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**GNOSIS** | An International Refereed Journal of English Language and Literature

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## **Editorial**

The July 2021 issue of GNOSIS had a very warm response from the readers in India and abroad that articles have been flowing in quick succession to fill the folder for this issue even before the deadline of 10 June 2021. The thumping reception of the journal shows the depth of multicultural issues in literature to which critics and readers are attracted. As a journal committed to quality research and writing, we are aware of the need to delink quality from publication cost. Hence, our decision to charge no publication fee from the scholars whose papers will be published in the issues of GNOSIS. At the same time since GNOSIS is a self-financed venture, co-operation and support in the form of subscriptions are solicited from the readers and admirers of English Literature and Language from all over the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the Academicians and well wishers of GNOSIS who recommended GNOSIS for publication. There are twelve research/critical articles, four poems and one fiction in this issue. Before concluding, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my our esteemed members of the Board of Advisors and Review Editors for their selfless and tiresome efforts in assessing the articles very sincerely and giving their valuable remarks to bring out this issue in such a grand manner. I am also grateful to the revered contributors who have made this issue of the Journal a beautiful reality. Wishing all the readers a mental feast. Happy Reading!

**Dr. Saikat Banerjee**

Editor

## **The Woes of Afghan Women under the Taliban Jurisdiction**

**Dr. Marjana Mukherjee**

*Received 15 November 2020 Revised 15 May 2021 Acceptance 2 June 2021*

**Abstract:** This paper seeks to highlight the condition of women during the Taliban regime. Focus of the paper will be to analyze certain literary works from the genre of non-fiction, primarily autobiographies and memoirs, to vividly portray the horrendous life led by the women in Afghanistan. Literature can help create awareness of the derogatory situation of the women in Afghanistan. A work of non-fiction creates a sense of greater empathy in the minds of the readers as they rarely doubt the authenticity of the writings. An analysis of the religious and cultural practices will be undertaken in writing the paper. Islam, often considered as the sole motivating factor behind terrorism, is wrongly accused to accomplish one's political intention. Traditional cultural practices have often been garbed under the veil of religion. This depicts religion as an instrument of terror and violence in front of the world. This misnomer needs to be eradicated. This paper will prioritize humanity over cultural, religious, political and social differences. Literature related to Afghanistan has not come into the mainstream yet. Awareness of these literary works needs to be undertaken for a change in the condition of the people there who are still enmeshed in the web of oppression and threat.

**Keywords** – Taliban, Afghanistan, Non-fiction, Islam, Culture, Politics, Women, Oppression.

### **Introduction**

Hafizullah Emadi states that the pitiable plight of women still is a matter of utmost neglect in the literary genre dealing with women and development. The few works available do analyze women's movement in isolation from international development and the class struggle which is evident within the

country as well. (Emadi xvii-xviii) Afghan literary texts in English have yet not received a place in mainstream literature. Popularity of these writings is the current need of the hour to evoke mass awareness and concern towards the plight of women in a country like Afghanistan. In this paper, I will try to introduce a few texts by taking references from them to highlight their traumatic condition. Facts appeal to the brain, literature appeals to the heart. These heart-wrenching narratives need an empathetic reading for delving deep into the crisis of their lives.

The word ‘Taliban’ is the plural of the Pashto word *talib*, which means an Islamic student. Their interpretation of the Sharia gave birth to a new extremist form of fundamentalism that has wreaked havoc in the entire world leading to a mass disapproval of their ways and ideologies, if any. An affirmation of their manliness could only be attained if women were kept under their subjugation. The leaders believed in a strict fundamentalism not only as a principle but also as a political strategy. Taliban leaders "repeatedly told" Ahmed Rashid, a former Pakistani militant, a journalist and an author, that "if they gave women greater freedom or a chance to go to school, they would lose the support of their rank and file." Ahmed Rashid has brought forth the concept that is so dearly held by the Taliban – “that women should be neither seen nor heard because they drove men away from the proscribed Islamic path and into wild temptation”. (Rashid 2) The texts used in the paper as a point of reference highlights the situations of innumerable such women whose voices have been padlocked and their stories lie buried along with their corpses. Memories of the rule of the Taliban and the pressure inflicted by patriarchy in the name of religion have been clearly highlighted in the texts.

### **The Reign of Terror**

The Taliban policy on women states that Afghan women are to “bring up the next generation of Muslims” (Marsden 46) but their attitude towards women seem far-fetched from the stance that they seem to take. The Taliban regime brought forth a barbaric and savage situation where the basic human

rights of women were even denied. They were granted a life of perpetual house arrest. Women were banned from work. The civil services of Kabul, the complete elementary educational system, a great extent of the medical system was badly affected as the work force comprised of women. Women were compelled to follow a strict dress code of veils covering them from head to toe. The Taliban religious police did not deter from beating women if they were found outdoors or for imagined infidelity. Latifa aptly states that “terror and chaos are now our rulers.” (Latifa 5) A burqa has become a mandate for women without even realizing the fact that many could not even afford it. Thus, condemning her permanently to a house where even the windows remain painted. They felt that ‘a woman should be in her house or in the grave’. (Joya 181) The emergency of a situation was also not taken into consideration. Besides salon and fashion magazines, even women’s bathhouses, the only place where hot water was available, were shut down. Tailors had to remember the measurements of their regular customers as they were ordered not to measure women for clothes.

Many families that were headed by working war widows had no other alternative left but starve to death. Many women, who had previously been the sole earning member of a family, had to opt for prostitution to feed the old and children in the family. As women were not allowed to go unaccompanied on the road, even small boys of the family accompanied the women in their profession of prostitution. A rapid acceleration of poverty and despair has increased the rate of trafficking and prostitution of widows and young girls. It seemed strange that the Taliban would turn a blind eye to this reality. The long years of war have resulted in a higher rate of widowhood and their situation is the most deplorable. Having left with no other option, they sell all their possessions and beg to feed the family that is dependent on them. The position of widows and divorcees is not just deplorable but she is always a victim of opprobrium meted out to her by society. Zarghuna Kargar in her book *Dear Zari: Hidden Stories from Women in Afghanistan* highlights the same fact-



An Afghan widow is like a pot without a lid. People around her throw things into the pot but they don't put the lid on. They say things and gossip about her, they treat her badly and when she asks for help they run away. She is helpless and hopeless. (Kargar 194)

The Taliban's initial acceptance as a relief from the warlords by the Afghan civilians soon turned into a nightmare as the Taliban started a phase of unimaginable repression, distress and doom for everyone especially the women. Life became filled with drudgery as all forms of entertainment were banned. People were disallowed to go for movies, videos, singing and dancing during weddings even, a major source of income for many musicians and dancers, thus, came to an end. Music or poetry along with dancing equals to dreaming. Dreams may lead to forbidden desires like love and romance. Mullah Khalil Ahmed Hassani states-

The only entertainment was public executions. The only safe activity was sleeping. Once I asked Mullah Omar what people were supposed to do for enjoyment and he said, "walk in gardens and look at flowers". But the funny thing is after he took over there were five years of drought and everything died so there weren't even flowers. (Lamb 16)

Afghanistan was dependent on several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies for various aids. But because of the Taliban's discrimination against women, children and human rights donations were decreasing. The fighting had forced several NGOs to leave. The UN had tried to convince the Taliban to temper their gender policies but had failed. In June, 1998, the Taliban stopped all women from attending general hospitals. The female Muslim UN staffs travelling to Afghanistan were ordered to be accompanied by a blood relative, an impossible task to achieve.

Ways of punishing people were savage. Christina Lamb brings forth Hafiz Sadiqulla Hassani's perspective. He was forced to join the Taliban. People would be beaten with

logs soaked in water like a knife cutting through meat until the room ran with their blood or their spines snapped. We did different things, we would put some of them standing on their heads to sleep, hang others upside down with their legs tied together, and stretch the arms out of others and nail them to posts. Sometimes when their spines were broken we would throw bread to them so they would try to crawl. (Lamb 18)

Christina Lamb talks about the instructions that she had heard from a commanding officer in Quetta-

You must become so notorious for bad things that when you come into an area people will tremble in their sandals. Anyone can do beatings and starve people of food and water. I want your unit to find new ways of torture so terrible that the screams will frighten even crows from their nests, and if the person survives he will never again have a night's sleep. (Lamb 9)

Suicide bombing was carried on randomly killing innocents. Suicide bombings were justified by the Taliban as they had to combat Nato airpower that had been killing innocent civilians at a huge scale. They further stated that the bombers themselves are often from the outer fringes of Afghan society: the mentally ill, the educationally subnormal and others who are distraught by the prolonged periods of war experienced by the country. (Fergusson 182)

Jean Sasson in her book *For the Love of a Son* exposes the experiences that Maryam Khail had been subjected to. Maryam's interpretation of the Taliban edicts was simple. According to her the basic implication of their rule was to curb all happiness and freedom from Afghanistan. Reports would constantly come about relatives or friends who would be humiliated by the Taliban. Various life-threatening and life-altering incidents would hamper the peace of mind of the listeners as well. New restrictions would be put into place without any warning and people would suddenly find themselves

beaten for an action which they did not even know was prohibited. Education suffered badly as most teachers were women. Even home schools were banned. If the Taliban found out any woman home schooling children, they would burst in the house and destroy pens, pencils, books and everything else. Fear of discovery often led them to change the venues that were demarcated for the purpose of home schooling. Rent would usually be high in safer areas. Maryam's friend had met the same fate. She and the children whom she was teaching were arrested. In the prison house she was given dry bread, thin soup and water accompanied by weekly beatings with a whip that continued for two years. (Sasson 369-370) The monstrosity reaches its height when Latifa mentions the plight of a teacher while she was found teaching by the Taliban—

First they beat the children, then they hit her. They threw her down the stairs of her building so violently that she broke a leg. Then they dragged her by the hair and jailed her. And after that, they forced her to sign a declaration promising that she wouldn't start again, that she respected the law of the Taliban. They threatened to stone her entire family in public if she didn't acknowledge the error of her ways. (Latifa 106)

### **The Islamic Camouflage**

The Taliban have issued edicts and condemned specific activities of daily life by highlighting them as against Islam. Zieba Shorish- Shamley states that “it is not the Islamic ideologies that determine the position of women in the Islamic societies, it is rather the pre-Islamic patriarchal ideologies existing in a particular society, combined with the lack of education and ignorance, that construct the Muslim women's position.” (Shamley) The line of difference between Islamic law and traditional law has been blurred-

If you go to an Afghan village and ask a woman who has not been to school and has no education about her Islamic rights, she would probably tell you about all the traditional

rules that she has followed and that her mother, her grandmother and aunties have always followed. Information about Islamic rights and the law of the country is very limited.

(Kargar 184)

Education is deemed as a danger as it may make a girl less attractive as a spouse as she becomes opinionated or even worse, ambitious. This is primarily to satisfy the male ego that cannot accept a wife cleverer than they are. Education is a threat as it is a way towards enlightenment. Hence, a false image of educated girls is created.

People say that girls who can read and write are cheeky and uppity. People say the more a girl knows the more a girl wants. They say that girls who go to school are not happy with anything or anyone. People say those girls do not respect their husbands. People say girls who have been to school are not to be trusted. (Shakib 41)

The reason behind this aberrant reading of the Qur'an is that it is written in classical seventh-century Arabic, a language that is extremely difficult for interpretation as most Muslims today are not native Arabic speakers. Anyone referring about God or the Qur'an cannot be questioned as it implies that he is potentially questioning God. Therefore, he or she can be accused of blasphemy. The onus of the clarification lies on the Mullahs who themselves are not highly literate. Only a thorough knowledge of Islam will help people to take a stand against the hardliners. Amina Wadud in her book *Qur'an and Woman* has rightly stated –

Rather than be elevated by the text to transcend their own limitations, some interpreters bring the text down to their level when they project narrow or negative meanings which suit their individual whims, perceptions, and prejudices about women. This is most often done on the basis of a single word! Some of these words do not even exist in the text. Other negative terms, if used at all, in the Qur'an, are neither directly nor exclusively

associated with women. Even when a negative word is coincidentally used exclusively with reference to women, it does not mean that *all* women necessarily fall prey to the indications of that word, nor that men are exempted from falling prey or permitted to fall prey. (Wadud 97)

The Qur'an in no way differentiates between the genders, something that has become very prominent under the Taliban reign. What matters most is good deed. This has been made clear in verse 40:40 of the Qur'an- "Whoever does evil will be repaid with its like; whoever does good and believes, be it a man or a woman, will enter Paradise and be provided for without measure." (Haleem 304) The attitude towards women seems to declare the fact that the more the women are made to suffer, the more secure will be the political future of Islam. This is also depicted in the puritans' tendency to look at Muslim women as a consistent source of danger, and vulnerability of Islam, and to go as far as branding women as the main source of social corruption and evil. (Fadl 170-249)

Verse 24:30-31 of the Qur'an tells—

*[Prophet], tell believing men to lower their eyes and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do. And tell believing women that they should lower their eyes, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal. (Haleem 222)*

But it probably is the veil of invisibility which the oppressive patriarchal society has always preferred to opt for their women, considered as their property. Amina Wadud in her book *Gender Jihad* states her opinion of the *hijab* clearly when she mentions that it is not the definitive identification of honor:

While the *hijab* can give some semblance of a woman's affiliation with 'Islam,' it offers no guarantee of respect or protection. Those who reduce women to their sexuality will continue to do so, whether or not admitting this eases their consciousness....If a man respected a woman as an equal human being and not as an object of his sexual fantasies, then even a naked woman should be safe from male abuse....It is just as easy to be reduced to my sexuality while wearing the *hijab* as when not wearing it." (Wadud 219-223)

Latifa's father explicitly mentions the unislamic preaching of the Taliban –

They're preaching jihad. But a Muslim doesn't kill another Muslim. Nowhere in the Koran is it written that we should take life. This is the final proof that they're inventing their own Sharia, all the while wanting us to believe that whatever they decide is written in the Koran. Their laws aren't written in the sacred book. They come out of the heads of a few mullahs who would do better to keep them for themselves. (Latifa 84)

The activities of the Taliban have been strongly condemned by Latifa when she addresses them as –

Horrible bacteria, I think. Dangerous and virulent because they propagate by spreading a serious disease, one that strikes a mortal blow at the freedom of half of humanity. It's simple to propagate this disease. All it takes is for the Taliban to declare – with the backing of brute force – that they are the indisputable masters of the Sharia, the rules laid down in the Koran. In fact, they twist these for their own use, paying no respect to the sacred book. (Latifa 34)

## **Conclusion**

The Taliban's intention was identified as terrorizing the defenseless and creating a rampant mayhem by concocting this aura of fear. Thus, maligning Islam as a religion that promote violence.

Terrorizing innocents is nothing but a moral wrong and a delinquency against not only society but God as well.

The true condition of women can be summed up in the words of Malalai Joya, the youngest MP in Afghanistan, who stated that women are committing self-immolation in Afghanistan to escape the torturous life that they are subjected to:

The sad fact, in Afghanistan, killing a woman is like killing a bird. The United States has tried to justify its occupation with rhetoric about ‘liberating’ Afghan women, but we remain caged in our country, without access to justice and still ruled by women-hating criminals. Fundamentalists still preach that ‘a woman should be in her house or in the grave’. In most places it is still not safe for a woman to appear in public uncovered, or to walk on the street without a male relative. Girls are still sold into marriage. Rape goes unpunished every day. (Joya 3)

These writings are ways of rebellion against a society that has gone awry by subjugating women. The spark of nonconformity heightens and highlights the fact that resentment cannot cripple women. A detailed reading of these works creates a greater sense of awareness in readers to condemn crime against women that is carried on using the misnomer of Islam. This in turn can curb the raging war taking place in the name of religion. The paper, thus, gets concluded with the optimistic words of Malalai Joya when she says that “Our enemies can cut down the flower, but nothing can stop the coming of spring”. (Joya 271)

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## **Images of Women in “Mena Gurjari” and “Aai Jasal”: A Feminist Reading**

**Dr. Sumana Biswas**

***Received 05 June 2021 Revised 15 June 2021 Acceptance 29 June 2021***

**Abstract:** The proposed study is an attempt to interpret with a feministic perspective, the images of women as reflected in *Mena Gurjari* and *Aai Jasal*, the folktales of Gujarat. It projects limitations and challenges encountered by women universally in almost all phases of her life with special emphasis on the female protagonists of the selected folklores. The reading of both the stories has underscored the general impoverished social status of women and how they been subjected to needless ignominy, depreciation, abrogation, exclusion and discrimination on different grounds for ages. It has projected not only how the burden of being exceedingly virtuous through mandatory observation of dictated code of conduct has been imposed upon her but also the gloomy consequences related to the same. Forbiddance coupled with superstition in the form of meaningless rules, rites and rituals has been made to fetter her mobility, to restrict her growth and to paralyse her cardinal sapience such that she can never outlive her subjugated station in a patriarchal society. Ignoring of their adequate efficiency and intelligence adds to their ordeal. This essay highlights an undercurrent of revolt in Mena and Jasal, as mirrored in their activities, thereby suggesting that they have in them traits similar to that of feminist mind-set as far as equality and enfranchisement of women are concerned for integral emancipation of women.

**Keywords:** Mena Gurjari, Aai Jasal, Feminist, Mahakali, Self-immolation.

### **I**

We are well conversant with the conservative definitions of femininity propounded by patriarchal civilization. The archetypal image of an ideal woman is that of a domestic angel, chaste, mild-tempered, serene, obedient, adaptable, patient, silent, passive, dependent, ignorant, innocent,

domestic, selfless, modest, virtuous, submissive, docile, generous and tameable puppet in hands of men. The male dominant society checks and manipulates women such that they do not differ from the former's opinions and commandments/ordinance imposed upon them. They are denied room to visualize, realize, judge, decide and defend just for avoiding all possible conflicts that might hurt male chauvinism. They are deliberately handicapped and trammelled with numerous constraints, inhibitions, prejudices and superstitions in the name of rituals, tradition, culture and heritage. They are engineered to play burdensome roles under multifarious banners of familial and societal affiliations with all accountability, thereby ignoring and obliterating their individuality in the process. Predetermined directives justify man's callous demeanour towards woman, who he thinks, is born to obey his instructions and to quietly allow herself to be exploited, enslaved, harnessed, disgraced, smothered, commoditized and crucified. Circumstances are designed to make women believe and underestimate themselves as helpless, insignificant and worthless entities left with no choice but accept the indispensability of patriarchal custody for their survival, sustenance and well-being. Those who refrain from opposing all maleficent rigidities and conform instead to banal norms prescribed for women become adorable paragons while active, rebellious, defying, curious, witty, wise, intelligent, ambitious, independent, candid and eloquent women are stigmatized as fiendish, vindictive, distorted witch afflicted with gruesome insanity. A woman's challenging the social standards is bitterly criticized as an audacious activity and consequently she gets subjected to castigation and ostracism because her ideas do not resonate with the stereotypical notions of the society, the architect of which are discriminatory patriarchs. Feminism is a movement featuring and opposing vehemently the ascending impoverishment, exploitation, marginalization, abrogation, depletion, and subjugation of woman. It is oriented towards dismantlement and demolition of such injustice against woman. Feminism is about equal privileges and

opportunities for all genders alike without discrimination. It advocates honouring of women's sagacity, identity, competence and power, and strives to equip all women in comprehending their basic rights.

“Folktales are stories passed down through generations, orally. Different kinds of folktales include fairy tales, tall tales, trickster tales, myths, and legends” (Aaron’s). They quintessentially instruct us morally and acquaint us with the tradition, culture and history of the community and region they belong to. Folktales are the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth. India apart from being a country of diverse culture, beliefs and rituals showcased in the form of fictional narratives as folktales, is also a region where women’s status is quite ambiguous and confusing depending upon prevalent orthodox beliefs and conveniences. This essay is a feminist interpretation of the folk tales of Gujarat, “Mena Gurjari” (Shankar, 2008: 5-11) and “Aai Jasal” (Shankar, 2008: 50-55) with special emphasis upon their female protagonists Mena Gurjari and Aai Jasal respectively.

## II

The mythical narrative of “Mena Gurjari” is woven around a simpleton Mena of Gadh Gokul, married to Chandio, chieftain of a warrior shepherds’ tribe of Gadh Mandhav. She adapts to the demands of the family, does the daily household chores and also sells curd in the market. It evinces that women of occupation has been navigating business and familial responsibilities since long as a system and custom of a patriarchal social structure. Being enthusiastic about glimpsing the opulent camp of the Crown Prince of the Empire on the outskirts of her village, she manages permission of going and selling her ware there from her reluctant mother-in-law through repeated pleadings. Here, we find society’s tendency to restrict, suppress and smother a woman’s desires and adventurous spirit in the name of prevalent orthodox conventions. However, she warns Mena that the Prince has a record of abducting

beautiful ladies into his harem. Such discouragement by Mena's mother-in-law in her pursuits is a not only an outcome of her fear born of aggravating insecurity surrounding hypothesised danger that women become more involved in defending themselves from but also manifests their nightmare that young women being vulnerable and frail are ever exposed to impending peril. After an encounter with Mena, the fascinated Prince tries to tempt her in various ways through dazzling baits, but her bold, persistent and firm smashing of him with her quick-witted arguments attests her resistance to his filthy manipulations. But, Mena's ultimate seizure by the prince, when she refuses to surrender, testifies her commoditization and colonization. Her revolt against transgression and astuteness get reflected when even amidst such adversity, she doesn't lose her calm and manages to send a message to her husband following which an infuriated army of Gurjars vanquishes the Prince and rescues her. But, on her return she confronts mortification of her integrity and strident abandonment by her mother-in-law, family and the entire clan. Finally, mutinous Mena renounces everything and reaches Pavagarh where she disappears with a flash of light and is believed to have merged with Goddess Mahakali, thereby creating a myth. This closing episode suggests that perhaps she commits suicide by jumping down from Pavagadh meaning "one fourth hill" or "fire-hill" (Pavagadh) to rid her soul of all dishonour and agony permanently. Her unification with Mahakali epitomizes that she transcends sheer mundaneness and mingles with the unfathomable "Primeval Force of the Universe, identical with the Ultimate Reality" (Mahakali), thereby distinctively emphasizing upon joy, courage, hope, cleansing, change, female power, independence, boundlessness, defiance and existential freedom to be—without seeking permission. Thus, Mena Gurjari's deeds and disposition allegorically equates her with the mythological "Kali, the feminist icon we need today, in that she is a complex figure of many contrasting traits, all of which are equally worthy expressions of female strength—unapologetic because it doesn't even consider that there could be anything to apologise for"(Mahakali).

