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Deccan Education Society's
Fergusson College

kaleidoscope
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Deccan Education Society's
Fergusson College

Pune - 411 004, Maharashtra

January 2014



**Deccan Education Society's
Fergusson College, Pune**

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January 2014

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Dedicated to the memory of **Prof G.P. Pradhan**

Former Student and Faculty Member (Department of English),
Fergusson College, Pune

**Prof Ganesh Prabhakar Pradhan
(1922-2010)**

A TRIBUTE

Freedom Fighter, scholar, teacher, political and social activist, Member of the Legislative Council, Editor... the list can go on endlessly. But, his most important achievement undoubtedly was that he was a SUPREME HUMANIST! While his students, friends and followers remember him for his scholarship and total dedication to his work, what impressed even a stranger meeting him briefly was his warm, genial, self-effacing exterior, a gentle smile playing perpetually on his lips...

When we look back at the long and eventful, though simple life of this grand old man, we realize that the first major event in his life was his participation in the Quit India Movement immediately after finishing his graduation from Fergusson College in 1942, inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. After spending 11 months in prison, he came back to academics at the behest of his teacher, Prof Bhate from Fergusson College. As soon as he finished his post-graduation in English, he joined Fergusson College as a teacher in 1945 and true to the promise he made to his teacher, dedicated himself totally to the teaching profession for the next twenty years, keeping aside all his political convictions and interests. A life-long crusader for the exploited sections of society, he did however, involve himself in issues related to teachers and played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Poona University Teachers' Association (PUTA) in 1953. He became its founding Secretary and was also an active member of the Poona University Senate from 1954-1966. In 1965, he resigned from his teaching position at Fergusson College to devote himself totally to active Politics by becoming a full-time member of the Socialist party. As he explained to friends who attempted to dissuade him from leaving the college, he did not believe in serving two masters. He had focused completely on academics during his teaching tenure. Now that he felt he had to move on in life, he felt it would be unethical on his part to cling on to his job when he wanted to concentrate on politics and his social activism. One finds the same uncompromising convictions and principles coming in when he

quit active politics in 1985, resigning from the Socialist party to take on the mantle of the Editor of the Marathi magazine, Sadhana, a top-quality weekly dedicated to social issues. In the interim period during his twenty-year long stint in politics, he got elected as a member of the Legislative Council in Maharashtra almost continuously from 1966-1984 and raised several important problems related to the educational field and other issues demanding social justice on a formal platform.

As he has aptly entitled his autobiography, *The Pursuit of Ideals: the Autobiography of a Democratic Socialist*, his life seems to be a continual search for reaching higher ideals. His dream as he defines it in the book is to see the emergence of an India based on equal opportunities for all- “work for all hands and power to the people”. Apart from a host of lessons that his life offers us, one major lesson that comes through is the ability to give oneself totally to a cause and to give up everything when the time comes... both with the same kind of ease. The fact that he donated a major part of his house even when alive, and the whole of it after his death to the Sadhana Trust, speaks volumes about his spirit of selfless service. His own words that end his autobiography best sum up the essence of his life: “In my personal life, I am awaiting with a calm mind, the day, when after life’s fitful fervour I shall rest.” The only memorial he desires is a tiny sapling planted by friends that would continue to perpetuate itself...

We at Fergusson College are indeed indebted to this illustrious former student and faculty member of the English department of our college and would like to dedicate this simple volume to him as a mark of our respect to his erudition and commitment to literature and humanity as a whole. May the tradition of liberal and progressive thinking set up by men like him in the college perpetuate itself and carry us onwards...

~ Chitra Sreedharan

Preface

The articles in the present collection embrace a wide gamut of topics ranging from modern experimental theatre, post-colonial studies, feminism and Queer studies apart from other socio-political approaches, while emphasizing that the core reading of all literature still has to be a broad humanistic one. Apart from contributions coming from several senior academicians in the field of literary studies, we have a couple of contributions coming from youngsters in their early twenties, ex-students of our department who have just started teaching.

As the volume is dedicated to Prof G.P.Pradhan, the very first article we have picked is by Dr Sudhakar Marathe, "The Middle Path: GPP and the Invaluable 'Sentimental' or Humane fiction". It starts off with a personalized tribute to Prof Pradhan and goes on to discuss how his approach to literature made his students realize the need to cultivate a holistic and humanistic perspective on literature, rather than reading it merely from a lopsided intellectual or even aesthetic perspective. This made dedicated students like Dr Marathe realize that what "millions read" therefore cannot be dismissed as mediocre, a point that he stresses while making a case for popular literature that is often marginalized from the literary canon.

