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Why does Fiction Matter? A Tale of the 1960s from Nepali Literature

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Abstract

The official finds its place in the chronicles of the state, while the ordinary reveals itself through the creative works of the people distanced from the official in society. The tension between the former and the latter adds dynamism to the social drama that inspires the creative genius to record the most ordinary with the precision of the lens beyond the access of the state. This paper centers on the basic question of relating fiction to study the historical worldviews and realities of a particular people, taking three test cases from the 1960s in Nepali literature: B. P. Koirala's *Narendra Dai* (written in 1964, published in 1970), Parijat's *Sirishko Phool* (1964), and Indra Bahadur Rai's *Aaj Ramita Chha* (1964). The three texts have presented the 1960s in Nepali literature from a perspective that lies beyond the reach of the official records in that all three authors have invented cozy but nonconformist worldviews of their own in order to set the quest of their protagonist. Drawing insights from new historicist theory, I have read the texts to see the ways each of the authors records the historical transitions of the 1960s from the perspective of the people, discussing how fiction matters in understanding and analysing historical realities of any point in time.

Keywords: agency, resistance, transition, people's history, self vs polity

Introduction

Often literary works imply the basic component of imagination and aesthetic sense of beauty, denying its role in imparting the dimension of social history in people. In other words, literature intertwines itself with history to derive the socio-political grounding, also referred to as setting in pure jargon of fiction. As a designer of a make-believe world, the fiction writer cannot fantasize about the absolute reality of her own to weave a completely new narrative that does not resemble any social set-up. Conversely, literature delves deep into the social configuration to explore the interaction among human beings and captures a social reality, though from a completely different viewpoint. This paper assumes that fictions matter in making sense of the time and place of a particular social reality and recording it for posterity. In other word, fictions turn into the repository of social history which continually informs the upcoming generation in the development of society as such and educates them by exposing the ills of earlier times.

As an imaginative form of art, literature also exercises liberty in designing human affairs to suit the taste of the author; still, the basic design and development of events find their way into the work of fictions in genuine ways. Fictions carry social history in the way historical documents present telling stories. In fact, each complements the other towards understanding the human possibility in life and society. The political reality and the imaginative power explore a novel way of presenting the social picture in literary form through fictions. This study examines the 1960s as the decade of historical/political transition in Nepali society as reflected through three seminal works of literature: B. P. Koirala's *Narendra Dai* (written in 1964, published in 1970), Parijat's *Sirishko Phool* (1964), and Indra Bahadur Rai's *Aaj Ramita Chha* (1964). I have read Koirala and Parijat in their original Nepal form, while I have made use of Manjushree Thapa's 2017 English translation *There's a Carnival Today* to analyse Rai's novel.

Critical Responses: Reading Existence, Gender, and Psyche

B. P. Koirala's *Narendra Dai,* Parijat's *Shirishko Phool,* and Indra Bahadur Rai's *There's a Carnival Today* are variously responded to in contemporary readings of the respective texts. As they were all

published in the 1960s, the quest for existence and meaning has always remained one of the main concerns of critics. Besides, the texts are read from the perspective of gender, in which the role of women in patriarchy is thoroughly examined. For instance, B. P. Koirala's Gauri or Munariya from *Narendra Dai* and Parijat's Sakambari in *Shirishko Phool* are treated as the epitome of women's revolt to bring about change in the ways of the people. All the texts have also been examined to see the rise of the voice from the margin. Indra Bahadur Rai's *There's a Carnival Today* writes the story of the quotidian life of Darjeeling and its people to document the insignificant issues gaining momentum in life as such. This section briefly reviews the major contemporary observations of the texts.

B. P. Koirala's *Narendra Dai* has been studied from various angles of observation. The scholars primarily focus on the presentation and treatment of women in their texts. For instance, Keshav Raj Chalise analyses the women in Koirala's novels. In his observation of the women, he finds coherence in the treatment of such women in Koirala's writings. Chalise states:

> Indramaya in *Teen Ghumti*, Sumnima in *Sumnima*, Uma in *Babu Aamara Chhora*, Gauri and Munaria in *Narendra Dai*, and Modiain in *Modiain* are all the female characters where they determine the major part of the plot. These images of women are not stereotypical women with constrained roles. They have the power and revolutionary nature to symbolise their identity. They are not only individual characters, but they are representative figures of female beings. (314)

Such women present themselves as an agent of change in the social psyche of the time as they threaten the comfortably running flow of social values. Society must change and find a new course of direction for them.

Koirala's novel has been approached from an existential perspective as well. The 1960s marks the high time for such literature. Nimagna Ghimire studies the major trends in Koirala's writing and concludes that *Narendra Dai* is an absurdist novel (110). Still, the issues of women have always gained primarily in the readings of contemporary critics like Ashok Thapa. He argues: "In all his works, B.P. has portrayed women with dignity and lauded their assertiveness, honesty, perseverance and sacrifice" (626). Like existence and the issues of women, Koirala also makes use of

Freudian psychological observations in human interactions. V. Sharma thus synthesises:

> Freud. B. P. wrote psychological stories relating to the problems of women, sex and the sadness of life. This style of story writing was new in Nepali literature, and for this reason he became very popular. Psychological aspects of such social problems as marriage between child-brides and middle-aged grooms, untouchability, caste and class distinctions, and exploitation of the poor and the have-nots by the feudal class are brilliantly depicted by Koirala, along with a touch of satire. (212)

Koirala's treatment of Freudian psychology exposes the inner human reality along with the social setup of his time. Koirala had experimented with a new form of writing the human existence as such.

Another major literary figure of the time was Parijat whose *Shirishko Phool* has attracted critical attention from diverse critics. In this study, I have gathered some of the contemporary studies on the novel. Saroj Dawadi studies the positioning of male chauvinism and the protest of women as the central issues in Parijat's *Shirishko Phool* (103). Dawadi places existential philosophy and absurdist ways of viewing reality as the context for the novel to weave the tale of the old soldier and the young girl. The issues of human existence are also one of the key concerns in reading the novel. Dipesh Neupane studies the text from an existentialist perspective to come to the following conclusion:

> Parijat's *Blue Mimosa* portrays the real state of a modern man who confronts alienation, loneliness, meaninglessness and boredom in life. The central character Suyog develops a sense of anxiety and alienation after the death of his beloved Sakambari. He feels isolated and alienated in the absence of his beloved. He realises the futility of life and becomes restless like a fish out of water. (5)

The influence of existential philosophy as evidenced in the preface of the novel prevails in Neupane's analysis of the text. Such reading also paves ways to approach the text from the perspective of gender.

Furthermore, Indira Acharya Mishra analyses the novel from the feminist critical perspective and sees a woman's body as a site of violence. As she writes, "Sakambari's unfeminine activities challenge

patriarchy. She has not embraced feminine attributes prescribed for women. Suyogbir finds her insensitive as she damn cares about others' opinions. Yet, despite her unfeminine activities, he gets attracted towards her. But she remains indifferent towards him. She has the feminist consciousness" (31). Mishra views the patriarchy as the social structure positively supporting Suyogbir in his attempt to draw pleasure from Sakambari's body. Like Mishra, Ramesh Adhikari also reads Sakambari as a rejection of man's dictation on her body (31). From the feminist point of view, the novel is read as an interaction centred on the interaction between Suyogbir and Sakambari. Similarly, Hari Jung Shah also gives a feminist reading of the poem and argues that the protest from women occupies the central stage in the text (n.pag.). Such readings focus on the agency of women and their protest in the patriarchal setup of society.

Like Koirala and Parijat, the maestro Nepali novelist Indra Bahadur Rai peoples his 1964 novel with the characters from the margin who reside in the hills of Darjeeling and work in the tea estates. For Bijayata Pradhan, Rai tells the story of the people not represented in mainstream writing. Pradhan writes: "This novel becomes important because it is the first work to sense the simmering discontent of the people of Darjeeling, urban and rural alike, towards the prevailing administrative system. It is also the first work to depict the political mindset of the people living in the hills of Darjeeling" (179). The formation of the political consciousness in the hills of West Bengal gains priority in Rai's writing. The ordinary people are placed in the backdrop of the political tremor that begins to show its first impact in the making of the collective identity of the people in Darjeeling. Nabin Paudyal also reads the novel, focusing on the political context of post-independent India. Paudyal emphasises the political episode of the murder of eight tea estate laborers in 1955 (n.pag.).

The formation of collective identity has become the key concern of critics in the novel. Though such readings have focused on the voice of the margin, the concerns and depiction of history have not been adequately paid attention to.

The available readings indicate a hitherto unexplored domain: the relationship between history and literature. How does literature

serve the cause of history? How does history metamorphose itself into the great fictional narrative of a particular age? When literary critics approach fictional texts to seek an answer to such questions, they realise the significance of writing fiction. The social history may not be as exact as the official political narratives of the time in that such history captures the major socio-political development of the era. However, the exclusionary nature of power tends to erase and/or omit certain aspect of historical reality, provided such reality does not serve or challenge the position of the prevailing order. In such circumstances, the official narratives are a mostly incomplete account of the past. Fictions complement history by surviving the detailed picture of society by placing the observer and the observed at the edge of society. Often, it takes a great deal of efforts to unveil the hidden in such narratives. Fictions matters in that it serves contemporary society by informing about the past through aesthetic weaving of the possible narrative, closely founded on the reality of the society that produces such narratives.

Nexus between History and Literature

This study makes a textual discussion of three Nepali novels from the 1960s in order to examine the social and historical forces embedded in the making of the works of literature. In other words, this study centers on exploring social history through aesthetic works of the time. Deriving theoretical insights from Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt, this study interprets the novels as the embodiment of social history. Even though literary texts are more concerned with imagination and aesthetic presentation in terms of both expression and argument, the people and their interaction are modeled after the real world. The organic development of the interaction/conflict shapes the course of action taken from the world. In this sense, both the literary and the historical merge together to sustain each other. The literary needs historical as much as the historical needs the narratives of the time to survive in the ages to follow them. As part of textual scholarship, the paper has examined B. P. Koirala, Parijat, and Indra Bahadur Rai as the critical insight into their contemporary history in their literary expression in order to establish the claim embedded in the question: "Why does fiction matter?"

Nepali Fictions in the 1960s

The 1960s presents itself as a unique decade in both literature and politics in Nepal in that the literary responds to the political in the most complicated ways. King Mahendra's new political system curtailed all the fundamental rights in Nepal, while Nehru's India never took the hills of West Bengal as any significant human society at all. In a such political context, Nepali literature responds to the larger questions of political transition through longer narrative works of art. B. P. Koirala, Parijat, and Indra Bahadur Rai do not raise the issue of their political boundary as such: instead, they move beyond to bring together the people and culture to pass on the political statement. The historical annals only do not suffice come true in such circumstances –history generally serves the purpose of the people who sponsor it. On the other hand, literature percolates deep down into the veins of the society from which to pick up the issues of the people, ignored hitherto from the political centers. Outlawed Koirala was imprisoned in Sundarijal jail, from where he rewrites the ills of the nation by weaving the narrative of Narendra Dai, Gauri Bhauju, and Munariya –all of them defy the centrally governing ethos of the time. They are ready to sacrifice themselves for their convictions. Parijat's antihero Suyogbir participated in World War II in Burma, experienced the hardship of battle in life, and derived an irregular sense of life from his encounter with women in Burma. Such perceptions of life and society instrumentally shape his self to understand the world around him, consequently leading him to force Sakambari to commit suicide. In Indra Bahadur Rai's *There's Carnival Today,* Janak experiences a lot of upheavals in the hills of West Bengals. The political tensions and the stress in the common people's lives help bring about Rai's philosophy of life emerging from the hills of Darjeeling. Creative response to the 1960s from Nepali literature adequately documents the political drama of the time from the people's perspective. In the absence of such literary writings, the tension would not have been recorded in the official annals by the repressive political orders.

Fictions matter in Nepali literature, for they document the socio-political history and hurdles of the time, the quest for liberal sensibility, and the political awakening to rewrite the contemporary needs of society in the 1960s. The historical comprehension of the

creative front reveals itself in the form of personal observation and national context. The larger picture gets imprinted in the form of social history as such. Similarly, feudalism, tuberculosis, and World War II have deeply engraved their impact on the consciousness of the time. The quest for liberal sensibility rests in the political resistance as embodied by Gandhi and the breaking of caste barriers at the time. The novels under examination boldly pass the statement on these issues. On the whole, the novels politically rewrite the awakening of societies in the best possible ways.

Nepali novels present history and hurdles in the 1960s. Dealing with the personal history of a retired war veteran, Suyogbir Sing, Parijit envisions an antihero who deeply broods over the nature of life after the war. Even on Sakambari's birthday, they have a party where Suyog visits them as an invitee. Parijat writes: "A golden head attached to a body of five feet and three inches, Sakambari stands in a saree of handloom, her back facing me. I am a youth of five feet six inches. Am I young? When I realised she was twenty-one years younger than me, I fell 21 kos (37.8 miles) away from the reality of Shivaraj's living hall" (53). The personal differences contribute to the comprehension of meaning in Suyog's life. He develops the same apprehension that the children in *Narendra Dai* feel for the protagonist of the same name. They do not know the reason but Narendra holds fear for all of the children in the village. As he appears in the scene, the children run away. Koirala thus presents Narendra arrival from Kolkota in his narration: "Sannani happened to look at a bullock cart coming from the west as we were in the sun for a while. She cried in haste, "Hide! Hide! Narendra Dai is there! Hide!" (4). To both Suyog and the children, the society and the entry of the protagonists are strange things respectively. They experience an uneasy atmosphere in such a context.

Both Parijat and Indra Bahadur Rai explicitly locate the national history in the happenings of the novels. For instance, Parijat places the whole context of World War II and the participation of Nepali soldiers in Burma to fight against the Japanese soldiers (90) to create a backdrop for the emergence of Suyogbir Singh, the Warrant Officer from the army. Bishalnagar and Indrachwok in the 1950s become the major sites for meeting both Suyogbir and Shiva. Such context adds to understanding the historical and spatial significance of the literary

work. Likewise, Indra Bahadur Rai enchains the whole narrative in real time by devising various historical allusions. He says that Janak's father died in 1930. As the author writes,

> Janak received news of his father's death in Calcultta in his second year of studying banking. The colleges had been closed, since the day before, to celebrate CV Raman's Nobel Prize victory. Janak put off a plan to visit Dandi, the site of Gandhi's Salt March, and returned to Darjeeling to support his grieving mother. Her composed bearing and serene countenance took him aback. (3)

In other instances, Rai refers to various points in national history to chronologically develop the events in the novel. He refers to Gandhi's rearrest and people's disagreement regarding the banning of the Congress (6) in the marriage to show that the events took place in 1932. The novelist knows the aesthetic measure of chaining the events in historical frames. He does not miss the major events in the region as he documents the effect of the great earthquake of 1934 on Janakman's life since Rai shows the protagonist shift his residence to another house after the shake (25). In the fictional works of the 1960s, the personal and the national intertwine the national aspiration and the personal efforts to accomplish them.

Like the personal and the national, the social forces are adequately documented in the creative works of the tiem. B. P. Koirala believes that fiction necessarily is rooted in the reality that people live in their life. The real and the imagined come as inseparable aspects of human life. He writes:

> Whatever the storyteller utters is all part of his autobiography. Perhaps, fiction refers to enjoying the reality of past life again, drawing the incidents forcefully from deep memory. I vividly recall the incidents from the past, see the people from the past and gradually invite them in the voice of faith into my heart –"Oh, Gauri Bhauju, Oh Munariya, Oh Narendra Dai…!!!" (2)

Rai also agrees with Koirala in the exploration of the inner social reality which Rai explores through his alter ego in Janak, displaying artistic orientation in that he thinks of writing a novel about Darjeeling someday in future. Rai narrates Janak and Sita reading Bhabani Bhikshu's "Will He Ever Return Again?":

> Sita smiled. "You are being literary today," she said to her husband.

> They both thought of the protagonist Sani from the story. The road to Chitlang hovered before Sita's eyes –a log, dusty road, the sweltering heat of the day…
>
> "You used to say that you're going to write a novel," she teased him, reminding him of his old dream.
>
> "I'm collecting material for it; I'm examining what I've already collected," Janak said. "I'm close to reaching a conclusion, which is – one lifetime is far too little for a person." (103)

Life and literary works cannot remain detached from each other in that each draws materials and inspiration from the other. Koirala introduces Narendra as one of the attractive youths who have a proper sense of fashion for his time. Narendra as the protagonist holds glamour: "He has the attraction of a brute type. It was not the attraction of a smooth marble statue; rather, it appeared like a sculpture derived from ordinary stone by average artists. Such statues are filled with roughness in determination and the elements of the brutal. It holds the craze of the cliff in which the scary occupies the greater portion" (2). Such characters inspire the social reality and prepare the ground for change. Narendra and Janak come close to challenging and rewriting the social core. Janak states:

> "I've looked at, analysed, and thought about a lot," Janak said after sitting back down. "I feel that we end up wherever the river currents lead. Life is merely a green leaf afloat on the water of a river. You are a leaf; I am a leaf. What an enormous exigency. We live life, and we make life live in life: this is the only meaning in a meaningless life." After a pause, he added, "These things are the things I'd write about if I were to write." (103)

The perceptions from society find their due place in both Koirala and Rai in that they deal with ordinary people's lives as the source of inspiration.

Along with history, the fictional world deals with the contemporary issues of societies. The crumbling feudal order, tuberculosis, and the impact of World War II emerged as the fundamental hurdles of the preceding time. Rai critically observes the situation of Janakman's father-in-law in eastern Nepal. He is a representative of the feudal order. Similarly, Rai passes on a very critical statement regarding the exploitation of the indigenous people in Eastern Nepal. He writes:

> After looking around to see who owned large, productive plots of land, people would start cases against the Rajbanshi, Sattar or Dhimal families and take over the plots for themselves. The history of Morang's indigenous peoples carried the ancient curse of the courst cases and offices of Gorkha's rule. Although the saying went "Go to Gorkha if you want justice", the indigenous people's experience taught them, "Yet live on in the Gorkha kingdom if you don't." They would flee overnight, abandoning their homes and fields, their wives and sons and daughters. The day after they fled, their land would become the property of some brave Gorkhali victor. In those days, when day and night were equally murky in Morang, the Gorkhalis committed daylight robbery, looting wealth and life and dignity. (12-13)

The injustice infused in the indigenous people in Nepal appears in a very vicarious remark in Rai's text. Also, Parijat also presents Shiva's mother staying in Madhes. In the 1960s, Koirala also presents the tale of Narendra Dai from the middle class Kshetri family from the eastern plains. Though Parijat tangentially touches upon the issue, Koirala and Rai's secantially delve into feudal order as the hurdle of development in their time.

All three creative authors bring to the center the issue of consumption. Koirala's Narendra Dai develops tuberculosis and suffers a lot from it (42). A plague of the time, Namgyal suffers from it in Rai's novel (49). Contemplating the impacts of TB, Rai moves on to present Namgyal's wife behaving weirdly: sexually dissatisfied, Yamuna appears in the text (81). As Rai narrates the encounter between Janak and Yamuna, "Janak straightened up, laughing. 'Here's where your attraction lies,' he said. 'From your waist to your feet, that part of you is long and slim and truly becoming. I like it' (85). Narendra and Namgyal share the same fate of early exit from the world for no sin on their part: the spread of the fatal illness claims their life. Parijat also deals with this issue seriously in her text as she helps Suyog understand the reality of life by presenting a case of tuberculosis and attraction in his neighborhood. Like a voyeur, he observes love between the shopkeeper's wife and the young softdrink hawker boy, just sixteen years of age. The matured woman suffers from tuberculosis. She has a hoary chest; still they make love for two hours (47). They exchange the pleasure of their body in the absence of the shopkeeper for two hours every day until she dies one day (125).

The novels of the 1960s deal with the issue of World War II. Parijat's Suyogbir emerges from the war, dead at his heart. He recalls his war days and his encounters with multiple women in Burma. He treats them like an object, without any kindness at all (91). He calls himself "old, drunkard, and soldier" (54) and finds it difficult to adjust to society. He is quickly attracted to women. He does not respect anybody: Sakambari commits suicide because Suyogbir Singh kisses her on her lips. Parijat narrates:

> I had lost control of myself. I was not in a position to tell right from wrong. Excited, I kissed her soft lips firmly holding at her fair neck and I felt abandoned by the compassion even before satisfaction. I was soaked in sweat as if awake from a frightening dream: my heart was palpitating. What would I do now? It's impossible to change history. I knew I would not be able to undo the malfeasance. (112)

Like Parijat, Rai also shows the impact of war in the hills of Darjeeling. However, Rai uses it as a frame of temporal reference to locate the events progress in the text:

> The three or four years between the Second World War and India's independence swept Janak along, as if on ocean currents and waves, to the meeting points of different situations, different nations and eras. Though it was no longer possible to keep advancing in the same way, he tried to remain in commensurate circumstances. (7)

Since Parijat worries much about the meaning and existence of people, she heavily deals with the issue in her text. She also declares that the war turns the human heart into a machine (35). The impact of war also becomes the hurdle in the writings of the novels in the 1960s.

In search of liberal sensibility, the novels have made use of resistance as such. Gandhi is politically personified as the epitome of resistance in that he moves beyond breaking the traditionally set boundaries. Koirala presents Narendra Dai influenced by the Gandhian ideology of life. As a social reformer, he does not accept the idea of caste and untouchability (23). Munariya offers water from the well to a cobbler: the Mother opposes this because it breaks the rule of untouchability (24). A true Gandhian activist, he does not subscribe to traditionally held values that his mother celebrates at home, resulting in conflict with his mother. Rai also designs his protagonist very close to Narendra Dai. Rai's Janak has assimilated the idea of

nonviolence in his life and it enhances the sense of tolerance in him. Rai explains:

> "No, you mustn't beat anyone, Aama. Non-violence…" Janak would tell his mother about Gandhi. "You must have faith in humanity and love everyone, even a foe, understand, Aama? You must lovingly conduct a satyagraha and make him realise his mistake. Do you know, Aama, that demands grounded in the truth have the power to bring about a complete transformation in the heart of a guilty man? And even if by chance he becomes harsher or more oppressive or cruel, we must observe the vow of civil disobedience, and not be enraged or seek revenge. Do you understand now, Aama?" (4-5)

Janakman has high tolerance, certainly emanating from his conviction in the Gandhian philosophy of life. Such a bent of mind helps him relate to his contemporary political development and participation in politics and business.

The characters challenge the existing social conditions by rewriting some of them. One of the domains is marriage. In Parijat, Shiva's father had an intercaste marriage with a Gurung girl (32). The whole set of people is both culturally and biologically hybrid. Koirala's Narendra overwrites the decision of his family by rejecting his wife, Gauri. Immediately after the marriage, he realises that Gauri is not fully grown. He develops a sort of special affection for Munariya. He engages the children in the game of football and goes to the other side with Munariya as he says he knows where the good grass is (7). In the rigid social structure, marriage functions as the special drama through which the couples realise themselves in the form of family. The struggle turns into a very complex phenomenon in Nepal. However, Rai's characters emerge very comfortable with such kind of practice. Janak Yonzan falls in love with Sita Pradhan who comes to Darjeeling for further study. Rai tells: "What this demonstrates is how closely Janak and Sita –the "father and daughter" of the *Ramayana* –guarded the secret of their "sinful" love, the precious truth that only they knew. Janak's confidant Sumshere knew only this much: Sita had come here from Nepal to study. She was probably a Pradhan by caste" (5). Both of them are well-accpeted in society without any tension. On the contrary, Munariya also has to fight the hardest battles to elope with Narendra. She elopes with him to avoid getting married to her betrothed (38). She did not think of

anything before falling in love. She just loved Narendra and ran away with him. Munariya could not conform to the norms of society. Such conformation would not make it possible for her to realise her love (46). By breaking the institutional dictation, all three novels present a unique solidarity in the quest for liberal sensibility in society.

Such fictions aim at awakening the political sensibilities in the 1960s to rewrite the current needs of society. Rigorously writing the socio-political dimensions of society in the creative texts, all three authors challenge the existing order. In 1960, Mahendra imprisoned B. P. Koirala. In *Narendra Dai,* Koirala compares his life to that of Gauri: he comes to realise that one does not have to commit sin to suffer perpetually in life (34). The stoic nature of life requires political intervention to bring about transformation. Parijat calls it the crisis of meaning in her time: she shows killer denrobium densifloram to Suyog and says that she enjoys looking at the flowers suck the hornets in them (41). Sakambari's crude ways of viewing the principles of nature frighten the very core of Suyogbir. However, Parijat exposes the murky soul of the antihero as Parijat writes, "I am an old soldier. I don't have any hobby for flowers but women. I began to have a headache. I attempted to forget myself playing with the fresh blue flowers" (44). Suyog has lost any political sensibility, turning himself into a machine. The crisis of his time develops from the absence as such. Indra Bahadur Rai documents the life of the people, otherwise left out in silence from the annals of Indian history. He employs the art of fiction in order to record the social history of the people at the margin of the nation. In this sense, Rai's novel serves the people to write themselves afresh and rewrite the larger canon by placing themselves as both participants and observer of the larger national canon. There was a strike at Tukvar Tea Estate as they continued the British rules. For the first time, Darjeeling wants to rewrite the colonial legislation on its own terms (134). The tension at the tea estate grows further and a political process sets out in Darjeeling for the first time (190). Rai closely observes the society form its political ethos to rewrite the needs of its time and uses the political demonstration in Darjeeling as the carnival in the novel (211). The novel holds up the issue of political awakening in Darjeeling in the 1960s. Like Koirala and Parijat, Rai also seeks the intervention of the people in shaping the political spirit in his society.

The 1960s captures the contemporary ethos of the transitioning society by writing down the historical happenings of the time. The fictions review the development of history from the 1920s to the effects of World War II on human sensibility. Furthermore, the major obstacles of the time are the rigid social structure and tuberculosis. All the fictions closely connect the development of the plot with such issues. The feudal order and the attitude of the state towards it attract Rai's attentions as much as Koirala's. Though Parijat does not directly discuss the implication of the feudal order, Suyog embodies the whole system in his gene. All three novelists give adequate space to tuberculosis to derive meaning from the life of the people employed to deal with the development of the plotline. The terminal disease claims the major character in Koirala's text, while the minor characters suffer from it in Parijat and Rai's novels. It helps to form a new understanding of life in Parijat's Suyogbir and Rai's Janak. The fictions also uphold resistance as a necessary mode of life: Parijat equips Sakambari with it to challenge the arrogance of Suyogbir; Koirala's Gauri, Narendra, and Munariya live by resisting, challenging, and living life on their own terms; finally, Janak knows that Darjeeling requires it to grow lively. In Koirala and Rai, Gandhi's impact is felt through the development of the personality of the lead characters: Narendra and Janak. On the whole, the fictions present the quest for liberal sensibility through resistance which challenges the feudal ethos embedded in the caste hierarchy through marriage, challenging untouchability, and enhancing the spirit of tolerance of the other. Fictions function as a fertile space to grow and impart political sensibility, implying the need for larger political intervention in the existing order of society. Koirala, Parijat, and Rai rewrite the contemporary quest and ethos in the fictions in order to help grow a more tolerant society where the self understands and respects the other.

Why Fiction Matters

The hard historical chronicles of states, by the limitations of their own, fail to reach the people who form the ethos of the present. Societies turn dysfunctional when the roots of the ruling heads lose ground in such ethos, emerging from the people. Fictions matter significantly since they show the ground to the ruling heads and help

identify the genuine spirit from the bottom. Creative genius can intervene in society to see the complexity of human life, existence, and political and social development. Without any restrictions, novelists can also intervene in the consciousness of the people even while in jail and direct the formation of a national spirit. The tension between the people and the state invites the critical attention of creative people to explore the point of equilibrium.

At a unique point in history, Nepali literature got three great fictions in 1964: B. P. Koirala completes *Narendra Dai*; Parijat publishes *Shirishko Phool*, and Indra Bahadur Rai's *Aaj Ramita Chha* also reaches the reader. The three texts review South Asian historical development from the 1920s as a backdrop for multiple points of junctures in the life of Nepali people. They touch on and examine the critical hurdles of the time in the form of feudalism and tuberculosis: the repressive social and medical issues shape the direction of human quest in the novels. The crises of meaning catch a large share of reflection in all three novels as the misery of the time are rooted in an inability to understand oneself and others. The three texts capture the spirit that lies beyond the access of the official annals of the state and promotes the nonconformist views of life. The texts emerge as political commentary on the life of the people as they seek to pose a threat to the existing order. Fictions matter, for they have the political ambition to serve the people at the base.

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2

Study of Evangelical Womanhood in Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story*

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Abstract

Religion provided enslaved African Americans with refuge from oppression by aiding the black community's spiritual, secular, and political concerns and developments in America's pre- and post-Civil War period. For white women, evangelical womanhood was an alternative for usefulness and an active social life to come out of the constraints of a homely life. On the other hand, black women embraced evangelicalism to find solace from the atrocities of slavery and actively participated in the upliftment of the black community through preaching, teaching, and social service, keeping in mind their love for God and humanity. The present paper focuses on how Evangelicalism and its ideals shaped black women's (and white women's) lives in the context of Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story: Being An Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold*. The study presents Kate Drumgoold, Mrs. Drumgoold, and Mrs. Bettie House as the epitome of evangelical womanhood who, despite hardships, chose to follow evangelical Christianity for self-awareness and self-realisation.

Keywords: Evangelical womanhood, slavery, loss, white mother, self-realisation.

Slavery, the system of unpaid labour and complete servitude, existed throughout history and was practiced by tribes, cultures, civilisations, racial groups, and religions. The Atlantic slave trade of black Africans began in the mid-fifteenth century and lasted until the end of the nineteenth century. To meet the demand for a large number of labourers in the New World (North America) and to fulfil their dreams of becoming wealthy, white colonists employed black Africans as unpaid labourers to do a variety of work in agriculture

and industries. Slavery as an institution was economically and politically oriented and based on dominant racial ideology and white supremacy, exploiting and dehumanising black men, women, and children.

