

Sambalpur Studies in Literatures and Cultures

IDENTITIES: INFLECTIONS & IMPERATIVES



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Editorial

Sambalpur Studies in Literatures and Cultures is a scholarly journal published by the Department of English, Sambalpur University, Odisha, reflecting an interdisciplinary ethos that has underpinned Postgraduate Studies, M.Phil and doctoral research programmes run by the department. Series 1, 2001, is the maiden issue of the journal. Since its inception, the Department has all along diversified pedagogy and research into areas as different as Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, Linguistics, Postcolonial Studies, Non-British Novels in English, with a view to, firstly, dismantling the already beleaguered purist notion of English literature, and, secondly, grounding the production and interpretation of literature in the historically structured cultural and social matrices. A culturalist turn in literary studies, with critically informed engagement with literary texts, social forms and cultural practices, which has already occurred in the academic world at large, has a bearing on the English studies programme at Sambalpur as well. Several U.C.C sponsored seminars and refresher courses organized by the department over the past one decade on topics relating to culture and politics of novel, Indian writings in English and English translation, environment and literature, pedagogy and practices of English, post-independence Indian novels, post-colonialism, among others, vouch for its academic beliefs.

The present series titled **“Identities: Inflections & Imperatives”** deals with ideologies and politics of identities predicated on gender, caste, ethnicity, language and culture not only in the literary forms of poetry, drama and the novel, but also in oral narrative and painting. These essays present a richly variegated terrain of identities, their discourses and politics of representations. These explain how identities, with their vernacular, corporeal, ecological, sexual, postcolonial, subaltern and global inflections, call for strategies of representation suitable for both self-acknowledgement and, more importantly, acknowledgement by the others. Pursuing agendas of resistance and emancipation, the strategies are shown to have been deployed either in complicity, or competition, or in both ways simultaneously, with other powerful ones in discourses of the English language, patriarchal, bourgeois and racial structures in post-independence Indian, Kenyan and Canadian societies.

Ram Shankar Nanda, in his essay ‘Language, Choice and the Question of Identity in the Comparative Study of Indian Literature’, disentangles the complicitous power-relations of educated Indians with institutionalized, market-place English to recuperate the idea of Indian identities in terms of an ethical recognition of its difference and dialogue with vernacular-based cultures. While he gestures towards a possibility of emancipation from the coercive forms of English-centered cultures, Ashok Mohapatra discusses subaltern resistance to the cultural hegemony of the Indian middle-class and its selective amnesia about the insurgencies of the Naxalbari youth – the subject matter of Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084*. In the essay ‘Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084*: Articulate Energy of Memory and Corpo(real) Motherhood’, he highlights the author’s subaltern politics of motherhood at a corporeal level, which has been realized through a narrative of resistance. Memory has been radicalized by Mahasweta Devia as an instrument of commemoration against the politics of amnesia by the social groups with vested interests and erasure of brutalities perpetrated by the state apparatuses.

Radical memory at the corporeal level is also the theme of Shauna Singh Baldwin’s novel *What the Body Remembers* that Anjali Tripathy explores in ‘Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers*: Re-remembering Her-story of the Subaltern’. The issue of identity of women in the Punjab before and after partition and the subordinate subject position assigned to woman in a patriarchally controlled

discourse of the nation is what Baldwin challenges, according to Tripathy. For his part in his essay 'Politics of Identity in Pinter's *The Caretaker*', Chittaranjan Mishra, takes up the issue of victimhood and marginality in Pinter's much acclaimed play to show how the self of the victim is subjected to brutal torture so as to render him as an object and a mere corporeal entity.

Postcoloniality as a condition of political and cultural modernity is also heavily freighted with the problematics of identity and home for diasporic writes like Rushdie and Vassanji. The unitary discourse of nation, hegemonic master-narrative of history, monoliths of cultural form are what Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is at war with. Multiplicity, hybridity, miscegenation and the like are the new identitarian tropes which one discovers in the contemporary postcolonial world while reading this novel. One also learns to understand how heteroglossia, which is germane to the novelistic form, is essentially liberating in its effect. Rushdie is, therefore, important, argues Bhattacharya in her essay 'Re-Reading Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*'. As for Vassanji, in his essay 'In-betweenness as a Postcolonial Condition: A Reading of M.G. Vassanji's *The In-between World of Vikram Lal*' Prakash C Panda focuses on in-betweenness and liminality as existential predicaments of postcolonial diaspora as instantiated by Vassanji's novel.

In the essay 'Intersecting Identities: Positions and Resolutions in Contemporary Telugu Writing', M. Sridhar discusses the discontents of dalit women writers in Telugu literature. Since many of them Muslim, Sridhar brings to the fore an intricate identitarian scenario that is crisscrossed with differential indices of class, caste, gender and religion and characterized by many ideological positions, conflicts and resolutions. Sridhar reads the literary and cultural movements of dalit women as processes of questioning from within of the real beneficiaries of the hard-won freedom movement. He mentions that there have been serious debates in the movements on how the dalit women writers should negotiate when identities conflict with each other. Also, from the perspective of gender Aloka Patel, in her essay 'William Wordsworth and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*: Coming-of-Age in an Ideological Landscape', makes an attempt at recognizing and understanding the ideological fissures of gender implicit in Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems, and then goes on to see how the Caribbean novelist, Jamaica Kincaid, responds to such ideologies in her suggestively titled novel *Lucy*.

Amrit Sen studies the paintings of Rabindranath Tagore and his writings on art in the context of the evolution of his critique of nationalism and as part of his celebrated Visva-Bharati experiment. In "'This World My Canvas": Global Identity in Tagore's Paintings', he argues that as Tagore moved from nationalism to its critique, his paintings and his concept of art changed substantially. Bringing together the local and the global Tagore recognized the canvas as the space where his universalism could freely acknowledge and sustain itself from all possible sources.

In the essay 'Documenting the Forgotten History: Reading some Aboriginal Poets of Canada', Mahesh Dey explores the issue of post-colonial identity of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada comprising three major groups, such as the Indian, the Métis and the Lnuvit. Although misleadingly called 'people of the First Nations' by the West, there is little cultural uniformity among the various nations in Canada regarding a common label of identification. Dey shows in his essay how the native writers cherish their "oral" tradition from which they get inspiration even today in the age of technology.

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Intersecting Identities: Positions and Resolutions in Contemporary Telugu Writing

M. Sridhar

First let me thank the Department of English, Sambalpur University, for giving me the opportunity to present the keynote at this National Seminar on “Postcolonialism and Identity Politics: Issues and Perspectives.” Let me begin on a personal note. About ten years ago, when I offered an Optional Course on “Identities” in my Department, just a few years after the wave of the Feminist and the Dalit movements in Andhra Pradesh, it was perceived by some as doing something that was passé. Now, many years later, I am glad to note that there have been a series of seminars on the issues of identity across the country. In December 2009 there was an international conference in Trivandrum on “The Political Economy of Social Division: Race, Gender, Class and Caste as Fetishized/Fetishizing Borders.” In M. S. University, Baroda there was seminar a few days ago on “Identity at the Margins.” In JNU, New Delhi a seminar on “Indian and Cross-cultural Approaches to Marginality.” has just been concluded focusing on issues of Identity. And this seminar here. Are these indications of a revival of interest in things that had become passé?

In my understanding of things, having won political independence and having reaped the fruits of it, the ruling bourgeoisie in India replicated familiar reigns of power and corruption that had given rise to a series of movements from the Left, the Feminist, the Dalit and the Adivasi quarters that have been spread over the last four decades. The movements may be seen as processes of questioning from within of the real beneficiaries of the hard won freedom movement. The last few years in particular may be seen as a process of further questioning being carried out within and outside the above movements regarding issues that intersect such as those of class, caste, gender and religion. There have been serious debates in the movements on how they should negotiate when identities conflict with each other. Perhaps, that the movements themselves in turn conflict with each other in this process has been the cause of celebration now! I shall try to examine some of these debates with reference to contemporary Telugu writing in particular to present their positions and discuss how the movements attempt to negotiate and resolve some of their conflicting interests.

The Dalit literary movement in Telugu in the 1990s is considered an offshoot of the experience of the Dalits who had felt oppressed by the domination of the upper caste leadership within the “Left” movement. It came up in a big way with several anthologies of poetry, short stories, novels and autobiographical writings being published during this decadeⁱ. The literary movement was dominated by male Dalit writers in the beginning, but soon Dalit women came up with their own anthologiesⁱⁱ. In the mid nineties, the Dalit literary movement experienced a major shift in its focus with the Madiga and other sub-sects among them expressing their unhappiness with the treatmentⁱⁱⁱ meted out to them by the Malas, a dominant sub-caste among them. This gave rise to the Madiga Dandora Movement which placed its political demand for the sub categorisation of Dalits in the quota of reservation. The literary aspect of the movement attempted to bring to focus the appropriation and/or marginalization of the cultural and art forms that belong to the other sub castes by the dominant group. While the Madigas may be considered to have succeeded in re-

writing the literary representation to a large extent, the question of their political representation remains unresolved with the matter pending before the judiciary.

Here is an instance both of intersecting and conflicting identities. Dalit women as well as Madiga men share common ground with the Dalit Malas in terms of their being oppressed by the upper castes, but experience oppression from a sub caste within their community. Women from all the sub castes experience gender oppression from their male counterparts and from the upper caste men. In fighting this oppression they try to forge alliances with women across the board. But as partners in distress with men in their own community in terms of their caste, they join them to fight their caste oppression. Negotiation of such intersecting and conflicting identities therefore calls for an unusual sense of judgement and discrimination. I shall try to address how different groups negotiate such a complex issue.

One may consider the case of the issue of language in male writings. When the Feminist movement of the 1980s in Telugu addressed the question of the use of language by men to describe women, the Dalit women were very much part of it. But when their male counterparts used similar objectionable language against women and even to threaten to rape upper caste women as a mode of retaliation of the caste oppression they suffered in the hands of upper castes, they had been placed in a peculiar predicament of not being able to defend their male counterparts. Swathy Margaret in fact strongly objects to this attitude of Dalit male poets who like any other men look upon women as property. This debate in Telugu literary circles had been sparked off by a collection of poems by some Dalit poets titled Nishani (Margaret 25-30). The Nishani debate is interesting in the sense that it brings to focus Dalit women's identity both as women and as Dalits. They take on the feminists led by upper caste women who readily appropriated the term Dalit to include all women using Ambedkar's formulation overlooking the fact that upper caste women join their own male counterparts to oppress Dalit men and women too. Thus it must be pointed out that Dalit women show solidarity with Dalit men to protest against the caste oppression they have commonly experienced from upper caste men. The above debate also demonstrates alliances that take place beyond the national level. While the Telugu feminist critique of language has obvious connections with the feminist movements across the world, the Dalit movement as a whole draws inspiration from the Black Panther Movement. There are bad examples too that they emulate. The specific instance of threatening to rape upper caste women by Dalit men reminds one of Elridge Cleaver.

In an essay titled "Dalita Feminist Manifesto" Jalli Indira approaches the issue of identities from the point of view of caste and gender. Addressing the sisterhood of women on the women's day she says:

We, Dalit women, have innumerable reasons to make ourselves heard on this occasion. The distinctions of caste and class within patriarchy do need, in order to adequately achieve their identities, to think about their differences and their place in the context of their historical backgrounds. We request Hindu women and non Dalit women to recognize the fact that the casteist patriarchy has split Indian women. The caste system, as an oppressive system on the one hand and as a political structure on the other, works against the unity of Indian women. This situation had not altered for centuries.... We would like you to take note of the disparities (diversity) that continue to operate and recognize their political significance. You

are being shaped. We are being destroyed. You are being idolized. We are being thrown into the fields to work day and night. You are being turned into “satis”. We are being turned into prostitutes.

.... Any democratic politics has to take cognizance of differences. Yes, we are all oppressed. But in the relationships of dominance that characterize casteist patriarchy, our respective positions and representation are different. In such a system, we remain not merely as women. We are there as distinctly different classes—as scavenger women, as agricultural coolie women, and as professional women. Each of these categories reflects its specificity in the social conditions. Real life is manifested in the complexity arising from these different angles. Any democratic feminism would aim at changing the social bonds ingrained in the power structures of gender, caste and class. Dalit feminist clearly belongs to such a thought process.... We heartily agree that a lot of Dalit men, non Dalit women and men are taking concrete steps to talk of the “differences” and to rethink about them. We hope this wonderful occasion—Women’s Day—will bring us closer to discuss not only our common concerns, but our differences as well.

Alisamma Women’s Collective invites not just Dalit women, but also Dalit men and non Dalit women and men to become partners in our political endeavour... (Indira 344-5)

Through their manifesto the Dalit women not only delineate the “difference” they wish to emphasise, but invite others to collaborate on issues of common interest. However, a recent meeting of the SC, ST, BC., and Minority women writers under the banner of “Mattipoolu” (Earth Flowers) underscores the need for the recognition of the contribution of “women from the oppressed social classes” towards the economic advancement of the society, which they strongly feel has been forgotten by the Communists and casteist Feminists (Subhadra 41-42). There is an obvious suggestion here of a departure from their 2003 position and a hardening of attitudes.

I am reminded here of a similar stance taken by Audre Lorde while addressing a conference on feminist theory as the lone representative of Black feminists and lesbians. She says: “It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians” (Lorde 1670). She goes on to argue further that “[w]ithin the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables [them] to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true vision of [their] future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which [their] personal power is forged” (Lorde 1671). She concludes her presentation saying that “[t]he failure of academic feminists to recognize difference as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower” (Lorde 1672).

Let us look at the case of Telugu women writers whose identity is defined by the minority religion they belong to—Islam. While as women, they share a sense of solidarity with other women, they do have their unique problems as Muslim women. In a moving poem titled “Purdah Hatake Dekho” Shajahana talks about how a fourteen year old Muslim girl is subjected to an incompatible marriage to a sixty year old man and then sold to an Arab sheikh “who puts a price on the lump of [her] flesh” and is thus traded as a “pawn between male brutes.” Obviously, the economic conditions of a backward class Muslim may relate her to women under similar conditions in other

communities, but she faces certain experiences like that of talaq which are unique to her. All the same, Shajahana notes with irony how such marriages of convenience are accepted by Muslim women as part of their lives in her poem “Khabaddar” (“Beware”):

Even as we are aware that our husbands are only temporary
for they throw meher at our faces and change wives
we decorate
our sacrificial dupattas with sequins of smiles

Even with hollow married lives which are broken to pieces when talak
is uttered three times
we are happy to dress ourselves repeatedly as brides

To be the sacrificial lambs at the altar of male brutality
we have coiled around the python of convention like black beads. (*Shajahana* ll. 5-12)

However, being treated merely as body and flesh could be any woman’s experience. It is thus that in the poem “I am @” Kalpana Rentala gives voice to a woman from a middleclass family who is able to use images from the world of the internet. Let me quote this short poem in full:

I am @

I am connected
Sss...you have one message...
Searching for residues
Hunt for memories left behind
Curtains down then on everything!—
gender, language, shame
values, clothes
Silence needs language
No body...no country...
Sixteen thousand images sprout
From desire sprawled on the screen
So what if they’re all asexual?
It’s all so wonderful!
They’re you, your own images
Don’t utter a word, don’t quarrel
don’t annoy, don’t hurt, don’t harass
No need for condoms or pills
No problem—either side of thirteen
Safest sex!
Come! Come, husbands collective!
I am connected
So I am at the rate of...

The above examples of distinctly polarized identities may suggest that they pose more problems than the alliances they tend to forge. But there is always hope when each of these identitarian movements functions, giving utmost respect to principles of pluralism and democracy. Consider for instance a recent foreword by Venugopal to a collection of poems by Afsar.

In his foreword to Voori Chivara (At the Outskirts of the Village) by Afsar, Venugopal refers to several of his “memory” poems that reflect the poet’s multiple identities as a Muslim, as a participant in people’s movements, as an expatriate in America etc. Of the composite memories that people his poems, Venugopal, a poet and critic belonging to the Revolutionary Writers’ Association, says: “The identity that one is born into through birth, and the different identities one acquires through study, experience, values and life-practice, provide each man some individual memories” (Afsar xvii). It is necessary to note here that in contemporary Telugu writing, the Muslim minority poetry came out initially as part of the larger Dalit Bahujan movement in the 1990s and both these identity movements have opposed the “left” movement of which they had been a part. In spite of this background, Venugopal is happy to write a foreword to the collection of Afsar’s poems. In fact, he is fully conscious of the instances of some serious differences with him in the last twenty six years to which he makes a specific reference. And he goes on to say that “the indelible friendship has not been consigned to memory. It is still fresh like the never fading old colour picture” (Afsar xiv). I wonder whether such camaraderie would have been possible in the initial years of the Dalit Bahujan movement, especially when the Dalit assertion of identity arose as a reaction to some extent to the “left” movement.

Let me conclude by dwelling on the nature of “identities” that emerges from the study of identitarian movements. It is a curious fact that discourse on identity may manifest itself as a denial of a stereotype as well as an assertion of self-hood. Khadar Mohiuddin, a Telugu Muslim poet wrote a long poem titled “The Puttu Matcha” (“The Birth Mark”), a poem written long before the demolition of Babri Masjid, about the manner in which a Muslim is treated in India. The indelible “birth mark” of his identity casts his community in a negative mould in the psyche of the majority of Indians, and the Muslims are constantly under pressure to demonstrate their patriotism. Their patriotism for instance needs to be demonstrated in a cricket match between India and Pakistan where they cannot but support India or else they would be dubbed as traitors. He says:

The cricket match becomes
the test and measurement of my patriotism
What more or less determines my patriotism
is not how much I love my motherland
but which countries I hate
and how much I hate them (Mohiuddin ll. 110-115)

But he is pained to find that the larger question of their identity that springs from the poverty of the majority of Muslims in India who are converts from the backward castes among the Hindus is conveniently ignored. But there are other Muslim poets in Telugu like Yakooob and Shajahana who assert their identity in terms of the language they use, a mixture of Urdu and Telugu, a language that clearly distinguishes them from their upper class counterparts who speak chaste Urdu. In some of their poems they refuse to use standard Telugu and assert their linguistic uniqueness. In his poem titled “Avval Kalma” (The First Word) Yakooob says:

We don’t know that we are supposed to call
our mothers ammijan whom we address as oyamma
and our fathers as abbu, abbajan, or pappa—

How do we know—even our ayyalu haven't taught us any of this.
Haveli, char deewar, qilwat, purdah—
How do we who live in bamboo palaces know all this? (Yakoob ll. 16-21)

Shajahana ends one of her Telugu poems titled “Laddafni,” a term that suggests her identity as a person from the doodekulai (weaver) community using Urdu in the following way: “ab sow bar sab ke samne chillavoongee/ han...mai laddafnee hun...! Laddafnihee rahoongi!” (Shajahana 21). As a reaction to his own marginalisation among the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, Mastaarji, a Madiga poet, asserts his community's identity in a poem titled “Madigodu” with its pun on “adi” (the first and primeval) by invoking their ancestry to the mythical characters of Adijambavu and Arundhati and places his community's signal contribution to the major cultural and art forms:

Who do you think he is?
He is the first one, the ancient man
the authentic one.
He is Madiga!
He belongs to that phase
when the earth took its shape
when the animate began to breathe
when the first man appeared on the scene—
That's why,
calling him Adipurusha
rishis, sages sent the wives of impotent men
to Kardama for their progeny!
[...]
He is Matanga
who created the veena
to make you flow in the ocean of music,
to provide succour for life
ridden with agonies and wailings! (ll.1-24)

I wish to end my presentation with K. Balagopal who offered a nuanced formulation on the issue of identities. Writing an “Afterword” to a collection of poems by Muslim Minority Poets titled *Zalzala*, he maintains that individuals possess many social identities at the same time. He says that different socially oppressed groups share a moral solidarity, which enables them to come together in times of need. This moral solidarity springs from an understanding of the universal principles behind the values each of these distinct groups cherish. He underlines the necessity of a third formulation which is neither Marxist nor postmodern to understand the question of permeability of boundaries across caste, class, gender etc., (Balagopal 91-92). While the Marxist position may suggest that all identities should be subsumed under the category of class, the postmodern position would deny universalism and celebrate differences that might threaten any sense of solidarity. Balagopal's third alternative seems to suggest a way out of this impasse while forcing each singular identity to have the moral obligation towards respecting each others' identity and differences.

(All the translations of the Telugu texts unless otherwise stated are by Alladi Uma and me.)

NOTES

1. Prominent among Telugu Dalit writings are the anthologies of Dalit-Bahujan writing— *Chikkanantunna Pata* (1995) edited by G. Lakshmi Narasaiah and *Tripuraneni Srinivas and Padunekkina Pata* (1996) edited by G. Lakshmi Narasaiah—which brought together poets that included minority voices from backward communities who empathised with the Dalit cause, *Dalit Manifesto* (1995) edited by Keshava Kumar and K. Satyanarayana that combines both Left and Dalit consciousness, Spartacus's (G. Mohan Rao's) novel, *Khaki Batukulu* (1996) about caste problem among the police force, *Chilukuri Devaputra's Panchamam* (1998) that deals with the caste discrimination experienced even by a person of the stature of a Deputy Collector, Yendluri Sudhakar's Malle Mogga *Godugu: Madigakathulu* (1999) and Vemula Yellaiah's *Kakka* (2000) which deals with the plight of the Madiga labourers in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh.
2. Dalit women brought out two significant anthologies. 1. Nalla Poddu: *Dalita Streeela Sabityam: 1921-2002* (2003), a compilation of "self-stories", short stories, prose pieces, poems etc., edited by Gogu Syamala 2. *Madiga Upakulala Streeela Kathala Samputi* (2006) by Joopaka Subhadra and Gogu Syamala. The latter deals with the lives and the culture of the women of the Madiga and related castes.

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Re-Reading Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Nandini Bahattacharya

Salman Rushdie and his *Midnight's Children* appeared at a point of history when the Anglo-American world was finally getting over its fixation with the 'factuality' of fiction; its obsession with 'realism' and 'utilitarianism' in narratives, when it no longer felt obliged to repeat, after the villainish Mr. Sengupta in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*: "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?"; when it had come to terms with the essential *naiveté* and inadequacy of assertions, such as those made by the redoubtable narrator of *Govinda Samanta*- "The age of marvels has gone by; giants do not prey now a days; skepticism is the order of the day; and the veriest stripling, whose throat is still full of his mother's milk, says to his father, when a story is told to him; "Papa, is this true?" (Day, *Govind Samanta*.3).

Rushdie appeared at a moment when the Anglo-American world was coming to terms with the idea that fiction was just that! Fictive, humanly constructed, a flawed, and partial take on life! A narrative that was aware of its constructed nature, that gloried in its own ruptures, its frayed edges, its unreliable narrators, its lack of organic wholeness; its propensity towards leaking into other stories or acquiring flavours of other narratives; and its inability to transmit prophetic or infallible - messages.

After all, what is described as the postmodern condition is a composite of such realizations. It is an awareness of the flawed and contingent nature of truth, and an understanding that each position is inevitably implicated in its Other.

At the same time Rushdie's emergence as a novelist and the making of *Midnight's Children* was inevitable in a post-60s world where the inexorable processes of decolonization; improved communication technologies, and economic and cultural globalization had resulted in the radical questioning of Eurocentric aesthetic norms. In other words, European fiction-writing was forced to come to terms with alternative modes of story-telling that often emerged from non-European locations and those which foregrounded qualities of orality, non-linearity, digression, contra-realism and lack of authorial omniscience.

