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Editorial, or rather in lieu of an 'Editorial'

Ashok K Mohapatra

There come moments in history that jolt us, the *lang-lit* academics, out of somnolence, and force us look beyond the bower of the lush foliage of affects and imagination creeping over the daintily intricate trellis of language to fields where some *more useful* people grow crops that sustain us or make use of the land for the *practical* common good of humankind. The present Covid-19 pandemic that looms large over the globe also prods us to not only discover what blights and cankers our arbo(real) floral world, but also makes us think if we can offer some succor to the people in real world who are already in great suffering. Do we need to work with others to be a little more meaningful that we have been thought as? Here I share with the readers of this issue of *SSLC* some ideas about the crisis in the Humanities and its interdisciplinary inflections on which I lectured some time ago under the title 'Crisis in the Humanities, Interdisciplinary Inflections'. I have transcribed the lecture with minor changes. The relevance of this editorial – which is in lieu of a conventional editorial – will be apparent from the brilliant essays very well-known and distinguished academics such as Professor Dilip Das and Professor Pramod Nayar have written on the corporeal pathology of human existence as encoded in literary and cultural practices of humans from interdisciplinary perspectives. Some other young scholars have also joined them in exploring various cultural aspects of the various epidemics and pandemics. For his part, Dr Prakash Joshi in his interpretation of Jack London's *Iron Heel* and throws light on the cultural pathology of human existence from the angle of Marxist theory. Interdisciplinary methodology used for understanding the problems of society and culture through the mediation of literary discourses has undoubtedly benefitted literary studies, the core of the Humanities. At the same time, however, it has generated a sense of crisis which I am going to focus on. The Books Review Section features two books that are in many ways disturbingly dystopic from post-humanist and post-truth perspectives that also underline a profound sense of epistemological and ethical crisis that overwhelms the Humanities.

First of all, I wish to talk about the circumstances leading to the disenfranchisement of the Humanities from the circle of knowledge considered useful and productive in a purely utilitarian political economy. This is a crisis for a core Humanities subject like literary studies manifested in its desperate need to ally itself with theoretical concepts and issues belonging not just to the Social Sciences, but also Environmental Studies, Economics, Genetics, Neuro-Sciences, Medicine, Data mining etc. in interdisciplinary terms. Eco-Humanities, Critical-Humanities, Digital-Humanities, Medical-Humanities, Energy-Humanities etc. are the new, exciting multidisciplinary fields that try to relate the concepts and theories of various knowledge domains to human experience in well-defined problematic contexts. For instance, should there be some role for empathy and imagination on the part of a doctor while listening to a patient during clinical examination and and finding the etiology of the disease in question? Should the doctor look at the

patient as a human being who is suffering from a disease, or a pathologized body already defined so in terms of the scientifically laid down principles and procedures, in order that she/he may only be subjected to impersonal regime of diagnosis and regimen of treatment. Here we find medical science seeking the help of perhaps literature so that a doctor would be less a heartless clinician so rich in domain knowledge and clinical expertise, but so poor in empathy, compassion, and ethical sense of a larger order.

Maybe these multi-disciplinary ventures are the need of the hour, for the alliance of theoretical scientific knowledge to human experience and existential aspects can effectively solve human problems that have become more in number and more complicated. I do not deny all this. But my chief point is that inter or multi-disciplinary inflections of Humanities , howsoever exciting and useful, is born out of a crisis that Humanities have suffered on account of a fragmentation of knowledge and the consequent dissociation and devaluation of Humanist disciplines at a certain point of time. I want to argue that the current scenario of multi-disciplinarity proliferating in the academia often with finding and funding in a global structure of knowledge-economy engenders an overwhelmingly heterogeneous epistemic field with multiple points for claims of legitimacy and ethical positioning. What is problematic is that the contestation being never-ending, no particular truth-claim is considered reliable or final. As a consequence, epistemological bewilderment and indeterminacy of judgment set in , and both are extremely disorienting for aesthetics and poetics.

Let me make a quick a survey of the history of the classification and regrouping of disciplines in order to show how a decline in the importance of Humanities took place. Once considered a natural and indispensable ally of the Sciences, gradually the Humanities got alienated from the sciences and suffered decline of importance in course of the rise of positivist, utilitarian and technology intensive pedagogy, well-known in the corporatized academic circle as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The historical knowledge would perhaps make us a little skeptical about our own position as students of the Humanities.

Conventionally, the disciplines of literature, art, music, philosophy etc. belong to the Humanities, a broad field of diverse experiences, ideas and knowledge about how human beings relate themselves to the world and to one another. The site of the knowledge is obviously human mind or subjective consciousness. That said, the question now is which disciplines do not belong to it? Those that study Nature as the site of knowledge like Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Medicine etc. don't, and these were part of what was called then called Natural History, and now Sciences. Are there disciplines that belong neither to the Humanities, nor to the Sciences? Those that study human being's behavior, and interests in the context of his existence in the world as site of knowledge are the Social Sciences such as Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Law and Jurisprudence. Some disciplines that are related to more than one site are Linguistics and Psychology (both can be categorized under Humanities and Social Sciences). Applied

Sciences and Technology that branch off from the pure sciences have their site of translating knowledge that consists in transforming theoretical and pure scientific ideas into devices and services that make life more convenient and comfortable to live than before, with much less suffering and pain.

This kind of disciplinary taxonomy in terms of the triad of Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences with respect to the three sites of knowledge is a modern phenomenon. It indicates how in course of the intellectual history of humans and their civilization disciplines have defined themselves; drawn, redrawn and guarded their boundaries; or sometimes allied with other disciplines to create new hybrid disciplines. Such type of branching has paralleled the process of knowledge gradually becoming transformed into an instrument of power in the institutions, regulatory bodies, and enforcement bodies within the State as well as getting transformed into commodity and cultural capital in a growing knowledge economy.

Having said all this, I wish to emphasize that the modern knowledge taxonomy so outlined is very different from the knowledge taxonomy of classical antiquity in that a spirit of unity animated human mind and understood the universe in its totality as a wonderful system of correspondences in the period of classical antiquity. Indeed, no segment of the experience of the universe, although distinctive in its own way, was ever considered insulated from other segments, since the sentient subject was at the centre of the universe that seemed to pulsate with meaning was a divine immanence, with God as the primary and efficient cause. For example, Pythagoras's (570-495 BCE) concept of harmonic intervals, explained mathematically in terms of the ratio of whole numbers demonstrates how musicology and mathematics were cognate subjects and were allied with cosmology and theology. Pythagoras worked music into algebra, geometry and astronomy within the knowledge system of *Mathemata*. A century later the Sophists extended Mathemata to linguistics. Another example would be Hesiod(730-700 BCE), whose *Theogony* is a genealogical account of the Greek Gods as well as that of illustrious kings from the Golden Age to the Silver Age, to the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Here history and theology inhabit the same field of knowledge. Aristotle, who was the first taxonomist and natural historian in the history of Bioscience, could speak magisterially on poetics, politics, rhetoric, and ethics.

Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian influenced mathematics and logic in a profound way. In the philosophical system of Confucius, music and politics found a prominent place. Taoism wanted humans to integrate with nature. If we take the Nyaya tradition of logic, which was developed by Aksapada Gautama in his *Nyaya Sutra* around 200 CE, we find observation, inference, comparison and evidence were part of a complex system. The inference or *Anumana* (a combination of both deductive and inductive logic) was used for diagnostic and therapeutic practices in classical India. So medicine and philosophy cohabited for a long time. The post Confucian logic of the Mohist school in China in the

5th century founded by Mozi applied logic to various fields beginning from optics to economics.

Rhetoric developed by Aristotle, Quintilian and Horace developed as a discipline not just for deliberations in the civic affairs as was the practice in Athens and Rome, but also necessary for the dissemination of scientific knowledge as Bacon would argue for it in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605).

If we think of the Middle Ages (5 to the 15 Century) as a period characterized by activities such as travel and translation – which became more well-pronounced during the Renaissance – we have to interpret both set of activities as border crossing of geographic boundaries and linguistic boundaries, and these were motivated as well as impelled by a thirst for acquiring knowledge about the people and culture in the places far and near, and also spreading Christianity or Islam or Buddhism as the case might be. These entailed crossing epistemological boundaries and resulted in multidisciplinary ventures.

In fact, the idea of composite knowledge became very popular with the compilation of encyclopaedias in the Roman Empire for the learning of the elite. From one of these encyclopedias, written by Marcus Terentius Varro (116-27 BCE) in the first century B.C., came the model of organizing knowledge into nine liberal arts: grammar, rhetoric, logic (these came to be known as the "trivium"), arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music (these were known as the "quadrivium"), medicine, and architecture. The last two were dropped by later writers and scholars, leaving the seven liberal arts to form the framework of knowledge and education in the Roman Empire. The Greek scholars had pursued the study of a wide range of philosophical and scientific subjects with a high degree of sophistication and technical detail, Roman readers and students had more practical and basic interests. As Rome's Latin culture gradually displaced the Greek scholarly tradition, scientific ideas and methods were distilled into encyclopedias or commentaries intended for the leisure reading of Roman gentlemen. It seems the very commingling of the Greek culture with Roman culture may have been the cause for the decline in the interest in the natural philosophy that had flourished during the heyday of Greek civilization.

One needs to keep in mind that knowledge had not been secularized then and not until the Renaissance and the early modern period. God was believed to be the cause and centre of all knowledge. In the western context, Christianity started dominating the intellectual world. Education offered in these schools was predominantly spiritual, while Classical learning was neglected, if not entirely abandoned. Christianity provided not only the institutions that perpetuated intellectual life during the Middle Ages, it was also the ideological underpinning of all scholarly work. From the fourth century onward, Christian writers and scholars were guided by Saint Augustine's principle that the study of nature should serve as a "handmaiden" to religious devotion. By viewing, appreciating, and understanding nature, one could better appreciate God's works. While this subordinate position for science may seem oppressive to modern readers, it actually provided some

justification and stimulus for the study of nature and eventually aided in the advance of scientific ideas and methods. During the reign of Charlemagne (C. 742-814), social reforms brought new schools to monasteries and cathedrals throughout the Carolingian empire (which by then encompassed most of Western Europe). Within these schools the study of the seven liberal arts was revived, and for the first time scientific and mathematical subjects were enriched by some contact with texts produced in the Islam world. While Western Europe had ceased to advance the scientific subjects mastered by the Greeks—geometry, optics, astronomy, and other branches of mathematics—Islamic scholars preserved, studied, and improved upon these works during the ninth through thirteenth centuries. During the Western revival of interest in Greek scholarship in around the tenth century, and for the next 400 years, European scholars relied upon Islamic texts.

In course of time Universities in Paris, Oxford and Bologna in the 13th Century became the seats of learning in medieval Europe. Scientific study, based on the texts being rediscovered and translated from the Greek and Islamic traditions, shared a place in the curriculum with Christian theology and Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy .In the university curricula, there was a reorganization of knowledge in terms of the an undergraduate faculty of liberal arts and three advanced faculties for the study of law, medicine, and theology. The liberal arts curriculum had expanded from the classical pattern to include moral philosophy, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. The technical methods of arithmetic and geometry were introduced in the basic curriculum, as were those of astronomy (emphasizing astrological principles and the important methods of calendar establishment and timekeeping). Of more central importance, however, was Aristotelian natural philosophy. Aristotle's works on cosmology, physics, meteorology, and natural history were mandatory reading for all students. Because these subjects, then at the heart of the university curriculum, were learned by all through the study of Aristotle's works and commentaries upon them, these ideas were universally understood and moved easily from one university to another, creating a kind of cosmopolitan intellectual worldview that helped to unify scholars throughout Europe.

But while the subjects themselves remained organized into separate areas of study, methodological approaches began to be applied across disciplines. The critical evaluation of statements and ideas characteristic of Aristotelian logic was used to consider claims about nature, and even theological doctrine. This led to tensions between the Church and the universities, and several times during the thirteenth century the Pope issued bans on the study of Aristotle. But Aristotle's works proved irresistible to scholars, and much effort was devoted to reconciling Aristotle's claims with those of the *Bible*. The "handmaiden" ideal motivated scholars who tried to bring Aristotle's scientific claims in line with Christian theology as they worked to show that this vast body of knowledge about the world could be put to use to serve man and the Church.

This led to a polarization of studies as Christian and Aristotelian philosophy, with tension between theological studies and the natural sciences that redefined the natural elements,

their principles and properties in new ways that clashed with theological epistémè. Careful curiosity about the details of the physics of motion, for example, prompted the fourteenth-century investigators to frame questions and attempt solutions that would later inspire Galileo (1564-1642CE). Astronomical observations and calculations made in the late Middle Ages made possible the groundbreaking work of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543 CE) and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630 CE).

In the Renaissance, the revival of classical learning was also coeval with the explosion of knowledge in various fields of natural science. It is next to impossible to chart the developments in this regard, but it is pertinent to say that the revival also entailed a new knowledge form that contest with the classical knowledge on the one hand and conflict with the theological knowledge of medieval papal Christianity. I shall only talk about the changing ontological notions of nature and the changing objectives of natural sciences that gained ground during the Renaissance and seems to have been crucial to the rise of rationalism and the new science.

In very simple terms classical Greek view of nature was that it was an intelligent organism with its inherent principles and rules that man could discover. This was Aristotle's view. If we look at St. Thomas Aquinas's view of nature in *Summa Theologiae* (13th century), he credited it with benevolent, moral purpose and light of nature to guide man. In Nature Reason was immanent. But to the Christian Renaissance thinkers, nature was but a substantive, mechanical system of forces subjected to reason as embodied by man, and reason was transcendental. It was subjected to human will and reason. The principles of nature as part of necessity were congruent with the Renaissance idea of Christian Providence. From his naturalist standpoint, in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) Spinoza gave an account of nature as a system of laws in various domains according to which essence of individual bodies, including, human are realized. Natural laws, although decreed by God, permit what can happen and what cannot, are the laws of necessity. His conceptualization of the laws of nature laid the foundation for scientific and philosophical enquiries. He developed psychological, ethical and scientific formulation. What is to be seen here is a very comprehensive epistemological scheme of metaphysics and science that could unify a broad swath of disciplines. As aptly pointed out by Descartes, the system of knowledge was like a tree, with its roots as metaphysics, trunk as physics and the branches as mechanics, medicine, and morals. For his part, Leibnitz talked about a general science with the ingrained unifying factor being metaphysics. Newton, too, reduced the laws of nature to principles of mathematics and mechanics of unifying matter, energy and force. And yet, he also believed in Neo-Platonism and Alchemy.

As for Kant, his idea of the unification of the sciences had grounding in concepts formed by Reason as an *a priory* category than in the unity in Nature (*Preface to the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*). The unifying principles of reason work towards an empirically structured phenomenal world. This was certainly a moment to inaugurate the rise of modern sciences that veered away from art and literature. This is because romantic

imagination which Wordsworth and Coleridge talk about in the 19th century was philosophically allied to the concept of *noumenon*, Kant talked about *noumenon* as a realm of non-sensible and intuitive knowledge. The intellect has a power of intuition that can bring objects into existence. Thus, this positive concept of a *noumenon* becomes the defining feature of imagination, the life and soul of art at a later time.

What is interesting was that while the arts and literature were veering away from the sciences, a philosophical paradigm of the unity of the scientific disciplines was formulated by the Vienna Circle in the 1920s through their differentiating from one another. In tandem with the rise of empiricism arose an anti-metaphysical outlook together with logical positivism that insisted on the principle of verification by proof. It formulated a scheme of reductionism in terms of which some sciences were considered more basic than the others. For example Physics and Chemistry were considered more basic than let's say Biology, and Biology was more basic than the Social Sciences and so on. The underlying condition of the grand unified science paradigm is that the concepts and propositions of less basic sciences were to be articulated in terms of those of the more basic sciences.I think this is a very important moment in the history of scientific education as well as the history learning in the academia. The Vienna Circle philosophers who theorized the scientific methods and the truthfulness of scientific truth created a structure of hierarchy and criteria of truth value that seem to govern various interdisciplinary ventures, particularly of the Humanities in the contemporary times to which I will return in a while. Suffice to say at this moment that the criteria of verifiability of truth formulated by them rendered the statements of ethics, metaphysics, religion, and aesthetics, the core fields of the Humanities as useless.

The separation of the Humanities from the Sciences and their disenfranchisement from what came to be considered as the circle of valuable and important knowledge took place in the nineteenth century. Even though John Henry Newman advocated for the importance of a liberal education in his *The Idea of a University* (1873) which assumed the objective of intellectual perfection and embodied the philosophy of the classical seven subjects of liberal Arts, he could not check the academic imperialism of the sciences in the college curriculum. Indeed, in the early 1880s there took place fierce debate between Matthew Arnold and Thomas Huxley, the biologist, as to what was the goal of education. While Arnold argued that the humanist goal of education was "to know the best which has been thought and said in the world", that obviously came from literature, he still conceded that an educated person should be familiar with "the great results" of scientific inquiry – like Darwin's assertion that "our ancestor was a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits." But how Darwin arrived at this conclusion was of concern only to the scientist. Huxley rejected this view, arguing that the fruits of science had become so pervasive that science must "stand aside literature" in the curriculum. This clearly shows science was gaining ascendance over the Humanities.

If we talk about English Literature, we find it facing the effrontery of Science. What is known all too well is Thomas Love Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820) in which he offered his opinion that in course of its advancement, a society needs rational and scientific knowledge for itself. While poetry could answer to human needs in a Golden age, it is little more than a distraction in the age of industrialized civilization that has outgrown the need for poetry. When societies become more complex, the intellectual role that poets had held is more effectively taken on by philosophers and statesmen. In the brass age, Peacock argues, the poet is "a semi-barbarian in a civilized community." Shelley in his *Defense of Poetry* (1823) makes a rebuttal by claiming poetry as a religion(although it is a different matter that he was an atheist) with prophetic power of the rhapsode which he invokes from Plato's *Ion*. We are not going to go into the contradictions in Shelley's position. My purpose is to show how literature – poetry especially –and science were getting embroiled in a conflict from the beginning of the 19th century that became more and more intense. What is perhaps little known is Grant Allen , a Canadian Science writer and novelist, wrote some novels on the subject of new woman, namely The Woman Who Did (1895) or *The Typewriter Girl* (1897) under the false name Olive Pratt Rayner, not only to pass these off as a woman's writing with her pressing issues, but also to designate the cultural practice of novel writing as *feminine* and his science writing as *masculine*. The gender prejudices embedded in cultural values and practices also differentiated Literature and Science as female and male in unequal terms.

In this context of the gulf widening between since and Literature, the enunciation of two cultures in the academia by C.P. Snow rings the alarm bell of crisis both for the academia and for the Humanities, in that, according to Martin Kemp, he believed that not only did Science hold a key to a humane future, in terms of a rational understanding of nature but also it could serve as the only force to tackle the problems of well-being in the developed and developing countries. Yet *'Luddites' from the humanities still prevailed in the 'corridors of power'* — as Snow titled his 1964 novel." For Leavis, as he countered Snow in his Richmond lecture (1972) science — and the technological society it was spawning — was devoid of humane values. He insisted on the need for other kinds of concern, "entailing forethought, action and provision about the human future".To speak of human well-being only "in terms of productivity, material standards of living, hygienic and technological progress" was morally bankrupt. Leavis was witnessing with horror what he saw as the beginning of a takeover by dreaded technocrats, the apocalyptic results of which had been portrayed by George Orwell in his 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

I don't think these debates will continue any longer as the disciplines of Humanities have lost their constituency for good. So long as it was ensconced within the College of Liberal Arts, ther Humanities were safe. But within the academic area of Research University that modern universities have grown into, with the STEM regime, the Humanities has lost out to them. STEM as an integrated system of education built up from school to the University level in the West –let's say in the U.S. – where research is done to define economic and

development needs and make an estimate of the nature and number of jobs. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online informs us that a working group of representatives from U.S. government agencies and offices identified 96 STEM occupations and divided them into two domains with two sub-domains each. The first domain was the Science, Engineering, Mathematics, and Information Technology Domain, with the sub-domains Life and Physical Sciences, Engineering, Mathematics, and Information Technology Occupations; and Social Science Occupations. The second domain was the Science- and Engineering-Related Domain, with the sub-domains Architecture Occupations and Health Occupations. The BLS list of STEM occupations included relevant education fields and social sciences as STEM careers. Despite their differences, all reports agreed that workers in STEM occupations were critically important, as they drove economic growth and competitiveness through innovations that addressed global challenges and created additional jobs. The only job avenue left in the field of teaching is steadily closing off, with PhDs in the Humanities subjects, and particularly literature, are not finding adequate and well-paid teaching jobs in the U.S. in the last few years. Nor are those already in teaching positions getting tenured tracks. Size of funding for the Humanities across the globe has shrunk in the academia; scholarships have died out, and no better is the situation in India. I need not offer any statistical data, which can be found from the internet.

The STEM model has also made inroads into India, thanks to the technocratic think-tank in the bureaucracy and corporate circles that determine education policy, which has for the past few years has been geared towards minimizing public spending on education, opening private institutions of Higher Education, , orienting the curricula towards skill development and start-ups, with minimal dependency on government funding. Even as some special funds are arranged in the premier institutions, these are but token gestures that can never adequately compensate for the losses incurred. What would the Humanities do to survive? It has to take recourse to the same principle of reductionism that still continues within the hierarchized knowledge system already formalized under the STEM regime. That means literary studies has to make heavy use of what is now called Critical Theory as a crutch to lean on, resetting its discourse in terms of the concepts and ideas of the social sciences and the basic sciences, using their nomenclature in order to sound more legible both in the sense of being decipherable and legitimate.

The convenience of making interdisciplinary alliance with non-literary disciplines comes to literary studies mainly through fiction. Since feminism and post-colonialism have been by and large jaded, if not passé , a large chunk of relatively new fiction with their dystopic and post-human projection have to deal with problems of environmental depredation, inequity in the corporate stories of development, stories of cyborgs, genetic engineering, bio-power and the concomitant ethical problems, problems of traumatic memory, corporeality, geriatric issues, virtual chronotopes, archival memories, preponderance of visual truth and knowledge, artificial intelligence and dystopic panopticon and the like.

These narratives naturally call for deployment of scientific ideas and concepts through the mediation of critical theory that have multi-disciplinary inflections. Courses are designed and research topics, choosing such works of fiction as deal with the issues I enumerated just now, or those that inhabit the interstices of fiction and non-fiction, or those lending themselves to meta-fictional mode. More of cerebration and ideation, and less of aesthetics and empathy seem to characterize the literary interpretation. But these are survival strategy for literary studies.

