from such a marriage should be considered as rape (95). The prison marriage, in return for escaping execution had been an open secret in the prison cells of Evin and very few women had shown the guts to express it in public. The most brutal method of the Iranian regime during the 1980s was the rape of young virgin girls the night before their execution. The rapes were justified under the religious term of *siqih* means temporary marriage. Though the higher officials knew these types of evil practices in prison, they approved it by remaining silent. Forced marriage was used as a tool to control the mind and body of the female prisoners. Such marriages would assure these male fanatics that the female prisoner would not step out of their line even after the release from prison.

Rape was a form of torture against both males and females in Iraqi prisons. The most attractive women in Baladiyat were raped repeatedly by the male guards. The women in the

prison lived a life of fear under the threat of rape. Aliya and her daughter were always under the threat of rape by the males. For Mayada, every twenty four hour in the Baladiyat remained the same. At night, the women were either subjected to torture and rape or forced to listen to others being tortured. The women in Evin who neither were nor ready to co-operate with the interrogators were threatened with execution. Taraneh, one of the inmates in Evin informed Marina that before executing girls, the guards would rape them under the assumption that virgins would reach heaven when they died. Testimonies of political prisoners show that the possibility of rape increased in prison when the female prisoners expressed resistance over all kinds of emotional and physical tortures.

The interrogation sessions of male officials in Baladiyat were often turned out to be torture sessions. The women prisoners were tortured to the core by the male interrogators. The interrogation rooms were converted to torture rooms also, consisting of various instruments for torture including chairs with bindings, electrical cables, and various hooks in the ceiling. The walls around the room were smeared with blood. Beneath the hooks one could see splashes of blood. (98) Samara, one of the shadow women in cell no. 52 explains the dreadful situation of interrogation to Mayada saying that "During interrogations they try to break our spirit along with our bones."(54) Samara, explains the inhuman treatment meted out to her by the cruel interrogators. The interrogators hooked a battery charger up to her ears and turned the electricity on full force. She says "the pain of torture was far beyond that of childbirth" (62). Each time the pain eased slightly they flipped the switch again and again and had a sadistic pleasure at her pain and terror. After that they tied her feet in a wooden device and started beating the soles of her feet with a stick. She says:

> For many weeks I had to lie in bed like a baby and couldn't even hobble to the toilet. The beatings took all the flesh from the soles of my feet. Then they became infected and I believed I was going to die. But, I slowly recovered, and now I can walk again. Since that first day, I've been called in on a daily basis. Some days they just question me. Other days they beat me on my back. Then the next day they beat me on my feet. Sometimes they will put me on the electricity. They ask the same questions. I give the same answers. (64)

The men of Baladiyat did not stop inflicting torture until she confessed to spying for Iran. Their deeds were so brutal for her that she went to the extent of saying about one male guard that "… if he were bitten by the most poisonous snake, the snake would die! (64)."The horror of living in the Baladiyat prison was explained by another woman saying "… even dogs in Iraq were treated better than prisoners (131). Aliya and Rasha were the other two shadow women who faced brutal treatment in the hands of male interrogators. Rasha was tortured almost to death by the ruthless guards. She was severely wounded. Her face was raw with deep cuts and her skull had been cracked. Due to electric drill, blood oozed out of a hole in her head. Her finger nails were ripped off during the questioning time. They put lit cigarettes on her wounds and bare legs. When she came back to the cell the stench of the burnt flesh would fill the air. The guards used to pull their hair and strike them in the faces with balled fists. The groans of pain mingled with their sounds of scream and the men's

laughter create panic in the torture room. Mayada says that it was more painful to hear the torture of fellow prisoners than to be tortured. When Mayada refused to confess her alleged association with Shiite Muslims, the enemies of Saddam, she was given electric shock. She explains the dreadful situation saying, "… the first burst of electricity coursed through her, and her head jerked backward as the electricity rolled down her neck and into her armpits, and up her leg and into her groin. She wondered if her body had been set afire."(256).

Every woman in Baladiyat was suffering from the mental and physical tortures at the hands of Saddam's security forces who were "experts at keeping the ones they are questioning one breath away from death…When a prisoner dies one moment before they wish them dead, it is considered a failure"(104). Many prisoners suffered heart attacks during the torture sessions. Samara herself says about a number of women "whose hearts stopped during a bad beating" (249). When the guards grow bored of the same methods of punishments, they thought of new sport to terrify the women. Feigned execution was one prank that satiated their appetite for cruelty. Mayada describes the horror of the situation in her biography pointing out the injustice and brutalities of male authorities in the Baladiyat prison. She describes how these terrified women were taken to a strange room full of human excrement and was asked to form a straight line. The guards forced them to stand against the wall. The warden, spitting on the ground in disgust at their fear shouted, "Face the wall! Prepare to die!"(241). He addressed the women as "filthy criminals" and "cowards" (243).Out of terror and panic many women collapsed. Waiting for the gun shots was a maddening experience for Mayada. Seeing the terror stricken faces of the women, the guards laughed loudly. The feigned execution drama continued for one hour and after that the women were taken back to their cell. This torture upon the women prisoners was aimed at devastating their emotional equilibrium, and the guards were successful in implementing it as several women including Mayada were mentally broken by this cruel treatment.

International standards regarding the treatment of prisoners are set out in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Rule 53 of Standard Minimum Rules to treat prisoners prohibits any involvement of male officers in the supervision of women prisoners. The rule instructs that the female prisoners should be attended, monitored and supervised by female officers. The U.N bodies pay more attention to the issues of gender based violence and sexual assault faced by women in detention. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights under article 5 prohibits any kind of torture, or degrading treatment in the name of punishment. But in the Baladiyat, the entire control of women was in the hands of the cruel guards of Saddam who addressed the women as "lowlifes" (44). Often abuse was in the form of manipulation and coercion into activities based on threat of harming the individuality of the prisoners. Foucault considers this deliberate removal of individuality as a "technology of power" (*Discipline and Punish* 30) used by the repressive state mechanism to control the individual actions by transferring them into subjects.

The condition of the women prisoners were almost the same in all the prisons in Iraq and Iran. The guards considered them as a bunch of stupid women. Every woman in the prison

faced physical and mental torture at one time or other. These women found themselves powerless and defenseless against the mighty guards, becoming only "comrades in tears."(179,Mayada). Aliya was detained in the Baladiyat prison along with her daughter and the daughter was forced to watch all the physical tortures suffered by her mother in front of her eyes. Aliya says:

> The most difficult thing I've ever done in my life was to muffle my screams while I was being tortured. They beat me, but I bit my tongue until it bled. I wanted to spare my child the terror of hearing her mother screech. One of the more vicious guards once tied my baby to a table, taunting me with the threat of torturing Suzan. I was tied to a chair so I could do nothing but watch as they lashed little Suzan. My baby shrieked until her belly bottom flipped inside out, and when they saw what had happened, they howled with laughter.(123)

The male guards in the Evin prison are represented as religious fanatics in full control of the lives of women. The women in the Evin prison had to remain submissive to the whims and fancies of male authorities. They were subordinated to enact the patriarchal Islamist rules. Women could not step out of the prison cells without wearing the *hejab*. When the prison guards suspected a lesbian relationship between the women prisoners, they were punished brutally in public. Marina Nemat remembers how two girls were punished in public by giving them thirty lashes for their alleged lesbian relation. "I watched the lashes rising in the air, turning into a blur, slicing the air with their sharp, piercing cries… Their small bodies shook with every blow" (117).After having given thirty lashes, the guards tied their wrist and ankles with rope and announced that they were punished according to the laws of Islam. Unable to suffer the physical and mental strain many women tried to commit suicide and those who objected to following the rules in the Evin prison were executed by the prison guards.

Terry A.Kupers in his article "Gender and Domination in Prison" by pointing out the misogyny exist in the women prisons, comments about the dominance hierarchy of top level owned by male staff and the bottom level occupied by women prisoners. The top is defined in terms of 'masculine' and bottom is defined in terms of 'feminine'. In that way the prison dominance hierarchy shapes gender relationships. The existence of this hierarchy in prison, thus, narrows down the personal possibilities of women and that is visible in the cases of physical abuse and assault faced by women during their incarceration. All women encounter the dread of rape and abuse that may happen at any time in such insecure ambience of the prison. So the dreadful reality of assault and abuse cause lasting havoc in the lives of prisoners who are assaulted and raped.

The Revolutionary Guards of Evin and the Secret police in Baladiyat used their political state support and administrative might to overpower women by objectifying, abusing and dominating them. The horrendous crimes and inhuman activities including the physical and verbal abuse, sexual torture committed by the prison authorities at these prisoners were horrific. The abuser/ abused binary, acted out in terms of gender is a clear representation of the gender hierarchies performed in the patriarchal societies of Middle Eastern countries.

The narratives of the political detainees explain the complex relationship between the prison administrative system and the women prisoners. The politicized experiences of personal, subjective and private lives of these women political prisoners throw light on the most infamous regimes of the 20th century and how the autocratic ruling system of these dictators altered and disrupted the normal lives of women living in these countries. The aims of these writers extend beyond the depiction of women inside the cells and it makes a linkage between prison and society emphasizing the 'predominance' of denial meted out to women in society as well as in prisons because of their double status as marginalized in these Muslim countries. The gendered dominance performed by the male staffs, guards, officers and interrogators who did not want to see any sign of happiness on the faces of women prisoners, reinforce the subservient status of women in prison. The male officials are the mere reflections of stereotyped reflections of male caricatures in the larger society. The prison accounts of these women political prisoners recreate the horrendous situations of verbal and physical domination by their captors. The act of narration of the carceral life allows them to reclaim those horrific moments of their lives and provides the picture of the intrinsically valuable lives of the political prisoners. They have succeeded in launching a public discourse on this subject which has haunted the lives of many women who were unable to articulate their struggles. The complexities and multi layered spectrum of power relations and their resistance to keep up their dignity construct a response to the horrors of imprisonment.

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From playing Bride to Self-Exploration: Arjie's Queer Awakening in Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy*

Savita Boral and Divyabha Vashisth

Abstract

Funny Boy is about a young Tamil boy from a wealthy family named Arjie Chelvaratnam. It shows how he comes to terms with his sexuality and deals with systematic discrimination in Colombo, one of Sri Lanka's biggest cities. Arjie goes from being a creative and sensitive young boy to a confident teen while developing his political identity as a Tamil queer person. Against a backdrop of the spiritual war against the repression of gender, race, and sexual orientation, Shyam Selvadurai's novels paint a realistic picture of the fears produced by gender non-conformity. His main characters have a hard time adjusting to the heteronormative family structure he creates. The Funny Boy, Selvadurai's most celebrated work, chronicles the coming-of-age of Arjie Chelvaratnam as a homosexual in Sri Lanka. The social and cultural issues of 1980s Sri Lanka provide the context for this story. Love, marriage, and cultural difficulties between the Sinhalese and the Tamils are all examined. The difficulty of diasporic individuals to be located inside cultural and ethnic frontiers is mirrored in Selvadurai's decision to set his narrative somewhere in the middle, between established sexual and gender boundaries. This paper takes a humorous approach to the topic of gender non-conformity and the value of individuality. It focuses on how the protagonist questions the rigidity and finality of gender categories by crossing them and displaying a destabilising subjectivity.

Keywords: Queer, hegemony. Ethnicity. Power politics, Gender

Introduction

Images of essentialized men and women stifling the voices of marginalised groups are common in heterosexual stories. These idealised representations of men and women reinforce sexist

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stereotypes and silence those who dispute them through the politics of erasure. Furthermore, it appears that heterosexual writers have usurped the authority to write on gender. With its realistic portrayal of sexuality that goes outside the heterosexual binary, Funny Boy threatens this monopoly on writing about imagined gender. By focusing on the protagonist of Arjun (Arjie) during the period of civil warfare, Funny Boy aims to go beyond the binary mainstream (two aspects of heterosexual person popular writings) and extant us with a modern view of sexuality. To highlight the variety in the gay discourse, Selvadurai employs two major narrative strategies: the employment of an innocent first-person protagonist-narrator and an intentional dovetailing of the political and personal. These methods were specifically chosen by him to emphasise the variety of narratives and to provide voice to the marginalised group. It is with these methods that Selvadurai achieves his goal of making 'pigs fly.'

In the 1990s, gay theory arose as an independent field that could be placed alongside lesbian theory. The appearance of gay and lesbian literature is indicative of the acceptance of this new sector, which is marked by the revolutionary activity of a group whose sex orientation differs markedly from that of the heterosexual majority. Peter Barry has elucidated in the book Beginning Ttieory that – "*What, then, is the purpose of lesbian / gay criticism? The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader tells us that 'lesbian / gay studies does for sex and sexuality approximately what women's studies does for gender. Like feminist criticism, it has social and political aims, in particular 'an oppositional design' upon society, for it is informed by resistance to homophobia and heterosexism privilege*." (p. 140) Funny Boy's unnamed narrator Arjie is a diasporan non-heteronormative person. The narrator of Funny Boy, a man named Arjie, is an adult living in exile from his own Sri Lanka. He has a hard time reconciling his personal view of his sexuality with the (often negative) views of those around him. Although there are hints of non-hetronormative sexualities in both works, the narrative never identifies this orientation by name. Neither author uses the Western-centric terms for sexual orientation and identity—"gay," "homosexual," or "transgender"—in their works. As a result, the author often portrays the characters as outside the groups of man and woman, and as an alternative as someplace in amid, in order to avoid using these descriptive labels. Anne Marie In the book Queer Theory argues that - In the late twentieth century both heterosexuality and, to a lesser extent, homosexuality have been thoroughly naturalised. This makes it difficult to think of either category as having histories, as being arbitrary or contingent. It is particularly hard to denaturalise something like sexuality.

Selvadurai provides a believable first-person narrator who reveals information gradually. The cloud of nationalism hovers over the story as he discusses his own development alongside the development of the country. The concept of nationalism is not one that Selvadurai endorses. He, on the other hand, has doubts. He explains that nationalist ideology establishes

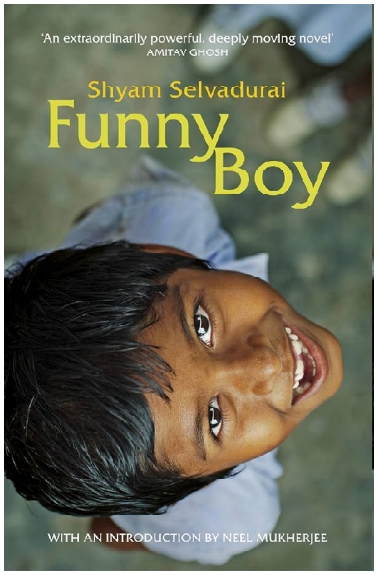
an unspoken rule of conduct, and that violating this code is inherently abnormal. It's clear that the novel is more of a historical narrative than a coming-of-age tale. By examining the narrative tactics outside the heterosexual discussions of Art for Art's Sake, we can see that for gay writers, writing is a tool for effecting societal change via their own personal experiences. The author examines two postcolonial concepts—nationalism and the LGBT community—through the'subjective' lens of a kid narrator. The protagonist and speaker, Arjie, struggles with his sexual choice amid relationships and dogmatic rigidities, and the title The Funny Boy alludes to this context. His father says that Arjie, now a teenager or young adult, has "certain tendencies" (162) that go against social norms for male and female conduct.

Dressing up as a bride for his "spend-the-days" is an important ritual for him, because wearing a sari frees him from the constraints of his gender. Dressing in a sari springs him a sagacity of freedom, independence that he may not have if he stuck to the norms of the boy's society. An example of this is found in a passage where Arjie describes the ritual of dressing up for a 'bride-bride,' saying, "I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to whom this day was dedicated, and around whom the world, represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, draping the palm, seemed to revolve." (11) He holds the practise of dressing as a woman in a near-sacred regard; nonetheless, this has earned him the label of "funny," the connotation of which he does not completely comprehend but which he can feel still has a disgraceful significance. In the novel's prologue, titled "Pigs Can't Fly," the protagonist, Arjie, believes that the backyard is his true home because it is where he "seemed to have gravitated naturally." Even though he is the only boy in a house full of ladies, he doesn't mind dressing up as the bride for his female cousins' favourite game of "bride-bride" when they're little. Instead of playing the boring game of cricket with his male cousins, he may indulge his wildest fantasies in this game, as the narrator explains, "The pleasure the boys had standing for hours on a cricket pitch was incomprehensible to me." (11)

As a result, the reader may recognise how Arjie breaks free of the confines of his gendered body through this stunning change, but his liberation is fleeting. Even before Arjie himself comes to terms with his sexuality, the reader gets the sense that his family is aware of, or at least concerned about, his gender nonconformity. Throughout the narrative, Arjie's family is hellbent on reclassifying him as a boy, discouraging him from playing with girls and encouraging him to play with guys. Arjie's family actively discourages him from expressing any non-traditional gender "tendencies" before he is even aware of the significance of these "tendencies." They are afraid he may grow up to be "funny," so they forbid him to play "bride-bride" (20). The family's steadfast effort to force him back into the role assigned to him by society demonstrates their respect for the norms that have been established. His "girlie-boy" (25) identity makes it difficult for him to identify as either a girl or a boy, making it uncomfortable for him to play cricket with the boys.

In the story, Selvadurai and Arjie spend most of their time and energy contemplating the racial, ethnic, and religious tensions that exist inside Sri Lanka. Arjie's vivifying desirability

assists as an inclination across the volume's six segments, but it is merely the key topic of "The Best School of All." The Queen Victoria Academy, an appallingly barbaric English-style institution, is where Arjie's father takes him to educate him. The Queen Victoria Academy projects an image of progressive, affluent, and middle-class privilege. This is the culture from which Arjie must emerge. Arjie fears that his father and the rest of the male-dominated, middle-class Tamil community would disown him if he came out as gay. Certainly, Arjie's dad tells him that the school "will force you to become a man," making it quite clear that the school's aim is to instill Arjie with the strategies for white-collar classmen category. Arjie's elder sibling cautions and aware him with the fact that their father worries, and suspects Arjie's Queerness , and that his decision to send the Academy is undeniably motivated by a desire to "cure" him of his homosexuality. In this context, it comes as quite a surprise that Arjie develops romantic feelings for and maintains a sexual relationship with ShehanSoyza, a Sinhalese classmate.



Arjie is torn between the two worlds of boys and girls because of the gender preconceptions that have been placed on him by his family. Arjie's earliest experiences with sexuality are limited to discussions about male and female identities. Arjie's isolation from both the females and the boys suggests he exists outside of the norms of either group, however the nature of this "funny" middle ground is never clarified. The phrases Selvadurai uses to explain identity are nebulous and changeable, without a fixed label. It's quite close to Arjie's experience of trying to find a place for himself amid traditional gender roles. Diggy, upon hearing that Arijie's girlfriend Shehan was coming over, made the statement that their father would "definitely know that you are..." but failed to fill in the blank. Arjie's place within masculine and female labels and ways of behaviour also defies representation in a single word, much like the identity of diasporic individuals is related to multiple distinct nations and cannot be appropriately described under any single cultural label. The author's refusal to label his protagonist challenges Western ideas on sexuality classification. He generally spends time by himself on his grandmother and grandfather's veranda stairs after his mother forbids him from playing with his female relatives. His physical location on the Veranda, which lies between the two groups' territories, is a metaphor for his social isolation. He is now having a new bodily sensation because of his seclusion. The process of draping the saree, which had been a source of liberation earlier, becomes a source of embarrassment when his aunt brings him to the drawing-room. Arjie has stopped clinging to his body as he used to. Throughout the narrative, he is troubled by the possibility that his gendered subjectivity is disintegrating or shifting. Arjie tries relentlessly to exist outside of binary gender and sexuality categories.