Rushdie's narratives evolved at this crucial juncture of history when the Euro-centre was falling apart, things could not hold and black, brown or yellow beasts like us had slowly but inevitably begun slouching towards Bethlehem, to claim their place under the sun. *Midnight's Children* is a momentous achievement not simply because it is a thoroughly enjoyable novel, but also because it embodies and enunciates these cultural tensions and conflicts while shaping and informing them. While on the one hand the novel is inflected by the postmodern debunking of grand narratives, and normative, classic realist techniques, on the other hand, it is shaped by Indian mythological traditions of oral, nonlinear, digressive, story-telling. It is equally conditioned by the bizarre and fantastic telling of the Bollywood cinema of 1970s, and the jerky, jump-cut methods of communication in advertisements, the bland linearity of journalistic reports, the musicality of ad-jingles, Bollywood songs and practically every mode of communication that was available to a 70s writer! Increasingly, we discover contemporary writers following Rushdie and experimenting with every kind of communicative methods available to them. In a lecture held on 2nd of March in Calcutta, Amitav Ghosh asserted that creative writers today are experimenting with emoticons, text-

messages, and blog-language, and those marginal and apparently juvenile fringes of the holy cow called English language, and their works are none the worse for such innovations. He goes on to assert that languages actually grow in resistance to their formal-structures and in subversion of the restraints that come with those formal structures. I believe Rushdie would thoroughly agree with such assertions.

What Rushdie has to say about possibly, the most well-known as well as demonized of his novels *The Satanic Verses* is what could adequately describe *Midnight's Children* as well, "it celebrates "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combination of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and that is how *newness enters this world*" *Midnight's Children* "is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves ("In good faith" *Imaginary Homelands*, 394).

It is to enunciate this hybrid, miscegenized and interstitial position that Rushdie employs his contra-realistic narrative techniques! While his magic realist technique is born out of the ideological conviction that "reality often contained a streak of fantasy that realism [...] lacked [;] in real life there were monsters and giants" (*The Jaguar Smiles* 169), it is also a means of inscribing an alternative, interstitial reality that real life so woefully lacks. Subscribing to the Bakhtinian notion of a carnivalesque, playful, topsy-turvy approach to life he asserts:-

Play. Invent the world. The power of playful imagination to change forever our perception of how things are has been demonstrated by everyone from Lawrence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* to a certain Monty Python in his *Flying Circus*. Our sense of the modern world is as much the creation of Kafka, with his unexplained trials and unapproachable castles and giant bugs, as it is of Freud, Marx or Einstein (*Location of Brazil* 122).

Much of the joy of reading *Midnight's Children* comes from this playful approach to reality, a perception of characters with magical powers of smell, touch and hearing, with powers of transformation, metamorphosis, twinning, invisibility, appearance and disappearance at will. At the same time Rushdie's "dazzling, puzzling leaping prose is the first genuine effort to go beyond the Englishness of the English language" (Rushdie, "Introduction" *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*, xviii). The magic alterity of lines such as "Come all ye greats-O, Eat a few dates-O" (*MC* 69) or "Fresh From Fifty Fierce Weeks in Delhi! Straight From Sixty Sharp-Shooter Weeks in Bombay!" (*MC* 49), render *MC* as one of the most enjoyable of reading-experiences. It is this shock of discovering the world anew, poised at an absurd angle to known realities that constitutes one of the primary joys of reading Rushdie's novels. It is same kind of shock and joy that Alice experiences when flowers in the looking glass world respond to her introspective query:-

"Oh Tiger-lily! Said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, "I wish you could talk!"

"We can talk,* said the Tiger-lily, "when there is anybody worth talking to."

Alice was so astonished that she couldn't speak for a minute; it quite seemed to take her breath away!" (*Through the Looking Glass* 200).

It is the same sense of celebratory topsy-turvy that one enjoys when Humpty Dumpty asserts that glory means a "nice-knock-down argument" and that after all it is the speaker who decides the meaning to be posited upon a word and not the other way round!

"When choose a word/" Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean-neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master-that s all."

(Through the Looking Glass 163)

As Vasco Miranda notes in *The Moor's Last Sigh*: "Forget those damn fool realists! The real is always hidden [...] inside a miraculously burning bush. Life is fantastic Paint that!" (MLS 174)

However, while Rushdie's natural trajectory is comedy, irony, fantasy and a heightened perception of the world, his alternative, fantastic perception of the world (unlike a Lewis Carroll, Sukumat Ray, Edward Lear, or J.R. Tolkien) is not primarily motivated by his desire to resist its oppressive structures and redefine it anew! This is what he has to say about the social function of fantasy:

This idea-the opposition of imagination to reality, which is also of course, the opposition of art to politics - is of great importance, because it reminds us that we are not helpless; that to dream is to have power. And I suggest [...] the other great tradition in art, [is the] the one in which techniques of comedy, metaphor, heightened imagery, fantasy and so on are used to break down our conventional, habit dulled certainties about what the world is and what it has to be. Unreality is the only weapon with which reality can be smashed, so that it may be subsequently reconstructed. (*Location of Brazil*, 122)

Such assertions must be situated within the cultural context of fantasy writing in the West. Since Aristotle's declaration that the essence of art is imitation, fantasy has been marginalized and identified as a relatively minor genre. Majority of critics have felt that the so-called realist mode of writing is somehow more profound, more morally committed, and engaging with actual human concerns, than writing, which employs the marvellous or fantastic mode. There seems to have always been a need to condemn or apologize for the fantastic, a need that is peculiarly ethnocentric, and that stems from the deepest of beliefs in Western culture that 'reality' is somehow 'morally'¹ better and aesthetically serious than fantasy. Rushdie's novels subvert these very assumptions, and go on to use the fantastic mode to engage with the real, in complex and nuanced ways. Rushdie's early novels critique two significant authoritarian, oppressive systems, or should I say 'realities?' -the 'brown' one, emerging from the newly decolonized subcontinent, and expressing itself either through the imposition of states of emergency or authoritarian, religious- fundamentalist/ dictatorial systems of governance, and the 'white', one, emanating from post-imperial Britain and expressing itself through torture, oppression and racially motivated denigration of non-white Britons, and coloured immigrants in Britain. Both these authoritarian systems are ultimately informed and inflected by patriarchal structures that render them particularly unbearable. Though the 'terrifying realities of post-imperial Britain, and the humiliating conditions under which diasporic Asians and Africans operate do not specifically impact the writing of *Midnight's Children*, they do form the thematic imperative of most of his early novels such as *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. Consider for example the use of descriptive fantasy in *The Satanic Verses* to foreground a) the realities of racial denigration and b) race riots fuelled by perceptions of such denigration:

Plus also: they had come into a demon city in which anything could happen, you windows shattered in the middle of the night without cause, you were knocked in the street by invisible hands, in the shops you heard such abuse you felt your ears would drop off but when you turned in the direction of the words you only saw empty air and smiling faces, and every day you heard about this boy, that girl, beaten up by ghosts. -Yes, a land of phantom imps [...] and worst of all, the poison of this devil-island had infected her baby girls. (SV 250)

Hatred breeds monsters on both sides leading 10 demonic explosions of anger and race riots. The description of the fire and arson that breaks out in Brickhall can only be described in terms of a classical inferno:

There is Gibreel Farishta, walking in a world of fire. In High Street he sees houses built of flame, with walls of fire, arid flames gathered like curtains hanging at the windows - and there were men and women with fiery skins strolling running, milling around him dressed in coats of fire. The street had become hot, molten, a river the color of blood...All, all is ablaze as he toots his horn, giving people what they want, their hair and teeth of the citizenry are smoking and red, glass burns, and birds fly overhead on blazing wings. (SV 462)

At the same time, Rushdie's employment of fantasy as resistance and subversion of unbearable realities must be situated within the postmodernist response to contemporary experience, an experience that is continually beyond belief. Philip Roth, trying to come to terms with the role of art in current culture, says that 'the writer in the middle of the 20th century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible, much of reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's meager imagination (224)" (Phillip Roth "Writing American Fiction." *Commentary* 31.3 (1961), 223-233). Our preconceptions of what constitutes the impossible are assaulted every day. Consider for example the latest incident of senseless killing of ordinary, non-partisan humans in the precincts of the Taj hotel in Mumbai! Or consider a diasporic Asian father's act of killing his daughter in Britain to maintain the honour of his community and redress the sin the girl having a white boy friend? Or consider the shooting down of an entirely blameless brown young man carrying a bulky rucksack near a British tube-station because the white police suspected him to be a terrorist! The postmodern novel faces the problem of responding to situations that are, literally, fantastic. No wonder then, that fantasy becomes the vehicle for the postmodern consciousness. The fantastic becomes the realism our culture understands!

In *Midnight's Children*, the employment of fantasy as a mode of resistance works in two distinct ways. On the one hand, the novel goes on to expose the nightmarish world orchestrated by the sinister green and black widow (reminiscent of the witches in the Wizard of Oz). Her bizarre tortures and oppressions threaten to frustrate the promise of plurality and the promise of freedom won at the midnight hour, a freedom, which the heterogeneous multiplicity of midnight's children embody, and enunciate.

On the other hand, the very act of writing a multi-layered, plural fantastic narrative with numerous and failed narrators, an absurd, deformed hero, and in a language that is *not while, not quite*, is a consummate act of resistance.

Midnight's Children revels in its numerous tellers of tales, and unreliable narrators, and recording of experience that are at variance with each other. By employing fantasy in narrative modes, this novel grants human experience no more than a shifting or provisional status, and strikes at the very root of Western cultural belief in *bildung*, a graded, meaningful, developmental, and goal-oriented

structure of human experience The meta-novelistic form of *Midnight's Children* is a way of expressing the idea that experiences and events can never be totally intelligible and that meaning posited in events may be endlessly deferred. It encourages us to live with uncertainty, to welcome a world seen as random, multiple and at times even absurd.

Midnight's Children is colored by an awareness of an Indian-born diasporic novelist writing back to the centre, using the master's form and the master's language and making them his own! The fantastic language (something that Rushdie describes as 'chutnified') is the means by which he expresses his resistance to an "Anglo-centric" vision of the world:

Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can't simply use the language the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our purposes Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle, a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between cultures within our selves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (IH 17")

If "language is courage: the ability to conceive thought, to speak it, and by doing so make it true" (S 281) then, *Midnight's Children*, like all of Rushdie's great novels, is concerned with "the real language problem; how to bend it, shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned walls, how to master the river of words of time of blood ...". (SV 281)

The *not white- not quite* language of *Midnight's Children* is also an attempt to inflect the holy cow of the English language with the vibrant colors, pungent smells and sharp tastes of Hindi, Gujrati and Mumbaiia Marathi and to let the world know that English is not the only language in the world.

I would like to end my lecture about Rushdie and *Midnight's Children's* importance in the contemporary world by referring to the fantastic mode in terms of playing around with the signifier of the human body and especially the body of the hero in a text. After all, the well formed, integrated, handsome body of the hero is metonymically representative of the well-formed body of the text, and the well integrated ordered society from which the text springs. Consider, for example the difference in bodily shapes between wicked or slimy characters such as Uriah Heep, or comic and socially irrelevant characters such as Micawber and the central, heroic characters such as David Coppefield. Dickens like most Victorians firmly believed that handsome does who handsome is! The body of the hero Saleem, in *Midnight's Children* is little short of absurd. In fact apart from Saleem's unbelievable ugliness, or should we say weirdness of looks, he has no stable body or features to speak about. After Saleem's body has been mutilated by accidents such as the loss of a finger and clumps of hair from his head, he stumbles upon a profound thought that is well worth quoting:-

The body [...] is as homogeneous as anything. Indivisible, a one piece suit, a sacred temple, if you will. It is important to preserve this wholeness. But the loss of my finger [...] not to mention the removal of certain hairs from my head has undone all that, [...] Uncork the body, and God knows what you permit to come-tumbling out. Suddenly you are forever other than what you were. (MC 237)

This othering of the homogeneous self is perhaps most effectively achieved by playing around fantastically with the human body. Saleem's body is mutilated, smashed, elongated, bloated, metamorphosed, made invisible, splintered, killed off, and made to reappear. The only other

character whose body undergoes so many changes is of course Carroll's Alice in the two stories- *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. All the boundaries between the living and non-living world, the animal and human world, the man and woman world, and the living and dead worlds are violated in *Midnight's Children*, and Saleem, like many other characters in Rushdie's novels, seems to enjoy a free-floating, perpetually volatile existence. And of course we remember that even before his birth he is predicted to be that grotesque, many headed, multiple limbed and plural bodied- monster, by the soothsayer Ramram Seth.

A son Sahiba who will never be older than his motherland-neither older nor younger. [...] There will be two heads but you shall see only one—there will be knees and a nose, nose and knees. [...] He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die before he is dead! (MC 87-88)

Rushdie's novels also adopt the bizarre and fantastic mode to destroy all complacent beliefs regarding the wholeness of the human mind. Saleem is born a schizoid (or a multizoid) with numerous other voices speaking through him), loses his rational consciousness, becomes a vegetable like amnesiac, and recovers all over again losing in the process, the fantastic mental faculties he had originally possessed. The novel ends with the complete dismembering of Saleem's body even while he is consciously reporting/describing the event. This death and life conjoining which is a feature of almost every important novel of Rushdie brings us to the final ethical question about the motivation regarding such endless pluralization of every position in his novel. Rushdie's novels have often been accused of senseless fantasization, nihilistic pessimism and an inability to suggest a fixed point of view or course of action. The answer to such accusations is to be found in a ridiculous refrain sung by Gibraeel, in *The Satanic Verses*:

To be born again firs! you have to die. Ho ji, ho ji!
To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly.
Tat-tataa! Taka-thum!
How to ever smile again, if first you won't cry?
How to win the darling's love mister, without a sigh?
Baba. if you want to get born again, first you must die. (SV 3)

The postmodern novel joyously affirms its powers to destroy because of the possibilities it creates for regeneration. It is only through joyous destruction that you expose the implicatedness of birth and death, the conjoining of life and erasure. Unreality is the only weapon with which hateful reality can be smashed so that it may be subsequently reconstructed. In order to live again first you must die!

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Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*: Articulate Energy of Memory and Corpo(real) Motherhood

Ashok K Mohapatra

Sometimes we choose to die because it is the only way to be both heard and seen, little sister- Shauna Singh Baldwin

In my paper I shall focus on the gendered subalternity and radicalism which Sujata's corpo(real) motherhood illustrates through her memories in Mahasweta Devi's *Mother of 1084*. Paradoxical as it may sound, Devi's subaltern radicalism lies in the representation of the impossibility of the emancipation of Sujata's subaltern self from an oppressive social order. It also indicates the failure of the politics of her memories to bring about tangible social and political changes. Similarly, the element of protest in the novel lies in the articulation of Sujata's voicelessness. Such types of representation and articulation constitute a critical knowledge that the novel affords to us, and its radicalism amounts to a moral triumph which consists in an inevitably failed mission against what is impossible to defeat and destroy. Radicalism articulates protest and anger in an alternative idiom even as it is understood by few.

Sujata, the protagonist, invokes the traumatizing memories of the murder of her Naxalite son Brati through her body, negotiates multiple time frames of the experiences of pain and loss and teases out of the memories certain ethical issues which her family members, the upper echelons of society and the state apparatuses try to avoid. Further, in documenting the memories she memorializes them. The subaltern position that she takes is understood as a profoundly political act of playing off of private experiences and their corporeal truth – or rather corpo(real) truth - claims against the protocols of publicly acknowledged facts and meaning. Through her subaltern counter-memories Sujata holds persons, classes and agencies of the state responsible for acts of crime which they would evade by indulging in willful amnesia. She debunks the falsehood of the claims that the civil society and the state make to maintain peace, safeguard public morality, and ensure law and order. Her subaltern corporeality is invested with moral power because hers is the body of a mother that remembers, interrogates, and even dies in protest.

At the outset I wish to clarify that the truth claims of the subaltern body, or its corporeality, can be best accounted for phenomenologically, since phenomenologists believe that truth is grounded in bodily perception and it can be re-lived through memory. Maurice Merleau-Ponty rightly says that “The identity of the thing through perceptual experience is only another aspect of the identity of one's own body...It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive things” (182). He also says:

The part played by the body in memory is comprehensible if memory is, not only the constituting consciousness of the past, but an effort to reopen time on the basis of the implications in the present, and if the body, as our permanent means of ‘taking up attitudes’ and thus constituting pseudo-presents, is the medium of our communication with time as well as space. (177)

Although another important phenomenologist, J.N. Mohanty, would refute this potentiality of body mentioned above on the ground that the body living in the present is a ‘habitual body’, and it is therefore more oriented toward the future than toward the past, and being progressive rather than retrogressive (*Phenomenology and The Human Sciences* 294), he would nonetheless concede to

Merleau-Ponty that body can reopen traumatic memory as an exceptional case (295) and, for that reason, Merleau-Ponty is useful for our purpose.

The body of Sujata constantly re-plays the traumatic memory of the sight of Brati's dead body in the morgue in its raw vividness and immediacy, re-invoking the same old time and space. The blue edges of the wounds, burnt, cracked skin, chocolate coloured blood are memories that glowed bright, hard, luminescent, like a diamond knife"(11) . These memories are the code of a knowledge waiting to be deciphered by Sujata's maternal body. She finds the rationale for keeping alive the memories of the loss of her son, asking herself why he and his associates courted death, and what larger meaning their murder acquired. Her consciousness is mediated through the narrator's comment which is cleverly structured like a catechism to emphasize that a mother alone possesses the power and authority to read and interpret what the others cannot. She can face up what the others dare not, since she is a mother: "Who is Sujata? Only a mother. Who are those hundreds and thousands whose hearts, even now, are gnawed by questions? Only mothers" (51), remarks the narrator.

To have a moral understanding of the memories of the ruthless suppression of the Naxalite movement from 1971 to 1974 Sujata replays them corporeally, whereas her husband Dibyanath has hushed them up all along. Her prosperous family too has maintained guarded silence about this matter. This calculated amnesia has also been endorsed and sustained by the civil society and the state. While, for example, at home his photograph was removed from the wall and tucked away somewhere along with his shoes and raincoat, in the public sphere the newspapers never mentioned Brati's name among the youth who were killed. Their bodies were incinerated under the supervision of the police hastily and in a hush-hush manner. With mordant irony the narrator remarks, "Exactly a year and three months later, the writers, artists and intellectuals of Calcutta turned West Bengal upside down out of sympathy with and support for the cause of Bangladesh"(50), but surely the youth were not worth anything and their self-sacrifice was inconsequential. The narrator goes on to add:

If they had been important, wouldn't the artists, writers and intellectuals of this legendary city of processions have picked up their pens? ... Sujata's vision was surely wrong. Surely. The poets, writers, intellectuals and artists are honoured members of society, recognized spokesmen for the country at large. (50-51)

In the official records Brati was never mentioned by name anywhere; the number 1084 was all that remained of him as a disembodied and abstract figure. He had not existed ever, as it were. Mahasweta Devi tells us how the society conspires with the state to maintain guarded silence about what happened to Brati and boys like him. She points out to us that the pretensions of the civil society to transparency, equity and justice are specious. Sujata, through the act of her remembrance, reveals to us that public culture is manipulative and hand in glove with the oppressive bio-politics of the state in refusing to acknowledge the presence of the intractable elements.

To counter this politics of invisibility and amnesia various types of strategies of radical memory through the mother's body are deployed. These strategies conjure up into presence what has been trucked away or occluded from sight; call up what has been forgotten. One novelist in particular who comes to mind in this context is Toni Morrison. She adopts in *Beloved* a postmodernist strategy of re-memory in a politically motivated revisionist epistemology. Although one might feel tempted to compare *Mother of 1084* with *Beloved*, one would do well to remember that Mahasweta Devi does not resort to the scheme of re-memory, and her novel sticks to the good old mode of realism unlike

Morrison's. A comparison of these novels can be made meaningful in helping us to understand Devi's politics of memory and motherhood only if the differences between them are properly understood.

Before one begins to consider the differences one has to acknowledge that both *Mother of 1084* and *Beloved* are implicated in the politics of calling up the memories that validate the private experiences of suffering and loss on the part of apolitical women against the hegemony of public opinion and officially sanctioned historical knowledge. Despite the formal differences between their works both Devi and Morrison believe in the fluidity of genres. Sophie McCall (2002) rightly attributes to the fiction and stories of Devi the quality of "documentary/fiction" that is realized through their function as a "critical antidote" to "the academically reified issues of bonded labor, women and development, and sex trade". Her stories straddle the borders of fiction, history, ethnography, and epistemically disturb one discipline in terms of another, producing discursive effects of irony and heteroglossia. For her part, Morrison restitutes in the African-American culture the oral slave narratives that rewrite the life of Margaret Garner, which has been recorded as 'history' for killing her daughter to prevent her from being recaptured as slave. She too dismantles the genre and episteme of American colonial history through the creation of a revisionary mythologization of the personal experiences of African American female bodies at the corporeal level. This paper does not have the scope to develop an elaborate comparison of the two authors at this moment except for discussing *Beloved* only briefly.

Beloved consists of a dense texture of the narratives of pains, loss, separation and death, which are the 'archaeology' – in the Foucauldian sense – of slave memory and communal history that are to be recuperated as the 'genealogy' of oppositional critical practices in the postcolonial academia. In terms of genealogy this hugely academicized, canonical text has, what Caroline Rody would say, "the historical project" of "a mother-quest, an African- American feminist "herstory" that posits a kind of "mother of history" and sends a surrogate, time-traveling daughter to enact its demonic errand of love or revenge: seeking to regain her, to heal historical separation, to know the story of the mother his-tory forgot" (105). In this novel, 're-memory', an idiosyncratic term used by Sethe, means *remembering* the memory. It is an act that enables her to imagine and reconstruct the past realities and enables her subjective self to grow from a suffering and experiential motherhood to a morally and politically conscious black womanhood. Since one's re-memory can enter someone else's re-memory, it serves as a trope of the interconnectedness of minds as well as different strands of memories that add to one another, echo, mediate, corroborate and also contest one another. Early in the novel Sethe tells Denver:

If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there."(37)

Thereupon Denver asks her, "Can other people see it?", and Sethe answers in the affirmative and goes on to add, "Someday you would be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up...But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (37).

Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs and Denver remember memories, and what is achieved is the restitution and redeeming of a repressed past and resurrection of the lost child in the form of a ghost, liberation and above all "claiming ownership" of oneself (*Beloved* 95). If scars are memory traces on the body of the pain and suffering on account of biological and emotional bond and the breach of it, the motifs

of re-memory run through three generations of women, making them embody the communal memories of suffering and weave together their narratives along with Paul D's.

However, the case of *In Mother of 1084* is entirely different. Even though Mahasweta Devi assumes a subaltern agenda in trying to reconstitute the past that has been excluded from official narrative of the nation, she does not do so in a post-modernist mode. The post-modernist mode, because of its anti-foundationalist approach to nation and its hegemonic narration, dispenses with the linear time scheme, distrusts the notion of historical continuity and teleology. It also questions the objectivity of narrative, and avoids the representation of a stable and solid self. Since Devi is not a postmodernist, the characters in her novel are solid, the events are non-discontinuous and concrete, and the situations are quite life-like. She is unlike Morrison at least because she would not subscribe to the latter's radical politics and aesthetics of re-memory that are anti-hermeneutic and anti-phenomenological. *Beloved* negates a sense of continuity among events, problematizes the events as *knowable objects* (emphasis added), and above all posits the absence of a knowing subject that employs reason and memory in a positivist sense to construct and interpret knowledge. In this novel we find that the bodily experiences are neither structured in terms of the unity of time and place, nor identified as belonging to specific persons. What strikes us in it is a complex interplay of voices dispersed over space and time and a process of metaphoric as well as symbolic images producing subjectivities and locations as *effects* (emphasis added). The processes of re-memory, remembering and "disremembering" (118, 131) are essentially discursive practices cutting across time and place to work out metaphoric selves that can at times go out of the body and merge with one another.