In the legend of “Aai Jasal” we come across Dhano Bhed who has two wives, Mani Behan and Jasal. Here we see how women have always fallen victims to polygamy. Mani was maliciously envious of Jasal because Dhano paid more attention to Jasal. Mani wanted to malign Jasal and once, when Dhano was out for a business trip, she got an opportunity to do the same. Mani saw Jasal with a stranger, whose name was Ladhwa, and whom Jasal incidentally offered water from the well out of humaneness as he was extortionately thirsty. This episode also happened to develop and build a strong brother-sister bonding between Jasal and Ladhwa, as a consequence of which Ladhwa had lunch at Jasal’s place on her insistence. The truth remained unnoticed by Mani, who blatantly spread a make-believe rumour formulated into a gossip that Jasal was entertaining a stranger in Dhano’s absence. On Dhano’s return, she craftily confronted him with it, inciting suspicion and violent anger in him, thus inviting immense predicament for Jasal. Angrily, Dhano walked into his house, where Jasal was waiting for him and started whipping her. Here, Mani’s flawed activities represent lethal feminine ventures which ignite medieval savagery in male chauvinistic prigs and simultaneously promote patriarchy by maligning women. However, her toxic disposition mirrors that women, when denied fair treatment in their lifetime, may turn antipathetic towards others of the same tribe. Mani represents those women whose constricted and conservative mental state is a morbid repercussion of stringent dictates that smother their freedom and desires apart from denying them room to express their frustration, agony, bewilderment, annoyance and grievance germinating from inner dissatisfaction, hence, converts them into irrational, tortuous entities playing atrocious roles.

Shocked, when Jasal asks Dhano the reason behind such physical abuse, he charges her of impiety and betrayal. Disgrace and quandary inflicted upon Jasal is metaphorically equivalent to her unjust crucifixion. Shattered, when she surrenders to God for her deliverance from the mundane, she means to rid herself of blasphemous sordid civilization as a mark of protest against the same. Her sudden

physical commotion accompanied by pouring out of vermillion from her eyes may have other different implications apart from mythical significance. For instance, Jasal's tangible tumult signifies her clinical pain caused due to inordinate somatic and psychological injuries inflicted upon her on one hand and a sanguine metamorphic process she undergoes to attain the state of an ethereal transcendence on the other. Vermillion in her eyes perhaps suggests a lesion possibly because of the physical assault she confronts. It simultaneously manifests her bleeding heart flowing out as tears of grief and grievance against noisome outlook of an insatiable blighted society. Finally she adopts the path of self-immolation, "typically used for political or religious reasons, often as an extreme form of protest or in acts of martyrdom" (Self-immolation). But, as per the tale, before performing this self-sacrificial ceremony, her wounds disappear magically making her look divine. This miraculous incident astounding the entire vicinity appears like a fable, yet it is quite connotative in approach, i.e. either Jasal's inviolable will power fuels her immunity to bear a more calm, confident, bold and unperturbed stance by outliving the trauma or perhaps the magnitude of ruin encountered by Jasal detaches her from worldliness and imparts her candid wisdom to rebel against sick, claustrophobic, banal and baneful ordinances of patriarchy. She cures with her blessings, the handicapped and diseased people, for instance, the lame representing cowards, who cannot take a stride for genuinely righteous causes, the deaf, who cannot listen to their conscience and the blind, who grope in the dingy bedlam of ignorance. This act of Jasal typifies her endeavour to restore people's organic sapience buried under the rubble of prejudiced and exploitative philosophies.

Jasal's urging her sworn brother Ladhwa to pour ghee on her pyre and drape her with *chunari* may have different interpretations. For example, the decision of Jasal's involving Ladhwa in accomplishing her mission is significant in avouching the sanctity of her sisterly bonding with Ladhwa in a solemn manner, though it appears as if Jasal is trying to purge her unfairly tarnished image under the impingement of

some unseen societal obligation lying in her sub-conscience . Also, by bathing in ghee, the sacred symbol of auspiciousness, Jasal perhaps wants to detoxify herself from all mortal contamination she has been dumped with and to promote longevity of mental clarity, memory, and intellect instead. Similarly, the *chunari*, she uses as her mantle “symbolizes modesty, virtue, probity, honour and respect of a married woman; offering *chunari* means paying respect to the feminine principle or Shakti that runs this Universe” (Significance of Chunri). So, she employs both ghee and *chunari* along with fire as her weapons to crusade against injustice and to proclaim her superiority amidst patriarchal monopoly. Also, her elevation to the sublime status of a universal mother ‘Aai’, parabolically parallels biological motherhood achieved through labour, pain and shedding blood.

Both Mena and Jasal get almost banished when alive, while deified after they embrace death as per the myth. This prominent change visible in people’s attitude is ironically a compound effect of the following factors: their chance realization of an unpardonable crime committed due to hasty judgmental perception, yet, their persistent denial of the same; their striving to suppress injustice done through hypocritical and manipulative ways of eulogising and worshipping them. Mena’s implicative suicide and Jasal’s self-immolation may remind one of Sati Pratha in which widows followed their dead husbands on pyre perhaps escape burdensome series of menaces. Their such drastic actions illustrate their inner-self burning on a pyre of frustration due to disgrace, prejudiced criticisms and predicament worsened by horrendously antagonistic and dumb spouses equivalent to dead husbands. So, in a way it is their declaration of an emblematic widowhood.

### III

Therefore, in the feministic explication of *Mena Gurjari* and *Aai Jasal* , we find that both Mena and Jasal have experienced inordinate harassment, humiliation and abandonment in spite of being

virtuous, chaste, gentle, generous, faithful, loyal, patient, religious, dutiful and reliable individuals. They are docile, obedient and silent but not to the extent of being taken for granted as slavish, passive, worthless and wasteful entities commonly imputed to the women clan in our society. They deserve applause and appreciation for their tenacious toil, efficiency and contributions, yet, not only remain far from any acknowledgement but also are enslaved, belittled and ignored often. They are viewed as carnal commodities and are considered as subaltern entities in our hugely discriminatory hierarchical society. Their opinions, suggestions and voice have been sabotaged and strangled as usual. They have been frequent victims of vicious social and gender discrimination, racism and disparity in various walks of their lives, yet they never stooped down in front of any adversity, thereby attesting their self-respect and dignity. They have been thought of as owned and customized objects, but they successfully secure themselves from being exploited and enslaved with the aid of their vigilance and wisdom. Their calibre and competence have been frequently underestimated, doubted, neglected, demeaned and annulled deliberately. Besides being denied opportunities, freedom and rights enjoyed by men, they have been subjected to violence in the form of physical assault and mental torture. But, though people have either aggravated Mena's and Jasal's crisis or have abstained from providing any remedy to relieve them, they have broken the stereotypical image of tormented woman, who instead of protesting, endures everything silently assuming it to be her destiny. They dispose/discard both allurements and threats as a revolt against conforming to any sort of compromises that they feel derogatory, stale and stinky. In the process, they defy patriarchal misogyny which has not only impregnated women with misconception about themselves but also has justified them craftily for ages. Despite possessing all feminine attributes and demeanour typical of an archetypal domestic paragon, their forthright actions sufficiently epitomize them as female icons dismantling the noisome belief that women are weak, impulsive, incompetent, greedy, dull-witted, insensible, hyper-sensitive, superstitious, prejudiced and full of discrepancies, flaws



and foibles. Their candidness and courage have been misinterpreted as audacity and aggression because they have kind of surpassed the general appendage- status of women, who are contemplated as morons ought to give in to the rigorous prescripts, unethical demands and dominance of male chauvinism for survival and sustenance. Both women undergo a tragic end, though mythically glorified, as a consequence of their rebellious self, an unacceptable and indigestible non-conventional disposition of woman in the censorious eyes of a gender biased community. But, finally, Mena and Jasal reawaken their inner-self, empower themselves with their autonomous ideologies, methods and resolution for righteous causes, thereby allegorizing their struggle for self-emancipation from the jaundiced society.

#### **IV**

The feminist study of both the folktales underlines how woman as an embodiment of virtues is exposed to all assaults conducted by man in the name of fragile tradition and culture. They highlight not only the deplorable colonization of woman, but also her congenital munificence, fertility and sexuality, which turn out to be the most atrocious hindrances on the way to woman's enfranchisement and liberation. Her adaptability and tolerance have been trivialized as her shortcomings, excuses, helplessness and inefficiency. The tales reveal not only how the resoluteness of woman has been harnessed, obturated and obliterated perennially but also how she is apotheosized and excoriated often by the opportunistic anti-feminist authorities depending upon the latter's conveniences and self-interests. The feminist portrayal of the narratives features vehement hypocrisy in patriarchal practices and its catastrophic effect upon women. Both the stories reveal totalitarian exploitation, manipulative marginalization, obnoxious derogation, rampant oppression and callous commoditization of woman despite their indispensability and generous serviceability in the society. Dearth of empathy, justice, appreciation and respect for women compounded with languor and inactivity towards granting them

fundamental human rights create cumulative pressure enough to make them suffer from insecurity to the extent of turning them paranoid, insane and mephistophelean individuals at times. The fact, that the quandary of women cannot be justified through any fabled transfiguration or any other ostentatious stratagem has been vividly expressed here. Thus, both the tales oppose such tyranny and inequity against woman, voice for extirpating the same and propose for esteeming and acknowledging their contributions as equally significant as those of men instead of nullifying the truth.

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## **Trafficking Organs: In(Human) *Harvest* of Human Body Parts**

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*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*  
T. S. Eliot 'The Hollow Men'<sup>1</sup>

The last stanza of Eliot's poem aptly summarises the predicament of the urban poor, who live and die ignominiously. They live a life of utter penury. With minimalistic resources, their backs pushed against walls, an unpredictable and an ominous future, there is no recourse left open to them but to sell their organs for sustenance.

Unfortunately, over the years, the market for organ trafficking has increased manifold. There is a bizarre yet symbiotic relationship between privatised institutions and the medical progress in the field of transplant/s of human organs. They are harvesting organs for use in other human bodies. It is legal in many parts of the world as also part of trafficking through black market and clearly indicates economic exploitation. Whether to make ends meet or to cater to their materialistic, consumerist desires, people commoditise their body parts. Tsuyoshi Awaya refers to this as 'Human Revolution' (1999: 145).

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault points out that 'in times of bio-politic' the dependency on 'bio-power' increases. The government uses the advanced technical/ medical techniques, thus, interfering in the lives of people and 'achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations' (1990: 140). He distinctly mentions that 'bio-power' was being used 'in a whole series of sub-State institutes such as medical institutions, welfare funds, insurance and so on' ("*Society Must Be Defended*" 2003:

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<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961), 80.

250).<sup>2</sup> It cannot be denied that advanced medical technologies are being utilised to solve medical problems. However, the State is totally involved as it decides the extent of involvement/ interference in the life of a person/ patient on the basis of encashing the medical problems of that patient.

The route of organ trafficking suggests that the trade can best be understood in the context of global capitalism when Nancy Scheper-Hughes points out that the ‘global circuit of organs mirrors the circuit of capital flows in the era of globalisation: from South to North, from Third to First world, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white’ (2001) “... India, or the Indies, was synonymous with poverty, squalor, backwardness, superstition, and overpopulation. **‘Far from being a desired space, it was the quintessential third-world country, exporting nothing but communicable diseases,’**” a former U. S. Ambassador to New Delhi, Daniel Moynihan, once acidly remarked’ (Krishna 2009: 1). India has, since, come a long way. Yet, the route of organ trafficking remains unchanged. Modern advancement in medicine and biotechnology has been responsible for the exploitation of human body for harvesting organs, tissues, cells, wombs (in case of surrogacy), sperms, eggs, hair and even tonics made from human placenta. In other words, every part/ organ of the human body is a marketable item to be used for medical purposes or medicinal values.

Manjula Padmanabhan, in her play *Harvest*<sup>3</sup>, uses technology to present the effects of globalisation not only on the psyche but also on the body of a so-called Third-world inhabitant. Arif Dirlik recognises globalisation as a deceptive power to ‘admit different cultures into the realm of capital only to break them down and remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption, and even to reconstitute subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and

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<sup>2</sup> [https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/foucault\\_soc\\_defended.pdf](https://pdflibrary.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/foucault_soc_defended.pdf) p. 250. Michel Foucault ‘Society Must be Defended’ Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76. Trans. David Macey. Eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. General eds. Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (Allen Lane, imprint of Penguin Books), scanned copy of chapter eleven, pp. 239-64.

<sup>3</sup> Manjula Padmanabhan (1997) *Harvest* in Helen Gilbert (ed), *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*. 2001: rpt. 2007. New York: Routledge. 217-49. ‘Introduction,’ Helen Gilbert, 214-16. All subsequent references are from this text.

consumers more responsive to the operations of capital' (*Global/ Local* 1996: 32). *Harvest* clearly shows this heinous side of the society. There is an imbalance of power which is distinguished by the in(human) trade between the receivers of a First-World country and the donors from a Third-World country, who willingly promise to give away their organs in exchange for money. In this connection, Georg Simmel writes: 'The modern city, however, is supplied almost exclusively by production for the market that is for entirely unknown purchasers who never appear in the actual field of vision of the producers themselves' (1903: 2). The fact remains that the beneficiaries of these organs are faceless people, living in their antiseptic world, using exploitative means to increase their life spans.

Written in 1997, *Harvest* is set in the 2010 AD in Mumbai, erstwhile Bombay. Sale of organs is common practice, which is a compelling need for the marginalised leading bleak lives, in order to get money to survive in the challenging circumstances of a modern city. The donors live in single rooms in the over-crowded city of Mumbai without basic amenities of life. The horrifying consequence of this extreme poverty is that selling their organs is the only way they can earn enough to support the financial needs of their families.

Problems of Om Prakash, the protagonist, are compounded when he loses his job. He has to look after his family but cannot. His wife is nineteen, brother twenty-two and mother is sixty; all are dependent on him but he cannot fulfil any of their needs. At the very edge, he pledges his organs to Virginia (Ginni/ Jennie), the blonde, light skinned 'youth goddess' (*Harvest* 217). She is the digital display of the aged, diseased American male Virgil. 'This is my fourth body...in fifty years... Two were not successful' (246), Virgil tells Jaya. He needs the transplants to keep himself young, and Om promises to provide his organs. The transaction is made through 'Interplanta Services.' A rigorous medical testing process is followed and he is declared eligible, fit, and healthy to pledge his organs to the anonymous buyer in U. S. A. He comes back elated that he has a job. He tells his mother:

We'll have more money than you and I have names for... (219)

To his wife Jaya, he says:

But... we'll be rich!

Insanely rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room...! (223)

Jaya is unhappy with his choice but Om insists that he made the choice not of his own volition. The sorrowful conditions of the house and family forced him to take that option. He insists that that was the only road he could have taken.

...I went because there wasn't anything left to do. I went

because I lost my job at the company....Because

I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks anymore!

...The factories are all

closing! There was nothing left for people like us! .

...I stood in a queue and was chosen! And if not this queue,

there would have been other queues . . . (235)

The house is usurped by 'InterPlanta'; everything is monitored and a close watch is kept on the healthy body of Om Prakash though the 'Contact Module, [a device that hangs from the ceiling, and which looks like a] white, faceted globe' (221). It not only helps Ginni to keep her distance from the unsanitary, unclean conditions from the home of a deprived individual living in a Third World country but also performs a voyeuristic function. Om urges everyone to eat food, which consists of multi-coloured nutritional pellets, on time. He is concerned that the contract might be terminated if they do not police their own behaviour. 'You know how [Ginni] hates it when we're late to eat,' sharing his anxiety, Om says (228). They are supposed to practice self-discipline and the 'Module' oversees that. In this manner, the donor's body is converted into a perfect site for the 'docility-utility' (Foucault 1995: 135-169)

model. The continuous surveillance would ascertain Om's health and a healthy body would ensure healthy organs. Foucault explains: 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved' (136). This 'docility' sees the body as a medium to allow for its increased 'utility.' According to Foucault's interpretation of social institutions, the human body is at the centre of power relations. Hence, knowledge and power can be exercised on it to extract the maximum benefit.

There is an array of gadgets, a television with a 'Video Couch' for Om's mother, an air conditioner, a mini gym, and a fully-equipped kitchen.' The fascinating craze of the urban poor, for various electronic gadgets, is also an important reason for them to sell their organs. The domination of human lives by machines is complete and quite ironical. Men have no control over their lives due to utter lack of resources. So, the hegemony of the guards/ agents and the Contact Module is not contested. Ma is helped into the 'Video Couch' by the agents, told to relax and experience ultimate bliss. The lid is shut; edges are locked, and sealed. When Jaya wants to know how Ma would survive without air, food, water and how she would relieve herself, one of the agent replies:

Ma'am-it's a total comfort unit. We have a full recycling and bio-feed-in-process. Your relative will have no further need from the outside world from now on till she chooses to delink...

...The unit is wholly self-sufficient (244)

In the 'Video Couch,' which is described by Helen Gilbert as 'sarcophagus... being something of a cross between a dialysis machine and an entertainment unit, though its features are comically exaggerated to enhance the text's critique of rampant materialism' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 215), it appears as if Ma is on a space tour, where nothing is tangible. It is utter seclusion. However, this is the escape Ma has chosen for herself, to be enslaved and controlled by a machine. She becomes the ideal beneficiary of Ginni's gifts, not bothered about Om's anxiety and/ or guilt. Her statement 'I am through

caring about anybody' (242) clearly indicates her distance from her family and her displacement as head of the family. She keeps herself busy in the make-belief world provided by technology to get away from the harsh realities of her impoverished life. By the end of the play, Ma is plugged into the 'Video Couch' in which she can watch any one of the innumerable channels. She surrenders to the artificially, technologically-created euphoria and is exhilarated that, without any effort/s, she and everyone else in the family can be rich for the rest of their lives. Ma is shown to be self-centred as opposed to the self-sacrificing mother of Nissim Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion,' when she says:

Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
and spared my children. (36)

Ma is not the epitome of motherhood. She does not have love, and compassion for her family. Instead, she is uncaring to the point of being callous. The one bedroom house becomes a microcosm for the concrete jungle of Mumbai. Relationships are meant to give material benefits. There are no emotional bonds between the four members of the family. Ma dislikes Jaya, who has an on-going affair with Jeetu, her brother-in-law, who also happens to be a male prostitute. Despite having an illicit relationship with Jaya, Jeetu continues to make ironically derogatory remarks to her:

... my brother's sold himself to foreigners? Or that you're my  
wife? (*shrugs*) The second one is hardly... news!

If we can shit in public, we can just as well screw in public too—  
especially since you're now officially my wife. (226)

In Act III scene i, Jeetu is mistaken for Om and is whisked away by guards for the transplant, to be returned with his body covered with bandages. His eyes are gauged out; he loses the ability to see the real world but his brain is programmed in such a manner that he can see the bright video image of Ginni, who is 'Nothing. Nobody. [Merely] a computer-animated wet dream' (245), says Virgil. He also



mentions that a different strategy is applied for every donor. ‘For every fish, a dish—’ (245). Despite all this, Jeetu is so enamoured by Ginni’s incredible beauty that he happily agrees to pledge his entire body for her transplant/s. He says:

...she’s a goddess and she exists. I would  
do anything for her, anything. . . .  
You never told me she was...so *young!* (*hushed*) And  
beautiful...  
I saw all of her, you know! Standing there (*he draws her with his*  
*arms*), all of her wearing... almost *nothing!*  
And she kept... (*he moves his body sensuously*) moving, like  
this, like that...! I could have had her, right there and then! (241)

Initially he resists the usurpation of their freedom by ‘InterPlanta’ and refuses to be a part of the family briefing called by the guards. When Jaya requests him to register with the agency, he states: ‘I don’t mind being bought— but I won’t be owned’ (227). However, the digitised image of Ginni, which has been planted in his mind, changes his outlook altogether.

Ginni promises them everything they could never afford.

I get to give you things you’d never get in your lifetime, and you get  
to give me, well... maybe my life. (230)

These are the words of exploitation and the analogy can be drawn with the irreversible Faustian pact with Lucifer.

Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer . . .  
Say, he surrenders up to him his soul,  
So he will spare him four and twenty years,

Letting him live in all voluptuousness;

To give me whatsoever I shall ask,

To tell me whatsoever I demand,

. . . .

