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Editorial

Sambalpur Studies in Literatures and Cultures , Series-III, 2013, comprises an assorted fare covering areas of translation, travel literature, postcolonial studies and cultural studies. Some of the papers are modified versions of presentations at several DRS seminars that Department of English, Sambalpur University, has held in the last few years in the fields of Postcolonial Studies and Translation Studies.

Translation, among other things, reinscribes a text in spatio-temoprally altered contexts, validating it in terms of contemporaneity and relevance to the time of its production. As Walter Benjamin rightly says in the celebrated essay "The Task of the Translator" (1923), translation of a work emerges not so much from its life as from its *afterlife*, vouching for its continuity and relevance. Through their study of Sandip Bagchi's Mobarak in the essay entitled "Sandip Bagchi's *Mobarak: Macbeth* in a New Avatar", Sarbani Chaudhury and Bhaskar Sengupta argue how Shakespeare's play in its Bengali adaptation is invested with new meaning and applicability in the Indian cultural and political context that is characterized by communalism, provincialism, terrorism, exploitative urbanization and increased economic polarization. In their essay the authors show how Shakespeare's tragedy of an individual becomes, in the hands of Sandip Bagchi, the tragedy of an entire civilization/ generation.

In her essay "An "Indian Woman" looks at Europe: *Kochattil Kalyanikutty Amma's Njan Kanda Europe* (1936)", Meera B explores the tension between nationalism and feminism that was latent in Kalyanikutti's travel narrative, the first of its kind written in Malayalam by a woman, contextualizing it in the period of India's struggle for independence. Indeed, the travel narratives of native women in England and Europe constitute a genre overlapping autobiography and take up issues pertaining to the identity of the self-conscious native woman, who was beginning to understand her social and cultural needs as well as claims within the indigenous patriarchy intersected by colonialism. This essay makes one recall the travelogue *Englande Bangomahila*(1885)[A Bengali Lady in England], by the Bengali lady Krishnabahini Das, or Sailabala Das's early twentieth century Odia narrative *Bilat Prabas*, published in 2006 in English translation as *Journey to England*, which – and many more written by women from other parts of India – raise issues like the native woman's education, freedom, woman's political role etc.

In the essay "Naipaul's India: Myth or Reality?", Sreemati Mukherjee takes up the theme of travel also, but the traveler in question is Naipaul, a postcolonial subject, who straddles mutually exclusive worlds and is fraught with a profound sense of homelessness . It is this element of affect that Mukherjee explores in the Indian travelogues of Naipaul, who – a socially and culturally wounded person himself –seeks redress and rehabilitation through journey to the ancient home. He plays out the role of a traveler from a position of "colonial otherness", which is different from Kalaynikutty's, who was the colonized other. For this reason India remains an unresolved paradox for Naipaul.

The same theme of the postcolonial predicament of being caught up in two mutually exclusive worlds, like that of Naipaul, has been explored by Kaustav Kundu in his essay "Re-figuring the 'Othello' within: Tropes of Alienation & Sexuality in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to The North*" with reference to the character of Mustafa Sa'eed, the protagonist. Dislocated and caught between two worlds of England and Sudan, he is too Sudanese for the English and too English for the Sudanese, and his liminality is never mitigated..

For her part, Swati Ganguly addresses the problems in the pedagogy of the postcolonial studies. While Naipaul and Jhumpa Lahiri are read under the rubric of canonical diasproran writers, Rushdie is studied as a postcolonial writer, and this categorization seems flawed because postcoloniality itself is the condition for the migration or dispersal of people outside their homelands towards the First World destinations. She argues that the politics of the location of the diasporan writers and critics in the West needs to be understood more closely, and that the tropes like hybridity, in-betweenness, ambivalence that have been valorized by Bhabha have to be considered less important for Indian classroom than those theories of exclusion and subalternity that Spivak talks about. She suggests that Spivak's essay "More on Power/Knowledge", a neglected but very useful essay for understanding subalternity, should find place in the Indian syllabus for postcolonial studies rather than "Can the Subaltern Speak?", considering the daunting length and dense citations of the latter essay. The former essay, however, helps students understand the deconsctructive feminist and postcolonial position of Spivak better.

There are three essays in this issue of the journal that can come under the rubric of Cultural Studies. Samrat Sengupta's essay "Is it Possible for Women

to 'Cease Upon the Midnight with No Pain'? Understanding the 'Masculinity of Suicide' as Resistance" explores the philosophical problem of woman's suicide, posing the question if self-killing in woman's case is not to be interpreted at par with man's as a rational choice for escape from the being of the world. If it is not, then why not so? He thinks through these question with reference to two Bengali stories, of which one is Tagore's "A Wife's Letter". Sengupta's problematic of suicide has inflections of gender that have already been politicized enough in literature and literary criticism.

Arijit Mukherjee and Sourya Chowdhury examine Jeet Thayil's *Narcopolis* and David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* in their essay "A Protean Discourse: Addiction and the Neo-colonial Way of the World" as representing the neo-colonial dystopic space of drug-addiction and a nefarious economy underlying it. What is brought to the fore is a hallucinatory, drug-induced fantasy of freedom that the consumerist culture, in tandem with neo-colonialism, promotes.

In the essay "Mapping the (Post)colonial Institutional Ontopology: Sahitya Akademi1 and its Ambivalent Epistemic Leanings", Saswat Das et al. make a cultural critique of the Sahitya Akademi, the national academy of letters. Carrying the postcolonial Nehurvian legacy of Englishness, the Akademi has homogenized an otherwise diverse linguistic and cultural terrain that India is.

The last essay ""The Spider and the Fly': The Politics of Reform in Ramamirthammal's *Dasigal Mosavalai* or *Web of Deceit*" by Meenu B. is a study of the cultural politics of *Ramamirthammal's Dasigal Mosavalai* or *Web of Deceit*, a Tamil novel with the reformist agenda of the abolition of the system of Devadasi. Meenu observes that although Ramamirthammal was a radical reformer for her age, she shared certain stereotypical notions about masculinity and femininity. For this reason she was unable to address an important issue relating to reform, hemmed within patriarchy.

Ashok K. Mohapatra

Sandip Bagchi's *Mobarak*: *Macbeth* in a New Avatar[1]

Sarbani Chaudhury & Bhaskar Sengupta

While numerous translations of *Macbeth* are available in Bengali, the state has produced only three significant adaptations of the play. Two of these, *Rudrapal* by Haralal Roy in 1874, and *Karnabir* by Nagendranath Bose in 1884/85, are nineteenth century productions primarily aimed at minimising all foreignness and homogenising the source text for an upper class Hindu Bengali clientele in a colonial scenario inflected by burgeoning nationalism and imperialist counter-oppression. Sandip Bagchi's *Mobarak* arriving over a hundred years later in 2003-04 (published 2009) is, by contrast, a genuine attempt at 'otherisation' which consciously deploys the end product for germane social comment in a twenty first century set-up. Bagchi's *Mobarak* repositions *Macbeth* in a spatially and temporally distanced alien milieu to produce a genuinely provocative 'Shakspeare-plus-relevance' otherisation addressing the operations of power and political maneuvering quite in the Anna Hazare mode. Whether the project is aesthetically satisfying or ideologically convincing is a debatable issue but the agenda of contextualising, appropriating and re-interpreting the text to suit the present political scenario undoubtedly extends the contours of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* investing it with new meaning and applicability.

The first notable shift from the early adaptations is the blurring of the religious divide and the absence of religio-moral disparaging of the Muslims. Both Duncan's and Macbeth's families are adherents of Islam while Duncan's faithful followers belong equally to Muslim (Macduff, Sweno) and Hindu (Banquo, Fleance) communities. That communal harmony is the key to good governance is stressed at the very beginning:

edeśe ekhon jāri suśāsan
takhte nabāb ābdur rahmān
khuśi sakalei, milemiśe thāke
hindumusalmān

["Now in this country there is good governance/ Nawab Abdur Rahman (Duncan) adorns the throne/ Everyone is happy, peacefully coexist/ The Hindus and the Muslims"] (1.1)

Hastina evokes definite associations of Hastinapur, the mythical kingdom to which both Pandavs and Kauravs lay claim in the *Mahabharat*. Placing it under a Muslim nawab, Abdur Rahman, signals an effort at secularising the traditional religious associations. Another strategic shift is the 'humanising' of the witches as 'Karnejaps' – powerful political destabilisers of foreign origin who act as choric narrators cum king makers.

The plot outline replicates that of *Macbeth*. The integrity and security of Hastina (Scotland) is jeopardised by the combined attack of Mostafa (Vusna-r Bhñuiya, Thane of Cawdor) and the King of Arakan. The rebel is supplied with arms by the Karnejaps, with the ulterior motive of placing an amenable stooge on the throne. But as the course of the battle changes with Mobarak (Macbeth), a tribal leader and the feudal lord of Sripur, vanquishing the rebels, the opportunist Karnejaps reframe their strategy and entice Mobarak to become the Nawab. Muskan (Lady Macbeth) also ignites Mobarak's dormant ambition. Mobarak slays and replaces Nawab Abdur Rahman. Azam (Malcolm) and Afroz (Donalbain) flee to the Badshah (Emperor, presumably of Delhi) to save their lives and are blamed for their father's murder in absentia. Bikram's (Banquo) suspicions regarding Mobarak's involvement in Abdur Rahman's murder gets him killed and Birottam (Fleance) is accused as he has fled to save his life. But Mobarak's erratic, uncontrolled behaviour during the grand banquet arouses the suspicion of the guests. Restless Mobarak meets the Karnejaps who assure him that he will never be vanquished until Shalban (Birnam Wood) moves against him. Muskan, unable to bear the strain of the killings, becomes insane and poisons herself. taking. Mobarak becomes an increasingly alienated and solitary as the condition of the subjects deteriorates. They demand an end to Mobarak's reign. Azam and Aftab (Macduff), supported by the Badshah, invade Mobarak's castle. Mobarak confronts Aftab in a duel and defeats him but refuses to kill the disarmed Aftab. The enemy soldiers carrying branches encircle Mobarak who seems to dissolve in nature. Azam becomes the Nawab amidst much fanfare but the vicious cycle continues as Birottam is brought onstage by Kalkarni (Hecate) and greeted by the Karnejaps as the future king. The play ends with Birottam advancing to question the laughing Karnejaps and Kalkarni in exactly the same manner as Mobarak.

Despite these broad similarities, *Mobarak* is a significant departure from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in terms of its nuanced contextualisation. In the present context of the Indian subcontinent, and the more general global scenario, the subversive political machinations of the Karnejaps and their foreignness assists the audience in identifying them as agents of opportunist national/ imperialist forces intent on destabilising the country or transforming autonomous nations into banana republics headed by puppet rulers. Their forte lies in disrupting political harmony by fostering divisive tendencies across the personal, political and communal spectrum. Dreams of direct/ indirect occupation of the throne breach the camaraderie between Mobarak and Bikram transforming them into wary contenders for political ascendance. Bikram's dream of reviving Hindu rule through son Birottam corrodes the communal harmony underscored at the beginning of the play. The Karnejaps, guided by their leader, Kalkarni, are the real destiny makers of both individuals and nations. They decide when Hastina will be ripe for a Hindu takeover, when Muslim rulers shall cease to rule. For this, as Kalkarni tells the Karnejaps, they require docile, pliant order bearers:

tomāder kathā chila, khuje
nebe eman nabāb
śirdñārā nei jār
śikhe nebe druta
āmāder manomata, sawāl jabāb.

["It was decided that you would search for such nawabs who have no backbone and who will learn quickly the questions and answers that please us."] (3.5.)

Bagchi drives home the point by 'masking' these corporal creatures: their very facelessness becomes the source of their power enabling them to take on a chameleon-like persona. The minimal stage presence of Hecate/ Kalkarni takes on a much greater significance in this context. He represents the supreme head of imperialist power, who projects a facade of studied detachment while maintaining constant surveillance as an undetected absent presence through his deployed agents. Thus the apparently straightforward tale of intra-national political ambition and intrigue becomes a multiple narrative of individual, regional, national and global politics.

Bagchi's overarching perception is more akin to that witnessed in the bard's history plays where power is less an issue of justice and legitimacy than of manipulative strategising. Nobody is innocent in the game of power politics: "rakta pichal takhter neœa" ["Lust for the bloody throne"] (1.1.) afflicts everyone from the vanquished Lord of Bhusna to Bikram, Birottam and Mobarak; even the incorruptible Aftab is accused of harbouring royal aspirations by Dilawar (Ross) (2.4). Nawab Abdur Rahman wastes idle hours in drunken revelry and stupor while Mobarak stakes his life in defense of his kingdom (1.5). Hastina's prosperity reflects the typical growth curve of any twenty-first century developing nation that prioritises metropolitan urbanisation at the expense of the suburbs. The Nawab's good governance therefore, hinges upon rural deprivation as the Karnejaps ironically comment:

adate konoi
bibhājika nei
śahar gñāyer mājhe
tabu abahelā bancanā gāthā
nīrabe nivrite bāje
adate ciratākāl
śahar sājiye swāsthya ferāy
chota chota grāmguli

["In reality no division exists between towns and villages; yet the tale of neglect and dispossession is played out in solitary silence. Always, in truth, cities grow healthy nourished by tiny villages.] (1.1.)

Azam, an inept weakling, promptly forgets his mission of liberating Hastina amidst the security and nocturnal pleasures of Badshah's court. It is precisely his incompetence and lack of courage that make Kalkarni decide upon him as the ideal ruler for their purposes (3.5). "Noble Banquo" (1.4.29) is replaced by a time-serving, opportunist Bikram who maintains prudent silence despite his knowledge about Mobarak's conspiracy. Spurred by Mobarak's success and the prophecy of the Karnejaps, Bikram dreams of a Hindu Hastina ruled by Birottam:

Mobārak miñyā nabāb hawāi
āmi niścita putra bīrottam haibe
cakrabarty rājā...

["Since Muslim Mobarak has become the *nawab*,/ I am certain my son Birottam too will eventually become a great *rajah*"] (3.1, emphasis added)

When confronted by Birottam on this score, he simply underscores the distinction between politics and morality and delivers a most un-Banquo lecture on the necessity of biding one's time:

> *...ek nahe nyāy nīti*
> *ār rāstranīti; āmi pragalabha hale tomār*
> *samūha ksati putra āmār. brātyader santos bidhāne*
> *māindār pāiyāche abhijāt nām, ati uccapad;*
> *islami śāsaker tnābe masnad thākibe nā*
> *jeno cirakāl; mahākāl cakra ghure āsibei*
> *hindu karatale. rāstranītibodh tatadin cup thākte*
> *bale.*

["The ethics of politics and justice are not the same; if I become loose-tongued now you will incur devious loss, my son. Know this, the throne will not remain eternally in the hands of Islamic rulers; cyclical time will reestablish the Hindu dynasty. Till then it is politique to remain mum."] (3.3)

The central conflict between good and evil thus gets translated into one between various vested interests. All characters, major or minor, are entrapped in a vicious circle of ambition and opportunism, which according to Bagchi, is symptomatic of the contemporary political scenario. Even the additional characters are similarly oriented. The most significant of these inclusions is Ullas who replaces Macbeth's Seyton and is altogether different. A mere servant ('maindar') of Mobarak, he rises to the post of his personal secretary by assisting his master in his evil designs. He informs Mobarak of Bikram's suspicions and aspirations, suggests his murder (3.1), is privy to the act as the third murderer (3.3), and lays the blame on Birottam (3.6). He executes Mobarak's order of slaying Aftab's family (4.1) and presumably participates in his wife's rape before slaughtering her. As Mobarak becomes increasingly dependent upon him, he takes the initiative of unleashing his marauding army on the starving populace (4.2). The trajectory of his rise mirrors that of Mobarak – from a trusted confidante to an emergent power who ultimately betrays his benefactor by consorting with Azam and Aftab. With his rise he comes within the ambit of the political power play envisioned by Kalkarni and the Karnejaps: they briefly toy with the idea of making him king before deciding to use

him only as their instrument (3.5). Bagchi foregrounds his rise by initially keeping him both nameless and voiceless: till Act 2 he is consistently referred to as the 'maindar' and flits in and out of stage carrying out orders, bearing messages in silence and is given one single announcement to make after playing the Porter in 2.3. He is literally reborn with a new name, identity and goal in 3.1 as he loquaciously declares:

āptasahāyak āmi nabāber
khāsmahaler – māindār nai ār
nabanām 'ullās' āmār;
chāyār matan tāi ghure firi
āpnār piche, śikhe nite druta kichu
rājakīya ādab kāidā.

["No longer a mere servant, I am now the Nawab's private secretary, privy to his inner sanctum. I have a new name, Ullas. I follow you like a shadow to quickly pick up some noble manners."] (3.1)

That he is indeed the mirror image of Mobarak and the prototype of all ambitious men aspiring to political power is reiterated by the lines following immediately where Bikram relives Mobarak's rise from the ranks to the Nawab:

...dekhi toke smriti pathe hñati...
ei darbār ghare
nūtan senāni ek āsiya dñārāila
mahrūm nabāb ke kariyā ādāb
paricay karāiche bandhu aftāb
mobārak nām oi tarun senār
dhīre se tarun hala sipāhsālār
tor mata chipchipe ujwal cokh
achire haiyā uthe sarbamānya lok
bhusnār sripurer māmuli bhñuiā
idānīm mulluker nabāb nājim...

["Seeing you makes me walk down the memory lane...In this very courtroom came not so long ago a young soldier and saluted the erstwhile Nawab. Aftab, my friend, introduced him. Mobarak was the name of that young soldier. Gradually he became a captain. He was slim and had bright eyes exactly like you. Soon he became universally respected. From a mere lord of Bhusna and Sripur he has now become the supreme ruler of this kingdom."] (3.1)

The most significant reworking is noted in the presentation of the protagonists, Mobarak and his wife, Muskan. Much more of a self-made man than Macbeth, Mobarak does not belong to the aristocracy but rises solely on the basis of his own industry and merit. He is doubly marginalised in terms of socio-cultural status as he is the head of a tribe. This tribal connection allows Bagchi to introduce a completely new angle that nevertheless typifies the interface between urban civilisation and primitive existence. The tribal's affinity with nature is iterated through Mobarak's soliloquy appreciating nature's simple beauty and his grateful acceptance of the coarse "chapattis" ["loaf"] sent by the villagers (1.2) but more specifically in the manner of his end/ death where he seems to merge with the surrounding branches (5.4). It lends a structural circularity to his rise and fall: emerging from the womb of nature with dreams of bettering the condition of the marginals, his contact with the ruthless urban civilisation robs him of his basic innocence, transforms him into a tool appropriated for political purposes that is discarded once its utility value is exhausted.

Viewed from this perspective, the injury received at the Battle of Jessore that renders him impotent (1.3), takes on symbolic overtones. Service on behalf of the state destroys his productivity – "phal phalibe nâ mobârak gâchhe kono" ["the tree named Mobarak shall bear no fruit"] (1.3) – both for his family and his tribe. For Mobarak and Muskan, the throne serves as a compensation for the void created by infertility: "santānhīn dampati kñade/ śūnya koler śoke/ sei kānnay nabābir neśā dhoke" ["The childless couple grieves over their empty lap and from these tears is born the craving to be king"] (1.3). In a kind of double Freudian exchange, the throne becomes the surrogate baby while Mobarak and Muskan in turn are products of a sterile and barren modern urban civilisation that infects them in more ways than one and taints them irrevocably. Unlike Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who are firmly entrenched in the established hierarchy, this pair does not belong; a sense of loss and maladjustment remains at the core of their being. For an Indian audience familiar with the *Ramayan*, Mobarak's final denouement takes on mythical connotations: rejected and solitary like Sita, he no longer wishes to remain in this unfriendly, alien habitat and returns by choice to the maternal womb.

Mobarak's wife, Muskan, is also a complex character with various nuances that far exceed the linear decline noted in her original counterpart. Bagchi takes pains to establish a close rapport between the couple based on love and lust. This mutual attraction however, is eagerly sought by both to drive away the poisonous pangs ["bisbyatha"] of childlessness (1.3). Consequently, there is a touch of desperateness in their lovemaking and the passion reserved for one's child is directed at the throne. They are, in this sense more culpable and tragic than Macbeth and Lady Macbeth because they covet the throne to replace something they will never possess while the Shakespearean pair might also have desired it for their progeny. If Lady Macbeth incites Macbeth to murder by accusing him of prevarication and cowardice, Muskan targets his sterility – "śiśna ache bīrja nāi" ["you have semen but no seed"] (1.5) – and reminds him of the *duty of the husband* to provide the wife with a child when he fluctuates in his purpose of murdering Abdur Rahman citing his *duty as a host – "āmāke janani karā kartabya tomār/ bhare dāo ei śunya kol/ dekhao tomār purusākar" ["Your duty is also to make me a mother. Fill my womb and prove your manliness"]* (1.5, emphasis added). She provokes him further by reminding him of the price he has had to pay for serving the Nawab:

ebhābe bipade rātri din basabās kare
youbanei jarāgrasta tumi
ār jār janya ei ātmadān
tini dibāswapne bibhor, kibhābe
kantakmukta habe tnār santāner tāj
gotā deś jāne, nabāb ekhano bnece
kār atmatyāge.....

["Thus living daily in danger, you have grown old in your very youth and the one for whom you sacrificed so much, is busy daydreaming how his son will inherit the throne without hindrance. The whole nation knows whose unwavering dedication has ensured the long life of the Nawab...."] (1.5)

For Muskan, Abdur Rahman's murder is a kind of belated vengeance for the multiple instances of indifference and ingratitude meted out by the ruler and especially for rendering her husband impotent and forcing her to be childless: "hariecha purusatwa nababer janya yuddha kare" ["you have lost your manhood while fighting for the Nawab"] (1.5). In the sleep walking scene (5.1), although she murmurs about the various assassinations

and the rape of the Lady of Vawal, her main anguish is reserved for Aftab's baby boy on whom she could have lavished her motherly attention were he brought to her instead of being slaughtered. Bagchi makes this hankering of the deprived mother, a crucial factor in Muskan's character and extends it to include a socio-political component. This is a distinct and enriching departure from Shakespeare: Macbeth and his consort desire power for themselves, but Muskan desires to see Mobarak as the monarch who can improve the condition of the populace and the marginal tribals, i.e., power to empower others. Personal vengeance takes on national proportions and transforms murder into justice as Mobarak is projected as the deliverer of the starving multitude:

tomār mukher dike ceye adhikāngśa lok
dubelā pāyna khete
bahihśatru sadāmagna
simānta pradeśe.....mane karo nijer
bālyakāl; kata kaste pñouchole ekhāne
ke habe tomār ceye yogya pratinidhi
bhukhā mānuser; ke debe netritwa tabe
samar bijaye
deś māne māti, māne
mātā, janmabhumi
tār kathā ekbaro bhābbe nā tumi...?

["Most people are looking up to you for deliverance. They do not get a square meal daily. Foreign enemies are always active along the borders. Try to remember your childhood deprivation. You have had to toil hard to reach this position. Who but you would be the fittest representative of the starving masses? Who but you would lead the country to victory in battles? Your country means your soil, your mother, your birthplace; won't you think about it even once...?"] (1.5)

Mobarak's crusader role is reiterated in the Banquet scene to remind him of his public duty, *"nabāgata nabāber hārdya-niyantrane/ edeśer dukhī-tāpī loker kutīre/ dubelā – dumutho bhāt roj pñouchak"* ["Under the warm sincere guidance of the new Nawab, let the suffering have-nots have two square meals daily"] (3.3).

Moments before her suicide, Muskan pleads with the absent Mobarak not to turn the kingdom into a graveyard (5.1). Neither fiendish nor desirous

to be "unsexed" (1.5.41), Muskan is the very opposite of Lady Macbeth: firmly entrenched within the feminine self, the childless woman becomes the archetypal mother figure for the deprived populace. While one might have issues with this stereotypical empowerment, it makes her a perfect complementary to her husband: he is the leader and she the embodiment of the tribals. Their tragedy lies in their inability to alter the established status quo.

Another significant departure is the Porter Scene at the beginning of Act 2, scene 3. Having the maindar (servant; later Ullas) play the porter is an innovation that both adds to and detracts from the original. Since the maindar has been privy to the plans of murdering Abdur Rahman (he was given the task of plying the king's bodyguards with drinks 1.5), the contrast between the porter's innocence and his intuitive presentiment of evil that is so crucial in accentuating the hell-like quality of Inverness in *Macbeth* is absent in *Mobarak*. D'Quincy's brilliant exposition of the normal making its return upon the fiendish is also in that sense not wholly applicable. Yet the maindar's complicity adds a psychological element absent in the original. His intoxicated imagination conjures up images of hell preying on his guilty sub-conscious thus providing an example of the ripple-effect of crime: even marginal order bearers must feel the effect of their collusion with transgressive action. However, more radical is the effect of contemporising the three arrivals seeking entry into Hell. Only one of them is a criminal – a potato farmer who sows vegetables in the "expectation of plenty" (2.3.5); the others are a miner killed in a mining accident and a hapless Muslim seeking safety in Hell after his entire family has been wiped out by Hindu rioters. All the three allusions bear topical relevance for a twenty first century indigenous audience. The price of potato, the staple vegetable of the common men across India, had soared beyond their reach frequently in the first decade of the twenty first century creating much furore. Ill maintained mines by the owners who prioritise profit over the workers' safety have led to numerous mines caving in or being flooded and miners dying; family compensations and government measures against the real culprits has been negligible. One of the most alarming features of contemporary India has been the notable escalation of communal violence where, despite claims to the contrary by majority

opinion, the Muslims and other non-Hindus have been at the receiving end. The Gujarat massacre and later, the Supreme Court judgment on the Babri Masjid case, where religious issues gains priority over the legal, are still fresh in the nation's memory. Given this context, the lone Muslim survivor preferring Hell over earth for security and shelter lends an undeniable ironic poignancy. *Mobarak* not only counters the predominantly Hindu orientation of the nineteenth century adaptations, its focus on the 'Muslim' side of the tale and the locating of religious issues within an imperialist-nationalist framework also extends the boundaries of an adapter's literary obligation to include vital extra-literary concerns. Bagchi's choice of characters encompasses the whole gamut of crime – from the individual to the capitalist and the religio-political – making the adaptation into an appropriate 'otherisation' befitting the contemporary scenario.