To resist hardships and extreme torture, over some time, enslaved people adopted different strategies that included "literacy, religion, escape, malingering, and rebellion" (Williams 62). In 1740, white Americans prohibited enslaved people from reading and writing because they thought literacy would bring "great inconveniences" (*American Slavery* 66). Slavery as a systematised institution existed and survived with the help of legislation, religious justifications, and racial bias. However, as time passed, the enslaved people adopted varied ways to resist exploitation. Between 1830 and 1870, the abolitionist movement in America raised voices for the emancipation of all enslaved people. The American Civil War, fought between the U.S. federal government and southern states, resulted in the defeat of the southern states and the abolition of slavery. On December 26, 1865, the United States of America, in the thirteenth amendment of the constitution, approved the abolition of slavery as a law: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction" (U.S. Constitution, amend. 13, sec. 1). The abolition and subsequent decline of slavery against the backdrop of the American Civil War in America opened new prospects and challenges in the lives of African-Americans.

Bounded in the chains of slavery, most enslaved Black people in the nineteenth century followed the spiritual path of Christianity in pursuit of solace by converting themselves to Evangelical Christianity. Evangelicalism played a crucial role in shaping the black community's way of thinking and living in the post-Civil War era in America. Evangelicalism broadly refers to a religious approach and, during those times, focused not only on building a personal relationship with God but also emphasised how white women and black slave women constructed their relationship with God through Christianity and how this faith in God developed to build a relationship with their children, family, and the surrounding community.

Theologian Alister McGrath defines Evangelicalism by the six fundamental "controlling convictions" (55). These convictions identify "the supreme authority of Scripture as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living" (55–56) and consider "the majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord and as the Savior of sinful humanity" (55–56). Evangelical Christianity emphasises the need for personal conversion and gives importance to the Christian community for "spiritual nourishment, fellowship, and growth" (55–56).

In the nineteenth century, the dominant ideology for women was "the cult of true womanhood" (Welter 21), which reinforced the concept of the ideal representation of women as virtuous, refined, and kind to their families and enslaved Black people. This established a separate "sphere" for women, wherein they were expected to follow and adhere to four virtues: "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Welter 21). The literature written for nineteenth-century women determined the roles that literature sanctioned for women. However, the examination of the roles of women in literature and behavioural code suggests that "the cult of true womanhood" (Welter 21) was restrictive and permitted only one "accepted ideal of femininity" toward which all women would strive. (qtd. in Boylan 62)

In the nineteenth century, new ideals of womanhood emerged with the proliferation of women's groups and organisations devoted to benevolent purposes. Ronald W. Hogeland has demonstrated several distinctive lifestyles available to middle-class women that offered a choice of acceptable behaviours within these cultures: "ornamental," "romanticized," "radical," and "evangelical womanhood" (Sweet 63), wherein evangelical womanhood was ascribed a "self-assertive, reform-minded posture" (63). It depicted Evangelical women as "nurturing, sensitive, and pious; more aware than men of injustice; and more capable of providing comfort to those in need" (Boylan 65). Evangelical womanhood "was a role choice whereby individuals shaped their lives around their religious convictions, forming friendships, undertaking activities, even choosing jobs that would best further their image as converted persons" (Boylan 66). Black women who willingly followed the path of spirituality and Evangelical Christianity in nineteenth-century

America embraced the notion of Evangelical womanhood to devote their lives to their community's welfare by preaching, teaching, and providing healthcare services.

Kate Drumgoold's *A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* (1898) is a post-emancipation account of her experiences regarding education for herself and her community. Her narrative does not focus on her quest for physical freedom, but on her mother's experiences of bondage and freedom, which admire her as a maternal heroine and strong woman: "Writing narratives of slavery offered women like Drumgoold [and Burton], who had had little direct experience of bondage, the opportunity to celebrate their mothers as examples of genuine female heroism" (Andrews xxxi).

Kate Drumgoold's family comprised "seventeen girls" (*SGS* 8) and a son: "he was my mother's only boy" (8). The large family with eighteen children indicated the prevalence of boy preference among black slave families. Kate's mother was of the view that boys are more capable than girls in every aspect: "she [Kate's mother] often would say if we were all boys, she would not have to worry, for boys could do much better than girls" (13). Despite being enslaved, the family lived in their own house with Drumgoold's mother and father before the American Civil War. However, one day the house caught fire and turned into ashes, and the Drumgoold family became homeless: "I was two and a half years old, as near as I can remember, when my own slave mother's house was burned to the ground" (*SGS* 10). Her mother saved all the children from the fire alone, as her father was not at home.

After this incident, Kate Drumgoold's white mistress Mrs. Bettie House took the "two and half years old" (*SGS* 10) Kate Drumgoold to her house: "her heart so fixed that she could not leave me at my mother's any longer (6)". She provided her motherly affection and care: "she took me to be her dear, loving child, to eat, drink, sleep, and go wherever she went, if it was for months or even years; I had to be there as her own and not as a servant, for she did not like that, but I was there as her loving child for her to care for me, and everything that I wanted I had" (6). Kate Drumgoold developed an affectionate mother-daughter bond with Mrs. Bettie House. Kate Drumgoold gave her the role of mother in her life; she addressed her as "my

white mother" (*SGS* 6), so she had "two darling mothers" (16): one who gave birth to her but, owing to poverty, was forced to part with her in her early childhood, and the foster mother, who loved her and wanted to protect her from the complex realities of enslaved life. In this context, Jennifer Fleischner comments: "It is primarily around these two maternal centres that her narrative—and identity—revolve, while circulating throughout are the intertwining themes of memory, sickness, loss, recovery, slavery, gratitude, and whiteness" (399).

Mrs. Bettie House's Evangelical faith, motherhood, and maternal love for young Kate compelled: "My white mother [did not like the idea] of calling us her slaves, and she always prayed to God that I should never know what slavery was, for she said I was never born to serve" (4). As a result, Kate Drumgoold remained unaware of the atrocities and violence experienced by the enslaved people during her stay with Mrs. Bettie House. In Kate's narrative, there is no implicit or explicit reference to any cruelty perpetrated by her owner, Mrs. Bettie House. She spent a happy childhood in the company of a "white mother" (4), who provided her with the privilege of attending church, learning to ride a horse, and having access to valuable gifts:

> I can call to mind when she the blessed one, that I call my white mother, went to get me some shoes and a fine hat, and the one that sold them told her, as she looked at a hat I wanted, that its price was twenty dollars . . . and he told my white mother that was too much for to spend on a hat for me, but she told him nothing would cost too much for her to get for me, and she got that fine hat for me and he had his money. (*SGS* 11-12)

In this context, Marie Schwartz, who has done extensive research on enslaved children, remarks that the owner, enslaved parents, and children shared a complex relationship: "At some times and in some places, owners succeeded in gaining the loyalty of slave children." "Most were children raised from a young age in the big house by their owners with no close relationships with kin or other slaves—children dependent on close attachments to the white family for their survival" (104). Similarly, Kate Drumgoold enjoyed a warm bond with Mrs. Bettie House.

Kate Drumgoold's selfless and pure love for her white mother and her sudden demise affected her emotionally: "The Lord has called her away from her child to be with Him, and how could I live

without her [her white mother]?" (*SGS* 11). She tried to counterbalance the loss of separation from her white mother by idealising the power of her white mother to fulfil her desires. She looked upon herself as Mrs. Bettie's "own dear, loving child" (6), as the happy memories of the time spent with her white mother became her strength for the rest of her life, and she regularly prayed to God to "help my feeble life be formed like hers [Mrs. Bettie House's]" (14).

Even her siblings' childhood was spent as household slaves, which deprived them of the love and nurturance of their mother as the institution of slavery in the American South promoted the separation of black slave children from their parents for monetary gains: "Mothers and fathers were brutally separated; children, when they became of age, were branded and frequently severed from their mothers" (Davis 2). Partly due to the tragic burning of Drumgoold's house and also because of the selling of her mother, the children were forced to do hard labour in slaveholders' households.

It was a common practice among white aristocratic slaveholding societies of the American South to send an enslaved Black person or poor man in place of a wealthy man as security in the Confederate Army as a soldier to fight in the American Civil War. Mr. House, Kate Drumgoold's owner, needed money "to keep the rich man from going to the field of battle" (4). Therefore, Kate's mother, Mrs. Drumgoold, became his victim when she "...was sold at the beginning of the war, [taken away] from all of her little ones, after the death of the lady that she belonged to" (*SGS* 4). The American Civil War was fought between American North and American South from 1861 to 1865. The Northern states of America supported the abolition of slavery, whereas the Confederate States of America, a collection of eleven southern states, opposed the abolition of slavery in America. The money collected was used to send a poor man into the American Civil War in place of Mr. House. Kate Drumgoold's brother James also met the same fate and was sent to the war: "The gentleman that my dear brother belonged to was a Methodist and a minister." "He did not want to go to war, so he sent my poor brother to defend what belonged to him" (29). The internal slave trade of African-Americans increased during the American Civil War to settle the financial obligations faced by white enslavers due to financial losses incurred in the war.

The separation of Kate Drumgoold from her mother (and also the death of her white mother) impacted her psyche: "the saddest thought to me was to know which way she [her black mother] had gone, and I used to go outside and look up to see if there was anything that would direct me, and I saw a clear place in the sky, and it seemed to me the way she had gone, and I watched it for three and a half years" (*SGS* 5). She tried to fill the gap of pain, loss, and separation from her mother by searching for her mother in the sky In this context, Heather Andrea Williams remarks, "In a sky as vast as her grief, the child fixed her mind on a clear place to help her grapple with the dislocation brought on by her mother's abrupt disappearance" (24). In this way, young Kate designed "her own mourning ritual, a practise infused with hope and a touch of magical thinking that allowed her to believe her mother was in the sky and would return just as suddenly as she had disappeared" (Williams *Help Me* 24). She spent her childhood surrounded by the memory of dual loss: loss due to separation from her mother and loss due to the death of the white mistress.

Kate Drumgoold, her siblings, and their mother formed a strong family unit after her mother returned to Virginia at the end of the American Civil War to reunite with her children with the help of information and resources provided by a white abolitionist, Major Bailey.

In the post-Civil War era, after the abolition of slavery in the United States, Kate Drumgoold and her elder sisters, after getting freedom from the legal bonds of slavery, started working as domestic helpers in different households to help their mother earn money in the absence of their father and brother, highlighting that Kate Drumgoold's narrative is "an account of a female family unit working to support each other when the mother had finally gathered them all together after separation." These female households were portrayed as complete families, even if they were not conventional in structure (Carby, 37). The Drumgoold family, supported by a single mother and nine daughters, worked in unison to manage the household:

> . . .the typical slave family was matriarchal in form, for the mother's role was far more important than the father's. In so far as the family did have significance, it involved responsibilities which traditionally belonged to women, such as cleaning house, preparing food, making

> clothes, and raising children. The husband was at most his wife's assistant, her companion and her sex partner. (Stampp qtd. in Davis 15)

After a reunion with her siblings, Kate Drumgoold's mother searched for their father. She found "he was married to another she tried to get him; but she could do nothing about it. . .he found him another wife" (8). His getting remarried underscores his lack of deep ties of love and affection with his children and wife, due to which he quickly gave up on his family. As such, the institution of slavery destroyed Kate Drumgoold's family by splitting them apart, illustrating "the mother-centered family with its emphasis on the primacy of the mother-child relation and only tenuous ties to a man" (Bracey et al., qtd. in Davis).

Kate Drumgoold's narrative highlights how she developed cordial relations with the individuals around her and how her solid evangelical faith in God "helped me to find love and favour with all after my white mother was gone from this earth when I felt that I would soon follow the darling one to the blessed mansion" (14). Traversing the path of evangelical womanhood, she built up a relationship of love, kindness, and motherly bond with most of her white employers: "It was there that I met Mrs. Sarah Potter." She has been all of a mother to me to give me all the encouragement she could bestow on me" (*SGS* 34). She referred to Mrs. C. L. Franklin as a mother: "Miss C. L. Franklin's mother, who is a lovely woman whom we all love as a mother, for she had many of the students at her house to board, like Mrs. William Lovett, and she was so very kind to all of them that she will be remembered by us all, for we love those in our school life that would say a kind word to us" (47). She "learned to love as a mother" (37) to Mrs. Haseltine, a lady from Boston. Her Evangelical faith, spirituality, and love for God helped her develop close motherly bonds with all her employers, despite the fact that she was a worker and these women were her employers.

Kate Drumgoold's amiable relationships with her white masters, mistresses, and employers seemed to develop and evolve simultaneously with the notion of love and humanity concerning Evangelical Christianity and womanhood. Patricia Hill Collins emphasises this idea of developing cordial relationships with whites:

> [women] who are domestic workers or who work in proximity to Whites may experience a unique relationship with the dominant group. For example, African-American women domestics are exposed to all the intimate details of the lives of their White employers. Working for Whites offers domestic workers a view from the inside . . . In some cases domestic workers form close, long-lasting relationships with their employers. (185)

By developing motherly bonds with her white employers, Kate Drumgoold transcended the oppression resulting from slavery. Mrs. Bettie House's motherly treatment and love towards an enslaved Black person who was considered racially inferior by Southern slave holding aristocratic society negated and opposed the ideology of racial and class discrimination.

In childhood, Kate Drumgoold "was baptised by Rev. David Moore, the pastor of the Washington Avenue Church" (*SGS* 17) as "In a culture that placed black females at the bottom of a hierarchy of human value, conversion gave black women a sense of self-esteem, personal worth, and dignity rooted in God's validation of their humanity" (Lindley 180). In evangelical Christianity, she found a means to face the injustice and oppression that many African-Americans encountered based on race, class, and gender: "I look to Jesus." "I have given my life, and He can hold me in the power of His might and keep me from failing" (17). Her faith in Jesus Christ gave her the strength to resist the injustice bestowed on enslaved people.

Being a devoted Evangelical woman, Kate Drumgoold used education to serve and uplift newly emancipated African-Americans from oppression, discrimination, racial degradation, and educational deprivation. For evangelical women, education led to self-awareness and self-realisation to achieve spiritual salvation and social activism. She became an educator and a distinct literary voice in her community to bring about social change. Her determination to educate herself and the African-Americans became her life's objective: "For every time that I saw the newspaper there was some one of our race in the far South getting killed for trying to teach (*SGS* 20-21)," She decided, "I made up my mind that I would die to see my people taught. . ."I could not rest till my people were educated" (21), as she realised education was a panacea for the agonised African-Americans.

After the abolition of slavery in America, the black slaves were free but confronted with new challenges and struggles: "the source of oppression was deeper than the racial discrimination that produced unemployment, shoddy housing, inadequate education, and substandard medical care" (Davis). The newly emancipated African-Americans were left with no choice but to work on plantations as labourers or as domestic servants in white households. However, the realisation that they could combat hunger, poverty, and healthcare through education became their prime objective:

> Even as they risked everything to reach freedom, African American's once secret acquisition of literacy emerged as both as public demand and support for education. Their determination to acquire literacy and numeracy generated the energy to build schoolhouses even when they talked the physical challenges of hunger, disease and homelessness. (Williams *Self-Taught* 30)

Kate Drumgoold was aware of the value of literacy for African-Americans. Her desire to educate herself and then to educate African-Americans is seen in her effort to secure schooling for herself despite poverty. Working as a domestic help in different white households, Kate Drumgoold continued to save money to receive formal education and schooling: "I should save every cent that I could so that I might send myself to school someday" (*SGS* 23). In Washington, D.C., Kate Drumgoold's schooling began at "Wayland Seminary, under the leadership of Professor G. M. P. King, of Bangor, Maine" (23). After attending Wayland Seminary school "for three years" (23), she moved to Brooklyn in 1878. She had to resume her job as a domestic servant due to financial constraints, but the determination to acquire an education made her "earn money to go off to school" (24).

Kate Drumgoold was "reform-minded" (Sweet 63); she strongly desired to uplift and bring social reform to African-Americans. In 1886, Kate Drumgoold completed her education and became a school teacher: "all of the people sought me to take their children in my school and give them a start. "I had my hands full of work, but I let them come in because the Board always sent them to me to find out if I could find room and time, and I always made the time" (*SGS* 25). She continued to teach deprived African-Americans for eleven years to "refine and elevate the mind" (27), in order to "cultivate our hearts

and minds and live to bless those we meet" (27). Her optimism and strong faith in God helped her continue to teach African-Americans. Besides, black students have a strong desire to acquire knowledge: "When I had finished my public school, I taught a private school for the summer and had a large number of scholars, and they progressed well." Some of them would go without their food all day to study extra lessons (52–53), which gave her strength despite different constraints.

Kate Drumgoold, in her narrative, presents an authentic and fresh perspective on black slave girls' maternal relationship with white mistresses and black mothers and its impact on her mind. Kate Drumgoold, through her narrative, highlights the collective struggle of the slave community before and after emancipation in the American South. It depicts the struggle of African-Americans who found solace in evangelical Christianity and emerged victors. She not only represented the plight, conflicts, and power struggles of black slave women in racist and classist American society but also acted as an agency that resisted the brutal slave system by exercising autonomy and following the path of love, faith, and spirituality: "No sooner had the heads of a favoured few been filled with knowledge than their hearts yearned to dispense blessings to the less fortunate of their race. "With tireless energy and eager zeal, women of colour have worked in every conceivable way to elevate their race" (Terrell 65). She demanded change and equality for the black slave community.

Kate Drumgoold's traumatic experiences of slavery and separation from her family in her early childhood made her turn to God for love, warmth, and comfort. She expressed her gratitude towards God for the significant accomplishments in her life: "If there is one that should feel grateful, it is this feeble-bodied slave girl, for I was such a slave to sickness, and God was so good to raise me, even me, and I will say, praise His name" (14). She tried to connect every good deed to the mercy of God and always placed faith in God during her difficult times and sickness: "The Lord helped me to find love and favour with all after my white mother was gone from this earth" (14). Her description of her religious and secular life, an account of her relationship with her white and black mother and with white employers, and her spiritual development and quest for

education made her testimonial voice distinct and unique: "We, as the Negro Race, are a free people, and God be praised for it. "We, as the Negro Race, need to feel proud of the race, and I for one do so with my heart, soul, and mind, knowing as I do, for I have laboured for the good of the race, that their children might be the bright and shining lights" (*SGS* 3).

Kate Drumgoold, in Evangelicalism, found a means to transform her memory of childhood separation into love for humanity and God. She tried to make her life valuable by associating herself with African-Americans' collective welfare. She imbibed the ideals and values of evangelicalism to create educational and social opportunities for African-Americans. Within complex series of constraints of male authority, white patriarchy, racism, and class difference, Kate Drumgoold being a black Evangelical woman, took hold of her life and shaped goals and activities based on her conception of womanhood as ". . . religious behavior became a more important means of self-expression for them [women] than it was for men" (Boylan 76).Evangelicalism helped her move from self-growth to community growth, treading on the path of education for spiritual comfort and self-realisation.

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3

"Politics of the Female Body" in the Selected Poems of Malika Ndlovu

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Abstract

South African woman poet Malika Ndlovu, locates the female body in the different realms like society, culture and history in the post-colonial context and traces the politics that are woven, constructed and construed around her body. Ndlovu, registers her protest and resistance against the female body being reduced to a site of colonisation and exploitation by the patriarchal societies. She employs the female body parts as symbols, metaphors and images to reflect the oppression and subjugation that she is subjected to physically, psychologically, emotionally, culturally and historically. The politics that she constructs around the female body focus upon how the female body is transformed into a site of colonisation, into a site to reconstruct the politics of history, into a body to restructure politics of amnesia and finally as a body that transforms into a site to revive female bonding. This paper traces the politics of the female body that are present in four of her poems, 'Spinal Secrets,' 'Next Door,' ' Lydia In the Wind' and 'Women Weaving' by drawing theoretical frame works of Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Katrak, K. H., Joanna Thornborrow and other post-colonial theorists to scaffold the ideas of the researcher.

Keywords: body politics, body as a site of colonisation, amnesia, female bonding, historical memory, post colonialism.

Introduction

Malika Ndlovu is a poet and playwright from Post Apartheid South Africa who believes in the healing and medicinal nature inherent in writing poetry. She believes that once a poet reaches the crescendo and climax within the complex writing system, the naked truth spills out from the deep psyche and starts spinning an emotional and awe-

inspiring narrative. Her vociferous voice calls out for the empowerment of women's status in every realm like domesticity, education, employment, culture, politics, economy and, of course, women's autonomy and freedom. Ndlovu asserts that "The starting point is yes, I'm a writer, and then the context is, a writer from where, I'm a writer from Africa, so I'm a black woman, I'm an African woman specifically" (Boswell 2003: 589).

Through her works, she celebrates womanhood, elevates women's status and appreciates the beauty of the female body and sings of the women's strengths. Running parallel to these ideas, she decries male domination enforced upon women and protests the suppression and oppression of women caught within the complex web of patriarchal templates. She resists the colonisation of women's bodies by her male partner. She delves deep into the gender inequities prevalent in patriarchal post-colonial society and protests the bias and violence that women are subjected to. Her poems reflect her vision, views, ideas and insights for a better society free from gender disparity.

Malika Ndlovu's collections of poems are *Born in Africa But* (1999), *Womb to World: A Labour of Love* (2001), *Truth is Both Spirit and Flesh* (2008), and the poetic memoir *Invisible Earthquake: A Woman's Journey through Stillbirth* (2009).

This paper attempts to discuss the poems of Malika Ndlovu in the backdrop of politics woven around the female body regarding political, economic, cultural and physical aspects of South African women. The argument of this paper relates well and runs parallel with the idea of Ronit Frenkel: "Issues surrounding victimhood, voice, agency, subjectivity, power, gaze, silences, knowledge and nation have often been recast in African feminist theory and need further exploration in South Africa today" (02). Though the above-mentioned aspects have deeply affected the lives of South African women, patriarchy has been the ubiquitous 'profoundly non-racial institution' (Sachs 1993:13) that has its way across various communities. Ndlovu employs powerful images, metaphors and symbols about the female body to represent the searing signatures etched on her physical body and within the deep layers of her psyche

as the marks of violence, colonisation and oppression unleashed upon her by the untamed male authority.

The politics she constructs around the female body reveal and interpret how the female body is transformed into a site of patriarchal colonisation. She exposes how the female body turns into a site where the politics of history are revisited and reconstructed. Ndlovu uncovers the woman's body as a site where politics of amnesia vis-a-vis memory are retraced within the post-colonial context. She locates the female body that is transformed into a site to revive and renew female bonding among the women poets in the post-colonial and post-Apartheid contexts. Ndlovu locates the female body within different social and cultural institutions to trace and retrace the various power dynamics, power politics, power equations and power relations that define, alter and shape the status of a woman in the apathetic patriarchal framework. Through her poetic works, Ndlovu reflects on the statements made by Spencer and Wood: "Feminist theories provide insights into different aspects of power dynamics in social institutions implementing "patriarchal colonialism" (477).

Through her poems, Ndlovu questions the neglected aspect of a woman's autonomous agency and protests the near absence of her representation in intellectual areas. She questions the patriarchal authority that manifests itself through framing unfair, non-inclusive, biased and subjective laws and norms against women within social, cultural, political and legal institutions, thereby reinforcing the view of Broadbent. "Radical feminist analyses reveal that the debris of "patriarchal colonialism" includes the continuing subordination of women through culturally condoned, widespread, and institutionalised male violence that survives in various forms to contemporary times" (2011).

Ndlovu locates the female body within the backdrop of a post-colonial patriarchal society. She focuses on how women have been reduced to sites or territories of exploitation, subjugation, oppression and colonisation through normalisation, internalisation and indoctrination by the various social institutions. She claims that it is crucial and necessary for women to decolonise their minds to liberate themselves from social and cultural shackles. Frantz Fanon, in his

seminal text on decolonization, *The Wretched of the Earth*, suggested that decolonisation was the "putting into practice" (37) of the sentence "the last shall be first and the first last" (37). It is a remarkable move that the marginalised bodies are turning around and giving back, resisting, protesting and contesting the power relations and power dynamics. Going by the theory of Fanon, Ndlovu seems to be suggesting women to interrogate, introspect, and question the politics of power that rest within the pockets of social, political, cultural and other institutions in the postcolonial patriarchal society.

In the poem, 'Born in Africa, But,' the awakening of her female consciousness, the turnaround of power relations and the experience of life through the perspective of an awakened woman to her situations are made evident. She says the universal spirit and essence that pervades every female has been stimulated and aroused within her.

> "Born in Africa but
> living before and beyond
> living before and beyond
> a universe awakens in me" (28-31).

Ndlovu articulates that women are more powerful than they are actually held to be by social and cultural institutions. She envisions a perfect, brilliant and astounding image of the women who lie outside the peripheries of the patriarchal society's limited imagination and beliefs. Through her poems, she gives a concrete shape to her vision, dreams and ideas. She gives a clarion call to all those women who are entrapped and enmeshed within the societal structures; to break themselves free, rally for themselves, realise their dreams and demonstrate their powerful potential. For her, poetry is a comfort and a vibrant vehicle that veers her vision into visible action.

Her poems articulate her ideas, hopes and visions. She seems to echo Audre Lorde's ideas in her text, 'Poetry is not a Luxury' "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action" (36).

The Female Body as an Archive of Secrets and Stories

In her most celebrated poem, 'Spinal Secrets', Ndlovu strategically structures every word that appears like a single vertebra of the spinal

cord. The way each word has been positioned to replicate the structure of the spinal cord is highly symbolic. She considers the spinal cord as the archive of a woman's memories and dreams. The poet delineates each vertebra as a single chapter of her life experiences. For her, the spinal cord is the repository of every woman's remarkable reminiscences and dazzling dreams. The poet has symbolised the woman's spine as the signpost that carries the secret scars of scarred memories and dreams that were dashed to the dust and endless episodes of violence that the woman has passed through her life. The essence of this poem seems to reflect the critical opinion of Goldstein: "It is because the female body has for so long been identified as an erotic object, canonised in the nudes of high art and the sex symbols of popular culture, that efforts to locate and describe alternative images became a paramount goal of the feminist movement and [therefore] of the culture at large" (Goldstein, vii–viii).

In patriarchal societies, the politics surrounding the female body have situated the woman's body within the narrow borders of eroticism and objectification. The popular, cultural and traditional tropes have located her within the narrow confines of gender stereotyping. It is essential to relocate the female body by breaking the conventional imagery and recreating an alternate image of the female body as an individual with intellectual capacity and creative prowess. Very interestingly, Ndlovu reimages the female physical body as an emblem of empowerment and a resource of resilience, as a symbol of undaunted courage and as an archive of spirited stories and as a sign of collective consciousness of all the women.

"For
Each
Life
A
Single
Story
Line" (1-7).

She says that between each vertebra, there lie buried painful secrets and traumatic tales that the women have experienced since time immemorial. Only through coaxing and cajoling do the secrets spill out and the tales retold. Otherwise, the secrets are dissolved into

fragmented memories that settle into the spinal cord's twisted and braided bone chamber.

"Between
Each
Vertebra
Coded
Secrets
Revealed
Only
Through
Questioning
Listening
Through
Time
Locked
In
The
Braided
Bone
Chamber" (8-25).

The awakening and consciousness towards her universal spirit had inspired her to return to her storyline, recall her life experiences and rediscover and reclaim her status. She says that all her stories have been wrapped in flesh, tissue and blood as they are true and come alive through every experience being retold and revisited. Within every cell are buried the hidden scars, the signatures of violence unleashed on her by her male companion. Every vertebra speaks of her stories of how her dreams and desires have been dashed, dissolved and disillusioned.

Ndlovu is retelling the stories surrounding the female body to restore the fallen human dignity, piece together the fragments of the body and infuse breath and life into the starving soul. She narrates the stories of violence, colonisation and oppression perpetrated through her vulnerable body only to unravel the politics woven around her body.

"buried
in
cells
wrapped
in

tissue
attached
to
bone
my
body
is
my
witness" (61-74).

Every atom of her bone is a witness to her dreams, desires and hopes that she doesn't want to forget and forego. At this juncture, it is essential to bring in the ideas of Kirby as she states: "What we take to be anatomy is just another moment in culture's refiguring of itself. In other words, anatomy is an illusion of sorts, albeit a very powerful one, and one that [Jane] Gallop imbues with a certain political efficacy" (75–76).

Ndlovu employs female anatomical structure as a powerful symbol only to crush all the illusions woven around the female body that predominantly prefigure within male gaze as an object of sex, pleasure and beauty devoid of any potential political, cultural and social agency.

In this poem, 'Spinal Secrets' Ndlovu reconfigures and redefines a woman's spine as a symbol of staggering strength, fearless fortitude, immense power and profound potential. It represents a symbolic archive of secrets about the woman's body, anatomy, autonomy, her life, regrets, promises, memories, desires and dreams. Through the spine, Ndlovu tries to deconstruct power relations, transform the power dynamics and seeks decolonisation of the body by male domination. The poet can transform the expression of power in society by transfiguring and refiguring the body's relationship to power.

As Thornborrow says: "[We need to] consider certain kinds of dissuasive action, including silence, as interactional resources available to speaker across many different setting, rather than see particular for utterances as being inherently more or less powerfully than others. Which of the resources a speaker chooses to use and the interactional outcomes that choice will depend on any numbers of

factors at play in the context at hand. This will always be an of the moment affairs. This idea of women using the resources available"

Interestingly, reflecting the theory of Thornborrow on how women use the resources available to relive their memories and narrate their stories, Ndlovu has chosen a woman's spine as a repository of her secrets and stories. She considers a woman's body part as a resource available to her to store her secrets, speak of her silence, and register resistance and protests. This context can be traced to the text on *Politics of the Female Body, Post Colonial Women Writers of the Third World*, where Ketu. K. Katrack says: "A politics of the female body includes the construction and controls of female sexuality, its acceptable and censored expressions, and its location socio culturally, even materially in post colonial regions. Third world women writers represent the complex ways in which women's bodies are colonised" (8).

The Female Body as a Site of Colonisation

In agreement with the view of Ketu K Katrack, the poem, 'Next Door', represents and expresses how women's bodies are colonised in socio cultural domains. Ndlovu seems to agree with Meena's critical statement on African Feminism: "African feminism is seen as a type of historical contestation of the oppressive social and cultural conditions that surround women's lives in Africa" (1992).