And yet, interdisciplinary engagement of a Science with literary Humanities is very redeeming in certain ways. Siddhartha Mukherjee's *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* (2010), or *The Gene: An Intimate Story* (2017) are books that disseminate the ideas of cancer and genetic engineering in fascinatingly literary narrative with sentiments, empathy and imagination in right dosage. Nobel Laureate Economist Thomas Piketty's book *Capital in the twenty-first Century* (2013) dealing with wealth and income inequality, citing the works of Honoré de Balzac, Jane Austen and Henry James George Eliot for data to illustrate accumulated capital in a rigid social structure in 19th century Europe can be another refreshingly new interdisciplinary engagement with literature. In fact all these books emerging from their domain knowledge cross their boundaries to brush shoulder with others in a free epistemic space as best-sellers. Everybody, including a physician and an economist, would read these books for knowledge and delight.

But when any book of literary scholarship sets out on the vehicle of Critical Theory to shake hands with myriad disciplines, it becomes too self-conscious to be simple and acceptable. Quite often it sounds conceited and strange and hollow. While claiming the virtues of multidisciplinarity which should offer the Humanities a larger epistemic latitude, greater intellectual freedom, analytic probity, and above all wider acceptance, it ironically gets stymied by its trappings and gets pushed towards a narrow alley. Here the crisis of the Humanities is very clearly exemplified through its interdisciplinary inflections. But the best of the scholars in literary and cultural studies are sensitive to this crisis.

CORONA DEVI: EPIDEMIC AND THE DISEASE GODDESS TRADITION

Dilip K. Das

The novel coronavirus epidemic has elicited two sharply divergent responses in India, associated with distinct causative or etiological paradigms, techniques of prevention, and communicative forms. One, which is official, understands disease in biomedical terms, and involves strategies of containment such as lockdown, testing and quarantine, wearing of masks and social distancing. Its dominant form of communication is narrative. The other is unofficial and colloquial, conceives of disease as the outcome of supernatural forces or cosmic disorder, and its form is the performative. The official narrative recounts the epidemic in terms of timelines and disease maps, caseloads and transmission chains, morbidity and mortality rates; while in the colloquial the community performs expiation rites or rituals to appease the supernatural forces. The first derives from a mode of knowing disease that is considered modern, while the second is traditional. Such divergent responses to epidemic can be observed in most parts of South Asia since the advent of colonial modernity, which introduced a distinctly European knowledge alongside long-existing medical traditions both literate and non-literate. Since then, these two ways of understanding disease have coexisted sometimes as contesting, sometimes complementary, and often as indifferent to each other, in what anthropologists have termed "medical pluralism." In this essay I attempt to trace the historico-cultural contexts of the colloquial tradition.

INVENTING A NEW DISEASE GODDESS

As the COVID-19 epidemic entered its fifth month in India, with little signs of abating, a new deity called 'Corona Devi' or 'Corona Mai' found worship in different parts of the country. In Kerala, a temple priest installed in his home an image of the virus made of thermocole. "In Kerala you have a deity for smallpox," he stated. "Worshipping a virus as devi is not an alien concept for us" ("Just"). In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh women gathered at local ponds to perform worship of the goddess, who was not represented in an image. A hole was dug in the ground, in which they placed flowers and offered incense and jaggery, flattened rice and sesame laddoos ("Fear", "Superstitions"). In Asansol in West Bengal, women of Nichupara Basti sang songs and chanted mantras to appease Corona Mai, who would "ensure that the virus leaves us forever." "According to them," reported the news story in *The Hindu*, "the Coronavirus is the creation of Shitala Devi, whom some cultures consider the goddess of relief" (Samanta). On 5 June 2020 ABP News reported a similar puja that, as one devotee claimed, started in Bihar. According to her, a cow appeared in the jungle, transformed itself into the goddess and declared that she would protect the people from the epidemic if they worshipped her. The worship of Corona Devi has also been reported from Assam (Nath). The news reports present these as instances of superstition that must be eradicated for a rational understanding of the epidemic to prevail, a task that the state must undertake. The report from Uttar Pradesh quotes a

school teacher in Kasia village, Radhey Lal: "The authorities must stop such activities which promote superstition. Everyone knows that there is no cure for corona and this kind of activities must be stopped" ("Superstitions"). One of the objections to the worship was that the devotees did not wear masks and maintain distance, and the rituals actually increased their vulnerability to infection instead of protecting them from it. Yet many did follow containment norms, even as they performed the rituals. Anilan, the Kerala priest did not allow "*darshan*" (public worship) at his shrine, which he dedicated to "corona warriors, including health workers, scientists, and Fire and Rescue Services personnel" ("Just"); and the women devotees in Bihar were "seen maintaining social distancing" ("Fear"). In other words, their responses combined both biomedical and colloquial forms.

While objections to Corona Devi worship may seem valid from a rationalist perspective, it is necessary to understand what makes such practices popular even when there seems to be awareness about the disease and the precautions necessary to prevent it. The normative binary of science versus superstition is not quite helpful in explaining the popular resonance of the phenomenon. Discussing the prevalence of multiple health beliefs among the Hagen people of Papua New Guinea, Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart write:

> Medical pluralism in the Highlands often results from two factors: (1) The acceptance of introduced practices without much understanding of the reasons for, or theory behind, them; and (2) the belief that there are certain conditions which are caused by entities outside of the worldview recognized by Western doctors and which, therefore, must be treated in a ritual way if the patient is to recover. (*Curing* 106)

The first factor, however, retains normativism in that it implies belief in a single theory as norm, and pluralism is in this case the outcome of a lack of understanding. It is the second factor – a theory of disease causation that is *different*, with a *different* index of effectivity, from the biomedical – that seems more relevant to our context, where ritual healing is not counterposed to scientific practice but exists alongside it. Strathern and Stewart, in fact, confirm this at a later point: "people's attitudes tend to be pragmatic and processually oriented. They may seek biomedical therapy at the same time as consulting a diviner or witch-finder. The one does not rule out the other, because they are perceived as dealing with different aspects of a complex reality" (*Curing* 172-73). In "The Small Voice of History," Ranajit Guha shows how in colonial India Western medicine and indigenous health practices coexisted, and cites "a series of petitions addressed to the local communities or Brahman priests in some West Bengal villages asking for absolution from the sin of affliction. The sin, supposed to have been testified by the disease itself, called, in each case, for such purificatory rituals as only the Brahmans could prescribe and perform" (307). The diseases in question were asthma, tuberculosis and leprosy, and the absolution sought was for the affected individuals as well as the entire community, which "had incurred impurity by association (*samsarga*)" (309). Guha interprets the petitions as a sign of subaltern resistance to the hegemony of Western medicine, but they may equally be an instance of multiple health-seeking practices coexisting in the society. Western medicine

may be effective against disease, but not against an affliction that calls for rituals of collective expiation.

RITUAL HEALING *VERSUS* BIOMEDICAL CURING

What precisely is the ontological difference between biomedicine and ritual healing, insofar as understanding disease is concerned? Western biomedicine as well as Indian medical systems like ayurveda, siddha and unani understand disease as 'naturalistic', or the outcome of natural causes, physiological, pathogenic or environmental. It is not relevant here to differentiate between a form of knowledge called 'science', with its procedures of observation, inference and regimes of truth, and those it rules out as not-science or 'superstition'. Strathern and Stewart oppose this naturalistic paradigm of disease causation to what they term the "personalistic," which interprets illness as predominantly the outcome of "actions of malevolent agents such as sorcerers or punitive ones such as ancestors" (*Curing* 11). The distinction is based on the intention of the agent – to cause harm or to punish – in the one paradigm, against non-intentional causality in the other. Personalistic systems, thus, involve identifying and nullifying the actions of the agent, while naturalistic systems seek to reverse the organic process of disease in the body. While this may be true of the ritual practices concerning sorcery, it does not explain something like Corona Devi worship where the deity does not *cause* the disease but *protects* her devotees from it. This is how one of the devotees in the ABP news clip explained the ritual. It is also how disease goddesses in South Asia – Sitala, Ola Bibi, Mariamma, Bhagvathiamma – have been traditionally viewed. Elsewhere, I have drawn on Marcel Mauss's concept of "magic" to explain these disease-goddess traditions (210). In *The General Theory of Magic*, Mauss states:

… in medical practice, words, incantations, ritual and astrological observances are magical; this is the realm of the occult and of spirits, a world of ideas which imbues ritual movements and gestures with a special kind of effectiveness, quite different from their mechanical effectiveness. It is not believed that the gestures themselves bring about the result. The effect derives from something else, and usually this is not of the same order. (25)

In other words, what is opposed to the naturalistic in this schema is not the personalistic but the magical, where magic refers to causal phenomena that do not derive from the laws of nature. The distinction, however, serves only a heuristic purpose: in ritual practice the naturalistic and the magical are not mutually exclusive but linked. Person and body – embodied personhood – are open to both natural and supernatural forces, and ritual healing must address both in order to be effective. Arthur I. Hallowell uses the term "behavioral environment" to refer to the social context in which people act in response to what they collectively understand as their reality, both natural and symbolic. In the behavioural environment of ritual healing, as Thomas J. Csordas explains, the distinction between the natural and the supernatural is blurred and the latter acquires a dense reality.

The "essential feature of the behavioral environment," writes Csordas following Hallowell, is that it "includes not only natural objects but 'culturally reified objects,' especially supernatural beings and the practices associated with them" (59). In such contexts, embodied personhood comes to be constituted in relation to deities and the spirits of dead ancestors as well as living persons. The behavioural environment includes all such beings and the norms governing one's multiple relations with them. It functions as a cognitive map of the magico-natural world that one inhabits and within which ritual acts like devi worship find their significance. Outside of this context, for those who do not share it, they are neither meaningful nor effective. They can be so only if they constitute a society's collective knowledge: "If the whole community does not believe in the efficacy of a group of actions, they cannot be magical" (Mauss 23).

Csordas proposes a dialectical relation between biology and culture, such that the human body is both shaped by and in turn shapes cultural practices: "if the body can be shown to be the existential ground of culture and self rather than simply their biological substrate, the way would be clear for understanding the body as not only essentially biological, but as equally religious, linguistic, historical, cognitive, emotional, and artistic" (4). Ritual healing is founded on such a concept. It understands disease as a disruption of the individual's (or community's) relation to the normative cultural world, the "behavioral environment" or cosmos, and it calls for ritual acts of reordering. Thus, Guha writes in his account of the West Bengal villagers: "What our petitioners sought … was moral prescriptions for absolution rather than medical ones for cure, and the authority they turned to was not doctors but priests" (309). This points to what has been seen as a key difference between modern biomedicine and rituals: the former cures the body while the latter heals the person and his social world. "[C]uring refers to an act of treating successfully a specific condition … Healing, by contrast, refers to a whole person or the whole body seen as an integrated system with both physical and spiritual components" (Strathern and Stewart, *Curing* 7). Or, as Csordas puts it, "the object of healing is not the elimination of a thing (an illness, a problem, a symptom, a disorder) but transformation of a person, a self that is a bodily being" (3). In "Embodiment Theory in Performance and Performativity," Strathern and Stewart argue that ritual traditions emphasize the healing aspect, especially if the disease is difficult to deal with and is perceived to entail "a deeper search for causes in the interpersonal and social realms of relationships" (67). This is a point we will return to shortly.

In non-modern cultures that were colonised by Europeans, the introduction of biomedical knowledge and practice led to a relative devaluation of healing without it being entirely superseded by curing. A key effect of modernity, Michel Foucault contends, was the "medicalisation of behaviours" that made the human body an object of scientific knowledge and power ("Two Lectures" 107). Clinical and preventive medicine emerged concurrently in eighteenth-century Europe, linked by "a common global strategy" the aim of which was to ensure "the health and physical well-being of the population in general as

one of the essential objectives of political power" ("Politics" 91, 94). With modern medicine curing came to be established as the proper function, eclipsing older traditions of healing. "In the modern period the medical story has pride of place. Other stories become, as non-medical healers are called, 'alternative,' meaning secondary" (Frank 7). The objectification of the body in contemporary techno-scientific medicine characteristically devalues the subjective experience of the patient, a key component of healing. As Arthur Kleinman writes: "the doctor is expected to decode the untrustworthy story of *illness as experience* for the evidence of that which is considered authentic, *disease as biological pathology*" (32, italics in original). N.D. Jewson argues that the shift from bedside practice to hospital and laboratory based medicine in mid-nineteenth century Europe resulted in a progressive alienation of the patient from the clinical encounter: The fundamental realities of pathological analysis shifted from the total body system to the specialized anatomical structures. The experiential manifestations of disease, which had previously been the very stuff of illness, now were demoted to the role of secondary signs. The patient's interest in prognosis and therapy was eclipsed by the clinician's concern with diagnosis and pathology. 235

The experience of illness signifies a break in the order of one's personal life, and not just a bodily disorder. Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan, in a moving essay that opens with her own debility due to ocular myasthenia, asks: "What happens when the present is so different from the past that subjects experience themselves as 'others'? And how does uncertainty about the future, its blocking, affect the 'identity' of ill subjects? How do ill subjects cope with the disruption of continuity?" (10). Illness threatens the coherence of the self, and the continuity that we attribute to the unfolding of our life. Against the perceived insensitivity of the medical profession, this has led in recent times to a proliferation of 'illness narratives' in which patients try to deal with the emotional consequences of ill-health and its impact on their social lives (Frank; Kleinman, *Illness*).

In cultures of ritual healing, however, a very different view of illness exists – it is neither individualized nor experienced as self-disruption. This is because personhood is understood as a locus of interrelationships, in terms of community and kinship, ancestry and inter-generational bonds. Personhood, as Mark Mosko puts it, "can be considered a *dividual* being, a composite formed of relations with a plurality of other persons" (218, italics in original). Other "persons" may be living or dead, human or non-human, including both nature and supernature. To return to the arguments of Csordas and Strathern and Stewart cited above, disease in such contexts signifies disruption, not of the order of the self, but of the norms of relationship that structure one's social existence. The presence of disease affects not just the individual but the entire community; healing, therefore, involves "the treatment of the person and their social relations as a means of dealing with the experience of illness and its resolution in recovery or otherwise" (Strathern and Stewart, "Embodiment" 67). It involves, in other words, restoring the order of the cosmos, which Strathern and Stewart define as "the whole world as inhabited by

people and apprehended by them, including the life-worlds of spirits and deities" ("Embodiment" 69). Organizing this world is a set of ideas that Stanley J. Tambiah calls "cosmology": "the body of conceptions that enumerate and classify the phenomena that compose the universe as an ordered whole and the norms and processes that govern it" (121). Integral to a society's cosmology is its religious system as well as the codes of interpersonal conduct, political organization and arbitration of disputes. The concept of the cosmos, thus, is somewhat akin to Hallowell's "behavioral environment," with emphasis on the socio-cultural rather than psycho-social determinants of behaviour. In short, disease – especially epidemic – signifies a rupture of the cosmological order, which collective rituals of healing seek to remedy. This is why healing is a public event, in a sense that clinical therapy is not, and involves all members of the community, lay people and ritual specialists alike, in its performance. We may recall in this context that Corona Devi worship in most places was reported as a communal event, with women gathering at water bodies in large numbers to perform it. The public nature of the event and collective participation in it serve the function of strengthening community bonds, temporarily suspending everyday conflicts and differences among members. The sharing of prasad, the ritual food offered to the deity, is a material instance of this function which, as Mauss observes in *The Gift*, is intimately linked to community-formation in Hindu culture: "It is in the nature of food to be shared out. Not to share it with others is 'to kill its essence', it is to destroy it both for oneself and for others" (73). As sacrificial offering, the prasad is a rite of appeasement that ensures the both the deity's continued protection and community-bonding.

GENEALOGY OF CORONA DEVI WORSHIP

From the news reports cited earlier, the worship of Corona Devi can be traced to the long-existing tradition of disease goddesses in India. Thus, the Kerala priest stated that the Devi was analogous to the goddess of smallpox, known variously as Mariamma and Bhagavathiamma in south India, while the women of Asansol believed that the virus was the creation of Shitala, the smallpox goddess in the east. To understand the popular resonance of the Corona Devi phenomenon, we need to locate it in the line of descent of these deities.

In the foregoing section we looked at sociocultural aspects of ritual healing, of which the disease goddess tradition is an integral component. Healing rituals constitute a set of beliefs that are colloquial, that is, disseminated through oral-gestural forms in contrast to the written texts of biomedicine. They constitute a part of what D. Venkat Rao calls "mnemocultures" or cultures of memory, as opposed to the scribal culture of Europe. In them, cultural knowledge is preserved and transmitted performatively and not through techniques of mechanical recording and reproduction. Rao's thesis is that mnemocultural traditions have proliferated throughout South Asia for centuries, indifferent to their encounter with colonial modernity and its archives, living on in embodied performances and dispersed across diverse communities. Healing rituals are collective performances that

both reproduce and reconstitute the cosmological order, following a breach of norms and the crisis signified by disease. Epidemics, understood as collective calamities, are presided over by specific deities that guard the community against danger. Remedy involves propitiatory rites for the deity, who intervenes if properly appeased. Sometimes it may be the deity who causes the epidemic, if the community had violated norms of worship. For instance, Sitala is usually a benign goddess who protects her devotees from smallpox, but can also cause it if the village errs in her worship (Misra 134). Similarly, the women devotees of Asansol believed that the corona virus was "the creation of Shitala Devi," who must be propitiated by rituals performed every Monday and Friday (Samanta). Given their mnemocultural origins, however, the rituals do not have a uniform pattern but vary across communities and locations. The performance follows a praxial logic in which the performers improvise according to context and incorporate new techniques that are perceived to be locally efficacious. *In Religion, Devotion and Medicine in North I*ndia, Ferrari describes how performances of Sitala worship in Jammu, Gujarat and Punjab included practices that were associated with the festival of the Tamil goddess Mariamma, such as oracles, fire-walking and body-piercing: "Although I realized that not all are comfortable with such innovations, sharing festival arena is normally not perceived as a problem. Tamils are encouraged by city councils … to maintain and transmit community culture. … Indigenous communities seem to enjoy the festive mood of Tamil celebrations and their spectacular displays of bravery and endurance" (101). The festivals are extremely localized, restricted to a cluster of villages or even single village, over which the goddess is believed to preside. The various deities are known generically as gramadevata, or village gods, with a shrine conventionally located at the entrance to the village. With regard to Sitala, Ralph W, Nicholas observes: "The conception that it is a particular village and not any other unit that receives the benefit of her worship is in some instances enacted by processions circumambulating the village, planting flags where paths cross the village borders, or otherwise bounding the village before her pūjā is begun" (37). These two phenomena – the dispersal of the disease goddess tradition throughout the region and its extreme localization – constitute one of its important characteristics. Finally, the worship of disease deities is founded on the idea of the body as a magico-natural complex, combining invocation and propitiation of supernatural forces with therapy or prevention. The practice of ritual variolation in smallpox epidemics is an apt instance. It is carried out by specialists who begin by invoking Sitala, chanting mantras and singing her praise, before making the incision to which the variola is applied:

> Variolation was indeed a *Śītalā-pūjā* in which the goddess was awakened, invited and worshipped as an immanent presence in the village. … Once the presence was ensured, the variolator proceeded with the next phase, inoculation, a ritual explained as sthāpana, the stabilization and installation of the goddess into the hosting body. (Ferrari, "Old" 156)

Therapy involves dietary regimens that cool the body, such as milk, curds and uncooked food. Susan S. Wadley cites a *katha* or religious story that prescribes the following rules:

"to not eat salt, to not season foods, to not fry things, to not put anything on the pot, to not yourself eat hot things nor feed them to a pox victim, to serve only very cold things" (38). The name Sitala means 'one who is cool', and is linked to the fact that smallpox epidemics usually broke out in the dry heat of summer. An important item in the Sitala tradition is the *neem* or Indian margosa, the branches of which are used to fan the patient's body to cool it (Wadley 56-57). Thus, the efficacy of the Sitala ritual is two-fold, concerning the body as well as the cosmological order. As Ferrari states: "health is not the only issue at stake. The whole healing process can be explained as a way of contrasting the crisis caused by one's temporary loss of social, cultural and historical belonging" ("Illness" 56). Performance of the ritual also protects devotees from the fear of smallpox, which must have been intense in an epidemic outbreak. Ferrari cites a verse from the *Skandapurana*, which states: "Prescribed rituals should be performed properly to have the fear of diseases, etc., vanquished" (*Religion* 8). For its practitioners, therefore, performance of Sitala worship brings multiple benefits, corporeal, social and psychological.

The deities associated with epidemic disease in India are almost all imagined as maternal figures, as indicated by the suffixes 'ma', 'mata', 'mai' and 'amma'. Biswamoy Pati mentions a male deity, Joogah Pennoo worshipped by the Kondhs of Orissa as the god of smallpox (6). But maternal figures predominate, even among the indigenous communities (Elwin 484-503), a feature that Narendra Nath Bhattacharya links with the Earth Mother of fertility cults that emerged with the shift from nomadic ways to settled agriculture (34). As stated above, the disease goddesses are local deities presiding over a specific village or cluster of villages, and are known by various names in their sites of worship. Sitala, the goddess of smallpox is also called Vasanta Chandi in Bengal, Kankar Mata in Bihar, Mata Masani among the Atari tribes in Madhya Pradesh, Sitala-Bhavani in Uttar Pradesh, Ai in Assam and Thakurani in Orissa (Bhattacharya 54). They are also associated with different powers in the various regions where they find worship. Thus, Sitala's power over smallpox exists predominantly in the east, while in the northern states she is worshipped as the protector of children, and as the goddess of good fortune in Gujarat (Wadley 35; Freed and Freed 122). In some regions of the north Sitala is worshipped along with six other goddesses: Kalki Mata or Masani Mata, the goddess of cremation ground; Khamera Mata, associated with measles; Khasra Mata, associated with skin infections; Marsal Mata, associated with mumps; Phul ki Mata, associated with boils; and Kanti Mata or Moti Mata, associated with typhoid. They are collectively known as the Seven Sisters, with their icons located in the same temple complex (Freed and Freed 124-25).