Numerous other departures from the original play point to the adapter's socio-political commitment. The Chorus of the Karnejaps helps to situate the play in the modern context, explains the underlying motivations of the characters, the manipulative powers operating behind the scenes, all of which help to tighten and reduce the play's length. For example, the slaughter at Macduff's castle (4.2) and the Malcolm-Macduff scene (4.3) are both reported that help to do away with two lengthy scenes and further help to trace the complex underhand negotiations and politicking responsible for shifting alliances in the political arena. Mobarak's rich gifts to the Emperor (synonymous with the English king in *Macbeth*) have stalled his decision to come to Azam's aid, he decides to intervene only when Azam's cause is strengthened by Aftab's arrival and Ullas's secret missive promising internal betrayal, both of which testify Mobarak's increasing alienation. Even then the Emperor is cautious in committing wholesale to Azam's cause: he will contribute only a limited amount of men and money (4.2) just in case the enterprise fails and he needs to court Mobarak again.

Other cosmetic changes are in keeping with the times or to strengthen the storyline. In a world where Caesarian has become the 'normal' mode of delivering a child, the prophecy that "none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth" (4.1.80-81) is predictably omitted. The doctor (Hekim) is accompanied not by a waiting-gentlewoman but by Ullas (5.1), which explains his decision to betray the losing side. Duncan's imposition of

himself as Macbeth's guest (1.4) is substituted by Mobarak's invitation to the Nawab to participate in the tribal spring festival 'Sarhul' in Bhusna thus accentuating his role in planning the Nawab's murder (1.2). Tribal songs and dance are incorporated in the welcome accorded to Abdur Rahman to locate Mobarak and Muskan in their natural habitat and to authenticate the tribal atmosphere. After Banquo's murder, Ullas, disguised as the third murderer, slays the other two to eliminate all witnesses.

If *Macbeth* is the briefest of the four great Shakespearean tragedies, *Mobarak* is an even more concise adaptation of it. The number of scenes in the five act format is considerably reduced, twenty one as opposed to twenty nine. While working within the given framework of the plot, Bagchi resorts to innovative realignment of sequences to suggest complexities and nuances not found in the original. For instance, the Dilawar-Aftab exchange (2.4) combines the Macduff-Ross dialogue in 2.4.with the much later testing of Macduff by Malcolm in 4.3. Act 4, scene 3 in *Mobarak* confines itself to the news of personal loss delivered to Aftab by Dilwar and Azam's urging him to revenge, totally side stepping the eulogistic passage on the English king prefixed to it in the original. Soliloquies are few but their mood and sentiments are interwoven in the conversations. This detracts somewhat from the poetic quality of the adaptation but the crisp exchange of dialogues in colloquial language ensures a fast pace:

AFTAB. *Mobārak, ghorā mukh, dekh ceye śiyare śaman*
MOBARAK. *Kshamā karo Aftab muhurter bhule raktapāt ghate geche gadh bhāwāle*
AFTAB. *Madākānnā rākh, astra dhar hāte buk cire rakta khābo tor.*

[AFTAB. *Mobarak, turn around and face your nemesis.*
MOBARAK. *Forgive me, Aftab, a momentary lapse made the blood flow in the Bhawal castle.*
AFTAB. *Stop weeping crocodile tears. Pick up your sword. I'll rip your breast and drink your blood.] (5.5)*

The two soliloquies spoken by Mobarak occur early in the play when he is yet to embark on the road to crime (1.2 and 1.5). Both are improvisations and emphasise his umbilical link with nature:

ekā śuye thāka
dūbbo ghāser māthe

ceye ceye dyakhā
jhakmake grahatārā
jhup kare dub
nadīr calti srote
dio go jīban
bādhābandhan hārā
baye jāk hāowa
dulie dhāner śis
aranya hok natamastak
karuk tomāke natajānu kurniś

["Lying alone on the grassy meadow, looking up at the glittering stars; a sudden splash in the flowing river – bless me with such an unfettered life. Let the breeze waft through the paddy fields swaying the corn heads and the forest bow down to you."] (1.2)

Such lyrical bonding with nature become increasingly rare as Mobarak becomes a prey of and party to metropolitan intrigues suggesting a severance from his roots. His simplicity and innocence are irrevocably corrupted by the urban encounter that leaves him "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" (3.4.23) forcing him to acknowledge, "mobarak ek rikta, nihsa manuser nam" ["Mobarak is the name of a desolate, bankrupt man"] (5.4).

As with *Karnabir,* there is a mixed use of *amitrakshar* and *payar* but without any hierarchic, moral or religious alignment as witnessed in Nagendranath Bose. The choice of metre depends entirely on the requirement of the particular dramatic situation. Thus the formal exchange of pleasantries between Nawab Abdur Rahman and hostess Muskan is in *amitrakshar chhanda (*1.4) while *payar* is often the vehicle for more intimate exchanges between the royal couple or between Bikram and Birottam. *Mobarak* is an eclectic mix of translations of original passages from *Macbeth* and Bagchi's original contribution keeping in mind the changed context of the adaptation. Though some of the most powerful lines of Shakespeare's play are missing –for example, "If it were done, when 'tis done....And falls on th'other" (1.7.1-28) – those that find a place in *Mobarak* focus more on transposing the sense in simple, straightforward language than in attempting to match the poetic brilliance of the Bard. The famous soliloquy "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" (5.5.19-28) is condensed to a nine-line utterance taking us back to the unembellished but poignant language of the unsullied Mobarak at the opening of the play:

āj bāde kāl sabāike jete habe
jete hay chiñre māyājāl
buke hñete egoi samay.....
śunya theke śunyatar dike
sab hñātā śes hoye rāt hale phike.....
nebhāo e prāsāder sab bātigulo
e jīban jeno ek ānādi kabita
chanda - jati - mātra sab landabhanda kare
jhup kare dube jai arthahīn bhore

["Everyone has to go today or tomorrow leaving behind the ties of love. Time crawls apace from emptiness to emptiness. All journeys end as night fades....Put out all the lights of the castle. This life is like an amateurish poem – rhyme, pause, metre all awry –suddenly vanishing in a meaningless dawn."] (5.4)

Bagchi is simultaneously bold and canny in his translation: he avoids direct translation of the most famous lines like the opening one or phrases like "walking shadow" and substitutes the "poor player" parallel with that of the "amateurish poem" to deliberately discourage comparisons of poetic quality and at the same time underscore his independent approach.

However, the most incisive and memorable lines are Sandip's own contribution especially in the poignant, bitter self-denunciations of those who choose ambition and evil. The newly crowned Mobarak speaks of the fetters of kingship, "nababo swadhīn nay ekhano bojhoni?" ["Even the Nawab is not free, haven't you realized that yet?"], and the futility of the course he has opted for, "gantabya nai thak ache path/ ar ache sei pathe abiram cala" ["There is no destination but only a road and relentless trudging along that path"] (3.2). The most trenchant self-loathing is reserved for Ullas for his role as Mobarak's evil genius:

jege thake shwāpader mato
ghinghine andhakār cete
kambakht muddofarash
anteybāsi – ekā ullās

["Ullas alone stays awake like a beast of prey licking the revolting darkness. Bloody moron, handler of unidentified corpses, lowly untouchable!"] (3.3)

The dramatic force of Bagchi's lines come from his assimilative use of language: unlike his predecessors who opt for Sanskritised Bengali and tatsam vocabulary, Sandip uses these alongside *tadbhab* words, Urdu and Persian terminology absorbed into Bengali, colloquialisms and mundane

everyday expressions. Tribal terms like "parab" [festival], "pal" [meat], Bengali derivatives from Urdu or Persian like "khoab" ["dream"], "masnad" ["throne"], raw invectives such as "kambakht" ["moron"], "nimakharam kutta" ["filthy traitorous dog"] nestle comfortably alongside tatsam words like "asi" ["sword"], "œiar" ["head"] etc. enabling the adapter to access the rich repertoire of hybrid Bengali language.

Thus *Mobarak* becomes a significant secular 'otherization' of *Macbeth* both in terms of language and content. It attempts to capture contemporary India affected by communalism, provincialism, terrorism, hypocrisy, exploitative urbanisation, increased polarisation, and held to ransom by global and national vested interests. One important distinction makes Mobarak a tragic hero of greater dimensions than Macbeth – the latter is killed by the righteous Macduff and replaced by the legitimate heir Malcolm but nobody can vanquish Mobarak – his death is self-willed – and Azam, the degenerate debauch, is an ill-suited successor. In the ultimate analysis, Shakespeare's tragedy of an individual becomes, in the hands of Sandip Bagchi, the tragedy of an entire civilization/ generation.

Notes

1. All citations from the text are from the following edition, Sandip Bagchi, *Mobarak* (Kolkata: Pritonia, 2009).
2. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the authors of this paper.
3. *Amitrakshar chanda* is a radical take off on the more popular *payar* and inspired by Shakespearean blank verse. Conceived by Michael Madhusudan Dutt for his self-styled 'epicling' *Meghnad Badh Kabya*, it comprises 12-syllabled lines with a movable caesura occurring at the end of a thought unit rather than a line, enabling prolonged and unhindered flow of expression. *Payar* comprises a 4-line unit of 2 non-rhyming couplets with a caesura after every 28 syllables and a rhyme scheme of *abcb*, i.e., rhyming consecutive couplets. It is one of the most assimilative and ubiquitous verse forms in Bengali that continuously absorbs new elements and reinvents itself while retaining the basic format (28 syllables followed by a caesura).

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An "Indian Woman" looks at Europe: Kochattil Kalyanikutty Amma's *Njan Kanda Europe* (1936)*

Meera B.

It was once an accepted notion that travel[1] in the colonial era followed a West to East trajectory. The neat binary between the "colonizer" and the "native" was built upon this essentialist assumption by which the explorer-colonizer/missionary/anthropologist was the "traveller" and the native the "destination". In fact, Mary Louise Pratt has coined the interesting term "travelee" to describe the native in the dominant discourse of European travel, i.e, "a person who is travelled to or on by a traveler, a receptor of travel rather than an initiator of it" (qtd. Majeed 11). Scholarly attention to the "counterflows to colonialism", to borrow the title of Michael Fisher's well-known work, has only been a recent phenomenon, largely a result of the emergence of postcolonial studies. Fortunately, in the last two decades or so, travel writing by Indian travellers has gained a lot of attention though most of the research has focused on male travelers. The women travelers from India have not gained as much attention, though one can see promising trends here. The popular perception about Indian women during this era, which was largely true in the case of the upper and middle class women, is that they were largely confined to their homes and had very few opportunities for travel. Even so, a number of women from these classes did travel abroad during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and have left accounts of their journeys. This paper is going to focus on one such travelogue, the 1936 Malayalam travelogue of Kochattil Kalyanikutty Amma, titled *Njan Kanda Europe* or "The Europe I Saw", the first foreign travelogue in Malayalam by a Malayali woman. My attempt is to examine the travelogue in terms of its exploration of an anti-colonial and nationalist discourse, including its interrogation of the colonial education and the efficacy of international organisations. At the same time, I intend to explore the shortcomings of the mainstream nationalist discourse by focusing on the tension I find here between Kalyanikutty's fervent nationalism and her nascent feminism.

Kochattil Kalyanikutty Amma, also known as Mrs. Kuttan Nair was known for her keen interest in women's education, active participation in

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the All-India Women's Conference and support for contraception, a concern she raised even in her meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. She used to contribute regularly to the Malayalam magazines of her day. In this widely read travelogue journal of the 1930s, Kalyanikutty Amma recounts her experiences of visiting Europe for the first time as part of a contingent of Indian women on their way to attending the International Students' Conference held in Holland in 1935. At the request of Mr. Devadas Gandhi, Gandhi's youngest son, she chronicled her three-month stay in Europe in the form of newspaper reports published in the *Hindustan Times* whose Malayalam translations simultaneously appeared in *Manorama* and *Gomati.* She compiled and published them in the following year under the title *Njan Kanda Europe.*

Njan Kanda Europe is significant for a number of reasons. The most obvious one is its temporal and spatial significance, being an account of Europe and its people, at a time when Europe was slowly veering towards the Second World War, with Italy preparing for the war against Abyssinia and the fascist parties getting stronger in Italy and Germany. This was also the period when the struggle for India's independence was gaining momentum and the Indian cause was finding a lot of international support. As such, there is a greater identification with India and the Indian freedom struggle in this travelogue. At any rate, the primary identity foregrounded by Kalyanikutty Amma in the travelogue is of an "Indian woman" though her regional and caste identities come into play particularly in her comparison of the relative freedom of women in Europe and India respectively. The target audience which was originally a national audience, her own association with India's freedom movement and her travelling to Europe as an official representative of India for an international conference could be some of the other reasons. The tour is also punctuated by meetings with national and international figures such as Kamala Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Romain Rolland, a supporter of the Indian freedom struggle.

While Kalyanikutty Amma's travelogue is rich enough to be read in many different ways, my attempt in this paper is to highlight its apparent tension between a nascent feminism and a deep-rooted nationalism. This is evident in Kalyanikutty's opinions on the different European countries she visits. On the one hand, she wants to answer back to a colonial discourse popularized by such books as Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* which

presented the Indian men as chauvinists and autocrats in relation to their women. On the other hand, she is impressed by the freedom enjoyed by the European women, in particular, the liberty to move about freely, rarely given to women in India. This is evident when she writes: "Though there are many opportunities and temptations to stray from the moral path in this big city and though many sights fit for Katherine Mayo's pen can be seen in Hyde Park after dusk, one can safely say that any woman can go out here, even alone, in the late hours of the night without any fear of molestation" (Amma, *Njan* 96).

Another reference to Mayo occurs in the travelogue when Kalyanikutty comments on what she saw when she peeped through a hole on the door of a building in the St. Pancras Housing Estate into a London slum, thus outwitting the authorities who had refused her permission to visit the slum. Here, despite Kalyanikutty Amma's qualifications, one can read in her contravention an obvious attempt to write back to *Mother India.* Commenting on the spectacle of poverty and disease she sees there, and borrowing her vocabulary from the above book, she writes:

> We could understand it if such slime pits and sickness existed in the "shabby, threadbare, sick and poor, old Mother India [which] stood at last on the brink of another world and [had] turned blind eyes toward the strange new flag above her head." But we failed to comprehend how such dirt and sickness could exist in a civilized country like England with its high ideals of constructive service and public duty. (Amma, Njan 94)[2]

Kalyanikutty thus directly answers back to the text and her tactic, as in the case of many nationalists, was to claim that "civilized" England was as culpable as the "uncivilized" India to the charges made against it by Mayo. The charge of sexual perversions attributed by Mayo to the Indian men, which is reiterated by Kalyanikutty in relation to the Englishmen in Hyde Park, is another such example.

Yet, the trip to Europe makes Kalyanikutty Amma indulge in freedom denied to her as a woman in India. For instance, she revels in and partakes of the freedom of European women to move about freely, even at late hours without any fear. In fact, this aspect is stressed by her repeatedly in the travelogue, be it in England, Scotland or Holland. Running down a slope in Holland with two of her friends in gay abandon like a mad woman is a memory she cherishes of her tour. She is also excited about the coming up of an organization in Czechoslovakia devoted to the cause of gender

equality. Many of the members even speak up in august assemblies about the India Bill and the necessity of extending the franchise given to some sections of Indian women.

So how does Kalyanikutty look at the women of Europe in comparison to the women of India? While she admires the Soviet Russian, the English and the Czechoslovakian women, in that order, for the liberation they have achieved symbolized by their achievements in various realms and their entry into the public sphere, she is of the opinion that women's position in Europe is not uniform with the other European countries lagging far behind. She talks about the tendency to push women back into the domestic sphere in some European countries and contends that whatever progress the European women have achieved is after valiantly fighting against their men. On the other hand, she talks about how the Indian men have been supporting the struggle of the Indian women for their rights. She gives the instance of the Southborough committee in charge of determining the franchise for Indians which was forced to backtrack after the women and men of India launched a massive protest against its recommendation to deny franchise to Indian women. While she admits that the kind of gender segregation practised in India is unnatural and tends to make the men look down upon the women, she proclaims the nationalist leaders such as Gandhi, Nehru, Devdhar etc. as great champions of women's progress in India. She also gives the example of two annual sessions of the Congress which had women as presidents—Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu, respectively. Though she admits that the Indian women still have a long way to go, she wonders whether they will have to overcome the same obstacles their Western sisters had and might have to face.

Thus while predicting a great future for Indian women with the help and support of the Indian men, she is quick to deny the charges that the Indian women are uniformly oppressed and lead a miserable life behind the purdah. She contends that despite regressive customs such as the purdah and child marriage, the status accorded to the Indian woman in her home is something unseen in other countries. She attributes this to the status accorded to Indian women by Hindu religion. Her subscription to the golden age theory, i.e., the theory that India once had a golden age from which there was a fall of grace, is evident when she calls the Indian woman "the veritable mistress of the household". Interestingly and perhaps

strategically, she attributes the fall in grace from this golden age not to the "Muslim invaders" as some of her predecessors used to do, but to the British intervention in institutionalizing Hinduism as a religion.

She also tries to show how some women of India enjoy even greater freedom than the Western women, referring to the Nair women, the women of her own caste. She also compares the women of North India and South India respectively and is of the opinion that the women of South India are more liberated than those of North India. This is one of the rare instances where she foregrounds her regional and caste identities. One can argue that the "region" here helps to serve the cause of the "nation", as in helping to debunk the notion of the "oppressed Indian woman". In fact, she argues that not only are purdah and child marriage absent in the Nair community, the extent of freedom enjoyed by the Nair women such as the right to divorce, the right of a married daughter to her maternal property etc., can and did even make the Western women speechless with amazement. Romain Rolland, she writes, asked her the secret of how Nair women continue to enjoy so much financial freedom and other rights at a time when India has lost all rights and freedom under the current regime. Perhaps her attempt, before a national and later regional audience, was primarily to respond to the discourse on the uniformly "oppressed Indian woman" and to turn this discourse on its head by suggesting that some Indian women enjoy greater freedom than many European women. It is significant that Kalyanikutty chooses to foreground her regional and caste identities in this matter in contrast to her attempt to embrace a pan-Indian identity through much of the travelogue.

How do we look at Kalyanikutty Amma today and her analysis of women's status in India and Europe respectively? Kalyanikutty Amma was far ahead of her time in her attempts to debunk concepts like "masculinity" and "femininity". This is evident in an article she wrote in a Malayalam weekly in 1938, "Streepurushasamatvattinulla Chila Pratibandhangal" (Some Obstacles in the Way of Equality between the Sexes), where she contends:

> Of what use is equality? ...Women who advocate the equality of the sexes do not certainly want one model to suit everyone. On the contrary, only equality will nurture uniquely individual qualities. We still possess only incomplete knowledge of our natures and dispositions. What do we actually mean by vague terms like "Manliness" and "Womanliness"? Does not

> research into psychology reveal our ignorance regarding aspects of sex difference? How many individuals are left stunted by our moral precepts, which are the offspring of our half-baked knowledge! (Amma, "Some obstacles" 177-178)

Even in this travelogue written two years earlier, where her feminist ideas are not articulated as strongly, she is very unlike many male travelers, her predecessors and contemporaries alike, who used to argue that the greater mobility of the European woman and her entry into male domains was harmful to her and that it destroyed her essential femininity[3]. Kalyanikutty Amma is genuinely happy and pleased with the progress the European women were making in their attempts to enter into the public sphere. At the same time, she doesn't generalize the position of European women as uniformly progressive, but points out the differences in women's positions there.

But certainly, among many contentions she makes in the travelogue, two of them such as the Indian (read Hindu) woman being the veritable goddess of the household and the extent of the Nair woman's freedom are problematic: the former being so because it subscribes to the golden age theory propounded by many Hindu nationalists, and as regards the latter many of the rights she talks about were taken away or were in the process of being taken away from the Nair women with the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896[4] . Possibly in the attempt to counter the image of the "oppressed Indian woman", she idealized the woman in India and gave her freedom she did not really enjoy. Perhaps in the conflict between a nascent feminism and a booming nationalism, nationalism won the day. Unlike Pandita Ramabai whose feminist ideals led her to a sharp critique of Indian (in particular, a Hindu) patriarchy, aided probably by her insider-outsider status, Kalyanikutty chooses not to directly confront the native patriarchy in this travelogue. Her insider status both as a Hindu woman, a Nair woman and a nationalist could have made her adopt such a stance.

The travelogue is also interesting for Kalyanikutty's perceptive insights into colonialism, fascism, the effects of colonial education and the efficacy of international organizations in solving world problems. Unlike many early travelogues where the travellers used to judge a country for its claims to "civilization", Kalyanikutty, with her anti-colonial sympathies, primarily judges a country based on the stance it adopts towards India. The English and the French are criticized for their lack of interest in knowing about

other people. On the other hand, the Italians, the Czechs and even the Germans are presented as open-minded in their desire to know about India, its people and the Indian leaders. The International Conference gives her many opportunities to come into contact with colonial ideologues, and she even enters into debate with some of them. Given Kalyanikutty's openly nationalistic stance, it is interesting to look at how she responds to the threat of extreme nationalism posed by countries like Germany and Italy. While she does emphasize Germany's history of friendship with India, and sympathizes with the Germans for the raw deal they had at the hands of the Allies after the First World War, she is apprehensive about the repercussions of the Nazi Aryan ideology on Indo-German relations. Similarly, she admires the patriotism of the Italians, but laments the needless sacrifice of the youth in Italy's attempt to extend its stock of imperial possessions. She presents herself as very bold throughout the narrative and is not afraid of arguing with people who hold opposing ideologies, be it the Italian Fascists or the Nazis or even colonial ideologues. She even questions a Nazi officer "who was enlightening us on the gentle ways of leading the Jews on to the right paths in the concentration camps," as to whether Jesus was not a Jew, and on hearing his emphatic denial, is quick to retort, "Then what was he? Was he a Nordic Aryan?" The Nazi officer doesn't reply, "perhaps not attaching much value to my question" (Amma, *Njan* 60).

Interestingly, though the object of the tour was to participate in the International Students' Conference and represent India on a world stage and discuss its problems, the object is not met during the conference. In fact, Kalyanikutty interrogates the utility of such a conference which is meant only for the independent Western countries who meet to discuss and find solutions to their specific problems. As she says, talking about "international brotherhood and cooperation" is meaningless between masters and slaves. She cites the example of the young English woman who refused to stay in the same building with the Indians. Despite this attitude shown by the "masters", she writes, "we, like small children, partake of the tablets they give for the sake of the sweetness outside and like an ostrich, try to live with our heads buried in the shade of false hopes" (Amma, *Njan* 146).

As a nationalist, Kalyanikutty's European tour gives her valuable insights not just into the power politics in international organizations, but

also makes her re-examine the part played by the colonial education in constructing her as a colonial subject. What impresses her most about the European countries she visits is the importance given to education there. Yet, this is not a disinterested curiosity, for she, in fact, traces to their education system the patriotism among the people of the European countries "which makes them ready to fight for their rights to the very end" (Amma, *Njan* 181). Even if they learn other languages and literatures, they never disregard their own. She contrasts this kind of education, which she projects as the ideal, to the kind of education she received and the mindset it developed in her, anticipating the words of many post-colonial writers after her:

> I never felt any aptitude for my mother tongue...Moreover, each of the defeats of our ancestors recorded in the Indian history books taught at school used to please me tremendously!...I do not know who has to be termed responsible for this mindset I developed, whether it should be the book...or my teachers... Somehow, I used to feel that my ancestors were a bunch of bandits or else worthless cowards who had to be mercilessly wiped out from the face of the earth. This unusual mindset we see in a common Indian lasts lifelong in many of them. (Amma, *Njan* 181-182)

She then talks about the need for a revamping of the Indian education system to foster patriotism in the minds of the Indians. For her, education is certainly a means to serve the nationalist cause, but her interest in education is not limited to it. She also talks elsewhere in the travelogue about the need to introduce physical exercise for girls as part of the curriculum and the need for co-education in schools. Education, according to her, thus also seems to be a means of bringing equality between the sexes.

It is apparent from all these instances that *Njan Kanda Europe* is not a travelogue which tries to project itself as an objective study of places and people visited where the writer tries to hide her presence, but is a work where the writer confidently asserts her subjectivity and "returns" the gaze that is thrown at her. The subjecthood emphasized in the title itself has to be interpreted in the light of the nationalist struggle with its attempt to give the Indian a positive self-image. Javed Majeed in his study of early Indian travelogues contends that the travellers often tended to highlight optical aids in the sub-titles of their travelogues, be it G. P. Pillai's *London and Paris through Indian Spectacles* or Pandian's *English Pictures from an Indian*

Camera as though the traveller believed that without them, his eye-sight was too weak or unfocussed to be reliable. According to Majeed, reliance on such technology is "rooted in their self-conscious sense of their fragility as subjects as 'see-ers'" (Majeed 60-61). It can also be argued that the use of such optical aids in titles might have been motivated by an attempt to distance the subject from the object of vision, perhaps to claim a different kind of "objectivity", though it is still qualified by the subjectivity of the subject's nationality. Be that as it may, in Kalyanikutty's assertive title, there is no hint of a disembodied vision; the "I" here is confidently looking at the object of its vision "Europe". This is significant because this travelogue and its assertive title created some controversy in the Kerala of the time, with a satirist even dubbing the travelogue "Europe Kanda Kalyanikutty" (The "Kalyanikutty" who was seen by Europe). What irked the patriarchal society of her time was the confidence she showed in airing her personal observations on places and matters which were supposed to be the domain of her male contemporaries. For instance, though she claims in her Preface that she is not knowledgeable about international politics enough to comment much on it, she does not shy away from airing her observations throughout the text. It is also to be noted that before Kalyanikutty Amma wrote this travelogue, there were very few travelogues in Malayalam with such a "subjective" title. All these raise larger questions about subjectivity in travel writing and subjectivity as an ascribed hallmark of women's writing. Also Kalyanikutty's middle class status brings into focus questions about whether travel writing itself is an elitist genre since a travelogue can only be penned by someone who has the leisure and resources to travel and to get it published.

Kalyanikutty's travelogue is fascinating because of all these reasons – because of what she says, how she says it, what she does not say or chooses not to. She is quite progressive for her age on the question of women's rights and displays a nuanced understanding of international politics and India's position within it. It is evident that she considered the women of her group as effective ambassadors of their country and her attempt is to build bridges with people of different nations in her tour. The travelogue blurs the distinction between the personal and the public, as it records both her personal experiences and her experiences as an official member of the women's contingent. At the same time, the tension one finds in Kalyanikutty's travelogue between nationalism and feminism is

symptomatic of the fault lines within the mainstream nationalist movement, which while it afforded women a chance to participate in public life, did not significantly alter the gender equations of the day, relegating gender issues as secondary to "national interests".