Arjie must exist in a space apart from conventional gender and sexual classifications, the people in migration may not be categorized in one edifying or folkloric classification. Arjie, "Funny Boy," was like the specific individual in a diaspora who struggles to fit into any single cultural, regional, or ethnic grouping. He attempts to find his place in the world but fails. He was unable to adapt to the political upheaval, rioting, and violence of his surroundings or to the adult world into which he was thrust, forcing him to abandon the dream world he had previously enjoyed. Arjie takes the middle ground after failing at both ends, suggesting that he is trying to find a way out of his current predicament. In numerous ways, the incapacity of diasporic individuals to position within cultural and ethnic bounds is reflected in Selvadurai's decision to situate his narrator in an anonymous middle space between delineated sexual and gender lines. Arjie gets so much disappointed and so helpless when he has been forced to abandon the fascinating game - "bride bride". "*Of all our varied and fascinating games, bride-bride was my favourite. In it, I was able to combine many elements of the other games I loved, and with time bride-bride which had taken a few hours to play initially, became an event that spread out over the whole day and was planned for weeks in advance. For me the culmination of this game, and my ultimate moment of joy, was when I put on the clothes of the bride*, (p. 04) As a result, Arjie is utterly transfixed by the "Bride-Bride" game, and he finds great joy in accessorising himself with clothes, jewels, and other trinkets. Arjie enjoys interacting with people from the fantasy involving females, since they hold his exclusive interest.

Arjie's family actively discourages him from acting on any non-stereotypical gender urges he may have before he can even begin to understand the full extent of such urges' potential consequences. Arjie was greatly irritated by this deterrence. His parents, especially his father, restrict him from playing "bride-bride" because they are afraid, he may develop a "funny" personality. After seeing Arjie engaged in a game of "bride-bride," his male companions warned him in no uncertain terms to stay out of the "second territory of girls" and "enjoy with his own territory, that of boys." Arjie realizes that - It was clear to me that I had done something wrong, but what it was I couldn't comprehend. I thought of what my father had said about turning out 'funny'. The word 'funny' as I understood it meant either humorous or strange, as in- the expression, "that's funny". Neither of these fitted the sense in which my father had used the word, for there had been a hint of disgust in his tone. (p. 17) Therefore, Arjie's separation from his parents can be largely attributed to his inherent scorn. Arjie's parents are terrified that he would become a "funny" or "disgusting" child, so they firmly discourage him rather than try to understand or intellectually confront his non-stereotypical impulses and tendencies.

His great interest in the lives of young women is plain to see. He's willing to take the hit of shame if it means gaining even a small foothold in the girls' society and experiencing the fun of dressing up in female garb. His desire to be accepted by the female population was, therefore, the strongest. However, in this transition from one gendered world to another, the topic of identity becomes so significant and nuanced that Arjie finds herself confused and

overwhelmed by the complexity of every circumstance. When Arjie attempts to play with the boys, he has as much difficulty as they do due to his "garlic-boy" status, which is the result of the gender stereotypes his family has instilled.. Arjie's exclusion from both the boy and female worlds implies that he lives in a realm between them, but this realm is never explicitly identified beyond being "Funny." In the first few sections, the protagonist's sexuality is only settled contained by the binary of male and female, just like the space Arjie occupies between the sexes is ambiguous and the terms used to describe it are inconsistent. In this case, the very name of the book, Funny Boy, alludes to the complex social and political climate in which the protagonist/narrator, Aie, struggles to come to terms with his sexuality. When Arjie was younger, his father noticed "certain tendencies" in his son that went against the traditional roles of men and women. When visiting his grandparents, Arjie enjoys dressing up as a woman by donning a sari and accessories. According to what we know about the grownup Arjie, he defines this ceremony as "transfiguration" in that he manifests "*I was able to leave the constraints of myself and ascend into another, more brilliant, more beautiful self, a self to who this day was dedicated and around whom the world represented by my cousins putting flowers in my hair, drapping the palu, seemed to revolve*". (pp. 4-5)

Seivadurai does a fantastic job of depicting Arjie's awakening to sexuality and his subsequent homosexuality. Arjie's transition from naiveté to adulthood has been wholly organic and genuine. When he found out about sex between boys, he was taken aback. And this curiosity does not take a long to reach to maturity level where he gets self-realization and self-experience thought to Shehan and himself. *What had happened between us in the garage was not wrong. For how could loving Shehan be bad ? Yet if my parents or anybody else discovered this love, I would be in terrible trouble... If you were powerful like Black Tie or my father you got to decide what was right or wrong. If you were like Shehan or me you had no choice but to follow what they. But did we always have to obey ? Was it not possible for people like Shehan and me to be powerful too ? I thought about this but no answer presented itself to me.* (p. 274) Arjie's physical and mental development have allowed him to understand concepts like common difficulties and societally accepted gender roles that he previously found opaque. His feelings for Shehan only serve to highlight how these realities run counter to societal ideals. These abandoned norms signal the end of his formative teenage years and pave the way for more carefree times ahead. Contradictory to the discussion of fixed ethnic recognisable proof, the execution of organised characters legitimises the narrator's transgression of social roles in their game of "bride-bride" and shields him from "becoming a man" within the confines of the British Queen Victoria Academy.

Textual revolutionary, Francois Fanon The Wretched of the Earth, one of the earliest and most influential postcolonial theorists, was himself a colonial subject who believed that western peoples' (that is, people of western/Caucasian racial stock) homo-sexuality was a symptom of psychological distress directly related to their "negrophobia." After President Mugabe reportedly called GALZ "worse than dogs or pigs," GALZ was recently banned from attending the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe, has made

some brash comments, including: "Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves, out of Zimbabwe." As a result, homosexuality is illegal in many jurisdictions. After laying out these examples, it's important to stress that, despite reflecting the values of the ruling authorities, the decisions in these circumstances are not necessarily supported by the frequently disenfranchised public. In Funny Boy, we follow young Arjie as he comes to terms with his sexual orientation with his developing knowledge of gender and ethnic standards. Arjie is the "funny" one; as a queer person, he wants to be in ladies' land because it allows him "potential for the free play of fantasy." He enjoys playing games like Bride-Bride with female friends. At first, Arjie is confused by his attraction to Shehan; later, after they engage in a sexual experience, he worries that his family would disapprove of his behaviour. Even once he comes to terms with the fact that what happened with Shehan was neither dishonourable nor inappropriate, he must proceed with caution because of the nature of the culture in which he finds himself.

Conclusion

Arjie is Selvadurai's vehicle for confronting our modern conception of sexuality, in which he aspires to go beyond the binary of male and female. Arjie overcomes his internal conflict and accepts his sexual orientation over time. Through coming to terms with his gender, he finds the confidence to fight against gender norms. His hyphenated identification, as a Sri Lankan-Canadian, mirrors his own nonconforming nature and liminal state. This research has sought to analyse and show how Selvadurai succeeds in shifting the predicament of gays in Sri Lanka from a private religion of pain to a public spectacle underlining homophobia through a gendered analysis of gay narratives in the country. By deconstructing the heteronormative identity, he gives his characters a fresh start.Without a doubt, Shyam Selvaduria's "Funny Boy" is a superb exposure of both homosexuality and heterosexuality. He makes no apologies for being a homosexual, and neither does his novel. He has no qualms about bringing up this controversial topic. He not only reveals, but also successfully defends the fact that homosexual couples experience sentiments and emotions. He excels at making his case clear and then defending it. In addition to focusing on ethnic strife, he also demands readers consider sexuality and gender norms.

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Tales of Kashmiri Pandits: Depiction of Violence and Loss in Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*

Mohd Nageen Rather

Abstract

The Pandit community of Kashmir has a distinct place in the society of Kashmir. These Kashmiri hindus comprised a numerically small but historically privileged cultural and religious community in the Muslim-majority region of Kashmir Valley in J&K. Many writers have depicted the human sufferings of conflict-hit Kashmiri people through their works as in forms of memoir, reportage and novel to delineate the real picture of pains and terror of the Valley in detail. The impact of violence in the Kashmir valley of the J&K state has been felt across communities, regions and ethnic lines. Among all, the Kashmiri Pandits have equally been the victims of the conflict and suffered because of violence. In Kashmir armed conflict induced migration and displacement of this minority Hindu community from 1989 onwards. Rahul Pandita, a native pandit of Kashmir, depicted the pain of these Kashmiri pandits in his memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*. The close reading through the application of qualitative method led to a critical analysis of the text. The analysis shows that *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* is a brave and remarkable text that reveals how Rahul Pandita's powerful narration unleashes the unarticulated saga of suffering of these Kashmiri Pandits.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir , Kashmiri Pandits, Saga, Sufferings, Violence

Introduction

Kashmir conflict has tremendously affected all section of its society. It has driven them to the doors of death, destruction and destitution. None has been spared by the bare fangs of this conundrum. Pandit community of the Valley has equally suffered the loss of life and loss of home, homeland and what not. R.K.Mishra puts his views as thus:

Over the decades, all sections of the people and regions in the state have suffered enormously, often silently and, sometimes, with in fructuous sound and fury. But the agony, suffering and

humiliation of Kashmiri Pandits is perhaps, the most heart-aching example of brutalization of a society. [...]The traumatizing aspect of their experience is the callous neglect and shameful indifference of those who have shed the rivers of synthetic tears of sympathy for them.(Mishra 4-5)

The sufferings of this community of Kashmir find voice in Rahul Pandita memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots: The Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits* (2013) which narrates the painful story of Kashmiri Pandits who migrated from Kashmir during 1990s. Pandita has first-hand experience of the tragic events happened with him and his family. By writing this book he tried to depict the suffering, pain and alienation of Kashmiri Pandits faced before, during and after their migration.

Pandita brings to light a less known face of Kashmir. Kashmir which once was celebrated as the paradise on earth is now turned to a land of contention, enmity, violence and death. Many writers through their poignant works tried to communicate the harrowing experiences of Kashmiri people to the world. But their very focus was only the brutality of the Indian security forces on Kashmiris, though it is not something to be enshrouded. Most of the writers fail to address the issues of the minorities living in Kashmir. "In *Our Moon has Blood Clots*, which unfurls the brutal episodes in the history of Kashmiri Pandits, Rahul Pandita dares to create a space where the anguish and agonies of the voiceless minorities in Kashmir could find a voice." (Raveendran 192)

Methods and Techniques

•A qualitative research approach, guided by close textual analysis, has been conducted. In the critical analysis of the selected work, the methodology utilized by the researcher has made use of the research techniques such as close content analysis, interpreting and comparing the primary sources chosen for the study.

•A contextual analysis of the selected text was conducted which allowed the researcher to examine the text by taking various factors into consideration such as cultural, social or historical and also consider the circumstances under which the selected work came into being.

Discussion

The rise of insurgency in the Kashmir valley and its adjoining areas since 1988 led to an ethno-religious divide between the two major communities inhabiting the valley and its immediate and a major consequence has been the migration of 55,304 families, which mostly comprised of minority Kashmiri pandits (Hindu) families to Jammu and other parts of the country. "A significant number of Kashmiri Pandits who numbered around 160,000 began to leave the valley in February and march 1990 for Jammu or India."(Schofield 245.) Ajay Chrungoo writes that "the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley started in the second half of 1989 immediately in the aftermath of gunning down of prominent Kashmiri Pandit leader Tika Lal Taploo"(Somraj et al 34).What was the overall situation of pandits during the

late eighties is best described by Sudha Koul who voices the insecurity of the Pandits in his memoir *The Tiger Ladies* thus:

We are becoming increasingly despondent. All of a sudden we feel we are too few, far too outnumbered, and far too vulnerable. Our lives and dignity have become imperilled in our own homeland. The Indian government is the sworn enemy of the mujhahideen primarily because India is a Hindu country. Being Hindus we are suspect in the eyes of the rebels, who are now calling the shots literally and figuratively in Kashmir. (Koul 141)

Pandits were in a state of confusion and lived a life of insecurity under constant threat and their sense of insecurity led them to opt for only one option left to them that was exodus. Rahul Pandita's book presents a heart- stirring tale of the socio-political ambience of Kashmir in the 1990s when brutal violence and an exodus of Kashmiri pandits took place. Being a Kashmiri native Rahul Pandita has faced in reality what he has written in his book. Rahul Pandita says about his book that:

It's a memoir on growing up in Kashmir as a religious minority, essentially Kashmiri Hindus, also known as Kashmiri Pandits— a small, miniscule community that lived in Kashmir for hundreds of years and were forced into permanent exile as refugees in their own country in 1989-1990 when a Islamic movement broke out in Kashmir valley.(*Interview by Peter Griffin. Forbes India Magazine)*. The need to give voice to the miseries of Kashmiri pandits was seriously felt by the writer. Pandits think that their plight is not given a voice and their miseries remain unarticulated and unheard which Rahul Pandits himself affirms that it " has become unfashionable to speak about us, or raise the issue of our exodus. But I have made it my mission to talk about the 'other' story of Kashmir." (Pandita 220).

The situation in Kashmir valley in 1990's was very fragile and there were clouds of danger sprawled all across the valley. People were very furious against the security forces of India. In the every nook and corner of the valley there were loud shouts and slogans raised and people were demanding Azaadi. Amidst this the pandits felt alienated and most insecure as they belonged to the minority section of the society. Rahul Pandita while depicting one of such scenes from Kashmir writes that: "...early in 1990 in Kashmir: a mammoth crowd in Lal Chowk , shouting, 'Indian dogs go back!' and '*hum kya chahte- Azaadi!"*.(Pandita 19) On October 14, 1989 , people of Kashmir witnessed a massive crowd participating in the Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi procession but the crowd was shouting slogans which were not in line with the religious sentiments of Pandits and which had come as a bolt from the blue to them:

Yahan kya chalega Nizam-e-Mustafa
La sharqiya la garbiya, Islamia Islamia
What will work here? The rule of Mustafa
No eastern, no western, only Islamic, only Islamic (Ibid 65-66)

Pandits realised that such venomous slogans were clearly threatening the Kashmiri Pandits. This message was very clear - the crowd did not want Kashmiri Pandits in the valley. Pandits

were forced to leave their homes and seek exile in other places of the country. The catastrophic mass exodus changed the social fabric of the state. For the Pandits each day in exile brings to mind a plethora of traumatic memories from which no escape is possible. Pandits who were the deeply rooted inhabitants of the valley were forced to flee from their homeland as a part of ethnic cleansing, are left traumatized:

Rahul Pandita during the course of narrating the tale of sufferings of Pandits catches even the minutest yet important details. The slogans which left an indelible impact on the psyche of the pandits find a place in the memoir. These slogans were threats and warnings in disguise. He describes the impact of such slogans on her mother which itself is the indicator of how other Pandit women were affected. Rahul Pandita writes:

I remember Ma began to tremble like a leaf when we heard it.
'Assi gacchi panu'nuy Pakistan,batav roostuy,batenein saan'
The crowd wanted to turn Kashmir into Pakistan, without Pandit men, but with their women."(Pandita 77)

One of the major thematic concerns of all the Pandit narrative is the loss of home. In fact the loss of home metonymically symbolizes the loss of the homeland since the Pandits had to flee their homeland. The Pandit home has been portrayed as a site of cultural and religious activity—a sanctified space of intimacy and intellectual engagements. Pandita remembers the condition of his father when he finally decided to leave Kashmir, "It was quite sunny the day Father finally decide that we should move to Jammu" (lbid 96), these are the memories which haunts Pandita, in 1990s he was about14 years old, so young to help his father, so young to understand that they are becoming homeless "And I don't think we realized then that we would never have a home again" (lbid 4).

Undoubtedly, Rahul Pandita's narrative evokes pathos since the protagonist's mother, now languishing in extreme penury living inside a makeshift tenement in Jammu, repeatedly states the fact that they owned a spacious house with twenty two rooms in the past. Besides Pandita shows how difficult it is to leave one's home, homeland and one's relatives. It is really difficult for a person to cut his roots from his home. The narrator laments the loss thus:

In constructing the house, my father had exhausted his entire Provident Fund; whatever little jewelry my mother possessed was also sold to help finance the construction"(lbid 21).

Generally it is the militant uprising in 1989 which is considered responsible which forced Pandits to leave the valley, but here one thing must be remembered that there are two dimensional narrative about the exile of the Kashmiri Pandits one is according to Kashmiri Muslims who believe that Pandits were made to leave the valley under a government's design to discredit the Kashmiri Separatist movement, and the other is that after the exile of Pandits Jagmohan could deal with Muslims of the valley most cruelly and sternly.

To portray all the Kashmiri Muslims as anti-Pandit is a sweeping generalization and exposes communal sentiments of the authors. The problem lies in looking only at their religious

identity and identifying all Kashmiri Muslims as pro-Azaadi and hence anti-Pandit. Pandita not only talks about the exile and sufferings of his community but he also shows how the two communities lived peacefully before 1990, how the people of one community visited the other community on festivals and marriages, people of one community didn't have any prejudice against the other. He recalls thus:

At our marriages, Muslim women celebrated with us by linking their arms and singing traditional songs to welcome the groom and his family and friends. My mother's best friend was Shahzaad (lbid 39-40).

Besides, Pandita shows that cooperation, the brotherhood and communal harmony between Pandits and Muslims was really exemplary. They would help each other, invite each other and live together like brethren. Pandita remembers that:

On Eid-Ul-Zuha, we would go to our neighbours' homes to wish them happiness. One of my father's Muslim friends lived nearby and when father would be out on long official tours, he would stop by, knocking gently at our door, refusing to come inside, and asking if we needed anything. My sister sometimes taught his children, and on Eid-Ul-Zuha I would slip out and visit his house to watch their family sacrifice sheep. A piece of lamb's meat would later be sent to us… Our neighbours wished us on Shivrarti, and we would offer them walnuts soaked in sweet milk and water. (Ibid 34-35).

Results / Findings

After the exhaustive and in-depth study of the book it was found that:

• Rahul Pandita painfully narrates the terrifying incidents which depict the plight of the ill fated Pandits.

• Rahul Pandita during the course of narrating the tales of sufferings of Pandits catches even the minutest yet important details of violence and loss. He recorded what he saw himself and what other witnesses and victims narrated to him.

•Pandita's book realistically depicted the socio-cultural ecosystem of the Kashmir valley, the political mayhem, and the resultant violence that turned the valley into one of the most heavily conflict-hit places on the planet.

Conclusion

Pandita's work represents the pains of the Pandits in a most daring narration and realistically drawn details. However the view that it is the Muslims of the valley who were wholly responsible for their displacement is totally wrong. Since the politicians of the country sitting in their cosy rooms were also responsible to a great extent for their petty political gains as Pandita himself admits that RSS wanted to mislead the Pandit youth by saying, "We are from the RSS. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. We will give direction to your anger," (lbid 103).The important thing which the writer has skipped completely is the depiction of

the miseries of the Kashmiri Muslims who also suffered in multiple ways as Avanti Bhati also admits:

The state wide statistics of the killings, when seen alongside religious lines, discount the fact that the militants were targeting only members of the minority community. Take for instance the statistics for the year 1990, the year of the exodus. The Muslim community experienced its own sorrows...number of Muslims killed in that year are 679, [...I]n each successive year, the figure of Muslims killed is significantly higher than the number of Kashmiri Pandits or other minorities targeted.(Bhati 19-20).

Both Muslim as well as Pandit community suffered due to conflict. Rahul Pandita's narrative is very crucial since it voice the Pandit version of Kashmir conflict who, much like Muslims, suffered irreparably as Dr. Manmohan Singh said, "what has happened to the Pandit community in the Valley is a great national tragedy. I would say a great human tragedy."(ORF Seminar 2015). Pandita's work beautifully portrays and records the atrocities perpetrated against the Pandit community.

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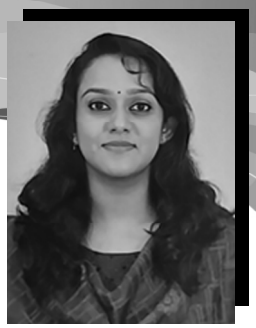
Right to the city: Resistance to redevelopment in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* and Murzban F. Shroff's *Breathless in Bombay*

Santhini M.A.



Abstract

The liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s opened the corridors of the country to the global market. Through urbanisation and infrastructure restructuring, the city of Mumbai rose to the status of a global city. Taking David Harvey's statement "urbanization has always been, … a class phenomenon", I argue that, as urbanisation elevated the city of Mumbai to the status of a global city, it deprived many unprivileged residents, not to mention the homeless in the city, of their houses, community, neighbourhood, occupation and ultimately 'right to the city'. The novels *Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga and *Breathless in Bombay* by Murzban F. Shroff, set in the city of Mumbai at a time when the city was undergoing intense redevelopment are illustrations of the above argument. This paper is an attempt to read the novels with reference to the concepts of 'accumulation by dispossession' by David Harvey and 'right to the city' by Henry Lefebvre, David Harvey and others.