The poem opens its doors to the theme of violence, and that violence is essentially a part of a woman's everyday life. The title suggests how violence permeates within the domains of domesticity and operates within the closed confines of the neighboring next door. This poem addresses the issue of male aggressive domination and rape within marriage and how the female body becomes the territory to unleash his unbridled male power. The poem's structure is unique, divided into three stanzas; each line comprises two words. The first line begins with 'He', followed by the next line starting with 'She'. He initiates action; She remains passive.

"He enters
She falls
He circles
She murmurs
He invades
    She whimpers" (1-6).

This status of the man being active and aggressive and the woman forced into being subservient and passive continues through the poem's tempo, reinforcing the relationship between the predator and the prey. The moves indicate the hungry beast entering, circling the woman to determine and define his territorial domination and colonisation. The woman falls, murmurs and whimpers and finally succumbs to the invasion of the coloniser. The woman's resistance to physical colonisation through her 'murmurs' and 'whimpers' throws light on the restricted and subdued expression through limited language usage. The woman is colonised by the man so deeply that her articulation of pain and trauma is reduced to whimpers. This episode of violence draws parallels with the maneuvers between the hunted and the hunter. The vulnerable prey 'falls' and wriggles after being caught within the fold of the predator, whines and whimpers helplessly as the predator takes over the game. The choice of the word, 'invasion' by the poet, is indicative of how the female body is conquered and then transformed into a site of colonisation and subjugation by the man.

Foucault challenges the idea that "power is wielded by people or groups by way of 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure" (Foucault 1998: 63).

This notion of Foucault of how power is everywhere and comes from everywhere can be applied to study the power dynamics, power relations and the constant yearning of the male to explore, exploit and establish colonisation over the female body. Patriarchal power and domination operate at multiple levels within society and home. To sustain his control and agency over the female, he resorts to aggressive acts that spill and seep into the domestic domains and strip her dignity, rights and her autonomous agency. Women's resistance and protest against male domination and violation of their rights, widespread in all practices and forms within the home and outside, can be seen as a political act.

"He threatens
She Resists
He Abuses
He Violates
She Obeys" (9-13).

The above lines focus on how the man gains over her body and violates her through abuse, threats and violence – physically and emotionally, by not conceding to her pleas and resistance. The woman confronts him initially but finally surrenders and succumbs to his male aggression and power. This act is a show of power and control that can be equated with power dynamics like 'capture,' 'conflict,' 'invasion,' 'surrender,' 'conquest' and 'colonisation.' Here, the man speaks the language of power through threats and abuses, whereas the woman speaks the language of resistance and protest through her silence, murmurs and whimpers. The expression of her protest and resistance against the colonisation of her body and spirit is restrained, subdued and passive. The entire act is devoid of any human emotions and expressions, thereby reducing the female body to a site of colonisation and as a symbol of a sexual object. He looks at her body only as an object of his sexual gratification and pleasure without any human qualities. In this context, the view of Katrak adds meaning: "In resisting patriarchal domination, women make strategic use of their bodies, often their only available avenue for resistance. For instance, they resist patriarchal domination via-speech, silence, starvation, illness and so on" (8)

"He exits
She unfolds
He tries
She Forgives
He tries
She Forgives
She Dies
He Lives" (20-27).

The above lines draw our attention to how social and cultural institutions have normalised this rigmarole of sexual abuse, violation of human rights and rape. Throughout the act of colonisation, she recoils and withdraws herself emotionally and remains stoic and frigid. This line is poignant as it speaks of how the woman has been crushed and how she passes through this horrendous violence inflicted upon her day after day. The ritualistic colonisation pattern continues to haunt her as she loses her spirit and body to him every day. As he lives through this institutionalisation of violence, she dies in spirit and emotions, as her body is reduced to an instrument of sexual object and abuse. The woman loses her language, human

dignity, identity, spirit and emotions under the aggressive, apathetic patriarchal domination and colonisation. To preserve her dignity and identity, the woman has chosen silence as a medium and language of resistance and protest. Katrak says that "female resistances are undertaken with self-consciousness and remarkable creativity that decides to take risks and confront domination selectively and strategically in the interest of self-preservation" (3)

The Female body is a Site for Reconstructing Memory and History

The poem, 'Lydia in the Wind,' is a poetic tribute to Ou Tamaletjie Williams, who died on 16 June 1910. Lydia Williams was a former slave girl in Cape Town, South Africa, who was emancipated after slavery was officially abolished. Ndlovu weaves an intense narrative to celebrate the life of Lydia, her experiences as a slave girl, and the whip marks she carried on her body as signatures of the colonial enterprise. Ndlovu laments over how such an inspiring person, who has counselled several victims of slavery who were psychologically, economically, emotionally and physically yoked with the burden of slavery and its aftermath, has been relegated to the footnotes of history. Lydia pioneered in trauma counselling; she reached out to many emancipated slaves to bring them to her bosom for solace and hope. She was the embodiment of freedom and a universal spirit. Unfortunately, she is forgotten between the two monumental upheavals; Colonialism and Apartheid. Ndlovu has taken up the mission of revisiting the past, remembering the forgotten by returning to the cultural, social and political historical narratives of South Africa. Through her poem, she is celebrating the life of the unsung heroine, Lydia Williams. Ndlovu is reviving the spirit of freedom by interrogating the colonial past. The words of Leela Gandhi hold significance in this context. "Post colonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia to the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project dedicated to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past" (4).

Through the following lines from the poem, 'Lydia in the Wind,' Ndlovu personifies Lydia as the wind, an element of force and energy. By embracing the wind, by being the wind and by becoming

the wind, Lydia embodies the spirit of freedom; but the wind is agitated as her wails fall on deaf ears. She may rest in peace only when her narrative, punctuated with pain and trauma, is remembered and honoured in contemporary times.

> "This wind is a wounded witness
> she will not be still
> not until we are listening
> Are we listening" (1-4).

The identity of Lydia as an emancipated slave, as a healer of psychological wounds perpetrated by slavery, is now forgotten. Her identity is stuck between the two unwieldy historical pasts; Colonialism and Apartheid. Her cry for identity is resonated through the howls of the wind as she moves restlessly between the two plots and gets sucked into the empty spaces within the country's historical records. Would she ever be recognised and given her due identity? In this context, Stubbs observes "the work of artists and writers and pastors and theologians through their increasing attention being given to slave stories, is helping to access this part of our past" (Cape Times, December 1999).

Ndlovu laments over how the songs of tragedy and truth are buried within the faded and jaded pages of history. She then raises a pertinent question – 'What if we don't want to remember our past today, does that recreate an account that's free from captivity'?

> "This wind is a haunted woman
> she is wild with rememberings
> singing the truth and the tragedy
> of our buried heritage
> our slavery
> If we do not know – are we free" (11-16).

Lydia was held captive when she was alive; after her passing away, she is still being held captive between the broken chains of historical events.

> "She is held captive once again
> this time by a broken chain of events
> our degrees of amnesia" (30-34).

Michael Weeder, in his book Slaves at the Cape: A Guidebook for Beginner Researchers, says

> "I see Lydia as representing a community of ex-slaves who contributed to the life of the church and society as a whole. More broadly, she stands for people who struggled their whole lives against injustice" (30).

Ndlovu asserts that history should retrace the stories of forgotten heroes. She says the country should recollect and return the narratives to their due places of honour. Recording and documenting the forgotten records of the cultural and political history of the country breathe life and spirit into the buried memories. Only then did the stories spread their luminous light across the recovery paths and bring in the light of consciousness. In this context, it's essential to refer to Frenkel's view on forgotten history and the importance of reviving it "…a history of women who have been excluded from official accounts by both their male counterparts and western constructions" (4).

In this process of breaking free from amnesia and embedding oneself into the collective memory of the country's history, the road to recovery is initiated. The organic integration of one's single identity merges with the other, thereby leading to the collective consciousness.

> "And in the questioning
> comes the who am I
> out of the listening
> comes through you am I
> through you am I" (38-42).

In the poem 'Lydia,' the poet symbolises the buried and forgotten body of a slave woman to the forgotten history of the country. Ndlovu employs the symbolic images of the wind to the universal spirit of freedom and liberty. She personifies the wind as the haunted, wild woman wailing loudly about the truth of the traumatised past. The buried body of Lydia (history) symbolically should be exhumed to reclaim, recover and relive the memories. Here, the body of Lydia becomes the site to reconstruct the forgotten memory; her body becomes a link between the two worlds and two histories, Colonialism and Apartheid. Lydia's body becomes the site for constructing the 'memory' of the horrific images of the horrendous past of South Africa, seared by the deep wounds of slavery and oppression. The symbolic significance of the body of

Lydia gets elevated here as it represents the traumatised body and spirit of South Africa, oppressed under colonialism, slavery and Apartheid.

One can trace the path of rediscovery only when one revisits and unmasks the historical content. One should allow the free flow of knowledge of the past and remove the blocks on the path of historical knowledge funds.

This poem maps the inspiration to regain the identity and merge with the conscious collective historical memory of the country. Ndlovu says: "going within! is a conscious step/ toward a deeper/ listening! a decision to disconnect! by turning inward! returning the beam! to its source" (Conning Ndlovu, 2000: 13).

The Female body as a Site of Female Bonding

The following poem for the study is 'Women Weaving'. Ndlovu transforms the entire community of women writers of South Africa into one single unit and one single body as a site to exchange and express creative acumen, innovative insights, writing skills and extend moral support to one another. In fact, the acronym 'WEAVE' stands for 'Women's Education and Artistic Voice Expression'. As a body, 'WEAVE' encourages the women to weave their thoughts, ideas, visions and views on women's education, empowerment, expression, and liberation into concrete shapes that manifest into extraordinary bodies of literary works. Ndlovu feels humbled, healed and inspired in the company of these women when the words work their way into weaving an incredible bond among them. Female bonding blooms as their experiences are willingly shared and courageously discussed. The WEAVE is transformed into a consecrated site of female bonding and companionship where their vulnerabilities are revealed, wounds are healed, spirits are revived, and experiences are exchanged.

Ndlovu claims, "Poetry for me began as an intimate and immediate journal of expression. Here was one place where I could whisper, sing, shout, mourn and mutter to myself in reflection, in states of pain or conflict and even moments of awe at the visions, the worlds this path of expression led me to. I could retreat and mentally roam free of the boundaries of what was expected of someone my

age, my gender, my nationality at any point in time "(Conning Ndlovu, 2000).

Kirby says that the "challenge is to realise the ways in which we are inextricably immersed within the strange weave of essentialism's identity, and to acknowledge that this bind is one that is not merely prohibitive, but also enabling" (72). True to the words of Kirby, The creative body weaves an individual identity of each woman writer that merges with the collective identity of the community of women writers. The poem, 'Women Weaving,' discusses how the shared spaces and agency binds them emotionally and enables them to produce an extraordinary body of artistic creation.

"The blood of our experience exchanged
In the company of these women
Anonymous spaces turn sacred site
Willingly
Courageously" (7-11).

As 'Weave' embodies a space, the other glaring and cruel empty and unexplored spaces like human relationships, intellectual and creative aspects, lost childhood, troubled teenage, abandoned and orphaned lives are now infused with renewed relationships, genuine laughter, revived spirit as they take their masks off to reveal their real selves, real identity, real agency by recognising their free – flowing roles within the tribe of 'SHE'.

"I laugh
I play like my pre-teen self
I can lay my masks on the ground
For us all to dance around
Synchronising
Recognising our flowing roles
In this tribe of She" (18-25).

These women writers explore and identify with their national, historical and cultural lineages through their artistic expressions. The gender dynamics are revisited and redefined through their voices as they invest their emotions in artistic expressions. They engage their space and time in creating artistic enterprises through which they can relocate their autonomous agency.

In this context, it is imperative to bring in the quotation of Ambrose Bierce:

> "To men a man is but a mind. Who cares what face he carries or what form he wears? But woman's body is the woman."(p.15). The organisation, 'Weave', embodies the body, mind, spirit and artistic creativity of women writers of South Africa. This symbolic embodiment transforms into a social agent of a woman's autonomous body and universal soul. The process of identity forming and self-actualisation concretizes into realisation of the collective experiences of the women poets. By realising their social and cultural agency through their creative prowess and literary enterprise, women writers can situate themselves within the complex social, cultural and intellectual tropes. Desiree Lewis reflects this idea: "the eclecticism of the writing demonstrates how the creative impulse can shift conventional barriers and create new ways of seeing, new ways of writing and, for readers, new ways of thinking about their world" (Mail & Guardian, December 2000).

The Female body as a Site to Reclaim the True Identity

The next poem, 'Instruments,' engages with the themes of the female body, its immense power, and its indestructible spirit. In this poem, Ndlovu shifts the woman's body to the elevated realms of aesthetic aura and spiritual discipline. She situates the female body within the universal space and refers to it as the embodiment of light and hope. The female body operates as an instrument to awaken and rekindle the universal consciousness buried under the cold embers of patriarchal perception and opinion. She transforms the female body into a site to reclaim the true calling of who they are and what they are capable of. The female body is a tremendously powerful site that ignites, inspires and awakens the perception of self-actualisation and self-realisation. Across the ages, the patriarchal gaze has looked down upon the female body as an instrument of sexual indulgence. But, Ndlovu subverts this misconception by deconstructing the debasing and dull image of the female held within the rigid patriarchal framework. She then reconstructs the dignified and incandescent image of the female by transporting her to the higher realms of society. Ndlovu creates a collective body of womanhood, infuses female consciousness into it and then re-reads the integrated female bodies as a single unit. When she is referring to 'We', she is referring to the unified, single unit of the female body; thereby embodying and representing the undivided voice and the shared spirit. The idea of female bonding and sisterhood is registered in patriarchal spaces' dark and shadowy corridors. The lurking fears

and reservations within these dim alleys are allayed by flashing effervescent light, incredible knowledge and togetherness through the beautiful female bonding and sisterhood. In her poem 'Instruments,' she sings about the beauty of female bonding:

> "We are light beings
> Some slumbering
> Some awakening
> To the truth of who we are" (1-4)

Abel discusses the value of female friendship: "I seek to represent the world as women imagine it could be, and as many women have created it. Feminist theory must take into account the forces maintaining the survival of women, as well as those that maintain the subordination of women. A theory of female friendship is meant to give form, expression, and reality to the ways in which women have been for our Selves and each other."(434)

Ndlovu calls the women brilliant and steadfast stars who shine their bright light on every possible aspect of life. In a way, the poet seems to be reiterating that every space in society is influenced and inspired by her imminent, immense and indestructible charisma. She calls the women the imposing and shining messengers of love and peace. Their status is unparalleled and supreme as they are endowed with a unique capacity to create and recreate. Here, the poet reinforces dual ideas, one of motherhood and the other as an artist, capable of creating beautiful pieces of literary, academic, artistic and critical work. Katrak supports her idea of how power relations and distribution are manifested in a traditionally patriarchal society. "It suggests that economic, political, and cultural norms can constitute an ideological framework that controls women's bodies and identity. There we find, among men and women, a power distribution gap that leads to women discrimination". [9]

> men writers present the struggles of protagonists to resist patriarchal objectification and definition as a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, mother-in-law. Sociocultural parameters of womanhood consciously and unconsciously constitute an ideological framework that controls women's bodies." (Katrak 42)

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In this traditional cultural and political setup, women are discriminated against in all possibilities of action and orientation. Their wings are clipped tightly by the societal norms, designed to suit men's conveniences. Women struggle with external forces to unfold themselves and uncover their profound potential through writing. Writing is a process of catharsis that helps them to heal; here, the words of Alice Walker add value: "I think writing really helps you heal yourself. I think if you write long enough, you will be a healthy person."

Ndlovu, speaks of the different capacities and possibilities that women can accomplish. She says that women can be exemplary healers; and can restore the broken bodies and spirits of the women who are crushed under the rigid patriarchal paradigms. Her poem, 'Instruments,' reflects this idea:

"Indestructible stars
We are light beings
Portals of love
Makers of peace
Creators of beauty" (5-9).

These women can be restored to health and happiness and be healed in body and spirit by infusing confidence and self-reliance, and help them to rediscover and reinvent themselves in the newly found sisterhood. Ndlovu says that women can trace their steps towards rediscovery and reinvention by embarking upon a journey into their 'self', to uncover their inherent prowess and acumen only to re-emerge as liberated women.

"We are healers
We are believers inherently
Rediscovering our way
Homeward
Inward" (22-26).

Ndlovu reasserts that a woman is born free and entitled to enjoy her status of freedom and autonomy in all walks of life. To be free is her natural state of being, and love is the emotion she shares and enjoys as if it is her second nature. She reclaims that women are born to bring light into other lives and that they honour each passing

moment as a precious gift of life. The idea of enjoying life and freedom is intrinsic to her personality. It comes naturally to her persona as she is personified and embodied as unbridled nature in all its expanse and bounty. Such natural zeal and spirit, which is supposed to permeate fully within all layers of life, is shackled and kept subservient under male oppression, colonisation and domination. It is time for the woman to retrace, rediscover and recharge with full gusto by breaking the boundaries, treading the unexplored areas and spreading the wide span of wings to take off and enjoy the gift of life.

> "We are born to bring light
> To honour the blessing of each moment
> The gift of every life" (30-32).

It is important to bring in the quote of Toni Morrison from *Beloved* :

> "She's a friend of my mind. She gathers me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them right back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind" (249).

Toni Morrison has celebrated the beauty and significance of female bonding, sisterhood and motherhood in her works. Referring to Morrison's quote adds meaning to the context here, as Ndlovu also emphasises the concept of friendship and sisterhood that inspires and kindles a bond that welds the women together to forge their possibilities, potentialities and capabilities and surge into uncharted avenues.

Conclusion

The poems of Malika Ndlovu discussed here have reflected the different dimensions, perceptions and politics surrounding the female body. In the poem, 'Spinal Secrets', the female body has been transformed into a site of archiving secrets and stories of a woman that she carries within her spinal cord forever. The poem 'Next Door,' presents the stark side of the female experience, as her body becomes a site of colonisation within the domestic doors. In the poem, 'Lydia in the Wind,' the dead and forgotten body of a slave woman is transformed into a site of reconstructing memory and history. The poem, 'Women Weaving,' portrays the collective body of women

writers of South Africa, which becomes a site of female bonding. The poem 'Instruments' converts the female body into a site to reclaim the true calling of women's status and identity.

In the poems, 'Next Door,' 'Spinal Secrets,' 'Lydia in the Wind,' 'Women Weaving' and 'Instruments,' Ndlovu has reimaged the female body by deconstructing the traditional images that man has created about a woman. Since time immemorial, patriarchal society has constructed the image of women only through one lens, the lens of desire and pleasure. A Woman has been embodied as the object of sex and as a tool of sexual gratification. But, Ndlovu has transfigured the body of a female into a vehicle of inherent intellect, intrinsic creativity, fantastic imagination, profound insights and inspiring ingenuity. The socially constructed binaries within the structures of patriarchy to define man and woman: strong/weak, masculine/ feminine, dominant/oppressed, creative/ unimaginative are overturned by Ndlovu, thereby reversing the sexual politics associated with the female body.

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4

Voices of Dissent in Sarita Jenamani's Still We Sing: Claiming Identities of Women

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Abstract

The history of patriarchal suppression on women is long, but only a few of them are unremittingly raising dissenting voice and claiming for their identities and freedom of self. Against this backdrop, the paper critically analyzes voices of dissent in the selected poems from Still We Sing: Voices on Violence Against Women, *edited by Sarita Jenamani. The anthology is a collection of poems written by South Asian women poets as their experiences of patriarchal atrocities, subjugation, and self-asserting voices have been poignantly expressed. Patriarchy disseminates and authenticates its power through several social values and institutional structures. Therefore, to concentrate on women's predicaments and their consistent resistance against numerous patriarchal manacles, I have employed Michel Foucault's concept of power politics and Judith Butler and Kamla Bhasin's ideas of gender and body politics of normative heterosexuality for analysis.*

Keywords: Patriarchy, normative heterosexuality, power politics, self-assertion, dissenting voice

Introduction

South Asian women share the common pain and sufferings imposed by patriarchal social structure. In the past, they were connected by plights such as child marriage, the sati system, and miserable widowhood; today, they belong to the common ground of contemporary patriarchal brutality, where rape, murder, infanticide, and acid attacks have become more common. In such circumstances, many social critics and writers have started persistently raising issues pertaining to patriarchal values and the susceptibility of women. Austria-based Indian poet Sarita Jenamani has recently published an

anthology, *Still We Sing: Voices on Violence Against Women (2020),* that comprises the poems of 75 women poets from South Asian countries. The poems included in the anthology capture women's experiences of pain, suffering, woman-ness, and patriarchal atrocities, as well as their strong voices of resistance.

Among the multifarious issues the anthology has incorporated, I am particularly focused on the voices of dissent in the selected poems that explicate women's identity claims. I have chosen Sara Shagufta's "Woman and Salt," Usha Sherchan's "The Eternal Agony and the Declaration for Awareness," Richa Jain's "I Will Come As A Ghost," Lipika Das' "Coronated," and Seetha Ranjanee's "Divorce" for critical analysis. The chosen poets are from Pakistan, Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka, respectively. Even though they belong to different countries, South Asian women somehow share similar experiences. Shagufta unveils the austere socio-cultural chains that tie up foot, tongue and freedom of women; whereas, Jain and Ranjanee express their extreme anger against the exploitive system that belittle women's identity. Both Das and Sherchan speak out against the patriarchal social psychology that reduces women to mere flesh. Most of the poets concentrate on the structural oppression and violence against women when their existence and identity get obliterated. Moreover, they comprehensively exhibit strong resistance. Against this backdrop, the paper critically analyses dissenting voices in the chosen poems that intelligibly reify women's claim to identity.

Several feminist critics have claimed that patriarchal gender values have played a vital role in the subordination of women. I have employed Judith Butler and Kamla Bhasin's gender concept to examine women's situations depicted in the poems. I have also taken Michel Foucault's idea of power and institutional control to demonstrate how controlling bodies, especially women's bodies, has become the central mechanism of patriarchal rules and regulations imposed on them. The poems under study, as I will argue, persistently question such a system of patriarchal control and dominance; instead, the emergent voices in the poems express women poets' desire for self-identity.

Structural Manacle and Women's Suffering

Sufferings of women connect with the patriarchal social system that reinforces gender binary. Patriarchy inculcates specific socio-cultural values that complement its rigidity. It begins with the gendering process that ultimately authenticates a hierarchy between male and female. Bhasin appropriately points out the socialisation process within the family and society that implants gender roles into the children, which she takes as "gender indoctrination" (13). Such socially validated norms and principle become compulsive frame for each member of the society to accept the gender hierarchy. There is a distinct male-female dichotomy that substantiates men's superior and women's subordinated positions. Moreover, in the South Asian context, patriarchal socio-cultural values have blended with religion and formed an authoritative institution that nobody dares to question. As Bhasin states, "Patriarchy is both a social structure and an ideology or a belief system according to which men are superior." Religions have played an important role in creating and perpetuating patriarchal ideology" (21). The patriarchal ideas imbued each social institutionhas proved lethal to women as they instigate their pain and sufferings.

Patriarchy strategically disseminates its hegemony through sociocultural norms and values. It assigns such duties and responsibilities to women that bind them within the household periphery. The structural manacle chains women's freedom and depletes their value, confirming them as docile and inactive creatures who exist just to satisfy men's carnal desire and to procreate. However, it is important to reflect on the fact that whatever perception has been established about women, that exhibits a solely patriarchal construct. Simon de Beauvoir has already refuted patriarchal gendering of women when she claims: "One is not born a woman, but, rather becomes one" (301). Naturally, children could never develop a specific gendered behaviour unless the family and society fed them such values. As patriarchal society train each child to adopt socio-cultural norms, during theprocess it successfully implantsgender ideology within them. Judith Butler accepts Beauvoir's view partially, however, departs in some part and argues: "There is nothing in her account that guarantees that the 'one' who becomes a woman is necessarily female" (8). Butler's idea is sensitive

in relation to the issue of sexuality as it has already crossed the male-female gender binary. There exist myriads of sexualities apart from man and woman who are outlawed by patriarchal structure. Amid complex gender issues, Butler claims that the matrix of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality operates through repetition (145). Her opinion becomes more agreeable as each gendered body is assigned to perform their tasks in repetitive manners; therefore, gender turns into an act that they perform regularly. For instance, men and women have been performing their regular act since long that has validated gender roles designed by the patriarchal system. Moreover, there is no rationality behind gender hierarchy—men's superiority and women's inferiority—aside from the imposition of patriarchal codes.

Patriarchal supremacy is manifested through several social, cultural, and political bodies and gender relations. It plays a vital and decisive role in the hierarchical positioning of each member of society. In Foucault's term, it is "biopower" that subjugates and controls bodies (141). Needless to say, inside the system, women's bodies are highly dominated. Geoff Danaher et al., while analysing Foucault's biopower, explain it as a notion for controlling, analysing, regulating, and defining the human body and behaviour (63). The governing powerhas not only controlled and subjugated bodies but also spread rumors about specific bodies, namely, women's body as docile and inactive. It is an outcome of patriarchal normative heterosexuality that gives priority to men as strong, intelligent, and powerful beings, whereas it suppresses and exploits women as vulnerable and brittle creatures. In reality, submissiveness and docility of women are nothing more than a myth created by the patriarchal society. It is the whole regulatory system that controls and exploits the human mind and body—women's bodies are more under structural control. Consequently, women of South Asian region areenmeshed within patriarchal socio-cultural frame.

South Asian women have been consistently injured by patriarchal values, and they carry some scars and grievances within them. The existing social system seems reluctant to accept and acknowledge women's space; rather, it obliterates their identity and assimilates them with the existence of men. The Orthodox Hindu religion practised an inhuman sati system in the past that burned

many women alive with their dead husbands. Then, the issues of identity and existence of women were unthinkable areas, as they even could not make choice for living their life. More importantly, they had to prepare themselves to sit on pyre as satis; some lucky woman got chance to live as a widow, shaving head and draping white sarilife long. In Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak's term, they are "sexed subaltern subjects" (96). The condition of dalit (untouchable) or third-gender women is more vulnerable as they remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Undeniably, women are voiceless since their speech has been controlled by patriarchy. In this regard, Spivak postulates: "There is no space for which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (103). Overtly, women's space, language, and overall body and mind are under patriarchal control. They do not have their own language, self-identity, religion, or philosophy of life within this structure. Mary Daly accepts that women were silent in patriarchal language—just as religion had developed without a concept of the female subject, so had language (Tolan, 324). Women are complete outsiders in men's worlds where neither language nor religion have incorporated them; both are rather sharp as razors that just keep on chiselling down their existence.

Amidst tremendous sufferings caused by normative patriarchal structure, South Asian women have trodden a long and painful path. However, they have rekindled their hope and collected enough courage to speak out against patriarchal injustices and start claiming their self-identity. The following section critically analyses the dissenting voices of women that have become instrumental in claiming their identity in the selected poems.

Voice of Self Assertion

The poems included in the anthology *Still We Sing* portray the structural victimisation of South Asian women and their wounds and sufferings that have been transferred from one generation to another. Just a critical look around could explore thousands of cases that narrate the tales of extreme violence against women. For instance, the grandmothers were burnt as slaves; mothers were domesticated and stranded inside the house boundary; whereas, the educated daughters' generation is always intimidated by the prestige of family and feels that they have to sacrifice their freedom. The

granddaughters, who are lucky to have been born, might get crushed by the lecherous desire of flesh-mongers like Nirvaya and Nirmala. The ones, who are inside the womb may get aborted after sex-determination. In this manner, women from every generation have been crushed by the patriarchal mechanism. However, South Asian women have started raising their voices in opposition to the authoritative and exploitative patriarchal system. It has become a weapon to break through the patriarchal coercion, dominance, and constant violation against them, which at the same time becomes a medium to claim their identity and freedom. For the detailed analysis, I have taken the poems of Sara Shagufta, Usha Sherchan, Richa Jain, Lipika Das, and Seetha Ranjanee.

Patriarchal society strategically imposes its rules on women's bodies. It has gifted them a veil, a nail, and a house boundary in the name of honor. Pakistani poet Shagufta, in "Woman and Salt," vividly pictures the bitter reality of patriarchal ideology hidden behind honour and decency. The structure has pulled out a woman's tongue and quieted her for the prestige of family. It has silenced her and taken her voice away; it has veiled her and taken her eyesight; it has also controlled her body and mind and snatched away her freedom and existence. Patriarchy is a toxic social structure in which women have lost everything. Shagufta illustrates the real condition of women:

> From house to footpath nothing belongs to us
> Honour is just how we pass our life
> Honour is the spear they brand us with
> Our tongues are tied with honour
> If the salt of our bodies is tasted one night
> We are considered, for a whole life, as tasteless as bread (126)

She has used "salt" as a metaphor for women's sweat, labor, and hard work, which is never acknowledged by society. Each woman spills sweat and blood for the progress and prosperity of the family. However, despite her potentialities, she is taken as a subordinate being. Kumari Lama elucidates that the existing social mechanism persistently internalises specific patriarchal values, which prioritise and authenticate the subordination of women (6). Such structural biasness always pushes women to the margin, no matter she is the central figure to run her house. Shagupta's depiction of women's

condition is applicable to each South Asian family, where mostly women hold nothing in their hands. The children, the house, and the property—everything belongs to her husband. In fact, property is the last thing a woman desires in a society where saving herself becomes the first priority. Many daughters are not lucky enough to remain alive to get married and have children. In the name of family honor, many of them get bricked up behind the wall. The poet hints towards honour killing when she writes:

> How many times was the wall of your house bricked up? (127)

Her question points toward the most sensitive issue pertaining to the right to live. Nonetheless, many orthodox families decide the life or death of their rebellious daughters. They become "unlivable" subjects (Butler, 3). Patriarchal structure decides whether the bodies are worth living or not. The family cannot bear the brunt of defamation, rather, they brick up their daughter in the wall. Women have no choice, voice, or freedom within patriarchal austerity. However, despite being chained by social rigidities, women hope for better days to come. For that, they have started raising their voice for freedom and justice. Shagufta resists the dominating patriarchal social order.