In the south the smallpox goddess is worshipped as Mariamma in Tamilnadu and Bhagavathiamma in Kerala. Mariamma is also associated with rain, mari meaning rain in Tamil. Like Sitala, she is known by several names such as Gangamma in Masulipatnam, Sukhajamma in Mysore and Sunkalamma in Bellary (Bhattacharya 55). Several origin stories are ascribed to Mariamma. R. H. Whitehead reports three different versions, as the wife of Rishi Piruhu, wife of the poet Thiruvallur, and wife of Rishi Jamadagni and mother

of Parashurama (115-116). In the version reported by K.R. Hanumanthan, she was "originally a Buddhist nun of Nagapattinam, who used to sit under a neem tree and do penance" (97). The different versions point to the way these local traditions proliferated across India, in diverse religious communities. Thus, in West Bengal the cholera goddess is worshipped as Ola Bibi by the Muslims and Ola Chandi by the Hindus, while in Burdwan district people of both faiths worship her as Didi Thakrun (Bhattacharya 57). Bhattacharya also links Sitala to two Buddhist goddesses, Parnabasari and Jyestha (54). Ferrari reports that at the Sitala temple in Gurgaon, Haryana he met a number of Sikh and Muslim devotees though the majority were Hindus (*Religion*, 44).

What makes the disease goddess tradition so unique is its flexibility. Not only do we find a wide diversity of names, forms, powers associated with them and origin stories, cutting across religious divides, we also see their capacity to incorporate novel epidemics. Thus, when plague broke out at the turn of the twentieth century in different parts of India, it became assigned to a new goddess variously known as Bombai Mai, Plague-amma or Uramma (Bhattacharya 56). Ferrari reports that in 2003 he found evidence of Sitala being associated with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in two towns of lower West Bengal, though it was far from being extensive or even popular (*Religion* 153-155). In Mensekyathanahalli, a village near Mysore in south Karnataka, there is a shrine to AIDS Amma. Set up in 1998 by the science teacher of the local school, next to a Mariamma temple, its objective was to create awareness about the disease and not healing (Das 189-220). Weekly worship was performed initially, but now an annual festival called AIDS Amma jatra is held on December 1, World AIDS Day. As in other disease goddess festivals, an icon of the deity is carried in procession round the locality, followed by awareness programmes. The initiative shows how the disease goddess tradition is open to re-invention to accommodate not only new epidemics but equally new functions.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have attempted to locate the worship of Corona Devi in relation to the long-existing tradition of disease goddesses in India, in order to explain why people across the country performed it almost as a spontaneous response to an unrelenting epidemic. One may, of course, ask whether this ritual of appeasing a deity is effective, whether it is an unreasonable response to an event that is natural and not cosmological, an outcome of ignorance that may possibly increase the spread of disease and, finally, whether it is necessary to study it at all. The first three questions follow from a different kind of inquiry, based on different assumptions about epidemic events. The ritual may be effective not in preventing or curing coronavirus disease, but in relieving the fear it causes. Its efficacy, as Mauss says of magic, is of an order different from the mechanical. Epidemics are certainly natural events, but they are also cosmological in the way they have been imagined in cultures of healing, whether or not such imagination accords with scientific reason. The ritual is the outcome of dispositions that are an integral part of culture, as much as biomedical ideas that have now become common knowledge. To answer the last

question, it is necessary to understand why people across different regions and in significant numbers practice a ritual that is without precedent but not without resonance. Corona Devi worship is not an individual response, even though it is some individuals who perform it. It expresses a social understanding of epidemic disease, and needs to be studied as such.

Dispositions, according to Pierre Bourdieu, are modes of action that are incorporated in cultural knowledge, and incline or predispose people to act in a certain way in a given situation. Social practices may be heterogeneous and multiple, but they also exhibit a degree of regulation and recurrence. Bourdieu calls the regulatory structure "habitus," taking the term from an essay by Mauss ("Techniques") to refer to embodied techniques that are culturally acquired and which both shape and are shaped by tradition. The habitus organizes the techniques as "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions" (82) that govern different instances of social life, such as exchange of gifts and favours, marriage alliances, and the performance of public rituals. By "transposable," Bourdieu means that they can be transferred from one instance, modified and improvised, to apply to another instance, as we have seen in the case of new epidemics like plague, HIV/AIDS and COVID-19. Dispositions are memories of past actions that have proved effective, "a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles" (82). Social practices are generated by the dispositions of the habitus, which they in turn stabilize and establish as tradition. Placing the worship of Corona Devi within such a context enables us to see how it appears meaningful to those who perform it, though they may not conceptualize it as such. Why is it that other epidemics, like SARS, H1N1 or dengue, have not elicited such response? I think it depends on the degree of fear that an outbreak evokes rather than the fact of its transmissibility, if one of the functions of the ritual is to assuage fear. Smallpox and cholera may not have accounted for more deaths than, say, endemic diseases like malaria, but they were certainly perceived as more dramatic and dreadful, as have been plague and HIV disease. These are epidemics that have figured in the popular imagination, in cultural narratives of loss and regeneration. The COVID epidemic, too, may follow this course, if it hasn't already done so.

Notes

1. I use the term 'colloquial' in a double sense, as non-formal and pertaining to speech: the colloquial, thus, belongs to a form of knowledge that is unofficial and transmitted through word and gesture rather than writing. Bonnie O'Connor prefers the term "vernacular," which she takes to mean "native to or firmly held by the people who use the system" (6); but vernacular, from verna which means a home-born slave, implicitly carries the negative connotations of other words that she dismisses: "primitive," "ethnic," "marginal," deviant," and 'unorthodox" (3). I think what most distinguishes this form of medical knowledge from the official knowledge with which it is contrasted, is its oral-gestural performance, and not that it belongs to the people.

How does one define the 'people'? Do all members of a community unanimously hold the beliefs O'Connor calls vernacular?

2. The term 'performative' as it is currently used is understood in two ways. First, it refers to performances such as in ritual and theatre, as opposed to discursive representations. This is the dominant meaning in cultural anthropology. Secondly, deriving from speech-act theory, it refers to acts that produce the meanings they seem to reflect or represent. Rituals are performative in this double sense: they are performed, and they produce the reality they refer to: "through performance, meanings are formulated in a social rather than cognitive space, and the participants are engaged with the symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality, rather than merely being informed by them as knowers" (Schieffelin 106). Roy A. Rappaport argues that participating in litergical acts produces the liturgical order as intrinsically authoritative (Rappaport 192-193).
3. Stratham and Stewart, *Curing* 97-114.
4. https://www.facebook.com/198230903525774/posts/3771062749575887/?sfnsn=wiwspwa&extid=IfJAV7BjjqUeUhEZ&d=w&vh=e. Accessed 11 June 2020.
5. In some of the *mangala kavyas* in Bengal, Sitala is seen as inflicting disease when people fail to give her due reverence. But this, as Fabrizio M. Ferrari argues, is not how the goddess is predominantly viewed. "The study of the iconography of Śītalā across north India confirms: a) her cold, auspicious, benign and protective nature; b) the lack of a disease-inflicting side; c) her multiform and simultaneous presence. She is a welcomed goddess who, ultimately, grants liberation. In her most distinguished aspect, she is the controller of disorder" (*Religion* 80).
6. Kleinman's comment is based on a distinction made in medical anthropology, between disease as objective pathological condition and illness as subjective experience. Thus Cecil B. Helman: "disease refers to abnormalities of the structure and function of body organs and systems … Illness refers to the subjective response of the patient to being unwell … It includes not only his experience of ill health, but the meaning he gives to that experience" (548). See also Turner 174-177. A recent focus in medical humanities is the need to listen to the patient's story, and some medical schools in the United States now include courses in "narrative medicine," which, as Spiegel and Spencer put it, train doctors to establish "a deeper rapport" with their patients and open themselves to "the experience of another despite – or perhaps because of – the limitations of language" (34).

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NARRATING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE: GRAPHIC MEDICINE AND DANA WALRATH'S *ALICEHEIMER'S ALZHEIMER'S THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS*

Pramod K. Nayar

Graphic medicine – graphic memoirs and fiction about medical conditions – is a flourishing medium today. Also termed auto/pathographies, these are 'personal narratives about illness or disability that contest cultural discourses stigmatizing the writer as abnormal, aberrant, or in some sense pathological' (Smith and Watson 2010: 261). Such graphic narratives, says Susan Squier:

> can show us things *that can't be said*, just as they can narrate experiences without relying on words, and in their juxtaposition of words and pictures, they can also convey a far richer sense of the different magnitudes at which we experience any performance of illness, disability, medical treatment, or healing. (Squier 2008, p. 131; emphasis in original)

I have elsewhere argued that the 'auto/pathography is a radical new form of communicating disease' (2015: 161). The forms of communicating a condition – Alzheimer's disease – whose first victim is the ability to communicate are the subject of this essay. [1]

Using Dana Walrath's *Aliceheimer's Alzheimer's through the Looking Glass* (2016), her graphic novel about her mother's Alzheimer's disease (AD), this essay examines the medium's representation of the medical condition.

DEGENERATIVE CHRONICITY

Alice, the mother, has lost her sense of time along with her memory. She keeps seeing her dead husband Dave. Dave has been dead a while, but Alice looks up she sees him in a tree (44). Walrath draws Alice's head at the left-hand corner of the page with her eyes angled upwards. On the right side of the page is a tree with a man in its branches. Walrath draws her father, and Alice's husband, as though she can see what Alice sees. One half of the page shows Alice as she is now, in the present, with her AD. The other half is occupied by what does not exist, except in Alice's mind. That is how the graphic text page is a combination of two "times", so to speak, indicating a polychronicity[2]. This scrambling of time is characteristic of AD, and one which the graphic novel format allows Walrath to brilliantly portray. The AD memoir exhibits a 'degenerative chronicity' (Zimmermann 2012: 79). This is the muddled chronicity within the AD protagonist's narration and recall of events. The mother is stuck in World War II. When meat is served at dinner, she asks. "Isn't there rationing?" (37). Walrath records:

> We needed more than biomedicine could offer to make peace with the Japanese soldiers that sometimes emerged from her memory of a 1945 newsreel to surround our house at sunset. (37)

But this scrambled time is more potent than just mixing up years and days. Degenerative chronicity also unsettles familial and other relationships in the text. Thus, Walrath is queried by her mother: 'Dana, why are you so good to me?'. When Walrath responds, 'Because you are my mother', she replies 'I'm your mother?' (43). The facing image shows Alice asking two questions:

> 'I'm your mother? Who's your daddy?' (42)

Later, Alice asks Walrath her name and on hearing it, says, 'pretty name'. Walrath responds: 'Thanks, you gave it to me' (47). Her 'constant question', says Walrath, is: 'Dana, are you my mother or my sister?' Walrath's interpretation of this question is: 'somewhere, she knew I was her daughter' (69). She elaborates: 'Trusting me to help her, she conjured for me the role of a mother or a sister' (69).

The degenerative chronicity is not solely about time, as we can see from the above instances. The AD narrative's degenerative chronicity is matched by a generative toxicity. By generative toxicity I mean the inheritance of toxic nature. Generative toxicity is in the very 'nature' of individuals and their family lines. That is, the loss of cognition wherein daughters 'become' mothers, sons 'become' husbands, and the family lines are blurred as a consequence in a family line that carries in it a generative toxicity: the AD gene. In AD memoirs, authors produce a genography (my term for a memoir or life narrative founded on the theme of genetics and inheritance): an account of a different kind of inheritance passed on/received. What is passed on is the imminence of a horrific condition that kills slowly, thus generating a kind of strangeness at the heart of the family: that instead of a taken-for-granted sustainable environment of the family connection, one has to account for a toxic substrate to the inheritance.

Tess O'Toole (1997) points out that genealogy and narrative both require a temporal element and a pattern of sameness and difference, or continuity and discontinuity. Elements of continuity and variation mark the line of descent from ancestors to descendants constitute what she terms the 'inherently narrative structure of a family line' (5). O'Toole also emphasizes the role of fabrication, speculation and imagination in the way a genealogy may be constructed:

> genealogies involve a certain amount of speculation, perhaps even fabrication. The exercise is indulged in not for any definite truth it will reveal, but for the imaginative play afforded by the attempt to fit her person into a sequence. (5)

The family line and its narrative are scrambled in Alice's head, but in terms of inheritances and shared structures, the genealogical narrative offers the imagination much to dwell on.

We see this aspect of the genealogical towards the end of the text, when Walrath refers to the death of Alice's niece of a cancer that was the result of a genetic mutation. Walrath writes:

> Rose Mary died young from one of those cancers linked with a gene. Some first cousins choose genetic testing after learning this information – for me, that's a terrible idea, the scientific evidence too gray. (67)

In Tess O'Toole's words, we see here 'not the appeal of genealogical patterns, but rather the anxiety they can generate' (2). In the actions of Walrath's cousins, we see that the individual 'imagination's response to the idea of family history … as integral to that history's influence' (2). The later generations and siblings imagine an inheritance of cancer – and this is their toxic genography. That is, the familial and filial connections are also disease lineages, at least in their imagination.

I suggest that this toxic genography – my term for the toxicity embedded in their genetic material which then is described in the form of the memoir – in the AD memoir is integral to the degenerative chronicity theme: the chronology, genealogy and family lines are marked by toxic inheritances that then alter the very value of these lines. But that is not all. Walrath writes of her experience of Armenia:

> In Armenia, people often referred to my "genetic memory," as though I had a series of latent codons that could be expressed only in the homeland. Genetic memory let me learn dance steps. It accounted for my spiritual bent and helped me speak. (67)

Facing this text is an image of the DNA double helix. Inscribed within it, as in all images in the text, are passages from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Language, genealogy and biological matter all come together in Walrath's image. What is significant is that Walrath's relations in Armenia trace her behaviour, aptitude and looks to her DNA – which she shares with her distant family (in Armenia). While some sections of her extended family think of the genealogy in terms of inherited diseases and a future chronology – or lifeline – others seem to attribute the qualities of a person to this same genealogy.

Walrath demonstrates skepticism towards both, her cousins' *imagined* toxic genography and the cultural genetics of her Armenian family. Yet, it must be noted, Walrath is aware of the genetic nature of AD:

> The axioms of biology pervaded my childhood home, but so did story. Here is mine: I won't be getting tested for any genes associated with Alzheimer's disease. I prefer the certainty of the stories I have inherited. (67)

Do the stories she heard include *Alice in Wonderland*? The image's symbolism indicates the Carroll story is a part of her DNA. We are told early on: 'my father was the one to read

Alice in Wonderland out loud to us' (21). The overlap between the story of a girl who shifts through time, space and corporeal identity (and has to grapple with the meaning of words) and the aging mother with eroding cognitive, corporeal and linguistic powers is Walrath's story.

"MISSING PIECES"

Walrath draws Alice in different forms. In the opening images, Alice is full and complete. For instance, there is a full-length portrait early on (8). The immediate image following this draws an Alice minus her head (Does this not recall the famous injunction, 'off with their heads' by the Red Queen in Carroll's text?). In the place of the head are two lines of text:

> Alice is disappearing.
> Soon there will be none. (10)

Recalling Carroll's Alice who disappeared down a rabbit hole, Walrath shows the head disappear, symbolically capturing the primary site of AD's horrific action – the brain. The next image shows a canvas or paper on which there are two columns: 'Days w/Alice' and 'Days w/o Alice'. The first column has marks running from top to bottom. The second one has none. The text says: 'of course I wasn't there for all of those days. But I was here on December 2, 2010, making 28,126 marks in her honour' (12).

The image of the marks on the canvas is one of the few without a drawing of Alice. Following on the heels of the previous image titled 'Alice is disappearing' (10), this one becomes symbolic of the disappearance: all there is of Alice is the marks made by her daughter in her name and honour. The emptiness of this particular page, without a drawing of Alice, faces a text-page titled ' None is hard to draw' (13). This is followed by a double spread page with the same two images, 'Alice is disappearing' and the canvas with marks (14-15). The accompanying text is split into two, one on (14) and one on 15:

> Disappearing Alice …
>
> … none is hard to draw (14-15)

The next section is titled 'missing pieces' (17). The visual and textual ellipses in these pages are the graphic novel's equivalent of the 'dramatic ellipsis' theorized by Terence Wright, who defines it as 'events essential to the plot [that] take place off-screen' (2008: 71) – of the text. Here the events essential to and the data (memory) that makes Alice *Alice*, are 'off-screen' :that is, off the screen of her mind. The ellipses in the above images and the accompanying text (the blank space where Alice's head should be, the … preceding and following the words on 14-15) constitute, I propose, the ellipsis that marks AD itself. The visual and textual ellipsis in Walrath communicates more about the 'disappearance' that is AD than anything else. 'None is hard to draw' she writes, in what is

a surely a metanarrative comment: how do you draw a disappearance? Ellipsis here is not the absence of words or meaning alone, it is the impossibility of representing the absence steadily creeping into Alice's mind.

If ellipsis is the hallmark of the image, it is accompanied by the heavy inscription of the Carroll text across Alice. Random phrases and sentences, cut-and-pasted like print, populate the entire Alice 'body', so to speak. It looks as though this Alice is wearing *that* Alice. Several things arrest our attention about this strategy of Walrath's.

First, the excessive textual inscription on the body serves as a potent and poignant reminder of the first major loss in AD: language. Walrath replaces the words of this Alice (her mother) with the words about that Alice (Carroll's character). As this Alice loses her words, all that adorns her are somebody else's words, which described another Alice.

Second, the inscription yet again recalls a polychronicity: this Alice's lack of words conflates with the words from a different era, about another girl, who disappeared down a rabbit hole. The languages, cultures and moments of enunciation are blurred as this Alice's loss is that Alice's gain, when the present of this Alice slips away, we can only see the words from that time.

Third, the words from Carroll are metaleptic, they move between levels: the level of Carroll's Alice and the world of Walrath's Alice.The metalepsis embodied in the Carroll words means that the two worlds begin to blur in Walrath. Michael Schuldiner writing about metalepsis in *Maus* argues that metalepsis is always 'paradoxical' (2002: 110). He continues:

> Of course, one can always make a kind of 'sense' out of the pairing of even the most disparate images, but certain conventions within certain media allow explanations for some pairing to come more readily to the mind of the reader. (110–11)

The Carroll world that collides with the Walrath world produces the paradox for the reader. This collision is also a contest of genres: between the fictional world of Carroll and the biographically real world of Walrath.

Fourth, the words, randomly inscribed on this Alice, not only overcompensates for her loss of language but these are a form of echolalia. Echolalia – the mechanical repetition of words enunciated by others – is a feature of AD and contributes to its incoherence (Ramanathan 1997: 90). In this case, although this Alice does not enunciate the words of that Alice, the very inscription by transference of the Carroll words is a variant of AD's characteristic linguistic feature. With this echolalia, one Alice morphs into another: an-Other Alice who exists and is the creation of somebody else's words. That is, Walrath's Alice is no longer the subject of her own narrative (words) but can only be the object of somebody else's words, either Walrath's or Carroll's[3]. When AD protagonists retreat into parallel or childhood worlds (as Walrath's Alice does), then the fictions in their heads

become real for them, while for us the biographical real's collision with this fictional real, on the same page, forces us to envision the world in the AD (protagonist's) head.

Fifth, and following from the above, the words inscribed from Carroll on Walrath's Alice are mirrored by the words that Walrath writes for and about her mother. The words embodied in Alice find their mirror image in the text on the facing pages. Carroll's text and Walrath's text between them create an Alice, a composite one: which Alice this is, is of course, a moot point.

THE REPARATIVE NARRATIVE

When Alice uses the indexical 'I' in speaking of herself, even when what she says makes little sense or is from some former era (in Alice's case it is World War II, as noted), does it mean there is a self still here, despite the AD? Steven Sabat and Rom Harré argue:

> To be able to index one's discourse in this way is to have a personal identity. Thus if the A[lzheimer's] D[isease] sufferer can be shown to employ first-person indexicals coherently in his or her discourse, on the constructionist account, the A.D. sufferer has displayed an intact self. (1992: 447)

The point is that the ability to enunciate the self may collapse, and hence the discursive construction of the self collapses with it. Now Alice uses the indexical I to speak of herself. What she produces, however, is illusion, fantasy, a recall of an earlier period. She moves from World War II to her distant family, her childhood, among other topics, even when unable to recognize Walrath as her daughter.

If psychological continuity is a marker of the self, then the AD protagonist does not demonstrate this continuity. However, as narrative theorists have proposed, there could be a different model of the self as well. Galen Strawson argues that diachronic self-experience 'one naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future', while in the episodic 'one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as some- thing that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future' (430). All of us may not experience ourselves as diachronic, argues Strawson, and so will not have a narrative of the self. Strawson however argues that the episodic, even when not 'see[ing] their life in Narrative terms', can and do have a link to their pasts. He writes:

> Predominantly Episodic individuals may sometimes connect to charged events in their pasts in such a way that they feel that those events happened to them – embarrassing memories are a good example – and anticipate events in their futures in such a way that they think that those events are going to happen to them – thoughts of future death can be a good example. (430-1)

Strawson goes on to add:

> Episodics will reply that the past can be present or alive in the present without being present or alive as the past. The past can be alive – arguably more genuinely alive – in the present simply in so far as it has helped to shape the way one is in the present, just as musicians' playing can incorporate and body forth their past practice without being mediated by any explicit memory of it. (431)

Alice recalls the smell of a neighbourhood slaughterhouse from her childhood (41), or that, being Armenian, she 'needed to practice [death] because death and dying remain relatively hidden in our culture' (47). During Alice's binge eating because of her AD, Walrath wonders if her 'hunger is a distant childhood memory, perhaps one that even spans generations' (25). When she has a story to tell, Walrath reports:

> Alice escapes the captivity of Alzheimer's through story. Pirates, the ultimate hostage takers, often lend her a hand. (29)

In each of these examples from *Aliceheimer's* what comes to the fore is not a continuity of the self but an episodic self, where the memories recalled (in fragments) are primarily affective in nature. That is, in lieu of psychological continuity as a marker of the self, we can see a self built upon *affective continuity*: the memories of hunger, threat or fear (surrounded by Japanese soldiers, kidnapped by pirates).

The affective and episodic self emerges in this kind of fragmented form of story-tellingthat could be well called a reparative narrative. It compensates for the absence of a continuous, semantically coherent narrative that (supposedly) captures a continuous self. Athena Helen McLean proposes that, when listening to or evaluating an AD/Dementia story, we move from 'coherence with the text to coherence within the person' (170). McLean writes: 'Coherence systems provide language for creating that new self, *even if that self or the story is a fictitious one*' (171, emphasis in original). And later:

> Coherence is a symbolic process that depends more on that unity of feeling—an affective state—than on logical rules of text or even on actual past experience … It forms its own constant emotional truth. (171)

The affective coherence in Alice's stories (the terror of the Japanese invasion, the rationing of food during the war) gains predominance rather than temporal or factual coherence: it is the former that shapes the self.