The second article by Dr Shubhangi Raykar, "The Text, the Performance and the Translation across Cultures: A study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*", focuses on the well-known and controversial play that was part of the progressive experimental theatre movement in Maharashtra and first performed in 1972. The article suggests how drama essentially comes to life through performance and the sharing of a culture-specific experience becomes more difficult when the play is in translation, as the nuances and subtleties are often lost.

The next article by Dr Rajeev Patke, "English in South-East Asia: Connecting history to Literary history" attempts to take stock of the possible relations between the writing of literary histories and historical narratives. Dr Patke basically emphasises the fact that contemporary literary history can be studied only by a reference to the past.

Dr Kamlakar Bhat's article, "Narrative disciplining of the Subjugated in R.K.Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma*" examines the configuration of the nation as a collectivity in the novel and points out that the "differentiated narrative gaze" reveals the operation of a principal of exclusion with respect to characters from the subjugated class/caste. His basic contention is that in spite of a new collective identity, differential treatment towards members of the collectivity still remains.

The next contribution to the anthology by Dr Sudhakar Marathe and Dr Ashok Joshi, "Sane Guruji and the notion of Antar Bharati" provides translated excerpts from the work of Sane Guruji, a very well known twentieth-century social reformer, freedom fighter and writer from Maharashtra who influenced by Gandhian ideals dreamt of establishing an educational institution, capable of providing holistic education and integrating different disciplines and different regions of India.

The article by Dr Prashant K Sinha, "Literature and political ideology" attempts to make a survey of the immense range and scope of the complex network and relationship between literature and politics in major canonical texts from English literature ranging from Milton to Swift, and European literature ranging from Chekhov to Brecht. Dr Sinha considers the question of what is the most desirable way of reading literature in relation to political ideology and whether the merit of the work is to be finally decided on the basis of its political philosophy or its aesthetics, and presents the verdict in favour of the latter.

The article by Gayatri Mendanha, "The Individual and the Collective" reiterates the same position by suggesting that literature is primarily a work of art and a mode of individual expression that finds expression through the collective, thus becoming a vehicle for expressing social and political concerns as well.

Dr Rajeev Patke, on the other hand in his article, "Modernist Writing and Postcolonial studies: An Asian Perspective" takes up a slightly contrary position by suggesting that our situatedness, that is "who we are, when we are and where we are" governs the whole mode of expression in modernistic writing. Thus, when modernist techniques are applied to postcolonial predicament, the results

sharpen the power of modernism to provide a critique of Western modernity. Aspiring postcolonial nations moving in the same direction ultimately end up internalizing “secularism, commodification, corruption, selfishness, immorality, rootlessness and a general estrangement from the sources of value”.

One finds the effects of this lopsided form of globalisation reflected through the next article, “Local voices, Global discourses” by Kunal Ray and Meena Aier through their analysis of Mohsin Hamid’s novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It focuses on the conflicting identities that form the crux of the novel through the figure of the protagonist, Changez . It also refers to the layers of subaltern discourse embedded in the text and the complex scenario of a global connect and the divide emerging through the rising suspicions between the Islamic world and the West.

The focus shifts to the realm of Queer studies through Dr Raj Rao’s article, “Merchant’s *Yaarana* and Sukthankar’s *Facing the Mirror*: Problematizing the Queer Text”. Dr Raj Rao believes the terms ‘lesbian/gay’ and ‘queer’ that people basically take as synonyms are actually radically different, a fact that emerges through the two anthologies dealing with the theme of same-sex love. While queerness is essentially opposed to replacing one form of normativity with another, lesbians by looking for stability in relationships start moving towards normativity, whereas gays take up a deliberate anti-essentialist destabilizing of heteronormativity. Both therefore prove counter-productive in the long run.