Notes

1. Even the term "travel" is suspect, according to Inderpal Grewal who argues that "that this [European/Colonial] mode of travel became and is hegemonic to this day is revealed by the deployment of the term travel as a universal form of mobility" in the process erasing other mobilities such as deportation or indenture or subsuming them under its universalizing umbrella (qtd. in Khair 11).
2. I have used the original English quote from *Mother India*. All the translations from the travelogue, though, are mine.
3. Many Indian male travellers to England and Europe from the late nineteenth century, while they admired the visible presence of women in public gatherings and parties and the easy interaction between the men and the women, displayed a sense of acute discomfort at the "masculine" way in which some of them dressed. G. P. Pillai was emphatic that women should not impinge on male territory in the matter of clothing and gave the instance of an English woman whose manner of talking and behaving was so evidently "masculine" despite her "feminine" clothing that he could not stop staring at her. Similarly, V. K. Gokak writing in the 30s, was also offended by the sight of a white woman travelling alone and termed the erosion of gender difference signified by a woman performing "masculine" activities such as smoking and dressing like men, a creation of "the Empire". See G. P. Pillai, *Londonum Parisum* [London and Paris] and V. B. Tharakeshwar, "Empire Writes Back: Kannada Travel Fiction and Nationalist Discourse".
4. There are also debates about how far the legendary rights of the Nair women were "real".

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Naipaul's India: Myth or Reality?

Sreemati Mukherjee

Travel allows discourse formation. Indeed, during the Renaissance in Europe, travel was a central aid to the creation of new geographies and cartographies, leading to radical envisioning of the European being in new socio-economic, cultural and geographical contexts. If the path of the tragic hero is self discovery, then the trajectory of the epic hero, even when involving inner discoveries and revelations, is often played out against a variety of geographical backdrops. The epic refashioning of the world that took place in the Renaissance, not only with the Copernican revolution, but the fervent development of all spheres of thinking, living and acting, is matched with the epic desire for travel and discovery that characterizes that period. The names of Vasco Da Gama, Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan are fairly synonymous with the epic energies of the time, and help to clinch the Renaissance idea of human mastery and possibility through the prodigious energies of traveling and discovering. This cluster of names becomes a leading leitmotif of the Renaissance refashioning of the world, and a powerful signifier of the modern sensibility which predicates itself on *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), the claiming of the self as a competent reader of experience. Travel automatically becomes a testament of the reading and writing self-empowered human subject.

V.S. Naipaul could be seen as carrying on this form of Renaissance fashioning in viewing travel as an important epistemological tool. Naipaul's discovery of the world also leads to discovery of the self. If the journey of the epic hero is a journey to self-knowledge, the trajectory of the hero/heroine of a latter day *Bildungsroman* or a *Kuntsleroman*, Naipaul's travels to India, have the epic dimensions of a culturally and socially disjunctive self searching for social, cultural and historical moorings. Unlike Niccolo de Conti who came to Vijaynagar around 1420, or Thomas Roe and Bernier who traveled to India in the 17th century, or William Howard Russell who came to India to report on the Mutiny of 1857, Naipaul's positionality vis-à-vis India, is not free of personal affect of either anger or pain or both, which complicate his response to India.[1] It is an emotion that spills over, through the apparent urbanity and dry sophistication that Naipaul

strives for, emerging in fact, as the "narrative desire" of his India travelogues. In focusing on the "dereliction" of India ("Reading and Writing" 23), Naipaul positions himself within the traditions of European travelers like Roe and Bernier and Russell, all of whom had noted the impoverishment of the masses vis-à-vis the ostentatious and pretentious life of the rulers (23). In the narrative by Ibn Batuta, the Moroccan Muslim theologian who visited India in the 14th century, "the local people were only obliquely seen" as "serfs" or "slaves" (23). But even in Batuta, the indications of India's "great dereliction" could be read between the lines (23).

In the essay "Reading and Writing" which Naipaul wrote eight years after his last narrative on India (*India: A Million Mutinies Now*) he discusses ideas of a permanent sense of homelessness, of being an outsider and a stranger to all communities that he had lived in, and his use of writing to negotiate this state of homelessness. Initially, the fact/fiction interface of the novel had bothered him at an ontological level because "part of the point of a novel came from half rejecting the fiction, or looking through it to a reality" (13). However, after decades of novel writing he turned his hand to travel writing when he was commissioned to travel to the Caribbean and old Spanish Main. In "Reading and Writing," he analyses what this transition from the novel to travel writing meant for him philosophically, psychologically and artistically:

> Fiction had taken me as far as it could go. There were certain things it couldn't deal with. It couldn't deal with my years in England; there was no social depth to the experience. It seemed more a matter for autobiography. And it couldn't deal with my growing knowledge of the wider world. Fiction, by its nature functioning best within certain fixed social boundaries, seemed to be pushing me back to worlds—like the island world, or the world of my childhood—smaller than the one I inhabited. Fiction, which had once liberated me and enlightened me, now seemed to be pushing me towards being simpler than I really was…
>
> I had trouble with the form. I didn't know how to travel for a book. I traveled as though I was on holiday, and then floundered, looking for the narrative. I had trouble with the "I" of the travel writer; I thought that as traveler and narrator he was in unchallenged command and had to make big judgments.
>
> For all its faults…. the book, [the travel book] was for me an extension of knowledge and feeling. ("Reading and Writing" 17)

Naipaul himself furnishes his critique with the theoretical framework, within which to situate his travel writing. As his reference to autobiography indicates, travel writing would probably fulfill in him the need to write about himself. Within this framework, I would read Naipaul's India travelogues as a signature of affect, of weaving or negotiating the past of his grandparents with the present of India, to settle in his own mind what his own relationship with the Asian subcontinent was. Once again, as he himself admits:

> Nearly all my adult life had been spent in countries where I was a stranger. I couldn't as a writer go beyond that experience. To be true to that experience I had to write about people in that kind of position. I found ways of doing so, but I never ceased to feel it as a constraint. If I had had to depend only on the novel I would probably have soon found myself without the means of going on,
>
> But there were other forms that met my need. Fiction, the exploration of one's immediate circumstances, had taken me a lot of the way. Travel had taken me further. ("Reading and Writing" 13-17)

Naipaul's visits to India seem fairly obsessive and circular in the trajectory of their hidden desire. *An Area of Darkness* (1962), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1976) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990), chart Naipaul's compulsion to return to India and a compulsion to write about its realities. My position in this paper is that, in the effort of seeking to clarify or understand India, Naipaul – a socially and culturally wounded person himself – seeks redress and rehabilitation through journey to the ancient home. If we simply consider the testimony of the three travel narratives to India, then we would have to posit that Naipaul did indeed take a very Eurocentric, orientalist[2] view of Indian realities, and seems too intent to denounce the dereliction (philosophical, moral, psychological, economic) on the part of a land to feed its millions. This was the land that his forefathers had to perforce leave because of economic exigencies. However, if we consider his later statements in "Reading and Writing" (1998), we will obtain a clearer understanding of why there is such a pointed dismissal of Indian realities in the travelogues:

> India was the greater hurt. It was a subject country. It was also the place from whose very great poverty our grandfathers had had to run away in the late nineteenth century. The two India's were separate. The political India, of the freedom movement, had its great names. The other,

more personal India was quite hidden; it vanished when memories faded. It wasn't an India we could read about. It wasn't Kipling's India or E.M. Forster's or Somerset Maugham's; and it was far from the somewhat stylish India of Nehru and Tagore...

It was to this personal India, and not the India of independence and its great names, that I went when the time came. I was full of nerves. But nothing had prepared me for the dereliction I saw. No other country I knew had so many layers of wretchedness, and few countries were as populous. I felt I was in a continent where, separate from the rest of the world, a mysterious calamity had occurred. ("Reading and Writing" 21)

Although dryness and satire are Naipaul's signatory attributes even in his African, South American, Caribbean and South East Asian travel writings, the Indian narratives are powered by an affect that is hard to ignore. One could put this affect down as anger. Pankaj Mishra's introduction to the *Writer and his World* and Naipaul's own admissions in "Reading and Writing" give us a sense of what Naipaul's private wound or affect might have been. Mishra informs us that Naipaul was born of Brahmin grandparents (the fact of caste being explicitly mentioned by Mishra) who left India as indentured labourers to the Caribbean (Mishra viii). And funnily enough, hard as he is on Gandhi in all three travelogues, especially the second one (*India: A Wounded Civilization*), it is Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* that first gives him a glimpse of social categories that his grandparents belonged to.

It was only in Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, in the chapters dealing with his discovery in the 1890's of the wretchedness of the unprotected Indian labourers in South Africa, that I found—obliquely, and not for long—a rawness of hurt that was like my own in India.

...I couldn't let go of the hurt. It took time—with writing, in many moods—to see beyond the dereliction. It took time to break through the bias and the fantasies of Indian political ideas about the Indian past. The independence struggle, the movement against the British, had obscured the calamities of India before the British. Evidence of those calamities lay on every side. ("Reading and Writing" 22)

In her essay, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, where Djebar, positioning herself as an Algerian Muslim woman, speaks of how writing her autobiography in French was like exposing a wound:

> To attempt an autobiography in French words alone is to show more than its skin under the slow scalpel of a live autopsy. Its flesh peels off and with it, seemingly, the speaking of childhood which can no longer bet written is torn to shreds. Wounds are reopened, veins weep the blood of the self flows and that of others, a blood which has never dried. (Spivak 147)

The idea of wound as a marker of collective racial identity is also common to African American writing, where physical and psychological scars and bruises give the black community a certain continuum of identity as in Morrison's *Beloved*.[3] Gayatri Spivak accepts the idea "of identity as a wound, exposed by the historically hegemonic languages, for those who have learned the double-binding 'practice of [their] writing'" (Spivak 147). Naipaul too writes within the double bind of an originally (racially) rural Eastern and later acculturated Western identity. In *An Area of Darkness,* his first travelogue to India, he expatiates on the mutual exclusions on which his Caribbean identity was predicated:

> I have been rebuked by writers from the West Indies, and notably George Lamming, for not paying sufficient attention in my books to non-Indian groups. The confrontation of different communities, he said, was the fundamental West Indian experience.... But to see the attenuation of the culture of my childhood as the result of a dramatic confrontation of opposed worlds would be to distort the reality. To me the worlds were juxtaposed and mutually exclusive. One gradually contracted.... The family life I have been describing began to dissolve when I was six or seven: when I was fourteen it had ceased to exist ... *the featureless area of darkness which was India.* (35; italics mine)

> ... it is a marvel that we should have accepted the separateness of our two worlds and seen no incongruity in their juxtaposition. In one world we existed as if in blinkers, as if seeing no more than my grandfather's village; outside, we were totally self-aware.... (35)

> I had been born a nonbeliever. Yet the thought of the decay of the old customs and reverences saddened me.... (36)

The above quote, in unveiling the layered complexity of Naipaul's childhood positioning between east and west and his psychological negotiation of this complex reality, is perhaps what leads to the powerful affect of his India travelogues, exposing the permanent wounds of straddling mutually exclusive worlds as he writes himself into these narratives. Naipaul demonstrates what Bhabha in "Remembering Fanon:

Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition" calls the "figure of colonial otherness," "It is not the colonialist self or the colonized other but the disturbing distance in between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness" (Bhabha 117).

Alternating attraction and repulsion for a particular cultural and environmental context is how the schizophrenic splitting of the self within opposing cultural determinations manifests itself (Mukherjee 77). Another way of looking at this binary within the colonized self is DuBois's term "double consciousness" ("The Souls of Black Folk" 613-740), which is aptly indicative of how many black skins have "white masks" (Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*). The affects associated with this psychologically split self could be anything from anger, grief to "ontological uncertainty" (Fanon 110). If a noticeable lack characterizes Naipaul's accounts of travel in India, it is his horror and revulsion from the obvious defects of Indian life – evinced so vividly in Anita Desai's (also, an insider-outsider figure) descriptions of Delhi bazaars and Bombay roadsides in novels like *In Custody* or *Baumgartner's Bombay* – and his almost utter lack of sympathy for the ravages of India's colonial past. Naipaul's configuration of India within a cultural, economic and political value system, accords India the lower position in the cultural binary. To me this is symptomatic of Naipaul's "orientalist" approach towards the multifacetedness, the endless complexity generated by overlapping time zones in an India where the past, not only as a psychological curiosity or nostalgic reference, but as a persistent social, economic, reality, fashions very many conflicting contemporaneities within the same geopolitical space. In consequence, to understand India emerges as a task demanding far more patience than Naipaul seems ready to expend. Forster perhaps clued in better to India's reality than Naipaul, when he centralized India's ambiguity and irreducibility in the trope of the Marabar caves in *A Passage to India*, which refused to yield a script that would help unravel its meaning.

The first thing that a reader of Naipaul's trilogy of travel narratives on India, *An Area of Darkness* (1964), *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1976) and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1990)[4], becomes aware of is the quality of their over-determination. India is either "dark," or it is "wounded" or it is home to a "million mutinies." It's not as if there is no truth in these metaphorisations. Afterall which postcolonial nation can boast of not having "wounds" or "areas of darkness" or "mutinies"? The centralizing

image for what is multiple, complex, contradictory and multifaceted is the method of poetry and music which may use an image or a leitmotif to focus some degree of meaning in the apparent chaos of reality or experience. The image or the symbol or the leitmotif may or may not be charged with personal affect, but in Naipaul's narratives, the wound that is India, is also the complex psychological wound of Naipaul's private history through his grandparents. If a chronotope[5] distinguishes Naipaul's India narratives, then it is the mental chronotope (Bakhtin 84-258), the time space continuum of a "derelict" India from the 19th century onwards that subsumes and orders external reality for Naipaul in India.

My argument in this paper is that even as Naipaul attempts a magisterial exposition of Indian, he seems in Pankaj Mishra's words, "aloof everywhere, unsurprised, immensely knowing" (Mishra ix), and inscribes himself perhaps more poignantly than he inscribes external realities when he insist only on seeing the wound, the darkness and the hopelessness of constant internal fissures within India's political fabric. To emphasize the idea of "affect " in Naipaul's vision and therefore its defective quality let me quote from his frank admission in *An Area of Darkness* when he feels that his ship is nearing India:

> From Athens to Bombay another idea of man had defined itself by degrees, a new type of authority and subservience. The physique of Europe had melted away first into that of Africa and then, through Semitic Arabia, into Aryan Asia. Men had been diminished and deformed; they begged and whined. Hysteria had been my reaction, and a brutality dictated by a new awareness of myself as a whole human being and a determination, touched with fear, to remain what I was. It mattered little through whose eyesI was seeing the East; there had as yet been no time for this type of self-assessment. (*AOD* 13)

Using Kristeva's concept of the "abject," I could posit that Naipaul clearly rejects the abject as part of himself.[6] Of course, Naipaul admits to feeling or experiencing "hysteria" and my guess is that the hysteria was occasioned by his fear that his racial characteristics might force him to somehow identify with this obvious other of European culture, an other with whom he shares both sameness and difference. Indeed, once in India, he admits to feeling irritated when people in shops showed him no special regard for his foreigner status (*AOD* 43), mistaking him as one of their own.

One notices how the area of darkness of his childhood grew to envelop India entirely for Naipaul. One notices how personal the naming of this text is. India is an area of darkness, because it is so for him. During his first visit in 1962, Delhi was simply a "city which remained its plan, unquickened and unhumanized ... a city built like a monument" (*AOD* 84). Nowhere is Delhi's historicity mentioned or a word said about her historical grandeur. A travel narrative should perforce deal with history to a certain extent, in locating the geopolitical space in time, and if it does not then it is limited on various counts. However, Naipaul has mentioned that he was a person without a past. Located in the west and possibly a British citizen by then, Naipaul skillfully elides over all questions relating to India's colonial past and its possible damaging implications. It would not be wrong to conclude therefore, that such an elision permanently damages the authenticity of Naipaul's reading of India, and qualifies our response to his moral indignation over her poverty. In *Area of Darkness* where Naipaul mocks Premchand sentimentalizing poverty he ventriloquises what seems the voice of India or its elite/intellectuals speaking to him as the European outsider who protests the moral indignity of poverty:

> Do not think that your anger and contempt are marks of sensitivity. You might have seen more: the smiles on the faces of the begging children, that domestic group among the pavement sleepers waking in the cool Bombay morning, father, mother and baby in trinity of love, so self-contained that they are as private as if walls had separated them from you: it is your gaze that violates them, your sense of outrage that outrages them... (*AOD* 44)

As always, Naipaul stations himself in the higher rung of the viewer/researcher/ethnographer binary vis a vis the observed culture, and curiously enough, says not a word about Mulk Raj Anand whose writing espoused the ideals of the Progressive Writers' Association, formed in 1936, and was dedicated to arousing a "critical spirit," against the torpor of tradition and imperialism. Anand's was a vehement voice of protest against the class oppressions of society.[7] When Naipaul claims in "Reading and Writing" (1998) that, "what was so overwhelming to me, so much in the foreground, was not to be found in the modern day writing I knew, Indian or English...in both English and Indian kinds the extraordinary distress of India, when acknowledged, was like something given, eternal, something to be read only as background. And there were, as always, those who

thought they could find a special spiritual quality in the special Indian distress." One wonders at the appalling ignorance he demonstrates of protest traditions in India. For a man who wished to work within the traditions of comprehensive knowledge, how is it possible that he did not research into the efforts of the Progressive Writers' Association to acknowledge and represent India's state of social, class-based and economic oppression? In his first presidential address to the Progressive Writers' Association, Munshi Premchand urged writers to move away from romantic representations of aristocratic realities to focus on the "basic social backwardness and political subjection" of India. To quote Premchand, "All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason, we reject as reactionary all that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps you to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive" (Pradhan 20-21).

In any case, Naipaul evinces completely ignorance of the tradition of protest that grew around the famine of 1942-43. The IPTA or Indian People's Theatre Movement staged Bijan Bhattacharaya's play *Nabanna* dealing with the Bengal famine of October 1942, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay wrote their immortal classics of social protest in novels like *Asani Sanket* and *Manyantar*. Other novelists of the period were Saroj Raychaudhuri, whose *Kalo Ghora*, and Gopal Halder's *Unapanchashi*, *Teroshopanchas* (meaning 1350 in Bengali) and *Panchasher Pathe*, are concerned as living social documents of those distressed times when India dealt with the man-made famine created by the exigency of sending food grains to the soldiers involved in the Second World War.[8]

In *India: A Wounded Civilization*, Naipaul mediates his knowledge or understanding of India through four texts, a methodology and a cultural mapping that are open to questioning. The texts in question are M.K. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, R.K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*, Vijay Tendulkar's *The Vultures*, Anantamurti's *Samskara* (*WC* 31-144).[9] Another guide who charts the way for Naipaul's biased and overdetermined entry into the psyche of the Indian person is the western-style-Freudian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar. Naipaul uses the latter's writing, and his private conversations as well as epistolary exchange with him. As far as Bengali is concerned, Naipaul clearly didn't look beyond Tagore,

and dismissed him as too aristocratic. Perhaps, Naipaul's own yearning for "metropolitan glamour and serenity" (Mishra ix) and his preoccupation with class, causes him to be especially hard towards an India, where his forefathers had not enjoyed social prestige.

In *India: A Wounded Civilization* which seems obsessive in its anti-Gandhianism, and where the "obsessions" of Indians are doggedly emphasized, Naipaul weaves in Gandhi's narration of his experiences in England to demonstrate the complete self absorption of Indians, their clannishness, their inability to move out of clan and caste and tribe perhaps, and their failure to connect with external reality. And his guide through his travels through both the Indian psyche and Gandhi is western style psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, who had practiced in India, Europe and America. After asserting with some vehemence that Gandhi was "practically uneducated" (WC 102), Naipaul excoriates Gandhi for not reveling in Southampton's busyness right after landing in 1888, or talking about the bustle of London:

> No London building is described, no street, no room, no crowd, no public conveyance. The London of 1890, capital of the world—which must have been overwhelming to a young man from a small Indian town—has to be inferred from Gandhi's continuing internal disturbances, his embarrassments, his religious self-searchings, his attempts at dressing correctly and learning English manners, and, above all, his difficulties and occasional satisfactions about food. (*WC* 103)

Now Naipaul's travelogue turns into a magisterial dissection of the Indian mind in Kakar's terms:

> "We Indians," Kakar says, "use the outside reality to preserve the continuity of the self amidst an ever changing flux of outer events and things." (*WC* 109)

Naipaul goes on in his own voice intermittently quoting from Kakar's conversation or letters:

> Men do not, therefore, actively explore the world; rather, they are defined by it. It is this negative way of perceiving that goes with "meditation," the striving after the infinite, the bliss of losing the self; it also goes with karma and the complex organization of Indian life... In the Indian set-up, as Kakar says, it is the Western-style "mature personality," individualistic and assertive," that would be the misfit. (*WC* 109)

However, the eminently "individualistic", "mature" Naipaul has very little to say about the historicity or the historical richness of Delhi when he comes to the city in 1962, except inscribe his own very subjective responses, somewhat tutored and prescribed by a gaze that seems offensively West centered or Eurocentric.

> It was in Delhi, the city of symbols, first of the British Raj and now of the independent Indian republic: a jungle of black-and-white notice boards mushrooming out of feverish administrative activity, the Indian Council for this and Academy for that, the Ministry for this and the Department for that ... a city ever growing, as it has been for the last forty years, a city of civil servants and contractors... (*AOD* 83)

Not a word has been mentioned about Delhi's historical richness or an honest attempt to look at its historical monuments with some awe and reverence. I could argue that Naipaul himself demonstrates the "underdeveloped ego" (*WC* 107) that he accuses Indians of having, and applies his diagnosis of the Indian character as having a "defect of vision" (*WC* 101) to himself. That is, he himself is closer to a certain stage in childhood when outer objects did not have a separate independent existence but were intimately related to the self and its affective states (*WC* 107).

At no point does Naipaul admit to anything tentative within his framework of analysis or reference, a trait that deeply flaws his work. This lack of humility, of deference and reverence for the nation he is writing about, deeply flaws his work, sometimes marking it as a kind of personal diatribe against the nation/home of his forefathers. When Naipaul reads the French accolade of Fierre Bes Georges, in the pamphlet of the Bhagirath hotel in Delhi, given to him by a tout for the hotel at Delhi railway station, the joke seems on India, whose people felt that it is important to sell the country to a foreigner in a foreign language. However, at the same time, Naipaul is also assuming commonality with the educated or elite European reader who would have understood French when he ejaculates to himself, "Et Monsieur, qu'est-ce qu'il déplore? Je ne déplore qu'une chose. Arrosez les excellents repos" (*AOD* 84). At such a moment of irony directed at India, it is certainly the European who knows French and perhaps the Indian who knows French, who are his silent and elite interlocutors. *An Area of Darkness* still has moments of exquisite humour that irradiate from Naiapaul's Trinidadian works like *The Mystic Masseur and Miguel Street* or *The Suffrage of Elvira*. Although caustic and darkly satirical even in these stories, there is a basic sympathy with the environment in

these works which make them aesthetically satisfying and pleasure inducing.

In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, he mentions the million "mutinies" of India—the Shiv Shena, The Dalit Panthers, the DMK and Periyar, the Brahmin Revival Movement and the Naxalites. Regarding Communism he posits that it is a foreign importation like every other worthwhile idea in India, and that the Communist party is so multiply fragmented since its moments of inception, that it would be silly to take it seriously. However, these multiple "wounds" of India do not seem to elicit much sympathy from him. Rather he leaves it to its fate of decline. Unreasonable as it seems, in Naipaul's analysis multiple wounds of India fester into the communal violence of the Ramjanmabhumi movement in 1992. Naipaul's allegation that Indian minds are all second rate would turn to nothing therefore the achievements of P.C. Ray, Amartya Sen, C.V. Raman, Satyen Bose, and men and women of the earlier generation who made modernity in India possible. Not a word is mentioned anywhere about how Rammohun and Vidyasagar worked to uplift the state of women in Bengal in the previous century and the almost miraculous efflorescence of women's activities in literature and politics in the 19th and the 20th centuries.

Instead there is a ludicrous discourse of Brahminism, of course, with South India as the field study area where the ethnographer traveler asserts that the confluence of Brahminism with Science in the present day can be explained by noting how Brahmins who had to undergo elaborate Sanskrit and puja rituals, somehow (miraculously, not explained by Naipaul) created mutational genes that allowed this splendour to break forth in scientific activity:

> Out of that confluence the new education,—the purohit or brahmin's difficult, abstract learning, the concern with the right performance of complicated rituals, the stillness that went with the performance of some of those rituals—there had come a generation of scientists. The old Hindu Sanskrit learning—which a late 18th century scholar—administrator like Sir William Jones had seen as archaic and profound as the Greek, … had, 200 years later, in the most roundabout way, seeded the new. (*MM* 151-52)

However, we have to admit that Naipaul has tried to encompass India through his travels. He has used direct and indirect sources. He has traveled to all the sites known for their history and culture and distinctiveness, but like the layers of the skin of the onion, India Unraveled, is not such an

easy task to achieve. Apart from the personal suffering that provides an important substratum to his books, he has also identified a more or less permanent paradox of Indian existence and reality:

> I had grown to separate the pleasant from the unpleasant, the whole circular sky ablaze at sunset from the peasants diminished by its glory, the beauty of brassware and silk from the thin wrists that held them up for display, the ruins from the child defecating among them, to separate things from men. (*AOD* 45)

And in the end, is there a kind of nostalgia for the sense of life's illusion that India managed to generate in him?

> The world is illusion, the Hindus say. We talk of despair, but true despair lies too deep for formulation. It was only now, as my experience of India defined itself more properly against my own homelessness, that I saw how close in the past year I had been to the total Indian negation, how much it had become the basis of thought and feeling. And already, with this awareness, in a world where illusion could only be a concept and not something felt in the bones, it was slipping away from me. I felt it as something true which I could never adequately express and never seize again. (*AOD* 50)

Notes

1. The Italian traveler Niccolo de Conti, who visited Vijayanagar around 1420, wrote about the powerful and efficient administration of the Hindu Vijaynagar kingdom. Abdur Razzaq who came from Persia and who also visited Vijaynagar in 1442-1443, praises the magnificent treasury of the King and indicates that the index of general prosperity could be inferred from the sporting of jewelry by common people. See R.C. Mazumdar et al. 368.

2. By orientalist is meant the method of reading Other cultures/Asian cultures against western paradigms and according the Asian or Oriental culture a lower place in the cultural binary of Occident/Orient in the ground-breaking cultural theory advanced by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.

3. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe has a clump of scars on her back which is called a "chokecherry tree"; Beloved has a scar on her throat where Sethe had slit her throat. Eva Peace in *Sula* has one amputated leg which according to rumour she chopped off to get insurance money for her family. The pervasiveness of wounds was what gave the black community in the post-Reconstruction period and later, a collective identity.

4. Henceforth all citations from *An Area of Darkness* will be referred to as *AOD*. *India: A Wounded Civilization* will be referred to as *WC* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now* as *MM*.

5. Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope as a temporal spatial correlation or simultaneity which orders narrative or experiential zones in narrative/the novel.