Reparative narratives, Erica Johnson tells us, are derived from an 'affective archive', and serve as a medium through which trauma is enunciated but also, to some extent, dealt with. Reparative narrative in the AD memoir is the retention of an affective archive even in the midst of the chaos that is AD. Faces, people and memories from the past with strong emotive content are mentioned periodically by AD protagonists and/or their

caregivers. The reparative narrative is founded on affective coherence above all else. It retrieves a personhood when the person is, supposedly, lost in the AD-state. We perceive this reparative narrative emerging in the forms of recall and their attendant articulations in the form of Alice's conversations and statements to Walrath.

For Alice, as Walrath notes, the familial relations in which she is embedded are no longer clearly defined. Mother/daughter, son-in-law/husband, are categories that no longer hold any meaning for her. But what is clear is that she experiences a specific set of emotions to the people around her. For instance, she mistakes Walrath for a nurse, but as Walrath takes care of her, she says: 'You're a good nurse' (53). Soon after this episode, Alice asks: 'Are you my mother?' and Walrath says, 'I'm your daughter'. Alice's response is the affective coherence of herself and narrative: 'That's nice' (55). Now Alice does not comprehend the term 'daughter', obviously. But she finds Walrath, whoever she may be, 'nice', and the entire process of being cared for by Walrath, pleasing. That is, for Alice, the nomenclature and the affiliative relationship that defines her-self as mother is subordinated to the affect of being looked after by someone who, to Alice's AD-ridden mind, is a stranger[4].

The idea of affective coherence of a narrative unconnected to its temporal coherence is emphasized by Martina Zimmermann who in her book on the poetics and politics of AD, writes: 'While I agree that temporal coherence is frequently lacking in patient-authored texts, I still believe their emphasis on significance makes these stories worth telling, reading and pondering' (8). She further argues that 'patient-authored narratives [serve] as a means to reclaim social and personal identity' (12).

This emphasis that Zimmerman draws attention to is the key: that the AD protagonist recalls sensations and emotions associated with people or processes (a 'nice' nurse, for instance) irrespective of the semantic, filial, affiliative and temporal/genealogical 'truth' of the people. It is not important, in the narrative, that Alice should or should not recognize or acknowledge the semantic, temporal and filiative coherence. What is important is that for her the affective is far more defining of her state of being and identity.

It is thus possible to see in this shift in the grounds of identity- and personhood formation that self that emerges in the AD narrative is an intersubjective one. Indeed, for dementia researchers like Tom Kitwood (1997), Sabat and Harré (1994) we have to think in different terms about the nature of the 'person', perhaps a relational, intersubjective self rather than an autonomous one. Lucy Burke, also writing on AD narratives, elaborates:

> To argue for the significance of this body of writing in relation to the ways we understand the meanings of intersubjectivity in the context of writing about dementia. I am thinking here particularly about the centrality of models of intersubjectivity and relational identity to the discourses of the personhood movement in dementia and its focus upon the ethical importance of the shared authorship of life narratives. (2014: 32)

Aliceheimer's, one of an unusual set of texts, foregrounds many of the themes and concerns of the AD memoir. Its employment of the graphic medium enables it to do and say things that would otherwise demand an extended narrative. In demonstrating how the AD-afflicted individual still remains a person, the text marks a shift in the conceptualization of the 'dementing process', as it is known, but also of personhood itself.

Notes

1. On popular representations of AD see Medina (2018).
2. More than twenty-six million people globally suffer from AD: 1.5 percent of the American population, 1.2 percent of the UK population, and by the year 2050 this number is expected to triple. See Ballenger 2006.
3. That chapter titles draw from Carroll's phrases such as 'curiouser and curiouser' and 'drink me' also forces us to see the mirroring pattern.
4. Unlike Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles*, another Alzheimer's memoir, *Aliceheimer's* does not rely on dramatic expressions and melodramatic moments in the drawings. In Tangles, as I have proposed elsewhere, 'the medium enables the writer to document, both visually and verbally, the range of emotions an extreme condition engenders in the home. *Tangles* here adopts the melodramatic mode through its highly expressive mode of narration' (2017: 47).

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Fakir Mohan Senapati's "Rebati" against the Backdrop of Cholera: Some Political and Cultural Implications of an Epidemic

Amruta Anindita

It is a well-accepted fact that literary writings deal with human life, its history and culture. Literary writings of a particular region, then, very often address contemporary social and political issues in their narratives. One among such issues, which has not received much critical attention is the cultural impact of epidemics and their representation in literature. This is particularly noticed in regional literature of nineteenth century Odisha. This paper will focus on the impact of epidemics on individual lives and communities in colonial Odisha through a reading of Fakir Mohan Senapati's short story "Rebati" (1898). Commenting on the current pandemic situation and literature arising out of it, founder-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival, Namita Gokhale says that

This pandemic is a hiccup in history, but it will exponentially accelerate remote technologies due to the compulsion of a new isolationist reality. But the stories will remain, the human stories, the grandmother tales that gives us wisdom, the speculative fiction that gives us wonder, the dystopian fiction that transforms into reality. The book that beloved and enduring object, will remain too. The ancient epic will remain, and in a galaxy far far away, a strong form a long time ago will resurrect the epic and bards of the past and future."[1]

Disease and the pathological condition of human life post-epidemics makes literary writers examine the helplessness of the human society when confronted with the fear of contagion. As a consequence, pandemics and epidemics have given rise to a new kind of genre of pandemic literature or epidemic literature. Among the many notable literary responses in India to epidemics during the last century are *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) by Amitav Ghose, *Pahighar* (1991) by Kamalkant Tripathi, *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) by Ahmed Ali. There are also short stories and poems by famous Indian writers that dwell on the effect of epidemics on individual lives. To mention a few, are "Phalwan Ki Dholak" (1944) by Phanishwar Nath Renu, "Nirala" by Suryakant Tripathi, "Plague Ki Chudail" (1902) by Master Bhagwan Das, Rabindranath Tagore's poem "Puratan Bhritya", Premchand's "Eidgah", and "Doodh Ka Daam". In the aftermath of a terrible outbreak of cholera epidemic following the famine of 1866, Odia literature of the nineteenth century could also not have escaped literary representations. Fakir Mohan Senapati's famous short story "Rebati," for example, which is also recorded as the first short story in Odia literature in the *Utkal Sahitya* vol.2 Issue no.7 in 1898 records the destruction of an entire family due to cholera.

The short story "Rebati" is set in Patapur, a small village in Hariharpur in the district of Cuttack, in the second half of nineteenth century Odisha. The story revolves around the family of Shyamabandhu Mohanty, the accountant of the Zamindar. A simple and honest

man, Shyamabandhu's small family includes his old mother, his wife and his only daughter Rebati. Despite all odds, Shyamabandhu decided to educate his little girl Rebati and engaged Basu to teach Rebati. Basudeva, a young man of twenty was the teacher in the upper primary school in the village. Rebati's conservative old grandmother is against this idea of educating Rebati as she wanted her to learn household chores to prepare her for her domestic duties as a woman. The old grandmother represents the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century. During the next two years of Rebati's education the epidemic cholera swooped down on the village and resulted in the death of Shyamabandhu, his wife, and at the end Basu. Rebati is blamed till the end of her life for the misfortune of the family. Although it is not clearly mentioned, the novel implicitly refers to Rebati's succumbing to the disease when her grandmother discovers her unconscious, and wails out her name in anguish.

The story has previously been read from feminist perspectives as an indictment of the oppressively patriarchal and conservative opinion prevalent as late as the nineteenth century in Odisha that education of women was root cause of misfortune and ruination of families. In this paper, however, I would like to discuss the story as an early narrative about the outbreak of the epidemic cholera in Odisha, and the controversies regarding its origins in rural Odisha, and therefore, India. The paper will approach the short story "Rebati" as a tale which is entangled in a debate about, whether Cholera as a contagion had its origins in the Indian subcontinent and had been carried to the Western part of the world by its colonial masters, thereby, giving it the shape of a pandemic, or whether the contagion had been transmitted to Indians by their white masters, who themselves having built up the regime of from 'modern' medications in the Empire, the grand edifice of European civilization in urban India, failed in their administrative responsibility to bring such benefits to rural India.

It is considered that the first cholera virus in India broke out somewhere near the port city of Calcutta, now known as Kolkata, during 1817-1821 [2]. Though the disease had been present earlier in India, yet it spread beyond India. Various Hindu festivals and pilgrimage sites were held responsible for the spread of the disease. In undivided Orissa, the disease was quite intense in Balasore during the famines of 1853 and 1866. Jagannath Prasad Das, Odia poet and playwright, in his book *Desha Kala Patra*, translated as *A Time Elsewhere* (1992), which is a fictional record of Odisha in the second half of the nineteenth century, (Odia Bibhaba), mentions the spread of cholera in Puri, originating from southern Orissa. He mentions that the epidemic took a serious turn in March 1866 with greater flow of pilgrims during Dola festival than in the preceding months. People died in great numbers in the epidemic, and the streets of Puri would witness 10 to 15 corpses to the cremation ground, but as the number of corpses increased each day, the sweeper would throw dead bodies into the cremation ground instead of burning them. The putrid stench of the decomposed bodies at the cremation ground was intensely repulsive to anyone who visited the place. It was believed that dogs and jackals would also stay off from the dead

bodies of the destitute because of the odour. The fear of modern hospitals and loss of castes often made the cholera patients refuse to be shifted to hospital. They would prefer to die on the roads (Das, 2011).

The death rate from cholera was considered as the misfortune for the human society in the district of Odisha in the Bengal Presidency in the late nineteenth century. Historical records generally mention that cholera affected mostly the poor class of people, although that was not the case always. The associative factors of the death such as lack of proper sanitation and hygiene, contraction through house flies and cholera affected persons could spread the disease across the class boundaries. Cholera entailed intense suffering for people in the states of Odisha with a high degree of mortality. Even the Raja of Hindol died of cholera in 1877 (the *Utkal Dipika*, 28 July 1877). Although such records refer to the class significance of the disease, its name in vernacular Odia, as referred to by Fakir Mohan in his short story, also hints at the religious, cultural significance of the disease. In the vernacular language the epidemic cholera was commonly called as 'Haija', 'Bādi' and 'Olā-uthā'. The disease is characterized by sudden and violent acts of defecation, vomiting and purging, Olā means to void excrement downward from the bowels through the anus, and 'utha' meaning the liquid substance within the bowel undergoing an upward movement through the mouth. The religious connotations become significant due to the virulence, ferocity and lack of effective cure of the disease. The incurability of the disease through local medications led to the widespread popular belief about the disease as divinely ordained, through its identification with the goddess Olā Debi. Although Sen and McNamra point out that by attributing supernatural powers to the disease and its cure through modern medicine was undermined (Sen 2012, pp. 50–51; McNamara 1870, pp. 45–98), there are also cases like that of Patapur, Rebati's village, where modern medical facilities did not reach. The villagers must have been illiterate, and therefore, superstitious, but even Basu, the school master, succumbs to the disease on the outskirts of the village without proper medication.

The disease also gave rise to various cultural practices in rural Odisha. Cholera was considered to be the act of the joginis. People of the village believed that these joginisor the evil spirits can only be controlled by the village deities, so they worshipped the deities to protect them from the outbreak of the epidemic. Another interesting practice to ward off cholera was to entice the goddess of cholera to leave a village through offerings of food and sacrificial victims. For instance, following a divine command supposedly issued by goddess Sāralā, people would keep earthen pots containing rice, mango, vegetables and a piece of either copper or silver Metal at the backyard of their houses to be subsequently removed to the village junction in the rural tracts of coastal Orissa (**UD**, 10 May 1873). The people of the adjacent villages would then transfer these pots to the borders of next village till these pots finally reached the place of goddess Bimalā in Puri. Known as *hāndibuhā*(circulation of earthenware pot), the pots would thus, be transferred to Puri in a span of few days without the supervision of anybody. More so, nobody would dare to steal

anything from the pots for fear of dying from cholera instantly. Even pathāns (Muslims) would abide by such divine command of the Hindu goddess and would not dare to take away anything from these pots. The belief that those who would not participate in the ritual or would desecrate it or disrupt the chain of the transfer of the post from one hand to the other were to incur the wrath of the jogini. This acted as a strong deterrent to keep the pots moving on to their intended destination. Such rites have been seen as ploys to divert the baleful influence of the goddess to safe distance (Arnold 1993, p. 176). It is worth noting here that similar circulation of ghaḍā (earthen pots) originating from Gwalior and passing through more than ninety villages along the borders of UP, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to ward off epidemic cholera was reported in 1860 (Arnold 1993: 177)

Villagers would shut down their doors in the fear of contracting the disease. We have instances like that of Fakir Mohan's Rebati and her grandmother, who are given no help, except at heavy prices. . In Senapati's "Rebati", the idea that the little girl's education incurred some such divine wrath and wiped off her entire family is only ironically suggested, and Rebati becomes the target of the blame. The short story gives us an account of how the rural people of Odisha were ignorant of the reason of cholera-outbreak. While discussing the political and cultural aspect of the spread of Cholera, David Arnold in his book *Colonizing the Body* (2015) writes "Cholera struck suddenly and unpredictably. A person in apparently sound health at one moment might be seized the next by violent vomiting and uncontrollable purging. 'The massive loss of body fluids that followed produced some of cholera's most alarming symptoms the agonizing cramps, the cold, clammy surface of the skin, the death, often within hours of the first seizure. "This disease is characterized by the suddenness of its attack," (160). Since Rebati's grandmother who discovers the unconscious body of the girl, is blind, we do not get any physical description of visible symptoms. But the narrator does inform us that Rebati had looked for water before she died.

The outbreak of various epidemics has also traditionally been perceived to be an outcome of famine. The famine in Odisha, also known as "Na'nka Durbhikya", was also considered a divine punishment and curse, although we have literature and records in overwhelming number to tell us that shortage of food production, wrong relief policies, free trade and administrative failures were the causes of this catastrophe[3]. Many cases of starvation deaths and diarrohea from indigestion following intake of food in the relief camps after long spells of starvation have been reported, but links between famine and cholera are rather tenuous and indirect. Hot, dry conditions are not normally conducive to the survival of the cholera bacillus, but drought and dearth of water driving the villagers to drink water from well, tanks and pools can cause the outbreak and contamination of cholera. Chronic malnutrition might have been a factor in weakening of resistance to the disease, though there is no clear medical evidence for this, and the changed pattern of the diet and behavior induced by famine were probably more significant in exposing individuals to infection. Hunger led to a desperate search for sustenance and relief, and

the consumption of roots, leaves and other surrogate foods often brought on sickness and diarrohea. The concentration of the famine-stricken masses in the relief campus of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore in most unhygienic conditions also facilitated the spread of the disease. The close connection with famine does more than account for cholera's great morality. It also underscores the association between epidemic disease and social disruption on a vast scale and points to problems of poverty and hygiene that were too deep-seated for the colonial regime to be able or willing to tackle. Initially, at least, colonialism responded to the challenge of cholera in a far more limited way (*Colonizing the Body* 168).

For both Western and Indian medical systems, cholera was an exceptionally troublesome disease, unresponsive or resistant to most of the favored therapies of the time. This made cultural and religious interpretation of the disease appear all the more pertinent and attractive; it also added to the British perception that the disease was peculiarly subversive, a disorder which not only challenged attempts to establish the superiority of western medicine but also emphasized the physical frailty and political vulnerability of colonial rule. Because cholera epidemics were seen to be so intimately bound up with Hindu rites and pilgrimages, even the introduction of sanitary measure and Haffkines's anticholera serum did not resolve the political problems that surrounded attempts to cholera. At the same time, divided opinions within the medical profession in India as to nature of the disease and the mode of its transmission made it more difficult for doctors and sanitarian to press the government to act, easier for the administration to adhere to a noninterventionist policy that favored many of its commercial, financial and political interests (Arnold 1993: 198).

And yet, the un-scientific and superstitious ideas about the outbreak of an epidemic have been part of human culture since time immemorial. When the divine factor no longer plays a role, the game of blaming some persons and groups for the outbreak of an epidemic or a pandemic begins naturally in times of panic and desperation. As we know that cholera is caused by various biological and environmental factors, still it becomes natural for people to blame some others. For instance, Pamela Gilbert in her book *Mapping of the Victorian Social Body* (2004) notes the presence of the cholera bacteria in Victorian England in 1832. She notes how the English blamed 'others' for the spread of the disease:

> The cause of cholera being unknown, susceptibility to the disease was ascribed to moral degeneracy from the first epidemic. In 1832 it was thought to be the special scourge of drunkards and blasphemers. The poor generally were suspect and the poor Irish, regarded as naturally dirty, came under particular scrutiny in the late 1840's and 1850's especially with regard to their funeral practice and the celebration wakes'. (94)

In making subtle suggestions as to the origin and spread of the disease in the family, Senapati seems to be raising intriguing questions about who actually is guilty of being the

carrier and spreader of the disease. Senapati offers no clue if Basu brought this disease to the village. It may have broken out from other sources. Since cholera strikes suddenly, Basu, could not have been the carrier. On the other hand, the circumstances in which Basu dies, on his return journey from a meeting at Cuttack, it could well mean that he contracted the disease in the city Cuttack and carried it the disease to the village at a later time. Keeping this in mind, we might also consider Fakir Mohan's story as a microcosmic representation of the debate over the origins of Cholera, in rural India or in the metropolitan colonial England. Many historians have also analyzed how the emergence and spread of cholera has impacted the people and place. Robert Morris (1976) ,an English historian and professor of economics, has mentioned in his work that, "to follow cholera track was to watch the trust and cooperation between different part of the society strained to the utmost" (Priyanka, 300).

We can say the that the moot question is how the contamination is carried through the masses and who are responsible for the transmission: whether the disease gets carried from the provincial regions to metropolitan centers, or if the unsanitary conditions of cities like London and Cuttack were responsible for the origin of the disease. The question remains unresolved and also becomes inconsequential as in Jayanta Mahapatra's poem "The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore, India" illustrates. It states that the British officials died due to cholera, but its focus is on how insignificant the colonial men running the Empire were. It reflects at most how the epidemic occurred frequently in colonial India and took human lives only as a putative truth, but never to insinuate someone as blameworthy.

It appears that Fakir Mohan Senapati raises the question to only suggest how nugatory it is. The pointlessness of the question only underlines the absurdity of linking it to Rebati's education. Through the horrifying experience of the epidemic cholera described in "Rebati" Senapati gives us a view that illness can create panic and horror. With great panic people reacted to the death of Shyamabandhu "in the countryside, the immediate response to such news was to shut tightly all doors and window of the demonic deity of cholera, as if the evil, old hag, out there, with her basket and broom to sweep heads" (*translation mine* 71). This gives us a fear of the contamination of the disease. David Arnold's essay "Disease Rumor and panic in India plague and influenza Epidemic 1896-1919" published in the book *Empires of Panic* states:

> Disease - or the threat of it - has been a patent source of rumors and panic in modern times…Perhaps, the greatest turmoil occurred in epidemic episodes that combined disease, rumor, and panic, united in a single moment of actual or incipient catastrophe, or epidemic whose cause and consequences were unknown and whose advance appeared so rapid and overwhelming as to be unstoppable. (Arnold, 111)

From a literary perspective, an epidemic highlights certain abiding moral and ethical issues with which humans have struggled all over the world, being faced with suffering

and death. The blame-game across classes and regions, scapegoating an imagined enemy of the state, pathologizing the ethnic and political minorities and non-dominant races are resorted to most of the times to deflect attention from the really important issues of eradicating diseases and bringing succor to the afflicted. Senapati is aware of this phenomenon as a literary artist. In the context of his story he seems to offer an unresolved question about the blamable origin of cholera – whether the village or the city – to perhaps suggest that it is as pointless to ponder over as chicken first, or the egg. This perverse tendency of human nature to blame someone for a problem suffered finds full expression during the time of a disease, and therefore the irrationality of blaming Rebati and her education for the calamitous ending of the family during the time of cholera is emphasized in the story.

Notes

1. See "This pandemic is a hiccup in history, says writer Namita Gokhale". *The Hindu*. May 27, 2020. <https://www.thehindu.com/society/this-pandemic-is-a-hiccup-in-history/article31686279.ece>
2. See Harrison Mark Harrison's" "A Dreadful Scourge: Cholera in early Nineteenth-century India". *Modern Asian Studies*. 54.2(2020): 502-553.
3. See Manioranjan Mohanty, "The Great Odisha Famine of 1866: Lessons for the 21st Century". Social Change. Nov. 21, 2017.

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DÉ JÀ VU OF COVID MUSINGS IN INDIAN SCIENCE FICTION: REVIEWING THE NOVELS OF MANJULA PADMANABHAN IN THE LIGHT OF ECOCENTRISM

Saswati Pattnaik

In a Covid-engulfed world, the terms of survival have drastically affected our livelihood, health and education. The global carnage has aroused anxiety and fear among humans, with an ironical blow to the notion of "being together" in these hard times. The present scenario has pushed the contours of humanity to its limits by portraying the underlying threats of economic collapse and national security. The enforced lockdown has made humans the new 'other' to one another in the fight against invincible pathogens. In the light of all this deepened sense of crisis, the genre of science fiction generates considerable interest.

Science fiction is a sub-genre of speculative fiction. The term was first used by William Wilson in 1851. However, the popularization of the term is credited to Hugo Gernsback, for his publication of the first science fiction pulp magazine, *Amazing Stories* in April 1926 (*Routledge* 1). A short history of science fiction can be best understood through its evolution as a literary genre. *A True Story* by Lucian of Samosata, in the second century AD, portrays an inter-planetary war and describes a voyage into space (*Science Fiction* 2). Brian Aldiss labels Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as the "progenitor of modern science fiction". In the context of portrayal of future, works like Samuel Madden's *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* (1733) and Louis- Sebastien Mercier's *The Year 2440* (1771), establish the notion of time travel. Thus, the emergence of science fiction and its recognition as a genre do not go in tandem. This gives rise to a problematic definition.