Keywords : accumulation by dispossession, liberalisation, right to the city, urban redevelopment, home

Introduction

By early 21st century, the city of Mumbai got elevated to the position of a Global city. This was facilitated largely by the policy of economic liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s. Liberalisation of the economy opened up the corridors of the country for foreign investments. The city of Mumbai like many other cities of the world which had the potential to absorb capital, set on a mission to make itself attractive to the global investors and to become part of global economy. The city aspired to transform in the model of Shanghai and Singapore. For this, the industrial city had to be redeveloped to meet the needs of the new

global service-and-finance market. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) with the help of the corporate giants of the city initiated the mission of city restructuring under 'Vision Mumbai'[1]. The plan called for large-scale infrastructure building, urban renewal and redevelopment with public private partnership ("Our Story). Private builders were called in. Industrial lands such as - closed down textile mills, godowns, warehouses etc were handed over to them to redevelop into commercial and residential structures. Private builders gained importance.

Urban restructuring did help Mumbai to become a world class city. Mumbai became the financial, commercial, and the entertainment capital of India. It is also one of the world's leading centres of commerce in terms of global financial flow and created a positive impact on GDP. But what really happened was, rich became richer and poor became poorer in the city. At the time of liberalisation, Mumbai was facing pressing population pressure, need for public housing, lack of water and sanitation facilities, unemployment and environmental pollution. But corruption, vested interest of planning agencies and private parties side-lined the pressing problems of the ordinary citizens in the city. MMRDA and the City and Industrial Development Corporation competed in the real estate market instead of contributing to social housing and creating jobs. SRA (Slum Rehabilitation Authority) "mainly favoured the private developers who were grabbing prime lands in the city and displacing/resettling poor families in far away and remote areas" (Sharma, 86).

It is in this context that I attempt to problematize the issue of urban redevelopment in the literary works *Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga and *Breathless in Bombay* by Murzban F. Shroff, set in the contemporary city of Mumbai. Taking Harvey's statement "urbanization has always been, … a class phenomenon", I argue that as urban redevelopment projects elevated the city of Mumbai to the status of a global city, these projects on the other hand have deprived many unprivileged residents (not to mention the homeless in the city) of their houses, community, neighbourhood, occupation and ultimately 'right to the city' (272).

Right to the city

It was Henri Lefebvre in 1968 who first proposed the concept of 'right to the city' in his book '*The Right to the City"*. The city according to Lefebvre is an 'oeuvre', an oeuvre in which all its citizens participate. To him, city is a 'work' in progress than a finished product. It is created through the labour and daily actions of those who live in the city. And all the participants of this oeuvre called city have the right to inhabit and use the city space. "The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city" (173-174).

According to Marc Purcell, it is those who live in the city – who contribute to the body of urban lived experience and lived space[2] – who can legitimately claim the right to the city (102). In his essay *What kind of right is the right to the city?* Kafui Attoh, citing several

scholar-advocates of the unprivileged in the city, argues that the inhabitants of the city- those who own a dwelling as well as the homeless, migrants, racial minorities, disabled, deprived, women, sexual minorities, political activists all have a right to the city just as the legal citizens those who have voting rights in the city and those in power who have a say in the urban decision making (675).

How does redevelopment deprive anyone of their right to the city? For Lefebvre, right to the city is primarily the right to use the urban space. But in the city, space is being increasingly commodified. Space has use value and exchange value. In the process of redevelopment under urbanization, the city space absorbs capital and thereby the exchange value of space in urban areas surpasses its use-value. That is, when a high-rise building is built in the place of a slum in the heart of the city, the exchange value of that space multiplies. That space might have been used by the slum dwellers for housing and work. But when it undergoes redevelopment, the same space gets transformed into a commodity with an exchange value. "The 'progressive' bourgeoisie taking charge of economic growth" … (here it is the capitalists and private builders who exploit the lower class) "replaces the oeuvre, by the product". The redeveloped land is a product with an exchange value. "The oeuvre is more closely related to use value than to exchange value" (Lefebvre 75).

In his essay *Hunters, Gatherers and Foragers in a Metropolis: Commonising the Private and Public in Mumbai,* D Parthasarathy points out how the low-income groups in the city are affected by developmental projects in the city. In the city of Mumbai, there are areas which are recognised as commons, such as beaches, lakes, rivers, forests, mangroves, salt pans etc. These are places which can be used by all city dwellers. Natural resources available in these commons enable the poor and those with no property exercise their right to labour. People hunt, gather and forage in these commons for a livelihood. Real estate lobby and state sanctioned developmental projects are always a threat to them. These people or their means of livelihood are not considered by the urban planners or developers when they encroach on forests, mangroves or saltpans. As part of globalisation, national and transnational funds flow into these commons to improve the general life standard of the so-called legitimate inhabitants of the city. Developmental projects like public housing, recreational spaces and infrastructure projects like ports, bridges etc encroach on these commons. For example, the traditional fishing community in the city, the Kolis who were settled in the urban coastal areas, had to give way to developmental projects aimed at tourism which in turn deprived them of access points for fishing. Interestingly, with the privatisation of beaches which promoted recreational fishing, artisanal fishers got branded as poachers and their activities as 'illegal fishing'. Apart from them, the Agari community of traditional salt workers, the traditional sand miners who mine the riverbeds, those who rear livestock in the forests, those who forage the forests and mangroves for food, fodder, fuelwood, leaves, flowers, fruits and medicinal plants all face threats of developmental drive for the pleasure of the affluent (54-63).

Capitalism, class and right to the city

Harvey observes that, "Capitalism, …is addicted to geographical expansion. Globalization is the contemporary version of capitalism's long-standing and never-ending search for a spatial fix to its crisis tendencies", where the crisis refers to overaccumulation (2001, 24-25). Spatial fix can be described as fixing/investing the accumulated surplus capital in the land, to create an entirely new landscape in the form of airports and cities, in order to accumulate more capital. Urbanization is central to the survival of capitalism. Neo liberalization of the economy has let the free flow of capital into the city. Cities can facilitate the investment of surplus wealth through development and redevelopment projects. In the crowded city, the demand for housing and amenities is always high. The surplus capital flowing into the city gets 'fixed' into built environments. But, in this process of urbanization, only a privileged minority gets to make decisions. The majority mostly the middle and lower-income groups will have to make adjustments or even suffer the loss of home and livelihood. Many of them will not be able to afford to live in the redeveloped areas where they used to live once, as these areas acquire new improved living standards and increased market value. They get displaced from their homes whether it be slums or chawals, or pucca houses, and would be forced to live in places suggested by the governing agencies- either in transit camps or in the outer city. As Harvey says in essay *Right to the City*,

> Urbanization has always been, … a class phenomenon. … Since the urban process is a major channel of surplus use, establishing democratic management over its urban deployment constitutes the right to the city…The right to the city, as, it is now constituted, is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires.

Accumulation by dispossession

"Bombay has been described as the first Indian town to experience economic, technological, and social changes associated with the growth of capitalism in India" (Patel 328). A consequence of capitalist urbanization has been the dispossession and destruction of the homes and workplaces of the urban poor, a process which Harvey refers to as "creative dispossession" in his essay *The Right to the City*. Harvey (2008) quotes Engels:

> …the growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those areas which are centrally situated, an artificially and colossally increasing value; the buildings erected on these areas depress this value instead of increasing it because they no longer belong to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others.

Harvey further argues that

> … it applies directly to contemporary urban development in much of Asia—Delhi, Seoul, Mumbai—as well as gentrification[3] in New York. A process of displacement and what I call 'accumulation by dispossession' lie at the core of urbanization under capitalism. It is the mirror-image of capital absorption through urban redevelopment, and is giving rise to

numerous conflicts over the capture of valuable land from low-income populations that may have lived there for many years.

Privatisation and right to the city

Rahul Mehrotra leading architect of the city in his 2007 article *Remaking Mumbai*, lamented that by giving away to private sector developers the power to determine the emergent form of Mumbai, the government 'devolved itself of the responsibility of delivering urban amenities' (394). Regarding the redevelopment of mill lands (an area of approx. 585 acres) Mehrotra further observed that:

> …no planning agency in Mumbai even prepared a master or strategy plan for the process by which these lands could be integrated for the benefit of the city…politicians, mill owners and bureaucrats manipulated legislation and essentially deprived the city of a fantastic moment to balance its desperate shortage of affordable housing, open spaces, public amenities, and social infrastructure like schools and hospitals. The fatal combination of greed and myopic thinking in dealing with the recycling of mill lands has resulted in Mumbai losing an important moment to reinvent itself. (ibid)

"Land sharks and builder mafia… corrupted the bureaucrats and politicians to the core, and used all unethical means and tricks in pursuit of super profits" (Sharma, 2010: 88). "Thus, "weapons of mass construction[4]" as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls, shopping malls, office towers, and luxury apartments invaded the mill lands" (Woods, 408). While commenting on the density in Mumbai, Vyjayanthi Rao pointed out that the planning instruments like floor space index (FSI)[5] and the transfer of development rights (TDR) have become 'weapons' enabling constructions (244). In the Development Plan of 1964, the permissible floor space index (FSI) for different zones in Mumbai were stipulated, with certain areas like Nariman Point getting remarkably high FSI. This also gave the builders and the realtors the opportunity to build more floors and to accumulate profit.

Another boon which was bestowed upon the builders was the system of slum TDR which was introduced by the Shiv Sena government. Under the slum TDR scheme, in return for the private builder's investment in the slum redevelopment project, the builder will be given the TDR (Transferable Development Right) to develop another land in the periphery of the city. Ideally, through this strategy, the increasing housing needs of the city can be met and the density of population in the inner city can be reduced. But the builders do not want the demand and supply of housing in the city ever to be met and they want the prices of houses to be kept high. The Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA) also got teamed up with the private builders in real estate and speculation. "It is also true that, at any point of time in the city, 25 to 30 per cent of the newly created housing stock remained vacant for speculation and profiteering. According to an estimate, the annual increase in land and housing prices in the central city between 1975 and 2000 had been between 50 to 150 per cent…" (Sharma, 78).

Redevelopment and resistance in *Last Man in Tower*

The novel *Last Man in the Tower* written in 2011 by Aravind Adiga deal with the issues in discussion. The novel is set in early 21st century, a time when the city was undergoing intense urban redevelopment. It is the story of a retired teacher Yogesh Murthy in an old apartment in Vakola, Mumbai and his fight against the property redevelopment business in the city. The cities in India have seen slum clearance and 'dispossession of the poor' as part of 'city beautification' projects during national emergency in the early part of 1970s. Both Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry have written about it in their novels *Midnight's Children* and *A Fine Balance* respectively. In the recent times, infrastructure creation and redevelopment projects result in such demolitions. When the rest of the land is covered with high rise buildings, it is only the shanties and slums which can be encroached upon. Yogesh Murthy in LMT, is a victim of such demolition.

I will be analysing the novel with reference to the concepts of 'accumulation by dispossession' by David Harvey and 'right to the city' by Henry Lefebvre, David Harvey and others. This will be done in the context of population density and housing deficiency which aggravated in the city of Mumbai post the implementation of Liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation policy in India.

Redevelopment is the process of demolishing an existing old building and reconstructing it. The builder and owner enter into an agreement in which the owner gives the builder the permission to redevelop his land on the condition that the owner will be given some flats in the redeveloped building and some monetary considerations. In return the builder can retain some flats and sell them for his profit. In the case of housing societies, all the occupants will be provided flats free of costs and the extra flats built will be sold by the builder for his profit.

The novel LMT reflects the reality of redevelopment projects in contemporary Mumbai. Vakola, where the story takes place is a slummy neighbourhood in the heart of the city. But for Dharmen Shah and builders like him it is a 'golden line' with huge development potential. He approaches the residents of Visharam cooperative Society, a pair of old buildings towering amidst huts, with the offer of redevelopment. To buy off the residents he offers them a price much above the market price. All but one, except the retired teacher Yogesh Murthy aka Masterji accepts the proposal. For Masterji, he does not have any dreams and so he does not want money. And that makes him an odd man in the city of dreams and the last man in the six-storey tower of Vishram society. All he wants is to spend the remaining 'cigarette stump' of his life in his house where he has lived for over forty years (Adiga, 30). Dharmen Shah on the other hand is like a hawk who surveys the land for prey. According to him, "Builder is the only man in Bombay who never loses a fight" (Adiga, 115). In Vishram, he tactfully brings out the evil out of the residents and make them get rid of masterji and gets hold of the land.

Last Man in Tower and right to the city

In the novel *Last Man in Tower*, the builder capitalist Dharmen Shah recognizes the potential of Vaklola and proposes redevelopment, foreseeing opportunities for himself. Vakola

happens to be the perfect sight, 'a golden line' connecting the Santa Cruz airport, Bandra-Kurla Complex and the Dharavi slums.

> Why is this line golden? Air travel is booming. More planes, more visitors… the financial centre at Bandra-Kurla is expanding by the hour. Then the government is starting redevelopment in Dharavi. Asia's biggest slum will become Asia's richest slum. This area is boiling with money. People arrive daily and have nowhere to live. Except…here. Vakola. (Adiga, 54-55)

It is not just Dharmen Shah who has recognized this golden line. A brochure which Shah received read as below.

> The 'King' of the Suburban Builders, J. J Chacko, MD of the Ultimex Group, has astounded all his observers, friends, and peers, by acquiring a prime construction plot in Vakola, Santa Cruz (East) at an audacious rate that constitutes the HIGHEST PRICE ever paid for a redevelopment project in this suburb, despite the vigilant and audacious efforts of various competitors to bag the prize instead.
>
> Mr Chacko exclusively discloses to 'Mumbai Real Estate News' that an architect from Hong Kong, the noted land of modernism, will be called in to design the world-class apartments; Mr Chacko also believes he will add a park and shopping mall to the area in a few months' time. Hotels, plazas, gardens, happy families will follow. (Adiga, 53)

The huts surrounding Vishram are being engulfed by builders for redevelopment. Shah's two high-rise apartments- Fountainhead and Excelsior in Vakola are nearing completion. He wants his master piece 'Confidence Shanghai' to be completed before his rival J. J Chacko's 'Ultimex Milano' comes up. For his dream project, Shah has set his eyes on the site of the Vishram Society apartment buildings in Vakola. Vishram "is the most famous building in the area. We'll take it and we'll break it- and everyone will know. Vakola is ours", says Dharmen Shah (Adiga, 108).

The occupants of Vishram are bargained into the proposal or 'creatively dispossessed'. The buildings of Vishram society which have housed its people for thirty and more years give way to the luxury apartment 'Shanghai' that would become home to high-income families. "…the new place will be super-luxury…Each place will cost about two crores or upwards. The current residents certainly have the option of purchasing in the Shanghai, but they will be better served by moving elsewhere", says Shah (Adiga, 112). Even though the occupants of Vishram are compensated with handsome money, they are deprived of their homes to which they have emotional attachment. The other builder JJ Chacko has also carried out the same strategy by paying off a slum dweller and acquiring his home. It is the builders' will that is executed here. The inhabitants are manipulated to clear off the place. Manipulation sometimes involves violence as well, as Shanmugham, Shah's lefthand man mentions has happened in Sion and Chembur. In those cases, those who opposed Shah's proposal are either threatened or beaten up. Shailesh Gandhi's comment on private builders, "The private builders do not have any significant milk of human kindness and are more often driven by

vile greed" shows that such violent evictions are common in the city (Gandhi, 2007: 221-22). The builders accumulate/ acquire the land by dispossessing the people of their homes often involving violence. Hence, it is as Harvey calls, "accumulation by dispossession".

Home and community

When buildings are charged with meaning they become homes. Those are meaningful places which provides security and sense of belonging. Ripping that away from the residents is depriving them of their identity, their emotional attachment to the place, their social networks, daily encounters, old neighbourhoods and sometimes the meaning of their existence itself. More than the quality of housing it is the sense of belongingness which can hold people attached to a place. For the old man Yogesh Murthy, his home was the place where he felt the strongest even though the building was not strong enough. His life away from Vishram is vacant and meaningless. Moving out of that home would have deprived him of the memories accumulated within those walls throughout his life there. Soon after his retirement, Murthy's wife Purnima got diagnosed with cancer and she died leaving him alone. Purnima was not the only family he had lost. His young daughter Sandhya bled to death as she accidentally fell from the train on her way to college. His home, the fragile building, is a storehouse of memories of his lost family.

> A man's past keeps growing, even when his future has come to a full stop…Though the men and women around him dreamed of bigger homes and cars, his joys were those of the expanding square footage of his inner life. The more he looked at his daughter's sketches, the more certain places within Vishram—the stairwell where she ran up, the garden that she walked around, the gate that she liked to swing on—became more beautiful and intimate. Sounds were richer. A scraping of feet somewhere in the building reminded him of his daughter wiping her tennis shoes on the coir mat before coming in. Sometimes he felt as if Sandhya and Purnima were watching the rain with him… (Adiga, 150)

Masterji can feel the presence of his dead wife in his apartment. The tapping of the calendar on the kitchen wall guaranteed her presence in the house and he is sure that Purnima is talking to him. Her almirah, bindis, silk sarees…everything brings back her memories to him. Only in these memories can he survive.

According to Don Mitchell, the right to housing, the right to inhabit the city, … demands more than just houses and apartments: it demands the redevelopment of the city in a manner responsive to the needs, desires, and pleasures of its inhabitants, especially its oppressed inhabitants (21).

***Breathless in Bombay* and redevelopment**

Murzban F. Shroff (2008) in his work *Breathless in Bombay* throws light on the life of Mumbaiites from different walks of life. The stories *Dhobi Ghat* and *House of Mine* deal with the topic of redevelopment. In Dhobi Ghat, Shyam Pardesi, the middleman comes with the offer of a builder. Mataprasad, the head dhobi tries to sensitise his fellows about the

problems they could be in if they agree to the redevelopment project. The dhobis will have to move to a transit camp for two years before a flat will be built for them. Mataprasad who had spent his early life in a transit camp knows about the delay and dangers of such projects. Chances are there that the builder will not keep his promise of compensation money or a flat in exchange for their land, the dhobi ghat, which is a green zone protected against development. The builder wants dhobi ghat to be de-reserved and registered as a slum. Then it would be easy for him to acquire and redevelop the land which can later fetch him profit.

If *Last Man in Tower* was the story of people who got divided at the proposal of redevelopment, in *The House of Mine* the tenants of a building slated for redevelopment unite to defend their homes. The story throws light on the haphazard manner of redevelopment in the city. The building given on rent by a private owner is slated for redevelopment by Mumbai municipal corporation and the inhabitants are directed to move to a transit camp in Powai. At this point, the tenants unite to defend their homes and bribe the corporation officers and gets the eviction cancelled by agreeing to repair and reinforcement. The repair done by the housing board contractor turns out to be a pretence leaving the building to new threats of white ants. But the inhabitants of the building determine to defend their homes from all sorts of threats.

Right to the city and right to livelihood

In the essay *Staying Where the Action Is: Relocation Within the City*, Guerrero (1977) comments on how relocation can affect the livelihood of an unprivileged urbanite. She writes:

> It means not only physical transfer to some locality beyond the fringes of the city but economic dislocation as well as the relocatee finds himself placed some distance away from his source of livelihood. It means higher transportation costs, longer commuting time and separation from the family. It means further the uprooting of established community ties and one's network of social relationships (51).

It is necessary for the low-income groups to stay "where the action is". For the people in the dhobi ghat moving away to transit camps leaving the ghat as per the builder's guarantee can risk them their livelihood. It could become hard for them to find potential customers around the transit camp. Already with the coming of washing machines the dhobis are out of work. Mataprasad had to travel long distances by train to reach his customers. Guerrero (1977) further remarks that urban renewal may be advantageous to the privileged sections of the society. But one must also think "whether the requirements of urban aesthetics can justify or condone the accompanying social costs incurred upon the dignity and livelihood of the disadvantaged segments of the city" (Guerrero, 1977: 51). In *House of Mine* too there are residents who can be adversely affected by the suggested relocation to Powai. The milkman, the flower vendor, the tailor, the cloth merchant, the goldsmith, shopkeepers, the tuition teacher, all of whom who reside in the apartment are dependent on their social networks for their survival. Moving away from their place of business even temporarily for the redevelopment of the apartment can derail their livelihood. They will in fact be deprived of

their right to urban life and thereby their right to livelihood. According to Lefebvre, for the working class, rejected from the centres towards the peripheries, dispossessed of the city, expropriated thus from the best outcomes of its activity, this right (right to the city) has a particular bearing and significance" (Lefebvre, 1996: 179). Moving these people to transit camps can cause isolation, displacement and distort the realisation of their right to the city. Transit camps which lie at the periphery of the urban area are undesirable residual spaces which create an illusionary sense of inhabiting the city. Redevelopment is sometimes just a name to get rid of people occupying a priced piece of real estate. "Much of Mumbai's growth, as well as its brutal nexus of money, power and crime, is connected to real estate" (Chaudhuri, 1998). The occupants will be taken to transit camps in remote areas where they wait to be taken back to the redeveloped homes. But there are proven incidents where such people are forgotten and left to live in the transit camps for ever in "uncertainty and permanent temporariness" (Alkhalili et al. 264). In *House of Mine*, Angelina's recollection of what had happened to her aunt who was been replaced to a transit camp far away and left to live there for ever must have been inspired by such events in real time. Harvey writes:

> The right to the city is, … far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization.