6. In the essay "Powers of Horror," Kristeva explains the abject as "the twisted braid of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have properly speaking, a definable object. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*.... the abject ... the jettisoned object, ... draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (229-230).

7. These words were used by Premchand in his inaugural presidential address to the first session of the Progressive Writers' Association. Mulk Raj Anand who imbibed the prescriptions of the movement wrote didactic novels of great social awareness. *Coolie* and *Untouchable* are examples of how Anand wished to raise class consciousness among his readers. For Premchand's address see Sudhir Pradhan 20-21.

8. Sharing the goals of the Progressive Writers' Association, the Indian People's Theatre Movement also launched several plays of social protest. Bijan Bhattacharya's play staged by Bahuroopi (Group Theatre), after the famine of 1942-43, is a case in point. All the other works mentioned in this context in this paper were works of protest.

9. Naipaul uses R.K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*, Anantamurti's *Samskara* and Vijay Tendulkar's *Vultures* (trans.) to mediate his understanding of India.

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Re-figuring the 'Othello' within: Tropes of Alienation & Sexuality in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to The North*

Kaustav Kundu

> It hardly needs to be said that colonial contact disrupts indigenous culture, often radically. For many people, it renders traditional ideas uncertain and ends the easy performance of traditional practices. In doing this, it makes cultural identity a problem – an issue on which one almost necessarily takes a stand … In short, under colonialism, in the region of contact, the conflicts are so strong and pervasive that they constitute a challenge to one's cultural identity, and thus one's personal identity.
>
> Patrick Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity.*

In her essay "Caliban the Excluded," Margaret Paul Joseph affirms the importance of technology as the enforcer of the West's power. She cites French sociologist Octave Mannoni, who presupposes that a relationship of interdependency exists between the colonizer and the colonized, which fulfils the unconscious desires of both (qtd. in Joseph 6). Mannoni theorizes that in literature this dual relationship as portrayed between a Caliban and Prospero and a Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday is really a portrayal of human beings, whose true natures are complex enough to contain both "monster" and "gracious being" (6). Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, reports Joseph, reject this notion of interdependency. Indeed Fanon critiques Mannoni for not recognizing that Prospero and Caliban do not *need* (emphasis mine) each other, but that the latter's state of dependency (and resulting inferiority) was actually created by the former when he used his technological superiority for exploitation (Joseph 7). Joseph writes, "Fanon recognized the fact that alienation is central to any analysis of colonialism." She continues:

> Marx concerned himself with the workers of the world: labor and its economic powerlessness. Fanon champions the wretched of the world: the colonized and their psychic disintegration. Robert Smith elaborates on this: "The colonized personality is alienated not only from his color and traditional community but, most importantly, through the dynamics of colonialism/racism, he is alienated from his very being as a Black person." (Joseph 7)

This psychic alienation is what ails Mustafa Sa'eed, the protagonist of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, one of the most important postcolonial novels of the 20th century. After Hosna, his widow, takes her destiny in her own hands and kills Wad Rayyes and subsequently herself, she is widely condemned for her actions by the village on the bend in the Nile. Only two people understand her actions: Wad Rayyes' eldest wife, Mabrouka — a fellow victim — and Effendi, the narrator (Mustafa's doppelgänger) and "outsider" of the story. Hosna's epitaph becomes: "She accepted the stranger — why didn't she accept Wad Rayyes?" (Salih 129).

It is the "stranger's" acceptance or non-acceptance that is at the heart of *Season of Migration to the North*. The stranger is Mustafa Sa'eed, a native of Khartoum[1], a prized student of English and an economist who tries to make his home first in England and then in the small village on the bend of the Nile. Mustafa confides to Effendi that his father had died before he was born, and he had no relations through his father and mother. This, he admits, gave him as a child "a warm feeling of being free, that there was not a human being, by father or mother, to tie me down as a tent peg to a particular spot, a particular domain" (Salih 19). This freedom of connection to his land, culture, and people leads Mustafa down some strange paths. As a young boy he makes the choice to attend English school and surpasses everyone's expectations. He is sent to England on a scholarship, destined to be the perfect "Black English" gentleman. The Black English gentleman is the end product of England's ideology of allowing indirect rule: letting the "natives" rule but ensuring that British interests are served. As outlined by Lord Macaulay the intent was, through education, to have a class of person, Indian [or black] in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (qtd. in Spivak 61)

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o asserts the detrimental effect of colonial education, which annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves (3).

Mustafa learns his part well and becomes an economist with a doctorate, but he fails to earn the full acceptance of his colleagues as an intellectual equal. He remains the token exotic stranger to his English counterparts, regardless of his learning an English accent: his skin is too dark. Many years later, one Englishman later recalls of Mustafa:

> He built quite a legend of sort round himself — the handsome black man courted in Bohemian circles. It seems he was a showpiece exhibited by members of the aristocracy who in the twenties and early thirties were affecting liberalism. It is said he was friend of Lord-this and Lord-that. He was also one of the darlings of the English left. That was bad luck for him, because it is said he was intelligent. (Salih 58)

In fact, Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* is an important novel describing the manifestations of colonial policies and the way in which these policies have become embodied by those who have studied in Western systems of education and thus have been under the tutelage of a specific type of power and knowledge. This process in turn makes the characters a type of colonial subject who is exposed to the "productive" aspect of colonial policies through the production of new colonial spaces and thus new colonial subjectivities (Scott 193, 195, 198). This is also portrayed through the complex relationship between the narrator and Mustafa Sa'eed.

Mustafa plays the game, but he understands that he is and will always be lacking because he cannot earn full acceptance on his own merits. A priest tells Mustafa when he is a young boy travelling solo to Cairo: "All of us, my son, are in the last resort travelling alone." This universal, inclusive statement is then followed up immediately with, "You speak English with astonishing fluency" (Salih 28). The stranger will always remain an object of astonishment.

Mustafa is an interesting oddity but not an equal to his professors and peers, and for the women he is the dark exotic "unknown." He becomes infected with the "white man's" disease, a "contagion that oozes from the body of the universe" (104) that reduces him to a thing, cutting him off from his blackness, fracturing his own psyche and cementing his alienation. In turn he takes his self-loathing and sense of raging displacement out on Ann Hammond, Isabella Seymour, and Sheila Greenwood. These women, succumbing to what Barbara Harlow terms the "sentimentalism of orientalism" believe in his otherness and his difference and want him not as a man but as a *black* (emphasis mine) man. Recalls Mustafa, "Each time

she [his lover Sheila Greenwood] would gaze at me as though discovering something new." Sheila Greenwood tells him, "Your tongue's as crimson as a tropic sunset," and exclaims "How marvellous your black colour is! ... the color of magic and mystery and obscenities." Sheila Greenwood considers her illicit encounters with a black man somehow obscene and it titillates her — "My mother would go mad and my father would kill me," she tells Mustafa (Salih 139). When Isabella Seymour first meets Mustafa, she agrees to go out with him and says, "Yes why not? ... There's nothing to tell from your face you're a cannibal" (40) and then breaks her marriage vows for Mustafa. Ann Hammond wears an Arab robe and head dress in the bedroom, styling herself Mustafa's slave girl Sausan. Recounts Mustafa, she (Ann) "yearned for tropical climes ..., [and] I was a symbol of all these hankerings of hers" (Salih 142).

Reacting to colonization that exploits native lands and indigenous people, Mustafa holds himself to be a "colonizer," an "intruder," and an "invader" who has come from the south to the heart of Europe (Salih 94, 95, 160). He defines himself as "a drop of the poison" that the colonizers "have injected into the veins of history" when they colonized native lands (95). Hence, Mustafa's sexual encounters often take violent and aggressive aspects in Salih's novel. As Saree Makdisi puts it, "[j]ust as imperialism had violated its victims, Mustafa violates his, and his unwitting lovers become sacrifices in his violent campaign" (811). Consequently, Mustafa's sexual encounters are often expressed in terms of conquests and military clashes. For instance, he describes his pursuit of Jean Morris, an English woman he married and later killed, in military jargon: "Every day the string of the bow became more taut" (Salih 33). His "caravans were thirsty" and "the arrow's target had been fixed" (33). His bedroom is "a theatre of war" and his bed is "a patch of hell" (34). During his sexual encounters, he "would stay awake all night warring with bow and sword and spear and arrows ..." (34). Mustafa exploits the East's spirituality in his sexual campaign against several European women who stand for the collective colonial identity and include "girls from the Salvation Army, Quaker societies and Fabian gatherings" (Salih 30). Hassan observes this and remarks: "That Mustafa's mistresses come from different social classes indicates that they share a cultural and racial, if not a class identity" (101).

As a black man, Mustafa is especially appealing to European women because he embodies stereotypes about the fabulous libido of black men. Fanon speaks of the myth of Negroes in the jungles with "tremendous

sexual powers" who "copulate at all times and in all places" (*Black Skin* 157). A white woman, according to Fanon, views the Negro "as the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations" (*Black Skin* 177). Mustafa manipulates such stereotypes about black men in his sexual affairs. His bedroom is a relevant case in point. It becomes the epitome of what Said calls in *Orientalism* "Eastern excesses, those mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values" (57). Mustafa's description of his bedroom makes this idea of "Eastern excesses" clear: "The room was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, unguents, powders, and pills" (Salih 31). The items Mustafa uses to decorate his bedroom enhance what Hassan describes as "fetishism in sexualized Western fantasies about Africa and the Orient" (97). Therefore, Ali Abbas rightly observes that in his numerous affairs with European women, Mustafa makes use of the "prejudices and misconceptions" European women have about African men and that he "uses his knowledge of Arabic history and culture with devastating effect in order to entice his unwitting victims to his bed" (30). Mustafa also exploits his cultural and racial difference from English men to provide a welcome source of change and fascination for English women. His relationships with Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, and Isabella Seymour illustrate this point whereby the colonized man assumes the power position of the master with relation to the colonizing woman who becomes a sexual slave/object.

With his inexhaustible store of hackneyed phrases, Mustafa constructs lies for the women and likens himself to Othello, "the noble black man" when it suits his purpose. He tells outrageous stories of his homeland and is as exotic as the women want him to be. Mustafa lies to these women so he can take them back to his bedroom, "a graveyard that looked on to a garden" (Salih 30). In this graveyard lie the remains of Mustafa, the black African slain by the savagery of colonialism. Colonizing the women helps him recover what has been lost to him ("Yes this was my prey," says Mustafa on meeting a new conquest [Salih 36]). The women, however, are complicit in their seduction. They are not raped and are only misled because they desperately want to participate in the roles he has ascribed to them, roles that give them satisfaction by defying their parents and convention in a bid to seek pleasure for pleasure's sake.

The master/slave relationship between the colonizer and the colonized gets reversed via interracial sexuality between native men and white women. Thus, Ann Hammond, awed by Mustafa's mystical sexual prowess, becomes his salve and he becomes her master. She tells him: "[y]ou are Mustafa, my master and my lord" (146). Isabella Seymour even calls Mustafa a "black god" and implores him to "ravish" her. Isabella tells Mustafa: "Ravish me, you African demon. Burn me in the fire of your temple, you black god. Let me twist and turn in your wild and impassioned rites" (Salih 106). The narrator is aware of this reversed relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He reflects, "How strange! How ironic! Just because a man has been created on the Equator some mad people regard him as a slave, others as a god" (Salih 108).

However, this is not a blame-the-victim mentality. Mustafa may project himself as the noble moor Othello to get these women; yet, he is ultimately more Caliban than Othello, and the women who fall for his lies are Mirandas who entrap him in the stereotype of the highly sexed black male. James W. Coleman writes, "The language that Miranda gives Caliban forces his definition in her terms and in Prospero's: Caliban/cannibal — the savage brute whose 'purpose' is enslavement. Caliban tries to use the language for his own benefit but he cannot" (2). Mustafa lies, but he cannot break free because he has named his prey — Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, Isabella Seymour — and in so doing he has made them whole and given them the power of language and identity, something no colonizer who strives to conquer the meek, submissive and exotic women of the dark continents ever does.[2] Mustafa tries to colonize them and hopes to infect them but finds that they are already carriers of the white man's disease — they have an innate sense of self and superiority and arrogance toward him. Effectively his Mirandas have chained him, reclaimed him, and reaffirmed his alienation from black or white culture. As a result Mustafa loses all pity for his prey and himself. He understands the foulness of his actions and his seduction of Isabella Seymour causes his "consciousness to [tell him to] desist," but he justifies it for the pleasure of the moment ("But the summit was only a step away after which I would recover my breath and rest"). Mustafa doesn't lie to himself, however. He continues: "At the climax of our pain there passed through my head clouds of old, far-off memories, like a vapour rising up from a salt lake in the middle of the desert. She burst into agonized, consuming tears, while I gave myself up to a feverishly tense sleep" (Salih 44). Mustafa seeks a moment of

connection, no matter how ephemeral ("far-off memories") to his world and he is willing to court the pain for a brief moment of connection.

This would-be colonizer of women, however, meets his fate in Jean Morris — the climax of his sexual conquest of the West. As if reciting poetry, Mustafa tells Effendi three times that "The train carried me to Victoria Station and to the world of Jean Morris" (Salih 29, 31, 33). Echoing a Greek Chorus, his words announce his fall: "The train carried me to Victoria Station and to the world of Jean Morris," he intones. It is a world he desperately craves and will seek no matter the cost. The line resonates with power; it evokes the train, the track that has been laid for Mustafa and the hopeless futility of trying to outrun his fate. Jean is the ultimate symbol of imperialism. She is white and has a mind of her own. She is the 'invented Desdemona' and the counterpart to Mustafa's 'invented Othello.' Typically Desdemona is discounted by Iago critics as being too passive: "Desdemona is helplessly passive. She can do nothing whatever. She cannot retaliate even in speech; not even in silent feeling … She is helpless because her nature is infinitely sweet and her love absolute … Desdemona's suffering is like that of the most loving of dumb creatures tortured without cause by the thing he adores" (qtd. in Neely 69).

Jean Morris, however, is no passive Desdemona. She is wild, capricious, cruel, demanding, promiscuous, and is not taken in or impressed by Mustafa's "otherness." She challenges him, humiliates him, kicks him, and destroys his cultural artifacts including a rare Arabic manuscript and a precious prayer rug. Mustafa's relationship with her exemplifies, therefore, a cultural and racial clash. The first time she meets Mustafa she does not speak to him but gives him a look of "arrogance, coldness and something else" (Salih 29). On their second meeting she tells Mustafa, "You're ugly … I've never seen an uglier face than yours" (Salih 30). As an archetype of the West, Jean Morris sees the ugliness of the white man's imperialism reflected in Mustafa. His face is the mirror of dark soul. By taunting him she is taunting herself. Mustafa is her fate, but she doesn't have to like it.

Mustafa, intrigued, pursues her relentlessly for three years. For Mustafa, Jean Morris is "a shimmering mirage" of hope that he can be accepted as [Black] English. One day she tells him, "I am tired of your pursuing me and of my running before you. Marry me." He does, and she taunts him with her naked body, which she initially will not allow him to touch (Salih 156-7). Mustafa recalls his mother telling him he had the freedom to choose

how to live his life (Salih 159) but realizes that in Jean Morris — the woman he never thinks of as his wife (she is not part of him, they remain apart) and who refuses everything about him including his name — he will never be the actor, only the re-actor and the knowledge causes him to cry out in despair: "I swear I'll kill you one day" (159). His cry is aimed at the West in as much as it aimed as his wife. Jean Morris laughs at his threat; the prospect of violence excites her, but she doubts the subordinate Mustafa will ever take action.

Despairingly, Mustafa recognizes that he has gone from being the hunter to being the prey. He has been thoroughly reclaimed as a colony and lost all identity as a man. All his life Mustafa has suffered from the coldness resulting from total assimilation into the Western culture and disavowing of his African-ness. This coldness has made it impossible to claim his humanity, to laugh ("You're not a human being," says an early lover, "you're a heartless machine"). Mrs. Robinson used to laugh at the boy Mustafa and say, "Can't you ever forget your intellect?" (Salih 28). It was only his intellect that set him apart and brought him to the notice of the white elite. In Jean Morris, his English wife, Mustafa feels the fires of hell because she is unimpressed. He is tormented and then delighted by his wife. He knows himself to be both conqueror and conquered. She destroys him, but she makes him *feel* (emphasis mine), simultaneously.

On the night of Jean Morris's murder, Mustafa returns home to find "her stretched out on the bed, her white thighs open. Though her lips were formed into a full smile, there was something like sadness on her face; it was as though she was in a state of great readiness both to give and to take" (Salih 163). For the first time Mustafa ["East"] can take from Jean ["West"] without either lying to each other or disguising their own purpose. These two people are involved in a fight for supremacy, and neither will cede. It is a fight that echoes the violence that is necessary to break from the bonds of colonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon observes:

> The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists (Fanon 37).

In seeking to reclaim his sense of self as a man who is not dependent on the white colonizer, the fictional Mustafa plunges a knife into Jean's

heart while he is still in her body. As she dies, the following exchange takes place:

> I love you, she said to me, and I believed her. "I love you," I said to her, and I spoke the truth. We were a torch of flame, the edges of the bed tongues of Hell-fire. The smell of smoke was in my nostrils as said to me, "I love you, my darling," and as I said to her, "I love you, my darling," and the universe, with its past, present and future was gathered together into a single point before and after which nothing existed. (Salih 165).

Mustafa strives to exorcise his demons, and it is only in the violent breaking of their attachment that Jean and Mustafa can be honest with each other: that beneath the hatred and misunderstandings could be love and need mixed with a savagery to be free of such emotions. Jean Morris calls to Mustafa: "Come with me. Come with me. Don't let me go alone" (Salih 165). And Mustafa does try to follow Jean Morris. He does not defend his actions and hopes that the white man's court will execute him because he is the "intruder [on British soil and over white women] whose fate must be decided" (Salih 94). Mustafa thinks, "I am no Othello. I am a lie. Why don't you sentence me to be hanged and kill the lie?" (Salih 94), but he fails to stand and speak these words. In Shakespeare's version, Othello is an adopted "white," but Mustafa knows that this has never been true for him. He understands that he is more like Caliban, one who has successfully raped and plundered but still somehow remains enslaved and at the mercy of the overlord.

The whites "punish" Mustafa with seven years imprisonment. The sentence is light because to punish him is to admit that the great British experiment has failed. They defend him first in the trial and then defend his memory by constructing a tale of him retiring as a millionaire "living like a lord in the English countryside" (Salih 56). "They" excuse Mustafa's actions without fully understanding why "he" acted.

As Fanon puts it in *The Wretched of the Earth*, settlers know that

> [t]he native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs. The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession — all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this, the settler knows very well. (Fanon 39)

Mustafa serves his seven years and seemingly rejects his Black Gentleman status. He returns to the small village on the bend of the Nile where he starts a new life with an African wife. He tries to reconnect with the community, with the "old" ways. On the surface he seems to fit. But when drunk, he recites English poetry in an English accent, and while asleep he calls out Jean's name. His unconsciousness is haunted. Just as in England he maintained a room that evoked the "orient," Mustafa maintains a secret room in his African village complete with a fireplace, English language books, and pictures of Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, Isabella Seymour and Jean Morris that captures the "occidental." Mustafa remains enthralled and continues to cling to his chains. Thus Effendi rightly condemns him for being a fool (Salih 137).

Mustafa remains a "stranger" to the villagers on the bend in the Nile. He takes some part in the local business and gives them advice on how to better their lot economically but won't take office. He is incomplete. He cannot go back when he doesn't know what to go back to. His inability to conform to the traditions of his village is reflected in how he influences his second wife, Hosna, whom he treats with courtesy and gives her some feeling of empowerment. The change is noted: "All women change after marriage, but she in particular underwent an indescribable change. It was as though she were another person. Even we who were her contemporaries and used to play with her in the village look at her today and see her as something new" (Salih 101).

This new Hosna eventually expresses her own opinions and voices her own desires. When faced with the ultimatum of marrying Wad Rayyes, she goes to Mahjoub and demands that Effendi marry her. When Mahjoub refuses to listen, the good woman who should be tamed both by her circumcision and her "place" in village society, acts out on her threat to kill both Wad Rayyes and herself (Salih 96). She is condemned because she fights against her fate and doesn't act according to the time-honoured tradition. The villagers are trying to hold on to a past of life that is pre-colonial, and Hosna's self-assertion denies the old traditions and refutes the fact that the "men are the guardians of the women" (Salih 98). Hosna must die. She is the required sacrifice as the old traditions start to give way and the villagers have a chance to build a new future for themselves that is not a continuation of colonial life or regression to the "old ways." Her rape and death are disturbing and troubling because she doesn't consent to the appropriation of her body and is not a willing participant in the

same way as Mustafa's women. Hosna cannot escape her fate because she "accepted the stranger" and sought change. She and the stranger are both casualties in the war of colonialism.

Effendi, however, can survive if only he chooses to act. Like Mustafa, he also spent seven years in England earning a doctorate in poetry. At first he makes the mistake of romanticizing his homeland. During his entire sojourn in England he "dreamed" of his homeland and never loosened his ties to the idea of his home. He didn't try and colonize white women or ape white ways; he studied poetry and feels insulted when Mustafa says, "It would have been better if you'd studied agriculture, engineering or medicine" (Salih 9). Effendi comes back to work in his country (he takes a position with the government) but unknowingly he has also been infected with the disease of contagion — envy, an idea that things are not idyllic, the potential for self awareness. His perception has changed. When he first returns, he views his people through a fog (Salih 1), and he questions why Hosna is being forced to marry Wad Reyyes; however, he does nothing to intervene because he is afraid that action will make him less African. He freely admits that he loves Hosna but does nothing to save her. The idea of taking her as a second wife (which he could do with his village's approval) repulses him. He recoils from a notion that seems unnatural to him. He is as complicit in Hosna's death as are the villagers, and the self-knowledge of his failure to act causes him despair and he jumps in the Nile, figuratively drowning (in a state of suspension between life and death) in guilt. The narrator's suspended state corresponds to his liminal existence on the borderline between assimilation and traditionalism.

Early in the narrative Effendi says, "The fact that they came to our land, I know not why, does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries" (Salih 49). Floundering in the water, he recognizes he must let go of blame and bitterness and work toward a future. He admits, "All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge" (Salih 168). In order to discharge his duties, Effendi must first be willing to let go of the old ways and *act* as he is willing, albeit a little slow. Mustafa had recognized this potential in Effendi and as a result had named Effendi as guardian to his two sons. Ever aware of his own faults, Mustafa understood that he couldn't be good for his

sons because he was still clinging to what is lost and forever beyond his grasp. In order to live, Africa and her sons must move forward. It will be up to the Effendis, if only they can overcome their paralysis and act. Thus Effendi's last cry of "Help! Help!" (Salih 169) is very uplifting and filled with the possibility of hope that he may yet survive.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, Tayeb Salih treats the problems of native identity, alienation and interracial sexuality as these are entangled with colonial and postcolonial settings. However, like Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, Salih's novel is an unequivocal denunciation of the colonial legacy in postcolonial countries: "Both Conrad and Salih expose the perils of colonialism, but while Conrad reserves his strongest condemnation for the greed and theft that attended imperial expansion, Salih questions the entire enterprise. Colonialism is repeatedly described in a language that evokes violent infection" (Lalami xiii). Being too Sudanese for the English and too English for the Sudanese, Salih's Mustafa Sa'eed is a man who is caught between two worlds. As 'the dislocated character,' Mustafa seeks integration into his native culture after experiencing sterility and sickness in the white cultures. He returns home to confess his life story in Europe to the narrator (Effendi) who, in turn, tells Mustafa's story as a means of coming to terms with its shattering impact on him. Maintaining a world free from colonial influence seems impossible in the vision Salih's novel offers. The glimmer of hope seems on the borderline between assimilation of white culture and traditionalism. This liminal space of cultural encounters can help mediate colonialism rather than responding to it in violent extremes or assimilative passivity.

Notes

1. Mustafa was born in Khartoum, which was founded in 1821 as an outpost for the Egyptian army but grew as a regional center for trade, including the slave trade. In 1884 Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad's troops laid siege to British occupied Khartoum and British General Charles George Gordon was killed. The city fell to the Mahdists on January 26, 1885. After 1898, the British recaptured the city.
2. Too often in "Western" literature the black woman is portrayed as exotic, nameless and often without words. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz's mistress is described thus: "Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the sombre and glittering river." In *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa names the women. He may exploit them, but he does acknowledge them.

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Westward ho! Postcolonial Theory, Indian Academic Diaspora and Pedagogy

Swati Ganguly

Over the last two decades Diaspora Studies has secured a niche for itself in the Indian academia. It rose to prominence close at the heels of Postcolonial Studies which had staked its claim in English studies from the early 1990s. 'Diaspora literature' is offered as an option in postgraduate courses and very often young researchers develop an affinity for what is understood as the relatively uncharted territory of 'diaspora cultures.' The success of diaspora as a field of inquiry in the academia—literature and culture in particular—is also perhaps because of its ability to continually re-invent the category itself. Thus, from the original use as a term to denote the forced dispersal and displacement of Jewish people, it began to be used, from the 1960s, to include groups whose scattering resulted from cataclysmic events—slavery, for example, as in the case of Africans (Safran 2005: 37) . Certain common criteria were identified as the basis of the experience of diasporas: a collective trauma, sense of victimhood and exile, nostalgia for the lost homeland. In recent critical study 'diaspora' is deployed largely in a metaphoric sense to describe various categories of people who have migrated from their original homelands; they include expatriates, political refugees, alien residents, and ethnic as well as racial minorities. (Safran 1991:83). In this essay too, the term is used in this extended, metaphorical sense; thus the subject of this inquiry is not so much a forced displacement or exile but as a voluntary migration of Indian academics to the West or North (in its current parlance) for greener pastures.

It does not require great insight to realize that there are significant overlaps between the literature of the diaspora and what is termed postcolonial literatures as far as the Indian context is concerned. It may seem a truism to state that some of the well known English language writers across the globe, also winners of prestigious awards—including the Nobel and the Man Booker—trace their origins to the nation which was once colonized by Britain. They are also, more often than not, part of a migrant 'diasporic' community located in affluent countries in the West, or to be more specific, in the United States of America.

It seems evident that there are potentials of dialogues between these two fields of study. However, these are seldom explored in the Indian academia. Instead, there is a tendency to render them fixed, stable and discrete categories. Academics bow down to the pressures of syllabi making, prescribing a limited set of 'writers' and pet 'themes' to cater to semester schedules. Indian postgraduate students are thus acquainted with V.S. Naipaul and Jhumpa Lahiri as part of the canon of Diaspora Literature while Salman Rushdie glows in the postcolonial aura. There is little scope in the Indian classrooms for engaging in the intersection of these two fields of inquiry. This seems to be a pity since the subcontinent's long and complex history of colonization has played a crucial role in facilitating the migration and dispersal of its people to various locations outside the geo-political boundary of their homelands.