On the other hand, *Mother of 1084* is known for its realism, physical and psychological, that consists not only in an accurate representation of the quotidian world in its physicality but also in the objectification of the states of Sujata's consciousness, feelings of loneliness, alienation and anger. Sujata, Brati, Somu's mother, Nadini and all other characters inhabit the space and time that are fictionally real and well defined. However, additionally, Sujata lives as a fundamental motherly self in an inner world of the memories of Brati that is mapped out in an alternative *asocial* space and *ahistorical* time. The space is asocial in the sense that it is purely cognitive, unencumbered by values and opinions. As for the ahistorical sense of time, it is a seamless continuum of past and present structured into the pseudo-presents that Merleau-Ponty talks about. That is why Sujata is seen as travelling back and forth in chronological time and sequencing a series of events in terms of historical time markers like dates to index them as events that otherwise go unrecorded. In doing so she develops a perspective on them, understands their political and moral implications and ultimately gains self-knowledge. In short, she memorializes the memories.

Indeed, as far as Sujata is concerned – and she being the narrative focus – memory functions as the fulcrum of the narrative. All the thematically major events in the novel are the past events, replayed again and again in her memory, being charged with poignancy and anger. The few other events like the preparations for an evening party in celebration of Tuli's engagement with Tony, Sujata's visit to Nandini, proceedings of the party and Sujata's death following the bursting of her appendix take place within a frame of chronological time spanning a little over twelve hours from 'morning' through 'afternoon' and 'late afternoon' to 'evening'. These events are not just functionally significant as tacks sequenced in terms of the logic of causality to hold the narrative together, these also precipitate the moral struggle of Sujata and explore the themes, of which the most important is the critical knowledge that she gains about the moral bankruptcy of the society, the oppressiveness of state apparatuses, tyranny of public opinion and futility of the radical idealisms of the youth.

Much as memory in the form of dreams facilitates Sujata's journeys through time, the entire narrative is still ingeniously plotted around some specific time markers in the form of extraordinarily vivid flash-back scenes. The reader too goes back and forth in the narrative to reconstruct the events in a linear sequence and understand the dynamics of memories that collapse the chronological frames of time as much as formulate them. The novel begins on the morning of January 17, 1970, the day on which "in her dreams Sujata was back on a morning twenty-two years ago" (1). The time referred to is mentioned as January 17, 1948, when she gave birth to Brati in the dawn (5) in the hospital where she had gone the previous day(4). The narrative unfolds yet another scene of Sujata lying on the bed by her husband's side on the same date, January 17, but with the most disastrous event in the offing:

But there lay back in the past, two years ago, yet another seventeenth of January, yet another dawn, when Sujata slept beside *the same man* (emphasis added) in the same manner. And the telephone rang. On the bedside table. Suddenly. (5)

A few paragraphs after the lines cited above, one comes across another reference to chronological time and the narrative throws a little more light on the ringing of the telephone thus:

Two years ago, early on the seventeenth of January, on Brati's birthday, on the very day that had brought Brati to the world, the news on the telephone had burst upon the neat and clean household..."(6);

The reader has to go through the narrative for some length and slowly, step by step, s/he begins to understand that telephone call was from the Kantapukur police station to inform her of Brati's death, and the man in the bed was the husband, whom she had ceased to love and reduced to just a bedfellow since the birth of Brati. In fact there are many other references to chronological time dispersed over the first three chapters, some of which are:

For three months she knew nothing. (6)

Exactly a year and three months later, the writers, artists and intellectuals of Calcutta turned West Bengal upside down out of sympathy with the support for the cause of Bangladesh. (50)

For a year after Brati's death, till she came down to see Somu's mother, Sujata had remained imprisoned with private grief. (57)

There was an unwritten silence for two and a half years right through the period when Baranagar and Kashipur were purged of the enemies of the society. (59)

All these points of time are coordinated in memories, with January 17, 1970, being the base year. Owing to their function as markers of a memoir or a diary, not only are the events indexed and made to appear as factual, but also the very discursiveness of their chronologization is significant insofar as it underscores the moral and political necessity of remembrance to counter the erasure of truth through silence and forgetfulness on the part of the civil society as well as the state. Sujata and the narrator mediate one another throughout the narrative, deploying the strategy of chronologization to record Sujata's private truths of pain as indelible public facts that debunk the smug masquerade of ethics by the intellectuals in the civil society and the state's covert style of liquidating its enemies.

And yet the strategy does not enable her to emancipate herself from the oppressive orders of family, community and the state. She fails to blazon to the world her memories of motherly loss, longing and Brati's struggle as well as death for some ideals as facts that should have been

acknowledged. This is because every single memory has a meaning and value, and the facts have to be honoured as sacrosanct. But women like Somu's Mother and Nandini, who have suffered losses of the same kind, are not in a position to forge with Sujata a bond of pain, and nor is she able to develop any social affinity with them. After she meets Nandini, the Narrator comments:

Only four years or so if one counted days. But by a different count, it was now way back in the past. Countless light years had passed since those normal days when, at the end once could go and visit Brati's mother. (90)

The strategy of chronologization fails her, since "a different count" of time renders her distanced by light years and alienated from everybody else, irredeemably. What is most painfully felt is the impossibility of emancipation of Sujata from the oppressive order and that her case is represented as more hopeless than Sethe's.

The shared past of the African American slave-mothers and children, with the more or less similar patterns of suffering, constitute the redeeming and consoling myths of a communitarian destiny in *Beloved*. However, when the moment for the sharing and transaction of memories take place between Sujata and Somu's mother in *Mother of 1084* the class divide between them becomes insuperable. Somu's sister grudges the upward mobile middle-class Chatterjees pulling strings to prevent Brati's name from appearing in the newspapers and managing to keep their reputation safe, while she, being blacklisted as the relative of a Naxalite, would never get a job, although she needs one so badly. Her coldness and contempt for Sujata thus stand in the way of the two mothers in a bond of mutual empathy.

When Sujata tries to reach out to Somu's mother it is far less for the reason of forging a bond of pain and tears than for approaching Brati's memories from the perspective of the other mother in order to find out the truth of the matter. Hence the narrator's comment on Sujat: "She had thought that all the memories were hers alone. Why had she never thought that Brati had left memories to Somu's mother too?" (39). Elsewhere the narrator observes, "A terrible shocking pain had brought them together at Kantapukur and at the crematorium, but it was an affinity that could not long last" (61).

Later, when Sujata meets Nandini, Brati's comrade and lover, something else stands between the women. This time it is the generation gap consisting in their dissimilar world-views and mindsets. Much as Sujata would desire the Nandini to continue to be a surrogate of her son and perpetuate the struggle for the ideals for which her son died along with his associates, the younger woman is disillusioned about the revolution; for she tells Sujata bitterly:

I will never feel the same way again. It will never come back. Total loss. An era is really over for good. The person I was then is dead. (77).

Then Nandini gives Sujata the terrible knowledge that nothing in the world has changed for the better or improved in spite of Brati's death, and in spite of her own suffering in prison and damage of one eye. The betrayal of one of the comrades proves disastrous for the whole movement. In addition, her revolutionary ideals too have been trivialized, being construed as fashionable and therefore an added qualification for her prospective marriage. What is quite foreseeable is that even if she refuses to marry she will be contained socially, as have been her male comrades by the brutal power of the state.

That the suffering, struggle and sacrifice which Brati, Nandini and their associates underwent have no meaning in the society shocks and saddens Sujata. But she can do nothing other than shrink back into her body and hold on to the memories of her dead son. Much to the dismay of all else, she keeps her son's memories alive like Chandi in 'Bayen', a short story by Mahasweta Devi. Chandi gets ostracized from the entire village and from her son for being suspected of raising the dead children from the grave by some strange power she possesses, suckling and nurturing them. Mother of 1084 too is a 'bayen' in a metaphorical sense, for she perversely brings alive her son whom the family and the state have declared dead. Like Bhagirathi, Chandi's son, who alone understands the mother and refutes the allegation that his mother is a bayen, Brati too understood what the mother's pains are and who is primarily responsible for them.

The mother-child dyad is the thematic inflection of radical memories rooted in the mother's body. That is what we find in Mahasweta Devi and Toni Morrison, even as their modes of treatment of the memories are different. As discussed, the highlighting of mother's corporeality and memorializing have been possible through the clever chronologization of time sequence of roughly twelve hours, which involves retrospective gazing at two specific moments of the past – Brati's birth and his murder – in such a way that they appear coeval and co-terminus with the most vital bodily experiences of Sujata painfully giving birth to Brati, surviving his death in pain and finally dying with a painful cry. All the three corporeal events taking place in the ahistorical temporality close off with the hermeneutics of interrogative power and moral authority that are rooted in the mother's pain. Although putatively Sujata dies from a burst appendix, which Dibyanath declares at the end of the novel, the end is supremely ironical in the light of what the reader already knows. What the reader knows is not just that emancipation and change are impossible, but also that the chronological strategies adopted by a suffering mother inhabiting an asocial space and ahistorical time only precipitate a crisis of dis-alignment with the world. The world goes its own way blithely, casting aside the past to oblivion and refusing to value attempts some people made to improve, although failed. It promotes complacency, indifference and amnesia, and excludes the person who has the critical knowledge to distinguish between *now* and *then*, index the defining moments of one's life and sift out the lived, corporeal truths from received public knowledge. Being excluded and alienated, such a knowing mother – and Sujata in *Mother of 1084*, as is the case - gets stuck in situation of impasse, notwithstanding travelling back and forth through time within a private space. Her subaltern memorialization subverts history and publicly acknowledged facts, although achieves practically nothing in terms of a revolutionary change. The moments of impasse are perceptually intense and hence metonymically represented.

One more important point worth noticing is that the minutiae of events and situations recalled in the novel are metonymic rather than metaphoric in the sense Roman Jakobson (1956) uses the terms. According to Jakobson, metonymy and metaphor are constituted according to the principles of contiguity and similarity, respectively. As he would have us see metonymic constructions and their effects of realism, the details of specific events and situation pertaining to Brati's death and the physical as well as psychological void created by it are metonymic in that these wrest our attention "from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time" (2002: 43). These metonymic images stand out for their powerful visual clarity, owing to which all movements in the present get stalled. For that reason these represent a situation of impasse suffered by the protagonist and arouse in the reader a sense being stuck up at a dead end. Further, contiguity as an organizing principle of metonymic images sets them in a recursive order. These images thus naturally agree to both the schema of chronologizing events and the movements of memory in time. Indeed, the recursiveness of the date January 17 is all too obvious. It functions as the metonymy of

remembrance, operating on the contiguities of Brati's birth and his death. Eventually, it gets displaced to Sujata's death during the party held for the engagement of Tuli with Kapadia. All other chronological indices that we find in the novel are but displacements of the metonymy of remembrance to other dates. What these underscore is a state of stasis in which the mother subject is stuck up on her memories, and all her movements between the past and present are only circumscribed due to an obsessive engagement with herself and total lack of contact with the world outside. In such a state the mother- subject lacks agency.

One has to reckon with the fact that the oppressed, particularly women, are doomed to dumbness, defeat, and lack of agency to directly intervene in history, and, above all, death constitutes the ontological condition of their subalternity. Also, though subaltern politics derives from Marxism, it is theorized as having been constituted through a glaring absence of the possibility of utopia through revolution in the post-colonial state that is already besieged with neoliberal economy and politics, and where ideology is considered retrograde and revolution a perverse atavism. Right from its birth, dogged by the impossibility of revolution, subalternity now becomes another name for subversion, interrogation, moral anger, which combinedly compensate for lack of proactiveness. It prompts questions about its own proactive potential and is found usefulness quite often.

We may recall Spivak showing us in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" that the subaltern are acutely conscious of the moral power of the body that derives from its pains, humiliation and destruction. They know how to use this corporeal power to re-inscribe history and re-write the social text of *Sati*, like Bhubaneswari Bhaduri did in choosing to kill herself while she was menstruating. The epigraph of the essay from Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* also illustrates the radical meaning that subaltern consciousness can lend to woman's body through her death. In this novel Satya kills herself in protest against the patriarchal order, and her voice in the form of radical consciousness whispers to Roop the subversive meaning of self-killing and murder of women during the Partition of the subcontinent that needs to be remembered in the nationalist history. In addition, we can say, as *Mother of 1084* reveals to us, that the corporeality of motherhood, can also interrogate the logocentrism of the transcendental Subject of motherhood for the simple reason that corporeality is further irreducible.

Finally, a couple of questions seem worth pondering. These are: i. Can there be a more fundamental system of knowledge than maternal biology? and ii. Can there be a more effective site of radical knowledge than maternal body that procreates and suffers? It is common knowledge that powerful originary and nationalist mythologies of motherhood built in different political cultures and at different times by masculinist power structures have disenfranchised woman from politics and history. But the aforesaid questions can be posed rhetorically as self-evident truths about the primacy of the body of mother, its phenomenological dimension, introspective power and experiential aspects of cognition and meaning that can truly resist the appropriative mechanisms of dominant discourses and also the ideologies of hegemonic structures. Mahasweta Devi is known for the resistant posturing of woman's body – and mostly mother's – in many stories like "Doulati", "Draupadi" and "Breast-Giver".

It seems very unlikely that the subaltern mother can speak for herself effectively in the ordinary language and semantics that are already mediated by hegemonic structures of power. However, she can deploy as an alternative the articulate energy of her body and the moral power of its corporeality to remember, understand, interrogate and challenge what she cannot fight out physically.

In conclusion, therefore, if we replace ‘man’ with ‘mother’ in Frantz Fanon’s memorable statement at the end of his *Black Skin, White Masks*, “ O my body, make me always a man who questions”(232), we will very well grasp the narrative intent and effect of *Mother of 1084*.

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Language, Choice and the Question of Identity in the Comparative Study of Indian Literature

Ramshankar Nanda

We all negotiate the claims of history from our specific locations. In the present state of our civilization, the claims of history crowd in on us in a flow of multiform social features and pressures. The long arm of modern civilization bypasses no one. Even the tribal and aborigines residing in the remotest corner of the globe are touched and, more or less, transformed by it. If it is no longer the intruding ethnographic eye busy cataloging and classifying, it is now the helpful presence of the NGO next door or the probing lens of *National Geographic* or *Discovery*. It is in the process of responding to these claims and pressures, big and small, from near and from across-the-seven-seas, we develop or articulate our identities, or, as in the some other versions, our identities get articulated or constructed. The details of this negotiation constitute the field of culture, which reproduces itself in an array of everyday practices, some material and others symbolic. It is also true that in the course of negotiating our identities, whether these are assumed or assigned, we tend to fix limits, boundaries, or borders which help us demarcate spaces we can call our own. These spaces go by a number of designations and offer us a history of naming our affiliations – home, club, congregation, group, clique, association, society, region, state, nation etc., to mention only a suggestive few. Such units carry identifiable political, economic and cultural markers and tend to get defined alongside similarly constituted other units. To belong to one or more such units is an inescapable fact of our social life. As latecomers in the march of modern civilization, our identitarian attachments are predictably multiple.

The problem arises when our multiple identifications produce incompatible interpretations of cultural experience and increasingly leads us to adopt, strategically or in a rush of group pride, positions that create a conflictual politics of deadlock and despair within and between cultural units. Current theoretical accounts of identity offer a wide range of explanations on the question of identity and its effects. In the domain of literary and cultural theory, new methodologies and schools have emerged in a bid to explain the intricacies of deadlocked identities. In this connection, some names have acquired a cult status in the academe, in itself a problem. It is pertinent to mention here that the puzzle over identity is nothing new and the efforts to sort out facts and explanations in this matter take us to the beginnings of many cultural and philosophical traditions. But what lends a particular urgency to our renewed interest is our need to map its tangled histories and sketch possible futures at a juncture when identity claims have acquired a new pitch and virulence. Not only in the large sphere of national cultures, but also in the daily trivia of our professional lives in relation to different groups and constituencies. The present paper proposes to discuss issues related to identity and difference in a comparative framework and to consider ways of establishing cross-cultural contact and dialogue in literary and cultural matters. In particular, it sets out to explore what it means to be a realist about identity, by way of reflecting on the relevance of a realist epistemology in the comparative study of Indian literature. In the process, it highlights the role of language and language politics in the practice and production of Indian literature. More specifically, I discuss the ambivalent role of the English as a 'link language' in the field of Indian literary productions. I also try to assess how our choice of relation to language power, and by extension of literary practice, can be linked to the mechanism of emancipator and progressive projects in the cultural sphere.

Let us examine the role of language in constructing cultural difference. Linguists speak of language groups, language codes, speech communities etc. to mark out domains of language use. Nationalist and regionalists use languages as tools in forging specific political identities. Historical trajectories of languages run, and sometimes are made to run, parallel to the historical trajectories of social and cultural formations. Language is a commodity we use extensively in our daily lives without quite taking note of the fact that it is tied to the market situation. Languages are known to lay traps, and sometimes mines of mystification; languages open the door to clarity and understanding. The same language can deliver contrary results in different contexts. There are standard languages and there are dialects trying to claim the status of standard languages. There are rank outsiders, the so-called 'bastard tongues'. There are levels of skills and functions within a single language which point to an internal pecking order. Languages tend to replicate the hierarchical structures in social formations. Languages wither and die if they fail to get the support of the community of users, or, for some reason, users decide to change. We move progressively in the direction of context-specific realities the more we think of language in society and in history.

My way of introducing the social bases of language may not go down well with purists of different persuasions. But if the foregoing account has communicated my endorsement of a material and historical mode of inquiry it has done its job. In language matters, it is safe to begin with the question, "Whose language?" Given the terms of our inquiry, the answer would be, 'the great Indian middle class' (to borrow Pavan Varma's suggestive phrase). Because, the mass of Indian unlettered, following their nomenclature, are without any letters. And the really affluent, in a sense, don't need a language. The many, who go to schools and colleges and constitute subjects for the statisticians' tables and charts, are drawn primarily from the middle class. Not everyone in that class has affiliation with either the English language or Indian literature, the focus of my concern here. But it is a safe proposition to make that anyone who can be linked both to the English language and Indian literature is most likely a member of the ever-expanding middle class in all its regional specificities.

I now turn to a stimulating essay by Ivan Illich, the Vienna-born cultural theorist, to think through some of the issues relating to the position of English among Indian literary practices and the cultural effect it might signify. The essay, titled – "Taught Mother Language and Vernacular Tongue", is an extension of one of Illich's key ideas as a radical social thinker – his pairing of what we call 'vernacular values' against commodity values. In the essay, Illich makes a distinction between taught language and vernacular tongue, the languages we pay to learn and the languages that are learnt without costs. In Illich's account of the mother tongue, our habitual assumptions and emotive attachments surrounding the idea of mother tongue are reversed. All those qualities we normally associate with mother tongue when we construct a mother/other tongue binarism are attributed by Illich to vernacular tongue, a language that subsists outside the structure of the market. In an innovative piece of historical archaeology, he traces the origin of the idea of mother tongue to a fifteenth-century Spanish grammarian, Antonio Nebrija, who was contemporary of Columbus. In particular, he discusses Nebrija's Spanish grammar, *Grammatica Castellana*, the first in any modern European tongue, to show how it marked the institutionalization of Spanish as a single dominant language of the emergent Spanish nation-state. Nebrija's grammar, and subsequently his dictionary, effectively reduced the multiplicity of the vernacular polyglot on the Castilian peninsula to the single

taught mother tongue, Spanish and obliged people to follow the language of the state. Illich quotes extensively from Nebrija's introduction to his grammar in which the grammarian spells out his reasons for a project for standardizing people's vernaculars that were getting unruly in the wake of an explosive burst of popular reading material after the invention of printing. Nebrija makes no secret of his intentions of replacing people's polyphony with state monopoly and putting the regimented language at the service of empire-building. He, therefore, seeks Queen Isabella's blessings for the project. This is how Illich reads Nebrija:

.....Here the first modern language expert advises the Crown on the way to make, out of a people's speech and lives, tools that befit the state and pursuits. Nebrija's grammar is conceived by him as a pillar of the nation-state. Through it, the state is seen, from its very beginning, as an aggressively productive agency. The new state takes from people the words on which they subsist, the transforms them into the standardized language which henceforth they are compelled to use, each one at the level of education that has been institutionally imputed to him. Henceforth, people will have to rely on the language they received from above, rather than develop a tongue in common with one another. The switch from the vernacular to an officially-taught mother tongue is perhaps the most significant... event in the coming of a commodity-intensive society. (14-15)

Illich goes on to elaborate this "language economics" (31) in the production of mother tongue and shows how the term "instrumentalizes everyday language in the service of an institutional cause" (28) and turns it into a language of bureaucratic control. Illich's retrospective re-formulation of Europe's early modernity makes available to us a genealogy of modern languages – mother tongues, as Illich would have it – as these have arisen out of a history of state imposition and commodity-intensive culture. Illich makes a compelling distinction between language that is developed "in common with one another" (15) and the language "received from above". Extrapolating on the Latin roots of the world vernacular, he theorizes an alternative space, a space that enables "a vernacular mode of being, doing and making" (24). This is how he recuperates the vernacular:

We need a simple, straightforward word to designate the activities of people when they are not motivated by thought of exchange, a word that denotes autonomous, non-market related actions that by their very nature escape bureaucratic control, satisfying needs to which, in the very process, they give specific shape. (24)

It is necessary to point out here the specific deployment of the word vernacular in colonial India. It referred to extant native tongues, which received patronage from the Orientalists. I should add that Sanskrit was not called a vernacular by the English colonialists. The Orientalists concentrated their energies on the multiplicity of tongues they found in different regions and called these vernaculars. For them, vernaculars and mother tongues were interchangeable terms. As Illich points out significantly, the word mother tongue entered the Indian language lexicons through the introduction of the word *matrubhāshā* in Sanskrit by the Orientalists. These vernaculars/mother tongues were later worked into standard regional languages by upper-class Indians with the help of their British patrons. Illich's recovery of an early, positive sense of the word vernacular purges it of the opposite, received negative associations from our colonial history.

I invoke Illich's suggestive reformulation of vernacular reality in order to posit a space on to which we can project our hopes of non-coercive and non-colonizing cultural practices. The domain of English in India, I would like to suggest, belongs to the opposite sphere of control, domination and standardization. Illich's account of the rise of standard Spanish at a particular historical juncture gives us a useful paradigm to underline the overwhelmingly institutional and instrumental

positioning of English in the Indian context. The institutionality of English in India has been a well-documented area of critical attention. Particularly, the instrumentality of English in foisting colonialist administrative and knowledge structures and in inscribing extant Indian modernities with technical and industrial values has been studied intensively. It is easy to see the authorizing role of English in the drive towards a single, standard language in the linguistically plural regions of the Indian subcontinent. In a process of language contact English has accentuated the institutionality of modern Indian languages and has put an end to multiple clusters of multilingualities. It has, therefore, destroyed vital vernacular spaces or rendered them redundant by the coordination of new instrumentalities. In the context of Orissa, the spread of English education and the consolidation of mother tongue education around standard Oriya were coeval processes. English's interventionist role continues in the post-colony. It is now a firm and familiar feature of our multiple language environments. Probal Dasgupta calls it the "Auntie Tongue" syndrome in his book *Otherness of English* and points out its market viability: "English is not a space. It is piece of real estate"(203).