And always be obedient to my will (*Faustus* 1979: 84, Act I Sc. iii)

It is an appalling reminder that no parallel can be drawn between the receivers and the donors. Ginni provides ‘things’ for which the person has to pay with his life as did Faustus. The entire body of Jeetu is transplanted to keep Ginni alive. Om also leaves to search for Ginni. He is ready to offer every part of his body if only he can meet the enticing Ginni. Sunil Sethi has described *Harvest* as ‘a modern, morality play’ (1997: 98) in which Padmanabhan questions the limits of poverty, material ambition, and individual dignity.

*Harvest* presents a world where nothing can be held on to as nothing is precious. It is a degenerated space of want, which forces the members of the family to give up every part of their body for materialistic gains. Padmanabhan also points towards the international market for surrogacy and artificial insemination. Men from First World countries turn to healthy women from Third World to bear their children. Virgil says:

We’re interested in women where I live... Childbearing  
women.

. . . .

We look for young men’s bodies to live in and young women’s  
bodies in which to sow... children. (246)

. . . .

The guards will make the child possible... It’s just a

formality, a device –

. . .

...an implant...which they're ready

to deliver... (247)

Jaya, however, is the only person who resists the advances of digitised yet physically unhealthy world of the affluent. She refuses to negotiate with Virgil as long as he attempts to assume control from his safe, disease-free environment in the First World. If he wants her body, he has to come to her. She tells him:

... I know...you're richer than me. But if

you want me, you must risk your skin.

I've discovered a new definition for winning. Winning by losing.

I win if you lose.

. . .

I'm holding a piece of glass against my throat. If you force the

door, you will push this glass into my throat.

. . .

...I'll die knowing that you...will have

lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. (248)

Very subtly, Padmanabhan weaves gender into the text. A 'weak and helpless' woman has the courage to thwart the efforts of a rich though unhealthy man from a First World nation. Discussing the end, Gilbert points out that 'Padmanabhan explores the nexus between sexuality and cultural difference to address the myth of the exotic, sexually available, and yet potentially dangerous "Other" that still

circulates in Western discourse... [Jaya's] demand that Virgil meet her in the flesh before she will consider his proposition functions as a more general challenge to Western societies to put aside damaging stereotypes and obsessive fears about contamination in order to interact with other cultures on a more equal, and respectful footing' (216).

The title of the play is also very ironic. Where harvest is associated with prosperity, here it denotes the harvesting of organs for the longevity for the haves from the have-nots. It is a macabre trade with its roots running deep in the black market. "Describing this phenomenon as a case of 'neo-cannibalism,' anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1998: 14) notes that 'wealthy but ailing patients in the First World are increasingly turning to healthy, if poverty-stricken populations of the Third World,' in order to procure 'spare' body parts. According to her, 'organ trafficking both illuminates and exacerbates existing social and racial inequalities [to make money]'" (Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant 2004).

To save himself and hide from 'InterPlanta' guards, Om thinks that he would crawl into the 'fridge.' This is reminiscent of the final moments of Faustus.

Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,

And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!

No, no:

Then will I headlong run into the earth.

Earth, gape! O, no, it will not harbour me. (*Faustus* 145 Act V sc. iii)

*Harvest* presents a scathing critique of the economic, social, and cultural inequalities, which exist in the First and Third worlds. The capitalist parasites continue to feed on those who have not only compromised their bodies but also their humanity in the hope of leading a materialistically satisfying life. This can be associated with the 'fourth world' dynamics of Manuel Castells (1996, 1997a, 1997b).

His main argument is that ‘a new form of capitalism has emerged at the end of the century: global in its character, hardened at its goals...’ This capitalism, combined with biotechnological advancement in the medical field, uses its exploitative tentacles to suck the life out of a destitute individual to further its own life. Padmanabhan depicts this stark, bitter, and bleak reality in her play. As pointed out earlier, only Jaya shows courage to fight these capitalist forces to prove her identity. Padmanabhan, thus, leaves the reader to contemplate over questions about winning through defiance, urban materiality and the ruthless vice-like grip materialism has on the lives of the urban poor.

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## **The Poetics of Wordsworth and Coleridge**

**Dr. O.P. Tiwari**

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Wordsworth occupies a unique place in the whole range of English poets and critics. A.C. Bradley has rightly said that "...there is now no English poet either of that period or of any other period, who has been the subject of criticism more just, more appreciative, we may even say, more reverential" (Bradley, 1955:99). As a matter of fact his ideas on poetry evoked severe criticism both from his contemporaries and later critics, but nobody could ignore him or avoid emulating his views on various aspects of poetry.

In this context there can perhaps be no better example than that of Coleridge who was not only his personal friend but the co-author of a great literary adventure known as the *Lyrical Ballads*. The *Lyrical Ballads* which was published in 1798 was a well-planned affair, the modalities of which were minutely discussed and chalked out beforehand by Wordsworth and Coleridge, delineating their respective contributions to that. While doing so the nature and individual traits of the two were duly taken into consideration. According to that Wordsworth, who had an inborn fascination for the beauties and bounties afforded by nature, and who also abhorred the artificial way of life, was called upon to contribute such pieces wherein simple phenomenon of nature and the life of ordinary country-dweller could be presented in a grand and impressionable way. Contrary to this, Coleridge, who drew his inspiration mainly from fairy tales, occultism, superstition and other unnatural things, was required to present such mysterious things in a way so as to enable them to look real thereby bringing what he called "willing suspension of disbelief." The publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* was greeted with great enthusiasm by the readers, but at the same time it also led them to look askance on certain points. It was, therefore, thought imperative by both of them to write a detailed preface to their novel collection, so that



the ideas behind bringing out the *Lyrical Ballads* could be explained, queries replied, and apprehensions allayed. Thus came into being the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1802), which Coleridge himself happened to have claimed later as half of his own brain-child.

It, therefore, really looks intriguing that the Preface which was written by Wordsworth duly in consultation with his co-author came to be vehemently criticized by Coleridge himself. Obviously, in the Preface Wordsworth appears to have incorporated such matters which Coleridge did not find convenient. Therefore, he decided to publish his own article, probably with a view to dissociate him from the ideas about poetry and the poetic process expressed in the Preface and to present his own viewpoint on the subject.

It is in this background that Coleridge published his prodigious work *Biographia Literaria* (1817). But a close look upon *Biographia Literaria* clearly reveals that Coleridge not only took his tips from the Preface, but also imitated Wordsworth though giving them the hue of originality. Some other critics of later generation like T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards, though coming down heavily upon some of the ideas expressed by Wordsworth in his Preface, can be found hovering around the ideas of Wordsworth expressed on the subject. It is perhaps because of this that Wordsworth is accredited with setting the agenda not only for his contemporaries but also for the future generations. In plain words, his theory of the nature and process of poetry that poetry is the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,’ it is the ‘recollection of emotions in tranquility,’ and it is ‘the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge,’ has been the guiding principle for all others, so much so that even after criticizing nobody dared to bypass them.

It is imperative here to examine the poetics of Wordsworth comparing and contrasting the same with that of Coleridge to know as to what mutual influences they exercised upon each other and what imprint did they leave upon the later poets and critics. In his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*

Wordsworth defends his poems “against the charges of lowness and unpoeticalness that had been made against both, their subjects and their diction” (Hough, 1980: 68). While doing so he comes down heavily upon “the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers” and firmly declares that poetry should be the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” not the “mere satisfaction of a taste for imagery and ornament” (68-69).

Coleridge seems to be in perfect accord with Wordsworth on these points, and also seems to hold him in a high esteem. Thus recording his reaction to one of the unpublished poems of Wordsworth, he says that “there was here no mark of strained thought or forced diction, no crowd or turbulence of imagery...which made so unusual an impression on my feelings immediately and subsequently on my judgement” (*Biographia Literaria*, Chap. IV). But Coleridge later finds some of the views of Wordsworth untenable and chooses to criticize them thereby giving vent to his own viewpoint on the subject. As for example, he does not believe in the generalization that rustics and common people, as a matter of rule, are honest and plain speakers, a theory held steadfastly by Wordsworth. He also does not accept that the so-called ‘hourly communication with nature’ is sufficient to inject all the virtues in an individual without his proper mental and moral conditioning. Similarly, he also does not vouch for the theory of a common language being spoken by the rustics as he feels that the language differs from individual to individual according to one’s traits, training and exposure. But about the emergence of a common language he says that there are certain factors responsible for it such as free life and moral education which is capable of bridging the gap between the language of a villager and a city-dweller.

He, however, supports Wordsworth about the indispensability of metre in a poetic composition, which, he feels, not only adds charm to it but also works as a controlling and regulatory device to keep the passion in balance thereby making the creativity possible. Similarly, the importance of imagination in the poetic process has been recognized by both Wordsworth and Coleridge, however

in a varying measure. According to Wordsworth it confers upon the poet an extraordinary sense of perception which enables him to appreciate the inner beauty of the object and to visualize things which are not physically present. It also enables him to conjure up past experiences and then to present them in an effective way. In other words, according to Wordsworth, in the poetic process right from observation to overflow i.e. from the first excitement to communication, imagination plays a key role. It is again through the power of imagination that an ordinary thing can be presented in a way that it looks grand, while a supernatural thing as natural, as has been articulated in the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Coleridge further elaborates this point and gives a graphic account of imagination as a synthetical and magical power which brings about harmony between different opposite qualities. Signifying the role of imagination in the poetic process, Coleridge says that it stirs the soul of man and helps in forging proper combination of various mental faculties thereby leading to activity. Further, Coleridge places imagination in two categories, primary and secondary, and states that primary imagination is involuntary which confers power of observation while the secondary imagination is a conscious act which enables to receive impressions, create images and harmonize disparate elements. In this way, in the poetic process primary and secondary imagination play a complementary role. It is, however, the secondary imagination which is directly linked with the poetic composition and is, therefore, also known as the poetic imagination (Hough, 1980:81).

It is thus obvious that both Wordsworth and Coleridge hail imagination as a creative power and share identical perceptions about its significance in respect thereof, but of the two, as Wimsat and Brooks (1957) observe, Coleridge “may be accepted as the more articulate and more theoretical spokesman” (389). Interestingly while signifying the role of imagination in the poetic process, I.A. Richards also refers to two types of imagination- repetitive and formative. Merely to recall past experiences is repetitive imagination, while to add something new and useful to it is formative.

According to Richards, in the poetic process imagination plays multifarious roles. Right from the first encounter with the stimulus i.e. object to the final presentation of the poetry all the activities like revival of past experiences, making proper modification in them to suit a distinct purpose, creation of proper images, use of appropriate language etc. are all directed by the imagination. Obviously, there is no basic difference between the views of Richards and Coleridge on the role of imagination in the poetic process which in turn is based upon the views of Wordsworth in respect thereof. The only difference, however, is that unlike Coleridge and Wordsworth, Richards does not give a concrete theory of imagination but only gives the six different senses in which the word imagination is used (Richards, 1961:239-242).

In short we can say that the views expressed by Wordsworth and Coleridge with regard to the poetic process are complementary and in no way contradictory. To be more precise, Wordsworth visualizes five stages of the process of creativity viz. observation, spontaneous excitement, subsidence, recollection, imaginative excitement and overflow. Observation denotes the stage when one encounters the object and is enthralled by its beauty. Giving a psychological interpretation to it, Richards says that the 'object' which he calls as 'stimulus' has the power to gratify some or the other 'appetencies' or 'the need of the organism' (47).

According to Wordsworth, a poet possesses an extraordinary sense of perception which enables him to pierce into the hidden truth (beauty) of the object. He is so charmed and captivated by the object that a spate of joyous convulsions overtakes him leaving him overwhelmed and stupefied. Coleridge describes the above super-sense as the primary imagination which makes proper observation of the worldly objects possible. The impressions obtained as such are stored in the memory chamber and the tide of excitement stands receded. Then there comes the stage when in a peaceful mood through a deep contemplation one revives the first experience on account of which an excitement akin to the original one occurs. The work of contemplation is an imaginative and conscious act which is described

by Coleridge as the secondary imagination. This time the poet is constrained to give vent to his feelings harmonizing the opposite elements and forging a sort of unity in multiplicity. Eliot describes this process as the ‘unification of sensibility’ which leads to creativity. As opposed to this, there is ‘dissociation of sensibility’ when disparate elements are sought to be brought together by force leading to no creativity or to worthless creation. The last stage of the poetic process is communication wherein the poet is required to adopt an appropriate language and style to arouse in the reader feelings analogous to his own.

It is thus obvious that the views of Wordsworth on the poetic process are quite similar to those of Coleridge, Eliot and Richards. As for the comparative value of the individual contribution and the mutual indebtedness of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is not easy to give an edge to one over the other. This fact is beautifully illustrated by the dilemma of an observer who says about Wordsworth and Coleridge that though they both profited one another, “it is not easy to determine precisely where the final balance of indebtedness lies” (Daiches, 1960:888). But as against this, Eliot is inclined to give precedence to Wordsworth over Coleridge as he says that “their influence upon each other was considerable; though probably the influence of Wordsworth upon Coleridge during their brief period of intimate association was greater than that of Coleridge upon Wordsworth (Eliot, 1975:70).

However, it is not gainsaid that both Wordsworth and Coleridge made invaluable contribution to the subject. For instance, if Wordsworth has the distinction to initiate the discussion, Coleridge can be accredited with making useful contributions by providing new devices and enforcing new arguments to support or elaborate a particular point. “Criticism of poetry,” says Graham Hough (1980), “may be either original exploration or the providing of maps or signposts for later travelers” (68). In view of this, Wordsworth is placed in the first category, while Coleridge “with the finished product before him” in the second (68). There is, however, no denial to the fact that Coleridge has a far

more analytical mind, and he has been rightly regarded as the ‘greatest single influence’ upon the New Criticism and “the most immediate source for English and American critics” (Bharadwaj, 1995:97). Eliot himself seems to be greatly influenced by Coleridge and is said to hold substantially similar views on the process of poetic composition. Similar is the case with Richards who, it is said, “picked up Coleridgean concepts, glossed over them, and presented them to the New Critics in their most usable form” (99).

To sum up the discussion on the poetic process, we may say that Wordsworth was an original explorer who set the ball rolling declaring emphatically that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions. The entire discussion really revolves round this statement and Coleridge and others appear to have taken adequate note of it. Though Wordsworth himself controverted the spontaneity theory by contemplating the stage of revival of the impressions in tranquility, it was in fact Coleridge who, through his theory of imagination, explained the whole process in a plausible way. Eliot and Richards also seem to have taken their tips from Coleridge and elaborated the subject grounding the same on a psychological plane. Thus, the views expressed by Coleridge and some of the modern critics, howsoever conflicting they may appear at times, are mostly complementary and reveal the poetic process fully well. In this way Wordsworth and Coleridge, besides influencing one another, also made spectacular impact on modern critics.

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## **Revolt Against Exploitation in Ngugi's *Matigari***

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**Abstract:** Ngugi wa Thiong'o is an Anglophone African writer, who in his fictional works, gives a Kikuyu view of the bitter colonial war, thereby correcting healthily a white man's point of view of the Mau Mau Revolution. He, in his novels, exposes vividly the exploitation and all its pernicious ramifications first by the colonialists and later by neo-colonialists. His righteous indignation at the depraved human behavior finds finest expression in his novels. In the works of Ngugi, the resistance tradition pervades and arouses the feelings of Africans. This paper makes an attempt to analyse the economic and political dependence of the African neo-colonial bourgeoisie through Ngugi's novel *Matigari*. It also analyses *Matigari* as a rebellious novel.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, imperialism, resistance, rebellion.

In his eternal quest for freedom—in the physical and metaphysical terms – man sometimes resists and overcomes, sometimes succumbs to the conditions he is in. In the search for liberation, crossing confining mental boundaries is a prerequisite for the recovery of the lost selves. Colonialism is one such confining condition implies not just laws of political freedom. Its tentacles of power and control penetrate the labyrinths of mind and consciousness. Colonizing is thus an invasion of the mind as well.

The issue of colonialism is relevant in the present times for understanding the intersection of the culture, knowledge and power, the politics of colonialism and the hegemony of Europe in the colonial and the postcolonial context. While political independence implies the breakdown of the visible imperial



structure, engaging with the colonial experience in a postcolonial state of mind is an attempt at dismantling the invisible imperial structures of control.

In Africa, the imperial tradition is maintained by the international bourgeoisie using the multinational and flag-waving native ruling classes. The economic and political dependence of the African neo-colonial bourgeoisie is reflected in its culture of apemanship and parrotry enforced on a restive population through police boots, barbed wire, a gowned clergy and judiciary. Their ideas have also spread to a corpus of state intellectuals and the academics of the neo-colonial establishment. The resistance tradition is being carried out by the peasantry and the proletariat aided by patriotic students and other progressive elements of the petty middle class. This resistance is reflected in their patriotic defence of the peasant roots of national culture and in their defence of the democratic struggle in Kenya. In the works of Ngugi, the resistance tradition pervades and arouses the feelings of Africans.

In his novels Ngugi sets out to disprove the specific charges made by the colonialist historians. He tries to restore the traditional Gikuyu values. He earnestly feels that the Mau Mau was a political movement with legitimate arms but not an atavistic religion. It consisted of brave and dedicated heroes and not cruel murderers. Ordinary Gikuyu people suffered immensely during the emergency. Ngugi intends to redeem the traditional African culture from the biased view of the colonial historians.

*Matigari* is a novel of rebellion. The word Matigari in Gikuyu means ‘the remnants.’ The novel was originally written in Gikuyu with a view to reaching Kenyans. Any leftovers of food or dregs in drinks became a signifier of Mau Mau, which functioned as a trope mediating the colonial past and the postcolonial movement. Now Matigari represents an attempt to celebrate the once unmentioned Mau Mau and to introduce it into the political vocabulary of Kenya. Unfortunately, Mau Mau cannot be incorporated in full into the postcolonial’s power knowledge configuration because the men who had

inherited colonial power had been some of its opponents. The figure in Ngugi's novel refers to General Stanley Mathenge who had left the Nyandrua mountains in the mid-1950s and reached Ethiopia. Mathenge was unhappy with what was going on in the postcolonial Kenya and infact he was waiting for an appropriate time to return and restore the reign of justice and truth. So Ngugi's fictional Matigari is a typical fictional character who posed a palpable threat to the Kenyan political establishment. So in this novel it is Matigari who hopes to "transcend the materiality of state power and neo-colonialism"(131)

The novel created a stir in Kenya. It seeks "to initiate a public debate about issues that the authorities prefer to restrict to academic seminars and conferences"(161)

The presence of the hero Matigari was felt everywhere but the government was very much perturbed that they discovered in the end that Matigari was a fictional character and so they set out to destroy the book that had promoted his presence. Matigari comes before us as a rebel who asks questions and creates conditions which undermine the political system's ecumenical discourse of power.

Matigari becomes a representative of Ngugian rebels who feels that the nature of struggle is unequivocal. He also asserts that those who sow the seeds must reap the fruits. He earnestly feels that white settlers and black authorities represent western capitalism. He ultimately repudiates any route to liberation that falls short of an armed uprising. He says, "the enemy can never be driven out by words alone, no matter how sound the argument"(138). He continues his rebellious spirit by implacably articulating thus: "Justice for the oppressed springs from the armed might of the united dispossessed"(161). This is the rebellious spirit sustained by Matigari.

Matigari, like other freedom fighters, fought for the independence of Kenya. After the independence, he left the forest and buried his guns and his sword under a wild fig tree and put on the belt of peace because he believed that the end of fighting meant the end of injustice. Soon he discovers

that the land through which he travels suffers from a great heat that symbolizes the endemic oppression in the demoralized land. He comes to know that injustice still exists in the neo-colonial society. The White men against whom he fought have been replaced by their sons who now have become partners in 'reaping what they did not sow'.

Matigari continues his rebellious spirit. But he is imprisoned when he tries to expel the people who occupy the house built by him and his children. In the prison he divides his food and drink among the other prisoners. He escape from jail boldly. He brandishes a flaming sword and the doors are opened. He has a voice like thunder and when he speaks, smoke gushes from his mouth. Within three days after his arrest, he walks out of the jail boldly. When he appears before the people, they reject him as madman and drunkard. Troubled by his failure to convince others to accept his vision, Matigari goes into the wilderness where he interprets his failure in terms of an ancient natural wisdom and mourns for the day when people could still read the stars.

Matigari makes a final attempt to convince the people. He approaches a student, a teacher and a priest. Unfortunately all fail abysmally. Their denial of Matigari condemns them as irresolute and complicit with the oppression. The minister of Truth and Justice appeals to the factory works to end their strike at the factory. He tries to silence the workers through bullets and power.

Matigari understands that his attempts at peaceful change have failed, so he takes up his guns. He has no choice but to fight. His experience and sacrifice give him authority to speak for the victims of oppression. The people also supposedly grant him unimpeachable integrity in his stand against the oppressor for no other perspective carries any weight against his own. He asks the masses thus: "what other deed do you need that is greater than the blood I shed?"(50). In the end he gives his life for the land. According to him there are only two types of people in the land---patriots and traitors.

As a rebel, Matigari expresses his displeasure at the degraded women. He sees women who are 'either fat, gossipy creatures who work in bars or frivolous individuals like the wife of the minister of Truth and Justice whose most noticeable act is to sleep with the chauffeur in the back seat of her black Mercedes. Guthera is depicted as the beautiful, rare and pure seeming woman who is nevertheless available. She is depicted as 'wrongly in prostitution.' Muriuki and Guthera declare themselves child and wife to Matigari, subordinating them joyfully to him as the noble patriarch.