This essay attempts to address the lacunae by suggesting that we problematize the categories called Diaspora and Postcolonial writings, transgress the protocol of pedagogy to create porosity among the borders of neat self contained categories. The essay is divided into three unequal sections, all of which attempt to explore the relation between colonization and diaspora. The first section is an attempt to read two excerpts from the non-fictional writings of V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie; they are the two eminent English language writers claimed by Indians as their own, but also disowned when controversies arise. My intention is to draw attention to the different modes in which they articulate the nostalgia for homeland and the experience of being exiles. These comprise the twin themes recognized as central to contemporary literary works. I use this to peg my discussion of the second section, arguing that in pedagogy we do not adequately historicize the 'location' of prominent Indian postcolonial theorists, although registering their identity as part of the diaspora, primarily in the United States, may facilitate an understanding of their subject positions and thus the politics and poetics of what constitutes their postcoloniality. In the final section of the essay, I make an attempt to identify the key contributions of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, the two Indian academics who are regarded as the most influential postcolonial critics in contemporary intellectual world, and also seek to address the problems in teaching the writings of these postcolonial critics in the Indian classrooms.

I

Memories of homelands in diasporic postcolonial writers: locations and locutions

Critics have recognized the main characteristic of diaspora as incorporating 'a history of dispersal, myths/ memories of the homeland and alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship.' (Clifford 305). Even when contemporary critical thinking has recognized the specificities of different diasporas occurring at various historical junctures, some of these 'originary' issues continue to remain relevant. One instance of this would be the experience of groups forced into indentured labour for plantation and other enterprises that comprised a regular feature of many European colonies. This is perhaps one of the earliest and most obvious links between the Indian postcolonial experience and the phenomenon of the diaspora. The first excerpt that follows, from an essay by Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul(2007), has its roots in this particular historical moment of rupture, though it does not refer to it directly:

> It wasn't as colonials we had forgotten or wished to forget where we had come from...The India that we had come from...permeated our lives. In religion, rituals, festivals, much of our sacred calendar...India lived on, even when the language began to be forgotten...And when we lost this idea of completeness, and a new feeling for history drove us to wonder about the circumstances of our migration, it was too late...and some of us, becoming truly colonial now, fell into the ways of colonial fantasy, fabricating ancestry and a past, making up in this way for what we now felt to be our nonentity (80-1).

I shall return shortly to this brilliant passage by Naipaul; but for now let us keep in mind the recognizable 'diasporic' element viz. the 'memories of homeland' and read against that the following excerpt from Salman Rushdie's Introduction to *Imaginary Homelands*(1992):

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back...But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge...that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

At first glance both these passages seem similar, since both evoke nostalgia for homeland; the inevitable recognition of the impossibility of a 'return' and thus the need for constructing homelands in imagination. They are structured around tropes that have become all too familiar in pedagogy. In many ways they constitute a theory of writing, emerging specifically from a postcolonial, diasporic condition. This suggests that fantasy and fictions are the inevitable *supplements* for the failure of the migrant to retrieve or reclaim the lost link with the origin, the homeland.

Yet, a close reading reveals interesting differences of understanding the historical predicament. Naipaul's nuanced narrative about the migrant community in Trinidad, to which he belonged, is an ironic glance at the slow but inevitable process through which his people began to acquire the identity of a colonial community. Instead of focusing on colonization as a historical phenomena, the original *cause* of dispersal and displacement, Naipaul makes it an *effect* produced because of the peculiar condition of the migrant's existence; he traces how perceived proximity becomes a denial to engage with memory and history, which then fosters a fantasy of the past. This is what Naipaul identifies as a state of 'becoming truly colonial.'

Ironically, Salman Rushdie, the acclaimed writer of the narrative of a nation's birth at midnight, does not, in this essay, ever admit the location of India as a colony in his locution. In this Proustian paean to past and to a lost time, in his celebration of the predicament of the fragmentation experienced by the writer of the diaspora 'as a dealer in broken mirrors,' Salman is not like his hero Saleem hand-cuffed to history of a colonized nation.

In his recent memoir *Joseph Anton* (2012), Rushdie has written in third person, and in great detail about the controversy over the *Satanic Verses*, the Khomeini fatwa, the fantastic yet excruciating and dreary days as a political exile. However, this massive tome also contains accounts, delightfully Rushdiesque, of how his father deemed it fit to send the boy Salman for his very proper British public school education where he managed to resist bullying and get accepted; it also contains accounts, albeit brief, about his Cambridge days; his early years as a struggling writer while he worked in an advertising agency. Indeed Salman Rushdie, in the days prior to the fatwa, emerges as a fantastic free subject with an immense and powerful will ; he serves as the model for the aspiring writer, public intellectual whose aim was to set out for the West as a promised land.

It is my submission that the passages by Naipaul and Rushdie need to be juxtaposed to get a glimpse into the heterogeneous histories of dispersal, displacement and migration, created by different phases of what is often viewed as a seamless continuum of the Postcolonial condition. What these two excerpts offer are distinctive cartographies of the minds of the writers whom we now fit into the readily available label: the postcolonial/diaspora writer. In the next section I argue that we need to locate Postcolonial Theory as a phenomenon arising from the migration of the Asian/ Indian academic community to the West.

Mapping intersectionality: The diasporic postcolonial theorist

Kwame Anthony Appiah made a scathing critique of Postcoloniality as 'the condition of what we might ungenerously call comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style Western-trained group of writers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery (Appiah, 1996, 62). While there may be certain polemical punch in this statement, it can hardly be dismissed as rant. It is a well known fact that apart from a few universities in Australia, it is the prestigious universities of the United States of America where the privileged elite groups of Indian Postcolonial theorists are nurtured. It is often their location that grants a peculiar aura to their locutions. This is not to dismiss the scholarship, academic rigour and intellect of the Indian academic diaspora.

Indeed, the migrant Indian academic community was in a particularly advantageous position: grounded in the academic rigour of British colonial education system, acquainted with a post-Enlightenment intellectual tradition, they were receptive to the changes occurring in the American academy in the late 60s, or early 70s when they made their transition. It is this privileged pattern of education that Colin McCabe referred to in the glowing tribute he paid to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a 'model product of the Indian undergraduate and an American graduate education—probably the most scholarly combination on this planet (McCabe 1988: ix). Gayatri Spivak has been recognized the world over as the as being 'pivotal in reshaping the tenets of almost all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, and after Edward Said, is the single most cited critic in Postcolonial scholarship' (Chakraborty 622).

There are arguments in favour of Postcolonial criticism and theory—predictably from within the community itself—as performing the crucial

'political' corrective in the script of Western hegemony. Thus 'postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries' and 'intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities and peoples.' (Bhabha, 1994, 246). The nature of this intervention is listed as 'critical revisions, around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination within the 'rationalizations' of modernity.' (Bhabha, 1994 246). This, as Bhabha argues, could only have been produced from 'those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement' because it is from them that 'we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.' (Bhabha 1994, 247).

Thus we have the most cogently articulated relation between the condition of diaspora/migration and the production of Postcolonial criticism theory. This ideological-intellectual endeavour could only be the work of migrant/ displaced/diasporic academics claiming the privilege of being representative of a certain form of knowledge. However, this epistemic claim was also enabled by their privileged access to certain tendencies in critical thinking/theory in the late 1960s that were on the ascendant in several US universities: the American appropriation and amalgamation of several European philosophical intellectual traditions which came to be understood as Theory with a capital T. Its identifying feature was a suspicion of common sense, empirical observation and a linguistic turn. Language was no more a transparent medium and it was recognized that our observations were mediated by its categories. Similarly anti-essentialism, challenging the notion of a fixed, stable essence also created a scope for challenging definitions that had debilitating effects on the discourse of colonialism. It became an important task of the postcolonial scholar in the West to reveal the inaccuracy of such definitions.

To provide one instance of how these anti-tendencies created an enabling condition one can cite the proliferation of the arbitrariness of the 'sign'; it became a central tenet in the new wisdom about the world. Instances include Homi Bhabha's 'Signs Taken for Wonders' (Bhabha 1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History' (Chakrabarty, 2000); and Ranajit Guha's definition of the subaltern as a sign in so far as it constitutes the difference from elite. (Guha, 1982)

The moot point is that these epistemological conditions had the potential to be produced in the American academia. The thrust towards an anti-positivist, anti essentialist intellectual position existed within the academia which had chosen to embrace the works of French thinkers—Ferdinand de Saussure, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan to mention a few. This catholicity allowed Indian diasporic community to be as interdisciplinary and eclectic as one could be, to rupture older colonialist regimes of education. The compelling demands of academic excellence, acted as a pressure from without, and kept up a proliferation of texts producing a prodigious body of knowledge. The question that it ultimately led them to was that of representation and authenticity. After all if all identities are matters of play of signs, the postcolonial scholars' task of 'representing' a specific historical formation becomes richer and more challenging. Then it was crucial to create some reference to identity. It would is not surprising, then, that the key concepts contributed by Indian Postcolonial theorists are linked to identity and subject-hood.

Inbetween-ness, hybridity and subalternity: the postcolonial mandate for Indian classroom

It is customary in Indian postgraduate syllabi to include selections of writings by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. While, it is indeed crucial that students be acquainted with their thought, there are several pitfalls in this pedagogical endeavour. Unfortunately the study of 'English literature' in most Indian academia occurs in a kind of insularity; hence students are uninitiated in the rigours of inter-disciplinary or cross disciplinary modes of learning and reading. Hence they experience something like a stasis when they encounter postcolonial scholarship because of their inability to grasp the short-hand through which critics like Homi Bhabha or Gayatri Spivak draw upon, in an eclectic manner, a wide range of disciplines—philosophy, history, anthropology, psychoanalysis, politics, to name just a few. Thus, for the average postgraduate students of English Literature Postcolonial theoretical writing appears as sacred but magical mumbo-jumbo, which they fail to comprehend but are doomed to repeat as 'charm' to succeed in examinations.

The difficulty is compounded by the little scope in the Indian classrooms, perpetually plagued by lack of time in the semester schedule, of explicating the distinctive politics and poetics of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. While this is a daunting task, it may be useful to locate

some issues which seem germane to the contributions made by these two scholars. To do so I would like to draw briefly upon Homi Bhabha's Introduction to his book *Location of Culture*; and in the case of Gayatri Spivak, her elaboration of the notion of subaltern as it emerges in her reading and translation of the fiction of Mahasweta Devi. These, I suggest, serve as supplementary reading to her often quoted but much maligned essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

Homi Bhabha's eclectic scholarship is borrowed from Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic model of colonialism, Jacque Lacan's concepts of mimicry and the split subject, and most importantly from Derrida's analysis of binary oppositions which structure Western thought. Hence his argument is that these are reductive since they imply that any national culture is unitary, homogenous and defined by fixity or essential core. Instead Bhaba (1994) proposes that nationalities, ethnicities, identities are dialogic, indeterminate and characterized by *hybridity*—one of his key terms, which is defined as what is 'new, neither the one nor the other, but that which emerges from the 'third space.'

The other key notion that Bhabha is most well–known for is *in-betweenness* . This concept is a sign of the centrality of diaspora-displacement in his theorization of identity and subjectivity. Thus Bhabha posits that "What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference" (2). This is what he terms as the 'the crucial in between spaces—where strategies of selfhood initial subjectivities, either singular or communal, can be forged and nurtured. (2). Hence Bhabha's favourite term is borderland; his favourite architectural image is the liminal space, of the boiler room or the stairwell and the half- way house (5).

For Bhabha, the diasporic individual, poised to take off in a flight to the West, is the one who, more than any other, embodies the qualities that he identifies as hallmark of a fluid sense of hybrid identity: that which is transnational, transitional, translational, occupying the space of in-betweenness, cross-reference and ambivalence. Indeed he spells this out thus: "The demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migrations, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora… the poetics of exile" (6-7). It is not hard to guess his Indian instances: V.S Naipaul and Salman Rushdie.

Despite much of what is ground-breaking in Bhabha's anti-essentialist, anti-positivist thinking, for me the most disquieting element of his ideological position is his virtual denial of the significance of the proliferation of what he himself terms as the "alternative histories of the excluded" (8). It is precisely these histories of exclusion that constitute Gayatri Spivak's critical engagement in understanding the processes through which a decolonized nation negotiates its colonial legacy, its Enlightenment inheritance. In 'More on Power/Knowledge', an essay not usually read in the Indian classrooms, Spivak writes:

> The political claims that are most urgent in decolonized space are tacitly recognized as coded within the legacy of Imperialism: nationhood, constitutionalism, citizenship, democracy, socialism...In the historical framework of exploitation, colonization, decolonization what is being effectively reclaimed is a series of regulative political concepts, whose... authoritative narrative of production was written elsewhere, in the social formation of Western Europe. They are thus being reclaimed, indeed claimed, as concept-metaphors, for which no historically adequate referent may be advanced from postcolonial space. (1993: 53-54).

One of the key concepts central to Spivak's engagement with the processes of decolonization is that of the *subaltern.* Indeed, the essay by Spivak which has gained a canonical status in the Postcolonial syllabi of Indian universities is 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', originally delivered as a lecture in 1983 and revised and expanded in 1985 and 1988 in finally in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*(1999). The originary moment of this essay is Spivak's intervention in the project of subaltern studies collective, ostensibly the only theory to emerge from within India, though most of its exponents are once again diasporic intellectual-academics. This intervention both draws upon and critiques Ranajit Guha and the collective's understanding of subaltern as that 'which is not elite' and cannot thus be located either in colonial archives or in any positivist histories of nationalist movement. The choice of the middle class woman Bhubaneshwari Devi and her suicide as instance of the gendered subaltern is Spivak's feminist intervention in the domain which had failed to her critique of foundational, essentialist positivist histories. However, the essay remains largely inaccessible to postgraduate students because of its dense citations of, engagement with and critique of Western philosophy—allusions which are almost impossible to decode without glosses.

The more accessible alternative to students of literature is the section in the essay 'More on Power/Knowledge' in which she locates the fictions of Mahasweta Devi. This passage, worth quoting at length, contains the kernel of her politics and praxis as a postcolonial, feminist deconstructivist translator:

> The space that Mahasweta's fictions inhabit is rather special... it is the space of the subaltern, displaced even from the catachrestic relation between colonization and Enlightenment with feminism inscribed within it....[this] is a space that has no firmly established agency of traffic with the culture of imperialism... conventionally this space is described as the habitat of the sub-proletariat or the subaltern...As she [Mahasweta] works actively to move the subalterns into hegemony, in her struggle in the field she pushes them toward that other episteme where the 'intuitions' of feminisms become accessible...Mahasweta's fictions are thus not stories of the improbable awakening of feminist consciousness in the gendered subaltern...These are singular paralogical women who spell out no model for imitation (1993: 54-55).

It is my submission that instead of Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' one could, as a more gainful alternative, make selections from this essay. This could then be read with her translation of Mahasweta Devi's fictions, her very long forewords to the translations. It is in these translator's forewords, for instance to that of *Draupadi*(1998), that she makes self-conscious, self-critical allusions to her own location as a diasporic individual—an academic in the First World engaged in the act of translating and disseminating a Third World text. Students would learn much from being attentive to these positions/ locations which mark her translated text. Indeed she spells this out in a recent essay when she writes that the "US academy is our home" (2012: 191). It is these that the Indian student must learn to watch out for. Spivak would have approved, for as she herself says in the same essay that it is in the classroom that we must always begin.

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Is it Possible for Women to 'Cease Upon the Midnight with No Pain'? Understanding the 'Masculinity of Suicide' as Resistance

Samrat Sengupta

I Know; yet I know
That a woman's heart, love, child, home, are not all—
Nor money, nor fame, nor ease.
Another, imperiled awe
Plays in our blood
And tires us out,
Tires us—tires us out.
There is no weariness in the morgue – "One day eight years ago", Jibanananda Das

The above quoted poem on suicide by Jibanananda Das, has pointed towards a certain realization of alienation – sort of weariness that characterizes existence. Existentialists like Camus have extensively dealt with the impossibility of man's transcendence from the order of life – from the way things are and would be - within the corpus of which one is born and belong to. Life seems to be a closure within which one is hermeneutically chained. The crucial problem that characterizes phenomenological thinking is the notion of transcendence. If one's being in the world is determined by his phenomenological chain of belonging, then how can we think of transcendence as a possibility from that immanence? In case of nihilists like Nietzsche, it is easier to move beyond good and evil through aesthetics of the denial of the values and norms of the society – through a nihilistic performance of the negation of the world. But that would assume a purported superhuman subject who is beyond that world and who is capable of re-producing the world by his will. Camus writes:

> The great rebel thus creates with his own hands, and for his own imprisonment, the implacable reign of necessity. Once he had escaped from God's prison, his first care was to construct the prison of history and of reason, thus putting the finishing touch to the camouflage and consecration of the nihilism whose conquest he claimed. (1991: 65-81)

For Camus, the experience of the absurd comes from the disparity "between an action and the world that transcends it". He writes:

> A man who has be-come conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it. A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future. That is natural. But it is just as natural that he should strive to escape the universe of which he is the creator. (1995:22)

This contradiction characterizes the absurd with which one might live. The complete immersion within the repetitive structures of belonging would have easily solved the problem. To accept the world as it is would end up all possibilities of end. End would then only seem a Dionysian destruction of the present. But there will always be desire – the desire for transcendence and that is what produces the 'absurd'. This desire for transcendence from the ways of belonging – from life as such, is some ways also the desire for death. The poem above throws therefore unfathomable irony towards the man who commits suicide – it illustrates how the man can never be like other animals and birds with spontaneous desire to live – to keep up his earthly existence for the sake of it. He seeks transcendence. His desire of life is also his desire for death:

> *This taste of life*
> *The smell of ripe barley on a late autumn evening*
> *All this seemed to you intolerable.*
> *Did your heart find peace in the morgue?*
> *In the morgue—in the suffocating dark—*
> *With blood-flecked lips like battered rat!* (Das 1998 48)

Towards the end of the poem, however the very knowledge of suicide, death and irony of man's attempt towards transcendence – the foreknowledge of the impossibility of escape probes the poet to fly high with the hunting owl who participates in the process of life and death the way it is. This becomes another method of transcendence - transcendence within immanence – the knowledge of the transitoriness of each moment and the process of one's being in the world helps one philosophically think beyond those structures. The pure joy of existence seems in the realization of its passage of each moment – the constant flight from reality and its limits constitutive of the immediacy of belonging. The mortality and its realization each moment makes the grand project of life redundant

but keeps alive the possibility of transcendence that is always already folded in the immanent moments. But the argument of this paper would be to locate the inherent masculinism in the very conceptualization of such transcendence. In the poem, we have seen that the "life" of the protagonist from which he sought to escape has been characterized by family and wife. The relationship which one shares with wife occupies the centre-stage of family life. If family is the prison-house of belonging – pleasurable yet compulsive, then that existence is structured by wife – the nourisher and care-giver woman – the feminine principle. She is the earth on which man gathers himself to dwell. All philosophical enterprises of immanence as well as of transcendence – of constructions and their beyond are founded upon a certain conceptualization of women. For men, if we are measuring immanence and transcendence, then for women we can only study how they have been worlded by the existing patriarchal meaning making apparatuses. If to avoid heteronormative repetition of life, one can think of philosophical suicide, then the subject of such suicide is predominantly male. The Being as such is male who organizes himself with respect to a feminine he constitutes and gathers in his being-there in the world. Sara Heinemma, a feminist thinker while discussing the engagement of feminism with existentialism comments:

> The fathers of existentialism argued that woman – as we know her – is a creation of men; she is the fantasy or projection which relieves man's anxiety of hisown carnality and finitude. (2006: 508)

How then we can think of suicide as a mode of escape for a woman's 'being in the world'? If women in the existing economy of meaning form the foundation of immanence as well as transcendence, then how can their thought of escape be conceptualized? I will try to work out this question through a short story by Rabindranath Tagore, "A Wife's Letter" (Tagore 2000), written against the backdrop of early 20th century and a more recent story "Lata's Day" by Sibaji Bandyopadhyay (Bandyopadhyay "Lata's Day" 2010).

"A Wife's Letter", like many 19th century Bengali self-writing, reveals the thoughts and feelings of a woman and her experience within the patriarchal household (I call it self-writing instead of autobiography, as more often than not, it goes beyond its intentionality of representing a coherent, conscious and continuous self and the descriptive becomes disruptive by

describing the functioning of the patriarchy within the household). The fictional structure of the story itself becomes a deconstructive performance of the self, of the woman who is thoroughly mired in her structures of belonging and for whom it seems almost impossible to think beyond that. The addresses of reverence and submission to the husband, use of terms like "My submission at your lotus feet" are neither fully a sign of total subjugation, nor irony and mockery. It shows that no other language or expression was available to women. Instead of irony, what we have here is a certain degree of self-effacement and auto-irony, where the self is constituted by chores of patriarchal ideology and denial of the same must associate a radical denial of the self and being in this world as well. Women's sacrifice for and subjugation to the norms of the family has this dual move of accepting patriarchy and at the same time denying it. Every moment of denial of patriarchy must come with the denial of the hegemonized self, and every moment of denial of the self in some way is also a denial of the structure to which this self is made an appendage. It is deeply ironic that for woman to assert her self outside the social structure in which she is hemmed, she must have to deny her existence – existence that is shaped by patriarchy. This is not to say simply, however, that the very acceptance of patriarchy and its idea of sacrifice and self-denial itself are subversive, but to think of denial itself as having the political possibility of denying the structure which denies women a subjectivity/self/atman/essence. Pandita Ramabai talked about Sati as a means of attaining freedom from the domination and humiliation of patriarchal power structure (Chakravarty 2007). Death becomes a solace, a denial of the self that is an always already denied existence.

Remembering the derivation of the word economy from Latin "Oikonomos" (Chakraborty 2008: 43) which meant "management of the household", we can read family as the hidden structural imperative of exploitation through which a classified, hiererchized society stands with all its functions. Here I would try to look at how the story "A Wife's Letter" performs an aesthetic of denial – a radical rupture from what it is – a departure from what seems natural and normal. Drawing from Althusser's notion that "reproduction" of power structure is made possible by repressive and ideological state apparatuses. Apart from repressive state machineries of police, military and judiciar, ideology, a set of beliefs and practices, as they exist in society, helps maintaining the pattern of life. It

happens through ascription of a certain kind of reality effect to ideas through embodiment and reification of the ideas of the ruling class. Althusser comments:

> It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are 'obviousnesses') obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the 'still small voice of conscience'): 'That's obvious! That's right! That's true!'". (1994: 129)

A certain repetition of this naturalness whose process of naturalization has been forgotten causes the reproduction of the conditions of production and helps in the perpetuation of the structures of exploitation and domination. The most invisible and most effective ideology which is behind all reproductive practices happens to be a certain understanding of sex-gender system based on reproductive heteronormativity. The structure of family, which is one of the major sites of ideological reproduction, is premised on the principle of reproductive heteronormativity and the pattern that exists and gets repeated in society is based on it.

"A Wife's Letter" performs a denial of this immanent structure from within it. The love between Mrinal and Bindu, which is non-heteronormative is purely situational, uncharted by the intentions of patriarchal value system. Out of the denial suffered within the household, out of the repressive machinery of family which denied any autonomy to Mrinal and out of Bindu's helplessness and marginal condition, the relationship grew. This is a bonding based on denial – the denial of autonomy and respect to women within the family and this denial is inverted by Mrinal to finally reject the society. The way Bindu was forced into an unhappy marriage and was compelled to return to her husband's family against her wishes reminds one of similar cases in late 19th – early 20th century as the case of Rukmabai, who refused to live with her husband and in a case filed against her, the court ordered her arrest in case she refused to return to her in-laws household (Chakravarty 2007: 290-292). The way Bindu committed suicide might also remind us of several such cases, some within Tagore's own family (Ghosh 2000). However, death is a reality which women are possibly exposed to time and again. Mrinal's desperate cry in the story: "What is life to us, that we should fear death? Death is unwelcome only to those whose hold on life has been strengthened by love and care. If

death...had pulled me by the hand, I would have come away roots and all, like a clump of grass from loose earth. A Bengali woman speaks of dying in every second utterance" (208-209). But the physical death of a person might not actually free her from the symbolic order of existence – the meaning-making ideological apparatus that would continue to locate the death within its course of definition. Mrinal's comments: "but where is the glory in such death? I am ashamed to die, so easy is death for the likes of me" (209) is proved true when after Bindu's suicide her husband comments: "This is all play-acting". (217) There is no glory even in death but there is a radical departure from the existing mode of life. To chose not to live is an impossible choice as one cannot experience how not to live. However, thinking of not to be is a radical challenge to the concept of a stable being exposing its contingency and transitoriness. It is therefore politically important to think through death and the state of non-being instead of a stable being, its identity in terms of property and its reproduction.

In no Indian philosophical system transcendence of women is imagined. Women's existence is always thought of as immanent within the family. The rejection of family as a mode of challenging the ideological apparatus can find correspondences with Sramanic rejection of family and questioning of every form of belief and faith – all biological and ideological reproductive practices, as discussed by Sibaji Bandyopadhyay in his article "Pita-Putra Dwairath" (2010). Yet, this entire drama of rejection was played out mainly by men. The argument about rejection of society and family was going on between the father representing the "worldly-wise" Brahman and the critical, philosophical son who represented the spirit of Sramans. But women hardly feature in this debate upon transcendence. Then in 1914 how could Tagore talk about transcendence of Mrinal in the pattern of Sramanic philosophical engagement with death and rejection of life that is structured, classified and hegemonic? Althusser proposed that "ideological state apparatus may not be only the stake, but also the site of class struggle. The class (or class alliance) in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus" (Althusser 1994: 113). But for that to be possible or, in other words, for ideological field to get converted to a space of struggle a certain understanding of ideology as ideology is necessary; otherwise ideology is naturalized and not thought out separately. To reject a certain pattern of

life it is important to understand the constructedness and contingency of that pattern. According to Marx and Engels, "the bourgeoisie itself ... supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie" (2002: 230). Much in the same manner liberals wanted voting rights of women for the expansion of market and flourishing of capitalism; for class-struggle to happen women's participation was desired; and similarly, for gaining autonomy and power, the English educated men in colonial Bengal wanted their women to read and write – they supplied the women with the instrument of education (Bandyopadhyay 1994). However, that instrument made it possible to think of the existing self of women also in terms of writing. As women were writing the reality of their lives, they were participating in the field of ideology and thereby also un-writing it constantly. Self-expression could become a medium of realizing the contingency of the present and immediate self. Therefore Mrinal could compose the letter and deny her existing self of second daughter-in-law of the household. Women were supposedly most potential being to think of transcendence as their immanence to the structure never belonged to them. However it was only realizable when the totality of existence could be measured as contingent through writing of the pattern of her existence. Mrinal writes in the beginning of her letter: "we have been married for fifteen years, but to this day I have never written you a letter...there has never been an interval in which a letter might have been written" (205). The pen finally could produce that interval to rethink and write what was always there unvoiced and unsaid.