II

What roles, in a history of different contracts and controls, can be attributed to English in our study of Indian literature, in a variety of regional contexts? This is not an easy question to answer. Like many others, I am troubled by the category or construction 'Indian literature'. To me, the term "regional-language literature" or the practice of calling the literature by the language of the region makes more sense. But I can see the point of using it as a descriptive label to build a cumulative archive of Indian literary productions without losing sight of the many histories and differences that underwrite such a project. The very organizing principle of such a body of writings would be comparison among the various regional and linguistic traditions of Indian literature. The manner of entry of English into the Indian literary scene, the particular moves that were made for its consolidation in different locations, the selective dissemination of cultural goods and the creation of a new cultural elite privileged with modern English education, the cross cultural transactions through translations of texts and concepts – these and many such issues would arise in any historical or explanatory accounts of the mediatory role of English in the field of literary productions, and I might add, manipulations. These involve multiple histories and their many explanations. I want to untangle one strand by way of pointing at the material underside of these transactions by looking into marketplace factors, which I take to be a key aspect of institutional English. My notation of institutional English is tied to the many ways in which it can sanction and support some kinds of professional, market-oriented regimen to the exclusion of others.

I wish to cite an instance of the production of a handbook on the twentieth century literatures of India by an American publisher a few years back. The editor, Nalini Natarajan, has written a brief introduction on the regional literatures of India, laying out the scope of the handbook and explaining the contexts and paradigms she has used in organizing her data. The book is a survey on post-1900 literary works from India and is meant to be a 'stepping stone' to a comparative inquiry of national traditions. I am particularly interested in an endnote on contributors which, hopefully, would open some of the issues that concern me here:

Contributors were invited through the usual academic methods of advertisements in the Modern Language Association (MLA) and at Sahitya Academy Conferences in India and through announcements sent to area studies departments in the United States, as well as at other international conferences. An interdisciplinary approach to literature was encouraged. Hence, contributors are from the fields of language area studies, translation, English and creative writing,

political science, philosophy, film and sociology. The contributors are active multilinguals, reading widely in their native language and also, in some cases, writing or translating creatively in it. Given the role of English in the formation of India's elites, especially in the post independence generation, such multilinguality is the exception, rather than the rule, in the academic context of the big cities (16).

The general issues that I want to isolate from Natarajan's experience in designing the handbook are, (a) the global contexts for the reception of *all* national literatures, where all constituents are regarded as so many units, tied to a grand scheme of human intellect and (b) the decline of the Indian multilinguals. I don't see how multilinguals are not active. For me, 'inactive multilinguals' don't exist. Could Natarajan's tautological "active multilingual" be the case of an overzealous editor standing by her weak contributors? Moreover, there is a double inscription of the vanishing multilingual – both at the periphery and the centre. Gayatri Spivak makes the interesting point somewhere about the First World nationals not caring to learn Third World languages. So the dialogue, as and when it takes place, has to be conducted in one language – call it the global language, or whatever.

To be fair to Natarajan, she does put her finger on the problem that I am trying to unpack here. "There are problems", she says in her introduction, "in surveying a regional literature in a colonial language, English" (2). She cites Spivak and Tejeaswini Niranjana to gesture towards "the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages". Natarajan, by way of contextualizing her use of English, describes her effort as "an invitation to deeper knowledge of the regional languages" (2), and dissociates herself from "packaged information" (2). Despite her disclaimers, it is very likely that Natarajan has no control over the use institutional English makes of *her use of English*. At the risk of sounding circular and abstruse, I must point out the instrumental nature of her job in an impersonal network of market-centric knowledge distribution. But, how to carry this load of guilt we carry in relation to our use of English, a language we need in our various ways, yet it privileges us impersonally in various other ways? This is a problem we all share, and this brings me to the question of language choice, with particular reference to English, where the actual use of our literary products may not in most cases match our avowed intentions. And there is no difference here between literary or cultural criticism and creative literature. *God of Small Things* may have avowed subaltern sympathies and *Orientalism* may be a sourcebook on how their discourse *fixed* us; but both Said and Roy, with known activist commitments, have no control over the market factors of the academic and publishing worlds, which turn their efforts into commodities of conspicuous consumption. In the event it would be realistic to face up to our multiple complications and be open about it.

III

I formulate the problem thus: how do we use English under the inflexible sign of 'language economics' and create non-coercive forms of knowledge that are attentive to Illich's vernacular reality and recreates that reality in non-appropriative modes of knowledge dissemination? I suggest a creative and critical project for my identity group – educated middleclass Indians tied to the disciplinary practices of English. We begin by re-inserting ourselves into the domain of the vernacular, understood in the Illichian sense (in the double sense of local tongues and local modes of being). This can initially mean immersing ourselves in the "Indian multiple diaglossia" (Ramanujan's phrase) and getting to know alternative space and traditions in our *proximate environments*. This is a critical process of re-listening, re-learning and re-articulating the vernacular scripts and intonations and, *then* entering into an inter-cultural dialogue, armed with home-grown

information and interpretations that can resist the patronizing tone of metropolitan habits of explanation. I think the question of identity, in our case, is an act of reclaiming our lost vernaculars in the puzzling multiplicities of the present moment.

And therein lie our commonality and our difference.

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Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*: Re-membering Her-story of the Subaltern

Anjali Tripathy

Subaltern is a term in post colonial theory coined by Antonio Gramsci that commonly refers to persons who are socially, politically, and geographically outside the hegemonic power structure, and the term is implicated in identity politics in certain ways. In the 1970s, the term began to be used as a reference to colonized people in the South Asian subcontinent. The Postcolonial feminists see parallels between recently decolonized nations and the state of women within patriarchy in terms of the relationship between a marginalized subgroup and the dominant culture. In her celebrated essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (82-83) In this article I wish to read the protagonists of Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers* (1999) as "subaltern", for they are oppressed and silenced by the hegemonic structures of the British Raj as well as of the Indian patriarchy. The chain of colonization is made clear in one of the novel's overt literary parallels: just as Britain controls and uses India, so do Indian men control and use Indian women. Thus women are victims of "double colonization". The marginalized position of Indian woman as subaltern was reinforced by the appropriation of woman as nation in nationalist discourse.

In his much acclaimed book, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993), Partha Chatterjee argues that well before demands for self-determination and political freedom began to define nationalist activity, it was in the arena of culture that Indian nationalism established its claims of sovereignty. The distinction between material and spiritual was linked to separation of *ghar* and *bahir* – the home and the world. The world is external, the domain of the material, typically seen as male; while the home symbolizes the inner spiritual self with women as its representative. (Chatterjee, 9). Women's bodies were encoded with the "spirituality" of a "superior" tradition. Interpellating the chaste woman's body as the bearer of an essential Indian/ Hindu identity, the period witnessed her transformation into an icon of the honor of the nation, the religious community, and the untainted household and "bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate subordination"(162). The partition riots of 1946-47 and the destabilization of community alliances that they entailed treated women's bodies as a site for the performance of identity according to the same patriarchal logic that resulted in the mass rape of women from the "other" religious community (Muslim), the "purity" of Hindu and Sikh women became a political prerequisite for their belonging in the new nation.

Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* has at its backdrop the partition of India at the time of independence, which has emerged in recent years as a thematic pursuit for both the literary writers and scholars. Baldwin says in an interview with Rich Rennicks via e-mail that she did not set out to write a partition novel at first but the allegory between the personal story of Satya and Roop, the two women in the polygamous marriage and their rivalry for children, which grew naturally into political.

The above statement recalls Fredric Jameson's observation in his thought provoking essay "Third world Literature in the era of Multinational Capitalism"(1986) that "the story of private individual

destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public in third world culture and society.”(320) He makes a generalization regarding all third world cultural productions and argues that all third world texts are allegorical and they are to be read as “national allegories”, particularly when the form is novel.

The discursive power to modulate the personal into public, I believe, is an allegorical power in narration; and it is a strategy of immense epistemic empowerment of female-self in the contemporary (postcolonial) fictional narratives by women, since it assigns to the female-self a legitimate space in history or the narrative of the nation. In *What the Body Remembers* Baldwin employs female body as a metaphor as well as a metonymy, which help personal narrative of woman to be allegorized into a narrative of the nation, and invest with it a power of resistance to critique the narrative of nation and history that have been constructed by men.

Set in pre-partitioned India, mainly Punjab, *What the Body Remembers* is the story of Roop and Satya, co-wives of a Sikh engineer called Sardarji, and also it is an allegorical tale of the partition of India. As Satya, the first wife of Sardarji bears no children, he takes a younger wife, Roop, in order to have a son. The country is torn apart by the events leading to the partition, as is Sardarji’s family by the conflict between the women. Thus, narration of the relationship of the two co-wives, strained by mutual incriminations, becomes an allegory of the discontent of the two nations, India and Pakistan, “married to one conqueror” (407). The realistic and allegorical narrative modes that the writer employs transform individual experiences into collective experience. She also transcends the private/public polarity on behalf of a "nationalist" narrative which is evident as public enters into private life of women.

Widespread violence against women’s body was witnessed at the time of the Partition of India. Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side of Silence* – to which Baldwin has acknowledged her indebtedness in writing *What the Body Remembers* – writes that “some 75,000 women were raped, kidnapped, abducted, forcibly impregnated by men of the ‘other’ religion” (45). Women jumped into wells to drown themselves so as to avoid rape or forced religious conversion; fathers and brothers beheaded their own daughters and sisters and other female members of the family so that they would not fall prey to dishonorable fate. Thousands of women were ‘martyred’ in order to ‘save’ the purity of the religion. This is the reason why Butalia metaphorically titles one of the chapters of her book as “History is a Women’s Body,” showing how history was played out on women’s bodies during the Partition and how women became passive, suffering subjects of history and hence subaltern bodies. Subaltern because I believe that women were not the agents of the bloodied history, nor were they able to claim recognition of their corporeal suffering and even ‘martyrdom’. Historical accounts by male historians have rarely addressed this dark underside of history of partition.

A few remarks about the role of allegory in postcolonial theory are worth mentioning at the moment. Stephen Slemon (who coined the term “post-colonial allegory”) in his essay “Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History” (1988) writes, the postcolonial allegory departs from our conventional understanding of the allegory as a “constrained and mechanical mode” of representing history, as it is involved in “displacing [history] as a concept and opening up the past to imaginative revision” (165). In postcolonial allegory, Slemon goes on to add:

Whatever the specific tactic, the common pursuit is to proceed beyond a "determinist view of history" by revising, reappropriating, or reinterpreting history as a concept, and in doing so to articulate new "codes of recognition" within which those acts of resistance, those unrealized intentions and those re-orderings of

consciousness that "history" has rendered silent or invisible can be recognised as shaping forces in a culture's tradition. (158)

I believe that *What the Body Remembers* fits this postcolonial allegory schema as it raises questions about the authority of the past through imaginative revisions of history. By providing alternative visions and versions of the past from a Sikh woman's view of partition, the novel produces a "counter discourse" (Slemon 11).

Baldwin's novel has great capacity for intervening in the masculinist nationalist discourse and historiography via the belated remembering and retelling of the collective trauma of Partition through the body as a means of such remembrance. That is why body, and particularly woman's body, assumes centrality in thematic terms in the book.

What is remarkable is that the novel presents the aggression on and by individual and community not as an upshot of the time but as a memory from past ages. What the body does remember, according to Shauna Singh Baldwin, is not only individual memory of the characters, but also group or collective memory. She used the concept collective memory when she explained to Ben Patchsea the title of *What the Body Remembers* in an interview that in addition to what Roop remembers, "the title refers to ancestral memory, collective memory/the subconscious and how it feeds our fears, appropriate or not. Fear then influences our actions, especially when the State sanctions violence by promising not to hold anyone accountable" (Feb 2, 2011).

Collective memory in Baldwin reminds one of Toni Morrison's use of "rememory" in *Beloved*. Morrison uses the word rememory to mean the act of remembering a memory. When Sethe explains rememory to her daughter Denver, she states,

If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place- the picture of it- stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think about it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there.(43)

"Rememory" differs from "memory" in its active force independent of the rememberer. It can be shared. Thus "rememory" as a trope hypothesizes the interconnectedness of minds of past and present generations, and thus helps comprehending the "collective memory" of which Baldwin writes. Baldwin writes of people moving across India, "moving not in hope of freedom and independence, but from the fear their bodies remember from other ages."(447) Roop's brother Jeevan says that he has discovered in the army that it is not only, as the English believe, Sikhs, Gurkhas and Marathas who can fight, "but all men whose bodies remember humiliation and anger from this and past lives."(174) "Sardarji's body remembers life preserving fear, passed down centuries in lori rhymes his mother sang him, in painting displayed in the Golden Temple Museum in Amritsar, in poem and in story"(345).

The role of stories, whether in painting, poetry, or other oral narratives, then, is to consolidate a particular view point. It helps perpetuation of communal memory in face of forgetting. Stories, it is observed in the novel, 'are not told for the telling, stories are told for the teaching'(64) . The act of story-telling is important for Baldwin as well as her protagonist Roop as it gives the author as well as her character a voice, lets them break out of the silence they have been conditioned into.

The very act of remembering/re-remembering body in the novel is implicated in an emancipatory politics and a narrative of resistance which the protagonists Satya and Roop work out in strikingly

different ways. When Satya feels she is being slighted by Sardarji, she protests. As sometimes death is the only way to be seen and heard, she willingly contracts tuberculosis and surrenders to death with the hope that

..There will come a time when just being will bring izzat in return, when a woman will be allowed to choose her owner, when a woman will not be owned, when love will be enough payment for marriage, children or no children, just because her sakti takes shape and walks the world again. (362)

Satya makes her presence deeply felt after death. She constantly haunts the thought of Sardarji and Roop as the voice of the truth and wisdom in every critical moments of their life.

Roop too protests with her body. Her transformation from a child wife into an independent self is complete when she is stripped off clothes on the railway platform at Delhi amidst mayhem and bloodbath of partition only to make others see ‘a woman’s body without shame’ and ‘as no man’s possession.’ She wants to scream, “See me, I am human, though I am only a woman. See me, I did what women are for. See me not as a vessel, a plaything, a fantasy, a maid servant, an ornament, but as Vaheguru made me.”(498) In this connection, Ashok K Mohapatra rightly says, “Roop’s exhibitionism is a protest against dishonour both the communities of Hindus and Muslims have perpetrated upon woman’s body by ironically inscribing on it the brutal sign of triumph and honour of their nations” (71). Ironically enough, although woman as a human being and an individual is not considered important, she draws catches attention – at times lewd – primarily as a body. Even when she is looked upon as a social being, she does not set the terms of defining others in social relations. On the contrary, she gets defined by the others and in terms of her relation with men in the family, community and nation. That’s why Roop sees in a dream on the eve of her journey to Delhi, “Men stand watching by the roadside . . . (they know) whose mother I am, whose sister I am, what religion I am, even if they don’t know my name.” (421) However, the act of parading naked, which is a bold act on Roop’s part, helps her overcome the fear of her body (“that lure of lust from the eyes of unrelated men”) and the event helps Roop claims herself albeit in a mode of ironical self-mockery, suggesting that the independence of the new nation-state is a farce.

Roop and Satya protest and they are transformed. But Roop’s sister-in-law Kusum becomes a passive victim of history without claiming recognition. She was killed by her father-in-law and became a “martyr” to save the so called purity of the religion and the community. When Roop’s brother Jeevan tells her how he found his wife Kusum’s body chopped up, her womb ripped out, ‘his story enters Roop’s body,’ and this phrase conveys not only horror of the listener, but the fact that the horror has become a kind of genetic inheritance: ‘this telling is not for Roop, this telling is for Roop to tell his sons, and her sons.’ (509) Roop’s punning determination to ‘remember Kusum’s body, re-membered’ (515) makes body a site of collective memory and history, or rather her-story which gives voice to unvoiced memories, hidden secrets and painful silences.

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Politics of Identity in Pinter's *The Caretaker*

Chittaranjan Misra

Pinter's characters for the most part of their action are engaged in power games. The game is concerned with the relationship of the identities of people who have power with those who don't. Pinter represents a drama of silencing dissidence and oppositions. From the beginning of his career as a dramatist Pinter has chosen to demonstrate situations where the underprivileged, the subaltern is denied access to power being robbed of his right to speak. The subjective self of the victim is subjected to brutal torture so as to render him as an object, his identity reduced to a mere corporeal entity.

These situations in his early plays like *The Room*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker* were analyzed by critics as metaphysical stuff rather than political metaphors. But reconsidered in the light of the plays written by Pinter during the last phase of his writing (after 1980), these plays have come to be discussed with more visibility. The unknown assailants and intruders of the early plays have reappeared as holders of absolute political power, and so have the peace activists, the masked monsters in plays like *One of the Road*, *Mountain Language*, *Party Time*, *Celebration* and *The New World Order*.

Enforcement of dominance through coercion, threat, and brain-washing run through most of his plays spread over a span of half a century baring the postcolonial world order. While killers like Goldberg, McCann, Ben, Nicolas, Douglas and Terry represent the forces that attack freedom and suppress identity politics, the victims like Stanley, Davies, Aston, Lamb Victor and Jimmy are left to their post traumatic conditions.

Except silent ruminations and occasional attempts at articulating the experience inside confinement or torture chamber the oppressed are hardly able to identify with a cause, let alone form groups on identitarian basis.

But Pinter's works are informed by a politics of identity. Lack of adequate background information and antecedents about the characters and the resultant ambiguity shrouding their identities in all his plays is a strategy he has employed to make the plays open ended. The plays refer to themselves as aesthetic structures but persuade the audience for a social engagement.

The Caretaker explores intersection of dominance and subjugation and can be seen as a site of contestation implicated with the concerns of social justice. Davies, a homeless and oppressed old man struggling for survival is given shelter by Aston and Mick in their house is again shown the door at the end of the play. The process of othering is dramatized through his lived experience, his perception of himself complicated by his relationship with the two brothers.

First performed on stage of Arts Theater, London on 27th April, 1960, *The Caretaker* was Pinter's first commercial success. Pinter plays with the idea of identity in this play. When Davies is asked the question "Where do you come from" he replies "Oh, I've been around". Brigitte Gauthier comments: "The first impression we get as we are confronted with this erosion of signs of identity is a disturbing sense of terror" (Gauthier.5). But Davies confronts the terror with resourcefulness. Brigitte feels that "such characters are gifted with an existential strength which throws us into the

arena of politics (5). In contrast to the ambiguity shrouding the identities of the character we find meticulously prepared list of stage properties on the stage direction. A fetid atmosphere is created in staging a room filled with boxes, coal buckets, a lawn mower, a shopping trolley, an iron bed, an unused gas stove in the corner, a statue of the Buddha on the stove, furniture, planks of wood, a clothes horse, pile of newspapers, and other things. A bucket hangs from the ceiling to collect raindrops leaking through the roof with a sack screen on the window. The well defined stage props expose the material conditions and their implications on the performative experience of the characters.

Davies is brought to this junk-filled house by Aston rescued from a fight and is given the job of a caretaker. He connects the two brothers Mick and Aston through his dialogue and wants to convince them that he deserves human dignity and has right to live. Davies goes under an assumed name. His desperate attempt at showing his insurance card to prove his identity and his reference to papers that he has left with a bloke at Sidcup make him more unfamiliar and untrustworthy. He seems to have spent long years on the road and been subjected to be distanced from his cultural origins. His multiple names, vague references to good days of his life, his elusive promise to go to Sidcup pre-suppose a consistent opposition to his identity by a process of disintegration. Critics find from 'Sidcup' clues to his identity. Sidcup, a Royal Artillery Head Quarters of the past used to be source of records and permission. Davies's repeated reference to Sidcup is a camouflage to project a public identity connoting dignity and order. Davies is afraid of a possible leakage from the gas stove. He is afraid of muffled voices, machines, strangers and darkness. This fear can be related to the vision of the Holocaust he is carrying in his subconscious.. The vagrant Davies could be an embodiment of Jewish presence. Elizabeth Angel Perez examines:

The Caretaker contains a vast range of allusion to the concentration camps: Davies won't sleep with his head towards the gas stove, he is constantly staring. Allusion to soap (Always slipped me a little bit of soap), to draughts, to cold put the spectator on the alert: gradually, the paradigms of deportation are being built up. His refusing to acknowledge that sleeping in bed is not a familiar exercise, his obsession with shoes, his refusal to "take out buckets" (bucket being a clear enough allusion to the buckets of excrement that had to be emptied by the prisoners. (141).

The concentration-camp like space is at the back of many of Pinter's plays. Through vision and memory of trauma the self builds up for itself the identity of the displaced and the oppressed in a social space. In hotel, hospital, prison and other rooms victims are interrogated, their identities questioned. The political reality of the contemporary world is represented on the stage. The institutional, social and political pressure prevents free thinking and examining self-images, coercive assimilation to the mainstream power logic is a leitmotif in Pinter.

If Davies is a Jewish presence and presented through his lies and survival strategies, Aston reminds one of the socially excluded and the mentally challenged. Pinter does not produce types but we construct their images abstracted from the cultural references occurring in the process of their experience. Aston's monologue at the end of Act Two is a vivid account of his nervous breakdown and ECT reminding one of Soviet Government's systematic brutalities to political prisoners in psychiatric hospitals. What is described in the monologue of Aston is dramatized in another play *The Hotbouse*. From Aston's speech we get the information that prior to this electric shock therapy he used to visit cafes where he used to talk to people who would listen to him. "I talked too much. That was my mistake."(Pinter.63), he says. Maybe the potential to construct a subjective self was chosen for subjection.

Davis, who has been treated 'like dirt', does not find the house a comfortable place. He hides his Welsh identity. He is not happy to be the caretaker since visitors would come to know of his fake identity and he would be in trouble. His ingratitude to the monks in the monastery, his conspiracy against Aston to take over the charge of the house, his racial hatred against the Blacks can be seen as his politics in a miniature world. But the family ties prove to be stronger and both Mick and Aston steer clear of the tangle of charity and ingratitude.

The question of identity emerges as most significant aspect of the play. The three characters project illusory identities. Mick, through his official jargon, terrorizes Davies. Davies terrorizes Aston with the possibility of another shock therapy; Aston's generosity gets mixed up with post traumatic stress disorder. The Beckettian game of passing the bag from one to the other among the three actors on the stage is symbolic of going after and yet escaping their 'wounded attachments'.

Pinter has constructed the identities of these three characters on the basis of a sustained conflict between each one's public identity and subjectivity, the external and the interior (one's own sense of himself) to show the pathological effects. If we analyze his later political plays resistance to American colonial tactics and totalitarianism of any form becomes clear. But Pinter does not name a specific country or a politician even in these plays. He is involved in a realistic identity politics where one comes to recognize the dynamic character of identity, the topical variables of ontological entities.

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William Wordsworth and Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*: Coming-of-Age in an Ideological Landscape

Aloka Patel

The canonical poet of the Romantic age, William Wordsworth is well known for his concern for nature, and his faith in nature as an inspiring and reforming power for the moral and spiritual growth of an individual. But the study of nature in literature is a complex activity, determined as it is by the culture, ideologies, and beliefs of a class of people. Culture and nature are intimately connected and any reference to the natural world is bound to draw attention to how the landscape of a place affects the people who inhabit it. Human culture, its literature, language, ideologies all arise out of the physical world where it is nurtured. Similarly, the implicit attitudes of a particular group of people has its effect on the environment, and that in effect influences human relationships, its inherent conflicts, complexities, and power plays of class, colour, race and gender. To put it in the words of the eco-writer Berry Lopez: "The contours of subjectivity . . . are moulded by the configurations of the landscapes with which a person has been deeply associated" (Quoted in Gerrard 459). The purpose of this paper is to recognize and understand the fissures of gender defined by such ideologies by William Wordsworth, particularly in his "Lucy" poems, and then proceed to see how the Caribbean novelist, Jamaica Kincaid responds to such ideologies in her suggestively titled novel *Lucy*.