The definitions of science fiction include its distinctive features and help to explain its holistic purpose. According to David Seed, "Science fiction is about the writer's present in the sense that any historical moment will include its own set of expectations and perceived tendencies. The futures represented in SF embody its speculative dimension" (*Science Fiction* 2). In this context Samuel Delany's notion about science fiction is important: "… (SF) narratives position themselves between possibility and impossibility. It is helpful to think of an SF narrative as an embodied thought-experiment whereby aspects of our familiar reality are transformed or suspended" (2). These unfamiliar events which depict familiar reality are often considered to be utopias. However, Patrick Parrinder states that science fictions employ a "negative valuation – realized in visions of totalitarian states, a dying Earth, crumbling empires of barbarous and hostile planets" (*Science* 77), and these images embody a dystopic world.

Darko Suvin argues that: "SF can finally be written only between utopia and the anti-utopian horizons" (qtd. in *Science* 77). He terms it as "scientific fictionalizing". In the *New Critical Idiom* series of Science Fiction Adam Roberts states that: "For Suvin the important thing about the 'science' part of 'science fiction' is that it is a discourse built on certain

logical principles that avoids self-contradiction; that is rational rather than emotional or instinctual (9). As Suvin's emphasis is on the scientific aspect of 'science fiction', Roberts refers to another influential critic, Robert Scholes, who focuses on the literary features of the genre. In his book, *Structural Fabulation*, Scholes undermines the notion of science fiction being 'scientific' in its approach and favors its "fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science" (10).

Science Fiction, as a literary genre, presents the unfamiliar as familiar with a shrewd intention to differentiate the rational dimension from flights of fantasy. This estrangement from genuine fantasy leads us to reconsider our assumptions on the present world, by comparing it with the imagined other world in the fiction. In other words, Sci-fi provides its readers a comparative reality which hosts presumptive problems of the present world and its aftermath. This helps us to analyze our decisions taken in the present and try to incorporate changes for a better future. With reference to this, the definition by Peter Parrinder sheds light on its logical and rational attitude:

> The logical and rational attitude of science fiction takes up the reader's nameless longings with the intention of showing just how and why they might become actual, and what their unforeseen and often highly unpleasant consequences might be. The result is not primarily an 'aesthetic fiction', aiming to delight the reader's sensibility, but rather a working model of an alternate reality. One of the places where this is most evident is in the utopian writings of the late nineteenth century. (10)

In relation to the definitions, purpose and features of science fiction, the genre provides insights on the vulnerability of human race, their imagined fear and anxiety for an impending apocalypse, their exploitation of nature and their unsuccessful fight to subdue the threats of biological warfare. However, what is evident from the recent writings in Indian Science Fiction is the growing potentiality of the environment (which includes the basic requirements of humans to survive), in an implicit or explicit manner, to control the political and social lives of humans. *Snowpiercer* (2013), a Sci-fi movie, depicts the turmoil in the lives of the last existing group of people, struggling to survive in an ever-moving train with limited natural resources and food. This has not only resulted in division of class according to economic status, but also, controlling the population in every possible way, including cannibalism and punishment of death by means of torture for every mistake.

This paper will try to investigate the terrific conditions humans are facing in a near future due to their irresponsible actions in the present, with an intention to strictly analyze the similar restrictions portrayed in the two novels of Manjula Padmanabhan, as in the present covid times and its reciprocations in their personal and social lives. This paper will study the impending dangers brought about by the drastic changes in our environment, climate and technology in the lives of people and their confinement to closed spaces with minimal movement and necessary changes in attire to safeguard themselves from an increasingly polluted world. In addition to these, this paper will examine how the very

environment, which was being exploited by humans for economic purpose has now become an asset of survival, thus, controlling the demography.

The theoretical framework adapted in the paper is Ecocentrism. Biocentrism or Ecocentrism is a sub-category of eco-critical studies. In opposition to anthropocene, it is nature-centric and highlights the dependency of humans on other biotic factors. In an online lecture, Pramod K. Nayar stated that human lives are interconnected with other forms of nature. Thus, as species or part of nature, we are mutually vulnerable to the workings of Nature. In the current times of adversity, of climate change and natural calamities, Nature's role has replaced human-centered power governing the lives on earth. A vivid ecological imagination portrays Nature in ethical terms, and not through the lens of aesthetic pleasure. The theory of Eco-centrism aims to show the power of Nature having moral and political control over the lives of humans. It gives importance to all forms of life, whether animate or inanimate. It recognizes world as the living space of all organisms created by nature and despises any effort to make humans seem supreme. With reference to this context, this paper will study the reflections on Covid phase of human life through the lens of Eco-centrism. Padmanavan's *Escape Escape* narrates the story of the only surviving girl, in a future India, protected by her three uncles. Her name is Meiji. Since all women have been exterminated, her discovery is a threat to their lives and estate. In the process to save her from the impending danger, she has to go on a journey to an island outside the country. This journey not only depicts Meiji's realization of her gender and her discomfort with a prosthetic penis, but also her understanding of a world outside the safe and secret home she was kept. Her journey from a desert to forests and then out to the sea serves as a filter for her emotions exposing her vulnerable self and unfolds flashes of the past. In this regard environment achieves an important position by guiding, protecting and controlling their actions.

The global pandemic we are facing today has restricted us to our homes. The slogan of the government is "Stay Home, Stay Safe". This kind of confinement has drastically affected our social lives. In the novel the pandemic is a result of a Great Change brought about by the Generals and their clone brothers. The vision of their ancestor was to create like-minded individuals who would never oppose the workings of the new system of governance. This Great Change was possible because of the amount of money collected through the disposal of nuclear wastes in the country to set up laboratories. This was important as instead of man-power, drone technology will function at factories and estates. These two will be the primary source of income except minor shops at remote places. Drones will be given more importance for they will be designated labour species, with subhuman characteristics and incapable of self-generation. The most significant change will be elimination of females as the Generals want to control the breeding technology and create super-intelligent humans or their clone brothers who would be produced without any defects. Since natural birth does not guarantee these conditions, so

females have to suffer annihilation as the roots need to be destroyed. In such a dystopic world the lives of humans are highly restricted. Travelling is not allowed. That is a privilege of the Generals. Estate owners are confined within their boundaries under a strict surveillance of Regional Generals. They can only communicate with their family members, if they have any. Communication with distant relatives, if they have any information of their survival, is very difficult and requires permission from the Generals. Even in technologically equipped cities they have Dynamic Surveillance teams, in the structure of gigantic orbs that operate all over the place through flight mode. Electronic communication is completely banned. Meiji's escape from such a dystopic world (which is the future of India) to the any other place is a great challenge.

Meiji has always lived a life of confinement, without having any slightest idea about it. When for the first time she is taken out to a field, she expresses her discomfort:

> Meiji had rarely been out of doors. She could not remember ever having seen an open field. In the dim light before dawn, the grassy plain stretching away to infinity looked like a mirage, a backdrop painted onto a wall. Except for the sky. It was hard to rationalize the upturned indigo bowl arcing overhead. The unfamiliar thudding in her throat she recognized as her heart-beat, sounded unnaturally loud. She had never been directly connected to such a vast space. The urge to run back indoors to safety and familiarity was turning her legs to jelly. It was not a feeling she liked. (63)

Meiji had the least idea about the fact that this was just the beginning. In a couple of days she would leave on a journey with her youngest uncle and the familiarity of a home would be a far dream. She would not be sure when and how her journey will end. In addition to this her second predicament will be to hide her sex. She is tricked to wear a prosthetic penis and disguise herself as a boy. She even has to maintain distance from strangers. The situation of Meiji draws similar patterns with the present world. She is uncomfortable with an artificial genital but has to keep it, just like we have to wear masks. She even has to urinate through it. Her insecurity and helplessness rises from her uncertainty about the end of her journey. In the same way the uncertainty of the end of an epidemic has increased the degree of fear and anxiety in covid times.

The journey of Meiji through the desert heightens her plight. She and Youngest have to travel through the Waste. Waste was once a thriving city. It prospered with trade and commerce. However, the nuclear experiments on the land, during and after the great annihilation of womanhood, have rendered it into a radiation ground. Meiji has to wear a special helmet for the purpose of travel and has to feed on capsules as there is no signal of food in the extended desert:

> When the first boundary post of the Waste was within sight, the travelers had to seal the tall cylindrical radiation helmets down over their heads, breathing with the aid of the built- in air filter. Normal conversation was no longer possible though they could

> shout through a mouthpiece if they had to. They each had supplies of water and food capsules in their pockets as well as strapped within easy reach, on the tandem. (122)

Environment plays an important role in Meiji's journey. The barren land creates obstacles for her security, but it enables her to have an experience of her inner self which would not have been possible in the protected environment of her home. Meiji always wanted to share her thoughts with her three uncles. However, she received only instructions. She was bound to follow them. The three uncles tried to control her growth through hormones. They created a world for her inside their domain, which retarded Meiji's understanding of the outer world. They only provided her minimal information and knowledge which would aid her in her great escape. Meiji's only friend was Mr. Froggie, a toy. When she chatted with him, as Mister Piggie, she almost felt she had a mind and narrated most of her ordeals, answering them herself as the voice of the frog. In this context it would not be wrong to mention that Meiji was her own imaginary friend. Fortunately, in the open expanse of the desert, when Meiji was at odds with Youngest, she would discover that she can interact with other people. She even develops feelings for animals. In other words, the environment surrounding her, enunciates her process of humanization. She experiences all kinds of emotions. She is angry with Youngest, yet she loves him the most. She develops compassion for a dead pregnant hare and her babies. She befriends a puppy and cares for him. She tries to understand the people she meets, giving her own point of view on the gypsy, Windseeker, Budget, or, the Generals.

The changing landscape also has an impact on Youngest. In the beginning of the novel, we find that Youngest is reluctant to take Meiji on the journey alone as he feels he will develop unnatural desires for her. He is unable to control his instincts towards Meiji as she is the only surviving female. He shares his problem with the brothers and seeks suggestions on how to control his hormones. However, they do not give him a befitting reply:

> 'None, to my knowledge,' said Eldest. He allowed himself a smile in the darkness. 'It was always a lone struggle and different men waged it in different ways. There used to be libraries of literature devoted to this lonely battle but we live in a time and place when the struggle itself has been eliminated from our lives. Your position used to have centuries of precedent behind it, yet now you're alone with it and find no guidebooks to light your path
> … We are in the condition of surgeons who have only a single scalpel with which to perform a life saving operation, yet the knife is bent. Not blunt, but bent: there is a difference. So what do we do? *You are the only available companion for her*. Unlike all the millions of young men who have, in times past, found themselves in position of temptation, you alone have no choice to remove yourself from the source oftemptation …
> Control your thoughts and your body will control itself … should you fail to control

> yourself, there will be no one to sit in judgement over you. There will be no witnesses to your disgrace aside from yourself and the girl … Each man must discover the limits ofhis own endurance through his own methods, whatever they might be. (37-38)

This global epidemic has reduced every individual to this level of Youngest. Our lives have become our responsibility. Like Youngest, we have to control our desires that yield the slightest chance to contact the Covid-19 virus. Our temptations for social gathering, outing or not adapting a suitable lifestyle will put us at risk and the blame of contaminating the people around us cannot be avoided.

The desert landscape leads to an untendered orchard. Meiji is astonished to see mango tress laden with fruits and screeches of parrots echoing in the fragrant shade. She questions the use of water from the stream as she has been informed that the rivers, air, rain, clouds, crops and fruits have become contaminated. However, Youngest assures her that the toxins, for some time ago have been reabsorbed and neutralized. If the desert landscape has unraveled Meiji's inner self, then the orchard reveals the innermost fears of Youngest, of his desires. In the midst of the trees when Meiji is all alone with Mr Froggie, she remembers the nude pictures she had seen of women. Youngest does not give her a satisfactory answer except saying that they are having fun. Moreover, after Meiji's first periods she has grown increasingly curious towards her body. She now can guess why she is called a woman and how her body is different from Youngest. Her uncle does not aid her in providing a suitable answer, although she thinks that the species to which she belongs are monsters. Therefore, Meiji decides to confront him at the slightest opportunity in hand. On getting sometime alone in the orchard when they had to hide from the Boys, Meiji undressed herself in the front of Youngest. Being naked she aroused a stringent current of past memories of his wife and unleashed an unnatural desire. She even put his palms on her breast, in a childish pleasure to show him how her parts have changed. However, Meiji was not aware of the turmoil that was going on in Youngest's heart; "He tried to remind himself that the person in front of him was still a child, even if her body was no longer childish (309). The environment aids in Youngest's turmoil. The sweet fragrance of the trees excites Youngest and he remembers the jasmine flowers that decorated his wedding bed. The music of the birds reminds him the melodious music played on his wedding night. Thus we find that environment assumes an important role in manipulating an individual's emotions and understanding of his or her own self.

The Island of Lost Girls

The role of environment gathers a greater position in the sequel of this novel. *The Island of Lost Girls* highlights the search of Youngest for Meiji, after he has sent her to an island comprising only of women. In this novel we find an inverted situation. The journey of Meiji in *Escape* was from a familiar and secured place to an unknown destination. Contrastingly, the sequel envisions her journey inside an enclosed structure, which is strange and unfamiliar. Meiji's memory has been temporarily deleted for security purpose.

She only has momentary flashes from her past. The enclosed structure or the building in the island is sustained by marine life. Youngest, in the disguise of Yasmine (a transgender), is in awe of the place. He questions Vane on the flexibility and durability of the building blocks. Vane dismisses his conception of "prefabricated blocks" as they do not have access to factories. She said the irregular joints, elastic membranes, sentient elevator cars and even the toilet seat have been made up of organic materials. She provides him an explanation which depicts the dependence of the inhabitants on biotic elements of sea:

> The Island was a cluster of highly modified living creatures. 'Crabs, specifically,' said Vane. 'They proved extremely versatile. We hybridized them, grossly altered their physical dimensions and created a strain that lives symbiotically with us. So long as we maintain their food supply, they can function indefinitely.'
>
> Youngest looked around again.
>
> 'Their nervous systems provide us with whatever we need in the way of power. Nervous energy is a form of electricity, after all. It's transmitted via nerves instead of copper wires. The marine world has produced versions of everything we use in electronics. There are electric eels, shape-fitting octopi and spectacular forms of bio-luminescence, all produced by the complex nervous systems of creatures in the natural world. We have merely synthesized and repurposed what was already there. (323)

The marine creatures and their modified versions are used for transportation. The giant crustaceans are guided through water-ways by the stimulation of sensory globes. The marine world in the novel follows the attraction-repulsion system, which they think is at the heart of all reality. According to Vane, as in the physical world electrons, protons and neutrons from a bond because of attraction and repulsion and stay sable in an atom; every being stays connected because of this system. The women customize a creature through pleasure-stimulation. The creatures seek this pleasure and return the labour. Whales and modified lizards are also used for the purpose of travel. In a tour around the laboratory Vane shows Youngest a small picture of their vast underwater enterprise:

> They visited laboratories where zoobiotic models were in development. There was a TravelCrab in production that could seat five travellers at a time. She showed him the power-emitting cells called 'creature-batteries' that were based on animals such as electric eel. They provided all the power used by the facility. Some were connected in relays to electrify conventional gadgets such as incandescent light bulbs. Others were coupled directly to animal gadgets, such as fans made from giant modified dragonfly wings and cold-light fittings synthesized from fireflies. (375)

These animals do not have their individual consciousness. Their nervous system has been cloned, synthesized and repurposed to form organic machines. The modification and preservation is not only confined to animals, but this also includes, vegetation. They have neat beds of artificial soil. Water, light and air had to be pumped into the closed room.

This entire build-up underwater represents a symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment. Each is sustained and empowered by the other.

Even, in this symbiotic sphere, Covid underpinnings are quite relevant. These times of adversity have rocked our world to the extent of affecting our psyche on the matters of social bonding and how we manage our daily lives. There is an underlying fear, when we have to deal with our neighbors or colleagues, that we might contact the disease. The fear of Corona virus has developed a tendency in us to see through the lens of suspicion. This has grossly affected our social and private lives. Youngest who has come in search of Meiji has a secondary purpose. He is connected to the previous dystopic world through a chip in his jaw. In order to save Meiji, Youngest had to make a deal with a General to give him information regarding the island so that he could destroy it. In addition to this he has to change his gender and become his sex-slave as there are no women for this purpose. Thus, like the spread of the virus of C covid-19, dystopic forces always try to expand their boundaries. Moreover, the use of masks and other safety supplements in our daily lives have made us more conscious towards our body. This has also led to respiratory problems in some individuals. When Meiji was asked to wear a breathing mask, her "nose and throat tingled with a phantom soreness" (230). The full wetsuit even made her feel more uncomfortable. However, the pleasure of riding on the whale subdued these tendencies. Such was not the case when she had to ride a modified carnivorous large lizard. In this case she had to wear a helmet, breathing gear and neuro-circuitry. The gel-pads placed on the animals conducted the brain waves to the processors in the helmet of the rider. This enabled the rider to have the sense of the animal's mouth and the movements of its tongue, limbs and hands. A rider will feed on the input through his eyes, nose and ears. At the same time it is important for the rider to not to inhale the air of the whale as it would risk her life. Thus, this ride required a great amount of control over body and mind. A slight mistake could risk her life. She could even fall prey to the animal. Nevertheless, the fear and anxiety that she felt was nothing in comparison to what she felt on the "Welcome Ritual".

People who are affected by the corona virus face an indubitable humiliation. Although our neo- modern civilized mind sheds the notion of "untouchability" and "otherness", baring its minimal involvement in pursuance of Covid, the tendency of human nature to go back to its animal instincts cannot be avoided. Meiji faces such a humiliation in the novel. Meiji and the other dispatched girls to the island were welcomed with an unusual ritual into the domain of Mentors. Vane asked each of the girls to stand naked on the platform. Her reasons included cleansing of body and soul with sunlight and air and a feeling of solidarity with others because of their shared trauma. But, the most important reason was to acknowledge the defects of their body, their reason for coming to this place and to heal themselves mentally. Whatever, the reasons might be, for Meiji this was a humiliating act. She monitored her frustration towards these Mentors and developed a strong dislike for them. The act was more humiliating for her as she had to expose her prosthetic penis,

which because of memory loss she thought to be a part of her body.

Conclusion

Escape and *The Island of Lost Girls* by Manjula Padmanabhan, depict the vulnerability and dependency of Meiji and Youngest on their environment. The insecurity, helplessness, forced medical treatments on their body, encounter with animals, wearing masks and special outfits on occasions and the uncertainty about the end of their journey; symbolically resemble the torrid circumstances of Covid epidemic in the present world. Furthermore, the genre of science fiction can be treated as a proactive force which highlights the dangers or shortcomings of the future (world). It provokes us to take into consideration our alternate reality and rethink our immediate decisions. Thus, in this way science fictions act as guide books for a better future. The dystopia in the fictional world seems to be an inverted utopia in the real world.

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BODY POLITIC, LITERARY THEORY AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Bedika Bhattacharjee

I wish to make an attempt to analyse the impact of the pandemic on the body politic insofar as literary theory helps us to understand the metaphoric implications of corporeality of the physical body while talking about culture and politics during the pandemic time. In my conceptual schema, body and embodies experience occupy the central position.

The representation of the body or embodied experiences through varied expressions finds a long history in literature since the earliest times. Being manifested in terms of sexuality, disability, race, sensibility, youth and ageing, birth and death (Hillman and Maud) bodily expressions have occupied the essence of narrative either as a biological fact or as metaphorical representation. In their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Body and Literature* the editors, David Hillman and Ulrika Maud note:

> Writers from Chaucer, Montaigne and Shakespeare to Rimbaud, James Joyce, Kafka and Woolf herself have all written with profundity and compassion about the many varieties of embodied experience: sex and childbirth, eating and defecation, pleasure and pain, desire and repulsion. (1)

The editors go on to explain that these authors have readily brought to light the different varieties and "complexities of embodied life" (1). Importantly, the centrality of the body or embodied experiences in a pandemic situation is a critical and a vital reality that needs to be accounted when discussing literature in a pandemic or contagion circumstances or condition. The body undoubtedly happens to be the core aspect of a narrative either dealt with explicitly or implicitly. What probably seems to be important in a pandemic reality is how the body politic would be influential in determining new parameters in literary theory and criticism.

Literary theory and criticism has largely been guided by the most crucial concerns of the times and have always determined in turn reading of literary texts and produced relevant fields of discourses. From structuralism to post-structuralism, from psychoanalytic criticism to feminism, form Marxism to Postcolonial theory, from Cultural Materialism to New Historicism, from critical race theory to queer theory and the present rise in ecocritical analysis of a text, literary theory and criticism have offered continuously changing parameters of analysing a text. Such a dynamism of literary theory and critical practice has unquestionably broadened the latitude of the reading and the measure of acceptance and applicability of a text in contemporary times as well the hermeneutic horizon. Literary theory has adapted itself to the changing contours of the times, and the text too, under the pressure of the altering situations and circumstances, released itself from the the author's intentionality to the reader's reception.

It is common knowledge that historical, social, socio-cultural, cultural, political, anthropological as well as gendered and physiological actualities have remained the clear determinants of the critical and theoretical discourses so far. The deconstructionist or the Post-structuralist liberation from the centred and rigid entrapments of structuralism was to a great extent the result of the oppression, horror and trauma felt during the post-war period. It was undoubtedly the result of a process of decentralization that took place in terms of faith, economy, history, tradition, culture and the conventional value systems. Simultaneously, deep-seated skepticism about the certainties of the structural notions of relatedness, unity and totality, and the foundational ideas about unified subjectivity and meaning gained ground in the post-war time. Hence all these resulted in the fragmentation, disintegration of ideals and ideas, language, form and content that postmodernism conceptualized, and deconstruction or post-structuralism were ushered into academic reading of literature and culture. It shall not be too farfetched to say that almost every contemporary landmark, incident, phenomenon and experience, even speech, language and to use Derrida's term 'differance' has been both the symptom and reflection of the complexities and intricacies of the post-war scenario, to which have been added the disturbing phenomena of climate change, growing inequalities of post-colonial imperialism, neo-liberal imperialism, right-wing fascism, homelessness, refugees, global terrorism and the recent most Covid pandemic.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic or Covid-19 that the entire world has been afflicted with, and is still going through is proving to be an endemic that undoubtedly is going to have its impact or effect in almost all sectors of life, extending to all classes of people irrespective of class, sex, race and ethnicity. In fact, its impact is being gravely felt in nations and countries irrespective of developed, developing or underdeveloped countries and nations. The discourse of the Covid-19 pandemic which is constitutive of medical, biological, physiological, psychological, economic, cultural, political and educational repercussions is primarily fabricated around the rubric of the body. In fact, in any pandemic outbreak it is the body that has indisputably been the prime magnetism and hub of concentration and discourse. The materiality of the body to a great extent has shaped the theoretical foundations of pandemic discourses so far.