Anirban Das refuted Partha Chatterjee's claim that Rassundari's autobiographical piece *Amar Jibon* cannot be called an auto-biography or *atmacharit* in the sense in which a man's autobiography can be measured (Das 2009 25). Chatterjee's suggestion was to understand it more as a description of her life-events illustrating the discursive field to which she belonged. However Anirban Das points out that from the very title itself "Amar Jibon" or "My Life" suggests how intensely it talks about the self. Tanika Sarkar also points out how the text has been preoccupied by descriptions of her own self by Rassundari (Sarkar 1993). Both Sumit Sarkar (2002) and Tanika Sarkar (2001) have connected the tradition of 19th century life-writing with the story "A Wife's Letter".

Sumit Sarkar has pointed out that among the stories published in *Sabuj Patra*, this story stands apart as it is written in the first person narrative. There have been much discussions of reading the late 19th – early 20th century life-narratives by the newly educated women as an expression of coping up with questions of nation-building. While Golum Murshid would suggest how in the beginning of 20th century the woman question became secondary because of burgeoning anti-colonial nationalism (Murshid 2001), Partha Chatterjee talked about the 'nationalist resolution of woman question' where educated women of upper middle class families were supposed to provide comfort and security to men suffering from colonial domination and humiliation (Chatterjee 2010). However, such readings have been refuted for neglecting the subjectivity and self-hood of women, which is considered simply being determined by patriarchal discursive conflicts by critiques like Sumit Sarkar (2002), Tanika Sarkar (1993), Sibaji Bandyopadhyay (1994), Himani Banerjee (2000), and Anirban Das (2009). Sumit Sarkar reverses the structure provided by Partha Chatterjee who has only tried to understand the women's question in terms of anti-colonial tradition-modernity conflict, where to combat colonial modernity, a reformulation of tradition was required. While for Chatterjee, woman is produced as a result of conflicts within the colonial-patriarchal discursive field, Sarkar has remarked on the sexist nature of anti-colonial nationalism based on an ideology of possession and control which subjugates the natural and the feminine by its fold of hegemony. Citing examples from Rabindranath's *Home and the World*, he shows how Sandip's inner thoughts reveal his desire for controlling and shaping the world, and how Bimala gets hegemonized by the charisma of such machismo. Sarkar points towards a certain sexually differentiated order of belonging which gives closure to our discursive existence in certain ways. While Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakraborty (2000) would talk about the reorganization of bourgeois public sphere in terms of a bad world of struggle outside and a comforting world of homely inside presided by the figure of *grihalaxmi*, Sumit Sarkar points out the inherent sexism in such reorganization. Man always seeks transcendence from the world organized around a certain notion of the feminine through a re-formulation of the feminine. Women's education became important during the high tide of colonialism and husbands themselves were contributing towards wife's education solely because of material changes that were taking place with the flourishing of a certain capitalist colonialist world order where man was moving towards

a life of salaried labor, and was often staying away from his family after getting uprooted from his rural mode of agro-based economy. On one hand he needed the companionship of his wife for emotional comfort as well as for rearing of children that would befit the emergent world order. Rochona Majumdar has pointed out how conjugal love becomes important in this context and how the notion of what a woman means or what she must be gets reinstated therefore (Majumder 2004). She must now on know how to stand by husband's struggle in the outside world, get educated in 'tradition' and pass that lesson on to her children so that they remain traditional and at the same time fit to live in the world of modernity with that. Women then become the corner stone of the foundation of this new oikonomos.

In the conventional scheme of orthodox Hindu culture, woman happened to be the unconscious apparatus and the primordial container where meaning was impregnated and through which heteropatriarchal family, state and society derived their essence, and also through which the male consciousness, the Being, realized and understood its phenomenonally given subjecthood. It was necessary to challenge such a scheme, and for that reason women were not only to be placed in a phenomenonal chain of events and situations but also they themselves produced those situations – they were the place-holders of social apparatus.

It seems that for women not only can there be a no exit situation but also an impossibility of knowing their selves to be bound into a chain of affairs. To understand what exit really means for women, it is important apparently to get into what selfhood or being they acquire in the world. Unlike men, who assume a closure of their identity that is already given, either as Cartesian cogito/consciousness or as Heideggerian Being as being-in-the-world produced through experience of dwelling and gathering, for women there is no home, no pregiven identity – no centrality of subjecthood who can know and who can be known. Woman can only be known through a discursive field of heteropatriarchy. Her knowledge of the world also is grounded upon a shifting being that 'she' is – the immediacy of her experiences has a meaning in the world, but that meaning doesn't belong to her fully. Sumit Sarkar has noted how often women in Tagore's fiction are childless. Similarly, In "A Wife's Letter"'s Mrinal is childless after giving birth to birth to a dead daughter (2002:146) That becomes a moment of

her to come out of her structures of family. Bindu comes in her life immediately after that. She seems to be a replacement of her dead child. It would be interesting to think how women are capable of realizing the already always existing other within the self - the negations through which Being is produced but which are therefore also a part of that being. A woman always contains within herself what does not belong to her. She is capable of giving birth to a child that belongs to the heteropatriarchal order of family and society. The child helps in the reproduction and continuation of such order. Unlike men, inassimilability and incongruency of the being and the world are experienced by women at every single moment of their life .Women realize alienation in the everyday life – their transcendence remains inscribed in the everyday experience of life not so much in terms of understanding it as belonging to it. Each moment of her belonging is marked by her non-belonging. Mrinal's love for Bindu is with the foreknowledge that she is not a relative, a blood relation. So there is no possibility of mutual possession or claim as well. Fatal attraction of two women towards each other seems attraction of the radical other of the structure to which they belong. If Bindu is the surrogate for Mrinal's dead child, then death – the radical other of life happens to be the surrogate of Bindu. Bindu's committing suicide perhaps has the hope for freeing herself from the world. Ironically, her letter never reaches Mrinal. She remains unrepresented in the horizon of meanings. Like the real life event of Snehalata's suicide by setting fire in clothes to avoid her father's huge payment of dowry to her would-be in-laws Bindu's suicide also gets discussed in patriarchal discursive field, as people comment that it has become fashionable for women to commit suicide.

Rochona Majumdar has discussed in details how a climate of public debate was raised in the context of Snehalata's case in 1914 which Sumit Sarkar points out to be used as an allusion in "A Wife's Letter" (2002: 137-139). While a group of traditionalists thought along lines of Mrinal's husband that it is only fashionable for women to die and such fashion is a result of education given to women, other group of revivalist found it reasonable to put a check on the practice of dowry. This climate of interpretations gets reflected in a story titled "Mrinaler Katha" (1917) written by the nationalist leader Bipin Chandra Pal as a rejoinder to Rabindranath's story. Pal's story, written mainly in epistolary form, gives us a re-interpretation of the original story. Here Bindu is found to be alive, and in a letter she

informs Mrinal that she is happy and secure with her husband who is actually not mad as described in the original story. Rather he is an idealist person who married an orphan like Bindu as he resolved after Snehalata's case to marry without taking dowry. He represents the reformist voice negotiating between tradition and modernity in the context of colonialism. We also get to know that the suicide of which Mrinal's brother Sarat informed her was of another woman in the neighbourhood, and Bindu described how this girl after setting fire to her clothes was desperate to live. In this story, on one hand, the heroism of girls like Snehalata was contested, and,on the other hand, positive roles of men in the patriarchal household were reasserted. Mrinal is represented here as immature and always immersed in a juvenile world of fancy. The alternative story becomes a representation of what others might think of Mrinal's supposed exit from her family. In the end she happily returns to her family. Perhaps it was actually not so easy for a wife like Mrinal to exit her family in real life. Perhaps intelligent women like Mrinal could realize their unbelonging and think of escape from structures of belonging even as they had to stay still within the family. But the story exemplifies how transcendence or exit from the world in spite of remaining within – not dying like Bindu but living with the knowledge of the alterity of death as omnipresent – is a possibility, with the realization of identity as something beyond which one can think and move. The point is whether actually a girl like Mrinal can actually leave her family is not that important. What is more important is how from within the structures of immanence she can accomplish her transcendence – how she uses her phenomenological existence and its apparatus of signs to go beyond it is significant.

Anirban Das summarizes Gautam Bhadra's reading of Rassundari's *Amar Jibon*. For him, the transcendence enacted in the act of reading is a personal experience for Rassundari, not enframed in a social program. She does not want to be an exemplar (2009:18). In her autobiography, Rassundari has repeatedly talked about her God – "whom she reverentially addresses as Parameshwar or Jagadishwar" (Das 2009:25). She seeks transcendence in her submission to her country and her God which are parts of her becoming. It is interesting to note how the sign-system of patriarchal world order such as the presence of God or the significance of one's country is used for transcendence – for going beyond the immediate phenomenological chains of existence. Mrinal in "A Wife's Letter" also uses the familiar role

of a religious devotee to exit out of her world. In Bipin Pal's story as well, in spite of Mrinal's unrealistic mistakes, she is referred to as a pious woman, still devoted to her husband and Nabin – the brother-in-law (thakurpo) of her sister-in-law (a character created by Bipin Pal who was not in the original story). Repentant at the end of the story, Mrinal returns to her husband. In fact she has never left her home, she has come to Puri only for a pilgrimage. Surely, though an exemplary character, Mrinal in the original story never wanted to set an example. Though her logic, intelligence and irony are exemplary, in the letter her strategy for exit is not unforeseeable in existing social structure. Bindu's death makes her realize that the confinements of life are temporary and fleeting and death is more real than the reality in which one is immersed:

> But death sounded its flute call: "What are these walls of masonry, these thorny hedges of your domestic laws? By what suffering or humiliation can they still imprison human beings? See, the triumphal flag of life waves in the hands of death! (218)

Death becomes symbolic of exit. Just as the poem by Jibanananda Das with which this essay began we see how suicide becomes a ploy to think of exit. But unlike man, no machismo of transcendence, no act of courage or defense is attempted to be shown. Death becomes like Lord Krishna who never abandons the beloved. The possibility of death is true for woman every moment as her immanence, her being-in-the-world, is not her own. She is homeless. Nature and women are troped as the mute earth and absorbed into patriarchal discursive apparatus. Women through their phenomenonal experience of the everyday can confront their bare life upon which foundations of society and family are laid. This moment of confrontation is the moment of the realization of the absurd – disparity between immanence and desire for transcendence. But for a woman like Mrinal it is different. The unfamiliar is within the familiar. Her act of philosophical suicide is through the immanent structures she belongs to. It is not a suicide actually. It is a realization of being always outside though remaining inside. Like Rassundari, Mrinal takes recourse to the religious system of signification and ascribes greater authority to God, the divine authority over her life than her husband who is only an earthly authority. The story is also a theorization of the everyday and its cycle of repetition which is imperative for the maintenance of any power structure. The

everydayness or rather the culture of everydayness gets its shape – its body by excluding its other. There is a primordial exclusion and fixation of woman and her desire – her identity and selfhood which gives culture its mark. The Brahmanical structure of household builds upon this fixation of woman – her confinement. The exit of Mrinal in the story is utopic and impossible. On one hand, it is like an act of suicide as only through death one can untie the self from its phenomenological moorings. But, on the other hand, after death no body lives to tell the tale. Here Mrinal still lives and like a sanyasi who having renounced the worldly life passes on to another life which is unrealizable in the real context of which the story was composed. No woman then could live a life without the support of husband outside the household. The utopic imagination of denying the household is inscribed in some other fashion in the diaries and memoirs of educated wives of colonial Bengal, though apparently they led the scheduled life of a good life.

I will end this essay mentioning a story written much later than Tagore's story, which would be extremely relevant to this discussion.It shows the impossibly possible fracturing of woman's self from within – the falling apart of the self given by patriarchy to which seemingly there can be no outside. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay's story "Lata's Day" is about a day in Lata's life. She is a married woman and the story shows her lassitude after her husband leaves for office. The story describes a single day but it could be any day for her. However, on that very day we witness in her a sensation of desire, that is unfamiliar, that occupies her and finally disrupts her body into pieces. It seems a moment of the descending of the unfamiliar within the familiar and the everyday. It can be thought of as a sensation or a feeling of going beyond the body and the self that is constituted phenomenologically. It might be any day in Lata's life but in the end the husband and neighbors could only discover a complete dead body:

> A complete corpus. Niether he, nor anyone else has any inkling of what killed the woman of Suren's household, what may be the cause of sudden passing...So, Lata celebrated her dying day without letting anyone know a thing. The scandalous orgasms of her senses triumphant, and the scandal remaining a secret. (89)

On the discursive horizon of heteropatriarchy we only get completeness of meaning, whereas the split within, the already committed suicide and

the exit from the everyday life often remain unknown in quotidian structures of meaning. Neither Mrinal's exit not Lata's mysterious death could help us to draw any conclusion. In our political imagination where caring and preserving the life and its conditions – maintenance of the everyday rituals of belonging becomes the norm; the denial of these structures is suicide just as suicide is an act of denial. In suicide at least the assertion of some kind of extended self is maintained. It can be normativized and normalized in the name of country, religion, family, party, self-respect etc. Suicide can be self-oriented in spite of destroying the physical body of the individual. It can be rationalized as any other self-oriented act. But such solace is not provided by Sibaji in his story. It seemed she died out of desire. It is a scandal like Mrinal's leaving her household. Breaking the boundaries of household, family, society and the self is phenomenological suicide – an act of ending the phenomenological determinants which produces the self. The 19th century diaries of Bengali women show that fragmentation though their life like Lata's body is discovered to be complete and undisturbed without any sign of disturbance and rupture. Literary texts supposedly perform that internal fragmentation of self – the always already committed suicide that happens within the normative structure of patriarchy without its knowledge. Patriarchy always sees its hegemonic body safe, secured and complete by itself.

Notes

1. "The worlding of a world on uninscribed earth alludes to Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art." Again, Heidegger suggests that the strife between thrusting world and settling earth-it is a violent concept-metaphor of violation-is strifed-realized or posited as strife-in the work of art as work. Many of Heidegger's examples in that piece are spatial. If the Heideggerian concept-metaphor of earth and world is used to describe the imperialist project, what emerges out of the violence of the rift (Riss in Heidegger has the violent implication of a fracture-"fighting of the battle," "the intimacy of opponents"-rather than the relatively "cool" connotation of a gap) is the multifarious thingliness (Dinglichkeit) of a represented world on a map, not merely "the materiality of oil paint affirmed and foregrounded in its own right" as in some masterwork of European art being endlessly commented on by philosopher and literary critic. The agents of this cartographic transformation in the narrow sense are not only great names like Vincent Van Gogh, but also small unimportanr folk like Geoffrey Birch, as well as policy makers. The technique is the great anonymous technique of capital-understood, as we have seen in Ranajit Guha's discussion in "A Rule of Property" -as physiocracy, mercantilism, free trade, or even civilizing mission (social productivity). I am also suggesting that the necessary yet contradictory assumption of an uninscribed earth that

is the condition of possibility of the worlding of a world generates the force to make the "native" see himself a' "other.", Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, "History" in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 211-212.

2. Rabindranath Tagore, "A Wife's Letter" translated by Supriya Chaudhury, Henceforth all references to this story will be from this text.

3. For further discussions on the significance of non-heteronormative love between two women that grows out of a denial of their subjectivity by patriarchal power structure see Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, "Approaching the Present–The Pre–text: the Fire Controversy".

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A Protean Discourse: Addiction and the Neo-colonial Way of the World

Arijit Mukherjee &Sourya Chowdhury

In the prologue to *Narcopolis* the narrator, while recounting his first voyage to an Opium den in Bombay (the eponymous narcopolis), speaks of the serial killer Pathar Maar who ruthlessly murdered pavement-dwellers at night; murders that no one noticed because the people killed were invisible entities, subalterns at the extreme peripheries of a post-colonial state. The narrator says he understood "his pity and terror", because, "...I knew him as a Samaritan, a pure saviour of the victims of a failed experiment, The Planned Socialist State of India." (*NP* 2).The sheer optimism which made Jawaharlal Nehru think that "greater triumphs and achievements... await us" (*Guardian*) at the dawn of independence had given way to conspiracy theories of State-sponsored-serial-killings to eradicate poverty that plagues the nation. Escape from the clutches of traditional colonialism gives way to several other modes of colonisation which continue to afflict the nation even as it tries to establish its autonomy. In our paper we aim to establish the evolving parameters that govern the changing face of colonisation in the contemporary socio-political-economic scenario. We believe that the traditional approach of postcolonial studies is insufficient to negotiate with the ever evolving issues of a fledgling Nation-State.

Postcolonial studies in its quintessential essence concerns itself with:

> [...] the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities. While its use has tended to focus on the cultural production of such communities, it is becoming widely used in historical, political, sociological and economic analyses, as these disciplines continue to engage with the impact of European imperialism upon world societies.(Ashcroft et.al.169)

But, for us, the demons haunting a contemporary postcolonial nation like India are both internal and external. Thus the homogeneous binaries of the Self and the Other as postulated by Edward Said[1] have collapsed

and given rise to a heterogeneous positionality and a multiplicity of postcolonial concerns. The internal concerns include the ever increasing levels of poverty, overpopulation, unequal economic growth, unemployment, illiteracy, communalism, squalor, and debilitating urbanisation. While externally, issues of Neo-Capitalism, blind consumerism and commodity fetishism, and globalisation continues to dog the nation. As we widen the ambit of colonisation, we shall discover that this culture of addiction to a consumerist culture plagues even the traditionally autonomous First World nations such as the United States of America. In David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* we find an almost dystopic view of the American nation-state striving to escape the clutches of this neo-colonising culture that it has itself partly perpetrated.

Addiction becomes a trope that signifies this detrimental socio-economic configuration, both in a metaphoric plane as well as in real terms. In both novels we find characters under the spell of drugs, their lives dictated by hallucinogens and systematic drug abuse. Thus, addiction itself becomes a symbol as well as an agent of neo-colonial force, and ironically, it is also an escape from the resultant problems as previously highlighted. In Plato's *Pharmacy*, Jacques Derrida speaks of the enigmatic concept of *pharmakon*[2], which stands for two diametrically opposite concepts of medicine and poison. Derrida is hinting at the essential multiplicity of postmodern thought but here addiction itself is the *pharmakon* in our context, standing for both entrapment and liberation.

In *Narcopolis,* we witness a social milieu which perfectly reflects our contention that the monoliths of the Self/Other have dissolved; this has generated a vigorous multiplicity of characters in the novel who transcend this traditional identity paradigm. The examination of the character of Mr. Lee provides some interesting aspects of this situation. Mr. Lee is a Chinese who has to take refuge in Bombay because of the political problems he faces in his own country. He can be identified as the Neo-Other, completely different from the traditional 'Other'. Initially he is unsure of his position in the identity politics that he is going to encounter in India. But as he travels through the North-Eastern parts of the country he comes to the realisation that he shares a common ethnicity with a large section of the Indian community. There is a blending of his identity which allows him to stay in the country without facing any socio-legal crisis. In this way Mr.Lee becomes a part of the society of Bombay; the neo-Other becomes a Self. But this whole process of assimilation is not without its own

problematics. He is assimilated without being 'acknowledged'. He is at once the Self and the Other. The Self, because he is assimilated and the Other because he is unacknowledged. If we examine the genesis of the construct of the Other we may refer to the theorists like Said and Bhabha. The Self is defined in negation- the Self is what the Other is not. The Self tries to know the Other, and while appropriating or abolishing the quintessential otherness, it does so by constructing a knowledge about them: "colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible"(Bhabha70). This further complicates the definition of the Other because here the sense of contention between the Self/Other which is generally expected to be present is missing. The whole society is absolutely unperturbed and unmodified by his presence. This is because his identity has blended with such a section of Indian society which has historically been neglected in socio-political terms and has thus been rendered insignificant. This draws our attention towards the issue of separatism which demystifies the glorious myth of "unity among diversity". His 'being-ness' cannot perturb a society whose concerns have strong fixities.

Dimple, a vital character in the novel who had been sold off to a tai[3] at a brothel in her childhoodby her mother and had been castrated there, problematises various traditional constructs through the complexities of her gender roles. If we attempt to draw an analogy with classical post-colonial configurations, she could be compared to what is ultimately termed the subaltern. Her voice is the one that is truly marginalised. Even as she vacillates between the male and the female sensitivities, she fails to find full assimilation into the social fabric around her through either. She perpetually remains the unaccomodated one, who in order to escape the degrading existence in the brothel quarters, tries to find love, shelter and acceptance from Rashid, the opium-den owner for whom she works. But although Rashid brings her to his home, she finds her place in a room beside the landing and not within the proper familial climes of Rashid's household. She herself is a Proteus; changing identities at the drop of a hat while reeling from a sense of unfulfilled lack and loss of identity. She is a eunuch-prostitute to whom people come to satiate their sexual perversions. She has this realisation that when people come to her kind because "they like the dirtiness of it...they have wives and children and they're making joke about...chakkas"[4] (*NP* 128). So the evolved subaltern in this context is the site of perverted sexuality. "The space between her legs had healed long ago into a scar". (*NP* 56). This sentence, seeped in

irony, essentially defines the paradox that is Dimple. While she has craftily moulded herself into various roles in an attempt to assimilate, her so called "healing" can only give rise to a scar, she can never fully be accepted or acknowledged by the socio-cultural post-colonial milieu that surrounds her. She is, most definitely, one face of the new subaltern; resourceful, intelligent, possibly more accepted than her predecessors, but neverfully acknowledged. The queerness of the existence of their kind is manifested in the extreme uneasiness of the society to accept them as they are. According to Dimple, this only lets members of their kind to extort money from people with merely a "gunshot clap". (*NP* 128). This can be understood by referring to Judith Butler who writes: "gender identity is ...performatively constituted."(Butler 25) and that "it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality"(Butler 136). As the new subaltern, she has come to the realisation that knowledge is power and is also acutely conscious of the fact that she will never find acceptance. She is also thus to find escape through constant reading; an elitist luxury in modern times. This could be interpreted as an attempt at transcendence of the condemned social class that she belongs to. But this attempt seems to be ever failing. Dimple has "many dreams that seem to pass through her simultaneously" (*NP* 60). She dreams of a house that she had never lived in but knew that it must be somewhere in Breach Candy or Marine Drive, a rich neighbourhood. She dreamt that she was popular with her teachers and she thought reading to be her "proper occupation". This whole endeavour reveals a severe 'lack' that she faces. But lack is this case is further complicated as it exists at both the real and imaginary level. Her lack "constitutes an *Urverdrängung* (primal repression), an inability, it is supposed, to be articulated in demand, but it re-appears in something it gives rise to that presents itself in man as desire (*das Begehren*)" (Ecrits 218) which again generates within her a passion for the ultimate signifier.This constant desire for reading is an attempt at negating this lack; a futile attempt. It is revealed that she had experienced a strange sensation that her arms were elongating; possibly a psychological compensation for her childhood castration. While dreams are classically interpreted as a pathway for the negotiation of repressed desires in human beings [5], for Dimple, even this road fails to provide succour. Even her "happy" dream slowly gives way to visions of an apocalyptic world. In a beautiful, though terrifyingly graphic description, Thayil speaks of the "great pit filled with black blood, its surface pocked with toxic gas bubbles, and the army of ghosts that fought to drink at the pit..." (*NP*61). Even a

successful attempt at drinking from the pit ends in decapitation for the ghosts at the hands of a hooded swordsman. More significantly, decapitation doesn't result in extinguishment of the ghosts. In Dimple's complex and layered dream, this is a vision of a doomed world following and unknown cataclysm, as prophesied by a nun, and Dimple "whimpered in her sleep at the ferocity of her own vision". (*NP*62). Thus Dimple fails to find complete escape and solace through dreams as well. In her we find the portrayal of the new subaltern. Infinitely more complex and layered, her character ceases to be a stereotype.

The novel's prologue (written in one evocative opium-induced sentence) speaks eloquently of the drudgery and debilitating poverty that greets the narrator as he first ventures towards the opium den. References to a failed State are made at frequent intervals in the novel. Indeed, the optimism that fills the heart of a nascent nation-state has given way to a kind of desolation. In this milieu, opium emerges as the protagonist. Characters flock to the dens to lose themselves in the comforting fumes, gaining illusory release from the drudgeries of the outside world. In a way, the opium dens are a postmodern pastoral space. The 'den' as a space is extremely interesting because it creates a socio-cultural hyper-real space which in a way is the 'Ideal' that the postcolonial Nation has always wished to create. Here, we find people from different strata of society sharing a common space in absolute harmony. William Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral*(1950),identifies a harmony existing within a pastoral space as it transforms the complex into the simple; however he also notes an inherent ambivalence within this space [6]. The hierarchy that exists in the world outside is demolished here to provide a notion of co-habitation which is simultaneously illusory and also very real. The effect of opium prevents people from communicating with each other after a certain point, and this absence of communication is the key to the whole possibility of co-existence. As soon as the intoxicating effect of opium ends, reality breaks in to destroy the harmony and we discover the prevalence of communal tensions that infests the society. The bubble bursts as soon as one steps outside the den. However, as Rashid himself says early in the novel, one introduces only one's "worst enemy to opium" (*NP* 6). This addiction that Dimple resorts to, to tackle her insecurities, is the thread that binds the characters. Addiction here is a tool of violence directed at the Self. Frantz Fanon had spoken of violence as a means of self-assertion of the Otherised [7]. Here we can see how this paradigm of violence has evolved and is now directed internally, towards the Self. This also establishes the

fact that a postcolonial nation is colonised by internal issues after independence and this in turn, further problematises the Self-Other configuration.