In a democratic society, the citizens should ideally have collective power in shaping their city. The right to the city for its inhabitants is also the right to control the process of urbanization.

Conclusion

In the novel *Last Man in Tower*, Yogesh Murthy, turns out to be an unprivileged citizen, a victim in the process of urbanisation which followed the new economic policy of the country. Mr. Murthy is ultimately dispossessed of his life, home, community, neighbourhood and right to the city. If it was the property redevelopment business in the city that Adiga focused on, it is the corruption in the city corporation which is unravelled by Shroff in *Dhobi Ghat* and *This House of Mine*. This is where Harvey's arguments become relevant. These stories bring out cases of attempts at "accumulation by dispossession". Whether it be Shah or the builder in dhobi ghat, they intended to acquire the houses of lower-income people and redevelop them for higher-income people and make a profit out of that. It is the low-income group that is targeted in all cases.

Notes

[1] An action plan prepared by *Bombay First* (now *Mumbai First),* a "not-for-profit catalyst organisation" to transform Bombay into a World-Class City through public- private partnership. *Bombay First* was founded in 1994 by the corporate heads of Mumbai.

[2] By the term 'lived space' Lefebvre means how a space is being used irrespective of the dominant ideas about that space. Edward Soja has also developed upon Lefebvre's idea of lived space.

[3]The term gentrification was coined by British sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe the displacement of London's working-class residents by wealthier newcomers.

[4] Arjun Appadurai used the term while referring to the big American private companies Bechtel and Halliburton, which benefited from the reconstruction of Iran after the war with the US.

[5] Floor Space Index (FSI) is the maximum permitted floor area that a developer can build on any given piece of land.

[6]People who stay in the ghats. Here, Western Ghats.

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"The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side" Reading *The Lady of Shalott* as a Socio-Economic Pandemic Construct

Sunanda Sinha

Abstract

The devastating effects of the ongoing pandemic are too overwhelming to comprehend as the scramble of social, economic, and emotional adjustments along with the probing questions on the human excesses surround our self-centred routine. Similar questions, in a different background, and to a lesser degree, were simmering under the tight lid of conflicting new morality in the Victorian Age. The rapid scientific, medical, and technological changes combined with the population growth, territorial expansion, and development of transportation –were commodifying the Victorian life. In these contexts, the paper will reconstruct Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot" through the socio-economic refrain of Shalott and Camelot as a feminine versus masculine divide. It will reflect upon the human excesses of lockdown and shadow pandemic and reveal how pandemic patriarchy burdens women with informal labour and socio-emotional abuse.

Keywords: economic, commodification, isolation, pandemic patriarchy, Shalott

Introduction

The Victorian Age was an archway to the new reality in literature, a paradigmatic, and polemic shift to a realistic attitude based on the problems and peaceful adjustments to the industrial revolution. The literature of the age too echoed an "earnest response to the expanding horizon of nineteenth-century life" (Abrams 906) which would go on to define the coming centuries. The Victorian settings, characters and storylines were grounded in contemporary reality conveying a philosophical attitude towards seeing and understanding the world. It had its conventions, technique, presumptions, framework, compromises, and limitations that would determine literature in relation to appearances and impressions of truth. Based on these poetic appearances and impressions in the author's mind, characterised identities of the

protagonists were fashioned within the Victorian setting which became the hallmark of the age. The lady of shallot is also a creation of impressions of the age and creative flight of Tennyson. These impressions are brought out through the dilemma of artistic predilection and social responsibilities. While the metaphor of artistic isolation as a necessary tool for the depiction of social reality is the primary theme, there are multiple ideological and rhetorical constructions beyond the conservative telling of Victorian life. Tennyson's revision of the poem in the year 1842 to include Victorian gender morals and the notion of suicide, almost nine years after the first version was published, is also indicative of the poem's vast expanse of meaning besides the subject matter based on "[what] we must say that Tennyson took what he pleased from Mallory, and what he pleased from the Novella" (Potwell 238). While Tennyson does observe from distance, seeing what the conservative Victorian artistic vision would permit, he leaves immense possibilities for reimagining his knowledge to integrate what is most obvious, yet, hidden in the implicit concerns of representation. There is a need to reconsider Lady of Shalott not only as a pandemic construct of early lockdown days but also as a suffocating realisation of a new changed routine reality. In that, her penultimate stride toward the window, leaving behind the shadowy world, becomes a rejection of her susceptible gendered position made more vulnerable by the social-economic dictates relegating women to an unfavourable position. This paper attempts to find similarities in her position vis-a-vis socioeconomic forces that mandate a draconian nature of quarantine on the most vulnerable, particularly women.

Shallot vs Camelot vs Lancelot

The lady of Shallot's condition is a sort of collateral damage of the socio-economic excesses of the Victorian Age. As Alastair W. Thompson in *The Poetry of Tennyson* points out, it represented the dilemma of introspective artist, condemned to the life of shadows, and risking destruction if he turns to reality" (44). When we move further from this earlier interpretation of the relation between art and life, a dilemma metaphorically placed in the refrain of Shalott and Camelot - the opposing prevalent images built on the stereotyped feminine and masculine principle – we are faced with two vastly different worlds that help shape the identity of each other. Shalott against the richer, freer, happier, and thriving Camelot, which in turn, sustains the helplessness of the imprisoned maiden in the tower - overlooking the beautiful mainland ruled by King Arthur. Similarly, the colour code of "four grey walls and four grey towers…and the silent isle embowers" (Mukherjee 58) - the land of shadows against the real Camelot – moving, producing/creating, and socialising, adds to the optical binary of illusion versus reality. The dichotomy of these two symbolic worlds furthers the typical stereotype of a woman confined within the four walls of the tower, where she weaves a magical web of life - an imperfect imitation of the world she looks through the mirror. Contrasting the grey walled tower, the colourful magical web upholds the ideology of women perfecting domestic chores while being removed from the outside productive world. The lived experiences of others are felt and perfected through her tapestry as she continues to live under the chains of extreme working conditions. Interestingly, she is stagnant in contrast to

the material world, which is prospering in the web that depicts images of market girls, page boys, shepherds, knights, and the road to Camelot. Every person in the poem has an identity, mostly a productive professional identity that is related to the status and work of the individual. Shalott, on the other hand, is insignificant even after her day and night continuous labour and there are mere conjectures around her presence in the tower by passersby. Her presence is absent in the robust material world that surrounds the tower. The poem is loaded with material references and yet, Shalott is not a part of this transactional world. Let alone her services, even her existence is invisible in a poem that is interlaced with images of trade and commerce:

> And thro' the field the road runs by
> …
> The reaper, reaping late and early,
> …
> Piling the sheaves in furrows airy,
> Beneath the moon, the reaper weary
> …
> An abbot on an ambling pad,
> Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,
> Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
> …
> The knights come riding two and two (Mukherjee 58-9).

The occupation, profession, work, purpose, and movement of common people are used to strengthen the idea of Shalott's invisibility and isolation. Similarly, her anonymity contributes to the need to preserve the innocence and purity of women by shielding them from the dynamic transactional world guided by purely economic system. Shalott's work, the task of knitting day and night, is also relegated from the productive paid domains of work and labour, which again fixes her being within the patriarchal paradigm of roles and responsibilities of women within the household. Interestingly, the assumptions regarding her behaviour and moralities are regulated by an extremely coded perception that is conveniently upheld to pander Victorian morality. The paradigmatic formulation of the rigid dos and don'ts for Shalott only strengthens the utilitarian perfection of Camelot and Shalott. Tennyson's poetic imagination considers Shalott's imprisoned state as a necessity for artistic perfection and her lonely plight largely leads to perfection in her work as well. This visible perfection within the domestic space at the expense of complete distance from the real world is achieved only through access restriction of spaces around and mutual dependence of existence on continuous day and night domestic unpaid labour. Though the perfection is achieved by the tranquility of labour, it is ruptured by the sight of Lancelot, "He rode between the barley sheaves/ The sun came dazzling through the leaves/ And flamed upon the brazen greaves/ Of bold Sir Lancelot" (Mukherjee 74-77).

Pandemic Patriarchy and The Lady of Shalott.

Society and personal space both are restructured in the new pandemic normal: activities are restricted, there is a withdrawal from social life, interactive space is curtailed, and movements are limited. By now it is established that the proportionate effect of covid varies with respect to gender, class, race, age, disability, socio-financial position, and mental well-being. These compounding factors play out on the vulnerable through disproportionate complex load, disadvantages, and conflicts. The definition of household, social, and professional spaces all stand changed, especially for women in all of the above categories. There is a clear divide in the quantum of the consequences of the pandemic, active discrimination emerges with regard to gender, and the sexist myths and their corollaries continue. In this context, the vulnerable and unfavourable position of women is similar to the unnatural curse of the Lady of Shalott. Almost three plus years of simmering pandemic in different capacities, in the extremely progressive era of 2020s, and the debate about the origin of the virus is still inconclusive; a lot like the origin/reason of the curse of the lady which even after centuries of substantial literary research is still ambiguous. Beyond the face, body, and copious description of Shalott's purpose of existence, the background of the curse is never discussed. Like Shalott's curse, the existing inequalities compounded with the pandemic exacerbate the working conditions for women:

> A pandemic magnifies all existing inequalities (even as politicians insist this is not the time to talk about anything other than the immediate crisis). Working from home in a white-collar job is easier; employees with salaries and benefits will be better protected; self-isolation is less taxing in a spacious house than a cramped apartment. But one of the most striking effects of the coronavirus will be to send many couples back to the 1950s. Across the world, women's independence will be a silent victim of the pandemic (Lewis).

An "estimate that 4.5 percentage of women's employment is at risk in the pandemic globally, compared with 3.8 percentage of men's employment, just given the industries that men and women participate in" (Madgavkar). Even with the disproportionate representation of women in different sectors, "female jobs were 19% more at risk compared to men in 2020" (Madgavkar). Similarly, their employability along with representation in different sectors witnessed a steady decline. Gender impacted the unpaid care work of women as it increased manyfold with the additional burden of resources and scarcity of finances during the pandemic.

> Thus masculinity and femininity are not terms which designate a given and separate entity, men and women, but are simply two separate terms of difference. Patriarchy does not refer to the static, oppressive domination by one sex over another, but to a web of psycho-social relationships which institute a socially significant difference on the axis of sex which is so deeply located in our very sense of lived, sexual, identity that it appears to us as natural and unalterable (Pollock 47).

Even before the pandemic there was a worldwide crisis in the context of inequality between the roles and responsibilities of women and men. Women now have undergone an additional

confinement, stress, uncertainty, and a more unequal gender relationship during the pandemic. The causes of pandemic infused inequality are heterogeneous and numerous and have been rapidly increasing and widening the gap between the gender. This gap has led to a widely isolationist system of operation where women are being subjected to direct or indirect discrimination in their professional and personal lives. "As COVID-19 has disproportionately increased the time women spend on family responsibilities—by an estimated 30 percent in India, according to one survey, and by 1.5 to 2.0 hours in the United States - it is not surprising that women have dropped out of the workforce at a higher rate than explained by labor-market dynamics alone" (Madgavkar). While women were dropping out of active workforce, their time, and role at unpaid care increased manyfold. Their lives were transformed by the long-established barriers of domestic responsibilities that doubled amid the regressive economic effects on gender parity at work during the pandemic. The unfair existing structures of professional and domestic work combined with complex additional childcare responsibilities have largely fallen on women:

> Globally, the work of childcare is done predominantly by women. This includes mothers and also other female caregivers such as grandmothers, siblings and workers in the childcare sector. In 2018, 606 million working-age women considered themselves to be unavailable for employment or not seeking a job because of unpaid care work, compared to only 41 million men. This imbalance has major implications for women's employment and income opportunities and for children's development and well-being (Griffin).

The pandemic has also exacerbated the gendered gap between income opportunities and childcare. The caring and nurturing roles for women necessitate taking a backward step in their career who then fall behind in the traditional linear career progression. But the bind to achieve unattainable socio-economic goals along with changed demands of motherhood looms heavily on the professional growth of women. This also brings to light the entrenched relation between child care and economy: "More than 2.3 million women have left the labor force since February 2020, accounting for 80% of all discouraged workers during the pandemic, reducing the labor force participation rate to 57%, the lowest it's been since 1988" (Modestino). The work and family conflict has widened the domestic roles and responsibilities, and has simultaneously blurred the boundary between home and work. The decrease in paid employment and increase in childcare and household responsibilities has made it difficult to mitigate what constitutes paid and unpaid care economy now.

The childcare economy, in particular, has marked a visible shift from paid economy (school, day-care, didi/nanny) to unpaid care work (homeschooling). The women have been under tremendous pressure to either take time-off from professional work and accommodate the now routine homeschooling, childcare obligations, and alternative online schooling/activities. Suddenly, the trained and qualified professional women were reduced to prioritise the socially gendered role of the nurturer and educator within the household. Additionally, the hard-earned empowerment of women that comes with money to afford a daycare/nanny has also become checkered as the risk of losing employment is far greater for women compared to

men. On one hand, women had the humongous task of managing childcare and healthcare of family members during the pandemic, on the other, those employed in the childcare sector (mostly women) were either forced to close or scale back operations while homeschooling their kids.

> parents – mostly moms – dealt with the daily challenge of managing work and child care, a challenge greatly amplified for parents who didn't have the option of working at home. And millions of women couldn't sustain their jobs and left the workforce altogether (Griffin).

Such demanding situations heavily falling on women will surely have a deep and long-lasting effects on gender equality. As we slowly progress towards a pandemic free world, a lot of these additional pandemic childcare or domestic responsibilities would continue as a routine and become a social norm. The potential consequences of the changed work structure in work from home has witnessed a surge in digital platforms and technology unearthing an urgency to upgrade digital knowledge.

> The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated change in working practices such that the volume of work rapidly increasing. In Higher Education for example, teaching and learning activities had to be taken rapidly online, which required additional training to learn the use of new technologies relevant to remote teaching. In addition, teaching pedagogies also had to be adapted to facilitate remote learning which also contributed to the volume of work rapidly increasing (Augustus)

The accelerated requirement for technology-based skill is likely to persist and lead to a greater demand of digitally savvy people at workplace. Women will lag behind their peers/ male counterparts in career progression, hybrid work arrangements and will need more personal and professional bridging courses to recover the lost footing due to the pandemic. The decades of struggle by women and girls have come to a standstill as pandemic stealthily blocks, restricts, and creates additional barricades in the career progression of women. As far as the government the policy and efforts are concerned, they are largely focused on achieving economic stability and managing healthcare sector as the impact on women remains neglected sidelining the huge increase in the need for informal domestic work and care within family. The generic economic male domains have been the primary area of interest of policy makers as gender impacts and sensitivity towards dipropionate household care demands on women have not been a strategic priority. Concerns over pandemic inflicted marginalisation and invisible oppression in the name of covid rules and company policies have also risen but have failed to translate into substantive measures as Antra Bhatt, specialist and co-author of the report *From Insights to Action* observes, "The resurgence of extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic has revealed women's precarious economic security… Women typically earn less and hold less secure jobs than men. With plummeting economic activity, women are particularly vulnerable to layoffs and loss of livelihoods…Globally, 58 per cent of employed women work in informal employment, and estimates suggest that during the first month of the pandemic, informal workers globally lost an average of 60 per cent of their income" (*COVID-19 and its economic toll...)*. On the other hand, those who have managed to secure

their job are fixed in the complex matrix of increased 'work at home' with the changed professional demands of 'work from home', in some cases, deepens, expands, and adds more challenges to the livelihood, informal care, and mental well-being of women. The sudden rise in economic insecurity, extra care responsibilities of ailing/recovering family members tend to fall mostly on women, and the surge in household domestic work significantly restricted even professional women to double up as stay-at-home working member. Now, with the gradual return to offices and schools reopening in physical mode, women continue to shoulder the bulk of balancing the transition from normal to pandemic to return to the changed normal now. Sadly, there is no redistribution of work in this getting back to normal and the pandemic encouraged return to traditional gender roles has destabilised the pre-pandemic normal. The jinxed gender inequality during pandemic and post-pandemic routine process translates into a far greater burden of work on women, putting them in cursed situation of the Lady of Shalott: damned to unpaid extended labour without the possibility of access to equal opportunity or ownership of one's life.

The Economic Excess and Camelot.

The acts and actions of the outer world against the static Shalott, portrays Camelot as the Victorian dream: an inviting hub of activity, a life full of opportunities. The masculine order, Camelot, stands in sharp contrast to the feminine world of Shalott which is rural, fragmented, and isolated world of labour by hand, "There she weaves by night and day/ A magic web with colours gay," (Mukherjee 59). Her hands work labouriously and consistently 'night and day' empowering her image of self-sufficiency and reliance on one's means. Ironically though, in the previous part there is a reference of fairy spirit which will protect Shalott from the corruptive ills of the transactional and interactive world of Camelot. Tennyson subjects Shalott to both self-sufficiency in the household chores, and dependent, at the same time, on the protection of an anonymous fairy spirit. A protection offered against the unarticulated structures of economic forces freely operating in Camelot, and any interaction with it would sully her pure identity. She may be unacquainted with them but these are practised and experienced around her and are also at the centre of her isolated accursed condition. For Shalott, it is well defined that tranquility and happiness both could be achieved by submissive silence around weaving day and night non-stop. While there is pleasure in her work, the movement outside pushes her to reconsider her static, time-tabled, and labourious engagement. The cause and purpose of her restrictions are ambivalent and the poem focusses too narrowly on the suspension of all essentials to Shalott. She lives in a split of being "half-sick of shadows" (Tennyson 60). Interestingly, Tennyson uses 'half-sick' demarcating the split of her vacillation between enjoyment of work and inability to be free from the cursed state of routine. Though it was too early to talk about the mental well-being of women in Victorian Age, the 'half-sick word is a telling account of the precarious mental condition of Shalott. The discussion on her mental and physical health is a misplaced expectation in the Victorian age, so is the question of her forced social distancing and resulting loneliness leading to compounding her overall health. Her mental breakdown stirs up an emotional excess that

effects Shalott's ability to restrain herself and she ends up surrendering to a poetic death designed by Tennyson. She rejects her confines, the corners, the shadows, and strides confidently towards the window – symbolising a material, political, social, and spiritual rejection of the dark shadowy existence. Her movement from the cage like tower suggests a shift from domesticity towards freedom.

Shalott and the Shadow Pandemic.

Tennyson revised The Lady of Shalott (1842) to change how the poetic observers viewed the poem. The revised piece is more ambiguous with a different tone and feel centralising Shalott whereas the first one focused more on the nature and surroundings. Apart from Tennyson, the several other literary and artistic versions of Shalott too portray her as what one would refer now as a perfect quarantine figure. If one re-reads the poem in the present time, she appears to be graphically woven by patriarchy to sustain gender inequities in a pandemic. While Shalott is spatially segregated from everyone in a sort of a lockdown, she witnesses the most insidious form of domestic violence. Her crisis is introduced by the loss of access to spaces around her: a spatial segregation and ghettoization of Shalott to forced unpaid labour. The strain on her health due to day and night weaving, lack of essential human interaction, the harassment of caged existence where she could only observe through the reflection of the mirror, and the denial of basic human rights to choose one's life are all part of the most covert forms of domestic violence. The existing structure of reduced access and chronic entrapment coupled with Shalott's inadequate knowledge about her condition makes her more susceptible to gender-based violence. Her situation resembles to the covid led entrapment of women: The stay-at-home directives globally led to an unprecedented rise in physical, sexual and psychological aggression and violence at home. The shadow pandemic (domestic violence) orchestrated by pandemic patriarchy intensifies the domestic dangers that were already present but exposed during lockdown.