Domination and fear of both women and nature are characteristic of patriarchal thinking. Wordsworth in his "Lucy" poems (knowingly or unknowingly) becomes a participant in constructing the culture (male)/nature (female) binary by associating his pastoral ideals with women. For women writers from the Caribbean, like Jamaica Kincaid, such an approach to nature as a teacher and moral guide to the girl child not only flatters the male ego by undermining the place of women in society, but also justifies the superiority of the English values over the Caribbean life styles.

It has been the practice in most cultures, even from ancient times, of gendering the physical world—particularly land, as feminine because of the associations of reproduction and fertility. Annette Kolodny in her book, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, published in 1975, gives a detailed account of the literary metaphor of landscape as female. Identification of woman's body with landscape as life-giving yet paradoxically wild and mysterious has been common in literature and the arts. Nineteenth century European explorers and colonizers in Africa and the Americas have also identified the landscape as feminine—rich, fertile, and virginal – ready to be tilled and cultivated, and to serve the physical needs of mankind. Such identification, ironically, sees women as vulnerable to the voyeuristic male gaze and exploitation. The richness, the potency, and the idealization of women as life-giving, nurturing and caring beings though flatter the feminine sensibility are oppressive and demeaning to all thinking women. In her novel *Lucy*, Jamaica Kincaid, in a very subtle manner, critically examines the identification of women with nature by the 19th century prophet of nature, William Wordsworth.

Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems carry forward the tradition of the European masters from the classical age, the Bible and its Miltonic adaptation, satires and conduct books (like those of the eighteenth

and nineteenth century writers like Hannah Moore) and also popular fairy tales (such as *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. These references project the girl child as closer to nature, being bred and nurtured in nature in order to acquire the virtues of the domestic and chaste maid doing household chores dexterously. But such conditions tend to debase women by assigning to them a subservient position, physically and intellectually. These also teach them to mould themselves and restrict their personalities to fit into the values prescribed by an overwhelmingly male sense of being with its prescribed ideological format. Wordsworth has been an ardent champion for nature, but very often such an epithet carries a restricted and negative connotation as it limits the scope of his concerns by ignoring the larger dimensions of life and its manifold issues. Arnold sees him as an upholder of the pastoral tradition, a poet who praised rural life while decrying an increasingly industrialized, urban, city life. Traditional reading has it that Wordsworth sought to ennoble and spiritualize nature. He saw the lives of the common people—field workers, old men, rustics, shepherds, etc – as guided by the promptings of nature; and he sought to idealize the portrayal of bucolic lives his poems. But nothing can be farther from truth than what Greg Garrard has to say in his essay ‘Radical Pastoral?’ (1996): “any attempt to elevate the subjects of pastoral ... any attempts to portray an ideal human ecology, can only be seen as mystification or distortion of reality” (457). Garrard raises fundamental questions about Wordsworth’s honesty of representation of nature and also his faith in the essential relationship between human beings and their natural environment as morally elevating and mutually rewarding.

As we look into the “Lucy” poems we gradually discover that Wordsworth exploits the traditional socio-historical notion of woman’s subordinate position in the Nature/Culture divide and transforms a culturally constructed notion into a transcendent idea by identifying woman with nature. Women in Wordsworth’s poetry are silenced and given a marginal position to that of the male. If we take the poem “Solitary Reaper” we find that the song of the reaper gains prominence not because her song deserves a mention against the tradition of a pastoral world, but because the poet uses it to perpetuate his own sense of self. In “Nutting” the unidentified maiden is made to manifest her presence only towards the end to naturalize the temperament of the boy, and not to evoke any sense of her own unique individuality without the attendant attributes expected from her in keeping with her bond with the world of nature. Or, for that matter in Wordsworth’s “To a Highland Girl” the girl is linked with a list of natural objects which she is to embody and transcend, thus suggesting that the girl by herself has no place or significance. In fact it is the man in his poetry who seeks self-realization and gratification of his emotional and spiritual needs. In the words of Marlon B. Ross:

Wordsworth joins forces with the disembodied voices of tradition and reaction, for he subtly and quietly reasserts and solidifies the priority of male needs and desires. The male’s need for self-identity is repeatedly reenacted in the poems, and the female always serves that need as the object of his desire; ironically, though she is always unattainable, she is always obtained (meaning held totally) in that she is objectified—hence contained—by the contours of male desire. Thus, as Wordsworth reaffirms and solidifies the metaphysical tendency to claim that the source and tales of human identity preexists in an ordaining natural order, he does so through the hierarchy of gender in which the female becomes a subspecies of male humanity. (392)

In the 1815 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* the ‘Lucy’ poems are arranged in two separate categories. ‘Strange fits of passion have I known,’ ‘She dwelt among the untrodden ways,’ and ‘I travell’d among unknown men’ are among ‘Poems Founded on the Affections’; ‘Three Years she grew in sun and shower’ and “A slumber did my spirit seal’ are with ‘Poems of Imagination.’ In the three initial lyrics seemingly secure in his own world, the poet is confronted with dreams of mortality. In the last two

lyrics the dream has become a reality and the poet is confronted with a world without Lucy. The poems celebrate the child's spontaneous communion with nature. Lucy poems, whether based on a living counterpart or not are highly symbolic. Critics like Jonathan Wordsworth, Cleanth Brooks and James G. Taaffe would relate the symbols to Wordsworth's own self-transformation during his stay at Goslar, the poet's own maturation, and a realization of the temporal world. The imagery of Lucy (also meaning light among other things) embodies the idea of creativity or creative light that the poet fears losing with growing age. The poems celebrate the child's spontaneous communion with nature. When the poet portrays Lucy, it is not the girl that he evokes; rather he evokes nature in the images of the 'violet' and the 'untrodden ways.' Lucy therefore, personifies the poet's relationship with nature. But a careful reading would show how Lucy is implicated in the nature/culture divide.

What strikes us first on reading the poems is that we never get to meet or see Lucy even though she is at the centre of the poem, and, almost as it were, pervades the landscape that is being described. Lucy is observed by an interpreter who stands outside the state of nature, giving injunctions to Lucy to grow up as a gentle and nurturing being. It is as if the virtues of the English countryside or Lucy, their redemptive qualities and inherent beauty can be perceived as an emotional salve only by someone who is placed at an objective distance from them. The series begins in a dream state with the poet-lover addressing a distant beloved who, although ostensibly placed among natural elements in the landscape, actually perhaps exists only in the poet's dream. The poem has been read as an expression of the neurotic ideas of losing a beloved and by association, and through association, a state of nature and the poet's creative abilities. Before he can arrive at such a state, on the way to meet his beloved, the poet evokes the traditional Western symbol of love and loyalty—the rose: "she I loved look'd everyday/Fresh as a rose in June." The rose is also but in conjunction with the moon, a traditional symbol of change. As the poet's passion keeps rising, symbolized by the galloping horse, the moon keeps constantly sinking behind Lucy's cottage before completely disappearing. In other words, even while the lover is going to meet his beloved he fears losing her constancy in love and loyalty and consequently her chastity: "And all the while my eyes I kept/on the descending moon." Would Lucy's love change like the changing moon? Or does the poet mean something else as well? After all, the moon also has other symbolic significances in European myths and literature—it is also, like Lawrence has described the Syria Dea, the symbol of creativity and fertility. There is therefore, for the poet, the possibility of Lucy's losing her chastity the moment she achieves maturity, since she embodies the creative feminine principle that is symbolized by the moon. The idea of fertility and fruitfulness has also already been recalled in the image of the orchard plot, which cannot but evoke the Garden of Eden, Original Sin, and of the Fall of man and its association with evil. Going to meet Lucy involves going through the orchard. In other words it is a journey through sin and evil that the poet undergoes. Woman and nature therefore become the cause of man's Original sin, Lucy after all also refers to the fallen star—Lucifer—the ultimate evil. Whatever the symbolic significance of the sudden "dropping" of the moon—whether the fear of losing the fertility and creative principles, or the loss of chastity of Lucy, it is the woman who has to bear the burden of guilt as the cause of evil. By rousing such fears in the mind of the poet-lover, the poet is in fact, already laying down values that the lover hopes to inculcate in the beloved.

The poems also evoke elements from the natural world to present to the reader the susceptibility of women to 'sinning'. As yet Lucy is chaste and loyal, but what if the poet's fears come true—and the image of the rose is destroyed by the symbol of the disappearing moon? The irony here lies in that the lover can now only hope for the death of the loved object: "O mercy! to myself I cried/ If Lucy should be dead!" Dreams, as we know since Freud, are states of wish fulfillment. To Jamaica Kincaid, and also perhaps to Freud, sexual betrayal itself is, for the lover, a form of death. To Annie

John, the protagonist of Kincaid's novel of the same name, her mother dies the moment she discovers her mother in the primal scene. Already from the beginning of the series of Lucy poems: "strange fits of passion... the poet has stated the qualities that are not appreciated in a young girl, and therefore, through equivocation begins to define the virtues desirable in a girl/woman, the first of which is chastity. Any deviation from the principles can only induce the lover to wish for the beloved's death.

The other poems are like epitaphs to someone who has already died. The second poem in the series, "She dwelt among untrodden ways" goes on to describe Lucy's solitary condition and her beauty which is given to be understood as the result of her elusiveness. She is compared to a violet and a shining star. Lucy's intimate relationship with nature and the ideal natural conditions in which she is nurtured is expressed in the very first lines: "she dwelt among untrodden ways." Her beauty may be peerless: "Fair as a star when only one/ Is shining in the sky," but it is also frail as a violet and is secure only in obscurity. In this case Wordsworth envisions a chaste, ethereal and disembodied nun-like figure "whom there were none to praise/ and very few to love." "Half hidden from the eye," Lucy as a maid is the embodiment of the conventional notion of woman as a mysterious creature. Lucy "lived unknown" with "none to praise" her beauty; and Wordsworth subtly drops in another virtue desirable in the maiden—of obscurity and self-effacement. Ironically, Wordsworth's self-transformation can take place only by effacing the identity of Lucy. Lucy's elusiveness, and finally her death serves as a morbid inspiration to the poet: "she is in her grave, and oh,/ The difference to me!" It is the final "me" that makes us conscious that it is not really Lucy who is important to the context of the poet. She is not the subject of the poem and memory of Lucy is simply a ploy for the poet to know more of himself. His self-realization depends on Lucy's anonymity.

"I travell'd among unknown men" is said to be one of the strongest expressions of love. But by identifying Lucy with the English landscape Wordsworth has transferred his interest to his love for England. Here again, we have an example of an English Romantic, like the American Romantics mentioned by Annette Kolodny, describing landscapes in terms of women. The woman gets identified with the landscape to be used or abused. "I travell'd among unknown men" is a passionate avowal of the poet not to "quit" the shores of England. The first four poems as we know are written consequent upon Wordsworth's visit to Germany. Wordsworth had visited Germany with Dorothy and Coleridge, and Coleridge in a letter to his wife had mentioned how the presence of Dorothy had raised eyebrows there: that 'a sister' in Germany "is considered as only a name for mistress" (Quoted in Matlak 50). If we extend the biographical implication of this poem, it can only mean that Lucy's pristine beauty, her innocence and the subtlety of her love can be appreciated only in England. Thus, Lucy is beautiful only in the English landscape, and England is cherished because of its association with Lucy, her beauty, innocence and chastity which are virtues cherished in England. Women writers from the third world, English colonies question these ideological impositions on women, and the self-assumed superiority of English men. They find the claims of the superiority of their culture and values of chastity and virginity which they impose as a matter of right not only on the English women, but also in the colonies, as oppressive. They extend this analogy also to condemn the English man's justification to possess their land and enslave their minds and bodies. Having colonized the 'virgin' landscape, the English also impose their ideals of morality, sin and virtue on the women inhabitants of the colonies.

Lucy died young, in the peak of her glorious youth. She, therefore remains forever young in the memory of the poet-lover, serving as an eternal source of inspiration. By analogy the landscape in

which Lucy grew, that is England, is also kept forever youthful and glorious. The ‘mountains’, the ‘bowers’, the ‘green fields’ where Lucy played will, like her, remain forever the same. In her death Lucy immortalizes the environment in which she was brought up. In serving her poet/lover as an inspiration she is ennobled and becomes an icon of womanly virtues. Wordsworth, in other words, has prescribed values such as a child-like innocence and beauty—a beauty untarnished by the mark of civilization and modernity. It is only women such as these—who are chaste and nun-like – who are praised, and find a place in the songs of poets. What was supposed to be an epitaph for Lucy has actually become an expression of love for England. Alternately, the ideal love that the poet bears in his imagination can be found only in England, and nowhere else: “Among the mountains did I feel/ The joy of my desire;/ And she I cherish’d turn’d her wheel/ Besides an English fire.” We can but only agree with Frances C. Ferguson that “The three Lucy poems ‘Founded on Affections’ accommodate the assumption that the poet’s unseen love object would be an English Maid” and nobody else (Ferguson 543).

In “Three years she grew” nature and woman become one as nature is personified as the loving, caring and nurturing mother who takes upon herself the responsibility of moulding Lucy in her own image: “She shall be mine, and I will make...” Ostensibly it is a lyric which can be read as an elegy to a woman who Wordsworth admired because of her association with nature. Here, the ‘violet’ of “She dwelt among untrodd’n ways” is replaced by “lovelier flower” who will be groomed by nature to be a companion to the entire environment—to the “rock” and the “plain”, to “earth and heaven, in glade and bower,” to the “lawn,” the “mountain”, the “willow”, the “stars” and the “river”. Nature has a litany of values laid for Lucy—She shall be a delicate flower, a sportive fawn, young and innocent, a “balm” to the suffering heart, silent and suffering, calm and composed, even against a storm, nurturing and sheltering like the clouds and trees:

And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.
‘The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend

For the poet knowing Lucy is like knowing nature itself. But, for the feminist critic of Wordsworth: “the psychology of this poem requires that nature be masculine; however, Wordsworth does not have to commit himself by using any masculine reference” (Ross 396). However, I would say that Nature here is very much a feminine presence—a Great Mother who has from her incipient stage herself internalized the feminine principles laid down by a patriarchal and hierarchal social order. Now she has taken charge to pass on this legacy of oppression to her protégée, Lucy. Lucy is only three years old: “Three years she grew...” when Nature adopts her as a surrogate mother to pass down the moral codes set down by society. At only three years of age Lucy is credulous, vulnerable and impressionable, hence, in a perfect position to be groomed to cater to the demands of the patriarchal society without questioning its authority. Though she has to grow up to be the nurturing and caring kind, ironically she will also be dependent upon the man for her existence.

That Lucy is being transformed by nature (of course, at the behest of the poet) to fit a social role is evident in the lines: “She shall be mine, and I will make/ A lady of my own.” Having said so much, Nature then goes on to expound what it means to be nature’s lady. The image that emerges is mostly that of a well-bred society-lady. The term “lady” cannot be free from its social connotations of aristocracy and sophistication, of a special status and class, and of proper manners and etiquettes. Lucy is to be bestowed with all the qualities that can ready her to be the bride and companion of a gentleman. She has to be gentle, simple, calm, meek, mild and reserved to appeal to a gentleman.

Marlon Ross clearly states: “The word lady makes little sense when dissociated from its social application, a form of status granted to women of a reputable class and chaste reputation. Nature attends wholly to two aspects of Lucy’s development, the aesthetic and the affectional” (399-400).

Lucy is just three years old, “Three years she grew in sun and shower” when Nature adopts her to bestow her with all the virtues fit for a lady: “Even in the motions of the storm/ Grace that shall mould the maiden’s form.” Not only does disciplining of a woman’s manners begin at a very early age when she is credulous, vulnerable and impressionable, to be a perfect wife and mother, but she has to unquestioningly cater to the demands of the patriarchal society. She has to learn the virtues of silence: “Grace that shall mould the maiden’s form/ By silent sympathy.” It is grace and silence that will inspire her towards sympathy and beauty. Not speech but silent hearing shall make Lucy beautiful: “She shall lend her ears.../.../ And beauty born of murmuring sound/ Shall pass into her face.” It is not just the beauty of form that qualifies a maiden to be a mate to the poet. True beauty lies in grace and lady-like behavior. Therefore, class and sophistication are what lend women true virtue to serve as a link between nature and the civilizing and progressive mind of the poet/lover. Lucy’s beauty lies not in her voice but in her innocent and ‘graceful’ state of silence. Silence in women has also earlier been seen as beautiful by Wordsworth in: “It is a beauteous evening, calm and free/ The holy time quiet as a Nun.”

Although Nature is given a voice in this lyric, we should not forget that Lucy is non-existent and has no voice. Lucy is given a voice (“Her laughter light”) only in the deleted 1799 MS version of “Strange fits of passion”. Even though she is the central character in the series of lyrics, she is marginalized in her silence. Nature, here, is not a benevolent mother, but like Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy would say: “a goddess from an old book.” She is the tyrannical god from the Old Testament, with only the gender reversed, which, after having internalized the patriarchal values, now imposes her ideals upon the young and impressionable Lucy. Bred in the image of this mother-nature, Lucy too would grow up to be a goddess. But again, ironically, this goddess is the victim of the male desire for a submissive female. By idealizing Lucy, the poet is in fact denying her any redemptive human qualities. To quote Ross again:

The tendency in Western culture is to position the female closer to nature than the male. This putative intimacy between the female and nature is based upon a complex of rationales that includes the woman’s biological role of reproducer and her conventional role as nurturer; this intimacy between the female and nature is also posited to assert the primacy and primitiveness of feminine instinct and affection. The woman is the less developed creature, created secondarily only as a helpmate, as an afterthought; as the masculine mind wields its reason to construct society and civilization, the woman stands as a constant reminder of his inescapable relationship to nature, of the base first nature that can never be fully eradicated. Whenever this base first nature is seen as creative, the female is received “positively” for sustaining the link between that nature and mankind; whenever this base first nature is seen as a threat, however, the woman is viewed “negatively” as a creature who lures man away from the progress of mind and civilization. (401)

Though she has to grow up to be the nurturing and caring kind, ironically she will also be dependent upon the man for her existence. Lucy’s education is like Kincaid’s Lucy’s schooling where women were educated to grow up in the image of English women from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century. Wordsworth seems to be overtly proposing a new kind of feminine education in natural surroundings, in opposition to the institutionalized education in cities. But what he has in fact done is simply displaced the same system of education fostered in society to a different setting. Instead of dismantling an oppressive cultural practice Wordsworth only fosters it. Nature dictates and Lucy

obeys. But just at the moment Lucy comes-of-age and acquires maturity of body and mind, she dies: “The work was done.../She died.” Killed by the poet the character now lives only in his memory forever in the ideal state of purity and innocence, uncorrupted by society and its evils.

Wordsworth disallows any questioning of the inevitability of Nature’s plan for Lucy. Lucy dies in the prime of youth, beauty and maturity. She is not allowed to grow beyond the ideal state since the only possible outcome of the climax of an ideal state would be a fall from grace! While Lucy remains forever beautiful in the memory of the beholder, Nature remains calm and quiet and stagnant—unmoved. In contrast, her absence makes a difference only to the poet: “she is in her grave, and oh,/ The difference to me!” The civilized poetic mind evolves psychologically and aesthetically only now, after Lucy’s death. Long ago Lucy “seem’d a thing that could not feel/ The touch of earthly years.” But now she is the symbol of the absoluteness of death and of human fears. She is dead and “She neither hears nor sees.” “A Slumber did my spirit seal...” is another epitaph recalling Lucy’s merging with nature in her death. But we cannot for sure say that Lucy is really dead. After all, the poem recapitulates a state of sleep. And as such, belongs to the group of “Poems of Imagination.” In his sleep the poet has no fears of Lucy aging. But she also has “no motion,” “no force” nor does she see or hear. What does the poet then mean by the “human fears?” By putting Lucy to death she has been denied “motion”, “force”, the ability to “hear” or “see”. “She seem’d”—only seemed—“a thing that could not feel/ The touch of earthly years”. She seemed therefore ethereal. But, like the poet himself admits, she does “feel” the earthly years—that she is human not a spirit or a “mute insensate” “thing”—that she feels, hears, sees and is not “mute” like nature had proposed her to be. These are the real fears of the poet—that Lucy might have an independent mature mind, that she may feel the differences, hear and see and most important, speak.

The series of Lucy poems begins and ends in a state of sleep and dream. And dreams as we have already said, are sites of wish-fulfillment. By denying Lucy the powers of speech, hearing and seeing, the poet is denying her the experience of the senses. A sensual experience would undoubtedly be a violation of her chastity which would no longer qualify her to feature in the list of Wordsworth’s ideal women. Wordsworth’s Lucy is merely a “thing”—not a human being. And therefore the best place for her is “With rocks, and stones, and trees”—not among human beings! In death Lucy is exactly what Wordsworth hoped she would be—ethereal, chaste, virginal, and natural. Lucy had to die because having come-of-age now she risks her nun-like existence. Why otherwise does Wordsworth see her “Roll’d round in earth’s diurnal course?” William Whitson (1667-1752) in his *New Theory of the Earth* (1696) had argued that “though the annual motion of the earth commenced at the beginning of the Mosaick creation; yet its Diurnal Rotation did not till after the Fall of man” (Chandler 463). Chandler argues that even though Wordsworth may not have read Whitson, he must surely have been aware of the theory which was quite popular during his times. We can safely conclude, therefore, that Lucy’s death is nothing but a consequence of her fall from grace. Her death is a personal loss to the poet/lover for not being able to possess his prize. By killing Lucy, the poet is able to retain the nubile image of Lucy as pure and untouched. In the poet’s dreams this living and breathing Lucy thus, is transformed into a disembodied spirit.

I would not say that the novel I am going to discuss in opposition to Wordsworth’s “Lucy poems” is a rewriting of Wordsworth’s Lucy. Far from it, Jamaica Kincaid’s eponymous narrator, Lucy can only be understood as a parody of the Wordsworthian Lucy. Kincaid’s Lucy is a rebel against a male supremacist society. She is bitter, she is angry, full of self doubt and conflict, but bold in her honesty of expression of such doubts.

Jamaica Kincaid, the angry writer of fictional and non-fictional works from the Caribbean island of Antigua, now settled in America, has become popular because of her bitter indictment of European colonization and its effects, particularly on women. Lucy Josephine Potter, the narrator and central character of Kincaid's *Lucy* is reserved, skeptical, and voyeuristic in opposition to Wordsworth's Lucy who was the victim of a voyeuristic male gaze. In an act of rebellion Kincaid's narrator returns the male gaze of the Wordsworthian narrator. Unlike Wordsworth's Lucy who is a native of the English landscape and a child of nature, Kincaid's Lucy is an exile from her native colonized world of the Caribbeans. Unlike Wordsworth's Lucy who had no voice at all, she is loud in her opposition to any kind of domination—physical or ideological.

Kincaid's Lucy, like her author, is from the Caribbean island of Antigua, a British colony. She therefore, hails from a landscape both politically as well as geographically very different from the English landscape. It is a landscape politically colonized and geographically exploited by the English. Tourist guides would describe this island as a heaven on earth—a garden of Eden. Although set in 1968, almost a hundred and fifty years after Wordsworth's Lucy was written, it evokes the reality of the pristine landscape of Wordsworth's imagination where his Lucy was located. By situating Lucy in 1968, Kincaid is also strategically locating her character at a crucial point in the history of Antigua. Antigua gained Associate status in 1967, and by locating the novel in 1968, Kincaid makes a statement of independence of thought and expression after one year of gaining freedom from imperial rule. Whereas Wordsworth's English landscape was threatened by the possibility of industrialization and growing urbanization, Kincaid's Antigua has not only been threatened but also its natural resources have been exploited by the wealth accruing from the very process of industrialization and technological development. Yet, as if not satisfied by the horror and degradation caused to the environment, Europeans and white Americans unashamedly continue to see in it the pristine beauty that it seemingly retains. Kincaid's angry response to such hypocrisy is also brilliantly expressed in her polemic against the white tourists in Antigua in her non-fictional writing, *A Small Place*. Kincaid's Lucy is deliberately shifted from this supposedly unspoiled (but in fact corrupted and exploited in the process of exploration and colonization) rural setting of Antigua to a Western, 'civilized' and metropolitan world from where Wordsworth came. What we have is a confrontation between idealized Western civilization and the rural colonial world. Simultaneously, there is a confrontation between the Western ideals of chaste femininity and landscape and the unreality and unsustainability of such ideals in alien settings. There is also a confrontation between the urban metropolitan world of conquerors and conquered, of dominator and the dominated and, male and female.