Rumi, another major character in the novel, exemplifies the effect of the aforementioned problems that are widespread in society. When we encounter him for the first time, he has lost his job. He cannot go back and join his father's business because he is not given any dignified position there. Having no means left, he had no option but to join his father-in-law's business. However, this creates another problem in his life as he senses a loss of respect of his wife for him. He is even sexually deprived by his wife, which almost ruins his self-esteem and pushes him to the edge of being a sadist. He becomes an opium-addict in order to negotiate with his problems; this state of addiction is akin to a thick, self-woven, self-spun spiderweb in which world affairs hang strewn about like the corpses of insects sucked dry. In this state the affair of the outside world seemed insignificant and helped Rumi to come to terms with his lost process of individuation. But even opium cannot bring a complete release. His insecure self compels him to keep a hammer in his briefcase. There are a few episodes which reveal the extreme state of his mind. At one instance he hires a prostitute and brutally assaults her and in another instance he kills the person who tries to pick his pocket. Sigmund Freud spoke of aggression as a means of sexual mastery in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality[8].Rumi is denied sexual favours by his wife as a result of his falling economic status. He redirects his instinct of male sexual mastery towards the aforementioned prostitute. What is at play here is the loss of selfhood suffered by Rumi which is linked to his place as a citizen of a fledgling postcolonial nation. He turns to opium as a means of illusory release as well. Interestingly, Freud has also linked sadism to the death instinct[9]; this, combined with Rumi's masochistic substance-abuse can be interpreted as a manifestation of the death instinct. His acts of violence emerge as an expression of his repressed angst. His sadism turns into masochism as he desperately tries to realise his own 'existence'. He deliberately attempts to incite a murderer into hitting him, attempting in vain to feel his own existence through the physical pain. The murderer's reply, "...you want to hit me and you want to be hit, you want to be beaten almost to death... because you're bored and pain is preferable to nothing" (*NP* 235). Rumi's existential crisis is the quintessential existential crisis of the postmodern age where over-commodification, consumerism and a loss of faith in grand narratives of any kind has given rise to eternal

boredom. Violence here also becomes a means of escape and later in the novel, when Rumi, on the verge of extreme insanity, encounters Dimple-alias-Soporo Onar in a rehab, the latter, seeing his condition, decides to free him through death.

Addiction acts as a colonising agent in this universe simply because of the dominance it has on the characters' lives. But apart from the physical or psychological hold that drugs have, economically too they play a similar role. In the age of neo-colonialism, market politics is determined by creation and satisfaction of false needs. As the novel progresses we see that opium is slowly being replaced by more commercialised drugs such as heroin and cocaine. The consumer-culture that is at play here forces the characters to switch from one induced need to another. While this introduction of newer drugs in the market is also part of a macrocosm of a consumerist culture of addiction, it is also a tool of assertion of neocolonialist forces.Garad"the new thing, brown powder, garad-heroine with the compliments of the Pakistani government....what kind of government would see anything in heroine but poison?...it meant that politics or economics, overrode every other thing in the world." (*NP*142). What is at play here is what we term consumer terrorism, usage of substance to cause disruption. This new form of addiction is a power tool, working towards subjugation and control of the masses. Garad that is supplied to India is of the lowest quality and in order to aggravate its intoxicating effect, rat poison is mixed in it. This reveals a global economic policy which leaves the "Third World" nations with the worst commodities to consume. This is manifested even in the export policy of other commodities such as tea as evident from this report on IIFT (Indian Institute of Foreign Trade) website:

> Although North India accounts for around 75?77% of India's tea production, depending on the year and market conditions, around 85?90% of North Indian tea production is consumed in the domestic market. The balance, much of it of high quality, is exported. Although South India accounts for around 23?25% of India's tea production, around 30?50% of its production is exported. Depending on the year, South India accounts for around 50% of India's tea exports by volume.

In neo-colonial times, subjugation and control is achieved through this commodification and consumerism. Thus, even as global economy undergoes liberalisation, and freedom is supposedly the birth-right of an individual born in this globalised space, we discover that this freedom is

only illusory. Using Jean Baudrillard's terminology, we can term this illusion of freedom as a hyperreal experience[10], never achieved in real terms. Fredric Jameson in "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" opines that postmodernism is to be understood as a cultural dominant phenomena rather than a single style, as representing various modes rather than a genre. Similarly in these postmodern times, the mode of addiction is ever changing, opium slowly giving way to more chemical form of drugs such as cocaine. Jameson also says that postmodernism is characterised by the replacement of affect, particularly 'Angst', by a 'peculiar kind of euphoria' (Jameson 15). The Oriental construct of India as an exotic locale where order gives way to disorder and overindulgence is the keyword that returns in a newer avatar as westerners come to the land in order to indulge in recreational drugs. We find characters like Jean-Luc the Frenchman who never goes back. There is also an economic factor at play as these drugs are available at much cheaper rates. Francois Lyotard has spoken of the sublime[11] as a dominant tenet of postmodernism. It is the desire to represent the Other of experience. It is that euphoria or those intensities that the romantics talked about; however, what has been lost is the essentialist notion of truth associated with the same. This sublime euphoria is not only found in hallucination, but also through other modes of media such as films. Interestingly, while our argument is that this consumerist culture is a colonising agent in this day and age, even the so-called first world nations are not free from the same.

In David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* referred to earlier a dystopic futuristic version of the United States of America is portrayed. The country that Wallace portrays has itself been colonised by the corporatisation and commodification that it has partly engendered. North America, a nation comprising U.S.A, Canada and Mexico, held together in uneasy tension, has each year sponsored by a separate corporation. Characters are in the throes of substance-abuse as well, much like their so-called third world brethren. However, economically, they are more prosperous. We could say that there is a time-lag is at play here with India trying to catch up to this universe of hallucinogenic illusion of globalised capitalist freedom as seen in the globalised West. However, Wallace's masterstroke lies in a central conceit that contextualises this phenomenon of consumerism. James Incandenza, the patriarchal central (but absent) character of the novel, had directed a film called *Infinite Jest* which is so entertaining that when a person starts watching it he cannot stop till death. At once a force of hypnotism as well as disruption emerges. While the film can be seen as

a metaphorical representation of this debilitating global culture, it is also represents consumerism as a force of terrorism. It hyperbolically representsa "high-tech paranoia" (Jameson 37). This metaphorical concept is also represented by Wallace in real terms in this novel. A group of Quebec separatists plan to use this film as tool of terrorism to disrupt the nation-state held in uneasy tension. Thus, in contemporary times, colonisation which works through newer modes, affects every nation, even the so-called first world.

A related concept, the rehab centre, is seen in both novels. While much of *Infinite Jest* takes place in the Ennet House Drug and Recovery centre, characters in *Narcolpolis* are also later transferred to a newly formed rehabilitation centre named Safer, started by the government. This is mimicry in play, shaped and configured by the culture of the 21st century. It is not only imitation of a western creation, but also a creation of a false need as mentioned before.

The novel, *Narcopolis*, is about the city of Bombay and it is, as Sarah Van Bonn describes in her review: "part cacophony, part symphony: a whirlwind of drugs, sex, violence, loves, lives, deaths, and more than anything, stories"(*Southasian Web*). In his interview with Stuart Evans[12], Thayil speaks of discovering a new Bombay when one reaches the end of the novel. For him, this Bombay is a dark, hidden, shadowy world of drugs and Opium dens that, if it still exists, has evolved to a great extent. The Bombay at the end of the novel - where a call centre borders a McDonald's while a despondent slum stands beside these two symbols of globalised progress – is representative of a typical neo-colonial cityscape where unequal growth and social inequality are the watchwords. For us, this trope of 'a new Bombay'opens up fascinating interpretative possibilities, once we chart the evolution of a postcolonial nation through it. This interpretative liberation helps to release the postcolonial discourse from its traditional concerns into an ever-changing, protean realm.

Notes

1. See Said's *Orientalism*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
2. For pharmakonsee Jacques Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy". *Dissemination*. Trans. BarbaraJohnson. London: The Athlone Press, 1981.
3. Tai is similar to 'Madam' or a woman who runs a brothel.
4. Chakka, literary, is the Hindi synonym for a eunuch but in its social usage it is a slang hinting at the impotency of a human being or a person who is a complete failure.

5. Refer to Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. C.J.M. Hubback. Bartleby.com. 2010. Web. 21 April, 2013. < http://www.bartleby.com/276/>

6. For 'the ambivalence within the pastoral space' see William *Empson's Some Version of Pastoral*. New Direction Publishing Corporation, 1960.

7. For 'violence and self-assertion' refer to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. USA: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965.

8. For 'aggression and sexual mastery' see Sigmund Frued's Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. Ed. Drs. Smith Ely Jelliffe& W.M. A. White. Trans. A.A. Brill. Project Gutenberg. Feb 8, 2005. Web. 21 Feb, 2013.

9. For 'death instinct' see Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*. Trans. John Reddick. UK: Penguin Books, 2003.

10. Refer to Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. 1st ed. 1981. Editions Galilee; 4th ed. USA: The University of Michigan Press, 2006.

11. Jean-Francois Lyotard discusses his concept of sublime in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. 1st ed. 1991. Editions Galilee; Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994.

12. For this interview see "Interview with JeetThayil on Narcopolis". By Stuart Evans. Faber & Faber, 16 Oct. 2012. Onlinevideo. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgzXansV7PQ>

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Mapping the (Post)colonial Institutional Ontopology: Sahitya Akademi1 and its Ambivalent Epistemic Leanings

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Introduction: agonizing English

Institutions are founded by acts of 'exclusionary violence', and the selfsame acts are perpetuated by them (Thomassen 2006:136). In this sense, it is quite natural for any institutionalized study of Indian languages and literature to dramatically culminate in disclosing what it conceals. The study has a 'Foucaldian genealogical urge', with a potency to expose its contingency upon forces it may have laid to rest while arresting that destabilizing process of "becoming" (Smith, Hall 2012: 26) to which, it is claimed, it stands permanently anchored. However, what such studies normally unfold besides exposing to a critical gaze what it conceals is the scope that it contains of being de/re-constructed by the 'futural community'. We, indeed, realize this as we cast a 'scopic' gaze at the existing institutionalized study of Indian languages and literature. In fact, what this study ends up making available for varying degress of critical reconstructive validation is what it eventually delivers or yields, an ambivalent panoptical colonial claim that views the English language as opening up myriad indelible creative spaces and possibilities in postcolonial nations while becoming a meta-language with potencies to reconcile the distinctive performativity of diverse heteronomous linguistic 'presences' within nation such as India. However, the epistemically enriched collectives of the de-colonizing period, the time when the nation stood as a monolithical entity contesting the stratagems of the colonial empire builders, stood oblivious of such deconstructive scopes that lay within the colonial institutional frameworks. Hence, what remained as a permanent mark on 'the social surface of inscription', within what Deleuze calls the 'semiotic regime' is the tragic failure of the nationalists to promote the regional languages among the intelligentsias and enable the common mass to contest the haloed status of English as the *a-priori* (Kant 2004:9) or the ambivalent claims of that ironically resilient comprador mentality that it was the 'crypto-normative agency' for the epistemic evolution and dissemination within the Colonized nations.

However, what further reiterated this failure was not exactly India's official policy on English, 'riddled with contradictions' (Kothari 2006:28), bringing in its wake very strong opinion for and against the retention of English. Rather, it was the Enlightenment inspired Nehruvite agency, with its *differend* (Lyotard 1989:22) devouring constitutional amendment, that did this. This was an amendment which while determining the futural operativity of English in India as an instrument of the State made it central to the public discourses. Interestingly, it bore those 'meta-strategical proto-enlightenment' strategies aiming to purge the governmental embryonic policies on English of its innate "agonisms" (Bevir 2010:314) and their equally self-destructive tendency for drawing antagonism from the very 'un-English' nationalists. However, it was not merely that pro-enlightenment Nehruvite leanings that opened up a space for an interaction between English, which for Nehru smacked of the Enlightenment tradition, and the de-colonized subjects. Rather it was the innate versatility and pliability of this language and its rather queer positioning within postcolonial nations that made it govern the public discourse. (It belonged to the 'trans-sites', the 'blurry in-betweens' and the 'Interstices' that always fell outside the monolithical singularity of regions) Moreover, it was this language's 'nomadic un-belongingness' that made it distinctly apart from the firmly rooted languages of antiquity and also unlike them made it accommodate changes and syntactical innovations, which gained global acceptance. In fact, this 'interstical', 'de-territorialized ontic attributes' of English language is what made it an effective tool in the hands of the diasporic authors and those writing in English, though— ironical as it may sound— stereotypical interpellative narratological account of 'indigeneity' is what most often these writers reproduced while exploiting this language's attributes. As MK Naik stated:

> Take an assortment of sadhus, fakirs, maharajas, agitationists, Westernized Indian men and traditional Indian women – either pious paragons or seductive sirens according to your mood and choice - and let them perform against the background of communal riots and nationalistic uprising; throw in a couple of tiger-hunts, rope-tricks, snakes and elephants; and a pinch of mysticism if you can carry it off successfully – and there you have your Indian English masterpiece. (2007:287)

Moreover, it were these attributes of the English language that stood out as undisputed virtues rather than solely existing for writers as convenient readymade tools to be appropriated. This became even more

evident as trans-regional recognition became one of the major driving forces for those writing in English. Even writers like Tagore were seen as engaging in English translation for 'personal recognition, not to intervene in the Colonial understanding of Indian culture' (Kothari 2006:23). It is this that the rapidly piling up critical commentary reaffirmed rather obliquely while alleging that Tagore's thinking was essentially English:

> His [Tagore's] mode of thinking is so essentially English, that I appreciate his English translation of Gitanjali far better than the original Bengali...Bengal has not given Rabindranath to Europe – rather Europe has given him to the Bengalis. (Chakrabarty 2007:158)

No doubt, English, due its 'existent nomadic positioning' within postcolonial nations and partly due to its 'originary textural hybridity'—it grew out of the intimidating scholastic Latin and the other high brow languages of the Greco-roman tradition — offered to Indians writing in English a unique vantage point from which they interrogated the world. But then, it also posed a danger of greedily devouring the Bhasas lying in the state of utter neglect:

> The English language is traveling fast towards the fulfillment of its destiny...running forward towards its ultimate mission of eating up, like Aaron's rod, all other languages.(Mukherjee 2007:23)

No doubt, the English language, to an extent, achieved both an unprecedented and in many ways exemplary integration of divided India, reorienting its ventriloquistic amorphous plurality towards the immanent political goal of achieving decolonization:

> [...] the genius of literature...clearly sees that in the missionary brotherhood she has found the men who are to extend her empire to the ends of the earth, and give her throne a stability that will be lasting as the sun. She beholds them subduing language after language, reducing them to the laws of grammar, and fixing them in the columns of the lexicon. She sees, with grateful wonder, the schoolhouse rising in the desert, and hears in the depths of its solitude, the creative crash of the printing-press, as it pours forth its intellectual bounties. (Viswanathan 1990:81)

But then, the integration it effected seemed more parodical than real. This is because what this integration worked towards was not the cohesion of 'chaotic India' (Naik 2007:1) during the Colonial times, but the systematic marginalization or denigration of those who could not afford the exorbitant English education:

> Those who are unsuccessful in gaining appointments will not turn to manual labor, but remain discontented members of society and enemies of our government, converting the little real education they have received into an instrument to injure us by talking treason and writing seditious articles in native journals. (Viswanathan 1990:143)

Moreover, it did during the early postcolonial times—in the historicist sense this would mean not long after the 'stroke of midnight' of August 15, 1947—what it had done during the colonial times to the western educated natives with an 'inner voice'. It made those exploiting the professed virtues of English —its pliability and its interstical flavor—feel that they were tempted into showcasing their creativity in a language that had no truce with their existential realities:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own...it is the language of our intellectual make up...but not of our emotional make up. (Rao 2011).

Sahitya Akademi's homogenizing drive(s) and its lack of communicative ethics

However, it was not so much the prevailing dissatisfaction among the native intelligentsia of being unable to register the subtleties of manifold lives people lived in India in English that stood significant among the complex interaction of forces enabling the creation of Akademi as much as the meeting held by the British at the Royal Asiatic Society in 1944 to set up a 'National Cultural Trust...to encourage cultural activities in all fields' (Rao 2007:7). Though this was ironic, undermining Akademi's nostalgic alliance with the ethos of the bygone resistant anti-colonial nationalist phase, its single minded resistance to Government's participation in its affairs spoke of its postcolonial ontopology. It was an ontopology that fore grounded its keenness to efface what stood then as the bitter memories of the colonial rule, remembered for its bullish hermeneutic interventions— evident in their effort to legitimize the idea of the Orient— that had altered the very notion of the 'indigenous otherness' beyond repair. But then it did not take Akademi too long to expose its reluctance to lead a 'postized' existence.

It was, no doubt, the bitter memories of the interventionist agenda of the colonial institutes— that ensured, among many other things, that natives slavishly rely upon their interpellative dogmatic interpretations even during their moments of self-introspection— as much as the necessity

of situating oneself in the post of postcolonial that made Nehru opine while inaugurating Akademi in the central hall of the Parliament that Government 'would refrain from exercising any control'(ibid.) over the activities of the Institutes. However, it was the non-functional rhetoricity of this statement that Akademi exposed along with the impossibility and the impracticability of remaining absolutely aloof from the functional patterns of the colonial institutes as it went on to erect itself upon the direct supervision of the government. However, what made Sahitya Akademi's committed postcoloniality a little problematic was that it, not unlike many other institutes in the other postcolonial nations, could not avoid the necessity or the inevitability of drawing lessons from, and also being caught up within, the working methodologies of the colonial institutes. Aditionally, the objective that this institute pursued smacked of that uncritical incipient postcolonial desire, where resistance stood tantamount to binaric reversal. It was also a reminiscent of those oppressive modernist values that Nehruvism was supposedly concomitant with. These were the values that brought about liberation from the inscrutable mysticism of the older traditions of the West while ironically laying the foundation of their colonial enterprise. In fact, it was not merely the government's rhetorical policies and partly its own inadequate, if not altogether inappropriate, understanding of postcoloniality that Akademi was intent upon serving by aiming to bring about cultural unity of the country. Rather it reflected in its operationality what Nehru in his desire to devise Indian postcolonial modernity in the lines of Western modernity. In other words, Akademi betrayed an acute fondness for, and an urgency to receive inspirational guidance from, what were supposed to be Western enlightenment's most effective tools, instrumental reason and the dull empiricistic operationality through which it expressed itself. This was an operationality that culminated in that homogenizing drive that both nationalist and colonial concerns precipitated.

Thus, it was the optimal use of reason that Akademi displayed as it went about establishing four regional centers. These centers spoke for other regions that either fell within its wall or lay outside as its loyal subjects. The choice of Kolkata as the regional center of the Eastern region was made not merely because Kolkata was a metropolis, but because it was felt that its dissipative cosmopolitanity had the unique Hegelian potency to reconcile the linguistic differentialities of other regions of the East. It is the same homogenizing drive that lay behind Akademi's decision to

make Gujarat the site of subsumption in the West, and New Delhi the head quarters of languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Kashmiri, English and Urdu. Same trend prevailed in the Southern region. It was Bangalore that stood as the melting-pot for languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, though it was the promotion of intra-regional studies as well as comparative studies among different language groups that these regional centers diligently worked for. Moreover, it was the hierarchized structural pattern of its constitution that stood out, a pattern that displayed the degrees to which Akademi's autonomy relied upon government's interventions. With President, Financial Adviser, and five members nominated by the Government of India of whom each one was a representative of the Department of Culture, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the National Book Trust, Akademi seemed like a government puppeteered Institute with little that it could call its own. No doubt, it was the scholarly eminence of the people that stood out as the sole arbiter when it came to electing people within the Akademi, in particular for the post of Akademi's president. But then, it was not the ironic liberating differantial (Derrida 1998:217) 'lines of flight' that unique Habermasian 'intersubjective communion' (Johnson 2006:73) both reflected and captured while the Council teased out that abstraction we call 'scholarly eminence'. Rather, the processes that judged the eminence of this kind displayed what we may call a 'mock democratic encounter' where consensus among members concerned was reached with the intent to consolidate a pre-determined 'telos'. It displayed a kind of sycophantical honor to the luminaries instead of teasing out those dissenting multivocalities resisting the formation of such a 'telos' in the first place. Moreover, with the intent to make the luminaries, including the Prime Minister, serve as President of the Akademi, what the Akademi betrayed was not a critico-dramatic unfolding of the Habermasian 'universal pragmatics'[2] (1979), but the extent to which it had narrowed down its scope since its very inception to enact what such concepts embodied and promoted, the deliberative procedures upon which the democratic bodies hinged, clearly distinguishing themselves from the autocratic systems. Though secret ballot was enough to reconfirm the democratic credentials of the Akademi, it was unclear whether the outcome of such balloting concretized the preferences of the Council or whether it stood as emblematic of the dialectical operationality of the communicative processes that thinkers like Habermas upheld.

There have been allegations against the Akademi that its awards are politically motivated; it is a primarily elitist institute, which while mainstreaming the marginalized linguistic presences ensured its prolonged sustainability by strategically awarding the luminaries; that the inner workings of Akademi members' mirror a reluctance to resort to universal pragmatics etc. A more serious critique of it reveals that it urges the States to create prototypes of the main award it confers on the writers. Though bestowal of awards by the states, in fact, aids, and has to an extent been integral to Akademi activities intended to bring about marked rise in the production of Bhasa writing, it has resulted in a kind of socio-cultural self absorption of the writers of the states, preventing them from fashioning deliberative encounter across its geo-political locales. In addition, there seems to be an implicit hierarchization underlying conferment of awards by the central Akademi and States' counterparts as evidenced by the desire of the recipients of the State Akademi awardee for the central Akademi award. In other words, it is the magnetic appeal of these awards that serve as an impetus both persuading and luring these writers into strategically 'de-familiarizing' their narratives, or more precisely flooding them with images and symbols of local insularity and entrenchment that work towards sealing the borders of their texts. As a result, both texts and writers end up becoming embodiments of universal pragmatics negating agency working against the very ontopological needs of both texts and writers to make meaningful resonances within 'de-contextualized sites'.

No doubt, Akademi awards with their resolve not to spark off a contest between languages, unlike the awards like the Jnanpith and Saraswati Samman, are symptomatic of the 'circumspectal matured sensibility' that the members seem to have endowed them with after sustained deliberative interactions with varied concerned groups. What seems to be at work is the overwhelming imperative of communicative rationality that the State promotes. The process of the award has often been allegedly vitiated by lobbying, nepotism and cronyism. As Rao says:

> Behind the glitter of awards-giving functions of the Akademi there is the sordid business of sifarish leading to undeserving candidates getting away with these coveted prizes causing much bickering and heart burning. As against the few who are honored, there are hundreds whose work does not receive official accolade (2004:43)

Akademi's epistemic leanings

Among the forces that reigned within the epistemic core of Akademi it was the Nehruvite consensus with its uncritical admiration for the pro-enlightenment leanings that stood out along with the mythopoeical lyrical assertions of Vivekananda, the quasi-mystical and poetic sensibilities of Tagore and the spiritually illuminating Gandhian march of Satyagraha. In fact, the tremendous empiricistic fervor that the Akademi went on to display within its language recognition policies— legitimizing a language on the basis of a logico-reductive analysis where what stood out was not the pleasant discovery of finding a literature in an unrecognized language, but a reiteration of cut and dried governmental decision making strategies— was 'epistemically constrained' (Norris 2009:57). So was the unmatched exhibitionism with which Akademi had foregrounded its fetishistic quest for cultural unity, almost persuading others and as well as itself to believe that the seminars, conferences and workshops it conducted in various parts of the country were the instruments for realizing the elusive unity of its nation or of any nation for that matter. Thus, grappling with what these thinkers had handed down—for we still experience a dialectical encounter of sorts with them as much as anyone else does while laying the institutional agenda within a postcolonial nation— becomes some sort of a-priori for understanding the epistemic constraints manifested within Akademi's activities and for putting forward a demand for the radical postcolonization of Akademi's objective in particular.

This is a kind of postcolonization that bases itself on Habermasian communicative rationality, ceaseless negotiations of Bhabha and Spivak, and quasi-absolutist thinking of the likes of Zizek and Badiou, therapeutically resuscitating that which lies petrified in the annals of history as the unwanted epistemic debris. This sort of postcolonization encourages vibrancy of constant renewal and negotiations, dialogic encounter and a reflective dwelling in others' epistemic configuration rather than an unreflective or uncritical alignment with, and inclination for, what the leaders hell bent on modernizing India in the lines of West believed and what the preachers keen on handing down 'metaphysical baggage' (Young 2004:148) preached. But then, it wasn't so easy for the Akademi or for anyone situated in the times when the Akademi was created not to get tempted by the magic current of phrases arising out of sources enmeshed within an ironic dialectical contest to outlive each other. It was the professed emancipatory logic of Nehru, the uninterrupted flow of purple

patches that Tagore's and Vivekananda's writing indeed was and the stunning simplicity of Gandhi's spiritually elevating principles.

However, it was not so much the urgency to rely on traditional ways of thinking—given that Vedic texts too had their iconoclastic strands—that bogged the Akademi as much as the need to project India as per the familiar topos that it was a country that stood for and quite convincingly portrayed 'unity in diversity' (Nehru 2004:143). Though such a notion has proven to be both 'contestatory' (Bhabha 2004) and worthy of being contested within the contemporary times, it both reflected and arose out of the thinking of visionaries like Tagore, Vivekananda and Nehru, whom we revere and to an extent idolize, if not consider them potently resilient and thoroughly unputdownable in the current times. In fact, it was not merely what is most commonly held up as the whole gamut of Indian civilization that Tagore brought out in his *Bharat Tirtha* (Indian Pilgrimage). What he handed down to the citizens of India situated during the very incipience of the postcolonial times is what they wished to have at that moment. The citizens of India wished to have a hard baked indigenous episteme that could contest the hegemonic Western constructs while rendering India as the unifying core of the civilizations of the world. India, according to Tagore, was a space of dialectical overcoming of the dissensions that kept the civilizations apart, though ironically speaking these civilizations were magically united in their purpose to colonize the embattled Indian territories and the rest of the militarily less gifted nations with their charismatic geo-political stratagems. They were also at the same time singularly committed in transforming India into what Rushdie had called in his novels a 'palimpstine' (Huddart 2006:72), blocking the postcolonial hindsight from penetrating deep into the historical annals to recover the signifiers of what was distinctly autochthonous. But then this did not prevent Tagore from poetically unconcealing—he too seemed to have believed in the 'world-disclosive'(Heidegger 2008) potencies of Heideggerian thinking— to the world what stood for him then as our nation's 'natural magnetism' or as one might say the innate 'unificatory therapeutic potencies' of India.

No one knows, at whose beckoning, vast waves of humanity
In currents unstoppable, from the unknown arrived here,
To merge into the endless ocean!
Here Aryans, non-Aryans, Dravidians, Chinese
Sakas, Hunas, Pathans, Moguls are merged in one body.