Matigari frightened the government of Kenya who searched for him but in the end found out that he was only a fictional character created by Ngugi. They confiscated all the copies of it. As a rebel he threatened the Kenyan government in the postcolonial era.

Matigari with his Christian teaching comes out with his quest for truth and justice.

Look! See the Boys and the Williamses coming to you. Please send them away and have them thrown into the everlasting fire you made for the likes of imperialists and their overseers. For you were hungry, but they gave you no food: you were thirsty and they gave you no water: you are naked, but they clothed you not.(81)

These lines reveal to us the rebellious spirit of matigari.

Matigari easily becomes a representative of the Kenyan workers. He identifies himself with the peasants. He continues his address to the Kenyan peasants and workers.

Imperialism has tried to kill that God within us. But one day that God will return from the dead... and liberate us who believe in Him. But... if you let the country go to the imperialist enemy and its local watchdogs, it is the same thing as killing that God who is inside you. (156)

Here Matigari insists on the Christ-like nature of the Kenyan dispossessed in the interest of fostering resistance to that dispossession. He is putting the Biblical terms towards a socialist revolution. Matigari asks the individual members of working class peasants to wage a war against the oppressors. He even draws their attention to mass political action. Thus matigari asks his people to continue the traditions of both peasant revolt and nationalistic politics extending back to the 1920s and continued upto the peasant movement such as Mwakenya.

Believes that the use of violence to preserve the oppressive social order always diminishes man but he is purified when it is used to change the unjust social order. Besides advocating protest and resistance, Ngugi, in his novels emphasizes the need for Kenyans to grow as worthy individuals and good citizens to build up a better nation.

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## **Deconstructing Ecological ‘Othering’ in Respect of Foucault’s Concept of ‘Biopower’**

**Rajeev Yadav**

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**Abstract:** The growth of recent environmental thoughts and environmental discourses is intertwined with the historical expansion of colonialism and imperialism. The European colonial occupation and settlement of colonies in Africa, Asia and America depended on the perception that the white European colonizer was ‘naturally’ predestined to rule over occupied, non-white populations and their lands. At the height of British colonialism, misappropriations of Darwin’s ‘survival of the fittest’ provided a convenient theoretical justification for colonial politics and the often brutal dispossession and relocation of Native populations. Furthermore, colonial discourse declared inferior subject positions for racial others as ‘closer to nature’, as critics have shown by analyzing the binary opposition between ‘primitive savage’ and ‘noble savage’. The ideological foundation of such “ecological othering” in many cases persists into the post-colonial contexts of the present. Sarah Jaquette Ray has shown in her recently published book *The Ecological Other* (2013) how environmental discourse constructs and enforces social hierarchies “along lines of ‘purity and pollution’ and by doing this it establishes a differentiation between “natural and unnatural bodies, and between bodies that are ‘good’ for nature and those that are not’. In this context Foucault’s concept of biopower proves to be helpful to further investigate the regulatory mechanisms of ‘ecological othering’ and to analyse how the framing of environmental problems often reflects exclusionary tendencies. Taking Ray’s concept of the “ecological other” as a starting point for discussion, this paper concentrates to explore how environmental discourse draws on the notion of “good bodies” and “bad bodies” and how the “healthy body” comes to play an important role for nation-building and population control. Furthermore, analyzing how this particular rhetoric has turned environmentalism into a white middle class movement, the paper

also discusses the role of environmental justice in opening the discourse and including a multitude of environmentalisms.

**Keywords:** Biopower, Biopolitics, Colonialism, Eco-criticism, Ecology, Ecological othering, and Imperialism.

**Introduction:**

Before analyzing the Ecological ‘othering’ as a new dimension of the ‘Ecocriticism’ and Foucault’s concept of ‘biopower’ and its role in investigating the regulatory mechanisms of Ecological ‘othering’ we have to go through in details to understand Ecocriticism and its various perspectives. The word ‘Ecocriticism’ gained its initial appearance in literary circle through the essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978 written by William Rueckert where he defined the term as “an application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world” (1978: 71). Rueckert examines the possible relations between literature and nature in terms of ecological concepts. Hence he attempts to formulate ecocriticism as efforts of finding a common ground between the human and the nonhuman to show how they can coexist in various ways, because the environmental issues have become an integral part of our existence.

However, apparently it ushered in critical vocabulary until the Western Literature Association Meeting in 1989 when Cheryll Glotfelty not only revived the term but also urged its adoption to refer the critical field that came to be known as “the study of nature writing.” Glotfelty writes speaking on behalf of the academic worldwide, “As environmental problems compound work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem” (1996: xxi). According to her as the professors of literature they can contribute to environmental restoration by focusing on the literary as well as on the ecological concepts and not privileging one over the other. The glimpses of concept of ‘ecological othering’ can be perceived here at an initial stage. Thus Glotfelty looks literature as the aesthetically and culturally constructed part of the environment.

In the same Meeting Glen Love in his Past President's speech, entitled "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Literary Criticism" emphasized the term to be widely used for studying the interconnections between human and non-human world. Since that meeting in 1989, the term "Ecocriticism" has bloomed in usage and ample indications are that acceptance of the term is imminent. At the WLA Meeting in 1994 organized in Salt Lake City in the session started with the theme "Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice" it has been advocated to foster an awareness of the varied uses to which scholars are putting the term. In addition, the writers were asked to consider how our present understanding might lead to future developments, both in scholarship and in pedagogy. However, the publication of the book, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* in the year 1996 edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm gave a new outlook to the movement of Ecocriticism. Here in this book Glotfelty gives oft quoted definition of 'Ecocriticism':

"What is Ecocriticism? Simply defined, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines the language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to its literary studies." (1996: xviii)

Glotfelty's goal in offering this comparative definition would appear to have been twofold: first, she proposes a commensurability between ecocriticism and feminist and Marxist criticism as parallel and analogous hermeneutical enterprises. To understand what exactly the nature of the analogy is in this definition by paraphrasing Tony Bennett's formulation, we might say that Glotfelty poses each of the three hermeneutics in question (feminism, Marxism, ecocriticism) as organizing itself in relationship to a constitutive "outside" of literature. Feminist criticism is "conscious" of gender as it reads literature, while Marxism brings an "awareness" of class and modes of production. The relation is modeled quite explicitly on the phenomenological conceit of human perception. To borrow Glotfelty own metaphor, ecocriticism has one foot planted in literature, and the other "in the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits ... when ... human actions



are damaging the planet's basic life support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse.” (1996: xviii)

Thus ecocriticism is a literary and social movement which advocates not only studying literary and cultural works in respect of the deep interconnection of the human and the non-human worlds, nature and culture, and ecosystems and its denizens but to work also in praxis for preservation of ecological ingredients and bring harmony between the human and its environment. In age of threatening pollution, wide contemplation, industry sponsored bio-disaster, nuclear war, depletion of valuable natural resources, population explosion, proliferation of exploitative technologies, conquest of space preliminary to using it as a garbage dump and extinction of species “it is now a truism to say that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for life of any kind” (Nayar, 2010:241). Ecocriticism has been born in the “bio-social context of unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature, worrying definitions and shapes of ‘development’ and environmental hazard” (Nayar, 2010:241).

In such scenario the ecocriticism has become one of the most provocative as well as productive dimensions of literary and cultural studies. Along with it the Ecocriticism paves the road for political, social and economic movement against the authority to reconsider the development policies sustainably and its implementation not at the stake of ‘ecological coherence’. Ecocriticism intends “to see how theoretically informed readings of cultural texts can contribute not only to consciousness raising but also look into the policies of ‘development’ and the construction of ‘nature’”. Having originated in the United States as a minor, mostly regional form of environmentally oriented approach in form of the Western Literature Association Meeting in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has since gained its own real space and grounds and become a new successful multidisciplinary branch of the humanities not only in the United States and England but worldwide.

### **Ecological ‘othering’ and Foucault’s Concept of ‘Biopower’**

Ecocriticism concurs with other branches of the environmental humanities ethics, history, religious studies, anthropology, humanistic geography in holding that environmental phenomena must be comprehended, and that today’s burgeoning array of environmental concerns must be addressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Ecocriticism is interlinked with other literary critical theories such as modernism, post-modernism, post-colonialism, feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism, Marxism, power theory brings new tools of critical approaches and dimensions to the literary texts in the hands of critics. Due to interlinking with these different critical theories various versions of ecocriticism have been developed. Deep ecology and ecofeminism are two most important developments in ecocriticism. These new ideas question the notion of ‘development’ and ‘modernity’ and argue that all Western notions in science, philosophy, and politics are ‘anthropocentric’ and ‘andocentric’. Technology, medical science with its animal testing, the cosmetic and fashion industry all come in for scrutiny from environmentalists. Deep ecology, for instance, stresses on a ‘biocentric’ view. One of such other promising and recent directions in the ecocriticism is the approach of Ecological ‘othering’ that is indeed an ecological study of literary and cultural texts and artifacts with post-colonial approach under the impressions of the ‘power theory’.

The present day environmental predicament is a sure result of the age old practice of exploitation of nature and abuse of the environment for the benefit of human civilization. While the reshaping of nature has been executed throughout human history, the episode of European colonialism is the most outstanding example of human interference with nature as the whole enterprise of colonization was based on the idea of exploiting nature and its resources. The Western cultural tradition of using nature for human benefits was most strongly propounded through colonialism. In fact, it is not only during the era of colonization, but the practice against nature is being carried out in the neocolonial period in the present day circumstances. Therefore the blame for environmental crisis falls primarily on the West as it is inspired by the Western principle of separation of the

human from the non-human. This very point calls for analysis of ecological concepts in literature from a postcolonial perspective. The ever broadening horizon of ecocriticism has broadened its potentiality by its “cross-pollination with postcolonial studies” (Buell, 93) and this merger has provided a deeper understanding of the issue of environmental degradation in present age.

With such wide expansion of the ecocritical studies they have brought with them some interesting and contrasting ideas which have compelled us to think carefully about environmental studies. The concept of ‘ecological othering’ is such a thought which looks into how the environmental movement deploys the environment movement deploys cultural disgust against various communities it sees as threats to nature. It penetrates into the discourse of body set by some environmentalists. Studying American environmentalism in her book *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* Sarah Jaquette Ray examines the ways in which the environmentalism can give birth to the social injustice through the discourses of the body. Ray investigates three categories of ‘ecological otherness’ under aggressive environmental movement: people with disabilities, immigrants, and Native people. Citing recent work in environmental justice ecocriticism, Ray argues that the expression of environmental disgust toward certain kinds of bodies draws problematic lines between ecological “subjects”—those who are good for and belong in nature—and ecological “others”—those who are threats to or out of place in nature (2013:23). The concept of ‘ecological other’ tries to study how environmental discourse as the discourse of disgust enforces social hierarchies even as it seeks to dismantle other forms of hegemony. According to her environmentalist studies use a discourse of dirt to delineate between pure and impure bodies. Ultimately, *The Ecological Other* urges us to be more critical of how we use nature as a tool of social control and to be careful about the ways in which we construct our arguments to ensure its protection.

When we study Sarah’s alarming concept of ‘ecological other’ with Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘biopower’ the environmental studies becomes more relevant and necessary to be careful for better understanding. Foucault first used the term in his lecture courses at the *College de France* but the term first appeared in print in

*The Will To Knowledge*, Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Historically, biopower emerged with the transformation of power formations in Western societies starting in the seventeenth century. Foucault claimed that biopower evolved in two forms, which he called 'anatomo-politics' of the human body, or discipline, and 'biopolitics' of the population. The former is concerned with making the human body useful and docile, the latter with managing human populations. Both require a great amount of scientific knowledge. The term 'biopower' has been used to by Foucault in relation to the practice of modern nation states to regulate their subjects through "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of the populations" (1998: 140). Foucault argues that this kind of attitude of the state toward the lives of its subjects is a way of understanding how the new formation of power dominates Western society. For Foucault 'biopower' is a science of power for managing people as a large group; the distinctive quality of this political technology is that it allows for the control of entire populations. It refers to the control of human bodies through state discipline. It is an integral feature and essential to the workings of the emergence of the modern nation states and capitalism. Defining it Foucault elaborately states in his lecture titled as *Security, Territory, Population*:

By this I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species.

This is what I have called biopower.(1978)

Further going into more details Foucault examines in his lecture titled as *Society Must Be Defended*, *biopolitical state racism*, and its accomplished rationale of myth-making and narrative. Clarifying his stance Foucault states the fundamental difference between 'biopolitics' and discipline.

Where discipline is the technology deployed to make individuals behave, to be efficient and productive workers, biopolitics is deployed to manage population; for example, to ensure a healthy workforce. (1976)

Concluding his thoughts on 'biopower' Foucault sees these differences in techniques as nothing more than "behaviour control technologies", and modern 'biopower' as nothing more than a series of webs and networks working its way around the societal body.

If genocide is indeed the dream of modern power, this is not because of the recent return to the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of the population. (1978)

'Ecological othering' and 'biopower' have tried to understand that it is in nature of State that it always tries to control the societal body on various grounds which is disastrous for society. What Sarah in her work discusses and is worried of is actually lies its genesis. But it is the responsibility of intellectual that the environmental movement should not become the tool of 'power politics'. Both concepts make us aware about the question of the politization of literature which can occur if the critical focus falls only on extra-textual themes in any given literary text. Therefore the true concern of ecocriticism ought not to be with obsolete representational models, but with how nature gets textualized in the literary texts to create an eco-literary discourse that would help in producing an intertextual as well as an interactive approach between literary language and the language of nature.

In conclusion it can be stated that the concept of 'ecological othering' and 'biopower' want to look literary texts as the progressive and equalizing force in the society, not as the discourse of disgust or dirt; power should not divide but unite. They intend to make literature as unifying link between human and nonhuman in place of dividing human beings on the basis of bodies; ecocriticism should not be considered as the tool of 'power politics' and 'othering' weaker sections of society on various grounds. Hence 'ecological

othering' is a unique phenomenon under ecocriticism providing it new dimensions and real praxis look by changing the wider part of society.

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**Subverting Exclusivity Indian English Fiction– Sp. Ref. to K. R. Meera’s  
*Hangwoman***

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**Abstract:** The present paper aims to study the psychology of a woman executioner Chetna and her traversing from a docile, pliant girl to a determined and unyielding lady. The circumstances lead her to become the first hangwoman of the country. A rapist and killer, Jatindranath breaks down when death sentence was announced against him and his mercy petition was rejected. She dexterously and professionally performs her job as an executioner. But the motherly instinct dominates Chetna’s persona in fulfilling his last wishes. Chetna a symbol of strength and self-respect to the whole world now eventually hangs male chauvinism, teaches a lesson to the officers, manipulative lover, and dominant father and breaks all the chains with which women are strangled since ages.

**Key Words:** Iconoclastic approach, dynamics of patriarchy, executioner, noose, self-abnegation to self-actualization.

...it is a matter of the pride of all women. It’s our chance to declare to the world that there is no work that women can’t do – *Hangwoman*

Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.

– Marie Curie

The Fiction in the Indian English literary landscape has traversed a long path in the projection of female characters from the romantic idealization to the realistic portrayal. The female writers are

portraying the different dimensions of female characters with vive and verve rejecting the conventional and stereotypical presentation, keeping with the growing awareness of the issues concerning women and their cause. The women fictus is no more presented in the higher idealized image of Devi and lower imperfect image of Dasi, an angel or femme fatale, benevolent saint or all annihilating friend or as a caged bird, a helpless creature trapped, annihilated and subjugated in a patriarchal setup, silently following the footsteps of her male counterpart. In real life as well as in literature the women have entered the phase of individualism, self-assertion, and self-actualization rejecting the period of self-abnegation and self-denial.

With widespread education, protest, support women have entered into a new arena that is providing them enough opportunities to showcase their talent. Women are bravely facing the challenges and smartly handling the new role and responsibility bestowed on them by society. Women are today professionally qualified, excellent homemakers, economically independent and adept at handling dicey situations. Females entered the avenues reserved for man rejecting the notion of a weaker sex. They are exploring the Career Paths which were for a long time considered a restricted arena for women like the job of fire Brigade, Security Guard, Auto rickshaw, Bus and loco Driver, Priest, Bouncer, Bodyguard, Bartender, Boxer, etc. By doing these jobs efficiently the women have proved their efficiency, dexterity and vitality. They by their capacity and dynamism have shown that they can do just as much as their male counterparts. The remarkable move of modern women from covert to overt in almost every respect of life is becoming the focal point of many modern Indian writers who are trying to carve for them a place of distinctiveness and showcasing their gradual changes and transformation.

Women writers who are writing in English as well as in the regional languages, by their innovative themes and iconoclastic approach have emancipated both the readers and the writers. By



profoundly presenting the new and challenging issues in their creative writing and through their futuristic vision they lead the literary landscape into a new zone and viewed it from fresh perspectives. K. R. Meera, a remarkable writer marvelously presents feminine sensibility and thought and aptly creates the galaxy of women, their passion, agony, struggle for survival and inner conflict. She created her female characters with vitality and vigour, with a renewed perception of life. In the novel *Hangwoman* Meera portrays the life of a young hangwoman who fights the power dynamics of patriarchy.

The concept of woman public executioner is an alien concept to a typical Indian scenario but a landmark in the history of Indian English literature. This daring and breaking new ground theme of making a young woman an executioner has never been thought or imagined either in real life or rarely in creativity. In Indian culture, women are considered as life-giver but not life destroyer. The *Hangwoman* is the story of a young girl who becomes an official hangwoman and courageously overcomes the hurdles and obstacles of life – man-made or self-made. The novel exquisitely captures in first-person narrative her traversing from a docile, pliant girl to a determined and unyielding lady passing through many ordeals. Chetna's venturing into men's world made her a victim of male chauvinism in the form of discouragement, taunts, jeers, gazing, lust, molestation. But eventually by her courage and determination she breaks all fetters more importantly the age-old conviction about the frailty of women. Chetna, a twenty two-year old, strong and tenacious woman struggles to inherit her family's profession of execution and eventually becomes the first woman executioner in Independent India. She not only hangs the perpetrator of a heinous crime but also male arrogance in general. She suffers from so many shackles in her search for her space that have been placed upon her by her culture, family poverty, the male dictation, dominating father, manipulative lover, corruption and hypocrisy of people.

The plot traces the lives of the Grddha Mullick family of hangmen in Chitpur, in Kolkata. The family traces its long lineage and history of hangman back to four hundred years before Christ to the present day. But now they live in utter poverty since the number of executions has decreased. They support themselves by selling the tea to the bereaved who come to cremate the body of their dear ones. Despite being an intelligent student Chetna has to drop her study after plus two. Her father, a hangman, Phanibhushan Grddha Mullick eighty-eight years old is a self-professed veteran of 451 hangings. Phani is appointed officially as an executioner of Amartya Ghosh, who had murdered a Kolkata industrialist Chandresen Ghosh and his three children. The angry and vengeful father of Amartya hacked the limbs of Phani's son, Ramu when Phani execute his son on government order. Phani, therefore, is keen that his daughter Chetna gets a government job after his retirement. The officers have shown their distrust in offering the job of an executioner to a woman. The minister was interviewed about the job of hangman to be offered to Chetna he denies: "No, no no... this is not a job a woman can do ... it requires a lot of strength...of mind and body... (*Hangwoman* 18) The IG too disagrees: "These women... by their very nature they are second- thoughts." (*Hangwoman* 58) By the influence of media and women organization Chetna gets the job of an assistant hangwoman to Phani the main hangman. Phani was imprisoned for killing his brother and sister-in-law, Chetna has to carry the tradition of the family by herself. To pressurize the government to free him in want of a hangman, Phani forces Chetna not to undertake the execution of Jatindranath Banarjee alone. Chetana denies it and steadfastly carries out the task of execution of Jatindranath Banerjee who cruelly kills a thirteen-year-old young girl Mridula Chatterjee after raping her. She fulfils Jatindrath's urge to have a sexual pleasure by embracing her. She becomes a perfect executioner by hanging the convict within twenty seconds. She breaks the shackles of patriarchy and myth of weaker sex. But the motherly instinct dominates Chetna's persona in fulfilling the last wishes of the convict who peacefully departs from this world.

Chetna's life came into lime light by Sanjeev a swashbuckling TV journalist, a reporter for CNC. He helps Phani in convincing the government to give the job of an assistant to a hangman to Chetna, thereby making her the first hangwoman in the country. He serialized a TV program - Hangwoman's Diary where Chetna is invited to talk. The new life of Chetna begins under the harsh lights of television cameras. In one fell swoop, Chetna finds herself pitch forked into media fame as the world's first-ever woman executioner: "TV cameras and mikes stretched towards me. I faced them like a terrorist hemmed in by gun-toting commandos." (*Hangwoman* 25)

Nervous and scared Chetna eventually gains confidence and captivates the audience by her resolute demeanour, captivating engrossing tales and precise responses. Chetna is being questioned in Hangwoman's Diary: "But what if he [father] withdraws? You are the assistant hangman. What would be your stand if you had to undertake the task by yourself," (*Hangwoman* 193) She would not waver, she responded. On being asked "Will your hand not tremble when you hang Jatindranath at the gallows?" (*Hangwoman* 25) She answered: "My hand will not ...but my heart surely will, thinking of that wasted life." (25) Sanjeev asks her in one of the episodes: "This is work that can throw even men off-balance. Do you think that a woman like you, Chetna, is capable of it?" (*Hangwoman* 87) She answers bravely: "There is nothing a woman can't do." (*Hangwoman* 87) Phaani and Chetna through different channels became celebrities by narrating sensational and breath-taking tales of hanging. Chetna an ordinary woman now with her appointment as a hangwoman became a symbol of strength and self-respect to the whole world now. The TRP ratings of Sanjeev's program spiraling up like never before.