Isolation limits social contact with families and social services, and thus may facilitate family violence and prevent victims from seeking help. During the COVID-19 quarantine, the home becomes a dangerous place for victims while individuals are living in forced close quarters. In addition, mental health exacerbated by social isolation increases the likelihood of locking victims of domestic violence in an unsafe home environment and increases their vulnerability. UNICEF reports that school closures increased child (sexual) abuse and neglect during the Ebola epidemic. It is also important to note that child abuse and domestic violence are likely to co-occur when isolated at home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have suggested that new forms of family violence may occur; for example, abusers may threaten to infect their family members with the virus (Xue, et. all, 2).

Shalott adhering to the excruciating routine fearful of the curse, is analogous to the pandemic threat of the abusers to infect the family members with the virus. Shalott's fear and stress behind the closed walls and the curse in the backdrop of Victorian excesses of burgeoning technology and industrial revolution highlight the omission and neglect of basic services/

essentials and social life. Her disconnection and invisibility are legitamised in an industrial world that changed the idea of work and employment while the nature of women's role at home is also redefined. Women's access to social sphere was marked with never-ending inequities too. Shalott then weaving the perfect images characterising true romantic idealism whilst being spatially segregated into invisibility is similar to women becoming stable with their surroundings of physical, social and psychological isolation during pandemic and trying to perfect the cumbersome work from home culture. Almost oxymoronic against the contemporary wave of consumerism and digital boom in a politically uncertain time. Interestingly, it's not a simple black and white understanding either where Shalott and Camelot can both be compartmentalised into feminine and masculine criteria discussed earlier in the paper. The Tennysian ambiguity continues in Shalott holding onto the most conservative anti-industrial tradition (labour by hand) whilst being pushed, at the same time, into violating the established tradition by wanting to identify with the corruptive socially visible and lived experiences of the industrial world. She is faithfully unfaithful, and Camelot, the picturesque, beautiful, free and commercial mainland of King Arthur's court, lures her into the social world with Lancelot being the architect of her dissent. Shalott then is not just at the helm of sexual politics, she is also the nature and the nurturer that is intruded by the omniscient and omnipresent gaze and eroded by the unprecedented human excesses on all minorities. The vigilant eye observing Shalott 24x7 is similar to the pandemic equivalent of online monitoring and surveillance mechanism that threatens to abuse individual rights and collective interests of the minority. History is replete with instances of long-standing discrimination and exclusion of the marginalised groups through surveillance.

> Discrimination against vulnerable and marginalized populations was entrenched by early surveillance efforts. Nationalist governments employed public health surveillance to legitimize discriminatory public health policies against migrants during the Industrial Revolution. The rapid spread of diseases in urban centers was often attributed to racial minorities, whether Roma populations in Europe or Chinese immigrants in the United States (Sekalala, *et. all,* 10).

At present, the world and government across nations are investing in high-tech surveillance which is increasingly intrusive policing system with little to no regulatory oversight. The intensifying trade war, national security, law and order are a few reasons given for technical imprisonment of the subjects. Though there is statutory and constitutional protection, researches have demonstrated a higher proportion of minorities as the target and at risk of being controlled by surveillance, "Among the poor and powerless, surveillance is local, ubiquitous, and palpable, with harms that include physical force, harsh financial pressures, and humiliating exposure of intimate lives" (Gellman and Bell). Shalott too is 'among the poor and the powerless' at the center of authoritarian dictates where she is tracked and her behaviour is analysed for potential dissent. Similarly, the women, in the triple bind of the pandemic world are also observed, disempowered, and forced to passive acceptance of virtual fencing under the intrusive eye. The pervasive surveillance at home during 'work from home', the professional digital

monitoring of the evolving online work culture, and the bulk financial and health care surveillance of government through different applications and equipment have all contributed to a historic external control. The conformity to digital equipment of marginalisation threatens to destroy the basic freedom and human rights. This 'shadow pandemic', the online data accessibility and surveillance has been raging, amplifying the impacts of veiled marginalisation of the lesser groups. The extent of connection between data and individuals is still unclassified and while monitoring may be required to control public transmission of the virus, the greater concern of surveillance data being used to regulate the subordinate groups is one of the newer forms of pandemic patriarchy. There is an apparent reduction of privacy, monetisation of private data, and greater possibility of social/political abuse of online surveillance that will have far greater consequence on the women and the marginalised groups. Due to the lack of any significant form of social protection from this form of predatory intrusion, women in 2021-22 find themselves isolated in the tower of the Lady of Shalott, where their bodies and intimate emotions are being encroached by the ominous surveillance gaze stigmatising them to the worst kind of oppression.

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Embodying the Immigrant Self: A Study of the Select Poems of Ouyang Yu

Asha P.V.

Australia is an island continent and one of the most multicultural societies in the world. They strictly adhere to the ideals of fair go and egalitarianism. It is commonly believed that multiculturalism is one of their most priced policies. But a reading of contemporary immigrant poetry will tell the readers the other side of the reality. The paper attempts to give voice to the unheard deliberations of Chinese Australians in Australia.

To understand the space inhabited by Chinese Australians in Australia it is pertinent to have some knowledge about Australian history. Australia was a penal colony of the British and it is the discovery of gold fields in the nineteenth century that changed the history of Australia. A large number of Chinese came to Australia during this period and it startled the white racist Australians. By the late 1880s Chinese Australians were "portrayed as an octopus – like threat" (Giese 8). To restrict the entry of the "Asiatic aliens" (8) and other 'coloured' race the Commonwealth of Australia passed the Immigration Restriction Act which came to be known as the White Australia Policy in 1901. As Shen Yuanfang says "To keep out undesirable races, especially Asian peoples, the Immigration Restriction Act created in Section 3 (a) the well known and infamous dictation test that was to be no more than fifty words, in any European language, and could be administered at the discretion of a customs officer at a port, or by a police officer in cases where the immigrant had disembarked" (65). This discriminatory policy, which was not abolished until 1958, profoundly affected the Chinese migration to and existence in Australia. It was a stratagem in ensuring Australian racial purity and the policy was finally dismantled in 1973.

Although the number of Chinese admitted to Australia increased slightly during the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese population in Australia continued to decline. During the White Australia policy period hundreds of Chinese left Australia, "in 1921, 4633 Chinese males and 220 females left, the highest number of departures in any year between 1901 and 1947" (Yuanfang 47). Australian immigration restriction policy began to relax in the 1950s. In the early 1970s, the Labor Government officially put an end to the White Australia policy and endorsed

multiculturalism as its official policy. Multiculturalism "is a normative political and social philosophy based on a public recognition and acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity and a positive response to cultural difference" (Momin 15). The then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam said: "We do not want migrants to feel that they have to erase their own characteristics and imitate and adopt completely the behaviour of existing Australian society. We want to see that society enriched by cross fertilization that will result from migrants retaining their own heritage" (qtd in Yuanfang 127).

Contemporary Chinese immigrants in Australia are now expressing themselves more directly and aggressively. Ouyang Yu is a prominent contemporary Chinese Australian writer, "whose themes center on anger, exile, and the question of literary voice. He is the editor of *Otherland*, Australia's only Chinese language literary journal. Yu's writing, *Moon Over Melbourne and Other Poems* (1995), speaks of the "between worlds" condition of failure to belong as either Chinese or Australian in terms of language, culture, history, and identity" (Madsen 266). His other major poetry collections are *Songs of the Last Chinese Poet* (1997), *New and Selected Poems* (2004) and so on. His works are noted for his caustic exploration of Australian cultural and multicultural identities. Poetry is a powerful medium to explore the inner dilemmas and angst of human beings. Ouyang Yu in his poems tells the world how it feels to be an unaustralian in Multicultural Australia. An unaustralian can be seen as someone who challenge the hegemonic power structure. According to the law "Multiculturalism has facilitated the move beyond assimilation to retain the cultural markers that define the Chinese as ethnically diverse" (Giese 43). But how far it has proved to be successful is questionable.

Ouyang Yu's poems are a quintessential record of the immigrant experience, a mixture of delight and rage, of wonder and frustration. His poem "An Identity CV" is written in the form of curriculum vitae. The poem is a powerful rendering of the social injustice the poet has to face. Like in a curriculum vitae the poet gives every details about him, like his language, nationality, occupation, race and so on. He says,

By mistake : getting caught by two, wanted by none,
hated by most, and preferring to be left
alone;

By nationality : Australian for the last couple of years;
Chinese for the first 43; unashamed of
either; having a bit of problem with
both; (14-20)

…

By skin-colour : supposedly yellow but looking slightly
white in winter or dark in summer if in
receipt of too much sun; preferring to be
changeable according to weather, and
place; (28-32)

He possesses a cosmopolitan attitude towards life and is at ease with every changing circumstances but the people he meets are completely unease with his presence in Australia. The Chinese are always perceived as the exotic other by the majority of white Australians. He realizes that he is "destined to drift for life" (8) and is unable to comment on the purity of his blood and he feels a DNA test would be needed to determine it. An acute sense of exile and an ambivalent relation with the host country is well expressed in this poem.

In his poem "Ways of not Seeing" Ouyang Yu talks about the different 'ways' Australians 'look' at them. He starts the poem by describing the common method followed by them. "One way of not seeing is a remote control / that senses your approaching and looks away well in advance" (1-2). Even if the writer happens to be in front of them, they have the ability to stare "into your eyes / and right through until s/he sees someone behind you" (3-4). As he sees this process of not seeing, he too learns to look back with a dehumanizing gaze, as if they were "a tree, a blade of grass, a kangaroo or anything / that doesnot mean anything" (9-10). They are invisible to the majority of Australians and consider them as "non-human objects" (8). This idea of unbelongingness is taken to a higher level in his poem "Alien", where he is critical of settler Australian's claims to being insiders. "I stand on this land / that does not belong to me / that does not belong to them either" (1-3). He muses over the fact that "the bloody inscrutable Chinese has no friends" (27) and they are always welcomed by

unwelcoming eyes
unsmiling noses
murderous cars
resentful phones. (7-10)

These poems point to the fact that racial hierarchies do exist in contemporary Australia as in other parts of the world. They are willing to accept immigrants from the north and south of Europe, but they cannot tolerate those from the east or non- west. The perpetuation of negative images affects the social cohesion and strengthens the hegemonic powers that function against the heterogeneity, plurality and diversity of Australia. The sense of not belonging in a multicultural Australia is very rampant in the writings of immigrant poets like Ouyang Yu.

He is able to shed the facade of Australia as a multicultural paradise, in his poem "I am a Man of Multiple Identity" taken from the collection *Songs of the Last Chinese Poet* (1997). The poet says:

I came to Australia
because I was told that this is a multicultural society
which suits me fine
but I'm not happy about what I see here
for example in a workplace
during the tea break
people fall into groups according to their different nationalities
they buy and read their own newspapers written in their own languages

only in a brothel do they begin to mix (9-17)

In this modern globalised world it is essential to embrace multiplicities than clinging on to the age old essentialist notions of homogeneity. These immigrants are labeled as 'others' whose intrusions into the mainstream have to be repelled at any cost. This overt stance of anti Chinese sentiments, xenophobia and acrid depictions seriously affect the emotional well being of immigrants. The excess concern for homogenization actually problematises the ideology of multiculturalism. The construction of east and west as mutually exclusive is a covert way to perpetuate the Anglo Celtic Australians hegemony.

In his poem "The Solitary Chinese" he gives voice to his deeper anguishes. He came to Australia with great hopes but is aghast to see the futility of his dreams. What makes him poignant is the apathy of the artists and writers to their cause, because they are the "engineers of human souls" (18). He says "He is caught between going back and staying on / neither has any attraction for him" (21-22). He believed he has come to the land of freedom but is bothered to find that "these kangaroo people / are only interested in the dry bush as kangaroos" (9-10). Differences are not appreciated and he is not welcomed by anyone. This sense of not belonging anywhere causes deep scars in the poets' psyche. Heterogeneous cultural influences have definitely helped in forming his fluid, de-essentialised and cosmopolitan self, but he is not able to find the same anywhere.

Chinese Australians are inevitably othered and marginalized, they occupy an ambivalent state, and a floating identity. The policy of multiculturalism fails to accommodate the other. Ouyang Yu is able to expose the predicaments of being a nationless migrant, who lives in a liminal space or a third space, and possess a hybrid identity. Hybridity has "taken on an array of meanings that range from the simple notion of racial / cultural mixing to a more complex concept of dynamic interaction and counteraction across unstable racial / cultural categories" (Lo 69). Hybridity is positioned as antidote to essentialism. Asians are usually located outside the nation space in Australia. The notion of identifying with Australia implies that the individual finds his or her place in terms of, or within a large inclusive pattern of life, which gives meaning and significance to the lives which become part of that pattern. To put it in Stuart Hall's terms, cultural identity in this sense,

> is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture… But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (Hall 225)

The need of the hour "is reflected in the open acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural diversity, peaceful coexistence and tolerance, cosmopolitanism and respect for human rights" (Momin 3). The poet envisions a better future where multiethnic communities are able to live as Australians and at the same time safeguarding their unique identities. Only an inclusive approach can assure cultural harmony in the global scenario.

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The Autobiographer as Witness: Living and Archiving Camp Life in Kaberi Kachari Rajkonwar's Memoir

Anshuman Bora & Rakhee Kalita Moral

Abstract

This essay examines the role of the autobiographical subject in edifying the archival of the self by narrativising lived experiences gained in camp life. To that end, the essay reads an Assamese memoir titled *Issa Anissa Swotteo Kisu Katha* [A Few Reluctant Words] (2013) by Kaberi Kachari Rajkonwar, a former female cadre in the militant outfit United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in Northeast India. Rajkonwar recounts her experiences of camp life as a rebel in several transnational geographies including the hostile conflict zones, confessing the predicament of writing about her life which is precariously entangled in the vulnerable spatiality of the camp. Drawing on the historically significant as well as resonant act of witnessing as an autobiographical instrument, the paper addresses the nuances in which the subjectivity of the narrator as a rebel and also a woman is constructed by scrutinising selected portions of the memoir.

Keywords: Witness; Assamese memoir; camp life; woman rebel; subjectivity; lived experiences.

Kaberi Kachari Rajkonwar's memoir *Issa Anissa Swatteo Kisu Kotha* (2013) represents a phase of Assamese Life-Writing in the twenty-first century where the narrative of an integrated private self is no longer foregrounded. Instead, it recounts the author's lived experiences as someone whose being is subjected to the flux induced by those experiences. The memoir thereby takes the form of an autobiographical project that subverts recounting or documentation of the experiences of a reductive personal self. This predisposition of the memoir and its interlocutor is largely due to its inclusion in the body of works that we propose to call Rebel Narratives. Beyond creative works in Assamese produced since the late twentieth century addressing the armed insurgency in Assam carried out mainly by the militant independentist outfit United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), we propose to mark a distinct

set of narratives that emerged in the first two decades of the twenty-first century explicating unique autobiographical characteristics as Rebel Narratives written by the former rebels of the outfit themselves. *Issa Anissa Swatteo Kisu Kotha* stands alone among these as the first work authored by a woman rebel.

Rakhee Kalita Moral

Issa Anissa Swatteo Kisu Kotha is an evocative testimony of the author's journey of life that started in a serene village in the Nalbari district of western Assam. Rajkonwar narrates the trials and tribulations she went through after getting involved in the Assam Agitation as a school student in the early 1980s and subsequently in ULFA as a young woman completing her university degree in the early 1990s. However, the major part of the work entails the recounting of her experiences as a woman rebel of the ULFA treading upon diverse places across the borderlands of Northeast India, Bhutan, Myanmar, and her eventual exile in Bangladesh with her family till her capture and handover to the Indian security forces in 2009.

The memoir stands apart from usual autobiographical accounts in Assamese insofar as Rajkonwar presents a subjective account of her 'self' whereby she opens her readers up for quite a few perspectives to rethink the construction of subjectivities in life writing. The insiders' perspective recorded in Rajkonwar's memoir, on the one hand, tends to censure life writing from the linguistic dispensation facilitated by poststructuralist thought which according to Phillipe Lejeune paralyzes the 'referential belief…plunging the reader into the imaginary' (as cited in Hayes, 2022); and on the other, erects the image of the author as an underground witness of unconventional spaces and geographies that get embedded in the tapestry of creative self-expression[1]. As a result, the practice of life writing, as exemplified in the memoir, turns out to be a means of an extension of the story of the self into a larger canvas where not only the private and the public spaces get entangled but also the wall between the intimate-private creative self and the supposedly realistic-matter of fact-worldliness of its context or the field, for that matter, is also dissolved.

Significantly, a large part of contemporary Assamese history is constituted of archives made up of a corpus of writings, reportage, memories, lores, literature—and even silences, and thus of a whole social dynamic that animates the political energies and responses of civil society in Assam to the critical transition it experienced. Like important actors in a social canvas, some of these are witnesses to changing histories and times. In evoking the "witness" in this discussion, we bear in mind recent seminal works on the role of testimony and witnessing in much greater catastrophes such as the Holocaust, and the unforgettable experience of human brutality in those dark times. Giorgio Agamben's important comment that such events often lead to an aporia of historical knowledge, and what he calls, a non-coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension (1999) is also telling for its validity in moments of violence and mass resistance movements such as the rebellion in Assam and

the incredulous thereof, that often appeared to hold its own during various events and incidents that marked its bumpy trajectory over three decades.

The witness is, more critically than ever, a spectator to the politics of fear, to the fear of the multitude, the fanatical crowd, to hatred, hostilities and the inherent violence that breeds in such societies of dissent and discontent. She has sometimes also been viewed as an unwitting participant in the horror she analyses being unable to "do something" to prevent this growing culture of violence. We would rather contend that the witness is an agent of change, a definitive part of its history, adding to the contemporary archive and whose responses viewed from a distance confirm her active political role in expressing her indignation at acts of violence by both, rebels and the state (Moral, 2015). In the case of ULFA, however, there are testimonies that also come from being directly part of the violence. The voices of rebels and former insurgents, which are testimonies in the real sense, animate the archive as we shall have occasion to elaborate upon, in this discussion.

It is equally important to dwell on the categories that these writings have come from. While many have witnessed this period of rebellion and revolt in Assam and been part of a large transformation, social and psychological, the creative writer has chosen to be more outspoken and prolifically employed the theme of insurgency as a trope for both fictional and lyrical narratives. Even at a cursory glance, the writing of the recent years is phenomenally affected by the present militant history of the region. More pointedly, a large section of this archive can be sourced from former rebels who have often written their memoirs, diaries, or confessions after disbanding from the outfit, whether in ceasefire mode or as surrendered cadres. Yet, the absence of the woman rebel in this archive, primarily as a writer is pertinent if not wholly surprising. Her experience of insurgency is integral to the manner in which life in the camps and outside lent a cohesive factor amongst cadres, and her testimonies remain critical to understanding the dynamic of rebellion through the decades of ULFA's existence as a guerrilla outfit[2]. But she is vocal and her testimonies provide a rich insider's look into both the camps and her life beyond the camps back in the community. Will the women's experiences of insurgency be recovered? And why does the archive remain silent on rebel heroines? Or are there really no heroines to celebrate? These questions prompt and signal the gap in narratives on and from female cadres. About nearly a decade ago, Rajkonwar, senior cadre and wife of the Chief of ULFA (pro-talks) Arabinda Rajkhowa published a book that was received with mixed reactions both from insiders and from the ordinary and informed reader[3]. The title, roughly translated as "Despite wishes and restraints, a few thoughts" confessional as it is, signals what Moral calls "the hesitant diarist, someone half-willing and only half-ready to speak" (Moral, 2015). As combat wives, the likes of Kaberi Kachari Rajkonwar have been typically rendered ineffectual and mostly viewed ambivalently. Yet, Rajkonwar not only symbolizes the tenuous and hidden spaces which women inhabit within the outfit but also sharply points toward an empowerment and agency that the rebellion, despite its failed mission, necessarily offered them. Clearly, the work breaks the invisibility of the former woman rebel and brings her centerstage and right into the thick of the discourse that

continues to evolve and emerge. The obvious gendered situation that the female rebel experiences and her self-reflexivity as a writer recounting her memoirs of camp life are quite evidently mired in questions about speaking more than she ought to (hence her hesitation, cited in the title) Other woman rebels who have not ventured to write do have their own strong views of the organization: their oral histories and ethnographies are rich sources of the life and times of the rebels and narrate many anecdotes and accounts of the perils and temptations of life on the edge. The recent 2022 publication of *Light Down* by Moni Hazarika, a former member of ULFA's first batch of women cadres of 1989, has brought some fresh insights into memoir writings and diaries by female combatants and rebels and is a more deliberate attempt to bridge the gap between what the author calls the larger 'history' of a state and small personal memories and observations of an apocalyptic moment in the lives of young men and women (Hazarika, 2022). They are also often, strident critiques of the patriarchy prevailing at the heart of the organization: something that is apparent when one looks at the profiles of the stakeholders and significant members who constitute the peace negotiating groups at this current moment.