The doors today have opened in the West, bearing gifts, behold, they arrive-
All shall give and take, mingle and get mingled and, none shall depart empty handed
From the shore of Bharat's Great Humanity! (Tagore 1975:506)

That it is this which caught the attention of the erudite Akademi policy makers instead of what critics and historians term lately as the productive contradictions of Tagore's verses constitutive of the cosmopolitanism of his writings is an irony that ought not to go unnoticed. It is pleasantly surprising then that while Tagore's verses held out or rather projected to the world a poetic reaffirmation of what the mythic texts of our nation had foregrounded— a tempting rendition of our nation being the cradle of civilizations, with divinely ordained powers to reconcile their latent agonisms while therapeutically arresting the conflicts that the civilizations were enmeshed in. Tagore insisted on visualizing India as a 'commonwealth of nations in which no nation' (or race) would deprive another 'of its rightful place in the world festival' and every nation would 'keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part of the illumination of the world' (Das 2008) But then the Akademi policy makers made nationalistic euphoric alliance with what Tagore could not help delivering despite not being in congruence with what the ennobling enlightenment rationality of west that Nehruvite interventions were fraught with eventually culminated in, dominance of instrumental reason and the unparalleled notoriety of scientism. What Tagore offered despite his disagreements with the absolutist world view and totalizing enterprises of the western rationality was the mythically shrouded notion of 'monad' (Leibniz 1991:56), of the 'holistic, organistic singularity' of entities that he was keen to position both as an alternative to and a mytho-poeic supplementation of what the West had to offer in its thinking about nation. In addition, it was the sheer calming effect and the balmy comfort of Tagore's symbolic representation of mind as the 'inner sanctum' that provided, as it might seem, the added epistemic impetus to Akademi policy makers. It most likely urged them to realize through the Akademi what had stood silently frozen in the metaphoric elusivity of Tagore's verses, India's cultural unity. To sum up, what the Akademi policy makers perhaps took from Tagore's verses was what was viewed as its centripetal performativity, its holistic monadological drive. It was a drive that overcame the occasional ambiguity that Tagore invested his verses with by depicting those originary nomadological wanderings of self before culminating in the emphatic affirmation of the inner harmony;

> In the night, we stumble over things and become acutely conscious of their individual separateness, but the day reveals the great unity which embraces them. And the man, whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness...no longer awkwardly stumbles over individual facts of separateness in the human world, accepting them as final; he realizes that peace is in the inner harmony which dwells in truth, and not in any outer adjustments. (Das 2008:76)

However, when it came to providing plebian, if not altogether grounded, validation to Akademi's objective, it was Nehru's rhetorical mythification of nation, which made an indelible mark on our permanent affectualised state. What the Akademi policy makers perhaps got from Nehru while fashioning the objective of Akademi was not some sort of toughened intellectual disguise for the latter in the form of his logico-reductivist re-rendition of Tagore's poesical renderings of nation. It was not the Andersonian type of national imaginary underpinned by intrumental reason that the successive neo-marxist thinkers had foregrounded. What the Akademi policy makers supposedly got from Nehru instead was his media saturated, almost Bollywoodish rhetoric of the nationhood, uncompromising in its intent to diffuse the prolixity of argumentation or the snobbery of that dense verbal play we commonly associate with intellectual parleys.

> The unity of India was no longer merely an intellectual conception for me: it was an emotional experience which overpowered me. That essential unity had been so powerful that no political division, no disaster or catastrophe, had been able to overcome it. (Nehru 2004:57)

Bristling with fictitious[3] coinages such as Bharat Mata, the rhetorical reaffirmation of nation, that Nehru's speech provided acted as the backdrop inspiring the Akademi policy makers to set up an objective standing tantamount to that collective war against the hegemonic power of the west which decolonizing movement in India enacted. Standing within the collective imagination as one of the deities or the goddesses, the cornucopia of spiritual healing powers and the powers of destruction, the fictitious image of Bharat Mata, on the one hand, not only inspired admiration, awe and respect but also exercised some sort of a centripetal force on the indigenous populace—and in this sense on the Akademi policy makers too—withdrawing them into its proximity, offering shelter, refuge and protection. On the other, this image motivated the people to organize themselves into an unbreakable unity for the cause of protecting what it

represented, the pristine, inviolable, unified chastity of a goddess. In fact, it is due to the tenacious hold that this image exercised on common man's imagination that striving for cultural unity in India most often stood translated rather spontaneously into a fight for protecting what was meant to be dear to everyone, the healing touch of the divine and the pristine feminine unified grace that it was concomitant with.

This stood reiterated in the patriotic song 'Vande Mataram' by Bankim Chandra. It is to this that the policy makers may have also turned to. The differential impact that the song had on the people was evident within the draconian measures that the British government took to ban the song or restrain it from gathering into an indissoluble defiant high note, a crescendo of nationalist obstinacy and resistance that the Colonial government failed to contain. Referring as it did to, *Jagadhatri*, Goddess Durga, the goddesses of courage, valour and strength in particular as per the Hindu religion, the song both enthused and exhorted the people to gather into a resistant collectivity against the colonial rule. In fact, it wasn't merely to fashion a nationalist uprising against the British rule that the reference to Goddess Durga in 'Vande Mataram' was made. Rather, such a reference that the song carried was strategical, both intending to draw the people of the nation into a gesture of unified obeisance and demanding from them some sort of submission to religio-spiritual dictum that it obliquely contained as an ironic undercurrent. In other words, the song infused among the people a feel that what they were receiving from it while fighting against the British rule was not only encouragement or the metaphysical strength that the deities, the pantheon of God and Goddesses in Hindu religion normally stood for, but a kind of divine ordination, responding to which was not merely a matter of thrill and excitement, but a matter of proving their loyalty to the Divine Goddess Durga, containing in herself alongside all the exhorting impulses, a dominant strain of mother-hood, demanding obedient, folded hand veneration of and submission to her ordination more than anything else.

The Akademi policy makers in this sense may have been equally inclined to receive what Vivekananda was keen to offer then to the people of India, either ignorantly hostile to, or flatteringly disposed towards, the Western epistemic advancement. What Vivekananda ended up offering was a combination of the epistemic insights he had received from the Western philosophers, Kant and Hegel, those who are considered to be

the inaugurators of the era of epistemic ruptures in the West. —given that it is the subversion and reevaluation of the modern episteme that Kant and Hegel had laid in the faintly modern West of the 17th century that the significant epistemic shifts in the West still stands for—and wantonly lyrical religio-spiritual poetics, directed towards projecting to the West the distinct markers of indigeneity, the familial 'inner domain' (Chatterjee 2011:6) where the indo-ontopology was fashioned and the spirit of the nation was assumed as having rested.

However, outsmarting its neighboring episteme while indicating the differential nexus it had with them was the Gandhian episteme, harboring quasi-religio-mythical and spiritually elevated ideas of ahimsa and Satyagraha. Gandhi, however, did not retain the majestic sweep of Tagore's formulation while formulating his take on the 'inner voice' (Gandhi and Desai 1993:135). Rather the majesty of the latter stood chilled out:

> The English have not taken India, we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them. (Gandhi 2009:25).

Gandhi had none of the Nehruvian reductive skills while translating his vision of India into a unique grounded eloquence, superbly negotiating its way into the heart of every common man. If on the one hand, Nehru had attempted to provide the enlightenment soaked scholastic pedantry—his 'stroke of midnight' speech did betray the stiff upper class rhetorical flourish, or more precisely, a brow-beating Colonial English flavor, both snobbishly indifferent to and irritatingly distanced from the 'hoi-polloi', Gandhian imagery, on the other hand, had a constitutional translatability. Rather than stooping to negotiate with the plebian lingo or betraying what such an act demanded, artifice and strategic manipulation, Gandhian take on nation inspired with its built-in negotiability a natural affinity for and spontaneous withdrawal from all epistemic sources that it was inspired by:

> Persons in power should be careful how they deal with a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes is right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy—because his body, which you can always conquer, gives you so little purchase upon his soul (Murray 2005)

Thus, it wasn't purely for the strategical reasons— from securing for the Akademi its futural space of operatability with governmental support to giving an impression that the goals the policy makers of Akademi had set for it were not disjointed from the national interests— that the policy makers of The Akademi chose to have its objectives and agenda tuned to the cultural unity of nation at the ontic level. They did this because they were sure that such an objective would both correspond to and receive juridical stimulation from the unity-fostering epistemes that had charted the course of the nation so far while aiding the decolonizing movement in the past.

If this be the case what more needs to be said to problematize Akademi policy makers' objectives have to well guarded and propped up by the epistemic leanings and the political rhetoric of their nation? Indeed, little more can be said unless the institute is to steer through the unpredictable moments that demand radical and subversive stance.If the objectives of Akademi are under the spell of tyrannical 'logocentrism' (Derrida 1998:51), the Akademi policy makers perhaps need is a context-prompted problematical encounter with it. This will eventually enable the policy makers to escort the objective they had laid for the Akademi into a negotiated existence and fashion the agenda of this institute without any sense of guilt. What is being put forward is not the relative inferiority of the colonial epistemes that made us relish the immediate postcolonial moments when nationalist epistemes appeared to have triumphed over them, effecting a historic rupture from the Colonial past in the anti-colonial political rhetoric. Rather what is being conveyed here is that instead of reductivizing, essentializing, or limiting the self-transgressive performatibility of these epistemes, the policy makers could have created the possibilities for the self-same epistemes underpinning the functioning of the Akademi as an Institute promoting Indian literature. It is the problematic encounter of the quasi-cosmopolitanity and trans-nationalism of Tagore's aesthetics, and Nehru and Gandhi's writings with and the Kantian and Hegelian elements in the religio-spiritual thoughts of Vivekananda ought to have been at the centre of policy making for the Akademi. It should have informed the objectives of the Akademi in addition to re-defining them in recent times reflecting as a performative alliance with and reflective deliberational negotiated dwelling in an ever expanding epistemic range.

The epistemic range probably starts from postcolonial negotiations with post-modern self-negational pragmatism to those posing a resistance to it by restructuring the older epistemes. It also involves a poetic performative approach, a protean and sustained dialogic engagement with everything worth episitimizing including the very orbit of the ontic. It is this vertiginous appeal of being positioned everywhere that the objectives of the Akademi need must hold in order to come to terms with the future, albeit problematically and ambiguously , rather than languishing in a never-ending nostalgia to carry in its sinews while preparing to greet the futurality, bound to be problematically sweeter and ambiguously empowered than the nostalgia whipping, temporal vicissitudes of the past that continue to overwhelm us.

Notes

1. India's National Academy of Letters
2. The idea has been used by Habermas to signify communicating, interacting, deliberating and debating in order to reach a consensus in an atmosphere free of oppression and coercion as something natural to mankind.
3. The idea has been borrowed from The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus (2011) p.147

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'The Spider and the Fly': The Politics of Reform in Ramamirthammal's *Dasigal Mosavalai* or *Web of Deceit*

Meenu B.

MuvalurRamamirthammal's Tamil abolitionist novel *DasigalMosavalaiAlladuMadipettra Minor*(The Dasis' *Web of Deceit* or the *Minor Grown Wise*), published in 1936, was written in the heyday of the Devadasi abolition movement when different organisations, whether it be the Self Respect Movement headed by Periyar or the Women's India Association headed by Muthulaskhmi Reddy, were working separately, and at times together, to bring an end to the Devadasi system. Born into a non-dasi family, Ramamirthammal was sold into the Dasi profession by her father on the advice of his relatives for economic benefits (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 2). Beginning her political career in the Congress, she went on to become an active Self Respecter and, interestingly, parted ways with Periyar when she quit the DravidaKazhagam in protest against his decision to marry his young comrade Maniammai in 1949(Kannabiran and Kannabiran 2).

Among the majority of the reformist novels which were mainly about the reform of the "family woman", Ramamirthammal's novel strikes a different note since here the main focus of the novel, on the surface, is on the reform of the "other woman", the "Devadasi". Through my reading of *DasigalMosavalai*, my attempt in this paper is to understand as far as possible 1. the framework within which the Dasi question got articulated during this period, 2. the spaces created by a movement like the Self Respect Movement for Dasis and other reformers to question the sexism of some traditional religious practices as well as older forms of conjugality and to envision in their place a more egalitarian society, and 3. the inability of the Movement to understand positions and voices that could not be fit into any neat categories.

The word "Devadasi" literally means the servant/slave of God and is traditionally referred to the class of women who through various ceremonies of 'marriage' dedicated themselves to the deities of the temples. What made them a different category was that they could own property,

and adopt daughters and the community of relatives following matrilineal inheritance customs and dedicated to temple service. The Dasis, wedded to the gods, were called "nityasumangali" because they could never be widowed. The "marriage" ceremony that initiated a young girl into the life of a Dasi, "committed her into the rigorous emotional and physical training in the classical dance" as well as advertised "in a perfectly open and public manner her availability for liaisons with a proper patron and protector" (Srinivasan 1869).

The Dasi had her place in the traditional order and was considered "an adjunct to conservative domestic society, not its ravager" (Srinivasan 1869). As the god's wife, she was an omen of good luck and was asked to dance in marriage processions and to string some of her own beads into the bridal tali(Srinivasan 1869).The roots of the Dasi system can be traced back to classical Hindu texts like the *Natyashastra* and the *Arthashastra* which fixed the roles for "Kulina", the family woman, and "Vesya", "the vessel of culture". While the production of legitimate progeny was the role of the "Kulina", the provision of aesthetic, intellectual and bodily pleasure was the special task of the "Vesya"(Srinivasan 1869).The concept of the "Vesya" in the classical texts helps us understand the social status and legitimacy given to the Dasis.

However, by the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the Dasi becomes the "ravager" of the domestic society in the reformist discourse and her function also gets reinterpreted as that of one just giving bodily pleasure to her patron and thereby brings on her the tag of the "prostitute".

Generally, historians trace the change in the activities of the Dasis and attitudes towards them to the loss of royal patronage, declining support from the zamindars, redistribution of wealth away from the temples, urbanization, industrialization and other factors (Jordan 2).In the wake of criticism by foreign missionaries and journalists, the Dasi system also became a source of embarrassment to the Indian westernized elite.

The debate over the role of the Dasi in society raged on in the 1920s and 30s. Two factions came to be formed during this period. While the reformist faction, which included Muthulaskshmi Reddy and the Self Respecters under Periyar, proclaimed the Dasi to be a prostitute who must be removed, the revivalists projected her as a "nun" who had to be "reconstituted and re-presented to a 'respectable' Indian public"(Stiehl 282).

The climactic moment came when, in 1929, Muthulakshmi Reddy moved a bill to end the dedication to temples in the presidency of Madras. In her bill, she attacked the temple authorities and the illiterate Hindu public for instilling an attitude in children that causes them as women to "view a criminal, unholy and anti-social act...as a hereditary right and a caste dharma" (Jordan 121).

Muthulakshmi considered the practice to be a corruption that had crept into Hinduism as, according to her, the Dasis were originally a band of pure virgin ascetics. For her, as Anandhi argues in her reading of *DasigalMosavalai*, the Dasi system posed a threat to "the essentialised, patriarchal version of the Hindu Indian womanhood" itself (Anandhi 3).Muthulakshmiworked within the parameters of Hinduism and therefore had to justify the Devadasi system as a corruption of what was once "sacred" and "pure". However, Ramamirthammal, a Self Respecter, did not have any such compunction on her as she was not just out of it but was also positioned against it. As a Self Respecter, Ramamirthammal supported and even drew on Muthulakshmi's demand for abolition though there were significant departures in their ideological frameworks (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 22). While the members of the Women's India Associationto to which Muthulaskshmi Reddy belonged sought in the characters of mythology a source of support for their activities, the Self Respect Movement denounced religion and mythology as "an instrument used by the priestly class to enslave the majority of the population which included women" (Rani 1).Thus, while, for Muthulakshmi, the Devadasi system was a slur on Hinduism, for Ramamirthammal, it was an embodiment of all that was wrong with the "Brahminical" Hindu religion.

Ramamirthammal shared many of the concerns of the Self Respecters regarding the Dasi question. According to Geetha"For women self-respecters, religion, caste and the claims of masculine sexuality seemed to exist in a complex and unholy articulation in the figure of the Devadasi" (Geetha13).

The story of *Dasigal Mosavalai* involves many plots interwoven within one another, each of which involves reform at one or another level. In a nutshell, it is about the revenge of the Tiruchi Minor, the son of a zamindar,on the Dasis,Kantha and Ganavathi,after being fooled by them. Another subplot involves a zamindarini Gnanasundari's attempts to get

back her husband Somasekaran who has also fallen into the "web of deceit" of the Dasis. The novel has a number of progressive women reformers like Gunabusani and Gnanasunadri who try to eradicate the Dasi system. It ends with the Dasi Abolition Conference where Kantha and Ganavathi also agree to join the movement.

Many of the concerns of the Self Respecters find their echo in Ramamirthammal's *Dasigal Mosavalai*.It is important to remember that Ramamirthammal was not born into the Devadasi community, but was sold into it. She was born in a community where women got married and where the patrilineal conjugal family was the norm unlike the Devadasi community where marriage was not an option for the Dasis[1]. I believe that one has to take into account this particular aspect of her subject position as a Devadasi when one looks at her criticism of the community and particularly the caste of Devadasis.

The radicalness of a novel like D*asigalMosavalai* lies first of all in the identity of the author herself. She was an ex-Devadasi, a "prostitute" in the eyes of many around her. Yet she dared to write a full length novel in an age where even from the middle class there were very few women novelists. As against the themes that were common in the novels of the period such as "wifely obedience" and other such "womanly virtues",Ramamirthammal's heroines in the novel, Gnanasundari, Gunabusani and Vivekavathi,are all women who consider their role as reformers as important as their wifely duties. Gnanasundari, azamindarini, and the daughter of a Self-Respecter, in fact marries Somasekaran with the express aim of reforming his Samasthanam, described as "the birth place of *Manu Smriti* and Vedic culture together" (Ramamirthammal 85).

As a Self-Respecter, Ramamirthammalis also scathing in her critique of the sexual exploitation of the Dasis by their Brahmin patrons using the cover of religion.Gunabusani and Gnanasundari argue in the Social Reform Conference that it is not the Dasis who are to be blamed but the traditional systems that make them carry on their profession of "prostitution" with pride. Gunabusani calls for the destruction of the root cause, which she identifies as "god-religion-Smrithis-the sacred texts, Puranas" (Ramamirthammal 202).

For Ramamirthammal, the institution of the Devadasi is inextricably linked with the conjugal relations as they existed in her society. She in fact locates the power of the Devadasi to attract young men in the faulty

conjugal relations between the husband and the wife in the traditional system. The "new" conjugality represented by the relationship between Sivaraman and Gunabusani is held as the solution to the Devadasi problem. Both are Self Respecters and the marriage between them is based on mutual trust. In contrast, stands the conjugal relations between the Minor and his wife. The Minor who has no affection for his wife constantly puts her down by comparing her to the beautiful Dasis.

Ramamirthammal sees this frequent comparison done by the men as one of the causes for the faulty conjugal relations existing between the two. But what is ultimately responsible is the traditional system of conjugality which teaches the husband only to meet the material needs of his wife. It does not expect the husband and the wife to be companions to one another and allows the husband to seek sexual pleasures outside the home, provided he takes care of the wife's material needs. It also discourages wives from behaving intimately with their husbands.

Ramamirthammal locates the mystique of the Dasi as lying in her powers of conversation which are denied to the family woman. She, through Gunabusani, argues that the family woman is neither less intelligent nor lively than the Dasi, locating the appeal of the Dasi in her being trained from a young age to seduce men. What one sees here is a change in the function of the wife in the new order. J. Devika discusses this change with respect to the classical concepts of the "Kulina" and the "Vesya" and argues that in the new order, the new woman had to be both the "reproducer" and the "vessel of culture" "by bringing accomplishments such as music into the interior of the modern home as sources of pleasure to the family"(Devika 282).

For Ramamirthammal, "music" and "dance" are still the preserves of the Dasi and ought not to be brought into the family. However, one can see this division – between the "Vesya" and the "Kulina" working in Web of Deceit as well. Talking intimately with the husband, decorating oneself with jewels all are seen in the novel as markers of the Dasi's identity. In fact, Gnanasundari manages to convince her husband of her being DasiKantha through her dress (decorating herself with jewels) and behaviour (behaving without any restraint infront of him). Ramamirthammal wants the new woman to take over some of these markers of the Dasi's identity on to herself – the major of them being open communication with the husband while she wants her to reject other markers – the craze for jewellery.

Kalpana and VasanthKannabiran also make a similar point regarding the fields of "alliance" and "sexuality" which, before the period of reform, were always separate and linked with the "family woman" and the "other woman" respectively. However, during this period, these two are brought together and both get re-inscribed in the process. Thus "sexuality outside alliance was inscribed in negative terms of immorality and vice, while attempts were made to inscribe alliance in terms of a more egalitarian (sexual) conjugality..." (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 19).

Ramamirthammal is able to accomplish a number of things through her novel *DasigalMosavalai*. She indirectly attacks the basic division between the "Kulina" and the "Vesya" and shows how they are culturally constructed. She is also able to bring out the plight of poor Dasis who do not have the skills or are unwilling to follow the profession. These women are treated as beasts of burden in their family by their own mothers. Their desire to enter conjugality, an option denied to them, comes out strongly in the words of Senavathi as she curses the Dasi system which gives a Dasi the right to invite any number of men to her home, but denies her the right to leave her house with one man.

Ramamirthammal also attacks the Dasi system for its utter disregard of the Dasi men. The men in the community like Karunakaranwere dependent on their sisters' income for their livelihood as they had neither skills nor rights to property. As a result, these men were virtually treated as "beasts of burden" in the Dasi household.

However, there are fault-lines within Ramamirthammal's concept of reform, which need to be traced to her own ambiguous attitude towards the institution. On the one hand, Gnanasundari and Gunabusani project the Dasis as the victims of Brahmin patriarchy during the Devadasi abolition Conference and on the other, in her conversation with the TiruchiMinor, Gunabusani sees theDasis as part of the Brahmin caste and hold them as equally responsible for the ruin of the nation along with the latter.

The Self Respect Movement's positioning of the Dasis as part of the Brahmin ideology is seen by Kalapana and VasanthKannabiran as a mistaken view. They attribute it to the dichotimization that "rendered invisible a discourse that could neither be contained in simple dichotomies nor be silenced" (Kannabiran and Kannabiran32).Unfortunately, while modernity and political radicalism (especially that of the Non-Brahmin

movement) came to be equated with the abolitionist position, anti-abolitionist articulations came to be reduced to a backward traditionalism that hindered progress (Kannabiran and Kannabiran32). They argue that the positions taken by the anti-abolitionists like Nagarathnammal and Doraikannammal cannot be interpreted as "Brahmin positions", since their radicalism and sensitivity to issues were similar in character to the radicalism of the Non-Brahmin movement. Kalpana and VasanthKannabiran argue: "It was the impossibility of fixing the anti-abolitionists within any of the existing political-ideological frameworks during that time that wiped out their resistance" (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 32).

Similarly, Ramamirthammal tends to see the Dasi system as the "cause" of male desire and not its "effect". The Tiruchi Minor, the hero of the novel, harbours lustful thoughts about the Dasis even before he talks to them and the Dasis take advantage of his foppish nature. The Minor, however, projects himself as an innocent man and his revenge where he acts as a Mama or a procurer and receives favours from the Dasis and cheats them of their wealth is commended in the novel. One can link the sympathetic treatment of the Minor with that of Somasekaran who is described as "a trapped butterfly" by the Minor at the Conference. In contrast to such men stands the Dasi who gets described in terms of a spider casting its web. The men are presented as vulnerable to the charms of the Dasis from want of any moral resistance. Somasekaran does not have to face the wrath of anyone despite deserting his wife and going after the Dasis. As a man and as a zamindar, his position in the hierarchy is much above that of the Dasis who have to shoulder all the blame. This raises the question as to whether the reform of the man who sought the Dasis was important in the Devadasi abolition agenda at all. It seems from the novel that the reform of the Dasis was the only focus of the movement. This was in fact one of the major arguments of the Dasi anti-abolitionists who reacted to the charge of prostitution with the words: "Without male chastity, female chastity is impossible" (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 31).

The "violence" of the reform is also quite striking in *DasigalMosavalai*. The Dasis, BogaChinthamani and her daughters are no willing participants in the reform. In fact, they have to be stripped of their wealth and status for them to accept the demand for reform and become part of the Devadasi

MunnetraSangam that ironically is funded by the very wealth which the Minor steals from them.

One of the most disturbing things about the reform movement as it emerges in the novel is that for the Dasi, the only means of reform is "marriage". The resolutions passed at the Conference thus ask for the compulsory marriage of the Dasis, inviting reform-minded youth to come forward for the "task" of marrying undedicated girls. The girls already dedicated to the temples are asked to enter inter-caste marriages with men ready to enter second marriages. The novel thus tends to negate any space for women other than as a "wife" or as a "prostitute". The Dasis are completely denied any option of continuing their lives as single women, and there is no question of their earning livelihood through art. This is because for Ramamirthammal, the Dasi's art is just a means to seduce innocent men, a cover for their actual profession, which is prostitution.

By the end of the novel, we see a role-reversal in the case of the Dasi men and the women. The Dasi man, represented by Karunakaran, becomes the breadwinner of his family while his sisters, who were the earning members before, are asked to enter into marriage and give up their art, their livelihood. The Dasis can still continue to be reformers, but for this they have to first come under the full control of patriarchy, albeit a more benevolent one, by entering into conjugality. This was also pretty much what happened in the aftermath of the Devadasi Abolition Movement. The women were forced to acknowledge "the moral supremacy of grhasta values" and relinquish all rights to temple service and its privileges. (Srinivasan 1873-74)"The men on the other hand continued to perform both in the temples and in peoples' homes.With respect to land rights as well, the abolition of the devadasi system benefited the men of the community over the women in direct contrast to the historical situation." (Srinivasan 1873-74)

The Dasi's dance or sadir now became the preserve of the "family woman" as the revivalists worked to return it to its "pre-prostitution glory". They re-named the dance BharataNatyam to sanitise it of the Dasi taint and their aim was to make the art "respectable" for a new caste of dancers. (Stiehl 284) The dance had moved from the religious to the secular realm and the control over performance moved from the Dasi women to the Brahmin women. (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 35)

The Dasi question, as one can see, was a pretty complicated one, contradictorily linked as it was at different levels with sexual and caste exploitation as well as freedom and independence for women. Unfortunately, none of the discourses available then, whether it be the conservative reformist discourse or the radical reformist discourse of Periyar and Ramamirthammal could do justice to the contradictions involved. Ramamirthammal was a radical reformer for her age though she shared certain stereotypical notions about masculinity and femininity (where Periyar is generally held to have more enlightened views). However, in the case of the Dasi reform, she was unable to address an important aspect of the whole equation – the reform of the mindset of the men who sought the Dasis and were also completely deaf to the artistic claims of the Dasis. One can say that the contradictions in the reform solution worked out in the novel are but a reflection of those in the reformist discourses of the period.

Notes

1. Not all women belonging to the Devadasi community remained unmarried. The men of the community could marry and their wives (who were from the Dasi community itself) led lives similar to the other non-Devadasi women. In fact it is this difference in the lives of these two categories of women that gets highlighted in the novel.

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