Sanjeev, the son of a Naxalite and prostitute promises to marry Chetna. Chetna rejects his proposal of marriage: "You will not marry me...In your eyes I am the daughter of a beggarly chap who has no qualms about finishing off a man once in ten or fifteen years for a measly sum of a hundred and

fifty rupees a month. Your eye is on the market, babu, I know that very well...you have inherited the knowledge of the different ways in which a woman may be sold!" (*Hangwoman* 281) The scrupulous Sanjeev impresses everyone by his winsome personality and pleasing behaviour. Ramu da warns Chetna "Chetu, he is an out-and- out cheat. I don't trust him at all. He is never going to marry you. I'm sure of that... You will end up in tears, Chetu." (*Hangwoman* 230) Sanjeev steals the golden coin of grandmother a legacy, a perception of bygone glory gifted by a raja of Gwalior that she cherished with deep love. He lifted a saree and ear stud from a shop. He is responsible for the quarrel that arose between Phani and Kaku that resulted in the accidental death of Ramu. Sanjeev reserves Chetna for his channel only: "Chetna's time, henceforth, must be exclusively for our channel. She must not speak to other newspapers or TV channels. Whenever she goes, we will go with her... till the eve of the hanging." (*Hangwoman* 52) Chetna has to submit to his command.

The novel throws light on the violence against women, their molestation, their use and abuse, their rape and brutal murder. Women have been suppressed exploited for centuries and easily at every step became the prey of men's lust and gendered violence. Chetna undergoes severe physical and mental pain by malignant attack on her breast by males - Maruti Prasad grabbed them from her rear; Sanjeev Kumar wrung them, and the police officer touched them with his baton. For a long time, she remained haunted by these assaults. But gradually she gains confidence and strength overcomes her fear and made her breast hard as stone.

Sanjeev abuses Chetna to subdue her spirit and gain and maintain power and control over her. He grabs all the opportunity to assault her physically by raping her. In the words of Susan Brown Miller, "rape is a crime not of lust, but violence and power. It can also be defined as Robbing of Honour." (Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* 47) Right in their first meeting he audaciously tells her that he wants to

‘fuck her hard’ (*Hangwoman* 92). His sexual assault and lewd remarks terrified and shocked her. Phani and Chetna visited the jail to see all the arrangements before the execution. Sanjeev accompanied them because he wanted to cover every detail for his channel. Out of curiosity, he pulled the lever hard, with a terrified scream Chetna felt into the cellar beneath the gallows. Sanjeev grabbed the opportunity: “I descended into the netherworld, into which many thousands of human lives had fallen. Sanjeev Kumar Mitra jumped in after me....his hands crushed and mutilated my body... He bit my lips hard and snarled...He kicked my body, crushing it. More than sorrow, insult and rag shattered me... That was the turning point in my story. After that, I did not have the heart to let him off.” (*Hangwoman* 76) Sanjeev took the chance of darkness to seduce her at the house of Protima di whose son was executed and her husband was sentenced to life imprisonment. His attempt to molest her failed by her quickness of mind. Sanjeev wants Chetna to go to the Chief minister to speak in favour of execution. When she denied it and he failed to convince her, he tried to rape her to teach her a lesson.

The silent submissive Chetna now responded bravely invites him to crush her body with his male ego. Stunned by such bold response Sanjeev released her from his grip. Later on, she readily goes to his room willing to have sex, she finds her male partner weak to encounter her forthright nature: “But he was afraid to take a woman who had walked into his bedroom of her own free will.” (*Hangwoman* 328) If Virginia Woolf kills angel in her to become a creative writer, Chetna kills the meek, tender part of her to defy the dynamics of power. She faces vulgar comments, bad touches and threatening from both officers and Jailers, when she visits Jail to see the arrangement before execution. She shocked everyone by audaciously revealing the officers’ sexual advancement and lewd remarks on TV show. Stunned by her exposure, all next time maintained a decent distance from her. Thus, she realises how beautiful it is when women react and respond.

Phaani too wanted to crush the very spirit of Chetna using violence. Chetna bluntly denies the marriage proposal made by Sanjeev that made Phaani angry. To teach a lesson to a disobedient daughter he knocks her down: “father followed me there, pulled me up and slapped me hard repeatedly on both cheeks with the back of his right hand. You rotting corpse, you don’t know how to keep your tongue I’ll pull it out of your head.” (*Hangwoman* 283) To subdue her revolutionary spirit he threatens her: “Chetna, only my word carries weight in this house, Father said, trying very hard to control himself. ‘I have made some demands of the government. If they don’t agree, I have to take a hard decision. And whatever they may be, you will have to obey.’” (*Hangwoman* 204) Chetna retorts him: “But that won’t be fair, Baba.’ I found my words with great difficulty. It is I who know what’s wrong and what’s right. Better for everyone to accept that – do what I say and move on. (*Hangwoman* 205)

The women grew up listening to the myth of women’s frailty that they internalized it with a gradual process. This is the reason that made Simone De Beauvoir comments ‘One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that is the human female present in the society. It is the civilization as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.’ (9) Chetna’s grandmother and mother narrate the plights, sufferings, molestation, and insecure position of women. Being anxious about Chetna’s future her mother advised her to accept the proposal of Sanjeev and do all that can please him and “just think of him a ladder.” (*Hangwoman* 251) A man is like a god and needed to be appeased by his woman: “You have a big future, Chetu. Dont’s ruin it. She sat up and looked into my eyes. For women like us, marriage is an escape route. It was for me. A place to sleep... some food, at least once a day...Listen to me, men are like gods. If they have no one to fall at their feet or beg or worship them three times a day, they are mere stones.” (251) She is taught by her mother and grandmother that women are insecure, incomplete and a nonentity without men. Jaya too was taught in *That Long Silence* by her

aunt that “A husband is like a sheltering tree ... Without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable... you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies.” (32) And the bitter truth is that is recognized by Jaya, Chetna and like her this sheltering trees do not allow anything to grow beneath them. The women have to suffer various kinds of oppression in patriarchal society. Indu Prakash Singh writes:

Whether it is child marriage, rape, dowry death, bride burning, child abuse, wife battering sexual assault or domestic violence, each form of oppression pins down her sordid tale from womb to her tomb that map and draw the contours of her decadent, capitalist, casteist, criminal patriarchal society. (*Indian Women* 24-25)

Sanjeev brought Chetna to the studio to present the mock execution before the audience in a serious and utterly professional way after the completion of Jatindrananth Banerjee’s hanging. He wanted to earn huge TRP for his channel and fame for himself by interviewing India’s first woman executioner. He forces Chetna to show the public a demo of a mock execution. – a final celebration of the event, making it an ultimate spectacle. The trauma which Chetna was undergoing Sanjeev was not able to comprehend. He paid no attention to her agony and conflict rather forces her to face the camera and narrates the incident. Kartik, the poor and needy brother of Jatindrath Banerjee is used for mock hanging. Sanjeev brings him before the camera to show the viewers clearly what his brother must have gone through today. Chetna tells the noose will not fit Kartik rather Sanjeev. She is now overpowered by the hallucinations of various dead women and past injuries done to her by Sanjeev, Maruti Prasad and IG. She cleverly ties the noose in Sanjeev’s neck and gives him a taste of the pain that he so callously refers to in his lengthy speeches on television, also offering him a glimpse of death:

I tied his hands behind his back ... It was I who undid the first two buttons of his shirt. I touched the hollow of his bare neck with a finger...Here, this is where the noose tightens. The C-2 vertebra should break', I announced loudly as I made him wear it...Slowly I tightened the noose. Then, lightning-fast, I pulled the other end of the rope. Sanjeev Kumar rose to the ceiling with a stifled moan...The noose tightened on his neck and he screamed 'Amme!')(*Hangwoman* 430-431)

Chetna Mallik a symbol of strength and self-respect of all women in India and the whole world boldly hangs Sanjeev and bravely steps ahead. Her face glows with a strange sense of contentment. She says to herself that 'I returned the world what it gave me.' Sanjeev's mother presented Chetna a Durga idol. This Durga idol is created by soil and that soil is collected from the Sonagachi a red-light area. The men to gratify their lust have created the world of prostitutes. The men kneel and bend before Durga idol symbolically it presents men's stooping before a prostitute: "The statue of Durga is made of soil taken from the beshya's doorsteps. That is because the ego of the man who crosses it unravels and falls on the ground there." (*Hangwoman* 432) Chetna the first woman executioner is ready to move on the new path no one can stop her: "my name and my life became undying in Bharat and the whole world, in the name of love, soil and death. I knew no one would stop me. Rain soil, light and history stood waiting for me. Jodi tor daak shune kevo ona ashe tobe ekla chalo re, I hummed as I began my journey to the future, to Bhavishyath." (*Hangwoman* 432)

Chetna forged through the challenges and ordeals of life. With each challenge, she grows mentally and emotionally. She moves forward with her head held high and a strength that can't be shattered. The novel exclusively traces Chetna's traversing from a meek emotional girl to a strong lady, from silent sufferers to assertive individuals, from self-abnegation to self-actualization. She is no longer



a puppet in the hands of men. The novel ends with her eventual victory over man's manipulation and dominance and her breaking of all the chains with which women are strangled since ages.

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**Demarginalized and/or Deconstructed- Intertextual Interrogations of *Devdas*'  
Heroines in Hindi film adaptations**

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**Souvik Datta**

**Abstract:** Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Devdas* (1917) needs no introduction, being perhaps the most acclaimed and frequently adapted among his works. Enlisted among various limits and liberties exhibited by their screen adaptations in Hindi is the depiction of the two women featuring in *Devdas*' life. This is because the films diverge in their depiction when compared to the literary original. All five film adaptations of the novel showcase their heroines with innovative touches, particularly in terms of characterisation. Chattopadhyay's composition of Paro and Chandramukhi is largely incongruous with the filmmakers' envisioning of them. Unrestricted by notions of temporality, contextualization or contemporaneity, this 'revisional' portraiture and its reasons deserve attention. Questions of audience acceptability and appeasement may well have been privileged over fidelity. Additionally, was this a corrective measure on their part, seeking to 'empower' these women far more than the author did? The paper seeks to locate these answers and raise further questions, utilising the 'centre-margin' theory. Are varying portrayals products of ensuing socio-temporal conflicts between the 'grand narrative' of a 'patriarchal centre' and the 'social periphery' inhabited by women? Moreover, what are their implications? Do these conflicts plunge the reader/viewer in a dilemma, unable to negotiate between affiliations to the original text, and a body of films nearly on the brink of a 'postmodernist breakthrough'? How does this challenge the contemporaneous representation of women – does it indeed counter the 'violence' caused through metanarratives like these? This discourse is sought to be inaugurated.

**Keywords:** Literature-Cinema, Intertextuality, Centre-Periphery, Postmodernism, Comparative Studies, Women.

**Body:** Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's *Devdas* boasts of widespread familiarity. The novel's exceptional story and unforgettable character(s) subjected it to numerous film adaptations, disregarding boundaries of language, culture, time, geographic location, etcetera. Most adaptations are specific to the socio-cultural ethos of the time and the target audience catered to. The text's timelessness and cult status are indisputable.

The various limits and liberties exhibited by these screen adaptations include the unique depiction and role of the two women characters who enter Devdas' life. Interestingly, the films diverge in their depiction when compared to the literary text. There exist five versions of *Devdas* in Hindi cinema. In chronological order, the first three are more direct adaptations, additionally sharing the titular nomenclature of the novel. The latter are more interpretative: contemporary and contextual. However, a common strain runs through all five 'texts': the unconventional portrayal of women, particularly in terms of characterisation.

'Centre' and 'Margin' are two important terms in 'Deconstruction'. Jacques Derrida used 'centre' to represent 'a point of presence, a fixed origin' that limits the 'play' of the structure in which it is made to exist. A 'centre' also becomes a condition, determinant or measure for the meaning generated in the precincts of this structure. Margins (and marginality) are relationally constituted, be it through representation or interpretation, a binary opposition to the 'centre' designating borders, boundaries or the periphery itself.

This paper seeks to determine how, in their chronological progressions, each film adaptation has portrayed women differently from the novel. Taking up one film at a time, these divergent portrayals

vis-à-vis the novel are sought to be examined, with a linear trajectory of meaning derived through interpretation. Thereafter, the paper would seek to connect this to the larger theoretical debate as intended.

### **The 1936 Adaptation:**

Unlike the novel, the film merely touches upon Devdas' discovery in abandon by Chandra, and her nursing of him, completely omitting all details of the elongated quest undertaken and the lengths resorted to. Devdas' use of the word 'wife' for her, 'true love' and devotion are all missing in the film. Barua was unable to bring forth her unrequited, unconditional love. Chandra appears reduced to a flat character, serving some banal plot functions. Was Barua way too mindful of her love for Devdas being strong enough to overshadow the romance of the lead pair, and the baggage of social norms and customs it came with? Or was he relaying the marginal position, and inability of transgression courtesans of the time were condemned to?

Chattopadhyay's 'Parvati' was brave, bold and disregarding of social customs inasmuch she considered fit within boundaries of reason. In the film, Paro dominates the narrative by means of her role, personality, perspective and action. The film began with her, the very first shot itself. Most of the dialogues, the best and most prominent ones, were given to her. 'Barua, however, does suggest that the title aside, this is largely Paro's story, as she introduces the narrative.' Parvati has a joint destiny with the protagonist, Devdas. Her portrayal is a raw representation of Chattopadhyay's but the movie is largely about Paro and defies the title 'Devdas'. 'Creekmur observes that Barua's treatment of the Devdas myth had also emphasized Paro's experience.' There are no surprises in Chandramukhi's portrayal considering the era it was set in. But Barua's tussle with the marginality attributed to Paro is remarkable. While he could do little given his obligation to the

novel and its temporal location, he marks the beginning of adaptative innovation to revise Chattopadhyay's 1917 classic. Apparent through a genealogical survey, Barua must be credited for subtly inaugurating the 'centre-margin' conflict in the spectrum of Devdas' Hindi film adaptations. Slowly but surely, this marks a historical epoch in the postmodernist resistance to prevalent metanarratives like patriarchy, leading to subjugation.

### **The 1955 Adaptation:**

Chattopadhyay's young Parbati was far more selfless than Roy's little girl. Roy's little Paro didn't hesitate to put the blame on Devdas, taking it to his father, who promised to reprimand him for the same. Her family did not disallow her from going to school, she was allowed it as a diversion after Devdas left for Calcutta. The director seemingly skipped the regressively inert role attributed to women, swapping it for a character who knew what she desired. 'A woman of substance would be even more unthinkable in the Bengali Hindu society of Sarat's time, but his characterisation of Parbati has colossal similarities with Elizabeth Bennett. The manner in which Parvati refuses Devdas' offer of marriage after her marriage is fixed reminds us the way Elizabeth refused Mr. Darcy's marriage proposal – there is similar strength in personality and self-pride, which is highly unexpected of a Hindu Bengali woman in the early 20th century.' The blazing personality of Roy's heroine sets the tone for a woman who remained passionate and fairly spontaneous in her expression of emotions, adding consistency to her growth graph vis-à-vis the narrative.

A glaring point of departure from the plot is to be found in Roy's Paro and Chandramukhi crossing paths in the film. 'Paro and Chandramukhi – ostensible rivals but sisters in their doomed passion – view one another on the road. In the original novel, the two central female characters never meet, but filmmakers have been unable to reconcile themselves to their complete isolation from one another. While the most recent version of the story allows its superstar heroines to indulge in considerable female bonding, Roy's

film merely suggests this possibility through a quiet but formally powerful moment.’ A directorial alteration of the novel for dramatic purposes, this seems a brilliantly subtle move to establish personal quests, a befitting reply to the patriarchal ‘centre’ which had doomed women to the margins without any agency of their own. This unknown complicity is not a walk on the path of resignation, but an active intervention challenging their ‘marginalised’ fate in social terms. Importantly, in consonance with the novel, Devdas acknowledges that Chandramukhi was indeed someone really close to his heart – equivalent in terms of the book where he calls her his ‘wife’, albeit in a single instance.

Unlike Barua, Paro’s portrayal by Roy is both a variation of Chattopadhyay’s heroine and largely resistant to unacceptable suppression. This stark upliftment from her depiction in the previous adaptation, this time at the level of action, clearly illustrates that the winds of change have begun to blow. Oblivious but acknowledged female bonding occurs, the woman is more assertive. She has begun to break away from her muted self of suffering, learning to cultivate assertion instead. No longer demure and muted, Roy’s Paro is more vocal than her literary counterpart, be it in action or body language. The conflict between the centre and the margins has begun, with tiny steps towards establishment of equality. The deconstruction of patriarchy appears to have commenced.

### **The 2002 Adaptation:**

Paro, seemingly an object of sympathy for Bhansali, is nevertheless crafted rather carefully. Unlike Chattopadhyay, his Paro seems a strange combination of vulnerability and firmness of view. The same woman who exhibited her distress in visiting her lover in the dead of the night was the same who stood up for her ‘first love’ Devdas when accosted by her husband, retaliating with rules being the same for both of them. She did not once hesitate to visit Chandramukhi to question her on Devdas’ whereabouts – social propriety to her was no concern in the face of love. Saratchandra’s Paro was almost always a

damsel-in-distress and a silent sufferer of fate and servitude. Paro in the film exhibits an attempt to break free, yet conforming to social normativity.

Contrastingly, the wispiness of Chandramukhi is disturbing. Bhansali's courtesan figure has none of the fiery potential of Chattopadhyay's. 'Chandramukhi that has been played by Madhuri Dixit in the Bhansali magnum opus gives the character a dream-like quality that is almost unattainable.' While she did assert herself in the face of her insult by Kalibabu, it is worth remembering that this is only an addition to the literary original. In terms of equivalence, she is hardly any more than an excessively glamorous alternative available to Devdas. Bhansali's Chandramukhi has none of the sacrifice, servitude and resignation to austerity that makes Saratchandra's woman an exception. There is no visualisation of her nursing him, and her accurate monologue on Devdas' predicament and Paro are omitted.

The parallel narrative created by Bhansali with regard to the Paro-Chandramukhi relationship is confounding. Whether to illustrate female bonding or visual spectacle of the paths of his female lead(s) crossing, Bhansali makes them confront each other, converse and console, and even dance and celebrate their love for Devdas, utilising Durga Puja as the context for all of these. Yet, Paro and Chandramukhi do not visibly illustrate attempts to help Devdas battle his exigency. Both of them are too typically weak and helpless, without agency, and neither actively toil to save Devdas from his devastating end.

Neither Paro nor Chandramukhi are outrightly rebellious, but both kindle hope remaining within the coordinates of traditional roles assigned by the novelist. Yet in their defence of themselves and their love-object, they attempt to destabilise and question the centre still remaining in the margins. Important questions asked by Chandramukhi, and inclusive attempts by Paro in festival times are both aspects of silent interrogation and revolt, in line with the larger argument.

***Dev D (2009):***

In Anurag Kashyap's film, there is a prioritisation of Chanda's character over that of Paro. Not only does the film devote a considerable duration on narrating her background, it also adds renewed vigour to the 'supporting' heroine by giving her enough importance and function. Chanda is so much more than 'Chandramukhi'. Her efforts in the novel are different, but the motive of Dev's recuperation and welfare are the same. The fact that she cleansed him in the end (by bathing him) enabled him to make a new beginning. Likewise, keeping him on the right path was a responsibility she seemed to undertake. Chanda being a woman who had been stripped of her innocence early on, has greater agency than Chattopadhyay's character, helping reform Dev utilising the same. Her character stands out, and their relationship remains unique till the end of the film. It was perhaps only appropriate that Dev's token of appreciation (in the form of the ring) reached Chanda in the end, something Saratchandra's heroine never managed to acquire. With an unimaginably painful adolescence and suffering, she became the inspiration behind Dev's moving on, channelising his eventual self-realisation. Dev becoming a tragic hero is averted through Chanda's help. Their 'happy ending', hinted in the form of marital union is appreciable.

However, Paro's role and relationship with Dev is a great disappointment with respect to the novel. Was the agency given to Chanda stolen from Paro's share of the same? Kashyap's Paro is largely lacklustre. Submitting to Dev's fancies of sending him a photograph in the nude to catch his fancy, entertaining his sexual requests on the phone to facilitate his return from London – she remains a largely sexual pursuit for Dev, from the very beginning and till their last meeting. The sexualization of the Dev-Paro liaison seems utterly problematic considering the relationship of innocence, affection and servitude shared by the duo in the novel. Paro attempts to fulfil Dev's sexual aspirations multiple times, highlighting the baseness of their relationship. Paro's rejoinder to her parents about her steadfastness about their match is



brilliantly done when she vented out her anger by pumping the tube well unsparingly, but was surprisingly meek in front of Dev when he rejected her. This is inconsistent with Paro's behaviour shortly before this and regressive given the era of its location. The portrayal worsens with the servitude exhibited in visiting Dev, setting his room in order, washing his clothes – only to be pleaded into becoming his sexual partner, insulted and banished upon declining. Kashyap's portrayal of Paro not only denigrates her as a modern woman but makes her a sexual prop – the absence of which drove Dev into being with people like Rasika who gave him what he desired till she found out his true intentions.