Existence of epidemics and pandemics including the plague of Athens from around 430 to 426 BC, the Antonine Plague from 165 to 180 AD (approx), the Black Death, the epidemics of smallpox, tuberculosis, cholera, typhus, malaria, yellow fever, the 1918 influenza, also known as the Spanish flu, are some noted examples of pandemic instances in the history of human civilization. Notably such periods of epidemics and pandemics are marked by conditions of flux and chaos both at the physiological as well as at the psychological, cultural and social echelon. Such pandemics and epidemics are more so often characterized by the fact of its being infectious and contagious that stringently confines the body under certain checks and precincts. In fact, contagion can be considered to be the synonym for pandemics and epidemics. The history of pandemic shows how

rigorous and painstaking were the restrictions imposed on the contagious bodies, with severe repercussions. The impact of pandemics or epidemics and contagions as such on life and culture besides other sectors of life, have been exceedingly far reaching and inconsiderate to a great extent. On the issue of contagion, Kari Nixon and Lorenzo Servitje note that "contagion is not just 'in the air' ". it is, they believe, "endemic to our contemporary culture" (1). The problem of the cultural decentralization which has been largely considered by critics and scholars to be the outcome of the devastating experiences of the two World Wars and the massive aftermaths of industrialization has been attributed in recent times to "infectious microorganisms" (Nixon and Servitje 2) which has had a strong history fatally effecting health and lifestyles.

Until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the presence of contagions and pandemics sounded quite mythic and metaphoric, although literally there has been continuity of the attack of epidemics and pandemics from time to time in human history. However, somehow living in an age of the highest technological, scientific advancements that are germane to medicines and human health and biomedicalization, one cannot and need not palpably think of infections and contagions. However, the fact remains that with the discovery of antibiotics and vaccines as preventives and resistant mediums of contagion are still very relevant as infectious diseases or contagions have been deeply embedded in our lifestyle, and have remained part of the discourses of health, lifestyle, behaviour, emotions and culture as well. Servitje and Nixon make an observation in this regard:

> It is no surprise, then, that infectious discourse paradoxically continues to intrinsically structure contemporary society even as much of industrialized society imaginatively constructs itself as beyond the pale of infection and serious contagious threats. (2)

Hence contagions formulates social, cultural as well as political constructions that validates quite despondently "dividing practices that subtend hermetic subjectivities, the distinction between self and other, and the supremacy and autonomy of the human" (Servitje and Nixon 3). Interestingly, contagion has not only been analyzed as a disease but also as a metaphor—a metaphor of divide, difference, social construction, subjectivity, resistance and the 'other', most significantly predicated on on the body or embodied experiences. The consequence of contagion to the cultural realm is a fact that has been addressed by Frederic Jameson as a "cultural logic" (Servitje and Nixon 2).

Despite being cultural entities and an influential agencies or medium, pandemics and contagions have failed to occupy the centrality of critical analysis and discourses. Taking the case of the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic, *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* (2019) brings to light the silence or the gap that has been witnessed in any discussion of modernism or the modernist period in terms of pandemics, epidemics and contagion which the period had devastatingly gone through. Discussing pandemics and the interwar modernist literature Elizabeth Outka remarks that although the literature of the modernist period made the war its central focal point, it also "excelled

at representing the pandemic's spectral presence and the change it produced on the streets, in domestic spaces, within families, and in the body". Outka further claims that "these realms of experience—the sensory, the atmospheric, and the affective—are often precisely the realms left out of written histories but infused into memories, poems, and novels" (*Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* np). Looking from the perspective of pandemics and its ghastly influence and impact, Outka offers a different perspective of analyzing the modernist texts for instance, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as "the metaphors of modernism take on new meanings: fragmentation and disorder emerge as signs of delirium as well as shrapnel; invasions become one of microbes and not only men; Post-war ennui reveals a brooding fear of an invisible enemy" (*Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* np). Apart from thematic representation of the pandemics that were infused in the modern narratives, the impact of the pandemic has been discerned at the technical level of the modernist style as well. The reality and influence of pandemics and contagions on mass culture, health and lifestyle unquestionably remains powerful. More so powerful has been the pervasive influence of pandemics and contagions on the body.

It has been discussed right in the beginning that the body remains an unavoidable issue in literature. It has been an important medium and agency for the projection of different feelings, emotions, actions, happenings whether in the cultural, social, political or historical spheres as well as the impact of such happenings. Notably, issue of difference and marginality in terms of gender, sex or racial inequalities in a society has also been rendered through the body. Arthur Kroker has made a very significant observation in regard to body and the technological, digital cyber-power. He says:

> Images of the corporeal body are the key visual language of contemporary politics. We may live in the shadow of an empire of cyber-power with what the German theorist Peter Sloterdijk has described as "terror from the air", but the messianic goals of "total information warfare" are effectively stymied by bombs strapped to bodies of religious and political fighters…the overriding cultural reality is that the image machine is itself haunted by memories of the body: bodies of missing children, crime victims, bodies of those abused, violated, accidented, disappeared. (1)

Kroker's observation truly substantiates the significance of the body over the reality of the machine which overtly seems to be the defining aspect in the present times.

In any genre one can possibly think of, the image of the body happens to be the focal point of conduct. While talking of slave narratives, one cannot possibly avoid the atrocities, fact of discrimination and violence to the oppressed class based on the agency of the body. Kelly Hager brings to light the prime significance that the body enjoys in children literature. Highlighting on the cultural significance of children's literature Hager notes that the "children's culture reveals an overwhelming interest in describing, depicting and reproducing images of the body in order to educate orient, and delight the child

consumer" (17). The close association of the materiality of the body to "social and cultural practices through which identification in particular versions of masculinity are made" (Woodward 202) can possibly lead to the profundity of embodied experiences acting as an agency or a medium to showcase masculinity or gendered differences. The social, cultural, materialistic, symbolic, ideological, realistic consideration of the representation of embodied experiences or the body in particular draws attention towards the nucleus of the body in enabling projection of different strata of meanings and interpretations. In fact, the subject-object parallel applies very well in case of the body where the body embodies in itself various subjective prospective and probabilities. Titaua Porcher-Wiart, while discussing the body or the image of the body in Pacific Francophone literature, remarks on such a quintessential aspect of the body that the body "always refers to an image, an individual or collective projection that reflects all of the meaning contained within it, both consciously and subconsciously" (405). Hence, according Wiart, it becomes quite pertinent to understand the body in connection to "symbolic, social and ideological interpretations … of corporality imparted by human societies" (405). The significance of the body in performance like theatre and dance is also an important area that brings to light the ramifications or implications of the body in terms of art and culture. It becomes quite imperative to consider the pluralities of the body and not to restrict or limit its understandings and potentialities amidst known parameters and confinements. Such is the connotation of the body in different context that it became a metaphor for almost every kind of idiom and incidence. The term 'body politic' refers to such a metaphorical representation of the body in connection to the social, cultural, political, historical, and physiological prevalence.

The term or the concept of 'body politic' was in circulation during the medieval times as a metaphor signifying the political, administrative and governmental implications. The analogy of the body to government was shifted to medical acquaintances during the Renaissance that was very effectively replaced by the indication of disease, death, disorder, chaos and the politics of infections, contagions, plague that promoted or provoked issues of discrimination, eradication and also the idea of the 'other'.

To have a look at the early application of the concept of the body politic, we need to understand Jonathan Gil Harris's political analogy that the concept bore. He accentuates on the "diverse, complex ways in which writers of the period conceived of social structure and process through the prism of the human body" (1). The notion of the body politic was precisely used as a political analogy operating on the foundations of society, sovereignty, constitutional and administrative aspects. One of the very first books on the body politic, *The Book of the Body Politic*, by Christine de Pizan was originally written in French during the Hundred Years War and much later translated in English in the year 1994 provided an array into the administrative politics inclusive of the political vice and virtue as well. The book primarily takes into account the appropriate education and behaviour for princes, nobility and the common people. The book opens accentuating that "Here begins the

Book of the Body Politic which speaks of virtue and manners" (3). The study of the body politic here or its application here has been directly in association with the medieval political theory focussing on social and administrative responsibility and performance. Drawing attention to the use of the body politic in political theory and praxis, Harris emphasizes that:

> Nowadays, it would seem, the body politic is a dead metaphor—or at least one whose descriptive power has become severely attenuated. In late twentieth century Western political discourse, it no longer participates within the elaborate repertoire of correspondences that characterized its use in early modern England. (1)

True to this, however, the metaphorical implication of the body politic in certain works of literature, have very often been understood in terms of the political or the administrative dialogue. In discussing the body politic in *Shakespeare and The Body Politic* (2013), the editors align their line of argument in and around the political or administrative happenings of the time. In their Preface to the book the editors draw attention to the presence of metaphors in most of Shakespeare's poetry and plays that significantly concentrates around the image of the body. Interestingly, the image of the body stands appropriately for the notions of the body politic that symbolizes the propositions of nation-state, administrative laws and functioning of the government:

> Shakespeare's plays and poetry are both timely and timeless because his work prompts thinking about The Body Politic, perhaps the most vivid and enduring image in speech describing political community ever proposed. His contemporary political relevance becomes evident when we reflect on the challenges posed to liberal democracy, especially those challenges that arise from within the form of government and regime itself. (ix-x)

While discussing the metaphor of the body politic Roman Silvani also brings to light the political manifestation of the state and the country in the novels of J.M. Coetzee. The image of the suffering body that most of the novels of Coetzee demonstrates have been read as a replica of the Body Politic in terms of the "socioeconomic, racial and sexual, that is, political oppression have concrete effects on the human body, including ugliness, mutilation, emaciation, cancer, sexual violation, and amputation" (1). The body politic that Silvani unearths in a discussion of Coetzee's novels is enclosed along with the state administrative or governing machinery including its violence, oppression, in the entire "dramatic history of the political emancipation" that South Africa has been going through since decades.

Apart from the affairs of the nation or state machinery the analogy of the body politic has also been analogized with the reality of diseases, infections, affliction and infective agents like virus more than often turning into epidemics and pandemics. The forfeiture or consequences of such pandemics and epidemics can be sensed through the huge loss of

lives and living, bereavement, dissolution and the ultimate probability of doom or an apocalypse.

The analogy of the body politic in the modern times, since the Renaissance particularly, to infections and plagues stands a strong ground of the veracity of pandemics and epidemics on the body. The history of human civilization undoubtedly brings to light the number of epidemics and pandemics that have affected from time to time the foundations of civilization, of living of life. Such an undulation was enabled by the impact of the pandemics on the body—the body that is figuratively and literally connected to life, living, society and hence the civilization. So far the discussion above has revealed the association of the body to several different fields of acquaintances and exercise. From gender, to race, literature, ethnicity, the metaphor of the body offers possibilities of exploration and insight into the bearing of the body. The notion of the body politic that initially was analogous to the system of state political governance and administration and later had been considered analogous to the fact of diseases and pandemics divulges the possibilities of linking the actuality of pandemics and epidemics which are endemic in nature to its ramification in the historical, social and the political spheres of life. It is important in this regard to mention the name and works of Avital Ronell who marked the "ramifications of the politics of the body" (Marder 111). Elissa Marder accentuates:

> For a long time now, over many years and in her many important works…Ronell has been trying to open our ears to the ramifications of the politics of the body. Recent events in world history and science are only confirming what she has been telling us all along. Before AIDS, terrorism, drugs, information technology, and viruses were on everyone's lips, she was turning in to the ways in which the question of the body opens up onto politics, ethics, religion and war. (111)

The fact of contagious diseases has not only remained the domain of scientists and physicians but also constitutes important facets of narratives from the earliest times of the Greco-Roman literature to the modern period where one can find a number of plague narratives and stories on plagues, pandemics and epidemics. In the representation of pandemics in a narrative it is important to note that it is not solely the human body, the anatomy at work but the body politic that is functioning largely. And notably this notion of the body politic from political, administrative theorizing has shifted to the rhetoric of diseases, contagion and infection namely caused by plagues, pandemics or epidemics. The association of the discourse of disease to the body is an area that needs less elucidation. To be very specific it is the body that gets possibly metamorphosed thus representing the multiplicity and plurality of probabilities or hazards that the body normally undergoes during its endurance with infections or diseases. The workings of the perils of diseases or pandemics on the body can be considered from the manifold associations to do with illness, ugliness, death, distancing, or social distancing, discrimination, pain, afflictions, emotion, feeling etc. that are all enacted on the body. Hence the rhetoric of disease or the disease metaphor acquires a very strapping potentiality of impairing the body which is

likely to be felt in every other spheres of life to do with culture, living and civilization. Susan Sontag in her prominent work *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) brings to light the various connotations of disease as metaphor. Susan very aptly discusses the connection between the body in terms of the disease particularly and the mind or the psyche. She discusses in ample length about the analogous connection between disease and the body and the palpable effect it incites. According to Sontag, the body metaphor or the disease metaphor tend to "'mythicize' disease by connecting the physical to the moral and by figuring illness as a mysterious and malevolent 'predator' " (Mitchell np). Sontag's reading of the body politic in association with the disease the body becomes an agency or medium of transition or transformation from physical to spiritual. It is perhaps the body that rationalizes the sense of guilt, pain, illness and death. It is the body or in other words the body politic that promotes the transformation of the metaphors into cultural tropes of guilt and blame that becomes quite pejorative. It is via the deformed or the dying body that one can make sense of the manifestations of guilt and punishment (Vaught np). In fact, it will not be wrong to say based on the discussion above that it is the body politic in connection to diseases and pandemics that also promotes and rationalizes the sense or the veracity of the 'other' by encouraging discrimination based on contagious or infectious disease or in other words the 'contagious body'.

Literature and narratives dating from the classics to the contemporary times have projected the legacies of pandemics and plagues haunting human civilization. In doing so it is of significance to note that the body in the narratives have often been enacted as metaphors or symbols of death, fear, illness, affliction, contagion, infections, discriminations, the other, anxiety, sex, disgrace, humiliation, domination and historical, political, social as well as cultural upheavals. Boccacio's *Decameron* (published in English in 1886, written around 1353), Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), Albert Camus', *The Plague* (1947) have in different ways though, presented or dealt with the rhetoric of the body in its embodied, metaphorical, symbolic and conceptual dimensions. *Legacies of Plague in Literature, Theory and Film* (2009), throws light on the "conceptual and symbolic continuation" of the disease or the plague "from the time of the final Western European outbreak in 1720 to the present day" and not on the medical reality (Cooke 1). The pathological aspect or the disease which the plague and pandemic narratives usually portrayed where more in keeping line with the social, political, conceptual or psychological realities that the body had to undergo. It was never alone the disease or the infection that the narratives embodied rather a play of the intricacies and complexities that the body as a metaphor articulated.

Covid-19 or the Coronavirus pandemic in the words and analysis of Slavoj Žižek is a pandemic in which "hands cannot reach the other person; it is only from within that we can approach one another" (1-2). In other words, Covid-19 has shaped and promoted an environment in which physical intimacy has been completely shunned and proximity is

encouraged in terms of feelings and realization. However, true to its very nature, pandemics and epidemics functioning upon the body have always dejected bodily or physical contact and touch. It cannot be denied that the discourse the entire pandemic has fashioned is fabricated on the body politic. It is the body politic that articulates the discourse of the contagious disease or the pathology in terms of social, psychological, economic and political aspects. It will not be too farfetched to say that the implication of the disease turns out understandable through the rhetoric of the body or in other words the body politic that stands analogous or is a metaphor for the disease or the pandemic crisis.

As has been discussed above, the substance of literary theory has always been realized and determined by the gravest concerns of the time. Instead of being blessed by technological advancements in almost every field of life, including medicines and physiology, the present time couldn't prevent itself from being a prey to the pandemic.

The Covid-19 crisis apart from the physical deterioration has instigated an atmosphere of fear, apprehension, vertical discrimination and absolute uncertainty that one cannot help but consider it a catastrophe which is the most serious happening or issue of the period. The seriousness of the incidence becomes all the more palpable through the metaphor of the body politic. In the present state of affairs it is quite important that body politic in terms of the pandemic finds its application in literary theory. It is important to note that in the present context it will be quite difficult and out of context to persist any discussion or discourse in literary theory without taking into account or bereft of the application of the play of the body politic and the Covid-19 crisis or pandemic. Notably it is not just the body—or the human body that can surmount literary analysis in the pandemic crisis. It has to be the body politic at work. The application of the body politic in literary theory would enable articulating the discourses of the disease or the pandemic bringing forward the different implications that the pandemic might bear or has borne. The metaphor of the body or the body politic would be quite imperative to discern the various sensations and meanings that the pandemic or the plague narrative embodies and it would be significant to understand those issues in terms of the play of the body politic as a literary theoretical formulation.

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RE-READING CAMUS' *THE PLAGUE* AMIDST THE GRIM GAME OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

N Suman Shelly

"Epidemics are a category of disease that seem to hold up the mirror to human beings as to who we really are." -- Frank M. Snowden[1]

Millions of deaths have been encountered from pestilence in the human history. Though the twenty-first century has the potential to battle out several infectious diseases, there are yet numerous scientific challenges which are very serious and pave way for new risks. For example, many effective methods of treatment have been researched in order to battle against the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in 1981. Nevertheless, we have been unequal to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes AIDS even after decades of research, and the virus has devoured 30 million lives worldwide. Further, the dogged intransigent behaviour of the virus to the science invites new threats. The continuous encroachment by global development and technological expansion on the natural environment is of vital concern today. It is because there are an estimated 1.67 millions of unknown viruses in animals and in natural bed which have the potential of an epidemic or a pandemic and thus, getting transmitted from the environment to the humans, most likely escalating through the global livestock population. Dr. Anthony Fauci, one of the foremost U.S. government infectious disease expert, who was offered podium time on Covid- 19 by Trump in a disinclined manner, spoke in a CBC News interview nearly a couple of years back, " I always say… nature is potentially the worst bioterrorist". Moreover, modern transportation connects billions of people over oceans and continents, increasing the vulnerability in terms of its activation and spread. This reminds me of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* who being the highest citizen and should have been a role model commits a serious crime. As a result of which the people suffer without being responsible for the crime. This suffering, immorality and spiritual corruption that pervaded out of such consequences led to the outbreak of plague. This is definitely not a cause but a consequence. Therefore, it triggers to one of the vital questions— to what extend is a pandemic, the consequence of our assault on the environment and the natural processes of life? Well, interpretations are open.

Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1948), *La Pesta* (1947) in original French, discusses the bubonic plague in the city of Oran on Algerian Mediterranean coast. The outbreak lasted for a year, creating havoc at all the levels. Born in 1913 to parents of French descent in Algeria, Camus studied philosophy, and was actively associated in theatre, journalism and activism on anti- colonial left. In due course, he shifted to France where he wrote *The Plague* while he was living in the Alps because of his ill health due to tuberculosis. In Paris he completed as he moved there as a journalist for an underground paper associated with the French resistance during the Second World War. Being a dedicated journalist, activist, playwright, author and philosopher, Camus established critical discourses between

Marxism and existentialism and manufactured a frame-work that echoes pacifism, moral dignity and anarchism. He was a controversial writer who has first- hand experience of the disease, subjugation and resistance.

Camus' epigraph in *The Plague* too alludes to Daniel Defoe. In his seminal book *The Journal of the Plague Year* (1772), Daniel Defoe, had written for the future: "I have set this particular down so fully, because I know not but it may be of moment to those who come after me, if they come to be brought to the same distress." Camus takes the cue from Defoe, but allegorically attributes the Nazis to be the perpetrators of plague and the rationing, the quarantine as the result of the epidemic. And he draws a parallel between the epidemic and the dictatorial rules imposed while Nazi occupation of Paris during the Second World War. The epigraph reads, "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not" (Camus, 1). These are the lines that have been quoted from the *Preface to Volume III of Robinson Crusoe*. Camus' idea of existence is constantly interrogated just to represent the authority of his reasonableness so that, the subjectivity of his perception of plague could be thoroughly accepted.

Camus' visionary chronicle of life in the midst of an epidemic functions at different levels. *The Plague* is a clear analogy of the Nazi occupation on France which begun in Spring 1940. Camus' experiences have been admired for his revolt against the 'brown plague of fascism'. The title of the novel itself speaks volumes about the manner in which the Nazi schemed in order to execute their target just like the bubonic plague. The dark clouds and the gloomy silhouette of the then and still not long ago holocaust has blacken the pages of *The Plague*. The present morbid context of Covid-19 has Oranian resonances of the collective graves being dug in order to dump thousands of dead bodies. In this regard, even Boccaccio in his *The Decameron* (1886) while discussing the Black Death that struck Italy mentions about the multitude of corpses heaped in layers within vast trenches just the way goods are piled up inside a ship. Another interesting coincidence with pandemic is the arc of time he mentions:

> ...what more can be said save that... so great was the cruelty of heaven (and in part, peradventure, that of men) that, between March and the following July, what with the virulence of that pestiferous sickness and the number of sick folk ill tended or forsaken in their need, through the fearfulness of those who were whole, it is believed for certain that upward of an hundred thousand human beings perished within the walls of the city of Florence, which peradventure, before the advent of that death-dealing calamity, had not been accounted to hold so many...(10)

Camus' style as defined in *The Plague* generates a sense of terror and anxiety among people, accommodating themselves in the rally to encounter and eradicate the coronavirus along with the world leaders. Through the narration one can clearly identify the similitude with the twenty-first century pandemic's ground zero, Wuhan, China, and

the doctors, medical experts and policy makers who have launched several safety measures against Covid-19 pandemic.