> A battleground is my courage,
> My desire – a burning coal
> We were born with shrouds around our heads (127)

Women are empty-handed, so they have no fear of losing anything. They have accumulated courage in their hearts like burning coal to fight against hegemonic patriarchy. The poem has captured the resisting spirit of today's women, who have spoken out against patriarchy to claim their own space and identity.

Several social critics have claimed that King Manu enforced rigid Brahmanic law on Hindu women through Manusmriti. He successfully executed the law around three thousand years ago that only authenticated religious domination over women. It is the same religious values that has been continuously strangling South Asian women till today. Mainly, religio-cultural values limit women's space and obstruct their steps. As Jenamani argues, "This sort of structural violence is coordinated by social structure and institutions that deny complete freedom to an individual just on the basis of gender" (xv).

Undoubtedly, it is patriarchal institutional power that controls women's freedom. Nepali poet Usha Sherchan, in her poem "The Eternal Agony and the Declaration of Awareness," highlights the eternal sufferings of women; nonetheless, she concludes with the urge of women's awakening. She portrays how patriarchal society has diminished women's selves and made them mere puppets:

> Deprived of voices even if having voices
> -We have been lying down becoming land
> -We have been tilled becoming field
> -We have been tolerating as if we were the earth (195)

Sherchan symbolically presents a woman's body as "field," "earth," and "land" in her poem. Within rigid patriarchal framework, woman is no more than a piece of land where men could sow their seeds. Such a lethal perception validates a woman's existence only as a body. Hortense J. Spiller uses the term "pornotroping" (67) to denote a person or group who is reduced to mere flesh, which appropriately applies to women's position in patriarchal society. Patriarchy diminishes women's worth to mere flesh and denies their intellect.

Patriarchal society has overshadowed the potentiality and intellectuality of women, as it highlights either the docility or the glamorous images of them. Nevertheless, such portrayal does not justify the inherent characteristics of women. In this regard, Sherchan has analysed the sufferings, plights, suppression, and entanglement of women and also pointed out their enormous capabilities. They have immense inner strength to cope with any situation that comes their way. They could use their innate power to subvert an unfavourable situation and claim their freedom. Concentrating on the ample strength of women, poet questions:

> How long shall we sustain these agonies?
> Awakening innumerable voices now
> When shall we proclaim for awareness? (197)

The above questions exhibit the curiosity, dissatisfaction, and disagreement of the poet. It also points towards her rising consciousness. Sherchan, through her questions, urges flocks of women to come forward to claim their rights. They have reserved enough audacity to fight against violence, injustice, and disparity

caused by patriarchal structures. The poet discloses the importance of women's self-awareness for claiming their space.

Indian poet Richa Jain differs from Shagufta and Sherchan while expressing her boiling anger as her verse tellingly voices against patriarchal misdeeds. It seems her agony has already crossed its limit when she spews raging flames. Her poem "I Will Come As A Ghost" attacks the whole social system that has made women so vulnerable and threatens to take action against the system designers. Patriarchal structure has controlled women from their language to body through its norms and values. They remained silent and walked along the same path shown by their oppressors. They were incarcerated within household captivity, nailed by rules and regulations, for so long that they had almost forgotten themselves. These days, women have realised the exigency to tear asunder the veils of suppression to move ahead for self-assertion. Walter Johnson takes the liberal notion of selfhood and self-oriented action as agency (115). In the sense that contemporary women have agency to take action, as Jain has evoked and prepared herself for, she expresses her utmost anger towards oppressive society, which surely shakes its marrow.

I will come as a ghost
The way
little by little
I die everyday (117)

The poem reveals the extremity of women's suffering as well as their aggression. Women have shed their existence bit by bit inside their kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms. Poet fore-fronts women's reality and side-by expresses her anger against the oppressive social structure. She shows her revengeful attitude and threatens the perpetrators. Moreover, the poet challenges masculine pride and calls for action right there.

To frighten you from yourself
I will dwell in your semen
I will come as a ghost
…
I will evolve; I am evolving (118)

The poet attacks masculinity, referring to "semen" that each man feels proud of. She turns quite intimidating towards patriarchy and its forebearers when she declares to come back to them through their

semen. It also symbolically indicates female foeticide, which is rampant in South Asian countries, as a result of giving high priority to a son as a family lineage carrier. In such circumstances, women have to go through several abortions while waiting for the baby boy. The whole process incorporates physical and psychological violence against women. Witnessing such misdeeds and disparities, Jain explodes with anger and challenges the inhumanly gender-biased patriarchal system.

South Asian women share common discriminatory social circumstances. They are connected through their tears and sufferings, and also through the common hope for freedom. They have reserved volcanic anger inside them. They need just a click to burst out, which will shake the rigid foundation of patriarchy. About the commonness of South Asian women, Aftab Husain opines, "One thing that unites this potpourri is riding the bubble with vigour and vitality and... hope for the future." (np). Women have kept a bundle of vigour just to unveil it at the right time. In fact, several rebellious women have already ignited resisting mettle of women. We can take rebellious Yogmaya of Nepal whose verses were powerful enough to threaten the Rana Rulers in the early twentieth century. Today's dissenting women are the descendants of revolting women from the past. Indian poet Lipika Das raises her resisting voice in her poem "Coronated." She rejects male supremacy as it only recognises women as flesh and therefore, invokes women for action.

> What remains
> When your flower-like body
> your dreams and tears/get insulted
> Rebellious only join/the procession (64)

Das reveals her radical self when she declares disobedience to patriarchal authority. She cannot tolerate hegemonic heterosexual ideologies that have only harmed women. It has closed myriad paths for women and bound them within a so-called secure house boundary. Women were overwhelmed by the love, care, and security provided by their men; however, it did not last long. They realised it was a patriarchal trap to enslave and exploit them. As Alice Pechriggl argues, "… female body imaginary which has been and still instrumentalised nearly exclusively for the representation of male institution – is detached from real women" (104). The patriarchy has

never presented and appreciated the true selves of women; rather, it has misrepresented and commodified them. Poet urges to raise collective voice to demand for own space and freedom.

> Destroying the termite hill of pain
> Coronate the time
> And metamorphose yourself
> Into a free butterfly (65)

It is necessary to break invisible fences that restricts women from enjoying their freedom. Das wishes to create a special bond of women to celebrate womanhood.

The patriarchal blade has slashed every woman in South Asia and left them with injuries. It has torn their existence into innumerable pieces. More importantly, the discriminatory system has bruised and battered their egos and dumped them in the corner. They are taken as the containers to carry semen and fetus. Sri Lankan poet Seetha Ranjanee depicts the bitterness of misrepresenting women's bodies in her poem "Divorce."

> This body which I thought
> I could get pleasure as I pleased
> See how it became a tool
> …
> See how it turned into
> A foetus-making machine/for others! (132)

A woman has no freedom to use her body as she wishes since it has already been marked with patriarchal coding. Neither she could taste bodily pleasure at her wish nor could deny at her dislikes. Motherhood is believed to be a blessing; it could be true if she has rights to her body. Otherwise, motherhood glory could be no more than a powerful patriarchal strategy to tame women. After all, we are in a society where there is no proper power balance. Tony Purvis's interpretation of Foucault's idea seems quite relevant in this situation. He argues: "Sexuality concerns the operation of power in human relationships as much as it governs the production of a personal identity" (435). Gender oppression connects to power relation between man and woman. Certainly, a man holds more socio-economic power than a woman, so he could execute it on her. However, it is time for them to wipe their tears and demand their fair share. They have to slam and disown patriarchal authority, which has

only exploited them. Ranjanee challenges patriarchal rigidity and raises her dissenting voice.

> I tore the authorising certificate
> that empowers the phallus unto eternity
> that stamps insults on my vaginal passage
> From now on, the crown
> Entwined with the phallus is disowned
> Yet, my vagina is free (132)

The poet has made a bold statement against coercive patriarchal authority and disowns phallocentric power. Phallic autocracy has always enjoyed vagina, however, it has unremittingly exploited women using the same organ. Vagina has always remained at the center of women's name and defame; therefore the poet uses it as a vehicle to free her entangled self. She roars with rage against patriarchal normative austerity and declares the freedom of her vagina. In fact, every individual has a right to their body, and women are reasonable enough to claim their rights and freedom.

Conclusion

South Asian society treasures glorious tradition, family bonding, appreciable cultural heritage, and influential eastern philosophy; however, it also incorporates the dishonourable continuation of violence against women. Proliferating women's suffering has been directly tied to the patriarchal structural values that our society has embraced for so long. Women have become the most vulnerable targets of patriarchal rigidities and atrocious heteronormativity. They are denied their freedom, silenced, and incarcerated within domestic boundaries. Nonetheless, surpassing myriads of unfavorable social circumstances, women have audaciously walked along the thorny paths and resisted against the oppressive system. In this context, the paper has critically analysed the voices of dissent that claim for the existence and identity of women in the selected poems from Jenamani's Still *We Sing*.

The patriarchal society has commodified women and diminished them to flesh. The men-centric suppressive system has always sidelined women and branded them as mere pleasurable objects. They are seen no more than vaginas and foetus holding incubators. Moreover, they are immensely exploited and deprived of personal

space and freedom. Nevertheless, women have started raising their voices against dominating patriarchal structures. South Asian women poets have questioned the authority, like Sherchan and Shagufta have done. Similarly, Jain and Das have threatened patriarchal oppressors, disowned phallic validation, and voiced for equality and freedom. Ranjanee has even declared that her vagina is free. Therefore, the chosen poems are powerful enough to articulate resistance against patriarchal normativity. The poets have raised dissenting voices for women's identity and liberation.

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5

The Door of no Return: Mythical Journeys and Conflicting Identities in M.G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*

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Abstract

Human journeys are as old as our civilisation and we have evolved with our journeys. To many, there are no journeys at all; it is just an illusion, and there are only arrivals and departures. This paper will attempt to explore the diasporic journeys of the major characters in M.G. Vassaji's *The Book of Secrets* from pre-colonial Gujarat to East Africa during the maritime or oceanic trade that flourished during the 16th century. The novels focus on the socio-cultural transactions of these characters in an in-between position in British East Africa, where they flourished their occupations and trades and felicitated the colonial rich in the interiors of Africa. In this paper, I will argue that these journeys are mythical in the sense that they pioneered civilisations and establishments that are remembered and glorified by subsequent generations, almost reaching mythic proportions. These migrants are often seen juggling their contradictory identitarian affiliations, which often pose a challenge in their transactions with native culture. Every so often, this inability emerges out of their self-proclaimed comparative superiority over the natives, posing a challenge to their very survival in a foreign land and propelling their further migrations in search of a better home in yet another cultural space.

Keywords: postcolonialism, ocenic trade, identity, journey, origin, Vassanji

Vassanji's account of his first visit to India in *A Place Within: Rediscovering* India begins with a suitable quote from The Odyssey: "What am I in for now? Whose country have I come this time?" (Homer, The Odyssey XXIII) Similarly, in the *Book of Secrets*, for

Nurmohammed Pipa, "leaving home had been easy, not so the return" (BS 134). In major diasporic novels, all the journeys are one-way affairs with little possibility of return to the "home country." This can be interpreted as a certain fixation or attachment with one's country of birth, and arriving in a new land is always full of puzzlement and bewilderment. MoyezGulamhussein Vassanji, who writes by the abbreviated authorial name M.G. Vassanji, was born in Kenya to parents of Indian origin and belongs to the esoteric Khoja Ismail Community. In 1959, his family migrated to Tanzania [then Tanganyika], and later he joined the University College at Nairobi [now the University of Nairobi]. Then he left for the United States in 1969 to complete his bachelor's degree at MIT, followed by a PhD in nuclear physics from the University of Pennsylvania. Finally, in 1978, Vassanji went to Canada and taught at the University of Toronto before becoming a full-time writer. He now lives in Toronto after adopting Canadian citizenship. Now, from Canada, he has written eight novels, two collections of short stories, and one biography. With such an over-hyphenated identity, the question now arises: how should one read Vassanji, from Indian, East African, or Canadian perspectives? Most of Vassanji's novels are set in East Africa, concentrating on the plight of East African Indians during the colonial and post-colonial periods. They opt for a second migration (like Vassanji himself) to Europe, the US, or Canada. Vassanji is seriously engaged in understanding the effects of migration on their lives. He also tries to explore the intricate relationship between the European colonial forces (German and British), Indians, and indigenous Africans. He seems to be more concerned with history and memory. However, in his novels, we never find a simple, linear narrative, unfolding chapters after chapters of the past; rather, he is fond of exploring the historical past through stories, personal myths, and folklore, thus making it mysterious. Though memory plays an important role in invoking the past, it mostly reveals "half-truths" or is ambiguous by nature. As Vassanji once said in one of his interviews, "ambiguity is the driving force or the nuclear reaction behind my creativity." (Desai, 2012). Hence, in Vassanji's novels, the historical past concerning the origins of its protagonists is always mediated through memories of childhood experiences, myths, folklore, grandma's tales, and street stories. Hence, it is more

concealed than revealed and shrouded in mystery. Being mediated through memory, the "truth" that emerges lacks validity and will always remain obscure, hidden in the detritus of the past. It can be faded and then retrieved in a new avatar to be narrated in a different way. So, a new story can emerge with a new reconstruction of the past. Even as it emerges in various versions, the past will always haunt the storyteller.

There were also movements and trade activities in East Africa before the arrival of British and Germans in the late 1880s. There were thousands of Swahili, Omani, and South Asian (mostly from India) merchants doing brisk business on the coasts of East Africa. The Asian community of merchants, traders, and financiers engaged in maritime trade also mobilised human resources from their "homelands" as slaves, petty officials, accountants, and assistants. Many traders from the western coast of India and the hinterland were no exception. From the East African coasts they proceeded to Inlands of Africa to spread their trade and habitation. Throughout the nineteenth century, Asian involvement in African trade contributed to the economy of the continent on its eastern coast. Innumerable caravan routes opened up during this time, passing through the Congo and up to Lake Victoria. In those days, the island of Zanzibar was the epicentre of all trading activities, dominated by the Omani clove planters. Compared to the trading activities on the coast inland trading. (Hutcheon, 198) in the changed socio-cultural matrix of the EastAfrican society during the colonial rule, the problem of identity across the Asian diaspora remained quite problematic. The Asians, with their brown complexions, settled for an in-between position, subservient to the British. Unquestionably, the blacks were doubly colonised in colonial East Africa. First as the direct subjects of the British or Germans, and second by the Asian migrants, who were popularly addressed as "baniya" by the natives. Interestingly, most Asian households had an African as house-help with very insignificant wage. These Asian migrants were undoubtedly the preferred partners of the British as they assisted in the expansion of the frontiers of colonialism through their close-knit networks in the "dukkawallah" community. (Siundu 2005).

Interestingly, noted critic and theorist Vijay Mishra once commented: "All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is

unhappy in its own way" (Mishra, 2007). Any issue of identity in any diaspora is closely contested and negotiated with several compulsions of racial, cultural, and linguistic divide. In this liminal space between identity construction and performative shifting of affiliations and transnational locations This leads to a diasporic nostalgia ideated from an "imaginary homeland," which arises out of culture shock, xenophobia, or fear of miscegenation and racial suspicion. Isolated in their self-created social and cultural ghettos, these diasporic individuals, in their squeamishness about racial culture and contempt for the black colour invite their own doom. This social tension, which is evident in the first generation, is wonderfully portrayed in Vassanji's novels without impartial intent.

Fear of assimilation and losing a dear one to "the other's" culture has always been a possibility. In this process, one might lose one's identity and socio-cultural past. Interestingly, the formation of identity and place of origin have been two of the major preoccupations of the characters in Vassanji's novels. In The Book of Secrets, Pius makes forays into memory lane, narrating his story and making a self-journey into his individual past, but ends up nowhere. The journeys in Vassanji's novels are mostly allusive and ambiguous, where the characters land at a pit stop before carrying their journey further. The obsession for home, origin, and identity seems to have no end, and the journey is taken like a blindfolded camel driving an oil mill: "walking perpetually in circles, patient, doggedly persistent in the illusion that it had a destination" (TBS 132). Vassanji does not seem to offer any solace for the unending journeys of these characters, probably typifying it as a modern predicament. In *The Book of Secrets*, Pius, in his inability to return to his homeland of Goa, adopts Dar as his home. His efforts to rewrite the community's history would not be fulfilled, as one's perception of the past from the temporal distance of the present would only reveal half-truths, half-stories, and half-lives. In doing so, Vassanji is found to assign a kind of karmic sense to these one-way journeys made by the characters in search of their identity and origins. He tries to relate that to the first generation, who left their home countries for better opportunities and never returned. This is one of the most recurring themes in Vassanji's novels. The saga of migration is transferred from generation to generation in almost an unending way. The characters often blame

their fate or Karma for these eternal quests. They are often seen to find a link with their ancestors, who chose to live in Africa after migrating from India as British indented labourers for the construction of the Uganda-Kenya railway link in the 1880s.

Further, like most of Vassanji's novels in The *Book of Secrets,* the arrivals lead to a problematic stay since, in a new land, instant assimilation with the native culture is not always possible. The migrant individuals will have to struggle for their survival, fighting small but vexing battles of life. Similarly, in The Book of Secrets, the narrative spans over a period of 75 years and three generations. The narrator, Pius Fernandes, a former history teacher, unfolds the story of the Indian-Shmasi immigrant community, which is embedded in the colonial history of Tanzania, using a 1913 diary of Alfred Corbin, the then Assistant District Commissioner (ADC). Pius's quest for the truth about the origins of Ali Akber Ali has ramifications such as the exploration of the history of an entire community in colonial Tanzania during the conflict between the English and the German, the problematic nature of desire, particularly of Corbin for Mariamu, the problematic of Mariamu's silence, the murky parentage of Ali etc. This book of Vassanji dramatizes arrivals fraught with uncertainties. Upon his arrival in Africa, Corbin seems to be overcome by the dark, strange, wild, and menacing presence that Africa has irrevocably taken on in his colonial imagination. It is an enigma, fraught with desire and fear, which is extended to his relation to Mariamu, the puzzling consequences of which impact the fate of Pipa and Ali Akber Ali. His act of maintaining a journal might well seem an epistemic control he exercises over the life among the natives, but his liaison with Mariamu and the complicated chain of events in relation to the stealing of the diary, its coming into the possession of Pipa, and finally to Pius is a spinoff over which he has no control. Now the diary seems to have gone on a peregrination with enigmatic fallout, as it were. Later in the novel, Rita and Ali, both lovers, arrive in London in search of a haven that could protect them from the wrath of the community back home in Dar. Like many others, they run to the land that offers them freedom and opportunities to fulfil their desires. But the pursuit of freedom involves the transposition of old selves and the relocation of those selves in the new land, not without the anxiety of being insecure and obscure. Gregory, Pius's English

teacher and possibly gay partner, is an example of an individual who leaves home and the old world together with their ties. For his part, Pius exults in his freedom from an old country and discards family ties, social conventions, and traditions. In the words of Alison Toron: "It is significant that Gregory renounces his British passport to live in the newly independent Tanzania, suggesting that queer sexuality has no place in dominant Western discourses and that Vassanji at least allows for the possibilities of alternative sexualities by introducing Gregory as a character." (13). But the relationship has its own share of uncertainties, and given the ambiguous sexual orientation of Pius (bisexual), their relationship becomes far from certain. The metafictional representation of this matter of history by Pius is a kind of his arrival there at the heart of the truth, but the metafictionality is itself enigmatic. As Ashok Mohapatra would say following these blots, "it would be a dark, endless, one-way passage of the diasporic self" from which there is no return, nor can he progress towards any closure or resolution (Mohapatra, 2007). This further reminds us that in the *Book of Secrets,* Pipa describes his life's journey as "the blindfolded camel that drove the mill as it walked perpetually in circles—patient, doggedly persistent in the illusion that it had a destination." (BS 132). Thus, the journey of every diasporic individual in search of his origin, identity, and "home" is always an endless one, just like the Shehzadee in Arbian Knights churning out stories after stories without beginning or end; in the circular path, you end up where you started.

In *The Book of Secrets*, which has a historical narrative structure, Pius tries to trace the relevance of a stolen colonial diary to a specific community's past. In his attempts to rewrite history, he ends up writing his own biography. He being also an outsider to the community, his perception of the historical past is questionable. Surpassing his "outsider" status as a Goan-Indian, he attempts at a sympathetic projection of the plight of the Shamsi community under colonial British and German rule. His inability to unravel the mysteries buried in the past confirms Vassanji's stance that there are limitations to our knowledge of the past as it is riddled with ambiguity, contradictions, and the narrowness of his subjective perception. Curiously, the book ends with an epilogue. In the very beginning of the novel before handing over the diary to him: "What

is history, sir" (BS 4). In that very instance, Pius remained silent, and the question remains unanswered in the novel, just like the various other mysteries that remained unravelled. It seems that Vassanji never wanted to give a conventional answer to the question. Rather, he offers us a community history that is autobiographical, and also allegorical of the national history. In defence of his refusal to clear the mysteries, Vassanji once said: "Writing of history is always an intrusion into the past but the person who is intruding is never very far from the characters he recreates" (Shawn 110). In the same interview, he further elucidates: "History is play between the created and the creating, the real and the imagined" where "the narrator and the historian both play a kind of game with history" (Shawn 108). This is very crucial for the thematic understanding of the novel, as with our limited access to the past from the temporal distance of the present, the credibility and authenticity of the past are always dubious. Hence, Vassanji believes, the answers to these questions are not very important, but what is important is "trying to understand the past" by "reconstructing it" (Shawn 117).

Vassanji's novels wonderfully exhibit the diasporic, and postcolonial space and assume hybridized and also hyphenated identities of these migrants. The characters variously deal with the problems of their origins in the lands from where they or their forefathers migrated under compelling circumstances; the origins continue to be mysterious, and therefore these call for ambivalent affiliation with communities and culture in specific chronotopes; many characters carry memories as cultural baggage to interpret the present and construct new identities in places that are culturally alien and hostile to them; they assume or evade or even become victims of domestic and political responsibilities; they continue to search for home as a cultural baggage to interpret the present and construct new identities in places that are culturally alien and hostile to them; they assume or evade or even become victim of domestic and political responsibilities; many of them continue to search for home as a signifier of stasis, meaningful selfhood and fulfillment, while home gets perpetually deferred to an indefinite future much beyond the scope of the narrative; many, however, manage to make a return either for a brief period or for good, although owing to peculiar personal reasons that can never be generalised The novel in

discussion shows us how important it is for someone to affiliate himself or herself socially, culturally, and politically to a place for survival and call it home, even as such affiliations become impossible because of his or her dubious origins. Pius is homeless. So is Pipa once again with unknown genealogical antecedents. The uncertainty about origin and inability for cultural and political affiliations necessitate one's search for viable identities and homes across geographical and cultural boarders. People move on in search of them, although with little success. They build narratives of their personal lives and embed them in the history of the community, which is informed by a still larger history of colonialism in east Africa. Book of Secrets turns out to be a metafiction of Pius' fictional exercise in fabricating a narrative of the self as embedded in the history of a community that seeks a collective identity in East Africa, where the British and the Germans were engaged in a power struggle. In a beleaguered colonial space, the characters and communities have fluid identities and volatile affiliations. In such cases, fictions of the origins and growth of communities as well as the lives and times of individuals are fabricated with the help of scrappy and hazy memories and fragmented histories. The fragmentary diary of Corbin is the source for the stories of characters like Mariamu, Akku, and Maynard. While retrieving them and structuring them, Pius tries to build his self-narrative. But these stories remain incomplete and disjointed; this disjointedness, which is a structural principle of the novel, problematises the origins and identities of the characters and invests in the diary a mystery that ironically becomes the supreme truth. How profoundly meaningful is the diary, which is otherwise fragmentary and incomplete? The title of the novel that alludes to the mystery and power of a truth that cannot be textualised, and a story that is fragmentary and incomplete and the ultimate analysis is more powerful than a story that is well crafted and complete.

Hence, homelessness led to migrations and the state of exile both in the homes left behind in the African countries and in the new homes in the countries of the West. A sense of emotional rupture, alienation, and psychic displacement were the natural consequences of such migrations. And yet the migrants, who carried the baggage of their Indian culture and memories of home from both India and

Africa, relocated themselves in the new world with reconfigured identities. For with every new journey, home becomes "multilocational," and the diasporic self, in its unending wanderlust, goes on seeking new "home" affiliations after each subsequent migration. Assimilations with foreign cultures happen, though at the cost of an in-betweenness that must be overcome as a new land with its imposing socio-cultural imperatives would be hard to repudiate. The only home that seems viable is the "imaginary" one with its mythical dimensions (Rushdie).

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6

Children's Graphic Literature: Celebration of Difference and Deference of Uniformity in Kamla Bhasin's *Rainbow Girls* and *Rainbow Boys*

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Abstract

This paper is to study that children's literature celebrates difference and defers the norms of uniformity. The two graphic texts for children *Rainbow Girls* and *Rainbow Boys* by Kamla Bhasin, visualise unease over uniformity and juxtapose it with ease and happiness over differences among the girls and boys respectively. The two texts visualise the difference in terms of physical appearance, expression of emotions, activities of play, likes-dislikes, and behaviours of children in various situations. They also visualise that the differences are functionally dynamic as they increase relatability, action and variation in emotional affinity. Uniformity is shown as cumbersome and enforced from the outside. The books also juxtapose difference and uniformity and incline towards the former by echoing the acceptance in affirmative narrations along with the visuals of differences. I intend to show that these two texts assert multiple childhoods, that the visual difference complements the momentum in childhood, the differences become the characteristics of equality of childhood, and they defer uniformity. I intend to use the method of juxtaposition in comic art to discuss how the juxtaposition of affects, abilities, pursuits, behaviours, and associations of colours and spaces create a feeling of acceptance in children about the differences among themselves and others.

Keywords: Children's graphic literature, differences, juxtaposition in comics art, multiple childhoods, affirmative narration

Multiple Childhoods

Childhood is not a singular, homogenous, and identical concept. American psychologist Erik Erikson divides childhood into five

stages according to the age-group they belong to (Erikson222-247). It also entails multiple childhoods based on conditions of birth, methods of raising children informally or formally, and the attitudinal and temperamental development of children during childhood. These conditions are complexly related to one another. Conditions of birth such as location, class, race, caste, and disabilities create different childhoods in terms of exposure, abilities, and limitations. Cultural aspects such as languages, rituals, methods of raising children—informal or formal, play, and imitation of roles develop different cultural relativity among children. The attitudes and habits developed among children will depend upon the two factors mentioned above. This also means not only there are differences among children and experiences in childhood but also entails diverse approaches to understanding different childhoods. Representation of differences among children in Kamla Bhasin's *Rainbow Girls* and *Rainbow Boys*has lessons not only for children but the adult readers. The realities of multiple childhoods often lead to the problematic representation and reception of difference. Some of these realities could be manifested visually whereas some of them are in the form of latency and yet to be realised and manifested externally. Representation of manifest and latent (invisible) realities of childhoods and complex relationship with each other is crucial in the analysis and understanding of the different beings. Universalisation of attributes of childhood would be harmful to the adaptation and reconciliation with the different in childhoods. Comics art, which fundamentally depends on the juxtaposition and complementarity of the different—words and images, has been used by Kamla Bhasin and the illustrator Priya Kurian in the texts to draw the readers' attention to differences and help them learn to deal with the different by treating the difference natural, essential, and complementary. The next section explains how graphic drawings in the two texts juxtapose the differences among children.

The Juxtaposition of Difference

Image 1 from *Rainbow Boys* shows two diametrically opposite pursuits; at least until recent time the adults perceived the two pursuits—studies and games quite the opposite. Although the words stress difference and stretch the difference to two extremes, "[s]ome

love to study and have no interest in games" and "[s]ome love to play if they had their way, they would play the whole day"(Bhasin, *Rainbow Boys*9), the children pursuing two different activities show temperamental similarities. Both the children have been completely immersed in the activityaccording to their choice. Whereas one is focused towards the book and is highlighted by the focus of the headlamp complementing the focused child, the other child is engaged in skills which could defy the gravitational laws. Both are determined to excel and seem to love their activity. However, for adults these two activities have different referential value. The examples of these boys would be used by adults to encourage the activity of the first kind and to issue a caution to them for refraining from the second activity.

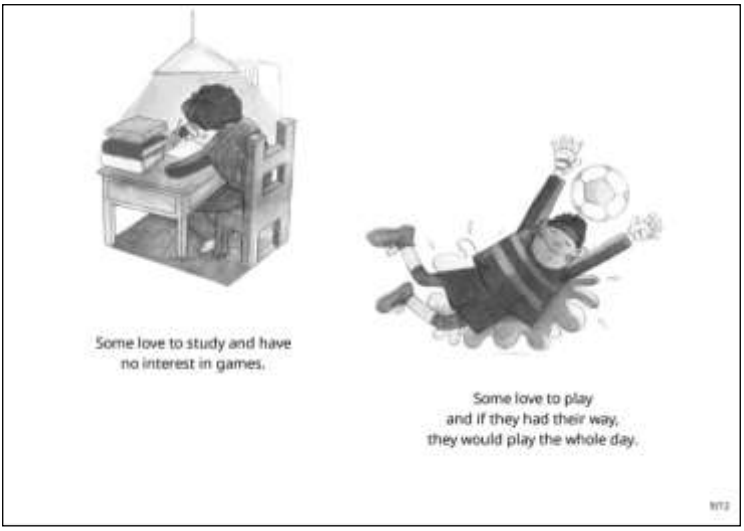

Figure 1 from *Rainbow Boys* by Kamla Bhasin and Priya Kurian © Pratham Books, 2019

Image 2 from *Rainbow Girls* stresses on the difference not only among the girls about how they like to appear but also intends juxtaposition with expectations from them and stereotypes about gender appearance. Similar to examples of a studious child the girl loving dressing-up would be preferred by adults over the untidy girl to encourage children to love doing things according to gender.