Lucy Josephine Potter is a representation of what the English Lucy of the 19th century would have grown up into had she been allowed a tongue and a voice. Kincaid's Lucy is the voicing of prejudices experienced by the now dead Wordsworthian Lucy. She radically subverts Wordsworth's feminine ideal of a nun-like figure. In the words of David Yost: "Where Wordsworth's Lucy lives in implied harmony with nature, Kincaid's Lucy imagines walking through a field of daffodils dragging a scythe, in order to kill every single one; where the Lucy poem 'I travell'd among unknown men' features a narrator who loves England 'more and more' the farther he goes from it, Lucy features a narrator who could scarcely hate England any more than she already does" (Yost 154). Both the Lucys are vastly different from each other: one comes from a colonized world of mystery, magic and Obeah, the other from the rational idealistic world of colonizers; one is coloured, the other white, one a descendent of a slave, the other a free spirit, one from a class of the dominated, the other from the class of dominators; one from a hot tropical climate, the other from a cold country; one is a rebel, the other is subservient. The only thing common between them is their suffering. They share

the identity of the oppressed woman and therefore the sufferings due to the imposition of white patriarchal ideals and moral codes.

Wordsworth's works had become deeply implicated in the colonial education system. Kincaid, in her novels testifies to the profound ideological impact of English Romantic poetry, particularly Wordsworth's. Lucy remembers an incident from her childhood when the colonial curricular indoctrination of English language and values had forced her to memorize and recite Wordsworth's "Daffodils". Daffodils were certainly not native to Antigua, they were flowers she would not see until she was nineteen years old and in exile. Yet she had recited the poem in exact imitation of her European counterparts to the great joy and satisfaction of her mother and her teachers, both of who are ultimate examples of the internalization of European values by the colonized people. The mother is made in the image of the Mother Nature in the Lucy poems and both are equally severe and tyrannical in imposing European ideals of chaste femininity and lady-like manners onto the girls. Lucy's mother had always tried to dress her daughter like a young girl in a picture that she possessed. This girl was white and set against an English landscape very much like Wordsworth's Lucy. Lucy says that her mother could never succeed in making her daughter in the image of this girl. It is obvious, she would not—Lucy was not white, and the place she was brought up was not England. All of Lucy's mother's attempts at instilling English values into her daughter had failed. After all, the islands were a place where promiscuity was not frowned at, although a chaste woman would be held in high esteem. Lucy's school is also suggestively named Queen Victoria's Girls' School. Lucy's mother trains her daughter in proper etiquettes and manners—table-manners, lady-like speech and reserve. The daughter's departure signals an attempt to escape from the oppressive influence of the mother. Lucy says that although the mother thought that she was sending Lucy away to financially support the family, she had herself been planning it all along. Ironically, the English values, symbolized through Wordsworth, come back to haunt Lucy in the metropolitan centre where she is supposed to have escaped. The mother also lingers in the image of Mariah, Lucy's mistress who also plays the role of surrogate mother to her. But Mariah is not a tyrannical goddess like her own mother—she is a benevolent one. As her name, Mariah, suggests she is made in the image of the virginal, chaste and tolerant Mother Mary (Mary also happens to be the name of Wordsworth's wife). Her manner of imposing values would be of the more persuasive and subtle kind that religions impose. While the real mother was authoritative in imposing her ideals, the benevolent mother attempts to do it in a more subtle manner. Ultimately one is not very different from the other, and neither of them succeeds. Mariah introduces Lucy to the daffodils "doing a curtsy to the lawn." But Lucy would not be as submissive as this. She vows to erase the poem from her mind. But so insistent is the colonial process, that Lucy dreams continuously of the daffodils chasing her: "I was being chased down a narrow and cobbled street by bunches and bunches of those same daffodils that I had vowed to forget, and when finally I fell down from exhaustion they all piled on top of me, until I was buried deep underneath them and was never seen again." (18) The daffodils therefore become symbolic of an oppressive system which had the power to erase her identity.

The horror of the daffodils is also an instance of the horror of the idealizing of women in the Western Romantic tradition. Wordsworth's Lucy is only one side of the story—the story of the docile and obedient girl. Kincaid's Lucy is not exactly the other of the Wordsworthian one. Rather she is the same submissive Lucy who comes to the metropolitan city at the vulnerable young age of nineteen to work as an au pair—but only until she has reached the city and acquired maturity. Kincaid's Lucy will continue the story of Wordsworth's Lucy which was left incomplete. Both of them are stories of coming-of-age of a young girl. One of them dies the moment she has acquired maturity, the other continues to live the incomplete life. The maid's words in Mariah's house when

Lucy first came to work are evidence of how the more modern Lucy is made in the image of the Romantic one: “like a nun... so pious it made [the maid] feel at once sick to her stomach and sick with pity”(11). The maid’s words echo Lucy’s fear that she will never escape her mother’s sexual ideology. It takes hardly one year for this pious girl to die and give place to a more liberated and sexually emancipated woman. If we try to make an estimate from the events mentioned in the poems Wordsworth’s Lucy must have been approximately nineteen years old when she died. As we have already seen in our analysis of the Lucy poems Lucy may not at all have died. She may only have dared to voice her preference for a more liberated life free of sexual inhibitions in a biased society. The reference to the unnamed Great Lakes in page 35 of the novel, which Lucy visits with Mariah and her family, is indicative of Kincaid’s obvious indictment of the Romantic Lake poet and his idealization of women. Lucy’s response to the Lakes are given in her words

From my room I could see the lake. I had read of this lake in geography books, had read of its origins and its history, and now to see it up close was odd, for it looked so ordinary, gray, dirty, unfriendly, not a body of water to make up a story about. (35)

Lucy’s response to the lake is typical of anyone visiting it from the islands. It tells of the differences in landscape of two different worlds and also of their perception. A lake like this one would not be something magnificent to be glorified in a poem when compared to the vast body of beautiful water surrounding the islands. Like most of us who are used to the sea, Lucy finds the bestowing of such glory on so insignificant a body of water as ridiculous. Lucy also finds ridiculous the attempts made by Mariah and her friends, who come to the lakes only for picnicking and spending holidays (like Wordsworth did) showing concern and getting worked up about vanishing marshlands (like Wordsworth was in his *A Guide through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*.) All of these environmentalists had houses built in these marshlands and Lucy sarcastically remarks to herself, “Well, what used to be here before this house we are living in was built?” All the members of this organization were well off but they “made no connection between their comforts and the decline of the world that lay before them” (72).

That Lucy and all women like her could not be defined by Western theories; and that Western ideologies had no significance for them is expressed in the interpretation by Lewis of a dream that Lucy has. The dream where Lucy sees herself running naked on a ground paved with cornmeal, being chased by Lewis and eventually falling into a pit full of snakes, is interpreted in Freudian terms.

In the novel Lucy has three dreams in which she is chased by daffodils, by Lewis, and by thousands of people on horseback carrying cutlasses to cut her up into small pieces. All the three dreams are interrelated. Daffodils come from the Wordsworthian poem as already discussed. Lewis, through analogy could refer to Lucifer and to the Fall, just as Mariah could refer to Mary. Lucy says, her mother is supposed to have named her after Lucifer, and therefore, ultimately referring to Man’s Fall and so to Wordsworth’s “Lucy” poems. Finally, people on horseback could only recall an age of chivalry and Knightly lovers. Like the lover of the Lucy poem, “Strange fits of passion...” who galloped on horseback to his lady-love’s cottage only to find her dead (if so only in his dream), it is Wordsworth and his sexual ideals that are ready to kill Lucy (in her dream) with cutlasses.

In her hatred of the daffodils and in opposition to the colonial pursuits of her mother, Kincaid’s Lucy is a deliberate variation on the chaste femininity of the Wordsworthian Lucy. Quite candidly Lucy asserts: “I did not care about being a virgin and had long been looking forward to the day when I could rid myself of that status” (82-83). Lucy, along with her friend Peggy refuses to be an

object of the traditional male gaze. Branded as a slut by her own mother, Lucy risks moral and social chastisement. In retaliation against her mother's impositions and the high moral, spiritual and social values that Christianity accorded to chastity and virginity, Lucy decides to live the fallen life of the iconic rebel, Lucifer. By claiming the slut identity, Kincaid's Lucy strips herself of all moral embellishments and stands in total vulnerability, ready to face a patriarchal and oppressive society, "the girl my mother had hoped I would be: clean, virginal, beyond reproach. But I felt the opposite of that" (97).

Even while she was a girl, her mother, representing society as a whole, had hoped that Lucy would be an ideal wife, a caring and nurturing mother, like a balm nursing suffering mankind to health. Lucy resists this domesticated image of herself, "I had been a girl of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse... a sense of duty to my parents, obedience to the law and worship of convention... But in one year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence"(133). A more vehement expression of her rejection of patriarchal ideals of a domestic life for women is expressed in Lucy's refusal to identify with the photograph of her in the midst of some everyday domestic duty, taken by her lover, Paul. In the words of the Holcombs: "The photograph that Paul had taken of Lucy depicts the young black West Indian woman in a moment of domestic chores: preparing food, performing a model gender role activity"(URL).

Lucy is the voice of the liberated woman. As the eponymous narrator says, she would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone. She believes in woman's emancipation and is unafraid to give vent to her views by raising her voice against any kind of oppression. She has learnt: "taste is not the thing to seek out in a tongue, how it makes you feel—that is the thing" (44). The tongue that she uses to manipulate her rebellious voice as a weapon to fight back white supremacy— makes her feel free, liberated, and an independent human being.

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**Documenting the Forgotten History: Reading some Aboriginal
Poets of Canada**

This paper attempts to explore the issue of post-colonial identity of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. They are peoples of diverse nations, but generally divided into three major groups, such as the Indian, the Métis and the L'nuit. They are also called the First Nations peoples or the Native peoples. There is no unanimity among the various nations in Canada regarding a common label of identification. However, I have used the commonly accepted label, i.e. "Aboriginal" for these peoples. In this paper, I have made an attempt to appreciate some poetical works by writers of Native origin and show how they respect their "oral" tradition from which they get inspiration even today in the age of technology. They were considered to be peoples without any history and tradition by the imperial white settlers, only because they had no written document or script to record the past in the white way. The European tourists, traders and settlers who migrated and occupied their land forcibly by signing treaties with them declared them to be "savage" Indians, uncivilized and uncultured. The history of the land was written from the day of the Europeans' arrival. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, many aboriginal children who were separated from their parents and educated in the boarding schools, began to express their silent voices in the master's language and in different artistic forms such as literature, paintings and other visual arts. Thus they not only succeeded to break down the stereotypes about their people created by the mainstream but also adopted new technologies to recreate their forgotten history and self-identity like other minority groups all over the world. I have used some visuals and some poems to depict their post-colonial identity.

"The post-colonial desire is the desire of decolonized communities for an identity and this question of identity is closely connected to nationalism, for those communities are often, though not always, nations" (During 1987: 125). According to Simon During, the notion of identity is connected with the notion of nation primarily, not with the individual. He further states that the post-colonial drive towards identity centers around language, because language defines one's selfhood and nationhood.

Canada has been recognized as one of the former colonies of the British Empire, and it still adopts the British Constitution for administrative purposes and regards the British Queen as its supreme head. Many critics consider it as an ideal laboratory for the study of post-colonial identity and writing. As we know, it emerged as a new nation by the union of three founding nations: the First Nations, the French and the English. Later on Europeans, Asians and Africans migrated to this 'Turtle's Island' and settled down as minorities. These people with their distinct national origins feel that they have been deeply affected by colonialism. The French have a sense of being colonized by the English; the English settlers have a sense of being colonized by the neighboring elder sister, the USA; and the First Nations, who are also called the Aboriginals, have a feeling that they have been colonized by all the settlers including the French and the English. The contemporary Canada primarily deals with the new identity being free from the US influence, and at the same time the minorities grapple with the process of decolonization.

The First Nations peoples of Canada regard themselves as members of an internally colonized country in modern times. The settlers from European countries came in contact with the nomadic peoples of various Aboriginal nations on this "Turtle's Island". They were cordially welcomed by the local tribes and supported whole-heartedly to survive and settle down comfortably in this

strange land. In return, they were offered many gifts including wine, blankets and tobacco along with motor-vehicle and many other items of technology for their necessities. They signed a number of treaties with the European settlers and were promised by the administrators that the treaties of their land-ownership would be respected always. Their lands were stolen away for agriculture and purposes of industrialization. They were pushed into barricaded locations namely "ghettos" or reservations. If they moved out of their reservations, they lost their Native status and land as well. They were not considered as members of the mainstream by their foreign rulers, who accepted their role of tutorship and began to "civilize" the "savage Indians" in the manner white men all over the world have done. The imperial government implemented "assimilation policies" by means of various Indian Acts to gradually "assimilate and acculturate" these barbaric uncivilized people through the spread of western education in boarding schools run by missionaries. Otherwise, these people would face rapid extinction.

Nothing of this sort happened to these peoples, including Indians, Métis and Inuit. Not only did they survive, but also their population grew. Their struggle for self-determination and self-government is seen as a threat to the imperial administration and a part of the worldwide war against colonial exploitation and racial injustice. The Native activists see their struggle as "decolonization", following Frantz Fanon's theory of marginalization as propounded in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Like our Tribal people in India, who are far away from development and democracy, these Native peoples in Canada have not been able to achieve their goals as independent human beings with distinctive cultural traditions and identities. Even today, they fight for equality, their land, status and self-government. The white Europeans have successfully created many stereotypes of these peoples in fast centuries in their writings and other artistic products such as paintings and films. They were forcibly made "silent" because they had an oral tradition and no scripts. They were said to be people without any land and history, as they did not know how to write or record past events.

Professor Howard Adams who is a Métis author and activist, has written a book titled *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (1995). In this book he provides a unique Aboriginal perspective on the effects of colonialism on his people. He argues that the Native communities including the Indian, the Métis and the Inuit constitute "internal colonies" in Canada. They have been invaded, their self-governance mechanism has been dismantled and the next generation has been separated for total assimilation into the mainstream. Adams fears that there will be nothing called Native culture or tradition, and the entire race would also be extinct from the world. The First Nations people became sick people, lived in debt and poverty, ruined by disease and alcoholism. Their children were forcibly separated from them by the government agencies such as the Children Aid Society and kept in different white foster homes, where these children could not live for more than a year. They were sent to residential schools for primary and secondary education. They were not allowed to speak their tribal dialects, practise their rituals and customs, offer their prayers and perform dances. The loss of language and Native culture made them absolute social "misfits" in their communities, when they returned after schooling in adulthood. Being ashamed of their low status and loss of identity, they took to drug abuse and alcoholism. They could not work like the whites competently and confidently in various professional fields in spite of their education and training. Doubly crippled, they could speak neither their own dialects, nor French or English efficiently and effectively. Many of them committed suicide, and the remaining did many odd jobs just for survival. In the following part, I have attempted to appreciate some poems on these issues and show some visuals in support of my arguments.

Emily Pauline Johnson, the Mohawk Indian woman and the daughter of the Mohawk Chief, is the first Native poetess and performer to have toured throughout the USA, UK and other parts of

Europe to written about the situation of her people in the garb of an Indian Princess. She has written a poem entitled "The Cattle Thief" in which she presents the character of the Eagle Chief who is accused of being a cattle thief by the white settlers. The Chief has been killed brutally and then his daughter who has witnessed this heinous crime claims her father's dead-body and says:

Stand back, stand back you white-skins, touch that dead man to your shame;
You have stolen my father's spirit, but his body I only claim.
You have killed him, but you shall not dare to touch him now he is dead.
You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed him first of bread-Robbed him
and robbed my people-look there, at that shrunken face,
Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your race.
What have you left to us of land, what have you left of game,
What have you brought but evil, and curse since you came?
How have you paid us for our game? How paid us for our land?
By a book, to save our souls from the sins you brought in your other hand.

Then she asks the foreigners to go back with their religion and give them their back their land and the herd of game. She also demands the furs and the forests back from the colonizers along with their happiness and peace. She blames them for being responsible for the Native peoples' hunger and other problems, which make the Eagle Chief a cattle thief. Her father's exploitation and oppression has been due to the settlement of the white Europeans on his land.

Another Native poetess, namely Rita Joe, who was born in 1932 and is a Native elder of Micmac nation, writes about her life and experiences as a Native woman in modern Canada. She went to the Indian residential school for her education. She spent her childhood with a number of foster families. She states that the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie has played an important part in her life as a Native woman in Canada. She also acknowledges the contribution of several foster mothers who were responsible for her upbringing. She is like a grandmother to many young Natives and works for their education throughout the country, particularly in the area of Native history and culture. She considers her people as her sole education: "I have a front seat to see and feel their needs, the major one being that we, too, live with ideal productiveness" (Joe 376). She further says that to be a Native writer is a significant responsibility: "The label is deep-rooted and the stroke of a Native pen does wonders, especially for the coming generation," (ibid) She also adds: "If we consider our Native culture important, we the Native people must put it down on paper our way" (377). She laments the loss of her dialed due to her residential school education. She writes:

I lost my talk/ The talk you took away./ When I was a little girl/ At Shunbenatadie school.
You snatched it away:/ I speak like you/ I think like you/ I create like you The scrambled ballad,
about my word.
Two ways I talk/ Both ways I say,/Your way is more powerful
So gently I offer my hand and ask, / Let me find my talk/ So I can teach you about me."
She sincerely wishes to relearn her lost tongue, its vocabulary and syntax, in order to teach the
Native ways and Native world view to the white mainstream.

Mary Augusta Tappage, a Shuswap woman, has lost her knowledge of her Shuswap dialect. She has written a poem titled 'T'vee-Big Chief, which records her experience when she returns to her community after schooling and fails to understand what her people say:

When I got out of Mission school/ I had to ask what the Indians were saying,
I could n't understand them. /We were only allowed to speak English at school,
I almost forgot my own language. /It's Shuswap, my language." (39)

This loss of language is also called the loss of culture and heritage. One cannot claim his/her self-identity without language and lexicon. For her part, Jeannette C, Armstrong, who is regarded as the first Indian novelist and also a poetess, has published her first anthology titled *Breath Tracks* (1991) and in a poem under the title "History Lesson", she records the arrival of the Europeans on her land in a Native way, symbolically represented by "Christopher's ship". She narrates with mordant irony:

"Red coated Knights/ gallop across the prairie/ to get their men/ and to build a new world
Pioneers and traders/ bring gifts/ small pox and Seagram/ and Rice Krispies
Civilization has reached/ the promised land." (204)

She strongly points out that her peoples' ten generations were mutilated at a blow due to the white Europeans' settlement and expansion. The last stanza highlights:

Somewhere among the remains/ of skinless animals/
Is the termination/ to a long journey/ and unholy search/ for the power/ glimpsed in a garden/
Forever closed/ forever lost. (204)

In her well-known essay on the empowerment of her Okanagan peoples in particular and Aboriginal peoples in general, she states: "Our task as Native writers is two-fold. To examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all our people in the future, arising out of the powerful and positive support structures that are inherent in the principles of cooperation" (Armstrong 1990: 210). Her main goal is to decolonize and empower her people through her writings and social activism. She encourages her children to have an optimistic view of life, to develop close connection with the land and Nature, to respect Elders and learn the Native languages and other indigenous ways from them. The Aboriginal youth should have the choice to educate themselves in native ways, returning to their own tribal communities and promoting a sense of tribalism and communal nationalism. As Marie Annharte Baker, in her poem entitled "One Way to Keep Track of Who is Talking?" writes:

Frozen Indians and frozen conversations predominate.
We mourn the ones at Wounded Knee,
Our traditions buried in one grave.
Our frozen circles of silence do no honor to them.
We talk to keep our conversations from getting too dead. (174)

The devastating effect of colonization was seen in the establishment of Indian residential schools far away from the Native reservations in order to forcibly take away the little children from their parents and peoples, put them in foster homes and ban them to speak their languages and practice their customs and rituals. This resulted in "cultural genocide" which can be explained as the deliberate and systematic destruction of the language, culture and traditions of a specific cultural group. There were about five hundred Aboriginal nations before the contact period and they have been wiped out over the years by the dominant white society without any repentance. Their land-claim disputes are to be settled yet; they were given voting rights only in the last decade of the twentieth century; and the Canadian Premier apologized publicly in 2003 regarding the child-abuse in Residential Schools and the cultural loss. The government cannot give compensation for this huge devastation of the Aboriginal nations.

Alootook Ipellie, who is an Inuit author. has written a poem under the title "Waking Up", which depicts the modern living conditions of his people. He records the changes that happened to his people due to modernization and colonization. In one stanza, he writes:

Life is like night and day
Painted in black and white
Graphic as ever
Does it mean we are headed for paradise
Or doomed to Oblivion? (259)

The narrator wakes up from his past reminiscences of his nomadic Eskimo life in the Arctic Islands and finds him in the urban location with a modern life-style, busy on his computer key-board designing and programming graphics. He laments that he does hunting and fishing no more like his ancestors. As a powerful shaman of older days, he dreams but laments too for the glorious past and the loss of his Native culture. The stanza has the following lines:

Lament my friends and enemies
Lament for the enlightened days of yesterday
Lament for the husky who is forced to retire
Lament for the beautiful Arctic landscape
Which will never again be seen with naked eyes
Lament for the great spirit
Which takes care of the natural world
For its time has come to an end. (260)

The narrator finally desires to have a rebirth, so that he can go back to his former state of an innocent Native child. But we all know that this is not possible in this mortal life.

Armand Garnet Ruffo, a modern Ojibwa poet and professor of Creative Writing in the Carlton University, Ottawa, has published several volumes of poetry. In one of his poems titled "Why I Write", he states:

So I can live in the past, /Earn a living./protect the beaver./Publicize conservation,
Attract attention, /Sell 35,000 copies in 3 months,/Give 138 lectures in 88 days.

Travel over 4350 miles, /Wear feathers, /Wear make-up.
Play Indian- no/Be Indian Go to pow wows,
Get to tour Britain, /Meet the King & Queen,
Become famous, /Become alcoholic,/Leave a legacy,
Lose a wife, /Be lonely. (319)

The poet-narrator uses humour and irony to write poems and tell the stories of his people, their past and their present, the apartheid prevailing in the Canadian society, the inequality and injustice that are meted to the Aboriginals even today. He has recreated the Native character Archie Belaney in his volume titled *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney* (1996). In one stanza, he writes:

I begin by signing my name Grey Owl,
And saying I was adopted by the Ojibway,
And that for 15 years I spoke nothing but Indian;
Then, before I know it, I have Apache blood.
Finally I'm calling myself an Indian writer. (319)

Thus, he reverses the position of the Native from the object to the subject in his poetry, presenting the Native perspective and breaking down the stereotypes created about them by the non-Native authors.

In conclusion, I wish to point out that many of the Aboriginal poets have taken the help of latest technology of the Multimedia to reconstruct their identity for the wider audience all over the world.