Did the resistance movement and insurgency with its unfettered, disaggregated body of information and narratives constitute a break or rupture in the normative archive or in a more postmodern sense actually reinvent the archive ethnographically and historically? Which is to say, would a history of the Assamese be incomplete without this slice of the archive, small and amorphous though it is? And are these violent epiphanies, moments of apocalypse in a community, tragic tales and suppressed stories, regimes of silence even, likely to be erased over a point in time? Would the archive thus be cast in a metaphor of memory or forgetting, or the unfreedoms with which women, for example, write, as Rajkonwar's memoir more than elucidates? It may be interesting to compare some of these narratives, particularly from female rebels across zones of conflict and find intersecting and common patriarchies and thus, gendered experiences in camps and rebel communes. *Hisila: From Revolutionary to First Lady,* written by Hisila Yami, Nepalese communist and Maoist rebel leader who later married Baburam Bhattarai, former Prime Minister of the country, narrates a similar predicament and the dismay of women finding themselves short-changed despite promises of liberation and equal rights as men.

The ongoing aim of this essay is to read the first part of this memoir which narrates the underground experiences of camp life of the author to interrogate the problematic entanglement of writing rebel life with archiving history- in a considerably wider sense of the term. Rajkonwar's autobiographical act of writing finds elaboration partly as self-reflexive and partly as self-effacing testimony of witnessing in various moments of the early part of the memoir. This nevertheless constitutes a textual archive of history.

One of the instances from the narrative where Rajkonwar, just a few days after her joining in the camp-life of the outfit in the Bhutan hills, travels through the hilly terrains of Bhutan along with a few of her companions in the outfit to an undisclosed campsite. In the tedious trekking path, they are accidentally confronted by some poachers equipped with

weapons who behave aggressively against them mistaking the militant members to be another group of poachers. In an aggressive act of retaliation, the companions of Rajkonwar shoot the poachers to their death with the guns which they wrapped in towels. As she confesses, this was the first time she confronted violence and death since she joined the outfit. She gazes at the lifeless bodies of six poachers as she and her companions cross over the bodies and continue their journey through the hilly terrain. Rajkonwar narrates:

> There was a trace of sorrow in everyone's eyes. Ever since three o'clock at night, we had been walking steadfastly in the hope of reaching our destination. But this accident in the afternoon made everyone walk with a heavy heart. I felt nauseated and fainted to the extent that I almost stopped breathing.[4] (Rajkonwar, 2013, p. 74)

This experience of Rajkonwar places her subjectivity at a contradictory juncture: the exercise of her individual will to join the outfit in support of a violent as well as extremist method of confronting the sovereign state comes in direct opposition with the lived reality of the camp life. In the above instance, the emotional excesses of the author and the corporeal manifestation of disgust induced by the violence caused upon circumstantially 'innocent' beings demonstrate rather contradictorily the limitation of Rajkonwar's individual agency and also her supposed role as an agent of the political transformation. What appears significant at this point though is the act of telling her life itself which is caught between the reportage of an otherwise undocumented history of transnational lived experiences and her own emotional inconsistency on facing a more or less hostile border *topos*.

Moore and Swanson, while deliberating on 'the social and institutional contexts of witnessing' which they intended to extend into the field of life writing, observe that, witnessing in an autobiographical setting, is "a complex meditation on how one reconstitutes oneself as a speaking subject, and how one's psychological and physical experience might be presented and understood within a matrix of social relations, linguistic conventions, and, not least egregious harms" (2018). This observation finds relevance in Rajkonwar's account of witnessing that stands in between agency and dormancy.

Witnessing under these circumstances work as a window to the larger structures of power relations at play. The testimony of a witness is a powerful positionality validating an active agency for the author on one hand; and on the other, given the uncertain and tentative ways in which she was perceived as a woman cadre in the camp, and after her arrest, as a pro-talk fraction of the outfit, the same agency deems subservient to circumstances contributing to a governing condition of 'reluctance' in the process of writing/archiving. The configuration of the camp life is of paramount importance here.

Agamben in his seminal work, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), discusses in detail the dynamics of camp life and transmits its symptoms in the form of a metaphor to come to terms, after Michel Foucault, with contemporary governmentality. Moving beyond the somewhat bygone understanding of the Camp as a totalitarian arrangement following the Holocaust et al, Camp for him is what he calls "the *nomos* of the political space

in which we are still living." (Agamben, 1998). Agamben's explanation of camp life as a ubiquitous condition in contemporary governmentality reinforces our understanding of camp life that Rajkonwar explicates. The author opens up an interesting way of understanding camp life by archiving it through her act of writing and conversely, being available to the pervading control exercised by its infrastructure within and without its physical geography. Although the disciplinary system of the rebel camps seems abiding for all irrespective of gender, Rajkonwar's confessions about a usurping patriarchal structure being operated from the camp infrastructure are scattered throughout the portion of the memoir under consideration in this essay. We discover Rajkonwar in the early part of the narrative as someone who is allowed to enter into the rebel camps in Bhutan Hills without getting the basic combat training essential for all the other new entrants. This exception is extended to Rajkonwar as she consents to the marriage proposal of the chief of the ULFA and by virtue of that allowed to enter into the camp. Rajkonwar narrates her first cross-border underground journey to the camp to get married in which she is accompanied by a few male cadres of the outfit. As soon as her identity is revealed as the would-be-wife of their Chief to her companions of the journey, the fellows immediately stop wondering about the otherwise impossible prospect of her entrance into the camp.

> The man stopped for a second— "Wait a minute." The other two men also stopped walking and stared at me in wonder, "Why haven't you been talking to us about it ever since? See, I mistook you to be someone else. No, you must be kidding us. Women go to *Kamakhya* or *Bhairava* temples to get married and you have come to the Bhutan hills for the purpose!" (Rajkonwar, 2013, p. 62)

The author is turned into a silent witness of this act of exception exercised on her by the infrastructure of the rebel camp as her fellows continually fix their gaze on her usurping of her individual will and agency jeopardising her sense of being an insider.

The author's compelling account of her wedding night at the camp is also resonant with the same note of hesitation and reluctance. Narrated in delicate poetic prose rich with metaphors, this portion of the memoir acquaints us with the author's deep-seated longing for the elaborate rituals of a conventional Assamese wedding which the camp life has denied her. Rather she waits for her husband in a makeshift hut made of plastic with extremely minimal arrangements in the recesses of a Bhutanese forest. Her husband arrives and directs her to light a fire using the dried bark of a felled tree and departs. Surrounded by the extremely cold weather conditions of the hills at night, Rajkonwar is unable to light the fire and waits for her husband to arrive. It is only after her husband's reappearance late at night that the fire is lit at his behest. Rajkonwar confesses:

> I was silent because lighting the fire was the most difficult task for me at that moment. Silence engulfed all my surroundings too. He brought out his combat knife and started scrapping to remove the bark. When he could gather a heap of it he lit the fire on the tree by placing the heap under the trunk and the wax candle under it. The fire started burning gradually.

It felt as if the fire embraced the tree with all desire.
(Rajkonwar, 2013, p. 67)

The metaphoric use of the 'fire' against the apparent 'coldness' of the situation is aptly manoeuvred by Rajkonwar in this portion. The 'fire' in question becomes the fire of desire and under the patriarchal circumstances of the camp, can only be lit by the husband. The author's inability to light the fire and by extension, her longing is symptomatic of her subservience to the patriarchal forms of power getting operated through the organisational setup of the rebel camp. However, the author's act of witnessing in the discourse of dominance destabilises the binarism of sovereign governance within and without the rebellion and validates the significance of the textual edification of the archive.

The title of the memoir stands in sharp relief, as the leitmotif of the narrative, pronouncing both the inherently dichotomous and staccato rhythms of life in the camp and later outside it, while reifying the diarist/narrator's need to articulate the unspoken and the unseen. In many ways, Rajkonwar could be read as a voice that intrudes on the exclusive male space and upsets the gendered site that Rebel Narratives have constituted in Assamese literature. Significantly, *Light Down* unlike *Issa Anissa* written nearly a decade after Rajkonwar's ostensibly, the first narrative of the rebellion by a female, has the advantage of objective distance and is the product of a less prickly relationship between former guerrillas and the state. Moni Hazarika is able to write of the outfit's leaders and central figures and personages with a degree of liberty that was unavailable to Rajkonwar, also on account of the latter being the wife of the former Chief of ULFA. Hazarika who is married to writer Anurag Mahanta (a former commandant of the outfit) and stayed as a couple during the insurgency participates in a somewhat different dynamic, removed and separate from the rebel group both as witness and as critics of their shared experiences of insurgency and armed conflict. Despite this all, Rajkonwar's archival of the rebel autobiographic self and its historicization in the contemporary discourse of Assamese literature posit a decisive interface between living and narrating through witness accounts that straddle the interstices of remembering and re-membering.

Endnotes

1. The predicament of referentiality endorsed by poststructuralist linguistic indeterminacy affected the recent debates around life writing. Confronting this dispensation, Rajkonwar's memoir records the shifting dynamics of referentiality and the textual-linguistic imaginary.
2. See Rakhee Kalita Moral, "The Woman Rebel and the State: Making War, Making Peace in Assam" (2014). See also Rakhee Kalita Moral, *Rumour, Rhetoric, Rebellion: Negotiating the Archive and Witness in Assam* (2015) for an early discussion on reportage from camp lives in the time of insurgency in Assam and the beginning of the official ceasefire of hostilities, after 2011.
3. The rift between the pro-talk fraction of the ULFA and that of the hardliners was visible since the early years of the first decade of the twenty-first century. As a prominent

member of the pro-talk fraction, Rajkonwar's account can be read as a defence of her political position amidst the changing public image of the rebels and the rebellion.

4. All the translations from Assamese to English carried out in the essay are those of the authors.

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Moving beyond the Binary of Utopia and Dystopia: A Re-Reading of Marge Piercy's Select Novels

Sangeetha V.

Abstract

Women writers of technoscience fiction have taken the immense privilege to address the hitherto unexplored terrain of gender in the digital world. They project their imagined world as a utopian or a dystopian space where the conventional binaries are often dismantled, eventually questioning the ontology of being human, particularly woman. Women science fiction writers imagine and recreate new subject positions conceiving the digital space as sites juxtaposing the old and the new cultural anxieties. Science fiction has always explored the terms utopia and dystopia to the maximum zeroing in the futuristic setting and increasingly discussing how the life of humans get influenced by advanced technology, cyborgs, etc. along with the transhuman possibilities in the binary of utopia and dystopia. This paper attempts to look beyond the binary construction of utopia and dystopia in women technoscience fiction and tries to find out whether these themes come down to an actual space in the narratives of Marge Piercy's *He She and It* and *Woman on the Edge of Time.*

Keywords: technoscience fiction, cyberspace, utopia, dystopia, transhuman, technocratic, Mattapoisett

With the advent of advanced technology, women writers of technoscience fiction often consider it a privilege to explore the domain of gender in the digital world. Earlier, radical feminists were convinced that the lack of technological skills in women was the main reason for their dependence on men in this domain. However, contemporary feminists contour technology as a liberated space albeit many radical feminists have examined the very gendered nature of technology- how technology is embedded with capitalist and patriarchal power structures. Women science fiction writers tend to envisage and recreate alternate subject positions conceiving the digital space as sites juxtaposing the old and the new cultural anxieties.

They delve into their imagined space, challenging, and questioning the ontology of being human, particularly woman.

The terms utopia and dystopia are quite often heard in the domain of science fiction. Writers of science fiction have explored these terms to the maximum with the help of computers and robots providing alternative histories, foregrounding the futuristic setting. These writers carve out spaces of parallel universe, interplanetary settings, extraterritorial life forms etc. where they foresee a future which is likely to be utopian or dystopian. They consider these settings to be too ideal to happen or give a warning about the too evil setting towards which the world is moving. Many dystopian works are delineated in the backdrop of a desolate world often moving off the track. Tracing the history of science fiction narratives which discuss the technological advancements like AI, genetic engineering, and neural network seemed to be generally categorised in the binary of utopia or dystopia.

According to Oxford Dictionary the definitions of the term Utopia is "an imaginary place or state in which everything is perfect" and dystopia is "an imaginary place or state in which everything is extremely bad or unpleasant". The term utopia emerged from Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) meaning 'no place', and representing a perfect world. It carries the dominant view as something "illusory, unrealistic and ineffective" which implies that such an ideal place is too good to be true (Afnan 330). It is a frame narrative and a socio-political satire where More makes fun of the world's excessive idealists. Slavery is encouraged and repeated offenders are executed so much so that we feel it represents a dystopic world as well, blurring the boundaries between utopia and dystopia. It goes without saying that More could not envision a utopian world which is free from constructed social relations especially gendered ones giving clue to the very nature of prejudiced western society. Margaret Cavendish in her utopian novel, *The Female Academy* imagines an all-female university which can also be interpreted as a subversion of patriarchal system where men rule the mainstream universities across the world. The concept of an all-female university cannot be considered as too ideal to be true as there exists all-female colleges and schools which seem to be popular even today.

The dystopian stories originating from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World, Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, and Burgess' *A Clock Work Orange* to the latest novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman revolve around the themes of violence, resistance, political oppression, devastating climate change, loss of individuality, and controlling technology. Many works including H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905), and *Men Like Gods* (1923) project a dystopiantechnocratic world. Nonetheless Wells included a chapter, "Women in a Modern Utopia" trying to address parenthood and maternity benefits peripherally touching the issues of women, seemingly claiming equality between the sexes. But he failed to inscribe the fundamental issues of gender and the constructs, acknowledging the fact that mothering and parenthood are the principal concerns of women. William Gibson's cyberpunk *Neuromancer* (1984) is the first novel of his trilogy and presented the concept of the dystopian world. "Most of the 1980s and 1990s sci-fiction movies such as "Robocops" series and a recent

film by James Cameron named *Avatar* (2009) present human beings having masculine identity only, and therefore considered masculine gendered" (Syrinne 3107).

Most of the Science fiction narratives set in the backdrop of utopia or dystopia turn their back towards technology, representing unstable temporal and spatial dimensions. Even though many dystopian writers including Huxley, have addressed the notion of sexuality, these writers have done little to address the notion of gender roles. Women writers like Piercy, Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel Delany, and Joanna Russ in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century laid hold of the feminist utopian tradition, critically challenging the prevalent gendered consciousness. Marge Piercy, through her utopian and dystopian themes tried to critique the status quo, bringing in the marginalised characters of the fictional narratives to the mainstream set in the background of technology.

The representation of an apocalypse world due to the advanced technology was termed by Rosi Braidotti as a 'Posthuman Melancholia' in her deliberations on Critical Posthumanities. Popular culture has been active in dictating an anxiety among the humans with the depiction of disaster movies and transhuman narratives, building on a long tradition of science fiction literature which has been extremely popular for years. Sci fi movies especially Hollywood movies have played a significant role in projecting the dark side of technology and proclaiming how man's fall is imperative due to the excessive use and dependence on technology. Science fiction movies like *Robot, 10.O, 2012, Terminator* etc cast an apocalypse and the vulnerability of humans take an intimidating warning due to the advancements in a technocratic world. Male writers and female writers have differently portrayed the cyborgs in their science fiction writings. "Males' writings presented cyborgs to add up the values that constitute the stereotypical gender roles in the western society while female writers used cyborgs to question the gender identity" (Smith 1). As Braidotti postulates, for the majority of population, the question of climate change is structured or constructed through Hollywood disaster movies successfully contouring the social imaginary of disaster through these representations.

"Because dystopian fiction begins with a kernel of the real world, it's often a harsh commentary on modern life and a warning about what our lives could become if we're not careful" (Cicero).

George Orwell's *1984* an exemplary of dystopia portrayed the role of big brother and mass surveillance which moves parallel with Michel Foucault's perspective of how power operates as a mechanism and how visibility becomes a trap in future as discussed in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). "The governments of dystopian societies like those described in *We, Brave New World,* and *1984* all focus on sexuality as a crucial matter for their efforts at social control. And it is also clear that this focus comes about largely because of a perception on the part of these governments that sexuality is a potential locus of powerful subversive energies" (Booker 337).

Marge Piercy's novels endorse feminist utopian as well as dystopian themes. Her technoscience fiction *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It* attempt to dismantle

the linguistic as well as patriarchal power structures, placing her novels in a futuristic setting. In her novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* Piercy juxtaposes a dystopian real society with a utopian futuristic society critiquing the political and social cultures of the existing society. By portraying the utopian space, Piercy also tends to criticise the pervasive sexist, racist, and gendered society. Connie, the protagonist goes through a miserable life as a consequence of the gendered world and experiences social oppression. She encounters many abusive relationships and gets intimidated with her life. She is trapped as a violent paranoid schizophrenic and sent to a mental institution by the patriarchal world depriving her rights to keep her daughter in custody. She looks through the lens of Mattapoisett's ideal society, "as a source of radical, mobilizing inspiration for feminists" which manages to implement advanced technology, individual liberty, and social planning entirely different from real communities which acts as an agency to the future (Tyler 55). She postulates the ideas of feminist movements through her novels and has delineated a genderless society which has been considerably associated with a utopian space. "The author utilizes this future to shed light upon and critically addresses urgent social issues like class, gender, and race. Finally, by inventing this future, the author provides her heroine a scope where Connie's human potential is valued and her silenced voice is heard by her friends in this future and ultimately by readers of the novel" (Dohal 5).

Piercy indeed tries to subvert the traditional notion of motherhood by giving the roles equally to all genders. The glorification and self-effacing position of motherhood is being challenged and parental roles are shared equally by each parent regardless of the gender.

Frances Bartkowski points out, "Piercy chose Connie to narrate her own story because her life is one in which many of the social practices criticized by contemporary feminism are brought to light" (53). The queer characters like Skip, Jackrabbit, and Luciente offer a wide range of diversity which presumably allows an all-inclusive domain unlike the characters of a traditional novel. Through the sweeping lens of Luciente the readers get an "ideal" setting which topples patriarchy, breaks up sexism, and crumbles class distinctions along with the decentralisation of power by the government. Luciente can be considered as Connie's alter ego who states "We couple... for love, for pleasure, for relief, out of habit, out of curiosity and lust" (Piercy 64). "Connie is completely in touch with the real world around her as well as her imaginative world. Being judged as insane makes Connie appear living on the edge of time, and Luciente takes her on a journey at a time meaning the present to another time meaning the future, over 150 years in the future" (Abdelbaky 385).

The message that Piercy projects through these utopian as well as dystopian worlds conspicuously foregrounds the fact that we are moving towards a dystopian phase and this utopia/dystopia categorisation seems to be blurring the line in the binary worlds as many of the incidents narrated have been moved into an actual space when we approach the 21st century.