The final article in the collection, “Moulding the perfect Androgyne: Rabindranath Tagore’s *Chitrangada*” by Chitra Sreedharan discusses Tagore’s attempts to bust through gender-stereotypes by picking a small tale from the Mahabharata and adapting it to suit his own purposes. This tender love story of a Manipuri princess, Chitrangada who Arjuna meets while in exile, ultimately ends with an emphatic declaration of a woman’s claim for equality with a man as also her right to be equally human and fallible. While Tagore’s progressive concerns get reflected through the work, one also realizes his attempt to go beyond a mere ideological basis by providing a holistic view of life by weaving in his intellectual, psychological, emotional and spiritual concerns while giving us a work that is equally satisfying on the aesthetic plane.

~ Chitra Sreedharan

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Our biggest Thank You naturally goes to all the contributors of this volume, as it would have been impossible to bring out the book without them- our heartfelt gratitude to all of them. The moment the late Prof G.P. Pradhan's name was mentioned, all of them instantly agreed to contribute and gave us their enthusiastic and unconditional support.

We would also like to thank Mr Paritosh Godbole of Sadhana Trust for all the cooperation he extended in acquiring valuable information about Prof Pradhan.

A word of thanks also to the Head of the English department, Prof Kajal Chakravarti and all the members of the English department for the moral support given by them. Special mention ought to be made of our dear colleague, the late Dr Vivekanand Phadke who was the prime inspiration behind bringing out the book. But for his enthusiasm and guidance throughout, it may never have got off the ground. It is indeed a sad moment for us that he is not there to see it taking concrete shape.

~ **Rajendra Mahamuni**

~ **Chitra Sreedharan**

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THE MIDDLE PATH : GPP & INVALUABLE 'SENTIMENTAL' OR HUMANE FICTION

Dr Sudhakar Marathé

Preamble

Many of us carry exact and specific memories of influential teachers. All I remember of the physical appearance of Professor G. P. Pradhan as we knew him at Fergusson College (Poona / Puné) is this: a small, slightly built man who yet walked upright, dressed in plain cotton trousers and jacket. He also wore a genial smile and rather thick-lensed spectacles. Behind them his eyes goggled good-naturedly. He came punctuality to his class, exuding general goodwill even before he spoke a word, and he never missed the human element in any piece of literature he taught.*

It was clear to us, his students, that he was strict—that is to say, he valued his conscience—without being overbearing, because he was strict with himself. Obviously, very obviously, he had strong principles and attempted to adhere to them strictly in his thought, emotion and conduct. It was his ability to feel and communicate emotion that impressed me most as he taught us Charles Dickens' Nicholas Nickleby. Luckily for me, until then I had read very few canonised books and heard very few meddling teachers.

Decades later, after teaching this novel in a course on Victorian Literature, I put a question on it in an examination. One of my unimaginative students began her answer by saying, "Nicholas Nickleby is Dickens' masterpiece." Rubbish—the sort of rubbish some students think will impress examiners: prescribed novel = masterpiece! The novel is by no means a masterpiece. Nor did G. P. Pradhan ever suggest that it was. But it was an absorbing story of a very real, feeling and unfeeling, oppressed and oppressing, sensitive and insensitive set of characters. And it was a story of real and unsavoury social phenomena. That fact impregnated every word of G. P. Pradhan's lectures. In his class one could not but feel with the characters, especially the oppressed boys in the horrifyingly realistic tale of heartlessness, systematically unsympathetic or cynical exploitation and

* Note : I studied for my B.A. degree at Fergusson College, Poona, from 1962 to 1966. Professor Pradhan only taught me during my first year there. But he did so unforgettably.

the suffering consequent upon it. And, although none of us in his class really knew then of G. P. Pradhan's political affiliation, I am very glad to say that his political commitment to focus upon social injustice was obvious to us.

Dickens had meant to move his readers. G. P. Pradhan had been moved and he had the language, tone and feeling to move us. Dickens had meant to outrage his readers with his presentation of the underbelly of Victorian society. G. P. Pradhan had been outraged. I was never a political person by almost anyone's definition, except that I was extremely sensitive to right and wrong at least by my book. And G. P. Pradhan showed me in his lectures—sometimes he was close to tears as he described what Nicholas must have felt—what Dickens demonstrated of his feeling for the boys 'sold down the river' by parents and guardians. G. P. Pradhan was always implicitly concerned about his students' consciences, the way someone committed to politics really ought to be, regardless of "theories" of politics—capable of appreciating the predicament of others, especially those whose lot it is to suffer the "slings and arrows" of an unjust society.