Figure 2 from *Rainbow Girls* by Kamla Bhasin and Priya Kurian © Pratham Books, 2019

Similarly, on all other pages of both books, different emotional responses, pursuits, likes and dislikes, abilities and attitudes of children are juxtaposed. Adults' attitude towards these is both manifest and latent. In the image with a boy cross-dressing as a girl the posture of a shocked mother manifests a homophobic adult response. The books attempt to reenact the two kinds of performances by children in juxtaposition and invite adults to respond to the difference. Conventionally adults would disapprove of disturbing or subversive differences as we have been trained to look at and accept conforming behaviours, pursuits and likes and dislikes. This takes us to the question of what these differences among children are. Further sections of the paper analyse and reason the different among children.

The functionality of Difference

Differences among children are functional, kinetic/dynamic, and instinctive (creative). Childhood is a highly functional stage in which the mind, body, and objects constantly work together to create new combinations in play, work or studies. Objects attract minds; the mind creates the functional possibility for the body to engage with the objects and the body follows the mind to actualise those possibilities. The objects of attractions keep changing their forms—

material objects to conceptual ideas such as desires, love, dreams and pursuits. The engagements with new objects or ideas often realise new experiences which have never been imagined by the body. This tempts children further to make new combinations of objects and functions. It gives rise to excitement and momentum for a new experiment. This whole process is unending.

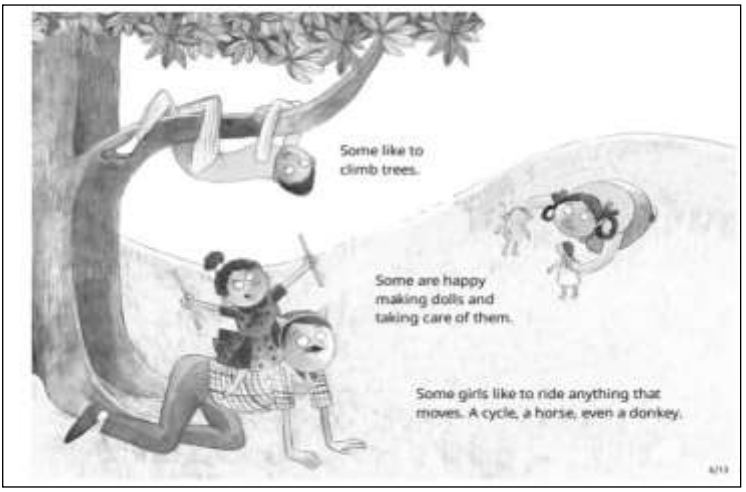

Figure 3 from *Rainbow Girls* by Kamla Bhasin and Priya Kurian © Pratham Books, 2019

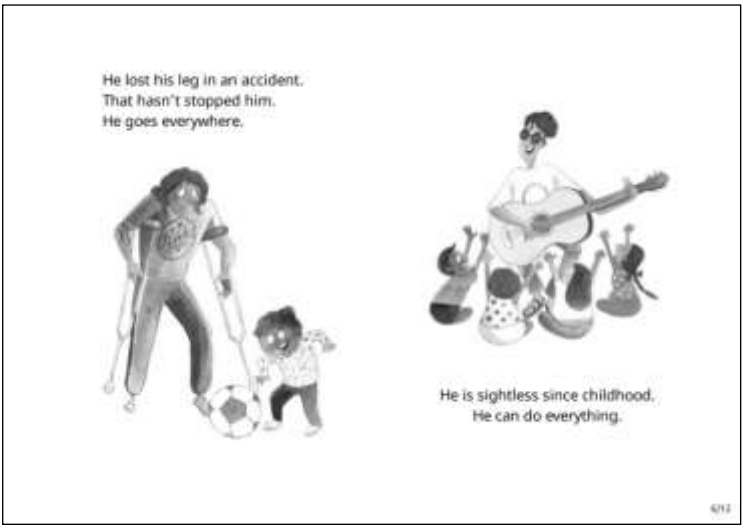

Figure 4 from *Rainbow Boys* by Kamla Bhasin and Priya Kurian © Pratham Books, 2019

Children are attracted towards objects in their surrounding. Shapes, sizes, colours of objects are their primary attractions. However, soon they start engaging the objects by modifying them as partners in their activities. Depending upon the objects available to them, their ability to handle the objects and their imaginative faculty in modifying them their engagement with objects become dynamic. Different things require different skills and capacities, physical or imaginative, and prompt them to perform those skills. As children move from object to object, they keep performing various skills and capacities. This makes the exercise functionally diverse and kinetic. The initial superficial attraction turns into a functional realisation of the situation or objects which keeps acquiring new dimensions depending upon the evolution of the creativity of children. Images 3 and 4 show that children are attracted to different objects based on the functional variety in engagement—climbing upon the tree requires working on the tree from below whereas riding a 'horse' is from above and requires horizontal balancing; playing football with an amputated leg or doing activities by compensating the absence of eyesight. The juxtaposition of the different objects or related activities against one another actually highlights multiple possibilities these objects could create depending upon the time, mood, energy and abilities of children. At any other given moment with a given mood and energy levels these objects could be used by children in different formations—tree for hiding; imagining the adult body as a fish or a co-player, and dolls could be replaced by toy animals to change the domestic scene to a forest one.

Each engagement of a child is an event involving a set of functions by the mind and body over a period of time. It is about sequencing and synchronising the functions, tiredness and method to deal with it, self-analysis and lessons learnt. Let's take the example of the child studying the book and the other child playing with a ball in image 1. Both the children must have meditated and chosen what to read and play; they must have prepared for the performance of the act of reading and play. Both activities have temporal dimensions of experiences which involve intellectual, emotional, physical energies. They would also display sensations of emotions, anger, frustrations, triumph and failures in learning while reading and winning or losing while playing. With recognisable variations these two events will

create a pattern of experiences for them. Children perform a series of acts; display a series of emotions while performing the acts and a set of realisations which are the outcomes of those events. Such events are essential for making children understand the nature of events, similarities between these events and incidents and situations in real life. They are exercises to train them to coordinate among the skills, existing and found ones, emotional responses to situations, conduct during events and to prepare them to deal with failures. Encounter similar situations all over life are neither possible nor desirable. Training in exclusively one kind of event will harm the overall development of children. The two events just show the variety of events in the life of children and the possibilities of using a variety of skills to learn to accommodate themselves to various situations. The skills learnt in one kind of event could also be used in other events when children are clueless to deal with new situations. The experimental applications of skills learnt from events of different kinds would change the outcomes of situations. The skills and abilities gained through different events could be used interchangeably for their benefit. The events need not be seen as divided into good and desirable and bad and undesirable events as entailed by adults in their prescriptions of books and warnings for play to children.

Difference and Relatability

Functional engagement with different objects and people over a period of time develops a bonding between children and them. The objects or people start becoming part of their life. The bonding could be temporary or permanent, however what is crucial is the ability to relate, emote and form affinities towards them on the basis of difference in them. In the process of forming the bonds of affinity the differences are not seen doubtfully, rather they become a source of attraction and interest. Their view of the immediate environment is accommodative of these variations.

Children's attraction towards the apparent differences among each other is actually a reason to move, imitate, adventure, romance and feel an affinity. Since the early stages of childhood children are attentive to sensory perceptions. Apparent visual differences attract them. Such attractions are non-normative. Children are yet to learn

adults' method of othering while relating to the differences. Adults normativise the different based on their experience, cultural upbringing, and morality and choose not to relate to the *wrong* aspect of the different. Adults prefer and value study over play, calm over noise, neatness over untidiness, orderliness over unruliness, obedience over disobedience, gender norms over genderlessness, productive engagement over selflessness and so on. In all such situations the difference is normativised and kept at bay by the adults. As children are yet to learn these norms, their relativity towards the different is just an act of instinctive exploration. The juxtaposition of different bodies, objects, and acts in the two texts portrays multiple possibilities of relationships by children with the difference. As children are yet to learn to relate based on the norms or values of adults, they can easily embrace the different.

Juxtaposition and the Meaning

Juxtaposing the Affect

Children's enthusiasm, interest, and excitement are indicators of how they engage with the difference and uniformity. Their reactions to the different are reflected through various affects. Affect is composed of "specific facial expressions, patterns of breathing, muscle contractions, vocalisations, and movements" (Shmurak 8). Silvan Tomkins illustrates nine affects—interest-excitement; enjoyment-joy; surprise-startle; distress-anguish; anger-rage; fear-terror; shame-humiliation; disgust; and dissmell to sum up younger children's reactions to various situations. Children's responses to their situations or activities of people around them are crystalised in affects. They are instinctive, bodily and "non-conscious experience of intensity"(Shouse).By way of the juxtaposition of different affects the two books indicate the range of emotions children are capable of as well as the necessity of variety in emotional engagement with the situations they are in. It also means that the circumstances they are in also need to be varied to evoke varied responses to train them to prepare to deal with a variety of situations, from exciting to traumatic, in real life. Affects also indicate that children are appreciative of difference in people, objects, activities, and situations. Images 5 and 6 from the two texts also demonstrate that children do not express similar affects but affects keep changing depending on

the changes in situations they are in or activities they are performing. It is a reason for the organic reflexes, mobility and action in all directions and towards all kinds of objects and people around them.

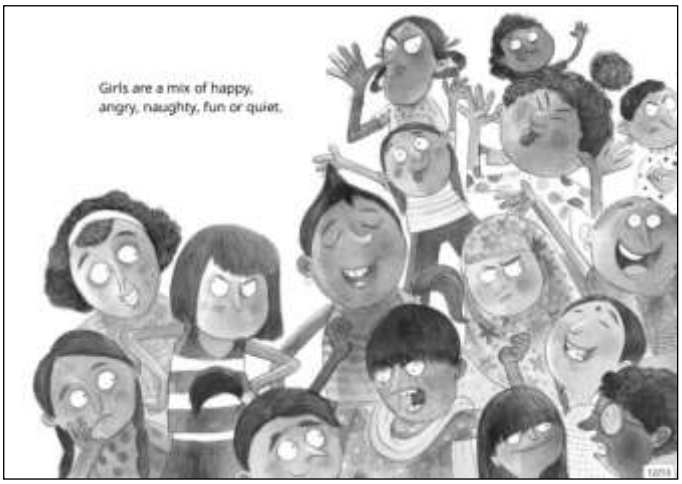

Figure 5from *Rainbow Girls* by Kamla Bhasin and Priya Kurian © Pratham Books, 2019

Figure 6from *Rainbow Boys* by Kamla Bhasin and Priya Kurian © Pratham Books, 2019

Affects release the load of emotions they keep on compiling in them due to consistent exposure to a variety of situations. The situations not only vary in nature—such as learning different subjects with levels of difficulties under different tutors, modes of transport, foods, playtime, parental gaze—but also have bearings upon their life. Affects absorbs and accommodates the stress of dealing with

incomprehensible situations without the compulsions of formal modes of response. Consistent patterns in affects in relations to situations and people around them also help adults gauge children according to the status of emotions and adapt their method accordingly. The exchange between children and adults on the basis of affects is to accommodate differences between both the children and the adults.

Juxtaposition of Narration and its Echo

Rainbow Girls has narrations such as "Tell me, are all girls the same? Should all girls be the same? It would be boring if they were" and "[g]irls can be calm. They can also be naughty"juxtaposed with the images of girls identical with one another (2, 10). Similarly, images of boys looking exactly like one another are juxtaposed by the narration "Who says all boys should be the same? They are not photocopies of one another. They are individuals" in *Rainbow Boys* (4). Narrations such as these in the two texts echo the internal monologue of children about the duality in relation to the difference they see among others. They also express their fears about being different from others and being judged for their difference. The narrations echo their doubts and fears but answer them in the next lines. The narration is a key element in expressing internal affirmation while they see images of children differing from each other. Children readers will corroborate the differences in images of children with the changes in their perspective towards them. The narrations would help them accommodate the differences among others. Both the texts appear to be "picture-specific," however, the narration and the graphic are in an "additive combination where words amplify or elaborate on an image or vice versa" (McCloud 154). The narrations are also an expression of acceptance, assurance, and consolation which could be taken as an antidote to what children usually listen in real life from parents, peers, or teachers about the difference between them. The child readers who have doubts and the possibility of feeling inferior due to difference get an answer in the narrations. The two texts could also have a bibliotherapeutic influence on children who face similar circumstances. While explaining the healing nature of stories for children Hugh Crago mentions that,

> (…) the reading of books can provide the comfort of knowing that one is not alone, and thus function as a 'safer', more private version of a psychotherapy or self-help group… reading can provide vicarious insight into one's problems, and even a measure of the integration of previously disowned feelings. (171)

It also answers the doubts of those children who find it difficult to deal with the difference in other children due to their conditioning about gender and stereotypes of appearance and behavior as well as differences of other kinds.

Juxtaposition as Equalisation of Difference

Although the images of children displaying variations in appearances, likes and dislikes, pursuits, capacities and interests, which at times are interpreted as contrasting to each other, are juxtaposed, instead of highlighting the opposite characteristics among them they are portrayed in terms of possibilities of seamlessness and interchangeability. Adults often tend to normativise differences. The appearances of children are divided into the binaries of serious, decent, and acceptable vs flamboyant, subversive and offensive. Likewise, the pursuits of children are divided between higher and lower or productive and non-productive. Adults also judge children by overrating certain abilities and capacities over other set of abilities. These terms of judgments of children on the basis of qualities often lead to discrimination against children who do not possess the positive attributes of the binaries mentioned above. *Rainbow Girls* and *Rainbow Boys* juxtapose the differences only to equalise and celebrate them. It also constantly hints at the possibilities of fluidity and interchangeability of attributes among children over a given period of time. While equalising the differences it prevents the readers from consolidating an observation into a norm on the static possession of attributes at any given point of time. Children who like to study may attempt and display the fundamentals of activities of play in the study as well as those who like to play may display passion in their engagements to make it a serious profession and earn a living, respect and fame. The possibility that they may switch their engagements in future cannot be ruled out.

At another level the two texts also juxtapose the gender stereotypes of appearance and behavior. *Rainbow Boys* show a boy crying, another boy wearing a frock, a boy having long hair, and two boys engaged in knitting (2). Similarly, *Rainbow Girls* shows girls wearing a short, another girl having no hair, and a girl with "shabby clothes and flying hair" (9). These juxtapositions entail the deliberate prick in the stereotyping of gendered appearance and behaviour which we have been accustomed to and practicing unconsciously. At a glance children may find these appearances and behaviours odd because they have been trained to see gendered alignment in appearance and behaviours. Gendered conditioning of children has a long-term impact on them. Shivaranjana Rathore, in her review of these two books comments on the effect of these norms on children:

> (…) the wonder of play is often marred early on when children find themselves rejected, bullied, mocked, shamed or abandoned for not falling in line with gendered norms of existence, often leaving scars well into adulthood.

But the assuring narrations such as "Who says all boys should be the same? They are not photocopies of one another" (Bhasin, *Rainbow Boys 4*) and "Girls are a mix of happy, angry, naughty, fun or quiet" (Bhasin, *Rainbow Girls* 12) help children to deal with fears in themselves for liking and doing things which are attributed to the other gender.

Pedagogy of the Difference

In order to communicate with the world around them, children require a language which is semantically substitutive for the formal language of adults. The reason for this is that the language homogenises for convenience. It tends to invisibilise and discourages differences. Adult language is equivalent to formality, orderliness, status quo, and seriousness. Children, especially those who are concerned about the treatment by other children and adults on the basis of differences among them, feel a little wary to express their fears and concerns. The long term impact of these fears would mean harm to their exposure to others. The language of comics not only accommodates their differences but also argues the differences without being clichés. It foregrounds the differences, juxtaposes the difference in bodies, capacities, desires, likes and dislikes, choices,

attitudes and temperaments and shows the inherence of difference in the reality of children's life. The reader cannot but notice, remember, and prioritise the difference while approaching children. It has meanings for children and adult readers. It trains children to recognise the terms of differences among themselves and others, to learn to search for meanings of the differences, to learn to deal with the differences among themselves and with the differences among others, understand the relatability and usefulness of differences, develop reception of differences among others and learn the modes of representations of differences. Although the two texts show images of differences among children in isolation or juxtaposed with distance from each other on each of the pages, the two images with congregations of children—one with identicality and the other one with different children—highlight the aspects of relatativity among themselves on the basis of identicality and difference. The previous image of similarity between boys and girls shows their apprehension, confusion and anxiety which could easily be traced to the problem of identification, competition and monotony. The challenge to find an appropriate answer for choosing between similarity and difference is always difficult. Children will always be made conscious of how their choice will be evaluated by others and especially by adults. Children are aware that adults would prefer similarity rather than difference because similarity would entail conformity and difference would mean subversion. However, while they attempt to conform by being similar to others, they are skeptical internally. In contrast, when they demonstrate the difference, they are free internally and demonstrate loyalty to themselves.

Deferring the Uniformity

Rainbow Girls and *Rainbow Boys* show problematic nature of uniformity in children's world and its probable impact on children. Children are baffled by the apparent similarities among themselves compared to the coolness among children who engage with the difference in all other panels in both books. A partial reason for their bafflement is the problem of relating to others and identifying others. The fear that all the children will be a copy of each other in all respect is evident. Further consequences of exposing to differences are common attractions, modes and intensities of engagements,

expression of emotions and relatability. However, when allowed to pursue these attractions, they would be socialising with a difference with varying degree. What is problematic with the desire for uniformity is that it will neutralise the instinctive variations among children while socialising. Differences have material and situational aspects. Children growing up in a village or a farm will have a different set of objects to deal with and will acquire skills accordingly. Their situation is different from children growing up in a city going to school. It is difficult to imagine both of them possessing and displaying one another's skills across all spaces and situations. It is only but natural and logical that their performance will vary in kind and degree if they move to new spaces requiring different skills. In a situation like this it is critical to understand how agencies of spaces accommodate their differences and help them learn a new set of skills or use the present skills. Even when new skills are acquired by the children, the pattern of those skills will be varied which, in a classroom situation, actually contributes to the heterogeneity of classrooms. It is imperative for the instructors to engage with the heterogeneity with creativity rather than frowning upon it.

Uniformity is an adult norm. It comes from the desire to order, conformity and convenience. It is more technical than instinctive in its observance. Uniformity is a useful tool in managing and controlling a huge number of children adult instructors have to deal with in spaces such as schools. While completing their curricular assignment, overseeing the progress of children according to the expectations of parents, maintaining protocols of regulatory bodies and preparing students according to the needs of recruiting agencies dealing with a uniform mass of children is convenient for the instructors. Maintaining uniformity is also technical. From wearing the uniform and shoes to carrying similar school bags and from learning the same curriculum to learning the same lessons in morality and other values children are expected to follow uniformity that is quite visible. The fruitfulness of uniformity for disciplinary reasons gradually becomes a norm in all other aspects of the process of learning. Children are expected to be uniform in conduct, abilities, and performance. With the stringent pedagogic pressure with the advancement in grades (classes they are in) children also tend to

follow uniformity to avoid penalties coming with deviations in behavior. With a lesser degree of encouragement to difference and creativity instinctive thinking and its application get beating. The extra-curricular activities, which are supposed to be encouraging creativity among children based on the inherent heterogeneity, are also not free from the role models of excellence to be followed by them. This will again lead them towards likeness with the role models. The force exerted by the agencies at home or school towards uniformity of appearance, behaviour and pursuit would be directly proportional to the degree of uniformity in these respects among children. *Rainbow Girls* and *Rainbow Boys* express the wish to defer the thought of uniformity by visually juxtaposing children's feelings of anxiousness towards uniformity with the feelings of happiness and fulfillment in difference in themselves and others. The two graphic texts also hint at the imminent loss of individuality if children are pushed towards uniformity.

Conclusion

Rainbow Girls and *Rainbow Boys essentially* argue that differences among children have functional and creative relevance. By visually juxtaposing the differences among them, the texts highlight functional similarity and complementarity of differences. Internal doubts raised by different appearances, aspirations, and actions are also answered by the affirmative narrations they read simultaneously while they see. Visuals of differences echoed by affirmations imprint on the minds of children that it is okay to be different. Eileen Colwell, the distinguished British storyteller mentions that, "[t]here are particular people in a community who need stories" (qtd in Hunt 11). The two texts reaffirm the fact that children confronted by the difference in them and others *need* stories explaining the meaning of differences and acquainting with them.

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7

The Dialectics of Nature and Civilisation: An Ecocritical Reading of Cormac Mccarthy's *The Road*

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Abstract

Apocalyptic fiction anticipates a global cataclysm due to man's incessant industrial, capitalistic, scientific, and technological endeavours. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, sees from an earth-centric approach underscoring rampant environmental degradation and ecological imbalance leading to such horrible catastrophes. Combining these two strands, this paper envisions the development of a symbiotic relationship between Nature and man, thereby attaining holistic growth. Looking through the theories of Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and especially Timothy Morton, this paper interprets the ecological concerns of the post-apocalyptic fictional world of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. *The Road* recounts the journey of a father and a son and their struggle for existence through the roads of a devastated and ravaged country with a hope of a better future of mutual sustainability and continuity of life.

Keywords: post-apocalyptic fiction, ecocriticism, environmental degradation, catastrophe, symbiotic relationship, existence, and mutual sustainability.

Ecocriticism is the literary and cultural criticism that considers nature to be of paramount importance and tries to interpret a text from an environmentalist lens. Ecocriticism is an umbrella term that studies the intersection of environmental concerns with multidisciplinary studies. The Ecocritical School of thought theorists who have been influential are Cheryl Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Jonathan Bate, William Rueckert, Timothy Morton, and others. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and

physical environment… ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies." (Glotfelty, 122). William Rueckert first used the term 'ecocriticism' in 1978. Although the origin of the word was in the United States, it gradually proliferated through an instrumental organisation named The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), founded in 1992 at a meeting of the US Western Literature Association.

The Ecocritics re-read texts attempting to discover Nature as silenced in texts and construe environmental representation as a relevant category of literary studies. Ecocriticism seeks to search for alternatives that would cater to the holistic and sustainable development of both man and nature. The genesis of the Ecocritical school of thought can be traced to the unprecedented advancement of science and technology, extreme capitalistic fetishism, rapid industrialisation, and rampant capitalistic modernisation that have been adversely affecting the quality of the environment. Lawrence Buell, in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, writes, "ecocriticism gathers itself around a commitment to environmentally from whatever critical vantage point" (11) and that human impact on the environment has been the most recurring problem which demands attention.

The development of Ecocriticism has been like a three-fold movement. The first wave of Ecocriticism began with Buell himself in both Britain and the US. Jonathan Bate, one of the pioneers of the first wave of ecocriticism, reinterpreted William Wordsworth's texts from this point of view. Ironically, Thomas Malthus, in that era, predicted an apocalypse in his "Essay on Population" (1798), wherein he enlists down the necessities of man, thereby hinting at the upcoming despondency which would cause a scarcity of resources. Malthus rejects the conventional image of Nature as gentle, nurturing, and kind rather than ruthless and destructive if harmed. Lawrence Buell, too, concurs with this Malthusian notion of a possibility of an apocalyptic nature in *The Environmental Imagination*. The second wave was critical of this apparent glorification and mystification of the idyllic notion of Nature. However, the third wave of Ecocriticism underscores rampant environmental degradation and ecological imbalance resulting in horrible catastrophes. The third wave of critics encapsulates the tenets of the erstwhile waves, exposing the causes

and consequences of the varied climatic changes like global warming, pollution, nuclear wars, extreme weather events, etc.

Developing a symbiotic relationship between the biotic and abiotic components to attain sustainable development, preservation of flora and fauna, preventing mass extinction of species, reducing pollution rate, and limiting usage of renewable resources are some of the targets that come under the paraphernalia of Ecocriticism. The idea of sustainable development was first proposed in the Brundtland report in 1987, implying the usage of natural resources without depleting them so that future generations, too, can access them.

The third wave of Ecocriticism deals with a component called "Anthropocene". The word "Anthropocene" has been derived from the Greek word "Anthropos", which means "human". Anthropocene examines human beings are responsible for the ecological imbalance and stimulator for these global catastrophes. It points out that man's progress has rendered nature dysfunctional. In *Ecology without Nature,* Timothy Morton quashes the traditional idea of Nature. He urges that the phase of the Anthropocene must be considered a juncture of self-introspection for us to realise the amount of wreck that has been done. According to Morton, Anthropocene clips out the winged hubris of man, thereby holding them accountable for their superiority complex. "Capitalocene" is a sub-genre of Anthropocene that suggests the capitalistic ideologies of Western males as the root cause of this environmental degeneration.

Morton, in *Hyperobjects,* proposes: "The end of the world is correlated with the Anthropocene, its global warming and subsequent drastic climate change, whose precise scope remains uncertain while its reality is verified beyond question." (5) What Morton implies is that global warming or climatic change is real, irreversible, and a transcendental object surpassing all spatiotemporal signifiers.

The scope of this paper is to examine the recent trends of Ecocriticism and the poignant ecological concerns in Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel named *The Road.*

Cormac McCarthy (1933 – living) is an American writer who has been a part of the Santa Fe Institute and is the author of eleven acclaimed novels. Among his honours are National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. McCarthy most popularly authored works are *Child of God* (1973), *Suttree* (1979), *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), *The Crossing* (1994), *No Country for Old Men* (2005), *The Road* (2006), and *The Border Trilogy* (2013).

McCarthy's *The Road* is at the pinnacle of his authorial career. *The Road* is set in postmodern America, ravaged by an unnamed cataclysm that the author does not reveal explicitly. The experience of the readers is quite disturbing and unsettling throughout the text. What engrosses the readers is the depiction of the end of the microcosmic US or the whole world on a greater scale. Most of McCarthy's works are predominated by male camaraderie, and, in this novel, too, the readers witness a universal human bond of a father and a son plodding through the plundered setting. The duo moves towards the South to escape the cold, grey winter and to have necessities for the sustenance of life. McCarthy depicts the minimalistic availability of food, water, and other resources amidst the terrible vulnerability of life. The novel is brimming with Biblical undertones against a deranged and sickening world that is beyond redemption. The protagonist has been deliberately unnamed, which has a dual signification. Firstly, the man stands out to be a prototype of all men thus, giving a vibe of universality to the readers, and, secondly, the name of the man becomes unimportant for there is hardly anybody left in that post-apocalyptic world to distinguish amongst themselves. They survive on canned food which they scavenge daily and plod along with a shopping cart (perhaps, a marker of capitalistic consumerism and a signifier of the normal world that the man yearns for), two knapsacks, and a pistol to kill them when captured. They avoid human contact because most of the other people have resorted to cannibalism.

McCarthy's landscape is enmeshed with nihilism: devoid of colours, sounds, life, movement, and devoid of God. The setting only has impenetrable darkness and a haunting vacuity:

> The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. […] The city was mostly burned. No sign of life. Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust… (10-11)

Nature, which has perhaps suffered a nuclear holocaust, is not aesthetic or prelapsarian but a rugged wilderness which is has been ravaged by human intrusion. The wilderness is thus violent, destructive, and rebellious. Morton propounded the idea of nature being a continually existing entity, implying that nature is present both in the wilderness and also amidst human society. Thus, rather than looking towards nature with reverend awe, a man might think it to be plausible and omnipresent as a backdrop to all forms of existence. Looking from a deconstructionist perspective, it can be said that the structure of Nature has been dismantled and decentred.

The lineage of the notion of "environmental justice" can be traced back to Lawrence Buell, who conceptualised ecological well-being and "equity". Environmental justice literature narrativises an individual's reaction to socio-economic and ecological changes. It strikes human greed and intrusion into the ecosystems as the common denominator for every environmental problem. Environmental studies encompass ideas of connectedness, assimilation, sustainability, of equity of both the biotic and the abiotic components, thereby ensuring smooth and harmonious functioning.

The Road sketches a "barren, silent and godless" nature. However, whenever it speaks, it talks of vengeful destruction for the injustices inflicted upon it. An earthquake awakes the Man and his son. The child being tender, is terrified. Later, they witness thunder, lightning, rainfall, snowfall, and forest fires amidst the appalling winter. The forest kept burning; the trees appeared like black skeletons, subsuming and devouring whatever came within its orbit. The orange glare of the burning fire, which the man saw in achromatic surroundings, appeared to him as a possibility of returning of the Sun that had been long blotted out by the dense and darkened ash. The natural contrasting imagery of colours is a trope to signify the cold and grey existence of two tramps who are keeping the "fire inside" them to survive. At one instance, the man was awakened by a loud cracking sound. One after another, the trees had started to fall with deafening crashing sounds spreading the wildfires

"among the embers". He awakened the boy from sleep and hurried away from that place.

The availability of food in this barren country is of utmost importance for the father. They sparingly feed themselves, starving most of the time yet walking continuously through the woods towards the South. McCarthy raises a poignant question that when human infrastructure, science, and technology have collapsed, the only resort left is Nature. However, if nature has been ransacked and ruined past retrieval, then all possibilities of existence and survival are blatantly negated. Nonetheless, in dire moments of starvation and existential crisis, the Man teaches his son to have perseverance and be resilient: "We have water. That's the most important thing. You don't last very long without water."(106). The man does not have any reason to survive, but his son does. They are each other's "world entire".

If the people living are good, then nature, too, reciprocates with goodness, for it is in the woods that the man salvages morel mushrooms and apples to have. The waterfall allows them to rejuvenate themselves. The child is attracted to its beauty and does not want to leave that place, but the Man realises that others might get attracted to the waterfall and, thus, it is unsafe for them. Throughout the novel, the boy does not want to enter any house, for he does not trust anybody. The boy prevents the Man from entering and salvaging any building, for he feels scared. Even while slogging down the southern mountains, they could hear the sharp cracking sound of felling trees one after another. The man pacified his frightened child saying, "All the trees in the world are going to fall sooner or later. But not on us." The statement may be reflective of an optimistic father who is perhaps teaching his child the strength to hold on. It may be symbolic of the faith that man has in nature, that it does not harm the "good guys". This echoes Morton's idea of "deep ecology" in *The Ecological Thought* that Nature is a paradox, possessing both good and evil, positivity and negativity in a labyrinthine "mesh":

> Ecological thought imagines interconnectedness which I call the mesh. Who or what is interconnected with what or with whom? The mesh of interconnected things is vast, perhaps immeasurably so. Each entity in the mesh looks strange. Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is

> full of "itself" …Ecological thought imagines a multitude of entangled strange strangers. (15)

This, therefore, suggests that nature is a complex of heterogeneity intertwined with each other. Every entity is a part of the other, and nature not only holds everything but is inevitably present in everything.