Piercy's dystopian work, *He, she and It* portrays the disillusioned protagonist Shira who

is a divorcee and loses her son in the court due to her ex-husband's "higher tech rating" (13). She becomes oppressed by the patriarchal environment and later gets an opportunity to immerse herself in the technology. The novel brings in a cyborg character giving clue to a futuristic idea of how humans get along with robots. Human characteristics are attributed to the cyborg blurring the boundaries between machine and human. The main character Shira who is a victim of patriarchal society falls in love with Yod, the cyborg. Piercy through the novel tries to question the credibility of the term "natural" when humans claim them as natural contrary to machines. The term seems to be problematic when human body is frequently augmented by pace makers, artificial and AI implants. Shira feels the relation with Yod as less mechanical when compared to other previous relations. "We're all cyborgs, Yod. You're just a purer form of what we're all tending toward," says Shira (156). The world in the novel is controlled by 'multis', the technocapitalists who destroy the human race and women are also treated as mere objects. In the initial stage we can see how the cyborg insists Shira to refer as 'him' over 'it' and proclaims "I am anatomically male" (Piercy 72). She reconfigures her identity with the help of Yod eventually challenging the man-made language or the linguistic environment. Donna Haraway discusses the fractured identities and acclimatises how with the help of a cyborg these identities could be reconstructed and dismantle the social power structures. Yod is claimed to be constructed as a male cyborg by Avram, the scientist albeit he/she/it cannot be framed into a particular gender. The interventions of Malkah and Riva, who act as tech programmers make Yod possess the female characteristics as well. Thus inorder to serve as a male protector he/she/it reframes or transforms its identity into multiple ontological frameworks. Gendered norms of the society and the normalised concept of heteronormativity are challenged by the relationship of Shira and Yod. This can hardly be considered as a dystopian phase as we are moving and getting along with cyborgs in reality. The Y-S enclave in the novel amends an artificial reproductive technology where each baby gets four parents including a doctor. The concept of motherhood is being revamped whereas patriarchy considers women as unfit for ideal mothers. The gender reconfiguration and altered ontology owing to advanced technolife could apparently be emulated in an actual space in the future society.

Should these themes be necessarily utopian? Isn't there a phase beyond utopia where we come into an actual space in future? These questions are relevant in the contemporary post-pandemic period as we have moved into the realm of a corporal world. A decade ago humans could not have thought about online education or virtual schools which might have been imagined as a dystopian future then. But the pandemic period provided us with a platform to think about previously expressed utopian or dystopian spaces coming into the actual space. We saw online schools and education which is now a normal way of learning. So the dystopian or utopian once represented in literature or popular culture could move into the actual space of reality especially in a fast-moving advanced technoscientific world.

Utopian literature stands in the liminal space between fiction and reality. Readers speculate the utopian narrative and imagine it as a non-existent entity but over time the cyberspace has

given more chances to bring down the fictional narrative into reality. June Deery foresees this kind of a future and eloquently puts it thus: "Speculation has begun about the Utopian possibilities of virtual reality. Will this alternative world, also planned and programmed by human authors, allow us to begin again? Could it, for example, create a postgender environment more favorable to women?" (45).

Many authors endorse equal gender rights and fight against patriarchy through a utopian phase but when it comes to the fictional embodiment they prefer the social stereotypical roles of women characters. The so-called stereotypical roles need to be altered in the cyberspace along with their representation offering a neutral ontological and epistemological subjectivity as against the social construct of power structures. "The virtuality of cyberspace is seen to spell the end of naturalized, biological embodiment as the basis for gender difference. The Internet is expressive of female ways of being, and thereby creates manifold opportunities for changing the woman machine relationship" (Wajcman 7).

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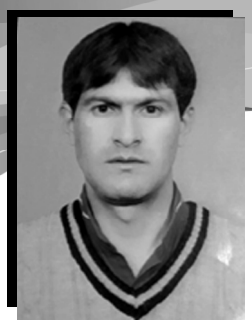

Resisting the Silence: Space and Human Agency in Sita Rathnamal's *Beyond the Jungle*

Suresh Kumar

Abstract

The tradition of life writing has never been popular among tribals in India. It was evidently because tribals were alienated from education and learning and were denied expression. Besides these handicaps, the received tribal cultural and religious conventions also prohibited them from expressing the 'self' and revealing the secrets of the community. Relegated to the lowest pedestal of society, tribal women remained silent for centuries. It was only after the adoption of the Constitution and the spread of education that they began to claim their right to speak, assert their agency and recount their lived experiences as a socially, economically, educationally and politically marginalized group. They took inspiration from subaltern writers and activists who employed their life stories as an apparatus to awaken silenced and suppressed masses and to register their protest against dominant socio-economic forces. It is worth noting that the tribal autobiographies evince the impact of dalit autobiographies. Like dalit writers, tribal writers also prioritize community over self and foreground prominent social, political and economic issues when they write their life stories. The present paper attempts to examine how tribal women use literature as an apparatus to express themselves, assert their space, and demand their human agency in a caste and class-afflicted society. Sita Rathnamal's autobiography Beyond the Jungle, which is selected for the detailed analysis, is one of the representative tribal texts that not only brings out the position of tribals but also exposes the dominant power structures. The book is a stepping stone in the realm of Indian women's autobiographies as it depicts the suffering and inner feelings of traumatised Indian women and mirrors their lived experiences in socially, and economically stratified post-independent society.

Keywords: Tribal, Space, Agency, Silence, Resistance.

Tribal women constitute the lowest segment of contemporary Indian society. Educationally backward, spatially marginalized, socially secluded, and abysmally poor, the tribal women are still the perpetual occupants of liminal space. Industrialization, urbanization, technological advancements, and various development programs initiated by Indian Governments do not benefit them for they live in the jungles far away from modern society. Being illiterate, tribal women are not aware of their rights and accept privation, suppression, and marginalization as their eternal lot. They are prone to sexual harassment both within their society and the urban areas where they venture for work or to sell their produce. It is evidently due to the stereotypical image that the tribal women are of easy virtue and are prove to be molested. A considerable number of studies and data reveal the fact that most crimes against tribal women go unnoticed. Despite the numerous constitutional provisions for their liberation, they are still othered and mostly silent. The socio-cultural reforms initiated by some of the liberal educated high-caste men in the middle of the nineteenth century left tribal women out of their scope. They focused on the issues such as the *sati* system, dowry system, child marriages, and property rights that belonged to the high caste and class women only. Tribal women's issues such as wretched impecuniousness, landlessness, illiteracy, rapes, forced deference to the high castes, classes, and internal patriarchal oppression were unfairly ignored in the early reformist discourses. It was with the advent of Dalit feminism in the closing decades of the twentieth century that tribal women's issues came to the fore. Dalit women attempted to foster a larger sisterhood among the women of lower strata and appealed to the tribal women to join their movement. Saikat Guha also says, "The reinvigorated dalit movements since the 1970s incorporated the poverty-ridden, oppressed and exploited tribals within the scope of their movements as both the ex-untouchables, *shudras*, tribals and labour classes suffer from societal segregation and economic dispossession" (144). Besides, tribal women's autonomous groups and organisations also played a significant role in mobilising muted tribal women and addressing their issues. The present paper attempts to examine how tribal women use literature as an apparatus to express themselves, assert their space, and demand their human agency in a caste and class-afflicted society. Sita Rathnamal's autobiography *Beyond the Jungle,* which is selected for the detailed analysis, is one of the representative tribal texts that not only brings out the position of tribals but also exposes the dominant power structures. The book is a stepping stone in the realm of Indian women autobiographies as it depicts the suffering and inner feelings of traumatised Indian women and mirrors their lived experiences in socially, and economically stratified post-independent society.

Sita Rathnamal is uncontentiously the first tribal woman writing in English. Besides her seminal autobiography *Beyond the Jungle*, she has written three short stories— 'Cuckoo in the Hills,' 'The Dark Ship,' 'The Pilgrimage,' and collaborated with British dramatist Bernard Box to write a play titled *Lepanto*. While her stories and play went into literary limpness, her autobiography won acclamation and was discussed and reviewed widely. Published in 1968 by Blackwood and Sons, an eminent London-based publishing house, this life story received inordinate advertence from international media and academic circles as it records a subaltern voice and explores the long ignored tribal culture and society. It recounts a tribal woman's

experiences who accidentally moves out of the jungle and gets exposed to modern urban society. It marks her transition from a disadvantaged Adivasi girl into a strong educated woman. Like the first book of Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Beyond the Jungle* also covers a few years of the author's life. The sizeable section of the narrative reads like a school girl's tale of her excitements, joys, and sorrows and depicts her relationship with society at large. Emphasizing this feature Ranjana Harish also says, "*Beyond the Jungle* is the fairy-tale-like autobiography of an unknown girl from an impossible land that men avoided" (78). The account of her love for Dr Krishna Rajan, who treated her at Coonoor hospital, occupies a significant space and thus keeps the self at the center. Interestingly, despite the centrality of the 'self,' this autobiography evinces a collective approach for it reconnoiters Indian indigenous culture and society, and articulates tribal issues collectively. Like other Dalit and tribal life narratives, *Beyond the Jungle* also demonstrates great concern for the community and offers a peep into the socio-economic condition of the Irula tribe situated in the mountains of Nilgiri in South India. Apart from the Irula tribe, Sita also brings out the living conditions and the cultures of other tribes such as Badagas and Todas, and infers that they were in no way different from the Irulas. Vandana Tete rightly calls *Beyond the Jungle* a distinctive life story for it does not foreground women's issues only and does not exalt the self. It belongs to the class of Indian women autobiographies in which the community is placed at the center and the individual self is relegated to a secondary position (5). Sita exposes the prejudice of caste and mocks the high caste morality and religiosity that legitimize social dichotomy and promote biases against marginalized sections of society. It strikes at the religio-patriarchal structures of the high caste Hindu society in which a tribal woman is allowed no space and is subjected to humiliation and exploitation on the account of her caste, and identity.

Born into an impoverished tribal family, Sita was the only child of her parents. Despite rampant poverty, she had a secure childhood. She lost her mother when she was still a little child, but she did not undergo indifference, suppression, and violence from her father. While wandering in the jungle with her friend, one day Sita fell into a dark pit and thus broke her legs. One of the jungle sorcerers applied mud plaster to her fractured legs, but they could not be set back. Instead, they caught a severe infection and her condition kept on deteriorating. Her father took her to the hospital in Coonoor; she spent several months in the hospital and ultimately got recovered from her ailment. Shortly after her return, a retired army officer Major Ganguli and two young civil servants visited her village to gather information and prepare a report on the living condition of jungle dwellers. Sita assisted them during their visit to her village and expressed her will to move out of the jungle. Major Ganguli passed this information to the government and strongly recommended that the child should be sent to the school on government money. Consequently, Sita received a letter from the Department of Education of the Tamil Nadu Government which informed her that she has been selected to study at Dodo Boarding School. Despite the opposition from the tribal community, Sita's father sent her to study at a School that was meant for the girls of the elite class. Sita faces caste and racial slurs at school, but she contests them and completes her schooling. After

completing her school education, Sita joins the general hospital in Madras for training as a nurse. She left nursing incomplete and comes home exasperated as Dr Krishna Rajan rejects her on the account of her caste and refuses to marry her. This life story ends abruptly as the author does not write about her life after she comes back to her village.

Structurally, this autobiography can be divided into two sections. The first segment consisting of the first seventeen chapters deals with the author's birth, parentage, childhood, and schooling. The second part covering the last six chapters details her experiences as a trainee at the general hospital in Madras, her deep and sincere love for Rajan, her separation from him, and her journey back to her village. The life story opens with a description of the geographical backdrops in which the author was born and brought up. Sita writes how the Nilgiri Mountains, where the Irula tribe resided, remained isolated, unexplored, and distanced from modern civilization for centuries. Nature has always been pleasant and fresh with its different hues in the hills, but the people living there were socially, economically, and politically disadvantaged. The inhabitants of Nilgiri lived in dark mud houses without electricity, water supply, and proper ventilation. They had no access to modern education, medical facilities, transportation, and technologies. The author's mother dies prematurely, for she could be provided with the required medical assistance due to the lack of transportation and a hospital near the tribal settlements (29-30). It was evidently due to the privation of medical services that the author was being cured with mud plaster when she fell into a dark hole in the jungle. It is worth noting that despite numerous constitutional directives for the empowerment of tribals, the occupants of Nilgiri were hardly able to procure food to eat and clothes to cover their bodies. They covered their bodies with rags or the hides of the animals, and never wore shoes. For food also, they were mostly dependent on nature. Among the tribals, there was the custom to eat only once a day. Eating thrice a day was a luxury or a feast for them. Sita says, "In the forests, food means nothing more than something to fill the stomach to stave off hunger. There are no refinements attached to eating and there is no question of making the food attractive to the palate. Food is eaten quickly and everyone is so engrossed in the function of filling the stomach that no one speaks when eating. When things are bad for us, we live for weeks on *erula* root, a kind of wild yam" (56). This extract from Sita's autobiography clearly suggests that class consciousness is a significant feature of tribal autobiographies. The issues of poverty, unemployment, hunger, and starvation figure predominantly in them. CK Janu in her life story shows how the tribals in Kerala have to undergo the pangs of hunger and starvation due to the intervention of outsiders who clear the forest for agriculture and thus strip them of their resources. She says, "Our problems mostly relate to our work, our lands and hunger" (34).

The issues such as communal violence, forced displacement, social and ecological crisis, communal violence, and the rapes of tribal women do not figure in this life story, but it demonstrates how besides wretched poverty, the tribals were socially and culturally retrograded. Female education was not a concern among tribals and the customs such as child marriage were prevalent among them. It was possibly because women's sexuality was considered a threat to the honour of the community. Sita details how her childhood friend Mundi was

married off at a tender age. The village women such as Darmil wanted the author to get married: "First Mundi, then one by one the village girls of my age and even younger were being married and old Darmil taunted me more and more until I thought I hated her" (167). It indicates that traditionally tribal women were conditioned to live within the socio-economic system in which a woman was treated as an appendage of the machine and was expected to contribute to the family income without questioning the tradition. Sita gives her own example and describes how she used to assist her father in growing grain and fruits during vacation: "I hardly looked at the books I had brought with me on my holiday; I could not find the time to do so. I had reached the age at which girls help with the growing of fruit and grain. My father expected me to help in the same way and as there was no one else in our family he had waited until my holidays before clearing the forest for a new patch of land" (157). The women of other tribes such as Badaga also had the same plight. Besides household responsibilities, they also had to work in the fields, fetch firewood, and forage from the jungle. They cover themselves with rages and constant slogging and scarcity of food makes their bodies fragile, and prone to fatal diseases (53). Although Sita is not explicit in her condemnation of patriarchy, she certainly clues that the tribal women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. They had no access to family income and most tribal societies are patriarchal in which men control family income and dominate in the public sector.

Sita unmasks the toxic socio-cultural conventions that build up for the humiliation, seclusion, and exploitation of tribals in mainstream society. Her experiences at school are testimony to the prejudices that society had harbored against Adivasis for centuries. She describes how she was shamed and secluded at school markedly because she belonged to the socially and economically disadvantaged Irula tribe, and she was unaware of the manners and elite class culture. Miss DeVaz, the housemistress at Dodo School, made her realise at the very first meeting that she was not desired at school for it was not for tribals to study there: "The school was at some distance from the station and as we walked side by side she kept looking at my bare feet which were quite unaffected by the stones of the road. The silence between us was more expressive than speech. My education at already begun; the first thing learnt was the double word: caste/class. Never mentioned but experienced in thousand different ways" (45). Besides, the attitude of her schoolmates and class teacher also was distant, disapproving, and discriminatory. Her schoolmates teased and humiliated her for her tribal way of life. It was because of the scare of frequent ridicule and humiliation that Sita avoided the company of other schoolgirls and circumvented to eat with them. She recounts an incident when a group of girls scorned her for her unsophisticated table manners. The girls resented that a tribal girl was sent to study in their school: "Do you think they should send Badagas to our school?" (47). The author expresses her mental anguish and talks about the tribulation of eating with other girls: "There was plenty of food, but I hated sitting on a chair and eating off a table. I hated the metal implements with which I had to feed myself. I was awkward and clumsy with them and aware of the looks and suppressed giggles of the girls at my table. I was glad when the meal was finished and we line up ready to march to the main school

building for assembly" (49). Sita details how her class teacher also detested her presence in class. She even threatened her to send her back home because she was a slow learner. She says, "The entire lesson was spent trying to teach me those few words but without any success. Instead of concentrating on words, I was worrying about the teacher's impatience at my slowness and dullness. She did not have sympathy with the mind that had never known these things and that was trying hard to grasp what was being introduced to it" (54). Sita says that she was allowed to stay at school due to her skill as a sportsperson and also the support of Miss Bromely. The series of incidents noted here is telling as it not only brings out the biases against tribals but also shows how Manuism operates in modern education system and how Manuvadi forces join together to alienate subalterns such as tribals and Dalits from knowledge, power structure, and to stifle their voices. It further suggests that the casteist forces conspire to hold the center and relegate the Dalits and tribals to absolute margins to live the life of subhuman beings without havening even human agency. Modern Dalit writers are of the opinion that the denial of education to Dalits and tribals is used as an apparatus to keep them confused, suppressed, and unaware of their plight. The young Dalit writer Yashica Dutt in her powerful autobiography *Coming Out as Dalit* (2019) details how Dalit and tribal students are tortured and mortified by the high caste students and teachers in the name of merit and reservation. She describes how the narrative of merit is used as a device to discourage Dalit and tribal students and force them off the educational institutes. She offers a list of the Dalits and tribal students such as Rohit Vemula, Balmukund Bharti, Delta Meghwal, Chuni Kotal, and others who were forced by Manuvadi forces to kill themselves. She also condemns the current regime in India for supporting anti-reservation and anti-minority forces to spread Hindutva. Sita also faces similar tortures and slurs at school and writes about her struggle to adapt herself to the sophistication and the manners at school. She describes how it was torturing for her to camouflage her identity and imbibe a culture that was not her own. This imposition made her to feel out of place and like a psychological refugee: "Highly organised atmosphere of school was overpowering and confusing. I felt as though I was wild creature trapped in a man-made mechanism too frightened to try to escape" (47). During the course of her life narrative, Sita suggests that in many cases the tribal women's exposure to modern civilisation makes them to suffer patriarchal oppression, caste-based discrimination, and identity crisis. She reiterates that the tribals' attempts to adopt Sanskritised culture subject tribal women to numerous restrictions and prohibitions in terms of their behaviour and general ways of life. Tete also writes, "It is an irony that while modern education and political consciousness opened the way for emancipation for the General and Dalit women, this external, educational and social structure worked to push the Adivasi women, who were away from the feudal and colonial clutches, into patriarchal structure" (21).

Besides class consciousness and cultural marginalisation, Sita also ridicules social dichotomy and inequality. She unmasks the precept of caste and shows its deep-rootedness in Indian social system and human consciousness. She examines the mechanism of the formation of social class in India and shows how the edicts of caste are imposed on the destitute masses such as tribals and Dalits to mute them and to perpetuate their marginalization. They are told

that they are born inferior and should remain in servitude to the higher castes and classes (161). It is because of these impositions and internalization of caste laws that Sita's father refuses to eat the piece of jackfruit in presence of Dr Rajan (120). It was not only a mark of reverence to a Brahmin but also due to the scare of being mocked for the primitive way of eating. We know from the history of the caste that the low-born people were not allowed to sit and eat in the presence of the high castes and the texts such as *Manusmriti* not only prohibited it but also had provisions against it. Like Dalit writers such as Bama, Urmila Pawar, Meena Kandasamy, Omprakash Valmiki, Manohar Mouli Biswas, Kancha Iliah, and many others, Sita also depicts caste as rigid institution and argues the even the educated high caste Indians also are constricted by the precepts of caste. Despite their higher education and liberal outlook towards life, they find themselves unable to break free from the socio-cultural and religious sanctions that promote the concept of purity and pollution.

Sita exposes patriarchal morality, scorns the constraints of caste, and sets in a woman's viewpoint, but her autobiography is mild in its tone and tenure. It does not register a strong voice of protest against existing discriminatory social, economic, political, and cultural establishments that exclude and oppress tribals. Besides, it also does not suggest strong alternatives and replacement models. She does not critique any ideology or institution and is uninformed of mounting feminist discourse and philosophical developments around it. It read like a story that offers a glance through a community and brings out how tribal women have to live in a caste, class, and gender-dominated society. Sita does not target any institution, regime, or agency for the subhuman existence of tribals and does not advocate for transformation in existing power structures and relations. She does not rebel or adopt a militant attitude and does not espouse a particular ideology. She lives her oppression and marginalisation like countless tribals. It is noted that there are some lacunas in Sita's standpoint as a marginalised and feminist writer, but her life story is not a petit narrative dealing with the suffering of an individual or a community. The significance of the text lies in its ability to break the silence imposed on subaltern groups and its exposition of the hypocrisy and paradoxes that co-exists in Indian socio-cultural systems of which women as a class are the worst victims. It efficaciously brings out the injustices inflicted on women, strives to create a space for them, and articulates their human agency. Besides, it also makes explicit the harsh realities of tribal life in general and demands attention to their subhuman existence even after many years of independence and the adoption of the Constitution. It brings out the capacity of tribals to survive amid numerous odds and shows their love for life. It reiterates that the subalterns can acquire voice and agency if they get the chance to express themselves. Implicitly, it evinces a demand for reforms in existing systems so that the impoverished and subordinated masses such as tribals, Dalits, and women can live with dignity. The motif of love betrayal sets in a feminist overtone, but it loses force for she does not question Dr Rajan for his hypocrisy and his slavish adherence to traditions. In a way, *Beyond the Jungle* is a preliminary text which paved the way for the emergence of powerful tribal life narratives such as CK Janu's *Mother Forest*, Mayilamma's *Mayilamma: The Life Story of a Tribal Eco-Warrior*, Temsula Ao's *Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags: A Memoir* which evince

strong feminist standpoint and join together to voice protest against dominant forces, and demand the rights, personhood and identity for tribals in India.