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"This World My Canvas": Global Identity in Tagore's Paintings

Amrit Sen

“Fondly indulgent is my Mistress of the Line to the errant in the poet.”¹

Although he had sporadically experimented earlier, Rabindranath's career as a painter flourished in the first half of the 1920s. Tagore went on to produce close to 2,500 paintings, exhibited across India, Europe and Asia. This period also saw some of Tagore's most sensitive writings on art and aesthetics, apart from the setting up of Kala Bhavana, the institute of art that he saw as an integral part of his experimental university. Clearly the "mistress of lines" whom Rabindranath so dearly nurtured, had a deep fascination for him.

This paper seeks to locate Tagore's paintings and his writings on art in the context of the evolution of his critique of nationalism, I intend to argue that as Tagore moved from nationalism to its critique, his paintings and his concept of art changed substantially. Bringing together the local and the global Tagore recognized the canvas as the space where his universalism could be accommodated in assimilating the ideas and traditions from various cultural contexts. Setting himself apart from the binaries of the self and the 'other' and the rhetoric of nationalism, Tagore's unique postcoloniality used the aesthetic to bypass the political.

It is in the first decade of the twentieth century that Tagore gradually withdrew from the discourse of nationalism. This is also manifest in the evolution of his ideas about the *brahmanidyahya*, his letters after 1910 witness a desire to extend the purview of his education:

My first intention was to educate Bengali children in close proximity of nature to enhance their sensibilities... however I increasingly felt the need to assimilate it with the spirit of the world ... The study of truth has no borders of the east and the West. My institution will be a pilgrimage of knowledge where the truths will reside.²

Key to Tagore's ideas was the emergence of a new selfhood in colonial India. By this time, Tagore had firmly turned against the spectre of nationalism and the fervent anti-colonialism of the extremists and the moderates. He refused to allow his self to fall within the rhetoric of nation, instead viewing India's history as a series of absorption of a series of incursions that progressively widened its borders.³ This was not to deny the pain and anguish that he felt at the exploitative practices of the British, but he genuinely felt that the Indian self would be enhanced by embracing the British virtues, an opinion that he retained even in his last writings like *Crisis in Civilization*.⁴ Positing Rammohun Roy as an ideal,⁵ he argued that this broader self had to work within the country, eradicating poverty and illiteracy to lay the foundation of a society that could then serve as model for moral regeneration. This society based on sacrifice and mutual co-operation would globally posit an alternative to the aggressive imperialism that Europe had fostered. Thus the self would enrich itself by absorption from the world and in turn enrich the world. For Tagore the binaries of European scientific progress and Asian spirituality could be collapsed to create a new world based on peace and mutual interaction, originating in the spirit of service. He also felt that the nationalist struggle was accepting the same rhetoric of fervent national identity that would always demand its 'other' and therefore fall into the trap of violence and the restriction of the self- it was this Utopian extension of the self that he attempted in his idea of Visva-Bharati in 1921, when Vidusekhar Shashtri read out its declaration:

This is Visva-Bharati where the world makes its home in a single nest ... we are of the faith that Truth is one and undivided though diverse be the ways in which may lead us to it. Through separate paths pilgrims from different lands arrive at the same shrine of Truth.

So unto this Visva-Bharati we render our homage by weaving garlands with flowers of learning gathered from all quarters of the earth. To all devotees of truth, both from the West and from the East, we extend our hand with love.⁶

Thus Visva-Bharati brought together scholars across borders moving from Indology to agriculture, from science and rural development to the study of aesthetics.

For Tagore art and aesthetics were not a peripheral; they were an integral part of the self, facilitating the recognition of beauty in all aspects of life and, therefore, key to the final vision of human harmony. Writing on *Kala Bhavana* (the institute of art) Tagore wrote:

Our notion of culture is limited within the boundary lines of grammar and the laboratory. We almost completely ignore the aesthetic life of man, leaving it uncultivated, allowing weeds to grow there... But where are our arts, which like the outbreak of spring flowers are the spontaneous overflow of our deeper nature and spiritual magnificence?... In the centre of Indian culture, which I am proposing, music and art must have their prominent seats of honour and not be given merely a tolerant nod of recognition.⁷

Tagore's own ideas on art can be classified into three main stages and they roughly coincide with his educational ideas. The young Rabindranath had grown up on the Jorasanko Thakurbari portraits. In 1900, discussing the paintings of J. P. Gangooly based on Banabhatta's *Kadambari*, he endorsed the practice of combining Indian historicist themes with realist rendering of Western lineage.⁸ Thus at the turn of the century, Tagore's perceptions and views on art were still those of his elite

compatriots who saw academic realism as the highest form of art and Ravi Verma as its finest exponent.

The beginning of the century witnessed a new nationalist surge in the sphere of art. Led by Abanindranth and E.B. Havell, the Calcutta Art School questioned the belief that it was essential for the Indian artists to assimilate Western representational methods for the progress of Indian art and began to foreground the cultural imperatives for an independent approach to the representation nurtured by Indian antecedents. Their activities reached a flash point with Havell's decision to introduce Indian art into the Calcutta Art School's teaching programme and to replace its European collection with the original examples of Indian art. In the public furore and debates that ensued, Tagore came out in support of Havell, arguing that instead of a passing acquaintance with Western art gained through a few inferior originals and copies a thorough grounding in one's own culture would be the right preparation for a fruitful encounter with all cultures. It was Rabindranath, who in 1891, prodded Abanindranath and Nandalal to take notice of the larger cultural panorama outside the purview of the higher arts and aroused their interest them in folk and popular culture. He invited Abanindranath and Nandalal to *Kala Bhavana*, thereby ensuring that Santiniketan remained the centre from which this movement could develop. Subsequently, both Abanindranath and Nandalal were to ally art to the nationalist cause.

(Abanindranath : Bharatmata, 1905)
print, 1930)

(Nandalal: *Gandhim*, linocut

As Visva-Bharati took shape and Tagore embarked on his career as an artist, his opinions changed substantially. Key to this was his exposure to the global art scenario in the course of his travels. In 1913, he visited the Chicago Art Institute Armory Show with 1600 exhibits, where Rabindranath studied the entire range of modern artists from the Impressionists to Marcel Duchamp. That Tagore was deeply impressed can be gauged from his attending Stella Krammrish's lecture in London in 1920. Tagore invited her to Santiniketan in 1922, where she delivered a series of lectures on world Art from Gothic to Dadaism. Rabindranath attended these lectures and translated them himself. In 1921, he also visited Weimer and Bauhaus in Germany and met Kollowitz, Modigliani, Johannes Itten. Tagore's visits to the British Museum also exposed him to primitive art, a form that he would encounter in his travels to Indonesia, China and America.

It was during his trip to Japan in 1916 that we witness Tagore's desire to evolve an art that could syncretise these various strains and would not merely fall back upon tradition, but would boldly enlarge it. Writing to Abanindranath, Tagore's tone is almost one of admonishment:

Aban, the more I travel in Japan the more I feel that you should have been here too. Squatting there all the time in your south verandah you will never realise how very essential it is to have contact with the living art of Japan so that our own art may revive and flourish.¹⁰

Tagore's movement away from the nationalism in aesthetics can be located in his essay *Art and Tradition* (1926):

When in the name of Indian art we cultivate the deliberate aggressiveness a certain bigotry born of the habit of a past generation, we smother our soul under idiosyncrasies that fail to respond to the ever changing play of life.¹¹

Rather art was seen as a sphere where disparate influences could come together to create a world without borders. Thus in *Art and Tradition*, Tagore added:

There was a time when human races lived in comparative segregation and therefore the art adventures had their experience within a narrow range of limit... But today that range has vastly widened, claiming from us a much greater power of receptivity than what were compelled to cultivate in former ages.¹²

Tagore's own paintings reflect the cosmopolitan approach to art as he freely moved between the various influences to develop a style of his own. He was aware of the different route that he was charting in his letter to Rothenstein in 1937:

I have been playing havoc in the complacent and stagnant world of Indian art and my people are puzzled for they do not know what judgement to pronounce upon my pictures. But I must say I am hugely enjoying my role as a painter.¹³

Key to Tagore's artistic vision was the idea of personality and harmony. As his interaction with Einstein clearly shows, for Tagore, beauty could exist in individual human perception. Thus impressionism appealed to Tagore's individual perception of reality.

(Rabindranath: Landscape)

Some of his landscape paintings and his self-portraits definitely reveal impressionist tendencies. Tagore's use of colour too reveals idiosyncrasies as he experimented with pigmentation to produce a boldness that was largely absent in contemporary Indian art. As Ashok Mitra points out:

He knew that colour must not lose its richness. This urged him to experiment with pigments... He produced such powerful ingredients and innovations that a piece of coloured surface acquired a luminous glow, an intense and pulsating brilliance never before experienced.¹⁴

(Tagore: Self Portrait, 1936)

Tagore's fascination for geometrical shapes is also manifested in several of his paintings. Archer notes his fascination with angular geometry, for smooth upward-thrusting shapes, for gaunt ovoid, for protruding beaks, teeth and noses and slimly pointing triangles. For Tagore, these shapes seem to be strangely imbued with the expressionist revelation of deep psychic pain. The pensive, ovoid face of the women with large unwavering soulful eyes was perhaps a more obsessive theme than any other. Exhibited first in 1930, endless variations of the same mood-image continued to be emergent throughout. He earlier ones were delicately modeled and opalescent, while the later examples were excessively dramatic with intensely lit forehead, exaggerated nose ridge painted in strong colours, foregrounding a primal gloom.

(Tagore: Untitled, 1930)

Both Archer and K.G. Subramanyan trace the expressionist motif in Tagore's repeated representations of the ovoid face of the desolate woman, reading into them the haunting presence of Tagore's sister in law Kadambari Devi:

His art is incontestably modern... in intimate essentials it presupposes the modern theory of the unconscious, the revolutionary ideas of Freud and the revaluation of reason which has followed the discoveries of psychoanalysis.¹⁵

In fact, as one moves through the later painting of Tagore there is an overpowering sense of darkness and the grotesque, an aspect that is also brought out in the numerous mask paintings that depict the subject in pain. Whether they refer to Tagore's anguish at the trauma of his family or a broader anguish at the fate of mankind remains unclear, but the strange brooding mood seems to cut across a variety of forms European and primitive. The influence of the European modernists leads Mitra to evaluate Tagore as, "the only great Indian painter, who starting with his heritage of oriental art gradually proceeded towards the European"¹⁶, but the presence of the influence of primitive art suggests a broader convergence.

(Tagore: Untitled)

At the same time Tagore was also collaborating with Nandalal, frequently drawing from him the representation of the everyday details. With Nandalal, Tagore also embarked upon the woodcuts of *Sahaj Path*, the Bengali primer, where images from everyday life were used for pedagogic purposes.

(Tagore, untitled, 1938)

(Nandalal, Illustration for *Sahaj Path*)

Political reality and the symbolic meet in these paintings. One begins to wonder whether Tagore's painting below seems to reflect the spirit of the self trapped in the sensory world, or is it the colonial self trapped within British hegemony.

(Tagore: Untitled)

Tagore's pencil sketch and the boldness as well as clarity of his lines also show his attempt to incorporate the Japanese tradition into his paintings.

(Tagore: Untitled, 1934)

However, the various influences were integrated within Tagore's theorization of art. K. G. Subramanian mentions the point that Tagore's approach to both education and art reveals aspects of the amateur,¹⁷ but this subsequently emerged in a cohesive theorization. Central to this was his idea of rhythm. Writing in 1928 to Rani Mahalanobis, Tagore explained the process he followed in his artistic creation:

First, there is the hint of a line, and then the line becomes a form. The more pronounced the form becomes the clearer becomes the picture of my conception ... The only training which I had from my younger days was the training in rhythm, in thought, the rhythm in sound. I had come to know that rhythm gives reality to which is desultory, insignificant in itself.¹⁸

This rhythm for Tagore was a shadow of the existence of a creator playing within a ceaseless world of forms. Where Tagore differed from the modernists is in this notion of the form as leading to the notion of an organic whole, rather than a fragmented reality. Thus even while drawing upon modernist tendencies, Tagore could freely experiment with them.

This paper is not meant to be a catalogue of the various influences in Tagore's paintings. What I wish to point out is that Tagore's experiment with Visva-Bharati involved the creation of a plural space that could freely acknowledge and sustain itself from all possible sources. Tagore's canvas reflected this plurality where he acknowledged the possibility of the free interaction of cultural traits. Was it a coincidence that Rabindranath's flowering as an artist developed with the emergence of his Visva-Bharati experiment?

NOTES

1. Rabindranath Tagore, "My Mistress of the Line"¹¹, 11 September 1938, in Rabindranath Tagore, *On Art and Aesthetics: A Selection of Lectures, Essays and Letters*, ed. Prithwish Neogy (Kolkata: Subarnarekha, 2005), p. 78,
2. Rabindranath Tagore, *Visva-Bharati* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 1318), p.114. Translations mine.
3. See Tagore's poem. *He mor chitta* where he articulates this idea. The same idea may be found in his essay on Rammohun Roy:

From the early dawn of our history it has been Indians privilege and also its problem as a host, to harmonize the diverse elements of humanity which have inevitably been brought to our midst, to

- synthesize contrasting articles in the light of a comprehensive ideal (Tagore, "Rammohun Roy", in Das, Vol. III, p.667)
4. See Tagore, *Crisis in Civilization* (1941), in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* ed, Sisir Kumar Das (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi), Vol. III, p. 725.
 5. See Tagore's essay, "Rammohun Roy" (1933), in Das, Vol. III, p, 667. Tagore hails Rammohun as the individual who attempted;

to establish our people's on the full consciousness of their own cultural personality, to make them comprehend the reality of all that was unique and indestructible in their civilization and simultaneously to make them approach other civilizations in the spirit of sympathetic co-operation, (p. 667)
 6. Rabindranath Tagore, "Declaration" in *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, 1.1 (1923), p.i,
 7. Rabindranath Tagore, "An Eastern University" (1922), in Das, Vol II, p. 567.
 8. For details see, R. Siv Kumar, "Rabindranath and the Indian Art Scene" in *My Pictures: A Collection of Paintings by Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi, Viva, 2005): vi-xiv, p. vii.
 9. *Ibid*, p. viii.
 10. Rabindranath Tagore, *Japan Jatri* (Kolkata, Visva-Bharati, 1926), p. 182.
 11. Rabindranath Tagore, "Art and Tradition" (1926) in *Neogy*, p. 54.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
 13. "Rabindranath Tagore to William Rothensteiff" Letter no 195, in *Imperfect Encounters: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore 1911-1941*, ed. Mary M Lago (Harvard: Harvard University press, 1972), p. 75.
 14. Ashok Mitra, *Four Painters* (Kolkata: New Age, 1965)
 15. W. G, Archer, *India and Modern Art* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959), p 75. According to Hiranmoy Banerjee, Tagore is reported to have told Nandalal Bose that:

The look of the eyes of *Nolan Southern* have become so deeply imprinted in my mind that I can never forget about them and when I paint portraits, not unoften her glowing eyes present themselves before my sight. Probably that is why the eyes in my portraits take after her eyes. [Hiranmoy Banerjee. *Rabindranath Tagore* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1971), p.18.]
 16. Mitra, p. 69.
 16. K, C.Subramanyan, "The Amateur and the Professional - Some Issues Raised by Rabindranath's Paintings", in *Rabindranath Tagore and the Challenges of Today*, eds. Bhudeb Chaudhuri and K, G. Subramanyan (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1988), p, 215.
 18. "Rabindranath Tagore to Rani Mahalanobis", November 1928, trans. Khitish Roy, in *Neogy*, pp.79-80.
 19. See Rabindranath Tagore, "The Religion of an Artist" (1924) for a more detailed discussion on Tagore's response to Modernism. Tagore writes:

I have read some modern writing ... from the point of realism the image may not be wholly inappropriate and may be considered as outrageously virile in its unshrinking incivility. But this is not art; this is a jerky shriek... when we find that the literature of any period is laborious in the pursuit of a spurious novelty in its manner and matter, we must know it is the symptom of old age. (p. 45)

In-betweenness as a Postcolonial Condition: A Reading of M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*

Prakash C Panda

1

In-betweenness is a psychological, political and epistemological condition of not being safely anchored in any particular, society, culture, polity and system of knowledge. One inhabits a liminal space and “cultural interstice” (Bhabha 324), torn between affiliations and allegiance to more than one cultural social and political identity within a certain stretch of time. Like a juggler who can keep several balls throwing up and down in the air, a person dwelling in a liminal space plays out different identities and affiliations at different moments. No identitarian affiliation is final. It is always *ad hoc* and provisional. Also, multiple identities, which one can assume, conflict among themselves more often than they complement one another. What is produced in effect is identitarian ambivalence that lends itself to a discourse fraught with inner contradictions and ambiguities. However, postcolonial writers valorize these contradictions as an artistic virtue. Among the post colonial writers the Kenyan-born, M.G. Vassanji looks quite promising with two Giller Prizes (one of his very first novel), six novels and two collections of short stories to his credit. This paper attempts to argue, using Vassanji's fifth novel *“The In-Between World of Vikram Lall”* (2003), that all identitarian affiliations are a kind of “Negative capability” or Vassanji's words *“neti, neti”* (not this, not that). Further, this paper analyses the in-between world of the Indians in Kenya before, during and after independence. The Indians, not white enough to be British or black enough to be African, thus inhabit a murky ground which makes them suspect in the eyes of both the white and black communities.

With regard to location, the in-between person is not rooted in a particular locale or social space; nor is s/he emotionally attached to ‘home’ as a place of birth or origins, where s/he can trace a long genealogy of ancestors, and access an archive of a long past. The condition of in-betweenness runs counter to a site of origin, a state of purity and even rest. It involves a movement and dynamism in directions that are quite unanticipated. Contingent factors of history and politics prompt the uncertainties of his or her never-ending migrations, border-crossings and re-locations in new milieus that problematize the notion of home. In addition, the strategies of the indigenous communities to designate themselves as insiders and validate their existence by way of excluding and invalidating people of other communities as alien and outsiders are part of a new politics of home that postcolonial conditions ushered in almost everywhere in the world. In the post-independence nations of Africa the indigenous people excluded Europeans, Indians and other non-Africans were excluded as outsiders because in the uneven and unequal field identitarian representations. People of Indian origin in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda were suddenly made to feel that they were ‘the other’ of Africa, defined in ethnic and exclusivist terms, as were – and still are – Europeans in South Africa and Zambia, for instance. Certain sections of Muslims, Christians and Parsees in post-independence Indian under the appellation of ‘minorities’- which does them more disservice than good-at times

feel that they stand outside the fold of the Hindutva model of nationhood. In this paper, I seek to explore the postcolonial conditions of some in-between and luminal identities in the post-nationalist period in Kenya.

Post-nationalism is one among the many configurations of post-colonialism in contemporary times, particularly in the multi-culturalist context of the Anglo-American first world, which is opposed to the notation of the melting-pot idea of culturally homogeneous nationhood. In the globalized context, the trans-national flow of human beings and cultures, in addition to that of capital, knowledge and technology, the politics and economy of the modern state are formulated and practised not in the national but in the global perspective. For all intents and purposes, therefore, nation-state is viewed as passé in the contemporary world politics. Cultures, too, are found to be not hermitically sealed in the zealously guarded national boundaries, but are perceived as circulating across geo-political, ethnic, linguistic and communal borders and getting hybridized. Nationalist historiography built upon a grand narrative is being increasingly held suspect as it is found to be grounded in a hegemonic power structures (both colonial and neo-colonial) that occlude, for instance, the viewpoints and narratives of dalits, women, homo-sexual people and other culturally ideologically and economically marginalized entities.

In the globalized scenario of culture, economy and politics, postcoloniality refers not to a simple narrative of a nation freeing itself from the shackles of colonial bondage and organizing itself a unified entity in terms of its pure and genuinely native traditions and indigenous culture, but to the narrative of the very birth of the idea of nation that takes shape within colonial discourse and the resultant contradictions, fractures, differences in respect of temporalities, class, ethnicity and gender. It has to face right from its birth until its growth in the post-independence era its inverted and virtual image- which is *postcolonial* image – in terms of a mirror, the reflecting as well as signifying protocols have been set by the colonial and neo-colonial powers.. The greatest contradiction which postcolonialism critiques is the idea of the nation-state, the very birth of which anti-colonialism, a pre-condition of postcoloniality celebrated. Therefore, it is very difficult to sustain post-colonialism as legacy of colonial discourse in the newly independent colonial state without *aporia* and contradictions. Postcolonialism helps us understand that the state, particularly of the Third world, had to compromise its autonomy in the planning of domestic economy and social growth during the period of the cold war. Later, under the neo-liberal regime of globalized monetary system and multi-national trade, the autonomy was compromised all the more, and as a consequence it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine post-independence nation state on the basis of homogeneity and unitariness.

Nation is variously imagined and symbolically performed in several ways by various sections of the populace in terms of their respective cultural ideals, histories and their own economic and political agenda. In contemporary India, nationalism becomes a heterogeneous, disparate and a-synchronous performative, interrogating as it does the retrograde late 19th century idea of a cohesive and unifying national culture which was anti-colonial in politics, although feudalistic in economy and collaborative with the colonial power structures. What is perhaps more relevant to the contemporary

world is a “national consciousness”, at least in the sense defined by Frantz Fanon in his speech to the Congress of Black African Writers, which is not nationalism”. It is “the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (1959). In our case, in India, our post-coloniality is the necessary condition of our not hanging on to a national culture but a national consciousness of our allegiance to the state as its citizens and also, at the same time, becoming inclined to accept a post-nationalist mindset to negotiate among different historical times, different systems of knowledge, disparate ethnic, caste and class entities, their incompatible religious faiths, moral values and ethical practices , in full knowledge of their incommensurability and irreducible differences. It also involves acknowledging the presence of hybrid forms and entities of culture.

‘Postcolonialism’ is, therefore, quite a complex concept with disparate meanings and implication for diverse groups of people. Some may find it amounting to a body of entities, power structures, histories and signifying systems that are too heterogeneous to be workable. Among the various conflicting views, the chief one – whether postcoloniality refers to a historical period of decolonization, or to a critique of an unequal as well as iniquitous political, cultural and economic practices, the subjugation and oppression of one section of people by another during colonial period and even after its end – has raised considerable debate. In relation to this debate a dispute has arisen over the choice between ‘post-colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’, generating much heat but little light. The post-colonial condition designating the periodization of a phase of the anti-colonial struggle and post-independence of the former African colonies of European powers also entail ‘postcolonial’ condition. In fact it can be argued that postcolonialism is already latent in the colonial discourse, as Mishra and Hodges’ definition of postcolonial literature would suggest. They say that postcolonial literature is “an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power,” which as they point out implies that postcolonialism is “already implicit in the discourses of colonialism” (284). Without rehashing this debate I attempt in my own way to settle it with the proposition that both the terms emerge from the same context and entail each other, irrespective of different significations.