Paro may not be as impactful as Chandramukhi, but Kashyap compensates through the character of Rasika, a likely alter-ego to her. Rasika appears anything but marginalised, carrying within herself an entitlement available only to men. Like Chanda who bore the brunt of patriarchal violence, she counters this grand narrative in her conduct and treatment of Dev. It is not Dev who uses her for sex, but the other way round. Both Rasika and Chanda outrightly challenge the centre, despite the 'marginal' roles they are assigned. This welcome conflict comes with its baggage: Chanda must revolt from the margins, though Rasika exhibits optimistic, even utopian possibilities.

#### ***Daas Dev (2018):***

In Sudhir Mishra's political saga, the characterisation of Paro steals the show. Chattopadhyay's heroine was a woman of substance, Mishra's Paro takes it several notches higher, enhancing her character in every potential. Perhaps the most impressive portrayal among all the adaptations, Paro isn't the meek heroine who gives a rejoinder once in the form of an outburst. Mishra's female lead is a thorough firebrand who remains true to her ideals and personality for the entire duration. When Dev was beaten up by his money-lender, she did try to get him out of the situation but in disgust refused to identify him in hospital. She put her self-respect first, given patronising attitudes of Dev's family. Paro took up social work in order to overcome her love for Dev and subdue her strength of feeling. Quick to point to his

mother the pitfalls of her son, Paro's personality exhibits utmost consistency. Steadfast in her love for Dev, she made it clear from the start that she was in it for love, not servitude – 'she would be his wife, not his nurse'. When insulted by Dev's family, she did not think twice before walking out on him, given her wounded self-dignity. When Dev insulted her upon seeking refuge, Paro, unlike in the novel, let this be the last straw. Stunned at his insensitivity, she did not hesitate to join the opposition party and marry its leader, Ramashray. Paro did not want Dev's sympathy or regret, and pushed him away on her wedding day, despite acknowledging loving him. Her ideals and virtues were too deep-rooted to tamper with her steadfastness of personality. Paro never wanted to hate Dev but also never sought to be submissive, unlike in the novel. Mishra's female lead had the courage to unbiasedly side with the truth, endowed with an unflinching sense of right and wrong. Paro stuck to her beliefs, telling her husband without hesitation that her politics was entirely personal and the cause behind her decision to enter its arena. She fearlessly told her husband that she needed to meet Dev when he called her up in the middle of the night – an equivalent to the nightly visit of Paro – both violations of social normativity.

Chandramukhi, here Chandni, is an interesting character with a meaty role. Though not assertive like Paro, the filmmaker makes the very basis of her character powerful. She is a strategist who lays out a move-by-move advisory for Dev, a guiding force who charts positions of advantage for him. A fixer in their political party and manager to Dev, Mishra ensures that the strings of Dev's life continue to remain in her control. Additionally, she is pivotal enough to function as the narrator of the film. Guiding Dev at every step, her love finds expression in her ability to plan to his benefit. Chandni guards him while simultaneously catapulting him toward political success. Functioning using connections of Shrikant Sahay, her vested interest remains Dev for whom her agenda is equally professional and personal. Early enough, she comments on Dev's irresponsible behaviour, cooperating with him to overcome his addiction. Chandni deserves due credit for strategizing Dev's establishment as a true political heir. The

sole consequence that concerns her is Dev's safety and prosperity – she didn't mind him muttering Paro's name in her arms, nor did she hesitate to sexually pleasure the Chief Minister to work it to his benefit. All this despite knowing her love would remain unrequited, like Chandramukhi's. But unlike the 'second woman' of the novel who sought to laud the Dev-Paro bond, Chandni strove to uncover the truth to Dev about Paro's press conference as an opposition leader – where she exposed the conspiracy behind his father's death and the dubious moral scruples of his mother. She also exhibited her *femme fatale* dimension in getting Shrikant murdered when he began suspecting her complicity in exposing his truth. Chandramukhi's ideal of service before self is given a realistic, active and tangible touch. Mishra establishes her as an extremely intelligent character who functions without any ulterior reward or acknowledgement in return.

With this film, both Paro and Chandramukhi seem to have emerged successful in their struggles over time. They launch outright attacks to the centre from the margins, flagging from their peripheral positions a 'power-play' – through repeated retaliations and firm rejoinders, questioning the basis of the centre's existence. This is the closest one can possibly get to the desired goal of deconstructing the centre itself, to enable free 'play', as opposed to confinement in relegated closed spaces perpetuating marginalisation. Equality is desirable; this adaptation seeks to give its women their due.

Paro and Chandramukhi appear to be caught at the crossroads between the 'centre' and the 'margins.' Victims at the hands of the novelist and multiple filmmakers – changing depictions in their cinematic portrayals in tune with visions of the latter – are likely results of intersectional socio-temporal conflicts. In the first three adaptations, a vacillating stance is adopted by the filmmakers, attempting to deconstruct the 'grand narrative' of a patriarchal 'centre' that posits women on the 'periphery' of society, yet relegating them to internalized states of submission. This raises pertinent issues. Viewed as a spectrum, the five films are inconsistent in the stance taken on *Devdas*' heroines. This can effectively puzzle the

viewer/critic, since each claim affiliation to the novel. If the genealogy is viewed using the lens of 'postmodernism', then the last two films appear to be on the brink of what Gerald Graff calls a 'postmodernist breakthrough', with the final adaptation having made the cut. The representation of women in each film is seemingly 'acceptable': in harmony with the time frame of its creation. This notwithstanding, nothing justifies the violence caused through 'metanarratives' like patriarchy and the limited social realities for these characters. Optimism is heralded in the attempts of the women to refute their forced marginalities. This is witnessed in the consistent movement to counter the 'centre', a partially conscious effort to break the shackles binding them, resisting their confinement in the context they were imprisoned in by the novelist.

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## **Traditional Individuality and Feminist Revelation in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee**

**Dr. E. Ranjith**

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**Abstract:** Traditional unfriendliness is an overall problem today. The huge change between two ways of life results in a person getting disheartened and frustrated. Bharati Mukherjee defines the American experience as one of combination and colonization a two way process in which both the writer and the immigrants produce by the transaction and experience. In her novels “The Tiger’s Daughter” and “Jasmine”, Bharati Mukherjee has showed an identical cultural shock.

**Key Words:** Disheartened, colonization, produce, transaction, identical.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Traditional isolation is a global problem today. The huge difference between two ways of life results in a person getting dejected and unsatisfied. This can be designated as culture shock when a person changes away from his own culture and swallows another; his old values come into clash with the new ones him discoveries. Bharati Mukherjee styles the American experience as one of “synthesis” and colonization a two way process” in which both the writer and the immigrants produce by the transaction and experience. In her novels “The Tiger’s Daughter” and Jasmine”, Bharati Mukherjee has showed a double cultural shock.

Jasmine and Tara travel out of their respective native lands in order to grasp their dreams. Their migration or “cultural transplant” provides rise to a calamity of identity and a final resolution to the choice. Bharati Mukherjee has consciously circumvented the temptation of glorifying her native country and to damage the embraced country, she has flourished in presenting a fascinating study of the problem of a banished person in America as well as in India. Jasmine travels out of India in search of the

American dream while Tara ideas a trip to India in search of the Indian dream. The object of their education stands to present these two objective occurrences booked by Bharati Mukherjee and final disappointment awaiting her protagonists.

Jasmine's fate had been prophesied by an astrologer very early in life. He had expected widowhood and exile with the forewarning that nobody could path away from his or her fate. Her journey through life led Jasmine through many transformations Jyoti, Jasmine, Jane and Jone through large geographical locals similar Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally towards California. At every stage of her life Jasmine revolts against her fate and the path drawnfor her. The narrative shifts between the past and present, between India of her earlier life and America of the present. The past is Jyoti's childhood in the small village of Punjab, her marriage to Prakash, the young determined city man, who always questions traditions. He has assumed her a new identity and new name Jasmine for she is small sweet and heady and would quicken the whole world with her perfume. The present is her life as Jane in Iowa where she stands a live-in companion to Bud, a small town banker. Bud is captivated by her foreignness, but he never requests her about India. He courts her because she is unfamiliar. She is darkness and furtive. The American experience surprises Jane and fills her heart with disgust many a time. In the process of her transformation, Jane is raced by a desire to belong. She closely identifies herself with Bud's adopted son, Du', a Vietnamese because he is an immigrant like herself. Both Du and Jasmine are in an urgency to develop American. They try to forget the nightmares of their early lives. America, the Land of dreams, has many disillusion in store for her. William Gordon, a kind Quaker lady in Florida, offers her a home. The experience with the Professor's family turns out to be even more disturbing. The biggest shock to Jasmine is the truth of the Professor's resources of earning a livelihood. He is not a professor but an importer and sorter of human hair. The next identity of Jane is thrust on her by the Hayse's family where she works as a „care giver". The twist given to the narrative where Jane

falls in love with Taylor is a weak link in the chain of events. The transformation of Jyoti has come full circle.

Bharati Mukherjee complements Jasmine's immigrant experience with parallel experience learnt from Trinidad. While Jasmine screams her heart out every night because she is too proud to go back to her native country, Jane is stunned by the switching of relationships in America. The final predicament comes when Jane is challenged with the souring of the American dream through the suicide of Durel. Du's departure from home in search of his family unnerves her. She is confined between her duty towards the cripple Bud and her love for Taylor. She types the final choice. She doesn't finish guilty but relieved. She has clogged thinking of herself as Jane. She senses strong enough once again to cope with the situation in a realistic manner. Time would draw its own conclusion about her true identity. The Tiger's Daughter also returns the conflict between illusion and reality. But the novelist has accepted the technique of documentation to bring out the contrast between two worlds and two cultures. An immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes fond memories of it. Tara is crammed off by her father at early age of fifteen for America because he is impelled by suspicion and pain about his country. Tara is homesick and even small things cause her pain. She prays to Kali for strength so that she would not break down before the Americans. New York is extraordinary and it has focused her to despair. Fate prompts her to fall in love with an American. Tara's husband David is painfully western and Tara is unable to communicate her family background and life in Calcutta. Her husband probes more questions about Indian customs and traditions. She touches completely insecure in an alien atmosphere.

Subsequently a gap of seven years, Tara profits to India for which she had dreamed about for years. She has come to believe that all qualms and shadowy fears of the time abroad would disappear quite magically if she could reappearance home to Calcutta. With the precision of a newspaper reporter,

Bharati Mukherjee leads her heroine through a series of adventures to a final self-realization and reconciliation. Tara's homesick eyes notice many changes in the city of Calcutta. She feels outraged and is unable to respond to these changes. She desires for the Bengal of Satyajit Roy, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces. What confronts her is a restive city which forces weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty. Calcutta seems losing its memories in a bonfire of images, buses and trams. An appetite for the ridiculous has taken over the city. Many of Tara's worries and battles are resolved by the strength, determination and quiet dignity of her parents. The visit to the Ashram of Mata Kannanbala Devi creates her share her love for her mother as well as the worshippers. The Indian dream is horrified but the writer leads the heroine to a final reconciliation. At the end of the novel, Tara is convoluted in a violent demonstration in which Jyob Roy Choudhary, a symbol of the old world order is brutally beaten to death. Pranab, the youth attempts to save him but is himself injured in the process. This is a course of history which cannot be stopped. Ultimately, Tara too is killed. The writer seems to suggest that Tara in her death finds oneness with the soil she feels right to.

Likewise, Dimple in, "Wife and Tara, Padma and Parvati in Desirable Daughters" feel out of tune once they consent their motherland for an alien land. They are unable to adjust themselves to an alien background and sense completely outraged. They scrap hard to reserve their identity and dignity in a land where hostile cultures and attitudes do not permit them to derive into their own. They contract trapped between two cultures making them feel unfit in both. Thus, a close experience of both the worlds the western and the Indian gives Bharati Mukherjee an authentic and objective perspective with a delicious combination of spite, charm, satire and kindness. She thrusts her heroines to the edges of their worlds and liberates them for a new world order. One can question whether being an immigrant has been



a warning to Mukerjee's own country as she leftovers devoid of the stability afforded by one's roots. But it cannot be denied that hers is a voice which is worthy of the reader's attention and respect.

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**“Let me scream out my story”: Foregrounding the Dalit Experience in Shyamal Kumar**

**Pramanik’s *The Untouchable & Other Poems***

**Dr. Basudhara Roy**

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**Abstract:** The word ‘Dalit’ like the word ‘woman’ or ‘black’, has a complex signification. While the nomenclature ‘Dalit’ marks a transgressive act of cultural reclamation and social agency, the term continues to be haunted by its specific histories of oppression and dehumanization. Stemming from the expressions and exclusions of a historically-layered power-discourse than from mere caste discrimination and prejudice, the Dalit experience remains multi-faceted and diverse. The present essay attempts a close reading of the poetry of the Bengali Dalit activist, Shyamal Kumar Pramanik, translated from the original Bengali by Jaydeep Sarangi & Anurima Chanda, as an honest, fearless, and evocative testimony of the Dalit social angst and the political hope for a more equitable world. Attentive to his nuanced use of imagery and language reflective of his political consciousness, this essay attempts to place Pramanik’s oeuvre firmly within the tradition of the Dalit literary agenda of subverting hegemonic epistemology through authentic and radical self-narration.

**Keywords:** Dalit, space, resistance, language, nature, hope.

T.M. Yesudasan, in ‘Towards a Prologue to Dalit Studies’, states:

In our academies, the production and distribution of knowledge goes through various procedures of rigorous social control. This process is called the politics of knowledge: to choose from a large body of information available, leave the rest out, subject the select knowledge to editing and interpreting, confer on it scientificity and objectivity, reduce its availability and limit its accessibility. In the academic assembly line, knowledge is produced by passing through these epistemological procedures of social control. What is always left out in these ideological apparatuses of the state is the history and knowledge of the oppressed. [...] The task of dalit studies is to release the

counter-hegemonic forces of critique in order to facilitate the eruption of dalit voice and truth, breaking the silence and darkness in the midst of the prevailing politics of knowledge. (2013, p. 150)

The distinctive Dalit voice in India, like the essential Afro-American voice in the West is, today, on its way to establishing itself as a global brand of marginal activist resistance and self-assertion. Speaking from the spatial fringes of orthodox Hinduism with a deep historical, social, cultural and markedly political commitment towards building a casteless society, the Dalit voice stands as a staunch testimony to and protest against an entire civilization of *savarna* dominance and exploitation of the lower classes. Formerly labelled as the ‘Untouchables’, later the ‘Harijans’ and still later, the ‘Scheduled Castes’, the term ‘Dalit’ was adopted by the oppressed classes of India in the late sixties and seventies of the last century. Derived from the Sanskrit root verb *dal*, meaning to crack or split, the word ‘Dalit’ like the word ‘Black’ is a self-fashioned label of empowerment and refers to those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in power, in a deliberate systemic manner. As a term of protest, the word in its intrinsic semantic sense, denies the notions of pollution and karma that were used to justify caste hierarchy and exclusion, and rejects the paternalistic and charitable connotations of the term Harijan as well as the caste system as a whole. Dalit writing is, today, a wide, fertile and burgeoning field of creation within the rich corpus of Indian writing and includes literary and other works by writers who identify themselves as ‘dalits’ and are capable, therefore, of bringing a historical epistemology of caste-subjugation to their writing. Shyamal Kumar Pramanik’s *The Untouchable & Other Poems*, translated from the original Bengali by Jaydeep Sarangi & Anurima Chanda, marks itself as an enriching addition to this versatile body of Dalit writing by virtue of its acute understanding of the power discourse of caste and the authentic articulation of a dialectic of oppression, anger, resistance and hope.

A collection of fifty fiery, powerful, and intensely autobiographical poems suffused throughout with the majesty of imagination and a fine lyrical charm, this book is a testimony to the lived experience of one individual – Shyamal Kumar Pramanik, his entire community – the Poundra Kshatriya clan, as well as the pan-Indian Dalit subjectivity characterized by victimization and loss. The Pods or the Poundra Kshatriyas are one of the major Scheduled Caste communities in West Bengal. While the name ‘Poundra Kshatriya’ is an honorific adopted by the community in around 1938-39, their original root ‘Pod’ means Padma or lotus and they are believed to be the descendants of the original tribal inhabitants of the Ganga delta. For Pramanik, as he states in his interview included in the book, the term ‘dalit’ refers to “those people from the depressed classes who are exploited socially and economically on the basis of their birth, by the system of Manuism and Brahmanism as propagated under the Hindu religion.” (2020, p. 17) While as a writer, Pramanik’s intention is to create a space for his writings “within the larger domain of Indian literature”, as a Dalit activist, he aspires to a casteless society – “to establish equality and fraternity among Indians, irrespective of their caste and religion.” (2020, p. 24) The very first poem of the collection, ‘I Know’, offers a manifesto of the poet’s writing:

I know

I know everything is right.

Yet I didn’t face you upright.

I sit in the turn of the road,

Heart full of sufferings.

I look at the Eastern sky

Watch the rise of

The fourth world from the dark. (2020, p. 25)

In this English translation, the semantic juxtaposition of ‘right’ and ‘upright’ with connotations of in/justice and oppression and the hopeful promise of the dark, largely sets the tone of Pramanik’s oeuvre. One finds embodied here all the ideas that watermark this intricate and urgent volume of poems - the liminality of space, the essential Dalit double consciousness, linguistic and ideological resistance, a sensitivity to the natural world as a repository of wisdom and harbinger of change, and, above all, the faith in the dawn of a better tomorrow - slow but definite. A quick examination of each of these five ideas can help us understand the way in which the Dalit experience stands central to Pramanik’s writing, both thematically and stylistically.

### **The Liminality of Space**

Pramanik’s poems address space in diverse ways. A close reading of the fifty poems in this collection, bring to us different dimensions of space-consciousness. There is the immediate physical/geographical space from where the poet speaks – “a mud house” (Pramanik, 2020, p. 59) in the soil of his birth in “one of India’s backward villages” (2020, p. 69) which is marked by “a restricted sky” (2020, p. 73), a “secluded river bank” (2020, p. 64) “surrounded by shit and vomit” (2020, p. 65) where “they loathe me, spew spit on my body” (2020, p. 53) and where “from dirty dustbins/We scrape out food on which we survive” (2020, p. 59) Permeating this geographical space is the cultural space that nourishes the poet’s sense of self and from the core of which he vectors himself with respect to his past, present and future. This is the space of both memory and vision, of experience and nurture, of deprivation and hope. While there are good things here to hold on to:

We had families and homes here

My own people lived by this old waterscape

We used to sing songs of Maa Shitala staring at each other

Used to watch Kalpurush at night. (Pramanik, 2020, p. 79)

there are also unerasable memories of loss such as in the poem 'Fairy Tales':

Our seven brothers and sisters

Used to look at each other

Under the moon shine

But when our mother cooked two pieces of roti

Tears flooded her cheeks

Moon shine was vanished. (Pramanik, 2020, p. 40)

Compounding these, is the emotive space of "hurt and pain, the humiliation of life" (Pramanik, 2020, p. 61), "oppression and abuse" (2020, p. 59) "mistrust/ incessant injustice, torture" (2020, p. 57) animated still by the hope of an "illumined planet" (2020, p. 61), "a storm at sea" (2020, p. 56), a "song of breaking shackles" (2020, p. 42). All these spaces are inhabited not just personally but socially and historically by the poet. In the poetic documentation of his lived experiences in them, he is not alone but accompanied socially by his entire oppressed community and historically, by his ancestors and descendants. The pronoun 'I' in these poems, easily and inevitably, lapses into a 'we' but the 'we', here, is a personal rather than a universal pronoun and its boundaries are sharply demarcated against a 'they' who "write stories on us/and more darkness descends into our lives" (Pramanik, 2020, p. 59), a 'they' "whose hearts are dark, were ones to write Manu/ discriminating one man from the other" (2020, p. 67), a 'they' who "swirl in a dark hole" (2020, p. 66), a blind, selfish, venomous 'they' -

They who had destroyed our houses

They who had destroyed our lives

Played Holi with our blood

And they, who did not speak

They saw but did not see (Pramanik, 2020, p. 74),

In the dialogic space of these poems, it is clear that 'I/we' and 'you/they' constitute social categories exemplifying a historical oppressor-victim relationship. Sharmila Rege in *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* suggests that the importance of Dalit testimony is sociological and activist in that "the intention is not one of literariness but of communicating the situation of a group's oppression, imprisonment and struggle" (2006, p. 13) Pramanik's poems offer a compound vision into the predicaments and crises of a caste-ridden society through the subtle interweaving of a variety of spatial planes that illumine the complexity of experience, literally and metaphorically.

### **Dalit Double-consciousness**

The term 'double consciousness' was coined by W.E.B. Du Bois to characterize the process of African-American identity-formation within a culture of racial discrimination. In his essay, 'Strivings of the Negro People', Du Bois talks of the discriminated other "being born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight" so that his sight offers him not self-consciousness but an insight into himself as he appears to the mainstream.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. [...] He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development. (1897, para. 2)

Double-consciousness as a theoretical tool and trope has, since Du Bois, made its entry into many academic domains such as gender, sexuality and diaspora studies. Within Dalit studies also, its value

remains far-reaching as it aptly captures the divided consciousness of the oppressed castes and their need to challenge their representation through courageous and defiant self-assertion. As Limbale argues, “If the Dalit is the protagonist of India’s boycotted society, the African American is the protagonist of Black America. Both are slaves.” (2004, p. 85) In Pramanik’s poems, the Dalit double-consciousness marks its consistent presence as the poet attempts to reconcile the category of Dalit with the universal human on the one hand and the particular Indian on the other. In ‘I’m Awake Alone’, Pramanik writes:

I watch the night birds flying  
Never sang a song of freedom  
In this painful life of neglect  
Blood wet soil of this land  
I’m a dumb and deaf in the tired coffin (2020, p. 32)

Again in ‘My Existence in Ruins’, he writes:

All my life I have searched for our civilization’s ancient history  
In the spread of this land’s depths  
In never-ending dreams.  
Am I such a nobody! (2020, p. 76)

To challenge the humiliation received at the hands of the upper castes, the Dalit community must establish itself as a collective and organized voice of protest, rage and revolution. Pramanik’s poetry gives stark expression to this recrimination of an unjust social order as he attempts to turn his victimization into the fuel of a socio-political agency which, in turn, brings us to the third remarkable aspect of his work – its spirit of resistance.