The Plague has its setting in the north-western city of Oran (Wahran) in Algeria. It is the city he loved to reside in along with his wife Francine. They both had vacated the city of Algiers for a proscribed love in Oran. Camus cautioned mankind and the world leaders, after defeating fascism in Europe with an intention that may the world be in a better and healthy condition paving way for prosperity, but his warning has a huge point in itself about the operation of the bubonic plague in Oran and the social injustice that wrecked the Kabyline region in the great famine in mid- 1930s. Camus for the first time protested and drafted a report on the dictatorial colonist policies that threw him out to France and broke him temporarily from journalism. Later, he published *The Stranger* (1946) which focused on the Westerners massacring the Easterners for no reason. Nevertheless, there are deeper and stronger reasons in order to represent *The Plague* as a reflection of Covid-19 and much more than a pandemic. The struggle that Camus has faced in his lifetime as an adolescent and a youth rebel in Algeria and France is beyond that of pestilence; it is both moral and metaphorical in deeper sense. Therefore, what would *The Plague* signal now for the general public and politicians, who have in a very tragic manner failed in the management of public health in such a critical situation? This is something very important to ponder on. In the contemporary times, *The Plague* ascertains the story rather of a divergent kind of plague i.e. of devastating materialism and its requisites that both the Western and Eastern societies must adhere to. For instance, one of the deadliest predicaments of Algerian post- modern history is they adhering to the Red decade of dystopian groups' terrorism and tragedy of state counter-terrorism acts in 1992 to 2000. In spite of its devastating after-effects, there was re-assurances to stand firm and together as one. Regrettably, it rather paved way for torpidity, clogging the roads to a brighter future, and manifested corruption of the law system throughout the couple of decades. As a contradiction, a cholera outbreak hit Blida and the neighbouring provinces in summer 2018. Interestingly, the city called as 'the city of roses' is an irony in itself. The epidemic had risen due to the dirty and unhygienic streets across the province and within the city, and the main cause for it to spread is the lack of understanding about the transmission of cholera. In recent times, people too are so casual and insensitive about Covid- 19 aggravation which proves to be nothing other than sheer stupidity. The lines from chapter 5 justifies thus, "When a war breaks out, people say, 'It's too stupid; it can't last long.' But though a war may well be too stupid, that doesn't prevent its lasting." (Camus, 35)

Camus' novel discuss about a society where the gluttonous leaders completely ignore millions of migrants having left on their own miseries across the globe. They are dying in the waters and the desert in search of a better life which transpires nothing except unfulfilled promises. Camus never distinguished between the vacuities that are the nucleus of iniquitous politics and in the tragedy of morality.

But why does *The Plague* cacophonously echoes to us today? Human beings have done many things in a tempestuous time like Covid-19 in order to distract themselves from social behavior, but in reality it is a herculean task to isolate oneself while struggling within the tragedy. In many cases, it has resulted in mental and psychological cripple. This also alludes to Boccaccio's discussion on the isolationist measures and his observation of acute fearfulness. The characters of *The Decameron* seem to have engulfed in a tapestry of hope. Isolation seems to be the only means to assemble human misfortune, subsume it and therefore, justify it.

Human mind very quickly responds to image and imagination. Is it able to dig out and dichotomize the indications of good and evil? If so, why would human beings have to be isolated? We need to open up to a new thought process which requires a target in mind and its manifestation through activity for the safe-keeping of the poor and voiceless, it can be the migrant labourers for that matter, blooming as a call for the new world order. In this light, Camus speaks about justice and his mother, "...I prefer my mother." It was said with reference to the liberation war in Algeria that took place against France i.e. Camus' motherland and Algerians clarified that they had enough of epidemics and social injustice. Later, the existential question of France's future in Algeria, having challenged by the patriots upon France's colonialism in Algeria became a principal doctrine of evolutionary humanism which Jean Paul Satre, Camus' friend set against his idealism and romanticism. Camus was left with one option- either to choose good for his place of birth or choose good against the injustice of his imaginary homeland (French military unit).

Today, every state is busy for the preparation of all possibilities in order to combat the spread of Covid- 19 pandemic, which 'one day' they would surely overcome with unanimity, discipline and forbearance. Though politics remains unmasked and ungloved, yet the combatants of the world are desperately wearing masks and gloves to fight out this invisible might while clutched within the terror of socio- economic misery and the plagues of political iniquities.

India too is in a lock- down mode. Migrant labourers in India walked hundreds of kilometers pathetically carrying their paltry luggages and starving children on shoulders or sometimes dragging them in the scathing heat just to reach home. In the mean time, the moment the government announced a lockdown throughout the country amidst the Covid pandemic made their situation more vulnerable. The migrant workers were thrown out of their jobs and further, from rented houses too for being unable to pay their rents. In the process, their meagre earnings began to slowly get over. The transportation facilities having shut down left no other options for them than to walk hundreds of kilometers. Amidst the terror of all these, their choices were constricted between the death and the deep sea, between starvation and pandemic. India has not registered such a miserable mass migration since the partition. In this regard Utsa Sarmin writes in her article,

Along with bearing the physical exertion, these workers had to shield themselves from continuous assault from police… in many places lathi-charged the marching workers and humiliated them by making them doing sit-ups while holding their ears…. Ranveer Singh, a 38 year-old migrant worker from Maharastra, who worked as a delivery boy for a restaurant in Delhi, was the first one who lost his life, not because of corona virus but because of the toll of walking hundreds of kilometers without food and shelter (Sarmin, 50).

Nevertheless, in order to re-map the boundaries of this pandemic having captured scenes of sufferings of those migrant workers, it is necessary to ask certain important questions—what are the reasons behind these lengthy marches? How does caste, race, gender, and other fissures functions within the framework of government in order to subsist this pandemic? If the battle against an epidemic is equal to a war, what are the forces of power at play in this battle against the pandemic? What exactly explicates this unanticipated visibility of the migrant workers in this time of a predicament?

Unquestioningly, Camus has incorporated the inhabitants of Oran who act jointly in his novel, but when the doom nears, there is a loss of hope and encouragement. The earlier belief about the plague being less dangerous and to last for a very short span turns upside down by the end of the novel. This whole notion is replaced by a sombre realism. Ultimately, they realize that this web of death and austerity which entangled Oran is not getting out of hand and disappearing in the near future. Our own pandemic is infusing similar kind of realism. Even after months of lockdown, still there are religious, political, economical and social constraints in order to return back to the old pattern overtaking the public health officials' scientific advice. Further, the media is acting as a catalyst to these constraints including politicians who are ready to play the grim game using this life-threatening situation and the rising death tolls for their own political gain. And amidst all these, we land on the belief of getting what we hope for. Such kind of a hope only makes one either to hold on to the past or fancy a future in mind preventing us from the present day reality. Therefore, the main objective is not only to combat the pandemic but to acknowledge the jeopardy of human beings confronting with the world because hope at times can create false expectations which leads to disaster. Camus was never dispirited. Acknowledging the prowling jeopardy and its grave mediocrity should not be the reason for distress. The lines from chapter 5 reads thus:

> A pestilence isn't a thing made to man's measure; therefore we tell ourselves that a pestilence is a mere bogey of the mind, a bad dream that will pass away. But it doesn't always pass away and from one bad dream to another, it is men who pass away…
> (Camus, 35)

It is important to acknowledge the battle against this unseen enemy and its exemplifications because in the process it will help us realize that there is a greater battle going on which centers in our grounds of existence against the trials and tribulations of

the world; something intense and authentic that one must hold on to in life's journey rather than something peripheral and spurious. In this regard, Dr. Matthew R. John reviews,

Camus challenges our predisposition to attribute humanness to all events, including calamities, and to deny vehemently the possibility of such events escalating into proportions fully beyond the scope of human imagination. He urges us to drop wishful thinking and self- denial of reality. In the initial chapters Camus locates Oran in a wider historical landscape by detailing some previously occurred plagues in the history. This includes historical accounts of Justinian Plague of Constantinople, the Black Death of Marseilles, the Great Plague of London, the Great Plague of Milan and the Plague of Athens. Further, Camus discusses the reoccurrences of such plagues in the future. There are even biblical allusions to Moses' time providing a wide historical angle which researchers believe to be possibly one of the causes for the spread of infections during the ten plagues of Egypt. And thus, that came out to be known as the fifth, sixth and seventh plague:

> This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth (Exodus 9: 13-15)[2].

We also, for that matter, remember the Spanish Flu in the nearest past that occurred in 1916 and lasted till 1920 and took nearly 14-17 million lives throughout the country. Now, this whole picture provides a pattern of understanding a calamity instead of thinking it to be an extraordinary threat, unparalleled ever in history. The present corona virus pandemic has consumed everything, leaving no room except to have soaked in morbid thoughts while living in the shadow of this virus. Thus, through Dr. Rieux, one of Camus' masterstrokes, he leaves an important message which we would otherwise overlook. The final lines of the novel justifies the idea,

> He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city. (Camus, 297)

In fact Dr. Rieux diagnoses the plague victims, a day after the epidemic strikes and isolates them from the rest of the population. He gives them medical treatment and observes them deteriorate and die. In the process, while witnessing this reality, he struggles within; sometimes he fails to bear though the same situation occurs a multiple

number of times. It is just like the mythical Sisyphus who rolls a boulder stone up the hill just to roll it down each evening. In his powerful essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus debates that we must perceive ourselves as Sisyphus and "imagine Sisyphus happy". Through the character of Dr. Rieux, we understand that it is much more important to confront the reality of the pandemic rather than overcoming it. When asked, "Who taught you all this, doctor?" He punctually replies, "Suffering". (Camus, 124) Dr. Rieux is conscious about the world which is unreliable for our aspirations. Comprehending the countless risks, one accepts perpetual battle embracing the human conditions and thus, lives perfectly. In the present times, struggle and rebellion against this pandemic is though difficult yet not impossible because it is no more antagonistic.

For Camus, rebellion is not a test of super human strength; it instead brings out the best of people—their compassion, loyalty, drive, and ingenuity. Dr Rieux cannot fight the plague alone—he needs the help of others (Winter, 560). Amidst the bubonic plague, Dr Rieux advances more deeply towards humanity. He learns friendship from Tarrou, resistance from Castel, faith from Paneloux, perseverance from Grand, and compassion from Rambert. Therefore, perseverance, compassion, resistance are no longer options; they are virtues aqnd values learnt and cultivated sedulously in hard times.

Notes

1. See Frank the Q & A session between Frank M. Snowden and Issac Chotiner. https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/how-pandemics-change-history

   Also see, M. Snowden's Interview by Roge Karma. https://www.vox.com/2020/4/10/21213287/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-epidemic-society-historian-nationalism-globalization

2. See Exodus 13 of the *Holy Bible* (The New International Version) which summarizes as "The Hail of Plague". The whole story references back to the Old Testament. Since, the Egyptian King Pharaoh was determined enough not to let the Israelites (the chosen people of God) go (and set them free) under the leadership of Moses, God decided to strike Egypt with the worst hail storm in the history i.e. the seventh plague of hail. This again has inflections to the capital crime of the Holy Bible mentioned in the Old Testament-- 'the disobedience to God' which also has a reference in the New Testament, Roman 6: 23, 'For the wages of sin is death.' (Disobedience being the capital sin in this case.)

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PROLETARIAN VISION OF SOCIETY AND REVOLUTION, PATHOLOGICAL CLASS HATRED AND ANTI-PROLETARIAN VIOLENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF JACK LONDON'S *THE IRON HEEL*

Prakash Joshi

The word *proletariat* carries a huge baggage of political and sociological connotations and implications, which precisely is the reason why the word continued to wield immense revolutionary firepower for more than a century and a half from around 1790s to around 1950s. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that the word in its original Roman sense referred to "the poor landless freemen" who "played an important role, not as an independent force, but as a mass following", who had "little opportunity for productive work", and "whose existence was largely parasitic on the Roman economy" (Proletariat). However, the revolutionary thinkers of the 19th Century who appropriated the word invested in it all that it means and connotes for us today. An instance of the word *proletariat* getting its new meaning, for example, is there in the very well known *The Communist Manifesto*. After having spoken of the bourgeoisie as a class originating from the "serfs of the Middle Ages", after having explained the class of the bourgeoisie as "the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange", and after having credited the class of the bourgeoisie for having "played the most revolutionary role in history", the *Manifesto* blames the same class for having created "agglomerated population, centralized means of production" and "concentrated property in a few hands" (Marx and Engels 9, 10, 11, 13). The *Manifesto* then speaks of the rise of the bourgeoisie causing a proportionate rise of the proletariat, which it describes as "the modern working class", the "class of labourers…who must sell themselves piecemeal" like "a commodity" or "every other article of commerce", a class driven to precarious economic margins because of industrialization making it "an appendage to machines" (Marx and Engels 15, 16).

As the word gathered its all new meaning and its all new significations in an all new modern society, there also steadily grew a philosophy to support and analyze the new meaning and the new significations of the word. Scholars have termed the philosophy the *proletarian philosophy*. This philosophy is essentially modernist in its character and rejects the traditional religious worldview about the happening and proliferation of life on the earth as "miraculous acts of creation" and introduces the idea that life is "produced and exterminated by slowly acting and still existing causes" (Darwin 427). By its very character, therefore, proletarian philosophy is revolutionary; and its revolutionary character gets more entrenched because the proletarian philosophers have generally been "vindictive and militant" in their theorizing on society and also because proletarian literature has been seen as "not only about the people, but by and for them too." (Rée 136, 137). The philosophy earns its visible revolutionary contours in the writings of Marxian and related

schools, but it borrows its theoretical revolutionary base from the social thought of Rousseau, who lived much closer — both spatially and temporally — to the French Revolution. Without much effort, one can see the connection between the proletarian revolutions and Rousseau's explication of the conflict that exists and persists between what he calls the 'partial will' and the 'general will'. Rousseau thinks of 'general will' as the will of the society as a whole, and of 'partial will' as the will of a group within a society. Speaking of the hierarchical structure of society, Rousseau says in chapter iii of *The Social Contract*, "[t]he stronger party is never strong enough to remain the master for ever, unless he transforms his strength into right, and obedience into duty" (Rousseau 48). Just a few lines later, Rousseau brings in the crucial argument about the element of uncertainty being inherent in the right-by-strength to rule: "For as soon as right is founded on force, the effect will alter with its cause; any force that is stronger than the first must have right on its side in its turn" (48). It is here in this open uncertainty and in this shifty character of the right-by-strength to rule that the idea of revolution can be seen embedded. If strength and force can legitimize the right to rule, the proletariat stands vindicated and justified in their ways to acquire strength and force, and thereby acquire the right to rule. Arguing along this vein, one would start seeing an interesting connection between the French Revolution towards the end of the 18th Century on the one hand and the early 20th Century Proletariat revolutions, the most notable of which was the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. When he observes that "Rousseau has a necessary connection" with the French Revolution and that "Marx cannot be read apart from the history of the labour movement and other revolutionary or reformist movements before and after the Soviet Revolution", Balibar underlines the connection between the "impact of Rousseauism and Marxism in their respective centuries" in terms of the "conceptual power" and the "controversial legacies" the two isms have had in their own times (ix, viii). One can see, thus, a direct line of development from Rousseau to Marx in the context of revolutionary Proletarian Philosophy.

This is how and where we come to talk of revolutions such as ensued Marxian writings, which are the revolutions drawing their double justification from Rousseau's idea of the right-by-strength to rule and from Marxian idea of social justice. Revolutions to overthrow governments and conspiracy to beget revolutions have been justified mainstream ideas in Socialist canon right from the beginning of modern socialist movements starting in late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The essential connection between the two — revolution and conspiracy — in socialist canon right from the beginning gets a good explanation in the third volume of *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* by Hal Draper. He refers to Babeuf's "Conspiracy of Equals" and then to the "Secret Directorate of the Babouvist movement" in late 18th Century France, and writes about the movement's "basic formulation" that one of the possible measures "the revolutionary authority" should take is "the creation of a dictatorship" (Draper 29, 30, 31). Revolution, conspiracy and dictatorship, thus, are interrelated mainstream ideas in socialist discourse. Socialist theory, thus, has a programme drawing its legitimation simultaneously from the internal logic of its

ideological base and from the external logic of its view of society. The socialist view of society is the view in which "the economic affairs of the society belong to the public and not to the private sphere"; or, to put it more precisely, the socialist view of society would necessarily" designate an institutional pattern in which the control over means of production and over production itself is vested with a central authority" (Schumpeter 167). Judging from their own point of view, socialists would think of a society as diseased if it is based on private ownership of the means of production and of property. Socialist ideology would therefore stop at nothing short of achieving the final goal of getting in place a government of the proletariat in order to redeem what in its ideological framework is a diseased society. Driven by the logic of its principles and by its view of society, the socialist ideology would justify itself in an aggressive, and even violent, pursuit of the implementation of its programme.

As has been evidenced by scores of revolutionary movements in the past 250 odd years, the socialist pursuit and the resistance to it — both — have a strong possibility of turning violent and pathological. Though fictive, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* in a way exposes that possibility in a graphic and rather horrifying way. One shouldn't assume, however, that Jack London was in any manner presenting an anti-socialist story in the novel. On the contrary, the novel has generally been identified as a fictional dystopian narrative presenting thoughts and ideas from an extreme socialist perspective. Though it has had its share controversy for having plagiarized "verbatim from an essay by the English journalist Frank Harris" and also for being "tedious and absurd", the novel was rated by George Orwell as "a remarkable insight into fascism" and has recently been seen by some as an "alarmingly contemporary" and an "eerily prescient analysis" of socialist "attitudes and ideas" in the decades following it (Jordison). For a novel, *The Iron Heel* has an unusual outward structure because of what it is presented as and how it is presented. The answers to the 'what' and the 'how', both, are there in the Foreword of the novel. The first thing the Foreword does is to state that the narrative is in fact the "Everhard Manuscript", which is a deficient "historical document" because "it bristles with errors — not errors of fact, but the errors of interpretation" (ix). The Foreword finds "inestimable value" in the Manuscript as a personal document", though with "error of perspective" along with "vitiation due to the bias of love" noticeable in it (ix). Though it speaks of the Manuscript as a chronicle of events from a single sided interpretation and a presentation of the hero from the perspective of a lover, the Foreword, however, discovers in it a truthful and vivid portrayal of "the psychology of the persons who lived in that turbulent period embraced between the years 1912 and 1932 — their mistakes and ignorance, their doubts and fears and misapprehensions, their ethical delusions, their violent passions, their inconceivable sordidness and selfishness" (x). Within the fictional narrative of the Manuscript, that is the novel *The Iron Heel*, the period from 1912 to 1932 is the period of two Socialist Revolts in the United States of America. The nature of the Manuscript and the events described in it create one dimension of the unusualness of the outward structure of the novel. But, more interestingly, it is the Foreword itself that is more unusual for the reason that it

comes from a fictional scholar writing it 700 years after the fictional Second Revolt in the Manuscript. The date of the Foreword, as given by its fictional writer Anthony Meredith, is 419 BOM, which would stand for the year 419 in the Brotherhood of Man Calendar that Jack London, like many other socialists, believed would be the new calendar of the new socialist world order after the discontinuation of the Gregorian Calendar. The year, as we can deduce from the concluding part of the Foreword by the fictional Anthony Meredith, is the year of or around the discovery of the Everhard Manuscript "seven long centuries" after it was written and hid "in the heart of the ancient oak at Wake Robin Lodge" (xiv). A small calculation, thus, places the first publication of the Manuscript around the year 2632 CE. So, here is Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, published in the year 1908 CE but fictionally declared as first published in the year 419 BOM, which is roughly the year 2632 CE — around six centuries in the future from our time here and now. Throughout, the novel has footnotes speaking of the Christian Era as in the past, suggesting repeatedly that the Era was long over and belonged only to history.

The novel is a narration by and from the perspective of Avis Everhard, Avis Cunningham before her marriage to Earnest Everhard, the hero. Though not done and not suggested by the narrator, it is in the interest of our analysis to see the novel as coming to us in two parts in terms of the development of action — from Chapter I to XII, and from Chapter XIII to the end in Chapter XXV. The Chapters have names too; and all of them stand in full sequential order, with every latter chapter following every former in time and in consequence. Yet, the end of the first part, Chapter XII, is not the climax or the turning point, as it generally happens in traditional-classical narrative structures. In the linear progress of the narrative, the first twelve chapters bring up a detailed subjective appraisal of Earnest Everhard and, alongside, describe the slow building up of the circumstances for the 'General Strike' that Chapter XIII mentions. From the 'General Strike' to the 'Nightmare' in Chapter XXIV, it is a continuum right up to the failure of the Second Revolt crushed by the Iron Heel in brutal retribution, "shaking up the whole fabric of the social structure in its search for comrades" and "punishing without mercy and without malice" (353). The last chapter, 'The Terrorists', is a brief and incomplete sketch of the aftermath.

The central interest in the first part is Earnest Everhard and his entire being — his distinctive physical characteristics, his representation and championship of the working class, his active involvement in and his commitment to Socialist Revolution, his intellect, his prolific reading and no less prolific writing, and his socialist theory and convictions that come out in his speeches. The very first mention of him in the novel, unfolding in the manner of reminiscence, is significantly couched in a powerful metaphor — "my Eagle, beating with tireless wings the void, soaring toward what was ever his sun, the flaming ideal of human freedom" (02). On the one hand, the metaphor delineates the nature of the association between the 'Eagle', the hero Earnest, and the narrator — the wife and beloved lover and admirer and a fellow revolutionary. And on the other hand, the metaphor brings to mind the image of the Great Seal of the United States of America, with the Eagle as the

emblematic presentation of the ideals of the great nation. In the introductory passages of the novel, the narrator speaks of him as "a Superman, a blond beast such as Nietzsche has described" (06). The reference the narrator is making is to the Overman that Nietzsche describes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Speaking through the prophet Zarathustra, Nietzsche calls Overman the consequence of an evolution that will make "the human" look like the ape, and, therefore, "a laughing stock" to the Overman (Nietzsche 06). His Overman belongs entirely — soul, mind and body — to our planet; he is "the meaning of the earth" and is "this lightning" and "this madness" (Nietzsche 6, 7). Explaining the concept in the Introduction of this fresh translation of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* being cited here, Robert Pippin writes that Nietzsche's Overman is "virtually a new species" resulting from "an epochal transition from mere human being" and that he "is genuinely self-transcending and can overcome himself" (x, xxvi).