Occasionally, the man is tormented by anxious memories of the past. He is haunted by flashbacks of the heavenly past, trying to hold onto that plenitude of beauty, colours, sounds, fragrances, and life. The dreams that the Man sees juxtapose the past and the present creating a montage of the fragmented psyche of a post-modern individual. Both reality and the imagination have been shattered into myriad pieces transforming the present into a den of nadir. He distinguishes between good and bad dreams, suggesting good dreams in such horrific angst-ridden times means acceptance of the wreck of the apocalyptic world, whereas bad dreams in bad times signify a struggle for existence. Stopping by a dam, the child enquires about its colossal structure and purpose. The boy asks if there's any possibility of a fish in that lake, but the man denies its presence. The man feels nostalgic and talks of falcons, cranes, fishes, crows, trouts, of rowing a boat in childhood, and also playing the piano with his wife – reminiscences of an Edenic life. The boy is sceptical of the man's past, for he was born amidst this chaotic world which is falling apart and is meaningless in the wake of brutal advancement of capitalism, incessant consumerism, rampant individualism, consequent loss of community, large-scale devastations of a nuclear holocaust or a natural calamity and finally the destruction of faith in goodness, religion, reason, and God. McCarthy alludes to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in the portrayal of an ambience of gloom, fear, futility, and existential crisis. The prelapsarian world that the Man yearns for is unfathomable for the boy.

However, the man woke one night when "the clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions". (54) He could not understand what was happening. The power was already gone. The man rushed to the bathroom to preserve the water for future use. His pregnant wife stood near him in bewilderment. A few days later, their child was brought into this world. She gave birth

to the baby in their house itself using a dry cell lamp and gloves kept for dishwashing because, subsequently, the medical infrastructure had already failed. With an acute shortage of food, crumbling support systems of existence (electricity, water supply, and medical aids), destruction of houses, and depletion of forest covers – there are hardly any hopes left for survival. This instance can be equated to the Biblical Fall of man since that night, the pristine Edenic life was snatched out. They were damned to struggle, suffer, feel pain and pathos, experience hunger and thirst, and get tempted by immorality and sin.

McCarthy shares the briefest details of the reason behind such catastrophes. In such a nihilistic world, to survive without food is a provocation. The Man's wife in *The Road* committed suicide while hoping for eternal nothingness, not being able to face such a situation:

> We're the walking dead in a horror film…Sooner or later they will catch us and will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it.
>
> You would rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't. (58)

After debating about the pros and cons of self-killing, she vanished into the darkness of the night leaving behind the coldness of her heart. The man thus considers the boy to be the only warrant that he has protected from all possible mishaps. The child is taken care of as if it is his divine responsibility and that he was appointed to "to take care of the child by God". The Man remarks about his son that "If he is not the word of God, then God never spoke" (3). *The Road* is interspersed with umpteen Biblical connotations that are ambiguous.

The religious ambivalence is evident when the Man kneels cursing God about his existence. He warns God to be throttled for making them suffer so much. The over-looming question that remains is whether God exists in this world or not. Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* opined that "Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead!"(120), signifying that no transcendental force is going to save a man from this absurd doom. Ely, another trespasser who is the only named character in the text, comments that death is a luxury

in these harrowing times. Ely admits being on the road always, which may imply that he had renounced human contact and bondage.

The only food left in this mutilated world is the flesh of each other. Henceforth, the survivors have transformed themselves into cannibals to exist. After five long days of starvation, the pair come across a huge house to forage for some food. The child being naïve, is certainly perturbed about entering the unknown house. He asserts to leave the house, but the Man does not listen. Upon descending to a basement room, the Man is horrified to see a group of skinny, naked, stinking, and amputated people, both men and women, who have been kept as food stock for the cannibalistic marauders. Those men and women were crying for help. Grabbing the boy, the man ran out of that place to save themselves. McCarthy depicts the moral infirmity of post-apocalyptic survivors, wherein the distinction between good and evil has been blurred out. The novel showcases the absurd behaviour of the post-modern, lost, alienated, and hopeless men who are pushed to the limits of endurance, both physical and psychological. It questions the sustainability of moral virtues in a disintegrated society alluding to the Biblical oracle that man does not only require bread to survive. The protagonist's aversion to cannibalism is starkly contrasted to the Sailor's hysteric remark in Eugene O'Neill's *The Thirst*: "We shall eat. We shall drink." (42), wherein readers witness how the drives of hunger and thirst can bring out the primitiveness in otherwise civilised man.

Eventually, they reach south, but Man's health deteriorates, and soon after, he dies. However, the man prepares the boy to survive in a ruthless world, following what they have been doing for so many years. Earlier, he preserved two cartridges to kill the boy before he died, but later, he embraced death, knowing that the boy can survive all alone. The boy sat by his father. And cried for losing him. The final episode of the novel shows the boy meeting a good family of a husband, a wife, a little boy, and a little girl. Bidding adieu, the boy joins their company, and the novel ends with a tinge of hope and a promise of continuity of goodness. The moral that McCarthy leaves open for readers to comprehend, interpret, and believe is that of mutual sustainability of all entities that belong to nature, resounding Coleridge's words in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us;
He made and loveth all. (17)

Hence, Cormac McCarthy echoing the Ecocritical tenets, reminds the readers to be empathetic, to be humane, and preserve nature before such an apocalypse occurs.

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8

A Study of English Movies Dubbed into Telugu: An Extension of Telugu Action Movies

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Abstract

Indian cinema is a highly contested space for more than one reason like the diversity of languages (in which films are produced), cultures and the regions it represents. Another notable offshoot of Indian Cinema is the dubbed international films in Indian regional languages. This paper considers English films dubbed into Telugu (a prominent South Indian language spoken in two states namely Andhra Pradesh and Telangana). These movies are released for those (Telugu) audience who cannot understand English. The majority of the English movies dubbed into Telugu are action – oriented as the Telugu audience largely began patronising action movies by the time English cinema started dubbing the Telugu version of movies. In this paper the researchers would like to identify the space in which English-Telugu movies exist and study their evolution. The aspects such as titles, dialogues, socio-cultural references, humour, advertisement strategies etc., are tailor-made to suit the tastes of the regional audience who patronise these movies. This paper delves deep into all these significant facets that make these dubbed movies acceptable to the Telugu audience.

About Telugu Cinema

'Bahubali-1& 2' have reinforced the significance Telugu cinema deserves in Indian as well as world cinema. Otherwise, western viewers, academics and scholars recognised only Hindi cinema as Indian cinema. It was only after the 1960s that Indian cinema was considered a valuable part of world cinema.

Indian cinema is a rich art form with many significant attributes. The uniqueness of Indian cinema is the richness of its branches in vernacular languages and their variety.

Telugu (a vernacular language widely spoken in two South Indian states, namely Telangana and Andhra Pradesh) is one of the prominent and oldest languages of India. Telugu cinema started around 1921 with the first Telugu movie, 'Bhishma Pratigna' by Raghupathi Venkaiah Naidu. While the first talkie movie, '*Savitri*' (1933) was made by the East India Film Company and directed by the father of the Telugu theatre movement, C. Pullaiah. Any way the first Telugu film with audible dialogue is *Bhakta Prahlada* (1931) and its first international appearance was in 1951 with the screening of *Malliswari* (1951) at the Asia Pacific Film Festival (Rani D.S-18).

Telugu cinema has been one of the popular art forms among Telugus across the globe ever since the screening of Telugu cinema beyond Indian screens began. Till then Telugu cinema entertained the audience across the nation state of India. Telugu cinema popularly known as Tollywood is one of the richest film industries in India (Kohli and Khandekar 2013, P.161) with approximately 349 films made in 2014.

Cinema is a significant cultural practice which ensembles art, entertainment, technology, industry and ideology. It is a powerful reflector of society that mirrors social transformations, cultural tensions and new trends that are surfacing in society in interesting ways.

To begin with, the two most popular genre of Telugu cinema were; social cinema, mythological /folk cinema, as these genres were popularly patronised by the theatre goers of the day. Along with these two genres, the issues related to patriotism also were popular as theatre used itself for spreading nationalism among the people. But a close scrutiny of the films produced from 1970 onwards reveals a shift in the focal areas of interest.

The Emergence of Action/mass cinema

In the 1960s the hero in folk/mythological films was a macho man with unrealistic muscle power with which he could kill any number of demons. For example, NT Rama Rao could kill any number of demons in *Jagadeka Veeruni Katha* (1961-A Story of the Superman), but the same hero fails to fight with his own brothers in *Kalisi Vunte Kaladu Sukham* (1961-Unity is the Source of Happiness). It is this

factor of N.T. Rama Rao gradually caught the attention of directors who began to recognise the aggression of NT Rama Rao on the screen which was gaining popularity among the audience. N.T.Rama Rao was till then appreciated for his performance in soft characters in movies like *Malliswari* (1951). *Missamma* (1955), *Intiki Deepam Illalu* (Woman is the Light of the Family, 1961), *Pelli Pilupu* (Marriage Invitation, 1961).

Therefore, directors began to show affinity to produce action films that can stage the aggression of the hero, who is more capable than a common man in solving the problems of the society/self. Along with NT Rama Rao, Krishna, Krishnam Raju, Chiranjeevi and others began to advance the cult of action film in Telugu cinema. Therefore by 1980 films like, *Kirayi Raowdilu* (Goons,1981), *Nyayam Kavali* (Justice Wanted 1981), *Puli Bidda* (Son of a Tiger, 1981), *Oorikichina Maata* (Promise Given to the Village-1981), *Thiruguleni Manishi* (Indomitable Man-1981), *Khaidi* (The Prisoner-1983), *Challenge* (1984), *Kathanayakudu* (The Hero-1984), *Adavi Donga* (The Thief in the Forest-1985), *Donga* (TheTheif-1985), *Chattam to Poratam* (The Fight with the Justice-1985), *Jwala* (The Fire-1985), *Kaliyuga Pandavulu* (1986), *Brahma Putrudu* (The Son of Brahma1988), *Khaidi no 786* (The Prisoner No 786-1988) and many more established the action hero concept in social films apart from mythological and folk movies. Noting this factor SV Srinivas writes, "Throughout the 1990s we notice that a recognisable example of a genre film, especially comedy or romance, is suddenly interrupted and intruded upon by developments which force its transformation into a revenge drama or another familiar variant of the melodramatic form that dominated cinema since the 1970s (if not earlier)" (2006) .

Therefore, Telugu cinema by the 1980s saw a greater number of action films with or without revenge line of narrative meant for the masses. These action movies took the subject lines appealing to a larger popular audience and were released in a greater number of theatres to attract larger audiences.

It was in the 1980s that the film audience was almost ripped into two categories. One category of the audience was aesthetically conscious and patronised films like, *Sankarabharanam* (1980), *Amavasya Chandrudu* (The Moon on No Moon Day-1981), *Mudda*

Mandaram (1981), *Sitakoka Chiluka* (The Buttherfly1981), *Premabhishekam* (The Shower of Love-1981). And the second category of the audience loved aggression and only enjoyed the action on the screen and there emerged Chiranjeevi, along with heroes like Balakrishna, Nagarjuna and others who established the action movie otherwise 'mass movie' as an important genre of Telugu cinema. Ever since that time mass cinema enjoyed greater significance among all the other genres of films. The budget for these films was always enormous compared to other genre films and thus the second-generation star kids favoured this genre. The reach of these films has always been higher and the popularity one would gain has always been greater. The hallmark of these movies is the fighting ability of the hero. He is, 'the man' who can fight with any number of people and will emerge victorious. For example, in *Khaidi Number 786* (The Prisoner No786-1988) Chiranjeevi, the hero could hit a large number of goons in different scenes spread across the entire cinema. Thus, a close observation of these movies clearly shows that, though these are formula-based movies i.e., movies with a prescribed number of fights, dances and love scenes, emotional scenes etc., the fact that the hero is the most capable person who will be victorious remains constant in all these action/mass movies

Nothing has changed much ever since then except the treatment of the action in these films. Discussing the presence of this unique genre in Telugu and Tamil, Bhardwaj Rangan, a popular film critic observes the changes in these films and writes,

> Once upon a time, the mass films were mainly about power struggles – so you had the village-based films where the hero was a lowly farmer and the villain, a Zaminder, or the city-based films where the hero was a lowly clerk and the villain, a politician or gangster. But in the past few years, mass films (at least the ones in Tamil and Telugu) have begun to look at the kind of 'socially relevant' issues usually relegated to documentaries and art-house cinema.

How the Action/mass Films Attract the Audience

At this juncture, it is essential to comprehend what a cinema (a particular cinema) does to attract an audience. Because, though a cinema is a cultural institution crafted aesthetically with artists from the story writer to the actor including all the technicians, this art form sustains only when it is patronised, so each genre's sustenance

indicates the acceptance and appreciation by that segment of the audience. And that again depends on a lot of factors. Pointing out the miracle the cinema does to the mind of a move goer, the popular psychologist Hugo Munsterberg believes that since a cinema is a combination of reality and moving images, it brings a peculiar complex state which is quite unique. The four prominent psychological experiences the cinema offers to the viewers are narrative engagement, transportation, empathy and instant solution. As researched by Bussele and Bilandzic, narrative engagement is one phenomenon in which the viewer is entrapped in the world of characters created by the film and the viewer is transported into the world of the characters created by the director through the visuals. Developing Gerrig's model of transportation in their paper titled 'The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives' Green and Brook write,

> The first consequence of transportation is that parts of the world of origin become inaccessible. In other words, the reader loses access to some real-world facts in favor of accepting the narrative world that the author has created. This loss of access may occur on a physical level – a transported reader may not notice others entering the room, for example – or, more importantly, on a psychological level, a subjective distancing from reality. While the person is immersed in the story, he or she may be less aware of real-world facts that contradict assertions made in the narrative. [701,702]

Eventually, the viewer begins to empathise with the characters and it is one powerful way of gratification at least when it comes to movie watching. As discussed by Brook and Green, empathising with characters is an act of identifying the personal relevance and developing a personal relevance and participatory sympathetic feeling enriching the emotional quality of the experience. But when a viewer goes into a cinema hall, he/she cannot flow with any narrative, cannot get transported into any fictional world and cannot empathise with all the characters. The whole gamut of engaging with a narrative, getting transported into the fictional world of the characters, and empathising with some characters happens as sequential actions only when the viewer can match or understand the world (created on the screen) with that of the world around him/her. Studying the way a viewer identifies himself/herself with the character in the paper "Identification with Characters and Narrative

Persuasion through Fictional Feature Films", Juan – Jose Igartua found that,

> Characters are a central component of fictional film narratives, and therefore it is appropriate to expect that a greater identification with the main characters in films (greater merging with them) will lead to greater enjoyment and affective impact. Thus, we assume that enjoyment and affective impact will increase in those individuals who have more intensely identified with the main characters in a film narrative. [352]

Thus, the Telugu audience (that audience who enjoy action /mass movies) from 1980s onwards began to enjoy the mass movies because these movies transport them from the real world into a fictional world where the hero is capable of finding solutions to all the problems related to the society, family, self and has high muscular power.

Significance of English Cinema for Telugu Audience

Along with movies from other languages being dubbed into Telugu, English movies occupy considerable space and significance. The space of dubbing cinema is very crucial owing to the huge number of films produced in Telugu. Telugu audience basically patronised English (especially Hollywood) movies which were action – oriented and a meaningful extension of Telugu action movies. English movies may be a source of learning for film makers, but for a quintessential action film/mass film lover who is watching a Telugu dubbed version of the English movie; it is an extension of the typical Telugu action/mass movie. Though Hollywood movies as observed by Dr Madhava Prasad, a film studies scholar in his essay, "From the Cultural Backwardness to the Age of Imitation" is,

> To give another example, it is well known that the Hollywood cinema, when it reaches the ends of the world, is more than likely to be regarded by the –second-or – third order viewership there as a source of knowledge and values which hold the promise of a better life. This impact of Hollywood overseas is further divisible into two related aspects : first, the direct social impact which has been an aspect of concern and investigation since at least the 1920s, as it is clear from the report and proceedings of the Indian Cinematograph committee(ICC) of 1927-28, the second, the formal pressure exercised by Hollywood upon Indian film industry, which is so strong that for some prominent

> filmmakers in India today, Hollywood is nothing less than a Platonic realm of ideas which they aspire to reproduce. [7]

English Cinema Dubbed into Telugu

Dubbing is a type of Audio-visual translation where the original audiovisual track of the source language is replaced with that of the target language track. Notable contributions made by Mayoral, Kelly, and Gallardo (1988) lays the foundations for an investigation into dubbing and audiovisual translation. In the 1990s, Europe saw the publication of wide-reaching studies on dubbing (Luyken et al., 1991; Whitman, 1992; Herbst, 1994; Agost, 1999; Chaves, 2000; Chaume, 2003, 2004a; among others), some pioneering articles (Hochel, 1986; Goris, 1993; Delabastita, 1989, 1990; Zabalbeascoa, 1996; among others), collective volumes (among them, those edited by Gambier, 1996, 1998, or Gambier and Gottlieb, 2001), and special issues of journals (the most recent being The Translator, 9(2) and Meta, 49(1), both edited by Gambier) and Karamitroglou's methodology for the investigation of norms in audiovisual translation (2000). All of them find that dubbing has two significant challenges, the simultaneous presence of images and dialogues and considering the dubbed version as a text to be studied as a separate meaning making unit.

Dubbing a cinema from one language into another is equivalent and rather more complicated than a translation of a text. As such translating a text belonging to one language of a nation into a language belonging to another nation is a complex process owing to numerous reasons including linguistic, literary and socio-cultural factors. Observing these issues in translation, Eugene A. Nida, a famous American translator of the Bible writes,

> Perhaps the most pervasive and crucial contribution to understanding the translation process is to be found in sociosemiotics, the discipline that treats all systems of signs used by human societies. The great advantage of semiotics over other approaches to interlingual communication is that it deals with all types of signs and codes, especially with language as the most comprehensive and complex of all systems of signs employed by humans. No holistic approach to translating can exclude semiotics as a fundamental discipline in encoding and decoding signs. [Nida, 1993]

Therefore, the sociosemiotic approach helps the translation of words, sentences, and discourse structures and the difference

between designative and associative meanings. This theory which is propounded by Holliday is further enriched in usage by Peter Newmark and Charles Morris. According to this theory, the translator can have a clear understanding of the potential consequences of the meaning he is producing through his text. But the translator has to understand that the message, including meaning, style and function, is what the prose fiction author wishes to convey through his/her fiction in the order of pragmatic level (intention of the author or the theme of the fiction), semantic level (choice of words), syntactical level (choice of sentence patterns, etc.) and discourse level (integrating the former three levels into the entire discourse). This is how the fiction writer encodes his/her message. However, how the translator decodes the message in the reverse order. At first, the translator comes across the whole discourse of the prose fiction, and then he/she analyses it at the syntactical, semantic and finally pragmatic levels. In the end, the translator perceives the message conveyed by the SL text. The most important thing is how the translator re-encodes the message he/she understands, which is the basis of the translating activity. The order is very similar to the fiction writer's encoding process, but the language employed is different. When it comes to the dubbing activity, the translator should coordinate the linguistic, cultural, and sociological factors of the target audience.

When English movies began dubbing into vernacular languages like Telugu in India, the selection of movies became crucial as the popular genre, ethos and method of these movies need to suit the larger audiences of the region. In this regard, the dubbing film production houses like Laxmi Ganapathi films (a prominent film house that produced dubbing of Hollywood movies into Telugu) opted for action/mass films as this section of audience loves action/mass movies and such movies do not give greater significance to ethos and methods. Therefore, these movies are most suitable for dubbing into Telugu. A close study of a few selected Hollywood movies dubbed into Telugu shows how the translators have attempted to suit these movies to the quintessential Telugu film goer. According to the evidences available and noted by Asish Rajadhyaska and Paul Willmen, in their book, 'Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema (1999)' dubbing of Hollywood movies began in Indian

languages prominently in 1992 with *Jurassic Park (1992),* and the initial movies that were chosen for dubbing; *Speed (1993), Cliffhanger (1992), Alladin (1992), True Lies (1994), Twister (1996).* Thus, a section of society patronised the English movies dubbed into Telugu. And the market for such movies has grown gradually over a period of time. Interestingly this regional audience isn't bothered or is unaware of the fact that the movies are dubbed to suit their local taste. The English movies go through a complete metamorphosis before they hit the screens. Right from the movie titles to the translation of dialogues, the usage of metaphors, the cultural references, and the humour – everything is given a local colour. The aspects such as titles, dialogues, socio-cultural references, humour, etc are tailor-made to suit the tastes of the regional audience who patronise these movies.

Movie Titles

The movie titles are translated, sometimes literally, but mostly in a way that attracts the masses. This unique approach may appear crass and needlessly flamboyant to those who've understood the subtle nuances of a movie and its title, however, it is this very flamboyance that catches the eye of the regional audience, so much so that it can relate to the title. This is the first step wherein the desire to watch a particular movie stem in their mind.

Let us look at some of the movie titles that sound hilarious to those of us who know the language. An observation of the title for the 23rd James Bond movie – *Skyfall* (2012) indicates depth and subtlety. For a Western audience, sombre or nuanced movie titles are not uncommon and it would come to the conclusion that *Skyfall* may indicate a darker tone in the movie. In stark contrast, the title for its Telugu version is *Lokam Chuttina Veerudu* (2012) – one meant to indicate action, adventure and a larger-than-life protagonist. When it comes to '*300*' (2006), we have a popular comic book series which fictionalises a real-life battle. This title is enough to attract audiences across the globe, familiar with the series or the lore. Conversely, the Telugu title *300 Yodhulu* (2006), is meant to further drive the point home to its audience that it's about a group of warriors. Now, let's look at *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013). For several people around the world, 'Jack and the Beanstalk' is one of the fairytales that they

fondly remember from their childhood. The movie title, while not verbatim, is meant to imply that an action-packed movie is in store. This may not be understood by the Telugu audience and thus, we have the title *Vintha Prapancham* (2013), something that effortlessly conveys strange happenings in the movie, as an easy way to attract the audience. Another example similar to *300* is the title *Battleship* (2012), a movie based on a popular board game of the same name. To draw the regional audience, which has had little to no knowledge of the game, a not-so subtle subtitle is used – *Battleship: Saagara Sangraamam*. *The Expendables* (2010) is an American all star ensemble movie series which narrates the story of a group of mercenaries who take up assorted missions that range from assassinating people to rescuing them. The term expendables are used for the characters in the movie as their lives are not important to the government, and any action taken by them is considered out of the bounds of the law. In the Telugu version the movie is titled *Yamadhuthalu* (2010), which does not convey the emotions behind the original title. Rather it is indicative of the excess action involved in the movie. There are, however exceptions to this theory, which broadly fall under two categories –

1) Actors or franchises, or characters are extremely popular around the world, even with the Telugu audience. Thus, the regional titles are simply English titles written in Telugu. To name a few: Superhero movies such as *Spiderman* and *Iron Man* don't see any changes to the title.

2) Art house or low-budget English movies with fresh faces – these may enjoy a fan base from a Western audience, but the Telugu audience may never be compelled to watch these movies. Hence distributors and production houses use titles of popular Telugu movies or something that has entered a Telugu zeitgeist and rename the movie titles altogether, with several aspects lost in translation. For instance – *Bigfoot* (2012) has the Telugu title *King Kong 3*, and *Dragons of Camelot* (2014) has the Telugu title *Bhairava Kota 3*. *King Solomon's Mines* (1985) is an adaptation of the popular novel of the same name. For the western audience, this title is sufficient as they are familiar with the novel. For the Telugu audience, this is translated as *Adavi Ramudu Andhala Sundari* (1985), as they are unaware of the

novel and its characters. On the other hand, the above Telugu title reminds them of popular movies from their own culture. The reasons that can be cited for the change in the movie titles include regional pop culture, rural folklore, socio-economic conditions, political influences, geographical setup, and the psychological impact of the Telugu movies on the non-English speaking Telugu audience.

Character Interactions through Dialogues

Even in a country where we have film makers like K. Viswanath, whose *Sankarabharanam* (1980) is noted for its subtlety, more often than not, regional audiences do not relate to Hollywood movies with the same mindset. And thus, character interactions are altered to amplify the entertainment value. For instance, in the movie *The Avengers* (2012), the scene is about the Avengers team – Iron Man, Captain America, Black Widow, Hawk Eye, Thor, and Hulk; battling the aliens and assembling for the first time. In one of the earlier scenes in the movie, Hulk attacked Black Widow losing control over his mind. He arrives in the midst of the ensuing battle in his human form – Dr Bruce Banner and says, "well, this all seems horrible". The tone of the character here is that of dry wit talking about the situation at hand. This can lead to a quick light-hearted note while watching the movie. In the Telugu version however, the dialogue is as such "parava lede, mothaniki bhibathsam srusthicharu" (that's alright, you have created a horrific scene). The tone of the character here is that of on-the-nose humour leading to a loud moment of laughter. Having learnt that *Hulk* has shown up, *Iron Man* says, "tell him to suit up; I'm bringing the party to you" as an alien spaceship is on his trail. This dialogue seamlessly brings out the witty and sarcastic nature of *Iron Man* while at the same time conveying there is imminent danger. Conversely, when we look at the Telugu version of this dialogue – *Iron Man* says, "Vaadini thoraga maaramani cheppu, aa Aliens ni antham cheyyataaniki." (Ask him to change quickly, to end those Aliens) Here there is no sign of the character's nature; the focus is on the situation at hand. In the English version, *Black Widow* reacts to *Iron Man* by saying, "I don't see how that's a party". Whereas in Telugu, she says, "Kaastha alochinchukoni maatlaadandi Stark" (Think before you speak, Stark); which is completely irrelevant and a

far cry from the dry wit in the English version. Now let's look at Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008). One of the notable scenes is the initial Bank robbery scene, where all the criminals' black money is stored. After the character, *Joker*, successfully completes the heist, the bank manager tells him, "Oh criminals in this town used to believe in things – honour, respect. Look at you; what do you believe in, huh? What do you believe in?" Here the bank manager displays a defeatist attitude after failing to control the situation. However, he musters enough courage to question the motives of the *Joker.*

Joker responds to the bank manager by saying, "I believe, whatever doesn't kill you, simply makes you a stranger". This interaction in the Telugu version is completely off track. The bank manager says, "Inka, ee brathuku enduku? Prajala sommu dochukoni, meeru baagupadathara? (What is the point of our existence? Are you going to benefit by stealing the public's money?)". Joker responds by saying, "Maa sangathi sare, nee chaavu ela untundo eppudaina oohinchava? Ippudu choodu (Keep our issue aside, have you ever thought of how your death will be? Now you shall see)" This interaction is reminiscent of the Telugu mass movies wherein the villain has stolen something from the public and this in-turn helps the audience root for the protagonist to defeat the villain.

Humour

Let's look at a scene from *Deadpool 2* (2018). Deadpool is a character known for his wit, conventional humour, sarcasm, and meta-humour, and is also known to break the 4th wall using self-referential humour. Appropriately, the movie contains these elements in abundance. Now let's take a look at one of the memorable scenes wherein Deadpool visits the X-men Mansion. Deadpool knocks on the door, and the character *Negasonic Teenage Warhead* (NTW) opens the door. In typical Deadpool fashion, he says, "Ripley!! From Aliens 3!" – referring to the similarity between NTW's hair & style choices and actor Sigourney Weaver's look from the 1992 Sci-Fi horror film Aliens 3. NTW reacts to this by stating that *Deadpool* is very old, considering his humour is based on a movie released over two decades ago. *Deadpool* laughs unnaturally and responds to this by saying, "Ha! Fake laugh, hiding real pain". This conveys self-deprecating humour. Conversely let's look at the scene in Telugu. When NTW opens the

door, *Deadpool* says, "Guntanakka, baniyan vesukunna guntanakka (Clever fox wearing a vest!)". NTW responds by saying "Veedu edho pedda andagaadu ayinattu (As if he's a handsome man)" *Deadpool* laughs and says, "Nuvvu baadhapadathaavu ani navuthunnanu, joke chaala chendalanga undi (I'm laughing so that you don't feel bad. The joke was terrible)". This dialogue in Telugu has no relation to the original dialogue. Now let's look at a scene from the movie Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 2 that reiterates the same point. The character *Rocket Racoon* steals batteries from a group known as the Sovereign Race. The Guardians are then chased by the Sovereign Fleet & attacked by their drone ships. During this pursuit, with characters Peter Quill and Rocket both piloting their spaceship, they have a humourous exchange. In order to escape to the nearest habitable planet, they have to go through a Quantum Asteroid Field to make a jump at light speed. One of the characters, *Drax* questions this by saying, "Quill, to make it through that, you'd have to be the greatest pilot in the Universe". *Quill* begins to answer by saying, "Lucky for us, I..." but is quickly cut by *Rocket* saying, "I am" This exchange is indicative of the team's banter as well as the funny over confidence displayed by the characters. Now let's look at this interaction in the Telugu version. *Quill* responds to *Drax* by saying, "Ela undi mana luck (How is our luck?)". Rocket then responds to it by saying, "Naaku undi le (I have it)" This exchange changes the tone of the humour altogether. While it is obvious that a lot of the humour is lost in translation, it is important to note that these dialogues aren't used by choosing them at random or just literal translations. These dialogues are chosen specifically to ensure that the audience relates those to dialogues in action/mass Telugu movies. The humour and experiences are also localised and thus the entertainment value increases.