### **The Language of Resistance/ The Resistance of Language**

The idea that language is a construct and it both subtly embodies and renders transparent issues of power, was persuasively brought to fore by Structuralism and Post-structuralism. Debates on power seldom fail to highlight the role of language in the construction and maintenance of hegemony and it has long been recognized that any significant social change can occur only when it is spearheaded by a linguistic change as well. The French feminists – Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, as well as postcolonial scholars such as Said and Fanon have closely investigated the links between language, oppression and liberation in their work. Dalit studies, too, recognizes the need to seize the domain of language and imprint it, both aesthetically and functionally, with the Dalit experiences of marginalization and protest in order to engender a change in the status quo. The term ‘Dalit’, as stated earlier, itself marks a linguistic declaration of an ideological revolution. The Dalit writing-back to mainstream Hinduism has involved the transformation of the stigma of untouchability into a radical narrative of identity. It is, as Anupama Rao puts it, “the narrative of how a new political collectivity was constituted by resignifying the Dalit’s negative identity within the caste structure into positive political value.” (2009, p. 2) It involves a celebration of the resilient and indomitable Dalit spirit of fighting back despite the centuries of scriptural sanctions enforced upon them. Limbale writes:

The reality of Dalit literature is distinct, and so is the language of this reality. It is the uncouth-impolite language of Dalits. It is the spoken language of Dalits. This language does not recognize cultivated gestures and grammar. [...] For their writing, Dalit writers have used the language of the quarters rather than the standard language. Standard language has a class. Dalit writers have rejected the class of this standard language. [...] To Dalit writers, the language of the basti seems more familiar than standard language. In fact, standard language does not include all the words of Dalit dialects. (2004, pp. 33-34)

In Pramanik's poems, too, the reader is confronted with a language that resists, both aesthetically and functionally, the materiality of subjugation and the incarceration of the imagination. While it codes the language of resistance fluidly and unambiguously through potent images of catastrophe and upheaval, it also offers a resistance to the structure of standard language by bending its syntax and semantics in remarkably new ways, a feature of Pramanik's style that the translators have brilliantly and faithfully preserved in their English translations. This, as the translators confess, has been no easy task:

With the present text, originally written in Bengali, the major challenge was in translating the anger underlying the language rather than the language itself. Pramanik is an extremely earthy poet. Most of his imageries are tied to elements of earth, be it water, trees, forests, or the soil. But what is unique is the way he weaves these elements to create a sense of the primordial state of being, where emotions run raw. While this makes for a powerful read in the original, in English, the sense gets immensely toned-down given the structural limitations of the language. With Pramanik's choice of words, finding equivalences in the target language was not so difficult; it was his rage that posed the biggest obstacle to the text's translatability. (Pramanik, 2020, pp. 13-14)

Even a cursory glance at the poems in the volume will be sufficient to make the readers aware of the problem that the translators have, very satisfactorily, wrestled with. Here is an epistemology and emotions that defy in their expression of rage, the syntactic configurations of standard language. In the short poem 'Untouchable', for instance, is a sacramental quality that far exceeds, connotatively, the denotative meaning of its sentences:

The man runs out  
To write a poem on fire  
Disregarding the inequality

He runs in the main street like God

I ask him, who is he?

He relies, I'm Shambok

The Untouchable (Pramanik, 2020, p. 37)

Here, the juxtaposition of the historical character, Shambok, a Shudra ascetic mentioned in the Valmiki *Ramayana* with the urban image of the main street and the religious/revolutionary image of the sacramental fire, invests the poem with a supernatural hymn-like power. The use of the word 'relies' rather than 'replies' which is a natural semantic expectation here, further heightens the poem's metaphysical impact for 'relies' connotes an inalienable sense of identity. The tripartite consciousness of the Dalit subject here as (hu)man, Shambok and Untouchable along with his intention to write a poem on fire collapses all sense of otherness into an ode of possibility and communal accomplishment. In 'Storm at Sea', the poet writes:

Days ablaze will return

Drumming our empty bellies we'll come

Holding hands

Like a storm at sea (Pramanik, 2020, p. 56)

The imagery of 'empty bellies' as both hollows of hunger and drums of creativity slaps the reader with both sharp truth and poetic awe. With Pramanik, less is, indeed, more and his crisp brevity buttressed by gut images is capable of conjuring the status of an entire people in the fewest possible words. The poem 'In Every Vein of this Body' naturalizes, through rhetorical questions, the need for the expression of resistance by linking it to the general idea of cause and effect and thereby, to the essential idea of survival:

Reduced to an untouchable

They loathe me, spew spit on my body.

Where can I rest in peace, please tell? (Pramanik, 2020, p. 53)

### **Nature and Democracy**

It would be impossible to study Pramanik's poems thematically and stylistically with any seriousness without paying attention to their acute consciousness of the natural world. There is not a single poem in *The Untouchable & Other Poems* that does not bring in some or the other natural image from the splendour of the rural Bengal countryside. However, nature is far more than a mere background to Pramanik's poetry. A close engagement with these poems reveal nature as a constant co-protagonist in the autobiographical narrator's world and an omnipresent reminder of the essential democracy that underlines the experience of nature. For Pramanik, nature is both companion and refuge. It is a repository of memories, wisdom, healing and hope. It is a legacy inherited and to be passed on, a link between the dislocated past, present and future of the community, binding bygone ancestors, family, and unborn descendants in one arc. It embodies the principle of creation and destruction, of renewal and change, of abandoning and becoming. All these themes are of vital significance to Pramanik's oeuvre and it is through his various aesthetic uses of nature that the poet succeeds in giving his poems a voice more emphatic than his own.

Firstly, nature through green fields, forest lands, muddy ponds, seasonal flowers, sunrises, sunsets, dawns, dusks, trees and birds, offers a contextual physical and imaginative site for Pramanik's poems. Here, nature constitutes the vibrant landscape which, though indifferent to the transactions and injustices of the human world, is, nevertheless, forever accessible to the seeker who desires healing and solace. Secondly, nature manifests itself to the poet as an agent of upheaval and change, his images of resistance and resurrection drawn mostly from the natural world. Thus, darkness, mountains, storms, and winds are

as powerful harbingers of hope for the poet as the sun, moon, rivers and flowers. The constellation, Orion or the Kalpurush makes a frequent appearance as “a stubborn warrior” (Pramanik, 2020, p. 62) and a symbol of unity, strength and resistance. Thirdly and finally, the natural world in its avatar of a pristine and primordial wilderness, chaos and disorder, offers to the poet a social vision of utopia where the ordering of caste is done away for good.

### **The Unambiguity of Hope**

The translators, Jaydeep Sarangi and Anurima Chanda, in their Preface to this collection, make a very apt observation about Pramanik’s poetry, “Awareness of (this) oppression does not simply manifest itself in torrid descriptions of Dalit life. Rather, it attempts to derive out of these experiences a new value system that would help Dalits to carve out a new social reality.” (Pramanik, 2020, p. 11) What stands out in these poems despite their moving agony and insistent rage, is the predominance of hope and the unwavering faith in a better tomorrow. For Pramanik, despite the darkness engulfing the past and present, the Dalit selfhood is on a steady journey towards light and there is no looking back. The motif of travel, movement and march almost invariably mark the conclusion of a large number of poems in this collection – ‘There was Directionless Wind Last Night’, ‘The River Rising Inside My Heart’, ‘Storm at Sea’, ‘Go Ahead’, ‘O Ascetic Black Dark Night’, to name just a few. Where poems do not end with a commitment to the physical journey, the commitment to the emotional journey into empowerment and utopian freedom and equality between men is forever present. One would be hard put to find even a single poem in the book that does not end with an assertion of possibility and the urging towards it. In ‘Come, Hold My Hands’, for instance, the poet writes:

I am tired, yet sing will I the morning song

One century later, if another comes

I will extend these gaunt hands

I know, we have no home, no nation,

Still, this fire, water, soil, and sky,

Stays in constant touch with our bodies

I have been clutching at its edges and sitting all this while. (Pramanik, 2020, p. 75)

In these lines is a bareness of physical and emotional resources that strikes the reader as Beckettian but as in Beckett's world, all is not lost and the marginalized man is thrown on the resources of the self. The human may be discriminated against, may be deprived of home, nation and entitlement but the human body, a mythic compound of the five elements that make up the universe will always be a microcosm sheltering the individual.

In the Introduction to his *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch writes:

The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong. It will not tolerate a dog's life which feels itself only passively thrown into What Is, which is not seen through, even wretchedly recognized. (1995, para. 1)

Hope, for Bloch, is a significant principle for the building of civilization. By offering a vision of what may be possible rather than what is, hope paves the way for the construction of a better, greater and more ideal society. Pramanik's poems, by envisioning a more equitable world for himself and his descendants, lays down the architecture of a more inclusive and tolerant world order and though the goal may not be achieved any soon, the faith in the journey can help expedite the change.

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**“But I want to live”: Terminal Disease vis-à-vis Social Ostracism in Mahesh Dattani’s *Brief Candle***

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**Abstract:** Mahesh Dattani posits a challenge to the conventional constructs such as ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ seemingly valuable in traditional Indian society. Dattani’s aim has been to confront the audience with a distorted picture of the well-guarded Indian society uncovering a world where all interpersonal relations are marked with hidden fear and suppressed aggression that forms the basis of the menacing existential reality of the contemporary Indian society. This paper attempts to focus on how the sense of hopelessness emerging out of the failure to connect has kept Dattani obsessed even in one of his later plays, *Brief Candle* (2009), where each of the cancer patients search in futile for an embalming touch of warmth, passion and reassurance to alleviate their pain. The familial space in Dattani’s plays has emerged as a relentless site of tension and contest, where each member engages himself in a struggle to create a homely space of his own desire. The bonds of love, trust, empathy that were traditionally been thought of as the basis of a family, has turned out to be utterly mythical and often illusory. Despair creeps in as a loss of hope in reaction to the breakdown of the defining qualities of one’s self or identity.

**Keywords:** Mahesh Dattani, *Brief Candle*, theatrical space, ‘dystopic’ familial space, wriggle for existence, angst, claustrophobia.

If socio-cultural issues like patriarchy, gender and alternate sexuality are at the core of the dehumanized conditions and humiliation in which Mahesh Dattani’s characters are engaged, a fatal disease like cancer has shown to upset any sustaining bond between them in one of his later plays, *Brief Candle* (2009). In this paper, I would, therefore, like to examine how Mahesh Dattani remains obsessed in this play with the sense of hopelessness emerging out of the failure of each of the cancer patients who



squirm pathetically to build a reassuring homely space around them. Their search for a revitalising touch of passion, security and stability turns out to be futile; they suffer despairingly from the disorientation of an individual space and hence, their quest for a sense of belonging continues.

In his note on the play, Dattani writes:

Without indulging in philosophical speculations, if we feel the unbearable heaviness of being, perhaps we can think of lessening the burden of stress, emotional turmoil, guilt or whatever it is that is adding to all that baggage that we carry around. So wouldn't it be a good idea if we at least acknowledged that burden in our plays or cinema?...Provide a pathway to our feelings and concerns so that we can look at life and its vicissitudes squarely in the mirror without having to wear a mask of placid existence? (*Brief Candle*: 3)

Dattani's aim has always been to jerk us out of our 'placid existence'. By removing the mask he introduces us to the everyday social problems and the ways in which the urban individual has to live through an array of such menaces. The mask of cancer reveals the plight of the cancer patients at the very beginning of this play. The 'Face of Cancer' is "a large three-dimensional mask" (*Brief Candle*: 7). The striking presence of the mask throughout the play offers a visible reminder of the pain of the patients, their anguish, and the claustrophobic space they are trapped in. Its silent, persistent stay on stage symbolises a tension between the struggles and sorrows of patients, and their sense of futility of such struggle. Dattani suggests that

The Face of Cancer could be abstract, maybe an androgynous face that is melting. Hollow eyes, sallow skin, tufts of hair, etc. A face that is ravaged by the effects of chemotherapy and is now ready to give up the struggle. (*Brief Candle*: 7)

The play dramatises mortality yet highlights life; it is a telling commentary on the importance of the quality of our lives rather than how long we live it. The playwright emphasizes the painful deprivation, inferiority and mental torture in both private and public spheres that his characters are subjected to.

Like other major plays of Dattani this play too is set in “A composite set. A gauze curtain will separate spaces” (*Brief Candle*: 7).<sup>1</sup> The audience is immediately engaged in a fractured space which is problematised with the predicament of human lives against the onslaught of such fatal disease. The narrative goes on to unfold human agony as well as social ostracisation in the form of indifference and reluctance of other people who often avoid such diseased persons. The play begins with a motley group of people in a hospital – the doctor, an attendant and a group of cancer patients – who attempt to stage a play *Hotel Staylonger*, a comedy based on the script written by another patient, Vikas, who has already died. A play within a play is another brilliant ploy by Dattani as far as the dynamics of space is concerned.

Dattani has made an effort “to work on that thin line that defines comedy from tragedy. In the play we have survivors of cancer who are in the process of putting up a comedy play as a fundraiser for their hospice. Usually it is the mask of comedy that we tend to hide behind. In the play the mask of death is predominant almost to the point of ridicule” (*Brief Candle*: 3). The contents of Vikas’ play significantly transform the hospital into a hotel with the chief doctor Deepika Dave enacting the role of the hotel manager. This is a very apt metaphor for the miseries the patients are going through. A hotel epitomizes an established space where people are provided with lodging and usually meals, entertainment, and various personal services. On the contrary a hospice constantly monitors and intervenes into one’s space

MAHESH. If you try to do such things, I will tell her and your hands will be tied to the bed. That is what we do to people who pull out their feeding tubes or run to the balcony to jump ... (*Brief Candle*: 17)

One can have the ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign turned on in front of his or her room in a hotel while in the hospital he or she is constantly reminded of his or her woes. The comic and the tragic are skillfully intercut to show how the two enmesh in our lives. “Staylonger” immediately creates an impression of a prolonged stay which is in stark contrast with the prospect of the patients’ lives in this play. The hotel provides them with a site in which they try to live their own lives, which have been derailed by their medical condition. The ‘Viagra’ episode and Amol’s obsession with ‘Bloody Mary’ are, therefore, symbolic as they hint at the menace of alienation resulting from cancer under the veil of humour. Amol says

Make the most of your stay in Hotel Staylonger, may your stay be long. (*Brief Candle*: 10)

Vikas has been projected as one who seems to realise the inner psyche of the other patients, the doctor and his male nurse. Hence, his script befits the turmoil.

Dattani rightly points out that comedy is generally the mask that we tend to hide behind, and hence, the mask is dismantled. Vikas is dead himself, and we find others at the brink of their lives. The terminal disease accompanied by the sense of fleeting time truncates and limits their space as well as existence like the hotel guests, for their stay is time bound. Deepika, the doctor has immaculately been chosen by Vikas to enact the role of the hotel manager (Dattani’s handling of characters has always been exemplary). Both as a doctor and as a hotel manager she makes us aware of our limitations, and perhaps of her own.

You will be in trouble. Because the airline is paying for only one night, and you have exceeded your credit-card limit. (*Brief Candle*: 10)

And later

Give him more morphine.

... ..

There is nothing I can do! Let me know when he is gone. (*Brief Candle: 21*)

Dattani's critique of love, marriage and family is brought to focus here as well. Vikas views life as an erotic adventure, to be proliferated by affairs and lovemaking. Incidentally, this is how he has actually lived his life.

VIKAS. ... But you don't go around screwing like I did. You just sit in a corner. Like Little Jack Horny. (*Brief Candle: 18*)

He had caused Deepika misery by being unfaithful and sexually promiscuous while he was alive. Consequently he developed AIDS which leads to cancer. He unravels later in a confrontation with Deepika

VIKAS. To me wandering was life itself. I would not have stopped for anyone. Not even for life. Change tracks and move on. I travelled abroad and worked. Somewhere in one of those countries that need a small medical examination for all migrants, I found out. That somewhere, sometime, amidst the people whom I encountered, I had embraced the end of my life. Change tracks. Move on. Time to make a return journey. Went to Kamtipura, Falkland Street, Dharavi – all my usual haunts. They embraced me. I wanted to live and die there, where I felt loved. (*Brief Candle: 40*)

Dattani makes us encounter with characters who are grasped by a tension arising from the conflict. Deepika suffered from Vikas' debauchery resulting from this charm of this nomadic life. Vikas conquered all the women he can in this life, abandoning Deepika, who dutifully clings on to her medical career and seeks to serve and save lives as a doctor. The robust bond is marked with strain. The situation gets even more problematised when Vikas is put under Deepika's control and care in the hospital.

She is reluctant to stage the play because she fosters some bitterness against Vikas for he had left her after their affair in medical college to live the life of a wanderer and free love. Her indifference towards him as a patient becomes significant in the light of his infidelity. To her, he is just another

cancer patient at the hospital she is running. At one point, Vikas condemns Deepika for seeing someone, and even sleeping with him while they were still together. Deepika retorts

What did you want? That I should stay faithful while you believed in free love? I knew it wouldn't work between us. I was preparing myself for a fall. With you, I didn't feel loved. I looked at you and saw that you were attracted to me. But when you talked about travelling and meeting farmers and field workers your eyes would light up in a special way. That is where you were going. I knew even before you dropped out that you were off on some other journey. I wanted to move on too. (*Brief Candle*: 40)

Dattani's attempt to construct her voice so that she might identify her oppressors and register her voice of protest is noteworthy. Deepika affirms her own space. However, it is not only under the domination of individuals the characters struggle but various institutions that trap them into certain stereotypical roles.

DEEPIKA. Oh come on! Regret? You just show up one day – sick. Deepika, nursemaid, take care of me now. Hug me now, and love me. Why? Because you were dying? Because you are a man and I am a woman? It's my job to nurture you? Because you have no one else? Where were all the whores, truck drivers, beggars you spent so much time with? Why didn't you ask them to hold you and touch you now? Why me? Everyone sympathizes with you because you are dead...I am the bad person. Oh, dead people are all saints! Living people are bad, bad, bad.

Where were you when I needed you? (*Brief Candle*: 39)

The same plight marks the lives of both Amarinder and Shanti. Shanti has had breast cancer and one of her breasts was removed. It is revealed to her husband, and now to Amarinder, both of them are horrified by the spectacle.

SHANTI. ... When I first looked up at you on that stretcher after my third chemo session, I reached out because I thought I was dead...I hope then you understand that I regret all the years I spent not knowing how to love myself. My body, my self. (*Brief Candle*: 33)

The bodies of both Amarinder and Shanti are diseased, scarred and even denigrated which manifest anxieties. The signatures of biotechnological intervention has not only 'ravaged' their physical selves but also their privileged sense of gender and identity. Looking at the dangling mask, Amarinder recounts:

They never told me that they will be drilling inside my body. At my core. What made me a man? Climbing a mountain, playing a game of hockey, knowing I could satisfy a woman in bed. All that was under attack with a group of needles probing at my prostrate, through the wall of my rectum. Like being sodomized with metal...I wanted to live! With everything I had! (*Brief Candle*: 23)

Amarinder's narrative is heavily loaded, and the performance of his body has to do with notions of maleness which is at stake owing to the fatal disease. The pre-operative body which no longer remains the same after the surgery throws into tension his assumed notions of the masculinity, and hence questions ideas of his selfhood as well resulting into a serious angst. Shanti as well a victim of breast cancer has undergone crucial changes in her body.

I lay exposed to the technicians, my breast pushed against the X-ray plate. One of them marked my lumps, treating my breast as if it were already a piece of dead flesh...Their job was to invade my body and take out tumours, and they did. But they grew and came back till they took it all out. A part of me that I had barely felt. That I had never seen fully myself. Gone. (*Brief Candle*: 32)

For both Amarinder and Shanti, the pain is as much physical as social, and relates them with the stigma of an embodied social embarrassment.

The same ostracization under the stereotypical dogmas of patriarchal society is successfully depicted in *Ek Alag Mausam*<sup>2</sup>, a screenplay by Dattani where HIV upsets the family ties. In this play Aparna, Rita, and George suffer from Aids and in the process, they lose the sympathy of their families. Aparna refuses to marry George on this Ground, but the latter insists on it.

GEORGE. Forget for a moment that we are HIV. Forget that we have five, seven, ten, twelve years to live. Forget that and then think of our lives together.

APARNA. How can I forget? It is there! Written in our medical reports. Our death warrant. We can have those tests done over and over again but the truth is we will one day have Aids!