So, here is this Earnest Everhard, who for the narrator is a Nietzschean 'Superman' breathing 'the meaning of the earth'. Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a prophet communicating his prophecy of the Overman to the people; and Earnest Everhard of *The Iron Heel* is a messenger — a visionary — communicating to the people his vision of the future. The future he envisions is the future dawning after the end of feudalistic systems and 'giantcombinations', which in the language of commerce of our time are known as 'international corporations'. That is the future of mankind as conceived in the proletarian vision of the Brotherhood of Man. In the opening scene of the novel, which is a "preacher's night" dinner hosted by the narrator's father at their "house in Berkley", he is introduced as a guest right "in the midst of the churchmen" (4). It is a telling incongruity: he is a "member of the working class", an "ex-horseshoer" with his "bulging muscles and bull throat" (05); and the churchmen have their hands "soft with the work others have performed" for them, and their "stomachs are round with the plentitude of eating" (21). The incongruity runs deeper and starker at intellectual and philosophical levels: he is a "working-class philosopher" (06), and the churchmen are, in the words of Earnest, "metaphysicians" who live in a "cosmos" of their "own making", shaped out of their "own fancies and desires" (08). What Earnest notices in their thinking is a thinking that is the opposite of scientific reasoning. Scientific reasoning, Earnest says, is reasoning from "facts to theory", while metaphysical reasoning is just the reverse — reasoning from "theory to facts" (10). Since we are looking at the novel as based on and building up on the proletarian revolt against the exploitative feudal systems and capitalist business corporations, the first scene for us brings up the first clean victory of proletarian philosophy and sociology over the ecclesiastical. The former of the two is a pragmatic and scientific philosophy and sociology meant for the man on earth, and the latter is an abstract and metaphysical philosophy and sociology meant, perhaps, for angels. Of course, Earnest, the champion of that philosophy, is the hero of the victory, as he is of the one following a little later.

Earnest's second victory, however, is at the thematic core of the novel — a rumbling, boiling and turbulent core. This is a cleaner victory, and more resounding and more meaningful and symptomatic of the action to follow in the second (thematic) half of the novel; and this is a victory against what can be called the typical and actual capitalist class. Going by the description of it by the narrator, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the victory comes at the battle royal at a specially organized event of the "Philomath Club", which is a club exclusively comprising of "the wealthiest in the community, and the strongest-minded of the wealthy, with, of course, a sprinkling of scholars to give it intellectual tone" (73). This battle royal of Earnest is against the most fearsome representative of the feudalistic capitalist class — Colonel Van Gilbert, who is "a great corporation lawyer" and can twist and mould law "like a Chinese puzzle into any design" he chooses (76). Of course, this jugglery with the law, the moulding and twisting Van Gilbert does is for the advantage of rich business corporations. As an invited speaker, an outsider at this meeting of the club, Earnest carries out a startling exposé of the duplicity, hypocrisy and grave exploitative methods of the big business organizations. The "members of the upper class", he says, surprise him by "the commonness of the clay", and adds without mincing words that he is "appalled by the selfishness" he has encountered among them and has been "shocked by the intellectual stupidity of the master class" (80). He exposes them all — the gentlemen who work as dummy directors and tools of "the corporations that secretly robbed widows and orphans", the patrons of literature who "paid blackmail to municipal machine", the editors who wouldn't print the truth in their publications, the people talking of "idealism and the goodness of God" while betraying their "comrades in a business deal", the people who are pillars of the church and yet contribute to foreign missions keeping their shop girls on "a starvation wage and thereby directly" encouraging prostitution, the people who have "endowed chairs in universities and erected magnificent chapels" perjuring themselves "in courts of law over dollars and cents", the railroad magnates granting "many secret rebates", and the senators and governors and supreme court judges who are tools and slaves to the "brutal uneducated" machine bosses and ride on "railroad passes" (81-82). To sum it all up, he calls the world of capitalists "the arid desert of commercialism" where there is "nothing but stupidity except for business" and where none is clean and noble and alive except "with rottenness" (82). As can well be expected, the exposé, though stark and brutal, doesn't shake and stir the gathering of the rich at the meeting. What shakes and alarms them is Earnest's talk of revolution — the talk of "an army of revolution twenty five million strong" that would aim to take in their "hands the reins of power and the destiny of mankind" (83).

There is a clear influence of Herbert Spencer, the 19th Century British Sociobiologist, in Earnest's arguments in both of his speeches — the first at the dinner at the house of John Cunningham, the narrator's father and a professor at the State University at Berkeley, and the second at the Philomath Club. In the course of the former, he identifies philosophy as "the widest science of all" that "fuses all particular sciences into one great science" (11). As he does so, he mentions and acknowledges Herbert Spencer as the source of his

understanding of philosophy. He actually cites Spencer when he finally defines philosophy as "the science of science, the master science" (11). As he fairly acknowledges, Earnest's indebtedness to him is obvious as we read Herbert Spencer writing of "the truths of philosophy" bearing "the same relation to highest scientific truths, that each of these bears to lower scientific truths", and adding that "[s]cience is *partially-unified* knowledge" and that "[p]hilosophy is *completely-unified* knowledge" (Spencer 115). In his second speech, at the club, Earnest again harks back to Herbert Spencer's sociobiology while speaking of socialist revolution. Earnest's feeling about revolution as imminent is based on, however remotely, on Spencer's evolutionary view of social organizations. Elaborating the evolutionary motion in the organization of society in the chapter titled 'Equilibration' in *First Principles*, the sociobiologist avers that social forces always strive towards a state of equilibrium (Spencer 459-60). We notice almost the same idea of 'equilibration' heavily characterizing Earnest's view of the evolutionary progress of a society towards achieving its final equilibrium in socialism. Explaining his view to his fellow revolutionists later, he says that society "flows from competition to combination, and from little combination to large combination, and from large combination to colossal combination, and it flows on to socialism" (141).

There is an unmistakable emotive turn in Earnest Everhard's revolutionary speech at the Club, both in its tone and in the phraseology employed. The emotive turn is understandable because "calls for revolution, whether democratic, socialist, or nationalist, tend to be written in the language of emotions" (Hake 01). His speech, being a call or an announcement of revolution, draws heavily on "proletarian imaginary", in which "democracy usually means the rejection of liberalism and individualism as enabling conditions of modern capitalism and the formulation of radical alternatives in the context of the workers' movement" (Hake 02). As Earnest announces the proletarian programme to wrest power from the rich — "to take your governments, your palaces, and all your purples ease away from you" — he echoes the Marxist idea and justification of the socialist coup (83). Karl Marx wrote, "...every class which is struggling for mastery, even when its domination, as in the case with the proletariat, postulates the abolition of the old form of society in its entirety and mastery itself, must conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest..." (qtd. in Draper 112). As can be seen, Earnest's bold announcement of "twenty five million strong army of revolution" is so much in line with Marxist insistence on the necessity of controlling political power in the interest of the success of the socialist programme (83).

The very next chapter, Chapter VI, brings about a turn in the narrative with the "warnings of coming events" beginning to "fall about thick and fast" (100). Obviously, this is a turn towards the worst — the worst that comes up in the latter half of the novel. For the narrator and for Earnest, her beloved lover, the warnings come in the form of what the university authorities suggest to her father, a professor. The authorities of the university want him to keep off "the socialists and radicals", and also suggest that his daughter, Avis

— our narrator — shouldn't be seen with "so notorious a character" as Earnest (103). As of now, for the reader it is only a distant feel of the 'iron heel' soon to come down in full force to crush whatever is in its way. This is also the stage in the narrative where the pathological condition of the society begins to reveal itself. We have already seen the first glimpses of the pathological condition, the malaise, in the preceding chapter. And this is the condition and malaise of hatred that the rich bear toward the working class. We have seen that malaise of hatred in the way Van Gilbert introduces Earnest as the speaker at the Philomath Club meeting and in the manner he reacts to Earnest's arguments. Since it is almost customary to think of human society as a living organism, its ailments too can be discussed and diagnosed as pathological conditions. Diseases of different kinds affect societies in different stages. For example, writing in 2017, R. C. Smith in his book S*ociety and Social Pathology* speaks of the society of our time as "ailing" and "caught in a pathological cycle of ritual social crises" that have "much to do with "economics, politics and one's larger social environment" (01). A better explanation of the idea comes later in a long quote of Milena Büchs cited in the same book:

> The concept of social pathology applies the medical metaphor to describe and explain
> social problems. From this perspective those individuals and groups who deviate from
> social norms, or institutions that do not fit with core social, are "sick" or pathologic and a risk to the society's "health."... The concept is closely related to those of social disorganization and deviance... When the concept of social pathology became famous, many authors using this concept also applied Darwinist and evolutionary models to the analysis of the society (qtd. in Smith 46).

Taking our clue and cue from the last sentence in the quote, it would be in keeping with the context and theoretical direction of this paper to say that the Marxist diagnosis for the pathological condition of the society would be class inequality. And, it would also be in keeping with the same context and theoretical direction to posit that the only obviously acceptable cure for this pathological condition of the society is the removal of class inequality by any means possible. Arguing in the same vein, socialist revolution would naturally appear to be a procedure of the cure. Let's get along with the same medical metaphor, and add that society in such a situation would become a site like the body in which the germs of a disease on the one hand and the curative means and methods on the other fight it out between themselves for control. Analogically speaking, thus, this exactly is the case and situation in the second half of the novel *The Iron Heel* — the intensifying and worsening suppression of the working class and their supporters by the people in power on behalf of the owners of big businesses and big corporations. It begins in an invisible and underground way, with publication houses and newspapers suppressing anything they suspect of sympathizing with the working class. While for many it may not be visible, for Earnest it is the sign of things rumbling underground, of the "whole fabric of

the society a-tremble" for something "to crystallise" (167). Soon enough, the Iron Heel starts "getting bold" and in almost no time there are "socialist papers barred from mail" and there are "destroyed socialist presses" by the 'Black Hundreds' that are actually a violent mob obviously paid by the people in power and by the owners of businesses. The ugly force of the Iron Heel begins to show itself with "two hundred thousand machinists" and "their five hundred thousand allies in the metal working trades" being defeated in "the pitched battles" against "small armies of armed strike-breakers", resulting in "destroyed property" and "the regular soldiers of the United States" putting a "frightful end of the whole affair" and many "labor leaders executed" (171-72). Though the story keeps bringing in other details too, onward from this juncture — when "cities and towns" become "like armed camps" and labourers get "shot like dogs" and when "regular militia" is "out everywhere" and "the regular army increased an additional hundred thousand" — the novel becomes a harrowingly terrifying description of a pathological brutality characterizing a conflict of civil war proportions (173). The following quote from Chapter XXIII gives a feel of the nauseating brutality of the Iron Heel in crushing the revolt of the working classes:

> The mob was no more than twenty-five feet away when the machine-guns opened up; but
> before that flaming sheet of death nothing could live. The mob came on, but it could not advance. It piled up in a heap, a mound, a huge and growing wave of dead and dying... Wounded creatures, men and women, were vomited over the top of that awful wave and fell squirming down the face of it till they threshed about under the automobiles and against the legs of soldiers. The latter bayoneted the struggling wretches... (339).

Once we start going into the psychology that makes this inhuman brutality possible, we only find a serious pathological hatred as the cause. The history of socialist movements from around 1790s onward is littered with several instances — on both sides — of abominable massacres and destruction that can only be explained by way of what we have called 'pathological hatred'. It is the same kind of pathological hatred that characterises armed terrorism. The hatred we encounter in *The Iron Heel* is the kind of "hatred that requires a defined enemy — the hatred that seeks the humiliation and destruction of that enemy that takes joy in it" (Wallard 23, check). Also, what we encounter in the novel is the "culture of hatred", which in fact "is a culture converted into hatred to serve the political agenda of its leadership" (Wallard 218). If we need a sort of theory to explain what happens in the latter half of *The Iron Heel*, all we need to do is to put these two GaylinWallard quotes in their contexts and build from there. To say very briefly, as briefly as is required here, the hatred which begins to show up in the novel early in the words of Dr. Hammerfield, a doctor of divinity, at the dinner at John Cunningham's house, and of Van Gilbert at the Philomath Club, manifests itself in its ugliest violent form towards the end of *The Iron Heel*. This worsening and degeneration of hatred in the novel goes

through the entire spectrum from an emotion to the feeling that (as the quote from Wallard cited above says) seeks to destroy and humiliate the target of the hatred, and from the feeling to a culture of hatred with a political motive.

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BOOK REVIEW 1

TALE RETOLD AND RE-LIVED: JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *FRANKISSTEIN* ,2019. JONATHAN CAPE. PP. 344, Rs 599

Ashok K Mohapatra

Aside from her brilliant feminist and postcolonial critique of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Spivak made an apt observation that the novel putatively exists insofar as it offers itself as a letter to the functional recipient Margaret Saville , albeit in a frame that is … "simultaneously not a frame, and the monster can step "beyond the text"and be "lost in darkness". Within the allegory of our reading, the place of both the English lady and the unnamable monster are left open by this great flawed text (268)".

The textual flaw implicit in the ambiguous frame and the location of the monster constitute its generative potential for spin-offs of the story and the monster. Indeed, the story has been recreated, with the configuration of the monster in new avatars – be it a dog turned into self-named proletarian revolutionist Poligraf Poligrafvoch Sharikov in Mikhail Bulgakov's *A Dog's Heart* (1925), or Whatsisname, a single body stitched out of the severed body parts of bomb victims in Iraq, turned into a vengeful monster to go on a murderous spree in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018). While these works dwell on the dangerous consequences of the creation of the prototypical monster, Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* (2019), a more recent postmodernist novel, veers off to the theme of embodied love which Mary Shelley explored as central to the ethics of being alive, although in an unnatural and monstrous body.

In her Gothic fantasy Mary Shelley critiqued, among other things, the limiting notion of love as an attribute only of humans who were endowed with beautiful bodies. While Frankenstein's monster craved for it, he only produced revulsion in others because of his ugliness. Being unloved and unmated, he bore malevolence towards the humans, including Frankenstein's wife Elizabeth. Winterson takes this critique further by way of exploring in a post-humanist, Sci-fi mode the possibilities of embodied-ness of love when the bodies are not natural and unitary, but composite and liminal, or rather robotic and transgender.

Subtitled 'a love story', *Frankisstein* is at one level the passionate love story that unfolds between the transgender Dr Ry (shortened version of Mary) and Professor Victor Stein, the TED-talk wonder and bio-tech visionary who aspires to develop the technique of downloading the contents of the cryogenically preserved brain of "Jack Good", the British mathematician and close associate of Alan Turing. Ry's passion for Stein and Ron's (an *amuse douche* and caricature of Lord Byron) sex-obsessions with sexbots, intelligent vibrators and teledildonics that he manufactures do foreground a quirky necessity for embodied-ness of love for lonely men and women of the contemporary world. But Stein's obsession with the enhancement of the cognitive and memory capacity of the brain leads

him to disembodied knowledge and memory. In fact both kinds of drives, one by Ry and Ron for love through radically alternative trans-gender and artificial robotic bodies in the first case, and the other by Victor for the rejection of body, are directed towards freedom from the entrapment both Victor Frankenstein and his monster struggled against to escape. Given that the fictional frame of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is ambiguously present and absent , Winterson extends the trope of the creation confronting the creator playfully across the fictional frame to stage a confrontation between Frankenstein and Mary in cleverly crafted Bedlam (etymologically 'Bethlehem', suggesting birth and resurrection of Christ as well as the madness of Frankenstein) scenes. What happens here is that in *Frankisstein*, Frankenstein's madness is made out to be not only the cause, but also the effect of his story (183) , and also he himself says, " I do not know if I am the teller or the tale"(194). Now the tale is a conundrum, for Winterson defines it in an opening comment to a chapter: "...In the telling of it (life) we find ourselves strangers among the strange."

In *Frankisstein* the chapters are un-numbered, with each carrying at the beginning an epigraph. Some of these are quotes borrowed from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or wise *bon mots* by Emily Dickinson or Max Plank, or Winterson herself. These build up a supra-segmental layer of text, as it were, that foregrounds the themes of metamorphosis and renewal of humans and their lives through constant retelling of the old stories about them. The regenerative magical power of story-telling thus collapses the conventional chrono-topic boundaries and fuzzes up fictional frames. As a result, the teller, their tale and the life of the teller, which is also a tale, are recreated and re-imagined in newer and newer local habitations and names. So, the fluidity of identities that Winterson's novel talks about, is ultimately a semantic and metaphoric effect of imagining the author as a construct of fiction, pretty much like what Foucault had memorably said in the essay 'What is an Author?'.

Interestingly, towards at the end of the novel, Ada Lovelace, Byron's daughter and famous Cambridge mathematician and associate of Charles Babbage, sanguinely says that the Analytical Engine in the future could re-present us and can read us back to life even as bodily life is perishable. Mary Shelley can be read back too to her own life. No one can be chained to time if metamorphosed into a story. Dr Victor Stein, apparently dead and invisible to all after the massive outage of power in Manchester and what appears as an accident in his lab, is still alive at the end. Why wouldn't he? After all he is a tale too, who can be told as well as read back to *Frankenstein*. *Frankisstein* is 'Frank-is-Stein'. And quite aptly so.

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BOOK REVIEW 2

YOKO OGAWA'S *THE MEMORY POLICE*. VINTAGE BOOKS, 2019. PP. 411. RS.394

Chandralekha Panda

Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* covers a broad swath of issues and themes such as totalitarian regime, cultural and individual memories and notions of cognition, familial and identitarian loss, and power shifts. Originally published in Japanese in 1994 and translated into English in the year 2019 the book was a finalist for the 2020 International Booker Prize. The book narrates the dystopian fable of an unnamed island where objects and the memories of them disappear.

The book opens with the protagonist, a novelist by profession, trying to recollect what disappeared first "-among all things that has vanished from the island." The small remote island were the story is set is controlled by the titular Memory Police who monitors things and people that disappear overnight. As the day breaks the islanders wake up confused, for their memory no longer holds the image of whatever has disappeared. In their respective ways they look around confused trying to make sense of the void by gathering on the streets or by looking at each other in vain and finally going back to their usual schedule. The objects that disappear are either voluntarily given up, or destroyed by the islanders themselves, due to their unfamiliarity or if they have been stowed away, or perhaps confiscated and destroyed by the Memory Police, so that all traces of the objects in question and their memories disappear.

Each disappearance holds many implications for the reader. As ribbons, hat, perfumes and roses disappear, it appears as if the genteel sections of the populace have no right to happiness of leisure. As map, stamps and boats disappear the islanders seem to be condemned to live in a state of complete isolation from the larger world. At each stage disappearance of objects, forms of life, indicators of dates the humans sink into the abysm of ignorance. Not knowing what lies outside one's own world and living without contacts to the outer world, staring at the vast, bare and unfathomable sky that has been emptied of birds, not being able to mark the passing of time in the absence of calendars the world outside, living without contact or to make any kind of contact. As birds disappear they take away with them the nascent idea of being free in an otherwise unfathomably vast sky. With the disappearance of calendars goes the idea of keeping record of important days and marking important events. Gradually, anything that can provide a glimpse into the past or that can trigger one's memory such as birds, roses, ribbons, words, novels, sculptures, photographs and cameras vanish simultaneously from people's mind and life.

The novel weaves a tragedy not because the objects vanish but these also disappear from the people's memory. The only thing that stays back after these disappearances is a sense of confusion, haziness and a blurred acknowledgement of something missing. Of course

there is no overwhelming grief or mourning over the loss because there is nothing to remember and thereby to commemorate: the memory of it all is just a blank slate when peered into. As objects are mostly personalized, their disappearance in the text also means a loss of feelings as well as memories that are related to it. The loss of memory leads to disassociation from every thought, visual and emotions related with the object and people who once owned/loved these objects. This is depicted graphically when the protagonist tries to remember her mother. Now dead, the unnamed protagonist's mother was a sculptor who made statues and bust in the little studio that lies in the corner of their house. She spent most of her time working in the now secret studio. When times are tough the reader finds the protagonist in the studio, going through her mother's items now locked in the drawers after sculpting tools and sculptures were added to the long list of objects that disappeared. She finds herself unable to remember integral part of her mother. As she fumbles through her mother's studio in silent nights, we see her picking each tool in her hands and trying to feel them. She remembers only in flashes, bits and pieces which fail to provide her relief and solace. She ends up more confused and helpless. As her mother's work and sculptures disappeared from her memory, the mother as a person too disappeared from memory as well. To cite a similar instance, when birds disappear and most of her dead father's work too vanishes from her memory along with the birds. Her father, an ornithologist, used to study and write about birds. Most of the narrator's childhood memories with her father were tied with the birds in their colorful plumage which no longer exist in the island. She finds herself without a center whenever she tries to hark back these memories when she is alone. There are none to find, there is only emptiness in that place of the memory and confusion.

The manipulation and suppression of information by the Memory Police does not limit itself to the objects' disappearance. It further slates acts such as silencing its citizens who are unable to forget. These people who are immune to this tradition of forgetting even as things disappear are hunted and persecuted by the Memory Police. They live in fear, faking memory and the notion of forgetting. For those few who remember, other's blank slate becomes a burden that they carried, in secret. The readers are presented with a list of things and people that vanished, what is not written in the novel is the aftermath- how others react to it, suppress it or deal with it.

The notion of memory forms an important theme in much of Ogawa's work. Throughout *The Memory Police* the narrator herself is in the process of writing her third novel about a dumb typist girl who gradually loses her voice when her only medium of communication- a typewriter is taken away from her. This story within a story narrates how the unnamed typist girl who is aspiring to be a novelist is betrayed by a person who otherwise is her guardian. For months she is locked in an attic full of damaged typewriters, hers being one amongst them where she gradually loses her identity. This story seems to be an allegory of the things that unfolds in the novel by Ogawa and with our own unnamed protagonist.

The book was translated into English by Stephen Snyder 25 years after it was first published in Japanese in 1994, and it immediately shot into prominence. Much of its popularity has to do with it being a archetype of totalitarian State –be it the Nazi Germany during the Holocaust or the Stalinist Russia or the Khmer Rouge Kambodia – that perfected the art of erasing all memories of genocide. It carries the resonance of many dystopic narratives dealing with loss of memories, private as well as public. It also alerts us to the current socio-political scenario of misinformation and manipulation. In an era of post-truth we see data or information that is circulated via digital media slowly but gradually poisoning the society especially after the right - wing and Fascist forces came to power all over the world, whose apotheosis is perhaps Donald Trump. Information circulated among public is either manipulated by politicians or faked by bureaucrats and corporate honchos for their own personal gains. As social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram play an indispensable part in spreading misinformation, the already debated ideas of public memory and the ways people chose to react and what they remember are complicated further contested in Western literary field with the publication of this book in English translation. Yoko Ogawa thus brings into forefront the notion of public memory and how it continues to be shaped and manipulated by those who wield power. The novel thus joins the list of modern writers such as George Orwell, Franz Kafka, Milan Kundera etc., whose writing style and content can be broadly tagged as both Orwellian and Kafkaesque.

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