Metaphoric Expressions

Now let's look at how, in the process of dubbing, the metaphoric expressions of one language can't be accurately conveyed as the essence of the language is lost in the process of a literal translation. For example, James Cameron's universally loved action-packed movie *Avatar* (2009) has a sequence where Jake, the protagonist, betrays his own kind (humans) to fight for the alien race Na'vi. The

aliens recognise him as one of their own and his love interest, *Neytiri*- one of the Na'vi, uses the dialogue, "I see you" as she greets Jake. For the Na'vis, this phrase implies that they have an emotional and intellectual comprehension of one another – that they understand each other. The phrase has a delicate but potent significance, far more than a romantic implication. However, in the dubbed version, *Neytiri*'s dialogue becomes, "Naaku nuuvante ishtam (I like you)" Here the metaphor is excluded and the focus is on the woman falling in love with the man. For a typical Telugu movie-goer, the most popular Telugu movies involve the hero winning the heart of the heroine and thus the simple alternative is chosen. In the movie The Avengers Captain America asks Bruce to transform into his superhuman form by saying, "*Dr Banner* Now might be a really good time for you to get angry". Bruce responds to this by saying, "That's my secret Cap, I'm always angry" Bruce's response is metaphorically implying his alter ego, Hulk. In the Telugu version, Bruce responds to Captain America's "Mee kopaani pradarshinche samayam occhesindi (It's time to display your anger)" by saying, "Meeko nijam cheppana Captain, nenu puttinappudiniche kopisthudini. (Should I tell you the truth, Captain, I've been angry since birth)" This expression that Bruce had superhuman qualities by birth is incorrect. But for the Telugu audience who have no knowledge of the metaphoric expressions, it makes no difference to what Bruce has spoken. A proper translation could be intriguing to watch, but the one that gets the cheers from the crowd will be the one talking about Machoism. The Telugu audience is not accustomed to metaphoric expressions of another language and thus in the dubbed version the dialogues sound irrelevant to those who understand the English language.

Sarcasm, philosophy & humour are reflective of the cultural experiences of a group of people. The best way to understand culture is through the choices of entertainment. Therefore, the Hollywood movies dubbed into Telugu do not teach or preach values to the quintessential Telugu audience but they focus on/ offer entertainment to the typical Telugu audience who loves action/mass movies or thrillers. These movies are enjoyed along with original action/mass Telugu movies and are identified as movies with a good number of fight sequences, chasings, love scenes and the central aspect is that the hero is the macho man who can solve all the problems around

him. The audience gets transported into this world of characters who offer solutions through muscle and mind power.

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BOOK REVIEWS

1

Review of P. Raja's *Any Wife to Any Husband*

Raja, P. *Any Wife to Any Husband*. Rock Pebbles, 2022. pp.104.

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A prolific writer, novelist, essayist, short story writer, bilingual writer and editor, P. Raja hails from Pondicherry, India. *Any Wife to Any Husband* is a poetry collection dedicated to his wife, Periyanayaki. This collection of 61 poems in English was published by Rock Pebbles, Odisha, in 2022. It is a collection of poems deeply rooted in his observations as a writer. All the poems bear a strong affinity to contemporary times. They are marked by an element of satire, wit and humour and urban sensibility.

The poet makes candid confessions where he wishes to pronounce serious judgment on an ordinary man. He is a master of linguistic niceties, and each word he employs conveys a distinct meaning. If delighting his readers is his sole weapon, it is equally his shrewd scholarship and critical judgment that play a significant role in shaping a poem. His dexterity reflects in his economy of words.

The collection under review has sixty-one poems. The first poem, "Fearlessly Flying", reflects his experience of travelling on a flight. Raja has a few self-negated doubts, which are genuinely present in every passenger. He writes, "I do not know at what speed? It is flying/ I only know/ It is fast, very fast? (9). In the succeeding stanzas, he writes that the cockpit records every bit of the journey and that his life is one conditioned by the cockpit voice recorder.

Towards the end, he sums up the philosophy of flight journey as, "All that I could see is / vacuum and vacuum/ at times wagons of clouds / pass below reminding me of / the ephemeral nature of life" (10). A typical vein of philosophy emerges in the end when one undertakes a flight journey full of fear, anxiety and alarm. Fearless flying is never possible. However, the passengers on board are frequently cautioned against any mishap. The ephemeral nature of life is emphasised in the poem.

The next poem, "Mathematics of Married Life", is numerically composed around mathematical calculations. Married life is an exploration of zero outcomes towards the end. The focus of the poem is that married life is likened to mathematics which eventually ends up in zero value. Man thinks he is married, but actually, he is living a life of nothingness. Marriage is neither a pleasant event nor a fruitful passage in the journey because man halts at nothing.

"Final Action" is a poem of absolute revelations on man's different actions in life. Different stages and roles –active and passive, restless, and life of lies are inevitably meant to be experienced. "Your show is over / vacate the stage/others are in the long queue/waiting to play their roles" (21). This poem is on the lines with William Shakespeare's "Seven Ages of Man". Both entrance and exit in life are full of hopes, stages, and lies. The final action, as the poet brilliantly sums up the philosophy, is "Now is your time / your place is a new stage / About action, all that You have to do is sleep" (22). All that man has done in different roles ended up in a pack of lies. His life is subject to endless trials in futile exercises. The final action signifies death.

In the poem" First Kiss", Raja demonstrates the haunting images of the first kiss in different contexts. The romantic touch and the mood get heightened by images that engage him in the kiss. Onions peeled signify the hurting of his lover in distress.

"City" is a poem of many reflections about busy city life. It is a city full of lies and robberies in broad daylight. Business gets multiplied, and the number of business men is beyond the countless stars. "The seductive harlot / sells nations through her / nakedness and shame" (26). It is a city of open prostitution. Towards the end, Raja bemoans that there won't be anyone who can control all illegal

activities. "Who will bemoan the city? / the Law is powerless / Justice is blind /How long shall the city weep? (27). The poet protests the lawlessness and injustice in city life. The wicked are surrounded by the righteous in cities. It has become a bloody city of utter failure in governance. The woes of the city are unending in illegal activities.

In yet another poem, "Oh, Once Again", Raja recollects how he spent his entire life looking for her dream girl. To him, she was a sweet dream and a solace. She was to him an affectionate mother. "Like a sweet dream / That turned true / You came as a solace / To my bereaved soul" (34). A bosom friend, he found in her a friend who saved him from the tunnel of sorrow. Soon, she disappeared like a dream from his busy-bee life. "Oh, how cruel it is / to spend the rest of my life / Looking for you once again? " (35). His wait and expectations ended in mere dreaming.

"A Writer's Library" is a poem of brilliant recollections rooted in auto biographical elements. As Raja is an established writer, he has his own library with a good collection of books. He recollects how his relatives branded him as a bibliophile. The writer's library is a storehouse of books that created more platforms for more books. He feels that "The very presence of books/ is a great company more interesting / than other interesting friends" (36).

The title of this poetry collection, "Any Wife to Any Husband," is one of the poems where the wife presents the experiences: "I married you / Not out of any love for you / Yet I did so / For I know I should marry /some idiot one day / All to provide myself / a false sense of security" (38). Further, she does own everything in married life. "The home I made of your house / the kids I made for your bliss / the reliable friends I brought in / the hostile relations I turned amicable / Oh! Only I could do that delicate handiwork / (40). Her observations about the house, kids, friends and relations are meant for a fair and judicious evaluation.

"My Two Pens" evokes the poet's possession of two pens –one of them was gifted by his father, and the other one he bought with his first salary. Raja uses such simple objects to fuel interest among the readers. These two pens never went outside his house. He uses a cheaper one and hands it over to those in need at the bank and other offices. There were occasions when he forgot all about the pen. Those

pens he uses are safe in his study on the writing desk. When he loses them, he never complains. He loves them just as a pen holds his fingers. It is nostalgic in one sense and demanding in the other.

"Butterfly" is a poem about his keen observations on a tiny creature. It was a lovely sight to see the beautiful butterfly. It flutters around him as he fondly recollects the colourful wings to collect nectarRaja describes, "To be or Not to be"/ is not her dilemma / what to be and what not to be" (49). Raja presents the growth of a butterfly as something "Eggs first, then caterpillar / Pupa then and soon a butterfly / all forms in less than a month" (50). The very sight of a butterfly invokes a curiosity in the poet, and he is compelled to compose a beautiful yet simple verse signifying the birth and development of a tiny creature in the universe. Poetry for Raja is inspirational, emotional and spontaneous. He has immense knowledge to produce matchless and innovative things with poetry.

"My Testament" is a poem of self-declarations in a fine narrative grip. Testament means something that serves as a sign or evidence of a specified fact, event or quality. He begins the testament as "When I am dead / Let it be said / P. Raja has lived" (53). Raja as a dutiful brother, affectionate father, and loveable parent, makes him dearer to them. He became a hard-working student to his inspiring teachers. "A jolly good guy / to his goody-goody pals / he has lived" (53). He wishes to be remembered as one who has enjoyed his three kids. He is a lover of good food and it is what to him "he lived to eat / and never ate to live" (53). Likewise, he has an endless list of wishes by which he would like to be remembered. Tasty whisky, teaching, books and stray enemies – all hold him in their fond memory. "If P. Raja has not lived / who else has? (54).

In "Painter Rain", he writes that "watching rain is a lovely pastime / when you have nothing else to do (61). To him, rain by itself is no beautiful sight. It becomes just a spray painter. A man needs a thousand eyes to see into the artist's creation. Artistic beauty holds men in beautiful sights. "And, I, imprisoned in my study / Move from windows east to west / to frame in words the scenes the rain painted" (62). A painter lives in artistic beauty. The rain that he paints becomes a creation in his hands. Creative art has life and this life is invoked in the rain by the painter.

In the poem "Porcupine Woman", Raja presents the most glaring realities. He goes philosophically in the lines, "Living together without love /is akin to making love to a corpse / Yet life has to go on" (68). As we move forward, Raja writes that "we are absent in our presence and present in our absence" (68). In conclusion, the lines are pregnant with realism. "Marriage is a net / woman uses to arrest / an ignorant man for life / yet it is the same a woman, who cries / "O" I am caught in a net of fate for life" (70).

"Paper Life" is a poem of the poet's own recollections in the company of books. Life for P. Raja is of writings and books. He desperately needs paper to attempt his writings. This spirit of books is reflected in the lines as "I live with books / I sleep with books / I know one day / I will die amidst books" (84). What does he do with the books? Raja writes that "Books keep reminding me / of my mother –love incarnate" and " Books remind me of my Dad –duty conscious /who turned my empty head / into one crowned with many laurels" (84). Today, he is so proud of creating titles in a good number. He searches for readers armed with bouquets. He strongly wishes that paper life will keep him alive even after his death. In fact, a writer lives in the works he produces during his or her lifetime.

These books would stamp out the literary journey of the writers. Raja will be remembered in the annals of the history of Indian Writing in English as a poet. "House of Books" is yet another poem of love for books. Raja finds the sight books everywhere – books to his right side, books to his left side, books on his pillow, books on his footstool, books on his bed, dining table, kitchen and books in the toilet. Further, his house is a home for books. "My house, a home for books / A loyal companion it is / through my whole life" (87).

"Night" is a poem of stunning revelations. It puts on a veil of darkness. "A live candle / lifted the veil and / searched for the / night in hiding/night was missing" (97). Philosophically, night finds shelter in those hearts of despair that eventually blame darkness. Night brings down many hues in different vicissitudes. Night symbolises death, the darkness of the soul and loss of faith. It means grief or death. It can refer to the darkness of life, mind, and soul. But night awakens us against the precautions of life, and the dangers that lie ahead of us.

In conclusion, P. Raja is primarily a poet of everyday situations. He has combined his experiences into the poetic output of sustenance and reliability. If life is to be lived in earnest, Raja's poems in this collection bear that stamp of authenticity and realisation. He converts his observations and experiences into simple verses full of literary realism and free from didacticism. This is where P. Raja's poetry will be a testament to Indian resilience after setbacks and bitter shades of life. The collection is worth reading for many reasons. It stimulates the reader's minds and awakens them to better ways of living a life.

2

Review of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*

Shree, Geetanjali. *Tomb of Sand*. Translated by Daisy Rockwell, Penguin Books, 2022. 696 pp. Rs. 691.

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Transgressions abound in *Tomb of Sand*. In the novel, language, border, body, and memory all become "doors," accommodating the increasing traversals of all its characters (Shree 29). Unlike Manto's Toba *Tek Singh*, where place and identity overlap one another, making each "equally uncertain," Geetanjali Shree's novel employs "a rambunctious tone and structure" to dig into Chadraprabha Debi's memory to deliver Chanda of Pakistan (Padamsee 2; cover copy). Translated from its Hindi version, *Ret Samadhi* (2018), *Tomb of Sand* won the 2022 International Booker Prize, a definite feat for a literary work originally written in an Indian language. To give credit where credit has been long due, Frank Wynne, chair of judges for the 2022 International Booker Prize, calls it "sui generis" while stating:

> "in its linguistic contortions it evokes Don Quixote, in its discursive digressions it is reminiscent of Tristram Shandy, in its sense of the magical there are echoes of Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez." (The Booker Library)

Before reviewing the novel, it is essential to dwell upon a lesson put forth in the first chapter: "Anything worth doing transcends borders" (Shree 13). In *Tomb of Sand*, borders could mean anything from the LoC to chapters in the book. The first part begins with the risky business of dealing with Ma's (Chandraprabha Debi) widowhood-induced depression with humor. Humor enables Shree to deconstruct her own childhood experiences of growing up in a civil-servant household and ask pertinent questions regarding authority, patriarchy, and traditions. But the novel is not really

concerned with these questions as much as it is with the art of transgression. Ma's back, entombed in the quilt, was like a wall to her family's requests to "get up!" (Shree 17). The language used to describe the hustle and bustle of her family members and their persistent endeavours at forcing her back into some sort of sustenance carries an anxious undertone that is fully realised after she disappears: "As the search deepens, the senses grow intemperate" (Shree 183). The first part is only the beginning of a sputtering language to evoke the family's "intemperate" anxieties at having realised that "Amma *really* was missing... "The rest of their lives would be spent asking themselves what else they had lost" (Shree 198).

Alka Saraogi suggests in her review of *Ret Samadhi* that "the second part is a great saga of the love of a daughter for her mother" (35). Ma, after being traced, temporarily moves from her son's house to her daughter's house, where she finds a lease on "new life," enabled by the swift transfer of roles between the mother and daughter (Shree 241). However, while Ma finds a new rhythm of life, the daughter finds herself "getting cooked" as she "just wasn't used to it" (Shree 298). In the meanwhile, Shree introduces Rosie Bua/Raza Master, a transgender character who inspires the novel's many transgressions, like "a body unrecognising of the legitimacy of any borders" (423). As Harish Trivedi rightly suggests, "Rosie/Raza threatens to run away with the novel" until Shree returns the narrative to two women instead of moving forward with two and a half.

The third part unfolds like a mystery. Ma rises from her tomb of sand, as if from amnesia, and embarks on a journey to find her husband, Ali Anwar, whom she had married when she was sixteen, back in Pakistan. Without legal documents, without a visa, but with her "heart of stone," Ma and her daughter go on an amusing adventure all around Pakistan, only to end up behind bars in Khyber. It might be confusing for readers to understand the motive of an eighty-year-old woman hoping to find closure for a relationship severed by the Partition, but Shree in an interview with VighneshHampapurafor *Scroll* tries to explain that maybe Ma has become selfish. Her old age allowed her to unburden herself of the

various responsibilities, roles, and rules she had to take care of. But to try and find a clear motive for her actions would be futile.

The novel has a few major characters, who are supported by a retinue of minor characters. However, most of the major characters are not named and are only referred to according to their relationship with Ma. We have Bade, the elder son, who is a civil servant in Delhi. We meet him when he too is transitioning into a new role as a retired civil servant, so his major concerns are to make better investments, although with Ma's pension, and to end Ma's vacation. Shree questions the many characteristics of men in Indian families: their fear of transgressions, their self-imposed responsibility of taking responsibility for everyone outside the family, and their inheritance of shouting (46). Even if she makes fun, she puts him under a microscope, turning the glass till different eccentricities emerge that dissipate into dreams dreamt on trees (Shree 451).

Beti, a modern woman in her own understanding, becomes a foil for Ma, wrapping her in "love that both fattens and starves" (Shree 35). When she and Ma reverse their mother-daughter roles, she is enveloped in a certain gloom of imposed motherhood where "no other desire, besides the desire to give one's child [Ma] everything," exists (Shree 241). The family and its responsibilities constantly agitate her, and she is driven to question her own identity and beliefs. When she realises her mother's appetite for transgressions is much stronger than her own, the gloom breaks, and she realises she is a secondary character in Ma's epic tale.

The many doors, the golden cane with its butterflies, the pathetic attempts of Overseas Son, Bahu's Reeboks, Sid's narrator friend, the crows, Delhi's environmental crises, the precarious lives of individuals occupying the margins of both state and gender, young boys of Pakistan wielding guns; enmesh with one another within the narrative. They aren't mere digressions; as Nikhil Govind suggests in his review of the novel in *The Wire*, these digressions allow Shree to deal with the seriousness of Partition with "both distance and intimacy, empathy, and a (rightfully) cultivated alienation."

The novel's polyphonic modes of narration and its unique use of language has received critical acclaim. French translator Annie Montaut reflects,

> "The language was poetic, like a river – sometimes noiseless, sometimes gasping, and at times galloping. Some sentences were very long (a page or two in length) and some were no longer than a word. The voices also kept changing." (*Scroll*)

Chapter 45 of Part Two allows readers to experience the traditional ways of Indian storytelling. In an interview with Vignesh Hampapura, Shree refers to the crows narrating the story, on lines with the *Panchatantra Tales* and its animal narrators as an influence on her novel. The story weaves a lot of tales together, leaving many incomplete, which might explain why certain reviewers like Reena Kapoor have felt as if the tale has been rushed, devoid of any actual dealing with the trauma of Partition, and tied up with loose ends. However, it is important to consider Shree's stuttering narration as a way of dealing with the myriad confusions of our contemporary world, where:

> "chaotic never-before odd couplings [abound]. Speak of this then this is the story, blend these cells with those then another story. This story belongs to these cells, and if you join some of these cells with those ones, you'll get a different story. Join a belly with a back and get one story, a belly to a wall and get another, and peel the back away from the rest, and you get another and another and another." (123)

Beyond the novel and its beauty lie a few issues that may not be specific to the novel but to Shree's style of writing. As she believes in dealing with public issues through the "circuitous route of art, theater, and literature [which] can create an ambience receptive to other voices and ideas" her readers might be willing to ask how the sudden death of a hijra reflects on society's perception of their lives (Shree, Outlook Web Desk). She does draw attention to the precariousness of their lives: "We are the grotesque, Baji." Keep us away. If you see us, punch us. Did she die or did she survive, don't even turn around to look. You can't see what you didn't see. We've always been missing, we're forever missing" (Shree 482). And yet, a few pages later, after Rosie is dead, we are met with strange musings about her dead body at the morgue: "Artistry. A curiosity. A monstrosity. And those? Breasts or boils? And was that a penis at half-mast?" (Shree 511). It is difficult to gauge Shree's intention in these lines; however, Rosie's concerns about the fate of the transgender community in India stand caricatured.

The narrator of the story believes this tale will be told for generations to come, which might be an apt prediction of how the novel is going

to be received in future times. However, by the end, even if Ma is put to rest on a heroic note, Shree's readers are left in a lurch with the stories that are left sitting on the fence. To embrace the novel and its grandeur, readers will have to imagine these stories as moles and play a hearty game of "whack-a-mole-story" to move on.

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3

Review of Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's *The Discomfort of Evening*

Rijneveld, Marieke Lucas. *The Discomfort of Evening.* United States, Graywolf Press, 2020. 224 pp. Rs 1280.

Reviewed By
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In his debut novel, *The Discomfort of Evening*, Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's advances by exploring the child narrator Jas' perceptions of a precarious world, ready to fall apart. *The Discomfort of The Evening* received the Booker International Prize for literature in 2020. Set in Netherlands, it was translated by Michele Hutchison into English from Dutch. The narrator, Jas is ten years old and through her the readers are introduced to the intense trauma that the narrator and her family had to undergo.

The terrible personal loss, along with keeping up with the school, taking care of her family-the toads and a growing 'discomfort' leaves Jas is grappling with the question of why and who could be Death's next favourite – Pigs, Cows, Hitler or Jas herself? As writer Max Porter adds, it is "one of the best debut novels I have ever read…Utterly Unforgettable." The novel's setting may be completely unfamiliar to an Indian reader, but the thoughts of a terrified child bring a ten-year-old in me closer to the novel.

The novel revolves around a Presbyterian family who dares to revolt against God only in their minds. The family consists of a father, a mother, and their four children, one of whom is Jas, the omnipresent narrator. The disturbed relationship between nature and God in the post-postmodern age is distinctly portrayed in the agitated marriage of the father and the mother – "It might sound crazy but I miss my parents even though I see them everyday…The

thing is, they're not drifting away from us but we are drifting away from them."

Not all readers will agree with the climax of the novel. Jas' growing years could be compared to that of Lolita's, hence creating controversy immediately after publication. The novel portrays Jas being continuously haunted by her brothers and father, sometimes the ghost of the dead cows on the farm and at times herself. This child's raw cynicism moves the modern reader caught in the midst of disillusionment and chaos. As Jas says – "There are no good times here, and if we have we only know them later."

The book can be assumed to be set in the 'Foot and Mouth' outbreak of 2001 in the Netherlands. A future edition can add background information about this point to assist readers unfamiliar with the context of the book. The family in the novel owns a farm and the children grow up sensitive to the cause of animals. The narrator's consciousness keeps drifting back and forth to the hamster in the room, cows mooing with hunger and toads mating. The stream of consciousness of Jas admirably progresses that of Mrs. Ramsay or Leopold Bloom. It could be seen in many scenes, such as when the shopping list reminds her of the temporary existence of man.

Unlike Jas in the book, the novel's author doesn't believe in any form of binary ideas. In contradiction to its author, Jas could be seen as a traditional girl, who entertains the ideas of mutiny against the patriarch and God. Jas tries to be loyal to the two masters that she serves-God and Dad throughout the novel. She believes that another master could make matters worse. Nonetheless, she ends up going against the codes of the Bible towards the end of the novel.

The novel can be of huge interest to scholars interested in trauma literature. One point that resonated with me personally was the comparison between Jews and Cows. Now that humans have gone through many epidemics, one can comprehend at the end of the novel, the threat epizootics pose to cause epidemics and how much care and love the animal kingdom deserves from us.

" 'Murderers! Hitler!' Obbe shouts afterwards. I think about the Jewish people who met fate like hunted-down cattle, about Hitler who was so terrified of illness that he started to see people as

bacteria, as something you can easily stamp out. The teacher told us during the history lesson that Hitler had fallen through the ice when he was four and had been saved by a priest, that some people can fall through the ice and it's better if they're not rescued. I wondered then why a bad person like Hitler could be saved and not my brother. Why the cows had to die while they hadn't done anything wrong."

Also ever wondered what will happen if your God actually listens to you? This is a novel that could be suggested to pessimist readers and their disbelief in God. One might wonder from the first chapter to the last of the novel how that ever absent God plays a vital role by just listening to Jas for once. This part of the novel resonates with that of *Hayavadanna* by Girish Karnad, where Kali listens to Padmavati's demands, which invites a twist in the peaceful married life of the characters in the novel.

Despite the lack of a complete biographical insight into the novel, this review ends with a recommendation that the book would be worth adding to the library of anyone who is interested in animal life, child psychology, religion and trauma literature or translational studies or just wants a deeper understanding of the world one lives in.

INTERVIEW

1

A Duologue with Dissanayake

Debabrata Das

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> "A number of postcolonial writers…deliberately distort facts to please their Western consumers"
>
> Daya Dissanayake

This is a conversation with the noted Sri Lankan poet, novelist and blogger Daya Dissanayake, who happens to be the first-ever e-novelist of Asia. He is also the recipient of the prestigious SAARC Literary Award. The conversation happened on 29.03.2019 at the Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata (India).

Deba: First of all, a warm welcome to India.

Daya: Thank you very much!

Deba: You are the first e-novelist from Asia. Tell us about the journey.

Daya: I always wanted to connect with a larger readership, as Sri Lanka is a very small place. The idea came to my mind in 1998, when the internet first came to our country. Then my son advised me to go online. It was my son who designed the website for me. The website is saadhu.com. It is so because the title of my second novel, which happened to be the first e-novel in Asia, was "Saadhu Testament."

Deba: Why did you decide to write about the saadhus?

Daya: I personally know a number of sadhus who are rendering great service to society. There is no doubt that a few of them are fake, but many of these modern-day sadhus are genuinely committed to the social cause. As you know, in our part of the world, poor people need service whenever they are in distress. In many cases, they get this service from these sadhus. However, their contribution goes unnoticed most of the time. My novel acknowledges their contribution to society.

Deba: Don't you think that the decision to go online as a writer might affect your financial interests negatively?

Daya: Yes, it does. But it affects the publisher negatively, not the writer.

Deba: What about the writer's royalty?

Daya: Only yesterday I came to know from some of the Bengali writers that in Kolkata they get less than 10% in royalties. The situation is no better in Sri Lanka. The bitter truth is that the writers get their royalties only on declared copies. The writers hardly ever learn about the actual number of copies published. Naturally, you would find only a handful of writers who survive on royalties. Therefore, publishing online seems to be a better option for any modern writer.

Deba: Do you then predict a bright future for e-novels?

Daya: I have always believed that the electronic novel is the future, and the audiobook will follow. The reason why I'm saying this is that in this mobile age, people get hardly any time to read books at home. They prefer books that can be accessed anytime, anywhere. E-books are the best option for this mobile generation.

Deba: Don't you think that the reading habit is declining everywhere?

Daya: Yes, I do agree. In Sri Lanka, the situation is even worse.

Deba: What do you think is responsible for this?

Daya: The main reason for this is our obsession with television. The Americans have been calling the TV an "idiot box" since the 1950s. They continue to call it by the same name. But in our part of the world, things are quite different. Here, unfortunately, parents themselves encourage their children to get addicted to television. I think that mobile phones and electronic gadgets have worsened the situation in recent times. Children normally read when they see their parents reading. In my house, there is no TV. Naturally, my grandchildren are not interested in watching television at all. They have picked up the habit of reading books like their parents and grandparents. So, the atmosphere within the family is very crucial.

Deba: Coming back to the subject of your writing, recently I was reading your novel *The Bastard Goddess,* in which I came across a strong female voice. To be honest, I found the gender issue common in almost all of your works. Is it a coincidence, or do you do it with a purpose?

Daya: I don't do it with any purpose. It happens naturally. Even in Buddhism, you find that Buddha considered women sacred. In Sri Lanka, people believe that the Buddha manifests himself through the mother. We have always been a matriarchal society. I have always believed that women are stronger than men. They live longer and possess better abilities to handle hard situations with ease.

Deba: You sound like a feminist.

Daya: No, I'm not a feminist. You can better call me a humanist.

Deba: Though we are neighbouring countries, we hardly read each other's literature. In regards to Sri Lankan literature, we, in India, generally read Sri Lankan diasporic literature more than literature produced by the writers who are settled in Sri Lanka. Can you explain the reason for the popularity of diasporic literature?

Daya: One reason is that our publishers have shown no interest in taking our works abroad. Governments have also not taken any initiative. A few years ago, the Indian Government

started a project called Indian Books Abroad, through which they promoted Indian books in foreign countries. I think that the project has been aborted. Anyway, at least they tried to do something positive for indigenous artists. But, most unfortunately, our government has not even thought of taking such initiatives.

Deba, tell us something about other Sri Lankan novelists.

Daya: The most prominent Sri Lankan novelist, among the writers in English, is Ediriweera Sarachchandra. He is a bilingual writer. His novels are hailed as the best English novels written in the twentieth century in Sri Lanka.

Deba: I do not think that Sarachchandra's works are as popular as the works of diasporic writers such as Shyam Selvadurai, Michael Ondaatje, and so on in our country.

Daya: That is primarily due to the fact that the works of those diasporic writers are easily available in India. Also, they know how to "market" their works. However, the problem with these diasporic writers is that they do not have any first-hand experience. They come to Sri Lanka for holidays. Their main source of information about Sri Lanka is the media. Everyone knows how reliable the media can be as a source of information about a country! All of them are biased. Thus, the diasporic writers base their works on second-hand, even third-hand materials. Their works can be closer to the truth only if they write about their childhood experiences in the country. However, there is another important issue that influences their representation in a major way, i.e., the demand of the publisher. The publisher wants these writers to please their Western readership so that they can sell easily in the Western market. Therefore, it is futile to expect authentic representation of the Sri Lankan people and its culture in the works of these diasporic writers.

Deba: Both India and Sri Lanka have a rich heritage of oral literature, but we do precious little to preserve it properly. Don't you think that the governments of these two countries must take

some serious initiatives to save our oral literature from extinction?

Daya: Oh, yes, that is a good question! Oral literature will be lost completely unless we record it. Oral literature lost its place with the advent of radio. Previously, they were passed down to the next generation by the elders at the evening gatherings, but with the coming of radio and then TV, that practise stopped. Therefore, today it has become mandatory to have government policies to preserve them. An initiative was taken by the SAARC Cultural Centre, based in Sri Lanka, a few years ago. They started preserving traditional knowledge in South Asia. They held one conference too. More importantly, they provided funds to a few selected research scholars from the SAARC countries to do research on the traditional knowledge of their respective countries. But after its first four-year term, it became totally politicised. As a result, in the last four years, nothing has happened there. A more painful fact is that even the completed projects were not published!

Deba: Traditional knowledge, of different forms and kinds, has been widely used by a number of postcolonial writers across the globe. Do you think that may help the cause that we have been talking about?

Daya: I don't believe in postcolonialism. I don't think that we can draw a rigid line between the colonial and the postcolonial. Ironically enough, a number of reputed postcolonial writers have colonial mindsets. One of the reasons for this may be that most of these postcolonial writers are from elite backgrounds. What else would you expect from these elite writers?

Deba: Besides indigenous themes, the question of identity (though the two are deeply interconnected) has emerged as a key issue in world literature in recent times. What is your take on that?

Daya: V.S. Naipaul is the best example of what you have just said. As I've already hinted at, these writers deliberately distort facts

to please their Western consumers. They exploit the subject of identity simply because there is a demand for it in the market. However, in doing so, they tamper with the history of their respective nations. That is most unfortunate.