GEORGE. You have branded yourself Aids, Aids, Aids! You have put a big red stamp on yourself. I thought only an uncaring, unfeeling, society would do that to us. But no. We don't have to worry about society. We are doing it to ourselves! I refuse to brand myself. All I know is that love you and I want to marry you. (*Ek Alag Mausam*: 533)

What is ironic is that George's father asks him to get out of their village. He says, You may live for another seven years. But you have killed us before we have entered our graves. What face we have left in this village?...Don't come back. Leave. Go George! (*Making a gesture as if to a beggar.*) Go! (*Ek Alag Mausam*: 537)

In *Brief Candle* also the sense of loss and disorientation permeates

AMOL. Bunki had gone forever. Where are you? Ah, I spy. There he is, doing a street play. Jan Natya Manch. Very Marxist, very passionate. Now he is on the street, but he is not doing a street play. Yet he is on the street. With his mother. One day his mother had gone shopping. And when

she came back, the watchman did not allow her into her own building...Help. Somebody help us, please. Both of us without a home...Nowhere to hide... (*Brief Candle*: 37)

It is sheer irony indeed that the patients who eventually succumb to cancer stage a comedy, in which there is supposed to be no death. They fail to connect their selves and it is only death which seems to offer them an embalming touch of some sort (at the end of the play Vikas and Deepika are seen singing together and reunited in spirit if not in flesh) which has been snatched from them in their familial space.

**Notes:**

1. In almost all the plays, Dattani breaks up the stage into smaller units or spaces. *Final Solutions* is broken up into a ramp and two other distinct spaces within one house, *Bravely Fought the Queen* is equally broken up into innumerable components, and *Tara* too opens with a ‘multi-level set’. Examples can be multiplied. Among many other functions performed by this stage arrangement, one of course is to show how within a larger familial space, an inter-spatial dialectical relation is always operational, and it resists the idea of one wholesome hegemonic family.
2. *Ek Alag Mausam* was released in India on 4 February 2005. The screenplay is based on the latest dreaded disease HIV positive (AIDS). Bijay Kumar Das, in his book *Form and Meaning in Mahesh Dattani's Plays*, observes that the HIV positives are in “a death-in-life situation which needs human compassion to soothe and assuage their feelings. (Das 2008: 89)

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## **Corona virus: Re-defining our surroundings & life**

**Shormita Bose**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to throw light on the various aspects of life that have changed the normal life of the people after the outbreak of COVID-19. The paper will explore the quarantine life of people during the COVID-19. The paper will describe how people are spending much of their time on phones, or doing some creative work like dancing, singing, painting, making handmade products, cooking new dishes, etc. This pandemic has encouraged a new style of online entrepreneurship among women, which has ultimately contributed something valuable to the society. Also, it will throw light on the disastrous effect of this pandemic on the online teaching technique, poor people, migrant laborers, transgenders, etc. This paper will also explore how the meaning of humanism has evolved after the arrival of this pandemic. Also, we can observe that this pandemic gives rise to a new kind of literature, i.e., pandemic literature. It will depict several aspects of the new lifestyle that human beings have adopted after living a quarantine life.

**Keywords :** COVID-19, Quarantine, Lockdown, Environment, Humanism.

### **Introduction –**

The outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19 at the beginning of the year 2020 has shaken the life of human beings. It has a drastic effect on the lifestyle of the people from all sectors of society. COVID-19 is an infectious disease that can be spread through droplets of cough of an infected person when he sneezes, exhales, or coughs. According to Worldometer, the latest update on the number of coronavirus cases across the globe is more than 18 crore till 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and the cases are increasing rapidly day-by-day. Around 213 countries are infected by this virus, which includes India, Russia, Italy, Brazil, Columbia, Mexico, Canada, Peru, UK, USA, Sweden, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Chile, France, Germany, Romania, Pakistan, Oman, Indonesia, Qatar, and many more. The surfacing of this pandemic resulted in

a worldwide lockdown. All the schools, colleges, offices, shops, malls, cinema halls, restaurants, public-meeting halls, etc are shut down to avoid large gatherings.

### **Life during the times of pandemic –**

Life has slowed down; it has pushed humans to lead a barred life. All the human beings are leading a life behind closed doors of their houses, i.e. living in a nutshell. While, some individuals are leading quarantine life which they are eventually enjoying now, as these people could afford roof, food, and clothes for their family very smoothly and without any hindrance. Quarantine life has taught us that limiting human activities resulted in repairing the ozone layer, less pollution in the environment, and pure and clean river water. The Economic Times reports (2020), ‘People recently saw the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayan mountain range from the city of Saharanpur in UP. Even though there is an aerial difference of about 200 odd kilometers, the peaks could be seen clearly.’ The environment has witnessed a severe drop in the pollution level in the whole world. Moreover, offices and markets are all closed and the people are continuing their work from home, it has eventually turned out to be productive for the people who are living in their houses. In general, we observed that people are spending their time on social media where they share interesting posts and videos of their art and craftwork, cooking videos, dance lessons, painting, workout videos, diet plans, skin-pampering homemade remedies, daily-life videos, etc. Creativity plays a major role during this ongoing pandemic as creativity promotes new and hidden talent to showcase their ability and it also increases productivity and efficiency. ETimes reports that a girl named Ridhi Doshi has made an attempt to promote Indian textile through her dancing skill, she states:

I have always been inclined to art and textile and have always wondered, how to make this information interesting for people. Then I thought of combining it with Bollywood songs and instead of wearing textile and posing, I thought why not dance. Also, it wasn't possible to go out

of the house to any stores or to craftsmen's houses to make these videos. So, I thought of tapping into my collection and doing this. Most of the time, we don't know that we are actually draped in a tradition of craft that is centuries old ....

(D'costa, 2020)

Furthermore, there are many people who have started doing online business of their offline stores. Women are coming out with their wide variety of collections of dresses, bags, jewellery, hand-made pottery sets, paintings, etc. in LIVE videos. This has largely encouraged women's entrepreneurship during this pandemic. Mental health is one of the pivotal assistance during these trying times, as most people are locked up in their homes. A report of FORBES (2020), highlights how women entrepreneurs are coming forward to support society with their help and assistance through their company. Crystal Evuleocha, who is the founder of Kliit, a digital health company, which provides sexual and reproductive services to women. 'In the wake of COVID-19, Evuleocha has started working to launch telemedicine consultations for women regardless of insurance coverage. Her organization's experts are licensed to provide medical advice, diagnosis, and prescriptions through the Kliit app.' (Chambers, 2020)

Additionally, schools and colleges are organizing webinars, seminars, and e-conferences on a routine basis, which will enhance the skills and knowledge of the students while remaining in their homes. Children are learning to play indoor games like chess, ludo, cards, etc., and learning new extra-curricular activities while sitting in the comfort of home. It has also highlighted the fact that virtual classes are much shorter than real classroom classes. Also, online teaching is a challenge in itself in developing countries; as most middle-class students could not afford computers and smartphones for online classes. It is believed that online teaching pedagogy is proved to be more accessible, affordable, flexible, and remote. As the students can afford to learn from remote and rural areas, online teaching technique is

accessible and is relatively cheaper. Both poor and rich children will have the accessibility to education in extreme conditions. ‘A learner can schedule or plan their time for completion of courses available online.’ (Dhawan, 2020) While another fact to be noted down that the availability of the internet is less in rural areas of the country due to poor coverage of the network. Also, there are children who could not afford smartphones and laptops to pursue online classes. UNESCO asserts:

Half of the total number of learners — some 826 million (82.6 crores) students — kept out of the classroom by the Covid-19 pandemic, do not have access to a household computer and 43 percent (706 million or 70.6 crores) have no internet at home, at a time when digitally-based distance learning is used to ensure educational continuity in the vast majority of countries. (Sharma, 2020)

UNICEF, which aims to work for humanitarian assistance for children around the globe, says, ‘Millions of children are at increased risk of harm as their lives move increasingly online during the lockdown in the Covid-19 pandemic’ (Sharma, 2020). The transgender community people lack health benefits and social welfare schemes, provided by the state. They are largely dependent on begging, prostitution, and bandhani ceremonies for their livelihood, but due to nationwide lockdown and maintaining social distancing rule, they are unable to meet their daily needs. ‘They lived in congested areas that are likely to be a hotbed for coronavirus, as most of the positive cases are beginning to be detected in slum areas’ (Bose, 2020). On the other hand, poor people and migrant laborers are facing the situation of crisis during the time of pandemics. Thousands of people were walking on foot from cities to their native villages, due to loss of livelihood, food, shelter, and other basic needs. Railways, buses, and other transport services were all shut down; this is the reason why these poor and migrant labor class people had started their journey on foot. Gurneel Kaur reports:

With economic activity grinding to halt due to lockdown, millions face indigence and hardships. 80% of the Indian workforce employed in the informal sector are the most at need. The unemployment among daily wage workers has forced them to flee cities and walk to their villages. Besides, thousands have been forced to leave their rented homes as they are unable to pay the rent. (Grain Mart India, 2020)

### **Humanism Effect –**

When humanism came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it assumed that human beings occupy the central position in the universe. But what we have noticed during COVID-19 that nature occupies the central position and only flora-fauna are allowed to flourish during this challenging time. Videos are getting viral in social media where we see deer were resting on roads, peacocks dancing in the fences, clear sky, pure Ganges water, less pollution in the environment, etc. which proves that our mother Earth is healing during the outbreak of coronavirus. Also, the outbreak of the four strongest cyclones Amphaan, Nisagra, Tauktae, and Yaas consecutively during the COVID period. It gives hint to humans that nature can be dangerous too for human beings. Amphaan (2020), a deadly super tropical cyclone hit the states of West Bengal, Odisha and Andaman and Nicobar Island in India on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020, amidst this pandemic coronavirus, the previous year. Moreover, after few days, Nisagra, another tropical cyclone which strikes Maharashtra and Gujrat (India) on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020. These two cyclones had made a deep impression of destruction during this ongoing pandemic. Due to which heavy rainfall, landfall, storm, cut-down of power supply, damages trees, roads, and houses, etc. caused a lot of disturbance and trouble to humankind. According to Deccan Herald (2020), a digital E-paper writes,

The cyclone has claimed at least 106 lives, leaving a trail of destruction in WB, Odisha and Bangladesh. PM Modi surveyed affected regions in West Bengal and Odisha, and announced Rs 1,000 crore assistance to West Bengal and Rs 500 crore assistance to Odisha. The cyclone

weakened into a deep depression and caused rainfall and winds in NE states. Around 6.58 lakh people have evacuated in Bengal and Odisha.

The worst times are still not over as this year another two cyclones emerged in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. The second wave of Covid has already caused death and severity in the country, adding more dismay to the situation, Tauktae and Yaas emerged in the coastal areas near the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. Tauktae, one of the strongest cyclones hit the coast of Gujrat on 18th May 2021 severely, causing landfall and heavy rains in that area and nearby states. Following Tauktae, Yaas has hit the coast of the Bay of Bengal at the end of May 2021. 'The very basis of human survival hinges on the sustainable inter-linkages with the environment.' (Chakkaravarthy, 2003)

#### **Conclusion –**

However, this pandemic has badly affected the lives of human beings; but on the other hand, it has encouraged the cultural and creative industries to come to the forefront. The creative industry has played an important role in flourishing the idea of *Aatmanibhar Bharat*, and it will promote the new policy of India 'Vocal for Local' i.e. products made in India can be popularized. It has opened the door to the cultural development of India, which will help in progressing the innovative, pioneering, and eco-friendly ideas of people. After the outbreak of this pandemic, all the people have started living a simple and healthy life. This pandemic has taught us so many new skills and lessons for a lifetime. People have become more careful and attentive towards their health. Also, we can observe the reduction in industrial wastes into the rivers, lakes, and oceans, reduction in greenhouse gas emission, and repairing of the ozone layer. 'Humanism has promoted environmentalism through its intellectual tools such as philosophy, literature, art and science.' (Omosulu & Inja, 2019) In all these years, it is noted that humans consider themselves as the master of the Earth, but the outbreak of this pandemic has changed the total scenario of the world. In this century, we may observe the emergence of a new kind of

literature, i.e. pandemic literature. New talents from various age groups are writing poems, stories, and articles on the effect of Covid in their day-to-day chores. An 11-year-old boy from the United Kingdom wrote a poem on Covid-19 and its impact. He writes,

‘Life was always fast-paced, we never slowed down,  
Until everything stopped when Corona came to town.  
Now all is quiet and there’s peace all around,  
We’ve looked in our hearts and kindness we’ve found...’

(Save the Children, 2020)

Mohd Salihu wrote a poem ‘COVID-19’, he prays to God to heal mankind. He talks about unity, humanity, and brotherhood as key factors to overcome this pandemic. He asserts,

‘Our fingers are all crossed  
As we all hope for a cure  
A cure to end the pandemic of Covid-19

Which has killed a many like Ebola did in 15...’ (Voices of Youth, 2020)

These kinds of poems which are centered on the coronavirus and the pandemic days are being written. This has flourished the idea of pandemic literature, i.e. Covid tales among the future generations and current generation as well.

Like so many researchers, academicians, scholars, and scientists from all over the world are studying and researching this disease COVID-19, which may give birth to a new branch of study in the coming times. However, the problem of unemployment, poverty, poor education delivery, fraud, the decline in GDP, poor economic condition, bad health services, shortage of food and water, etc. have been increased even more in the country. So, all the people across the globe are learning to adjust to this new normal situation, and it will take a lot of time to recover from the losses caused by this pandemic.



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## **When Life becomes Painful**

**Mita Bandyopadhyay**

When life becomes painful,  
death becomes an easy escape.

When light of the day becomes harsh,  
darkness of the night becomes soothing.

When words become piercingly sharp,  
silence becomes sweeter than ever.

When relations become hurting,  
loneliness becomes enjoyable.

When activities of the day lose their significance,  
idleness becomes worth.

When acceptance of life becomes a numb sensation,  
rejection of life becomes a motivation.

When life ceases to be a celebration,  
death becomes a choice.

Yet, when there is death all around  
Why do I still not wish to die?

Though, life becomes painful at times,  
Isn't it worth living all the time?

**Pandemic Muse**

**Tania Alphonsa George**

It is a text they say.  
It is just a natural “Hey”!  
But there is something higher in camaraderie.  
We walked in the same corridors.  
Laughing with glee and mischief.  
Our first meet was under a blooming grove.  
There were a million things unsaid.  
The happiness was all mine to keep.  
  
There is something beautiful in reunions.  
Something old is remembered with joy.  
The air becomes thick with nostalgia.  
And all the pain bounces away.  
Like a rebound on a wall.  
Messages like neurons speedy fire.  
All we are is a spark,  
In the mind.  
Whose in full we never may know.

## **The Tyger**

**Hilal Habib**

Silence! Silence! Silence oh Tyger!  
Listen to the screams of the silence,  
Espy the air of venom and wild rigour,  
All buds are unsubtle and wavering.

Watch the frenzy drama across the frontiers  
And ken the shadowy gossips and gimmicks.  
Smell the stinking aroma of pygmy proxies  
And the abjection of featherless files.

Shield the endangered vale of lambs  
For they are worried and despairing;  
Lost inspirits and baked in numbness,  
Beguiled and alarmed in frenzied folly.

Rise now thou hale and robust creature,  
Pierce thy rage and rinse thy dissent,  
Toss out the hemless gown of serfdom  
And hum and haw the hymns of freedom.

Neither arms nor charms are to yield,  
But lofty ideals to exalt in the field,  
Hold the grip that strengthens thy wrath,  
Not the political fame but an unbent faith.

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright with forged fun,,  
Winding and howling of wolves are likely to shun,

Muffle their discordant sounds, heal thy wounds  
Fight thy cause even if threats are like hounds.

You alone and alone can make the way through  
If you don't bargain between fair and foul,  
You can catch the hover of ugly cloud, Oh Tyger!  
Let them not rub your eyes with their dust.

## **Watercolor Afternoon**

**Abishek U**

Shutting the book, I discover I have left my head inside

It is dull in here, however the sections open

their lovely spaces and give a stirring sound,

words changing themselves to their importance.

Long sections open at progressive pages. A reverberation,

consistent from the title ahead, murmurs behind me.

From in here, the world weavers,

a wilderness reclaimed by these connected sentences

cut out when a writer voyaged and a peruser kept the way open.

At the point when this book closes

I will pull it back to front like a sock

furthermore, toss it back in the library. In any case, the talk

of it will frequent all that continues in my life.

A candleflame in my dream inclines when I move !

## **LIV**

**Celin Sohet**

“Concentrate. Concentrate on my voice. Concentrate on the myriad sounds around you. Feel the rain, feel its smell. Feel the sound of raindrops falling, feel it in your skin. Now feel it all drift away-not just the rain. Feel all your clouded memories drift away, light as a feather.”

How can it drift away when you remind me of it every day? Every time you tell my bad memories to drift away, I feel like I am reliving it. Stop saying it.

\*

The alcohol; the pills; the drums; the iron fists; the rope; the knot.....

\*

But this time those thoughts came to me. I didn't scream-because I awoke from my unconscious with the sound of a falling broom from the maid who had come into clean the doctor's room.

“How many times have I told you not to enter my office when there is a patient?”, Dr. Mill's voice on which I was supposed to concentrate was a lot changed now as she shouted at her maid, “You can come in after he's gone. Now get out.”

I saw her outside the doctor's office, waiting to clean, few minutes after. “She works that ‘feel raindrop thing’ on every patient in this hospital, you know,” she told me as she gave a smirk and went inside.

I went to my room and packed up my bags. Today was my last day at St. Paul's De-Addiction Hospital. End of an era, or in other words, two years. Before I leave, I was to meet with the director.

“Dr. Rose Mills here”, he pointed to my doctor sitting beside me, “says you are good as new and that you have improved beyond doubt. So, we want you to head on back to the world, take on a new life and



never to return to those old shabby ways. Are you ready for that?" I could sense that the question wasn't rhetorical.

\*

The alcohol; the pills; the drums; the iron fists; the rope; the knot.....

\*

"Yes doctor", I lied, which was easier than admitting the truth.

As I stepped on to take on a new life in a new world, I saw the maid wiping the glass doors at the entrance.

\*\*

The faces of smiling people on the posters of Ashoka Studios kept staring at me. "So why is it that a national level photographer associated with the National Geographic applying at Ashoka Studios?", the manager-cum-hirer of the Studios asked me.

"I just wanted to take a new route", I lied again.

"You've been missing from the spotlight for a few years. Where have you been?"

"I was at St. Paul's De-addiction Centre for a while", I managed to get it out.

The manager-cum-hirer's face went white, his smile faded and his easy-posture shifted.

"So, thank you Alex. We'll, huh, get back to you."

They won't.

As I stepped out, I heard their whisperings inside. “You know that Alex, the adventure photographer. It was true what we heard about him. He did get addicted. But last time I heard he had hanged himself. Looks like he’s awoken from the dead. He was sitting right here asking for a job.” A cynical laugh followed.

\*\*

“You’re that photographer who went all nuts”, the waiter asked, curiously laughing at my face, “aren’t you?” But he did pour me the coffee. The lady sitting at the next table who heard this chat asked for another table for her and her kids.

As I walked through the park without a new job, a new life in a new world, I was reminded of my old one. I could vaguely put together my father’s face, who had bought me my first camera. I could remember the lily, the first picture that I took with it, the lily that reminded me of my mother whom I never met. But I knew she was the most beautiful woman in the world because that’s how my father always described her. I remembered my old life- a one filled with wonder, at its immensity, its beauty.

I sat down on a bench, next to a lily. A group of boys walked up to me. They couldn’t have been over twenty.

“You’re Mr. Alex Steiner, right, the paragliding record holder?”, one of them asked me.

“Well, yes. But I’m more of a professional photographer than a paraglider.” I smiled, after a long time.

As they headed on towards their teacher, who was also at the park, he scolded them, “How dare you go talk to that drug addict? You know better than that.”

\*

The alcohol; the pills; the drums; the iron fists; the rope; the knot.....

You're an addict, that's all you are.

He tried to kill himself.

He's like all those celebrities-drinks and drugs and a whole lot of money.

Drink and drug yourself. That's all you know how to do.

\*

"Aaaahhhh....." This time, I screamed. I heard all those people's voices who convinced me that I'm nothing more than a drug addict.

I went to see Dr. Mills the next morning, at the hospital. I feared that I might go back to my old 'shabby' ways as the director put it. But she was preoccupied. When I was about to leave, I heard a sound of glass breaking. I traced down the sound and found myself in the hospital's store room. It was her, the maid. She got startled by my presence there, as she picked up the broken glass pieces.

"I'm sorry. I'll leave", I didn't want to scare or disgust anyone anymore.

"No. I am not afraid of you", she said.

"I don't understand", I confessed.

"Isn't that what you think everyone else thinks of you-that they're afraid of you?", she asked putting on a smile.

"Well, I am a drug addict who tried to kill myself, aren't I?"

"No", she said, correcting me, "you are an adventurous photographer whom the society hanged on a drug label."

Silence interrupted us for a while. It felt good, like I was finally being understood. She sat me down and continued.

“You are a photographer who went to photograph the Mayas of Mexico, who got roped into a chain gang and when you tried to break free, back home, the people crucified you as a drug addict. They tied a knot and you gave them your neck”, she finished.

“I loved my life. I don’t know why I did that”, I admitted.

“Life isn’t about the places or the things; it’s about the people. It’s not about what you went through, it’s who you went through it with. The rain becomes beautiful when you have someone to share it with. And sometimes, only sometimes, that person might be yourself.”

“You know, in all the time I’ve been here, I never got your name”, I said.

“It’s Liv”, she smiled.

I held her hand. I held on to life.

That night, I had a new ‘old’ to dream of-one where I didn’t have to scream.

\*

A Lily; her loving husband; a camera and a Liv dancing in the rain. Finally, I felt the raindrops on my skin.

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