Literature has always meant to me creative constructions that record what history *per se* can never record, individual experience, especially feeling experience and the workings of motivation and conscience. And of course individual experience is always embedded in social reality. Literature is the only means by which such history can ever become available to socially, geographically and temporally distant readership. It may or may not include analysis and opinion that a writer wishes to impose on his reader. But it must include representation of social experience as well as the inner experience of character and the workings of motivation. That is why the one quality of linguistic composition that distinguishes literature from history is the narration from the viewpoints of a cross section of characters. Events occur in literature as they do in history. But there is an essential difference: whether in poetry, drama or fiction, narration succeeds with the bulk of readership or audiences of oral narratives in any language and culture *only* if it amounts to a good story well told. For this to happen, a writer must be very canny in the craft of narration. It matters little if he is not avant garde in technique. Of course no

writer or raconteur can ever weave a compelling story without being good in his technique: yet literary history as taught in class directly or indirectly never acknowledges this incontrovertible fact. The most read and heard authors always satisfy both these expectations, even if they do so only topically, for their time in history: telling an interesting story interestingly.

No sophistry in critical terms, no so-called theory whether traditional, modern or post-modern, can gainsay these basic historical facts concerning the narrative, mainly literary, arts. Historicise literature, and you will see revealed the template of what *works* and what matters *most* to the bulk of readership or audience at any given time. In 1919, in his oft-read essay “Hamlet”, even T. S. Eliot made the mistake of concluding that, despite its immense, centuries long and international popularity, the play was an “artistic failure” because Shakespeare did not manage to express Hamlet’s intractable innermost thoughts and feelings. But it is an enlightening historical fact that in his two 1937 lectures at Edinburgh University on Shakespeare’s development, in reconsidering both Shakespeare’s work and the phenomenon of historically confirmed popularity, Eliot eventually brought together the two facts I asserted at the end of the previous paragraph: that popularity *matters*, and that no *lasting* popularity can be achieved *without* proportionate technical skill.¹

That writer succeeds with the numerically vast majority of readers who tells a good story. In telling a story, a writer *may* overtly express an opinion—why not, indeed, when every critic is free to do so? It is only critics who think that a writer with his own opinion

¹ See “Shakespeare as Poet and Dramatist”. The main argument in my book T. S. Eliot’s Shakespeare Criticism [Delhi: B. R. Publishing Company (1989)] is based on this ‘change of mind’.

can influence readers adversely. Only critics think that authorial mediation between story and readership is a crime. Yet even works they include in the canon reveal the value and practice of mediation: for instance the novels of Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne. Let the author's warning note at the beginning of the immensely popular *Huckleberry Finn* be the emblem of writing that *wants* to be political, that wants to influence its reader while narrating a compelling story. Readers have always silently and without hesitation "gone for" writers who can entertain them with well-told stories which are credible, life-like even as they present cases beyond their own existences. Some 25 years ago there was a young person whom we interviewed for admission into my department's M.A. programme. Despite much probing she did not tell us what she read for *entertainment*, for *enjoyment*, for what one might call "instruction" or the "feel good" factor, a sort of self-righteousness every one of us enjoys. When we managed to bring her round to the word "fiction", she said, with unfeigned horror: "You mean it is alright to read fiction?" By fiction she meant novels that were *not* written by canonised masters of experimentation such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, but novels that sold by the million, the best examples of which entertained generation after generation of readers. This is what formal study of literature had done to the poor thing.

Today her descendants are likely to name some so-called "post-modern" novelists in place of Joyce and Woolf. But the lesson comes just the same: the names of ordinary novelists are not to be uttered aloud in the hallowed modern or post-modern edifices of college or university departments of literature. Such misguidedness, whether modern or post-modern, merely attempts to spit at the sky, at the overwhelming evidence of literary history. Most readers have never even heard of Joyce, let alone reading either *Ulysses* or *Finnegan's Wake* or considering Forsyth's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* a post-modern narrative. But they *have*

bought and read, and continue to buy by the million and read, novels by successful story-tellers of past generations and of their own generation. My simple contention is that, whatever value one may ascribe to avant garde experimenters and those who write for a minuscule minority of super-learned and cosmopolitan readers, such writers do not make or represent a literature. Those who can tell stories of believable human characters in believable circumstances more or less directly, feelingly and compellingly, whose entertainment and moral value are confirmed by generation after generation of readers, whose books are constantly or regularly printed and re-printed by publishers, whose works are filmed and re-filmed, and whose works sell by the million in each passing decade—they are the makers of literature in the most justifiable sense. They perform both tasks assigned to literature traditionally and in recent theory, of entertaining and instructing readers.