Deba: Ethnic conflict has been a common theme of many Sri Lankan diasporic novels. Do you see any political agenda behind that?

Daya: It has a definite political dimension. It is done to portray not only Sri Lanka but the entire South Asian region in a negative light. It presents our part of the world as a place of degradation. The main problem with these writers is that they write about what they hear, and what they hear is what they want to hear! And those who tell them those stories are there to tell them what they want to tell them!

Deba: Have those infamous ethnic conflicts been resolved in Sri Lanka?

Daya: No, they are not over as yet because whatever issues the Tamil people raised have not yet been resolved. Issues are still there, but they are not strong enough for a prolonged war.

Deba: How is the government handling this issue at the moment?

Daya: They are not handling it at all!

Deba: Don't you think that this might lead to another disaster in the future?

Daya: Yes, that can happen anytime. We don't have peace; we only have the absence of war.

Deba: Recent ethnic conflicts have involved Muslims too. How do you explain that?

Daya: That is again unfortunate. The politicians want something, especially in the South, to get the Sinhala-Buddhist votes. There are two major political parties: one party is surviving on the Sinhala-Buddhist votes, and the other party has its eye on the minority vote bank. Some of the Buddhist monks have been getting involved in this conflict because of their

religious interests. Financial motifs are also there. This nexus is taking the situation beyond control.

Deba: Don't you think that people like you should join politics to rescue Sri Lanka from its present plight?

Daya: Politics is something I have always avoided. I have been very critical of both politics and politicians in Sri Lanka because, in our country, politics has become synonymous with complete corruption.

Deba: Would you call this political bankruptcy a colonial leftover?

Daya: I do not see it as a colonial leftover. The source of this bankruptcy lies in our flawed concept of democracy. That is why, when Bhutan decided to become a democratic state, people protested. They preferred to live under the king. A Bhutanese poet wrote that democracy divides people. I also strongly believe that in Sri Lanka too, people are divided because of our flawed concept of democracy.

Deba: What would you prefer then?

Daya: I would prefer anarchy.

FEATURE ARTICLE

1

Marginalised Women in the Life of Aśoka

Daya Dissanayake

Writer and Journalist Srilanka

Abstract

This is an attempt to understand how women were marginalised in ancient India, based on the life of King Asoka. The wives and mothers, the consorts, and the women in the harems and as servants were marginalised and less equal to the men in this society. We do not have the names of most of these women. We also hear of rich businessmen and high-caste fathers and how they allow their young daughters to "cohabit" with a young "prince," who is allowed to abandon the young unnamed woman with two children and be "gifted" to the harem. The society and the women themselves would have accepted the situation in silence. If Ashoka's claim to have shown respect and followed the teachings of the Buddha is true (he has never claimed to be a "Buddhist"), how could he abandon his first wife or consort and two children and also maintain a harem? This is a question that remains unanswerable.

King Aśoka's consorts are mentioned in many historical and religious writings over the past two millennia, which has also enriched South Asian literature. However, if there had been any such historical characters, it is debatable because the historical Aoka has not yet been established. Dr. Ananda W. P. Guruge published *Asoka the Righteous: A Definitive Biography*, commissioned by the Sri Lanka Government, in 1993. Guruge quotes Robert Lingat: "In reality there exist two Aśokas: the historical Aśoka whom we know from his inscriptions, and the legendary Aśoka who is known to us through texts of

different origins, including Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. To make history from legend is always blemished by arbitrariness and subjectivity."

> "So far as annals, king lists, chronicles, dates of important battles, biographies of rulers and cultural figures go, there is no Indian history worth reading. Any work where the casual reader may find such detailed personal or episodic history for ancient India should be enjoyed as romantic fiction (like some Indian railway time-tables!), but not believed." (Kosambi. 1965. P 22).

Today we hear of seven Aśokas.

i. from the inscriptions,

ii. ii. from the Sri Lanka Pali chronicles,

iii. from the Sanskrit northern literature,

iv. Taranata's History of Buddhism in India,

v. the real historical Aśoka, who may have been a totally different person, a truly humane ruler, or just another Indian Raja who had diverted his megalomania in a different direction.

vi. The popular Aśoka, created by the commercial media.

vii. The politicizedAśoka in the 20th century.

It has become a near-impossible task to see and identify the real Aśoka, through all the legends built around him and the misinterpretation of his inscriptions. Just as we do not know really anything about historical characters named Chandragupta, Aśoka and the Mayura dynasty, we do not know anything about their mothers, wives, or daughters. All that we know from early Greek writings, the Sri Lankan Pali chronicles, and later Sanskrit literature is as creative as the much later *Mudrarakshasa*, which raises strong doubts about the so-called wives, consorts, or queens of Aśoka. Even if Aśoka had been a ruler in the Indian subcontinent and his grandfather was Chandragupta, we do not know who his grandmothers were, either paternal or maternal, or if Aśoka knew them. We do not know about his relationship with his mother, or if he received his mother's care and love, or if he was one more child in the palace, among many offspring of Bindusara. If he had 100 brothers and probably a similar number of sisters, he would have grown up

among all the women in his father's harem and with so many young girls, many of them probably his half-sisters. We have so many confusing and contradictory stories about Aśoka's consorts. About Aśoka's daughters, we only hear of Sanghamitta.

The so-called Maurya dynasty is believed to have been founded by a king named Chandragupta. We do not have any information about Chandragupta's birth. Romila Thapar considers him to be a *Vaisya*. His mother could also have been a *Sudra* woman or a courtesan of the Nanda king. It is the Mahavamsa that claims he was born of a family of *Kshatriya* called the Moriyas. This is said to be supported by the reference to a K*shatriya* clan named Moriyas. But it was in the best interest of the Lankan chroniclers to claim *Kshatriya* descent so the Lankan kings, too, could find a link to them and even to the Buddha. We do not know how many wives Chandragupta had or who Bindusara's mother was. She could have been a Greek or Macedonian princess, or any other woman in the palace or the city. According to the 12th-century "*Parishista-Parvan*" by the Jain writer Hemachandra, the name of Bindusara's mother was Durdhara. [i] We do not have even a single name for Aoka's father, while Aoka had three names. Bindusara would have been a nickname to establish the legend about the spots (bindu) on his skin. Then the second king of the so-called Mayura dynasty is nameless. Just like the first or second "queen" of Aoka, known as Devi. The Jain work *Rajavali-Katha* states that his birth name was Simhasena.

Aśoka was a *raja* who used three names, sometimes alternately, sometimes all together, and now known today mostly by the name he himself had used only a few times. It is not often we meet kings who used several personal names. Most would be satisfied with one name once he became king. Only in the case of the children of Bindusara, to avoid confusion, each of the 200 or more children would have needed more than one name to identify them in the royal household. If we are to accept that Aśoka killed the 100 brothers, afterwards he could easily manage with one single name. We have even less information about Bindusara than we have about his father or his son. If there had never been a historical Bindusara, it would be very difficult to talk about his son. Aśokavadana does not mention Aśoka's mother's

name, but mentions that she was a Brahmin girl who was gifted to Bindusara and introduced into his harem. (Strong 205)

Aśoka as a sub-king or viceroy, also raises questions. Guruge does not agree about Aśoka being a viceroy of Taksasila, but he is convinced that Aśoka was the sub-king of Ujjeni. Perhaps he needs to establish this to support the story of Mahinda thera and Sangamittatherini, because only the Pali chronicles mention them.

> The data on Aśoka's connection with Ujjaini come only from the Sri Lakan Pali sources. "The grandson of Candagutta, the son of Bindusara, (king Aśoka), whilst a mere prince, was subking of Ujjeni, charged with collecting the revenue (of that province). (Guruge 38)
>
> "Mahavamsa leaves no room for doubt. In two places it says that the region was bestowed on him by his father. *dinnamrajjamujjeiyam,* (kingdom of Ujjeni given by his father) *Avantiratthambhunjantopitaradinnamattano.* (while enjoying the region of Avanti given to him by his father" (Guruge39)

Paranavitana in *The Greeks and the Mauryas* does not say much about Aśoka except about his taking over the kingdom. According to Paranavitana, Aśoka was the viceroy of Avanti when Bindusara died, and the eldest son Tisya succeeded to the throne. Aśoka may have worked on the rivalry of Avanti with Magadha, and mustered a large force, came to Pataliputra, slew his brother and took over the country. (68) The Mahavamsa was written about seven centuries after Aśoka in a country about 3,000 km, from Pataliputra, it could be the fertile imagination coupled with the need to establish the Mahinda-Sangamitta and Aśoka-Tissa connection. Until someday some archaeological proof is discovered, we can only speculate on the AśokaUjjeni connection.

If we believe these legends, when Aśoka turned eighteen, Samrat Bindusara made him the viceroy of Avanti, a region in Ujjain. It is interesting to note that Aśoka that time was known as a heartless general, and that was precisely the reason why he was sent to Avanti to curb an uprising. However, even the heartless general fell in love with a common girl and married her. The girl was none other than Samrat Aśoka's first wife, Maharani Devi. Aśoka's skin is said to be rough to the touch, and he was fat and ugly and had fainting fits. Though most writers accept these conditions, there is no evidence about Aśoka's appearance or health conditions other than what could

be inferred from the legends, which appeared many centuries later. Had he been so ugly to look at and his skin so repulsive, would the daughter of a rich merchant or any of the other "queens" or "consorts" agree to "cohabit" with him? That is a question we should ask ourselves. If Devi had been a woman acquired for his harem, we could understand her giving in to the king's demands, but not a free woman (if she was a free woman) in the provinces, when Aśoka was only a young prince who was not even expected to be the next king. Unless Vedisa Devi had been attracted to Aśoka, who at the time was just a prince among 100 other royal princes, she may not have agreed to be his consort.

About Aśoka's fainting spells and his skin condition, we are accepting what was written by people who had lived many centuries later and who had never set eyes on Aśoka or seen a true image of Aśoka. Based on these imaginary descriptions, we try to identify a figure in a carving made over a hundred years after Aśoka, by an artist who never set eyes on the king, and we use this carving as proof of Aśoka's appearance and health. Today we read Charles Allen's imaginary tale about how ugly Aśoka looked because of his skin condition that his father sent him away from Pataliputra. Allen has accepted that Aśoka fainted at Bodhgaya, when we do not even know if he had ever visited Bodhgaya. The next evidence is weaker still, as the Mahayana tradition goes back to previous lives of Aśoka, his previous karma, and the story about Aśoka burning to death some of his queens for making remarks about his skin.

Based on such flimsy evidence, Aśoka has been diagnosed as having suffered from neurofibromatosis type 1 (Von Recklinghausen's disease). [i] Then a whole set of symptoms are ascribed to Aśoka, "cutaneous neurofibromas and pigmented skin lesions." If Aśoka had suffered from such a grave illness, could he have performed his duties first as a vice-king, then ascended the throne amidst so much opposition, and then ruled such a vast empire for over three decades? How did he manage to command such a huge army, administer his country, manage so many ministers and officials, and propagate his Dharma while enjoying his time in his harem? It was not only Guruge; there were others who believed in legends, and Guruge quotes them. Also misleading is the adulation that often poured from the pens of many an intellectual and political

leader who admired Aśoka for what he is supposed to have said and believed. The Pāngurāriā inscription is an example of how the same inscription has been read and interpreted in many different ways.

The 'introductory part' of the Pāngurāriā inscription is

piyadasi-nāma
r[ā]jākumāra[sa]
saṁvasamāne
ma-des[e] [upunitha
vihāra-[ya]tāy[e]

It is taken for granted by many who read the Pāngurāriā inscription, that it was addressed to a prince named Samva. Sircar translated this as "The king named Priyadarsin [speaks] to Kumara Śaṁva from [his] march [of pilgrimage] to the Upunitha-vihāra in Mānema-deśa." We are assuming that because the word follows "upunitha", that "vihāra" means monastery. But the term "vihāra" had not been used for monastery or Buddhist religious place, anywhere else in Aśokan inscriptions. It has been interpreted at all other instances as "tour" or "pleasure tour", "*vihārayātāṃanuyati*" (Girnar Rock Edict VIII) a "pleasure tour" (Hultzsc14)Talim (2010, 194-9) considers *saṁvasa* to mean "to associate with, to live together". *Dipavamsa* uses *samvasam* for the association of Aśoka with Vedisa devi "cohabited with him" (Oldenberg 1879, 147 VI: 15)) and taking *māne*as Pali *mānavam* – "youth, young man", *upunitha* as *pahinatha* – "going as messenger, being sent". Thus her translation is "King named Piyadassi, was living with prince. He, the young man, was sent to Majjhima (MajjhimaDesh), sojourning the pilgrimage". Even this translation is not very coherent and does not explain the need of such a statement to introduce this inscription, it shows how words could be read and interpreted in various ways, when the script is not very clear.

Harry Falk also comments on this inscription, giving it a totally different interpretation.

piyadasi-nāma
r[ā]jākumār[e] va
saṁvasamāne (i)
mamdes[m] (p)[ā]upunitha
vihāra(y)atāyā

"The king (who now after consecration) is callePiyadassi, (once) came to this place on a pleasure tour while he was still a (ruling) prince living together with his (unwedded) consort." Falk adds, "The word order makes it tempting to assume that "living together with his consort" belongs also to the predicate "came to this place". If this impression is justified, then the text says that Aśoka came to the rock shelter of Panguraria in the company of Vidisadevi: a genuine *abhirama* indeed. Aśoka tells us in RE8 (A-D) that his former *viharayatras* included *abhirama* and hunting". If we accept this there was no prince 'Samva' or a temple named 'Upunitha', and also shows the sentimental side of Aśoka, who wants to leave a permanent record of his romantic alliance in his youth. However, since Aśoka does not mention the name of his 'consort', it could have been any young lady, (or a young prince named Samva) who was accompanying the young prince. There is no evidence that the young person was Vidisadevi. Perhaps this is a very good example of how an inscription written over two millennia ago, could be read differently, guessing at hardly decipherable letters and moving the spaces between words.

Langudi stone sculptures, were discovered in 2000-1 by Dr D. R. Pradhan. These two sculptures carry inscriptions in Brahmi lettering which appear to refer to Aśoka by that name. The smaller statue is the head and shoulders of a man with long piled-up hair and large earrings. According to Professor B. N. Mukherjee of Calcutta University, the accompanying inscription reads: '*Chhi* [shri, honoured] *karenaranjaashokhena'*. The word *karena* can be read as 'bestowal' which suggests that the statue is a portrait of a donor named 'King Aśoka'. ...The second sculpture is slightly larger, shows a man seated on a throne flanked by two standing queens or female attendants. He sits with his hands on his knees, and wears a turban and pendulous earrings, with numerous bangles from his wrists up to his elbows. *'amaupasaka Aśokasasamchiamanaagra eka stupa'* Prof Mukherjee translation – 'A lay worshipper Aśoka with religious longing is associated in the construction of a prominent stupa'. We do not know who the two female on the carving had been.

There are several consorts of Aśoka mentioned in literature.

Vedisa-Mahadevi Sakyakumari

> When the prince Asoka, while ruling over the realm of Avanti, that his father had bestowed on him, halted in the town of Vedisa, before he

> came to UjjenI, and met there a lovely maiden named Devi, the daughter of a merchant, he made her his wife and she was (afterwards) with child by him and bore in UjjenI a beautiful boy, Mahinda, when two years had passed (she bore) a daughter, Samghamitta. At that time she lived in the city of Vedisa. (Geiger XIII b-11)

Devī (/ˈdeɪvi/; Sanskrit: □□□□) is the Sanskrit word for 'female deity or 'goddess' (Monier-Williams); the masculine form is deva. Devi and deva mean 'heavenly, divine, anything of excellence', and are also gender-specific terms for a deity in Hinduism. Or a "Hindu goddess and embodiment of the female energy of Siva "(Collins). Kumari (in Pali) is a young girl (Rhys Davis), a title mostly used for a princess, and as a personal name today. In ancient times 'Devi' would not have been a personal name, which means we do not know the name of the mother of Mahinda thero or Sanghamittatherini.

Who was the first queen? Was she the mother of Mahinda and Sangamitta? If not, was the first queen also a follower of Aśoka Dhamma or Buddha Dhamma? Why are the Pali chroniclers silent about her 'religion' or if she too had been 'converted to Buddhism"? It is only in the Mahavamsa and Aśokavadana, we find the story of the 'second' queen Tissarakkha and the destruction of the Bodhi tree out of jealousy, such information is only in the Mahavamsa and Aśokavadana.Aśoka's first wife Devi did not belong to any royal family. She in fact, was a daughter of a merchant of Vidisha. According to Mahabodhivamsa, Devi however belongs to Sakya clan making her a relative of Buddha. This link is however disputed. We do not have much data on Aśoka's consort, Devi of Vedisagiri, or if at all she was the legal first wife of Aśoka. *Dipavamsa* only says she "cohabited with him" (*samvasam*) (Oldenberg 1879, 147 VI: 15). She is said to be a follower of Buddha Dhamma, but nowhere do we find any reference about her influence on the faith of Aśoka, or if he had gained any knowledge or familiarity of the Buddha Dhamma or the Saṁgha, during the period of his "cohabitation" with Devi.

Sri Lanka Buddhist tradition has Aśoka as sub-king of Avanti and Ujjain. There was a special reason why the Sri Lanka Pali sources should have taken special care to preserve the memory of the particular phase in the life of Aśoka. It is on his way to Ujjain that Aśoka enjoyed the hospitality of the guild-chief Deva of Vedisa, met his daughter Vedisdevi and married her. While the Dipavamas says

they 'cohabited', Guruge quotes from the *Vamsatthappakasini* which was written nine centuries later, to state "The marriage was contracted according to custom with the consent of the bride's parents" (Guruge 1993, 40-41). We may never know what the real name of Aśoka's consort in Vedisa had been or if there had been a historical person, who had 'married' Aśoka. If we accept this is a fact, then Vedisadevi was the first queen of Aśoka, and her son Mahinda would have been his eldest son and heir to the throne. We have to give credit to Guruge as he tries to be impartial wherever possible, even within the agenda he was trapped in. "Notice has been taken of the attempt which the Pali sources make to trace Devi's ancestry to the Sakyas so that she could be given an added prestige as a relative of the Buddha. We have already discussed this same tendency as regards the Maurya dynasty. No evidence exists to support either or both of these assertions whose origin as faith-inspired accretion is obvious." (Guruge 1993, 43)

Karuvaki

A very interesting possibility has been raised by Amul Chandra Sen, that Vedisha Devi could have been Kāruvākī referred to in the Queen's Edict. Aśoka might have been already married when he met the Vidisha merchant's beautiful daughter who therefor became his second queen. What happened to her son Ujjeniya is not known and he might have died early. Mahendra and Sangamitta taking to the monastic life and when she gave birth to Tivara, she came to be known as 'mother of Tivara'. Sometimes we try to produce an entire book from a few words in an inscription. The Allahabad /Queen's Pillar Edict is an example. We try to identify the queen, and why Aśoka had this edict inscribed only in one place while it was addressed to Mahamatras everywhere. Sen comments that it was either not meant to be inscribed in stone, or the modest queen (assuming she is Devi of Vidisha), did not want it inscribed everywhere and stopped it after seeing the first inscription. Or it was not meant to be inscribed, but was one more set of instructions sent by Aśoka to his ministers, for their eyes only.

At the word of Devanampriya, the Mahamatras everywhere have to be told (this).What gifts (have been made) here by the second queen (*dutiyayedevlye)*, (viz.) either mango groves, or gardens, or

alms-houses, or whatever else, these (shall) be registered, (in the name) of that queen. This (is) [the request] of the second queen, the mother of Tivala, the Kaluvaki. (Hultzsch, 159) Hultzsch in his footnote mentions that according to Buhler (1A, 19. 123) Kaluvaki is probably the name of the queen's family, and it may be connected with the Vedic *gotra* of the Karus. Sen considers it either as a modern caste Karwas, or the Queen's personal name (of sweet voice), based on the bird Kalavika from the Himalayan region, and linking her to the Sakyas who lived at the foot of the Himalayas. (Sen 156, 137)

The doubts raised by this inscription are because so far no inscriptions regarding the gifts made by this queen have been found. Either the officials did not establish them or they were inscribed on perishable material. The large charities of the 'second queen' would also agree with the religious disposition of the Vidisha queen...these charities were by a queen who was known to be as staunch a Buddhist as Aśoka." (Sen, 33) This is an attempt to interpret the inscription using unconfirmed legend, as so far no evidence has been found about Vedisha Devi or her children, another instance of trying to recreate history based on narrative. Another legend is "Rani Kaurwaki was a daughter of a fisherman who stayed in Kalinga (present day Orissa). According to the legends, Aśoka met Karuvaki and fell in love with her when he was living life in exile and had gone incognito…..Kaurwaki became the mother of Aśoka's second son Tivala or Tivara who later became the viceroy of Takshila. Both the name of Kaurwaki and Tivala are found in Samrat Aśoka's edicts." [1]

QUEEN'S PILLAR-EDICT: ALLAHABAD-KOSAM

1. (A) *Devanampiyasha v[a]chanenasavata mahamata1*
2. *vataviya (B) e heta® dutiyayedevlyedane*
3. *arhba-vadikavaalameva dana-[gah]e [va® e va pi a]mne*
4. *kichhiganiyatitayedeviye she nani (C) [he]vam .. [na] .dutiyayedeviyetiTxvala-matuKaluvakiye*

   (A) At the word of Devanampriya, the Mahamatras everywhere have to be told (this).

   (B) What gifts (have been made) here by the second queen, (viz.) either mango-groves, or gardens, or alms-houses, or

whatever else, these (shall) be registered, (in the name) of that queen.

(C) This (is) [the request] of the second queen, the mother of Tivala, the Kaluvakl*

As stated by Buhler (IA, 19.123), this is probably the name of the queen's family, and it may be connected with the Vedic gotra of the Karus. . .. (Hultzsch p 159 footnote)

Prinsep had read *dutiyayedeviye* as 'second princess (his) queen. He has also seen a *kichchiganyetitiye* as 'the third princess' (Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal vol. 6. 967)

Padmavati

Nothing much is known about Rani Padmavati except the fact that she was the mother of Samrat Aśoka's son Kunala. Rani Padmavati died very early and so it is also not known whether the marriage was out of love or a political alliance….Though Kunala was younger than both Mahendra and Tivala, he was always seen as Aśoka's heir. This makes us believe that Rani Padmavati would definitely be from a royal background and would be next in line after Devi and Kaurvaki.[3] On the very same day on which King Asoka built the eightyfour thousand dharmarâjikâs, his queen Padmavati gave birth to a son who was handsome, good-looking, and gracious, and whose eyes were very bright. Asoka was overjoyed by this good news, and declared: I am filled with supreme delight for the greatness of the Mauryan line has been assured. A son has been bom to me. I ruled through Dharma, may he increase Dharma! And so the boy was given the name Dharmavivardhana (Dharma-increasing)…..: "The prince's eyes are like those of a kunäla, let him therefore be called 'Kunäla! " (Strong, 268) Padmavati is also mentioned by Lahiri, as the mother of Kunala. (Lahiri 284)

Asandhimitra

In a previous birth, "Then the (maid who) had pointed out the store wished that she might become the royal spouse of the (first), and (desired) a lovely form with limbs of perfect outline. (Adissamanasamdhi means literally with invisible joints ') Geiger V 59-60.

> "While, both his earlier marriages (Devi and Kaurwaki) were purely because of love before he became a Samrat, Aśoka's fourth marriage was an imperial decision after he became the third Samrat of the Mauryan dynasty. This time he married a princess with invisible joints 'previous marriages and gave her all the royal rights.Her name was Asandhimitra and she belonged to Assandhivat, a little kingdom which finds its presence in the present day Haryana. Asandhimitra who married Samrat Aśoka (not prince Aśoka) became the chief consort of Chakravartin Aśoka Samrat and continued to remain so till she died her own death in 240CE.She did not bore any child but took care of Prince Kunala ever since he was a little boy because his biological mother Rani Padmavati died when he was very small. This is the reason why Rani Asandhimitra is often thought as Rani Padmavati, the biological mother of Kunala. However, Asandhimitra and Padmavati were two different individuals."[2]

Allen (394) is basing all this on the later literature, when there is not a single scrap of evidence to support the story. Unless he could prove that these episodes had really happened, he should not have stated the following –

> The favouring of Buddhism, cannot have gone down well with the Brahmans, Jains, Ajivikas and other non-Buddhist sections of the community. This favouring of Buddhism impacted most directly on the orthodox Brahmans because it was chiefly from their ranks that the Buddhist monks were drawn. Sakyamuni Buddha's first disciples were Brahmans and this trend had continued, so that the more Brahmans who converted to Buddhism the weaker their community became. A reaction was inevitable. Aśoka's quintessential festival ended with Aśoka mounting a special platform built around the Bodhi tree to bathe it 'with milk scented with sandalwood, saffron, and camphor poured from 5000 pitchers of gold, silver, crystal and cat's eye, filled with different kinds of perfumes. Outer panel east gateway Sanchi. This took place in 240 BCE. Next scheduled for 235 BCE – (Allen 2012, 391). The 2nd panchavarsika festival could not be performed. 239 BCE Asandhimitramother of Kunala died about 235 BCE Tishyarakshita became queen, both in Northern and Southern traditions she conspired against Buddhism, caused the Bodhi tree to wither, and had Kunala blinded. Samprati becomes heir-apparent. The new queen headed a non-Buddhist faction at court.

Thiysrakshita

Padmavati is mentioned as a queen, while Aśokavadana calls Tishyaraksha to the position of Chief Queen (Strong, 270). John S.

Strong quotes a story from S. Mukhopadhyaya from the Aśokavadana. The term Bodhi indicates the Bodhi-tree itself, Buddhas achievement of enlightenment, while Aśoka's queen Tisyaraksita believed Bodhi to be a new mistress of the king. If we are to believe this story, the queen did not know of the Bodhi tree, she had not heard the tree mentioned in the royal household and was so naive to have believed Bodhi was the name of a woman. After Samrat Aśoka's chief consort Asandhimitra died in 240CE, her favorite maid Tishyaraksha took care of Aśoka. It is said that she attracted Aśoka by her charm, dance and beauty. Next, it is believed that Aśoka made her his concubine and even promoted Tishyaraksha to the position of Chief Queen. The age difference between Tishyaraksha and Samrat Aśoka was huge. It is believed that Tishyaraksha was attracted to Aśoka's son Kunala – the presumed heir to the Magadh throne. However, Kunala regarded her as his mother due to her position in the Kingdom that time. Tishyaraksha couldn't accept this rejection and this is the reason why she blinded Kunala whose eyes attracted Tishyaraksha, the most. Though the attraction of Tishyaraksha for Kunala does not have any historical evidence except that they are penned down in two Bengali novels, according to Aśokavadana it is known that it was Tishyaraksha who was responsible for blinding Kunala, Aśoka's presumptive heir.[4] Succumbing to hatred and bringing about harm to herself, she had the great Bodhi-tree destroyed by means of mandu-thorn. (MV XX, 4-5)There is nothing more in any Sri Lankan source on this matter." (Guruge 1993, 272). This could only be a later addition to support the legend of Aśoka's veneration of the Bodhi tree, but it could also mean the helplessness of the king in later years.

Kähcanamälä

The only daughter-in-law of Aśoka mentioned in literature is the wife of prince Kunala. "By and by, the prince grew up, and was married to a girl named Kähcanamälä." (Strong p. 270) We have no information of any other women associated with his sons.

Harem

Asoka admits he spends a lot of time in his harem *orodhana*, which could mean he had many women as his consorts, in addition to the

few women mentioned in literature. Perhaps as many women as his father, who would have cohabited with so many, to be able to produce about 200 children. XI Rock Edict, Girnar.

> Reporters are posted everywhere, (with instructions) to report to me the affairs of the people at any time while I am eating, in the harem, in the inner apart-ment, even at the cowpen in the palanquin, and in the parks. (Hultzsch. RE 6. p. 57)

There would have been many unnamed women in his harem, as mentioned in Aśokavadana. By virtue of his name, Asoka also comes to be identified with the Asoka tree {Saraca indica). The text itself makes this clear in several instances. Just prior to his conversion, when Asoka goes out to the royal pleasure garden with his harem, he comes across an Asoka tree whose blossoms are at their peak. Thinking this tree is my namesake, he becomes sexually aroused; but, as we have mentioned, because he has rough skin the young women in his harem do not enjoy caressing him. And, outof spite, they express their contempt for him by chopping all the flowering branches off the Asoka tree while the real Asoka is asleep. When he wakes up and gazes upon his dismembered namesake, he is mad with anger. (Strong, 128)"Who did this?" he asked his servants who were standing nearby. "Your majesty's concubines," they answered. On learning this, Asoka flew into a rage and burned the five hundred women alive.'[1] (Strong, 210) Aśoka's 'harem is also mentioned, where he had allowed. "When King Asoka began having faith in the Teaching of the Blessed One, it became his custom to invite monks to the palace where he made offerings to them and listened to their sermons on the Dharma. Occasionally he would set up a curtain behind which his wives could sit and listen to the Dharma, although they were strictly forbidden to approach the monks directly." (Strong, 296)

Women in Asoka's Society

We would never know what would have been the place of women in the time of the Chandragupta dynasty. All we have from the inscriptions is that Aśoka had appointed an *ithijhakha-mahamata* Mahamatras controlling women. (Girnar RE XII) There is no evidence except from the fictional records by Greek visitors, and from the Arthasastra, which may or may not have been written during the

time of Chandragupta. If Ashoka's claim to have shown respect and followed the teachings of the Buddha, (he has never claimed to be a "Buddhist"), how could he abandon his first wife/consort and two children, and also maintain a harem, is a question which remain unanswerable. Based on all these writings, the woman would have been a slave, a commodity, temporary companion, under a service provider as *Ganikadayaksha*. (Supervisor of Prostitutes, Artasastra), or an instrument of political intrigue and even a *Vishkanya*, (*Mudrarakshasa*, by Vishakadatta). Then Aśoka, his father and grandfather would have known any number of women in each one of the above categories. In such a situation this study becomes an exercise in futility.

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Notes

1. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4314928/ (accessed, Nov. 2, 2022)
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