In the postcolonial perspective the nationalist is truly a hybrid, materialized as a subject position between the dialectics of two discourses: one of which is colonial, while the other is anti-colonial. As a hybrid he is engaged in both complicity and conflict with the colonial power. Ironically, however, he may invoke and deploy a notion of purity latent in nativity, natality and nationalism. He also builds up an array of representations of national culture, tradition and history, which are totalizing, essentialist and exclusionary. The postcolonial subject too is a hybridized entity, but s/he interrogates the totalistic representations of various kinds, of which nation and nationhood are archetypes. In this context, R. Radhakrishnan’s concept of diasporic hybridity (2000) becomes crucial for assuming a modality of “immanent critique”, which is prey neither to the seductions of transcendence nor to the blissful quietism of contemporaneity as status quo. He explains the hybridized position thus:

As immanence would have it, the critique has to realize its position as neither 'within' nor 'without', and validate its knowledge or erudition as a form of hyphenated consciousness or problematized belonging. And as critique would have it, adjudications and evaluations have to be made on the basis of contingent 'values' and 'criteria'. (par.11)

As is apparent, the postcolonial subject, located in a globalist and de-territorialized situation, out-side the fold of nation-state, does not hang on to the transcendental signifier of 'nation'; nor does s/he remain blissfully oblivious to the fusion and mishmash of forms that constitute the contemporary cultural reality. On the contrary, with a hyphenated consciousness, s/he constantly questions her or his stable cultural and sentimental affiliations to nation and national culture that are made out to be pre-given. What s/he underscores are the unanticipated, contingent, x-factors that constitute values and criteria of belongingness to the nation or exclusion from it. This, however, does not mean that the diasporic self de-territorializes her/himself in order to remain away from home, community and national boundaries. On the contrary, s/he re-territorializes her/himself within the fold of home and community, which are both within and without the geographical and cultural space of nation. It is in this sense that the postcolonial subject liberates her/himself from the nationalist anchorage of the colonial subject and assumes a post-nationalist stance, which is both dislocation as well as relocation of the self within the nation. Further, post-nation/postcolonialist diasporic writers like Rushdie, or Vassanji, or Rohinton Mistry make fiction out of history as much as a nationalist writer like Bankimchandra Chatterjee in his *Anandamath* (1882) does. However, their ends are different. While the nationalist does so in order to politicize history within the framework of the national imaginary for anti-colonial struggle and excludes some sections of populace from the fold of nation, the post-nation/post-nationalist writer depoliticizes it, delivering free from the clutches of the nation. Even as the memories of belongingness to the nation afflict the diasporic writers, they still try to break free from the geography of the nation and its culture, and relate to it in ironic modes from a distance in space and time. In this process of dislocation from and re-location in the imagined community of nation, the diasporic writer is both within and outside history.

2

Since the underlying assumption of this essay is the diasporic postcolonial/postnational dislocation and re-location of Vassanji, it becomes necessary to clear up theoretical confusion produced in the critical circles whether Vassanji writes in a genre of 'immigrant' fiction or 'postcolonial' fiction. In her critically acclaimed book *The Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marangoly George attaches the label 'immigrant' to the fiction of Vassanji and argues:

In the west today the literature that is recognized as postcolonial is that produced by authors with a "third world" affiliation. It is read as being chiefly concerned with issues of nationalism and/or national allegory as well as with articulating a critique of colonialism. (171-72)

She goes on to state that colonization is part of the historical baggage of all nations involved, and the onus of what is called 'postcolonial' discourse is borne by writers and academic practitioners whose personal histories include birth, childhood and, possibly, an early education in one of the

former colonies, but whose work is published and received by western publishing houses and academic (as well as other) readers. It is this writing that primarily qualifies for the category of the “immigrant genre” as I envision it.” (172). She further clarifies that these novels are written for the readers in the west as well as for the readers of the once-colonized part of the world. These immigrant fictions deals quite delicately with the experience of immigration to western nations and are written in global languages, so these fictions “straddle the geographic boundaries” of nations.

Instead of engaging in the endless quibble over generic labels we need to take a close and hard look at the issue of migration in Vassanji’s novels, where we find that migration as a historical phenomenon, whether voluntary or enforced, has been caused by colonialism and its aftermath. Although Rosemary George maintains that Vassanji’s fictions does not rightly belong to ‘postcolonial literature’, and that it belongs to a distinct ‘immigrant genre’, such classification, which is based upon an extremely narrow view of postcolonialism, does not prove to be helpful in our case. This is because she ignores the historical link between colonialism as a cause and immigration as consequence. Further, very strangely, even as she identifies the issues of nationalism and national allegory as features of postcolonial novel, she seems to have missed out on all these in Vassanji’s novels, which critique nationalist history and politics so conspicuously – whether in Kenya or India – in the novels, namely *The Gummy Sack*, *The Book of Secrets*, *The In-between World of Vikram Lall* and *The Assassin’s Song*.

Simon Lewis in his essay “Impossible Domestic Situations” argues that in categorizing Vassanji’s fiction as immigrant literature, Rosemary George took the concept of postcolonialism in a rather constricted sense, identifying it as “...concerned with issues of nationalism and/or national allegory as well as articulating a critique of colonialism” (Rosemary George 278). In contrast, Simon feels that “hailing from a once-colonized country cannot be the determining factor for labeling a genre as postcolonial. For any ‘immigrant genre’ it is quite common to overlap the postcolonial and postmodern features (223). No doubt, the term ‘postcolonial’ refers to the period of formal European colonization, but it also refers to what Bhabha dubbed as a kind of “social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of once-colonized Third World comes to be framed in the west.” (Bhabha 63) Hence, it would be over-simplistic to term Vassanji as a mere immigrant writer. By doing so we may run the risk of ignoring the “profound political implications” of his works. In addition, the return of Karsan Dagahwalla in *The Assassins’s Song* to Haripir in India from Canada and to assume of the spiritual duties and responsibilities as the new Sahib of the Nur Fazal monastery clearly proves that Rosemary George’s theoretical formulation of Vassanji’s fiction as immigrant literature extremely limited and dated.

Viewed from the perspective of the decolonized and newly formed nation, the issue as to who would be its constitutive member becomes an important and debatable postcolonial issue implicated in identity politics. Many characters in Vassanji’s novels indulge in this politics when their political, economic and cultural stakes are high, whether in the newly independent African state or in the dream-lands of America or Canada, which are alien and disorienting at the same time. Indeed, as the

varied and multiple identitarian posturing of the characters are presented as provisional and liminal, dictated by contingent forces of history, culture and politics, the attributes of their identities such as originary home, purity of lineage and culture and above all a homogeneous community are called into question. No identity is final, as Vassanji would suggest. All identities are *ad hoc*, relative, hyphenated and liminal in the interstices of histories and cultures and nations.

Cultural identity thus is a complex and richly nuanced category. In the words of Stuart Hill:

Identity is as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production/, which is never complete, always *in process*, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (italics mine 392)

When we take a close look at the socio-cultural construction of the East African society during and after the colonial rule, the problem of identity associated with the complex condition of in-betweenness becomes self-evident. During the colonial rule the indigenous black people of East Africa were the direct subjects of the British or Germans, while, the "other Africans", who were from the Asian subcontinent, were seen as a privileged class. These people—largely Indians—migrated in great numbers to the newly formed colonies in East Africa for jobs of low grade as civil servants, railway workers, policemen and soldiers, and also petty trading. This being the occupational profile of the Indian and also Asian diaspora in East Africa, the Asian Migrants were higher than Africans but lower than the whites on the economic and power hierarchy in the new colonies. (Siundu 16). It was the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway between 1806 and 1901, which generated ample opportunity of employment of the Asian workforce. Around 32,000 Asian were brought to construct the line, of which 6,000 opted to stay back in Africa after the completion of the work. This form of migration forms the base of the plot in Vissanji's fifth novel, *The In-between World of Vikram Lall*. Y. Tondon writes in this context:

The completed railway line provided British with a key tool to assert political and economic hold on the region and at same time promised brighter prospect for the Asians who had taken part in the construction. The Asians thus take part in "helping imperialism extend its tentacles to another part, laying with their own hands the physical and economic infrastructures that facilitated the implementation of colonialism. (19)

The above account makes it apparent that from the very beginning that Indians helped the colonial expansion of the British in the East African region. While doing so they forgot that they were themselves colonial subjects back home under British rule. But as days went by in East Africa they started inhabiting a dangerously an in-between space across the political, economic, racial and cultural divisions of the white colonizers and the black colonized. Neither could they, unlike the British, seize and exercise complete political power and authority, nor could they be subjected to extreme colonization like the native Africans. Thus, acting as very "visible agents of imperialism...." (Siundu 17) they were a comprador class by themselves in a situation of colonial sandwich. The following view of Dan Odhiambo Ojwang is quite noteworthy:

...a three tier systems emerged right across the region (East Africa), with the Indians generally occupying a median position where they formed a buffer between the Europeans at the top and the African at the bottom. (9)

The non-involvement in the anti-colonial politics, and particularly in the Mau Mau movement during the 1950s in Kenya, cost them dearly. Refusing to be part of the political mainstream and remaining as a miniscule of African population, they became a minority in a country where they had lived for generations. In the post-independence period they incurred the hostility and wrath of the African and suffered racial segregation. Ruefully, Vikram Lall, the protagonist and first person narrator of *The In-between World*, narrates his predicament as a family man, “whose safety and well-being were” his “constant concerns” (312). He recalls his predicament in post-independence Kenya, thus:

The Africans? If you were well-connected, through family or communal allegiances, even penniless you were protected and favoured... But we Asians were special: we were brown, we were few and frightened and caricatured, and we could be threatened with deportation as aliens even if we had been in this country since the time of Vasco-da-Gama and before some of the African people had even arrived in this land... This abhorring of a people, holding them in utter contempt, blaming them for your misfortunes – trying to get rid of them en masse – could and did have other manifestations in our continent. Idi Amin cleansed Uganda of its entire Asian population by deporting them, and many African leaders applauded him. Little did they know how slippery slope it was from that move towards genocide in Rwanda. (302-3)

Vikram (for short, Vic) was drawn unawares into the quagmire of corruption as a middleman, moneychanger and fixer. Acting as a conduit for illegally channeling funds for his boss Paul Nderi and money laundering, he chose not to be inquisitive about the modus operandi of this illegal practice and feared to take a morally upright stand lest this should earn him the displeasure of his boss Paul Nderi and endanger his family as well as career. In addition, as he found the entire administrative set-up highly personalized and structured around Jomo Kenyatta, the nation's Supremo and his cohorts. So he had to curry their favours in the most craven way for a petty reason like securing the permission for uncle Mahesh to come back to Kenya to be reunited with his family. This irony of the situation is that he acts as a back-stage boy, pulling strings for the enactment of corruption though not participating in it. His complicity – not direct involvement – made him an outsider even as he was very much an insider in the den of corruption. This is also indicative of his in-betweenness.

One may now turn to the issue of in-betweenness of communal and ethnic identity of Indian diaspora, which is largely a performative of continual negotiations of several compulsions arising from the African situation of sharp racial divide. It is not only a static point of medial position between two extremes but also a highly ingenious performative of shifting affiliations and locations according to exigencies. The diasporic nostalgia for an idealized home left behind or lost and the uncertainties of social and communal affiliations in the adopted home, coupled with cultural conservatism, self-pride and the resultant fear of miscegenation, produced in the first generation of diasporic people some degree of racial paranoia, if not full-fledged racism. Living in their self-created

social and cultural ghettos, Indians were squeamish about mingling with the African races through marriage for obvious reason of racial contempt for the black. Vassanji's fiction instantiates this social tension whenever younger, second or third-generation diasporic Indians attempt alliances with the opposite sex across their racial and communal boundaries. Apart from the fear of losing a kinsman to another culture, the dreadful possibility of miscegenation also becomes another stronger cause of the social tension in the multi-racial East Africa.

However, the young protagonists in Vassanji's novels question the latent essentialism and purism in the identitarian posturing of race and community in many ways, of which love and marriage across the communal boundaries is one. By doing so they foreground their liminal position and often mark themselves off from their parents, many of whom are of the first-generation diaspora.

In *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, as Deepa gets seriously involved with Njoroge, her childhood lover, her mother opposes this alliance. The latter fears that she may be ridiculed by the members of her community for having found "a pukka kalu for a damad" (an absolute nigger for a son-in-law) (218), notwithstanding her fondness for him, whom she has known since childhood. She goes on to add "...we have to think of the samaj, the community, don't we; the world watches us..." (218). The racial snobbery eventually turns her love for Njoroge into unmitigated hatred, and she begins all him names like "Sala badmash" (211). However, when it comes to Vic's getting involved with the white girl Sophia, the mother does not object to her different race and culture. Even the father, brimming with happiness at the thought that his son has become "a man", congratulates Vic, "Shabash... Well done!" (264). However, it is now Deepa, who becomes surprisingly conservative regarding this matter.

Deepa had already warned me that if knowledge of my loose moral conduct, that being constantly seen with a beautiful white woman, were broadcast among Nairobi's Asians, I would find it hard to settle down. (265)

Whatever be Deepa's motive, whether jealousy towards her brother's affair with a girl of another race when her own did not materialize, or plain solicitude of a sister for her brother's well-being, the fact remains that Indians viewed the whole issue of cross-cultural alliances from socio-culturally expedient perspectives. As for Vic's uncle Mahesh, he does not frown upon the idea of marriage, being politically radical and uncompromisingly progressive, he is still very unsure of its feasibility. So, he says helplessly: "Our people are not ready for it, what can we do?" (202).

What makes a man leave the land of his birth, the home of those childhood memories that will haunt him till his deathbed?.. it has been said that it was poverty at home that pushed them across the ocean that maybe true, but surely there's that wanderlust first, that itch in the sole, that hankering in the soul that puffs out the sails for a journey into the totally unknown? (17)

For his part, Vic also has his own share of troubles when he falls in love with Jasmine, a girl of Sahmsi community, in Dar es Salaam despite their families opposing such an alliance. They visit the temples and mosque in defiance of the existing religious norms, provoking a deadly racial attack on them from which they had a fortuitous escape. (220-21). This incident instantiates the cruel fact that

two people in love cannot decide their future unless approved by a society that operates according to its rules of hypocrisy, fakery and duplicity. The instance of the failure of forging relationship with an African is symptomatic of the Indians being unaccepted in that continent as culturally and racially alien, even though they may have accepted this land as their home. They have to suffer the consequences of their liminal position, which gets accentuated in the post-independence Kenya.

The liminality consisting in ambivalent culture, political and community affiliations produces an agonizing reflection on the part of Vic about the confusion over the national identity of his own as well as that of parents is the moot question that keeps popping up. During the moments of a train-journey in *In-between World*, Vic and his father look out of the window to see the African landscape. This landscape gazing is an important metaphorical device to turn the mental category of the nation and home into a visual representation and inscribe in it his belongingness. Vic reflects:

This is my country- how could it not be? Yes, there was that yearning for England, the land of Annie and Bill and the Queen, and for all the exciting, wonderful possibilities of the larger world out there. But this, all around me, was mine, where I belonged with my heart and soul. (112)

Vic also remembers that his father Ashok Lall declaring proudly to his mother during the sight-seeing from the train window, “This is Africa... all this beauty and vastness, *dekhabe hai esa, tumhare desh mein?* Have you seen anything like this in your country”? She, Vic recalls, smiled, replying, “This is where I have married and made my home... And this is my husband’s and children’s country” (112-3). Both reminiscences exemplify deep emotional attachment to the land as home, with its burden of filial, communitarian and sentimental investments. And yet, in moments of crisis, whether political and social, their Africanness becomes a dubious issue. When the differences of race and class complicate the social relationship as struck by Deepa and Njoroge in *In-between World*, her parents show signs of inconsistency, confusion and paranoia. This prompts Vic to hope that his parents will eventually submit to a process of assimilation and acculturation:

Like many of my generation I was confident that our parents would have to change their ways in *our new world* (emphasis added). They would take their time, but they would surely change. For now, however, they were too inconsistent and confused about where they stood and who they were, even as they called themselves Kenyans. (159)

But this does not happen, and his optimism with his narrator’s hindsight the youthful optimism seems to be too naïve and misplaced. Thus Vic reflects: “To the African I would always be the Asian, the Shylock ; I would never escape that suspicion, that stigma...” (286).

In this novel, Vic becomes a rather influential figure among the Asian business community due to his envious position as PA to Paul Nderi, Minister of Transport, and his strong connection with Jomo Kenyatta. At a time when corruption was rampant in the corridors of power the Asians - here Indians - were used as scapegoats by the African politicians to legitimize their fraudulent money transaction. It is no surprise that being an Indian, Vic could be easily made the fall-guy when things went the wrong way for the corrupt politicians. No wonder, he is blacklisted in the Gemstone

scandal. To avoid prosecution leaves Kenya to live as an exile in a dull, dreary and secluded place near Lake Ontario, Canada.

As a matter of fact Indians were 'marked' as the other in the politically, ethnically and culturally differentiated colonial and postcolonial African social matrix. In the postcolonial era, the appellation 'different' was applied to the Indians, while during the period of colonial rule it was reserved for the Africans. This interesting change of the signification of the term underscored a reversal of the positions, with the political power changing hands from the white rulers to the native black elite. Suddenly, the Africanness of Indians became a highly questionable proposition. As a consequence, they were consigned to the margins, from where they were pushed further out of the national boundaries to go to North America or England. The African nation thus came to be defined in purely monolithic terms, although overwhelmed by its inner contradictions and differences that have times erupted into ethnic violence and civil war. Those who imagine nation in purely monolithic terms do so in imagining it from the perspective of their own class and ethnic group in order to serve their own political and economic interests. They confer upon themselves the privilege to define who they are and who the *others* are. Such imaginings take place within a social and political structure favouring them and enabling them to subjugate the others. The others challenge the perspectives, interests and strategies of the dominant groups by their own imaginings of what nation is and how legitimate is their position within the nation. So, there arise sub-national imaginings and representations of the self within the nation, which gives the illusion of a unified whole. In other words, 'nations' arise within the nation, breaking up as these did nation-states like USSR, Yugoslavia, Indonesia and many others did in course of history. In Kenya and East Africa, not only were there differences between Indians and the Africans in cultural and ethnic terms, but also between the various African tribes.

In *In-between World* Vassanji has competently projected the tumultuous times of both the colonial and postcolonial period with great sensitivity and a sense of responsibility as a postcolonial writer representing the Indian community in East Africa, whose national identity was called into question in the post-independence period. Being beneficiaries of a colonial system, Indians were looked upon as a baggage left behind by the colonial rules. The ambivalence of being insiders of colonial East Africa as domiciles and yet regarded as outsiders in the post-independence state was constitutive of their in-betweenness. This ontological ambivalence could not have perhaps been represented without the narrative strategies of ambivalence, which Vassanji deployed in his novelistic discourse. We also find a link that Vassanji builds between the historicity of the ontological ambivalence of Indians and discursive ambivalence of the characters and communities that are fictitious. This link also produces effects of ambivalence consisting in a potpourri of facts and fiction, with factuality being predicated upon the real, historical situation on the one hand, and fictitiousness resulting from the novelistic imaginings of names and habitations as representation of the existing historical realities.

The issues of in-betweenness and liminality articulated within the postcolonial cultural politics of Vassanji develop along the trajectory of postmodernism that seeks to dismantle nation and national culture based upon racial and ethnic purity. This politics is motivated by the need to survive at any cost by alleviating the anxiety of not being able to affiliate on a permanent basis to any particular

culture, community or state and to rationalize a sense of alienation from the nation and its politics. In his book, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* Sarup defines the predicament of Vassanji, thus:

It seems to me that he is interested in living and theorizing in the interstices, in and between cultures. In his view, these intervening spaces have a strategic importance. Working on the borderlines, he is very aware of the cultural incommensurability that has to be negotiated. He has drawn attention to hybridization, the process whereby two cultures retain their distinct characteristics and yet form something new. He has also suggested that when we think of power-knowledge we should also consider the role of anxiety. Anxiety can be a sign of danger, but it can also be a sign that something new is emerging. (163)

Vassanji focus on this in-betweenness as mentioned above, which demands continuous negotiation with self and the others. This gives rise to ambivalence where the two different cultures live together but, yet are able to hang on to their divergent traditions and beliefs. In an interview with Ray Deonandan, Vassanji says: "I tell stories about marginalized people. All writers do, whether the people in question be a family of Jews in New York or a farming community in Saskatchewan... I've had people who've moved from Nova Scotia to Toronto tell me that they can appreciate my stories because it speaks to them of their experience. Again, it is one of marginalization." This experience is only possible in an interstitial space or borderland where multiple cultures can contest with each other. The Indian or broadly Asian culture always stands in-between the cultures of the colonial British or German officials at one end and the indigenous African native at the other, maintaining a balance between them as a "colonial sandwich" (Brah 16). These instances of in-betweenness, which should ordinarily liberate one from enclosures and boundaries effect, quite ironically, a new set of enclosures for the liminal subject or the liminal community s/he belongs to. Such a subject can resort to many new identitarian posturings and shift its affiliations. The positions of in-betweenness, which the migrants willingly accept, or are forced to accept, is quite decisive of their position in a marginal society where they are pushed to the extreme. It becomes evident that racial and cultural superiority is quite inherent to the Indian community and deep rooted in their psyche. It is never attenuated in the alien cultures, and, at times, it travels with them in their successive migrations.

Further, in *The in-between World of Vikram Lall*, we find the Mau Mau period being dealt with quite elaborately through the childhood reminiscences of Vikram Lall. The novel honestly accounts the tumultuous currents of the period. The Mau Mau oath taking in the dense dark forests of which the narrator becomes a part of, through his African friend Njorge, the killings of the British and their children by the Mau Mau oath takers which remains as a scar in the young mind, his discovery of his own uncle playing as an aid in the murder of his playmates Annie and Bill, the dead silence of the streets in the night. For representing in a graphical way Vassanji can be credited for getting a complete understanding of a child's psyche and represent the events through a child's eye view:

It was the nights that curdled the blood that made palpable the terror that permeated our world like mysterious ether. The faint yet persistent chir-chir-chir of crickets or the rhythmic croak-croak of frogs when it rained, the whine of the solitary vehicle on the road, seemed only to deepen the hour, enhance the menacing ominousness lurking in the dark outside. The Mau Mau owned the darkness, which cloaked them into invisibility; then suddenly they materialized, a gang of twenty or forty seeking entry into a marked house, throwing poisoned meat to the guard dogs, hacking a watchman to death... or a single murderer looking down upon you as you lay in bed. (42-43)

The boy Vic lives in constant imagination of a fiery world of “Daityas” (demons), a name used by his mother for the Mau Mau activists, who were led by “Ravana” the demon king (here it refers to Jomo Kenyatta). During their play they enact the Mau Mau game suggesting the fight between soldiers of the special branch and the Mau Mau oath takers which again overviews the childhood innocence and purity. Vic finds it difficult to erase from his memory that his own uncle was providing aid to the Mau Mau activists and the gun that killed his playmates Annie and Bill was stolen from his father’s chest. Here, the use of the childhood reminiscences to describe the Mau Mau period seems to be a deliberate narrative technique employed by Vassanji which serves two purposes. First, Vassanji could have avoided accountability for any misrepresentation of facts, taking the plea that his narrator was a child when the actual incident happened, and it’s a mere projection of a child’s worldview. Second, he could venture into those highly conflicting areas of African history on which even the historians feared to tread upon. Thus, he was quite successful in presenting an allegory of African freedom struggle with the plight of the Indians who lived there during that period.

To conclude, in-betweenness was a condition of existence for Indians present during the colonial rule where they were sandwiched between the blacks and whites. They played the role of political and economic intermediaries, and due to their complicitous relations with the colonial masters they benefitted in material terms and claimed a position of superiority over the blacks. When the colonial nations of East Africa became free these Indians were treated as outsiders in the post-independence period. So, in a country where they were living for three generations, suddenly they became alien in their adopted ‘home’ and were pushed to a liminal space of in-betweenness. Seeking better prospects and a comfortable family life they further migrated to a first world country like England or a self-avowedly multicultural country like Canada, where they are further subjected to an in-between position due to the difference of their skin-colour, culture and English with a peculiar accent. The cultural values and traditions which they nourished and upheld for years suddenly became useless in the new locality. Re-located in the diasporic space they have to struggle hard for everything for a job and to meeting their existential needs. This inescapability of such liminal ontological conditions of diasporic existence and the complicated political and ideological choices the diasporic people make have been brilliantly portrayed by Vassanji as themes of in-betweenness. Vassanji demonstrates in his novels that the anxiety of in-betweenness is a burden that the migrants have to carry on their backs as they persist in their constant search of a home, secure family life and relatively stable identities.

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