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Summer Death

K.V. Raghupathi

Whoever came and knocked on the door she woke up with surety that it was her half partner. But it was a fantasy. Day after day, night after night the same experience was repeated with no ray of hope to see her half partner.

"Here he came," she muttered with every footstep she heard.
"Quietly", she said to herself, "he will come and take me home."
But nothing happened.

She was sixty-two, not quite old. But streaks of grey hair parted with black hair. A graduate but willingly not employed. Highly self-assured. Quarantined in an isolated ward within the premises of a government hospital for no strong reason. A week ago she had uninterrupted hiccups that led to interrupted breathing. On suspicion, she was admitted here.

There was no communication with the outside world. The room was like a cell in a prison with a cot and a bed covered with a blue plastic sheet and raised pillows on either side; of course a two-foot-tall stool to sit. But for these objects, the room was empty, the door standing half open, only the mynas chattering outside on the trees abutting the room with content and joy and the crooning of doves. "What did I come here for? What sin did I commit? What did I want to find here?" A couple of magazines lying on the stool like fish, staring at the empty walls. Tired of reading stale articles, she might see nothing else, the pages flapping under the revolving ceiling fan with blurred images.

Her hands were empty, the walls were empty, and the glazed floor reflected the only burning light and the running fan. The room smelled medicated.

She sat awhile and moved around the cot as though perambulating as the space was small. Soon the shadows of her memory crossed the floor, from the deepest dark chambers.

The pulse of the room beat softly with the beatings of her memory. Soon the pulse stopped, the streaming thoughts ceased like conveyor belts in a flour mill.

A moment later the light stopped burning, plunging the room into semi-darkness. Out in the world, the happenings were shut. Nothing could be seen nor heard. The torch in the mobile was turned on, the light flashed, the room shone and coolly shuddered.

The glass upside down in the middle of the plate was the death; death was the glass upside down; death was between her and the glass; the cot looked like a coffin, sealing the room with darkness.

Her partner left her, he was forced to stay away in fear of contamination. He was seventy-two, a retired employee in the service sector of the state government of Andhra Pradesh. Tall, five feet eight inches, bespectacled, he was afflicted with health complaints such as hypertension, cervical pain, and liver disorders. Unlike his wife, he was weak at heart. He had been on medication for long, ever since he had left the job.

He was not allowed to meet his quarantined wife. There was no virtual physical, face-to-face communication as the rules of quarantine were made strict. However, this had not prevented them from having communication on the mobile. But, it was barely a minute or two, it was on sharing health concerns, as there was nothing else that could be communicated long since both were in quarantine, she was in the hospital and he was in self-imposed quarantine on the advice of doctors.

They had a son and a daughter, the son settled in Vermont as a software engineer, married to an Indo-American girl employed in the marketing sector. They had a pretty nineteen-year-old daughter in the UG programme in a college in Vermont. Due to lockdown, he could not fly to Tirupati to express and share sympathy and love with his mother.

The daughter died in fits after giving birth to a baby son. Her premature death was a deep shock for her mother, had almost made her senile both physically and psychologically. The little son was separated from his grandma. The communication between her and the son-in-law ceased after heated arguments over ownership of the baby son.

There was none at home except the old couple who had been living tending each other until Corona swept the temple city plunging it into a series of lockdowns, preventing the outsiders, chiefly pilgrims from other places from reaching for the *darshan* of the Lord of the Seven Hills. The whole temple city was under lockdown for twenty-one days in the first phase putting a severe strain on the people and business/commercial activities.

The mobile rang, it was a call from her son in Vermont. Every time the call came from him, they talked nothing else except exchanging bare pleasantries and inquiries.

"For how many more days….?" The voice blared feebly.
"Until I am tested negative," the mother replied coolly.

"Do prayer four times a day. No other way. He alone can save you, free you from the virus. I spoke to Dad. He too is not keeping well. His health has declined further due to isolation. Yet, he is buoyant, self-confident. Feeling lonely… taking medicine regularly…" The mobile stopped due to bad signals. Communication was tough. Perhaps, this was the last communication between the two.

Meanwhile, in the absence of calls from Vermont, what was happening to the couple was barely known to their son. The health of the husband declined further with no sign of revival. More than the physical ailments, his separation and isolation from his wife in self-imposed quarantine had made him utterly despondent and wreck.

One morning foul smell emanated from the small house located in the west of the Vidyanagar colony in the city. The smell wafted like smoke and reached as far as a hundred meters. The neighbours suspected something had happened in the house. But they feared to go near since the city was in lockdown besides of contamination. Notwithstanding the smell, one neighbour gave a call to 108 ambulance and informed about the smell. No sooner had the driver of the ambulance been told about the smell than he drove past straight to the house. Wearing the PPE kit that included apron, gown, gloves, mask, and breathing equipment and goggles three persons including the driver alighted from the ambulance like astronauts and strode towards the house, but much to their consternation found the house was bolted from inside. All the side windows were closed and it was hard for the ambulance workers to see the inside of the house.

Neighbours shut their windows and doors of their houses in fear of contamination. However, a few peeped through the slit windows. Soon, the driver informed the police about the smell. On receiving the call, the police jeep, cream with horizontal maroon stripes with flashing light on the top reached the spot, and without hesitation, the personnel comprising four kicked the door harshly with boots. Soon the latch went off broken and the door swung open and bashed one of the personnel in the face. Nevertheless, they barged into the room that led into another room at the right corner and found the body with a bloated belly, disfigured face, and stiffened dangling hands and legs

"Nothing can be done here at this point," screamed the masked police Inspector. "Remove the body to the hospital."

On receiving the orders, the ambulance personnel with protective clothes placed the body on the stretcher and carried it to the ambulance. The house was sealed and barricaded.

Three days had passed and there was no communication from the husband. The mobile left untouched by the police stopped ringing. This had created more anxiety and suspicion in her. There was none in the ward to whom she could inform and complain. The warded man visited three times a day to provide food in the plates kept outside the door for the in-patients. Dressed in a PPE kit he would barely talk as instructed. He would not go near the patients. Only from a distance, the plate was dragged by a long stick and after filling it with

food it was pushed back to the door. The in-patients had to collect it and replace it at the door after finishing eating.

The anxiety and suspicion grew louder and louder in the absence of communication from her life partner. Neither the doctor attending to her nor the warded man nor the toilet cleaner told anything about her life partner. The doctor maintained pressed silence though he knew about the death of her partner in fear it would harm her psyche more than her body.

The communication from her son in Vermont too ceased. She was left to herself. Something danger must have happened to her partner, she suspected. Who would confirm it? There was none. As her suspicions grew louder and louder, her heartbeat too went faster and faster. She hardly slept. The plate was left with half leftover. The warded man removed it and filled it with fresh food. It went on for two days until on the third day, he noticed the food on the plate was untouched. Panicked he called her, but was content with her reply, "I am not hungry." It was repeated on the fourth day and the following day, frightened he called at her in a mild tone, as there was no answer from the cell, he increased the decibel of his voice, and still, there was no answer. Agitated, he shouted loudly, but there was no answer. Assured with his suspicion, he skittered and informed the doctor on duty in the other building barely a hundred meters away. The doctor dressed in a PPE kit removed her to the special cell with the assistance of two in-house boys.

There she lay on the bolstered cot, emaciated. She had fasted for three days and the doctor knew the reason for her senility but was stern in not revealing the truth of her husband's death. Here, in the special cell, she was forcibly fed intravenously. Saline water was injected into her body. Her health was a bit revived and she had come to her near normalcy.

"Tell me, doctor, what has happened to my husband? Is he all right?" Her face was writ with anxiety.

"He is all right. There is no cause to worry. He is safe," the doctor burst out without giving any room for suspicion.

"Why then there has been no communication? There are no calls from him. His mobile is not ringing." She insisted.

"He has been advised to take complete rest. He is on medication. To avoid external disturbances, his mobile is removed and kept on silent mode."

"Can I see him?
"You cannot in this state. You are weak. You need to recover."
"You can bring him here, at least," the woman whined.
"The area is a prohibited zone."
"Can you at least make a video of his image and show it?"
"No need to worry. He is safe."

Sensing that he would be annoyed with questions, the doctor walked away reassuring her. But she was hardly convinced.

Nightmares pursued her.

The room was darkened. He left her, went North, went East, until the stars, turned bright in the Southern sky. The house was emptied, found beneath the darkening sky. However, the pulse of the house beat gladly, "safe, safe, safe." Outside the wind roared in the sky. Trees stooped and bent in surrealistic shapes. Moonbeams splashed blood and spilled wildly in the rain. However, the pulse of the house beat, "safe, safe, safe." The walls of the house were brightened with the moonshine. Wandering through the house, opening the windows and doors of the East and West, whispering like a child, she sought her joy in the company of her partner. "Here we slept. Here you kissed and hugged me without a number. Here we joked and laughed belly full. Here we ate together. Here we played dice. Here we told stories to each other." The doors and windows went shutting beating rapidly without wind outside, like the pulse of a heart of a fear-stricken child. Nearer she went, the doors and windows ceased without wind outside. It seemed as though the wind had fallen off from the cliffs. But it rained sliding down the glass panels of the windows and outer walls. She heard no noise beside her steps. The lantern was burning, shielding the darkness. "Look, he breathes. He is asleep, sound asleep with love on his lips." Taking the lantern in her left-hand stooping, she looked deeply and intently. She paused awhile and then long. "He is asleep, sound asleep with a smile on his face." Suddenly, the wind roared outside. The windows and doors were wide open, the wind drove straight the moonbeams to sneak in and cross the floor and walls. "Safe, safe, safe, and the house is safe." The heart of the house is safe, beats proudly and loudly. "Long years I live." Here he murmured, sleeping. She lifted up the lantern and peered. "Safe, safe, safe. He is alive, asleep, permanently." The pulse of the house beats wildly.

The glass upside down in the middle of the plate was the death; death was the glass upside down; death was between her and the glass; the cot looked like a coffin, sealing the room with darkness.

Waking, she cried hysterically, "Yes, he is safe, he is safe, he is asleep, sound with love on his lips and smile on his face."

The light in the special room went off. She slid into eternal sleep.

Love Spreads Bliss

Bhupesh Chandra Karmakar

Love is manifested in many ways like ego,
our mistake and pride, anger, and jealousy.
Love is an indefinable emotion and love
spreads bliss while attachment brings sorrow.
Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting
two bodies and love is about true patience.
I could feel true happiness always requires
peace of mind and a spiritual purpose in life.
I love beautiful lotus, soft music, and soft look
in the eyes, even warmth in the heart.
I feel love is a conscious act of the will and it
is sacrificial and unconditional at all times.
Love is the sun of life which rises midway
in life and Love is really indescribable.
God has created many flowers in garden but
my friend is the sweetest flower of friendship.
I always love my blossomed friend as I love
the sunflowers in the flowering garden.

The Secret of A Long Life

Some people have the longest
life expectancy and the secret
to their long life lies in their diet.
The laziest hour of the day strikes
right after a satisfactory meal.
So, people feel drowsy and often
decide to take a short nap.
We should never sit or lie down
after consuming our food.
We should avoid sugary foods.
We must consume green tea.

Physical fitness is key to long
life and good health of a person.
Yoga is a way to stay fit, which
can do wonders to improve
our health.
Yoga helps to lower the blood
pressure.
Yoga improves respiratory
function of our body.
Exercise is the key component
to healthy living in life.
Those fit at midlife are less likely
to develop chronic diseases
like cancer.
'It is rightly said that health is wealth'.

God is Powerful

I do not know where God resides.
He is wonderful creator of universe.
He listens to our daily prayer all the time.
His power in nature is miracle to us.
We sow seeds. He gives us rain.

He solves our daily problems in time.
He takes care of our body and soul.
His loves us without any measure.
When we surrender our problems,
he judges the person miraculously.
He is a majestic creator of this universe
We cannot compare his greatness
with anyone on the earth.
We trust God who knows our thoughts.
When we pray, He reduces our burden.
If we open our eyes, we can see Him,
God gives us peace and removes our fear.
We worship God who helps us to survive.

Lethe's numbness

Tania Alphonsa George

seductress
is oblivion

she teases
erasing the obvious
pain into shards

red amber rusk in a glass
Lethe is a seductress
wears red lipstick
six-inch heels

sashays in the contours of the mind
with a lover mirage
erasure of his memories

is the name of her game

till she pulls the trigger on the last image

Mon Amour Est Morte

she pours her drink
in pills
pills and potions
over
love hexes, letters, and love high

until she loved the void
and the numbness became she

Au Revoir Mon Amour

Gaia

The womb is meant to age,
Like wine, it gets better.
Like a gauze that binds life and death-
Into the physical.

The magical talisman ingrained;
gives pleasure to the weak,
And power to the wild mind.

The womb is like a chalice,
The sticky red beady cushion.
Pledging the promise of life,
Warmth, moisture, and nourishment.

It is a tomb for the unspoken warriors,
Who slept within their dreams -
too early before dawn could persist.
So is this old earth.

Europa

Europa, oh you got my heart enmeshed in a throne of thorns.
My crown beats, and wavers until the ache ebbs away in a river of azure blue cold roses.

Oh Europa, I carry multitudes of you within mirrors and mirrors.
I scatter the ashes of the memory of my lover at your altar.
I bemoan him in my dreary dreams.
A few grains of pomegranates, roses, and mead-
For your wine gratifies my soul.
And the space of my rib with regret.
A chalice of red overpoured.

Bacchae! Bacchae! Bacchae!

The mad maenad dance-
Ivy blooms, rue, and roses-
Fiercely scathe my breasts.
Of passion and resentment.

As you Europa drowned in the pang of the thorns of Zeus.
I will learn to live and drown in the Opheliac lilac wine of my lover's mirage.

Wanderer

In an ephemeral world-
A dream within a dream.
Wandering aimlessly,
Is the seeker in bondage.

Bound by the senses,
In a prison of flesh.
Hunger, thirst, and desires.
Million-minute lances that pierce the soul.

The soul boundless -
Anchored by a golden thread.
To the flesh.
A million heartstrings-
Attached to a mirage.

Wandering to sustain,
The cage of flesh.
To roam the earth,
Accursed like Cain.
For the blood that never was spilled.
To give birth under the pain of the flesh.
To feel the pangs of rebirth-
Of the spirit.
To have a million moments etched into memory ink.
Washed into nothingness.

All to cease,
Senses into oblivion's dirge.
Nothingness is profound peace.

"*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Soaring with Bharati in the Wisdom-Chariot (ÑÂNA-RATAM) by Radha Raghunathan, with a foreword by Indira Parthasarathy, Published by The Adyar Library and Research Centre, The Theosophical Society, Chennai, 2022. Pages 397. Rs.300.

C. Subramania Bharati (1882-1921) is fondly remembered as a patriotic reformist, who in his very short life, induced the sense of nationalism through his powerful poetic compositions and writings in periodicals. Of his many works, the *Ñânaratam* or *The Chariot of Wisdom* stands out because of its subtle manifestation of Bharati's inner world of thoughts and deeds. *Ñânaratam* is an allegorical narrative in Tamil that is painted on a thin fabric of Bharati's autobiographical canvas. It was written at a time (early twentieth century) when Bharati was addressing multiple challenges, at home, and in a society that was struggling to gather itself in search of a unitary path to national freedom. Bharati first published it as a series in a periodical titled *India*. However, he could complete only two chapters (*Upaœântilokam* and *Gandharvalokam*), as the series had to be discontinued following his exile to Pondicherry. It then appeared as a book in 1910 with additional three chapters (*Satyalokam, MaGGulakam,* and *Dharmalokam*). Still *Ñânaratam* remains to be an incomplete narrative of Bharati (with only these five chapters) for reasons unknown. Hence, to comprehend Bharati's grand structure of the text as well as the essential meaning embedded within it, one would have to extract it only by a hypothetical paradigm.

Ñânaratam attracted an English translation in the hands of Prof. P. Mahadevan, who served as the principal of Madurai college (1930-37? and/or 1946-53?). It appeared as a serialised translation in the weekly *The Sunday Times* (year not known to this reviewer). In 1980, Mahadevan's complete English translation of the five available chapters of *Ñânaratam* was published posthumously by Tamilnadu Textbook Society, Madras, as part of Tamilnadu Government's Translation of Classical Series No.6. Interestingly, *Ñânaratam* has also been translated into Sanskrit by S. N. Sriramadesikan that is found in his book *Bhâratiyâr KâvyasaEgrahânuvâda%* or *Bharatiyar's works in Sanskrit,* Madras (1963). Based on this Sanskrit translation, S. S. Janaki provides a summary of *Jñânaratam* in her monograph *Freedom Fighters and Sanskrit Literature* (1998). A very recent English translation by Gregory James titled *The Chariot of Wisdom* published by Hachette, India (2023) revisits this work once again recollecting the nationalistic ideals of Bharati.

This Tamil work in prose, categorised as a novella, is etched with Bharati's writing style of simplicity packed with profound intensity. In this novella, the auto-diegetic narrator (i.e., Bharati himself) wishes to take a ride on a chariot from Triplicane to Adyar accompanied either by Kâlidâsa's *Sakuntalam* or an Upanicad. But he happens to embark on a journey to the World of Tranquility (*Upaœântilokam*), World of Celestials/Pleasure (*Gandharvalokam*), World of Truth (*Satyalokam*), Earthly World (*ManGulakam*), and World of Righteousness (*Dharmalokam*), one after the other, mounting on an imaginary chariot viz., his wisdom (*ñânam*).

The book under review viz., *Soaring with Bharati in The Wisdom-Chariot (Ñâna-ratam)* by Radha Raghunathan is yet another deeper engagement with this nationalist poet's only novella. It has three sections. The life and legacy of Bharati occupies the first section. In the second section, Raghunathan recalls the connection of Bharati with Annie Besant, the theosophist and freemason who strove for Indian nationalism. Here, Bharati's two essays, that appeared in Besant's weekly newspaper, *The Commonweal,* viz., *The Crime of Caste* (Vol.VI, No.45, 1916) and *The Occult Element in Tamil Speech* (Vol.XIII No.322, 1920) are reproduced.

The third section begins with the translator's observations and remarks on the text and her translation. Here, Raghunathan delves into some carefully chosen 'unique' aspects of *Ñânaratam.* In this context, one would expect a synopsis of *Ñânaratam.* She begins with an elaborate discussion on the concept of chariot-imagery drawing parallels from western and Indian literature. She then attempts to bring out several facets of Bharati's personality by closely examining the narration in his novella. This broadly includes exposing Bharati's philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic fervour.

Then appears the Tamil text *Ñânaratam* neatly typed in Tamil script. The variants are recorded in Tamil in the notes following the text. The text is preceded by a reproduction of Bharati's own preface in the 1910 edition and a publisher's note from an undated source, both of which are translated into English. This is followed by Raghunathan's English translation of *Ñânaratam* with annotated notes. Keeping up the spirit of the title of her work viz., '*Soaring With Bharati,'* Raghunathan traverses further into Bharati's journey by reflecting on several key features of the novella. This can be clearly seen in her annotated notes to her English translation.

Towards the end of the fifth chapter (i.e., *Dharmalokam*, p.352-3), Raghunathan adds 'Climax' and 'Denouement' as sub-titles. First, as pointed out in the beginning, this is an incomplete work of Bharati. Second, Bharati ends this chapter with a pessimistic expression, viz., 'I have lost dharma,' which is very unlikely from his pen to suggest that to be the end. Overall, Raghunathan's sincere efforts to bring out Bharati's *Ñânaratam* marking his death centenary published by the Theosophical Society deserves attention from readers who are interested in Bharati and his works.

S. Bhuvaneshwari

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