Incidentally but significantly, this readership comprises 'ordinary' readers as well as sensible school teachers, university academics, engineers, lawyers and doctors. To take just one example, a very renowned professor, a senior friend of ours, had in his personal library not just first editions of the Romantics and valuable eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare, but also every novel ever published of Jane Austen as well as of John Buchan and Dick Francis. What is more, he re-reads these novels regularly. He has given me many very valuable academic books. But when I asked him if I might have his collection of novels of Dick Francis, he most politely but firmly said that I may not!

Inevitably, in the present context, one would have to take stock of the eternal dichotomy between Classic and Popular—having written elsewhere on this subject, however, I need only say that the distinction is always purely a creation of academic and amateur critics, never of the general readership; that it completely ignores

the fact that there is never a clear cut or wide division between the types; that as a matter of fact not only do the two types merge into either category at their borders, but that works float across those borders in *either* direction from time to time. One must also adduce here the simple fact that numerous canonised or classic works lose almost all their readerships from time to time, and that in any case they are never read by the majority of readers in any language at any time. Here is a list of the kind of writer I have in mind when I say that it is serious but entertaining and uncomplicated novels that become part of general reading: if he were writing today, Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Deloney, the first short novel writer in English, would have been one of this list, as would perhaps Shakespeare himself if he had been a modern novelist. But in any case, here is a list of British novelists whose work has enormous literary value and has had great and long-lasting general, even popular appeal: Daniel Defoe, Sir Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, some of the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens especially in the time of weekly-installment social-justice novels, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, John Buchan, Agatha Christie, W. Somerset Maugham, H. E. Bates, John Wyndham, Nevil Shute, P. D. James and Dick Francis.

What the works of these and other such novelists possess in literary, human and technical terms is hardly ever found in the most technically "superior" novels; nor is it found in the most highly celebrated post-modern novels. Indeed, in any case very few common readers read novels of either of these extreme types. Almost no discerning ordinary reader derives complex pleasure from novels canonised either by traditional scholarship or by newfangled scholarship. A better than competent command of language, a better than average command of narrative technique, technical innovativeness, a strong story-line, a set of recognisably and engagingly human characters, and the enticement of feeling involved in significant predicaments of morally testing motivation

and usually some degree of adventure: this is the combination of qualities that successful and truly popular fiction offers its readers. Inevitably, intelligent readers enjoy the presentation of characters in life-like, demanding and intriguing situations and they enjoy the way the story is constructed and told, the provocation to thought and complex moral consideration and, by and large, the brevity achieved by means of a perceptibly quick pace. That is the reason why George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is hardly everyone's cup of tea, but everyone including freshmen in colleges and universities thoroughly enjoys the concentratedly forceful *Silas Marner*.

Almost every writer successful in attracting discerning common readers also presents other qualities in different measure in his or her writing: depth of analysis of human motivation (as in crime and detection fiction—read W. H. Auden's impressive analysis of the chief interest of murder mystery fiction), creation of historical or other contexts that engage thought (including uncomplicated and easy to imagine "science-fictional contexts", as in Richard Jefferies' *After London* and John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids*), even life-like near misses that result in disappointment instead of the classic "Jack gets his Jill" formulaic narrative—in fact, overt and repeated exploitation of or reliance upon formulae may be the distinguishing characteristic of low-level and *temporary* or purely *contemporary* popularity, as that of the women's romances of the late twentieth-century—heroism within limits in which an ordinary character (as opposed to some superhuman hero) can traverse an imaginable landscape of difficulty (as opposed to a supra-natural landscape). This last is the reason why even a *very* good novel like Ursula le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* does not interest the *general* readership, while John Wyndham's *Midwich Cuckoos* does. Historical contexts of generally popular fiction include technological advances as *well* as most trying war time situations of life-like characters (as in numerous novels of Nevil Shute). Of eternal interest are subjects like crime. From the highly demanding

exploration of “crime” and “transgression of law” in Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*, Foretopman and Stevenson’s *Markheim* to almost any novel of P. D. James and Dick Francis, novels that attract the common reader regularly resort to depiction of moral and legal transgression in situations within the ken of the common reader and challenging at the same time to his sense of rectitude and his imagination. I am afraid that it was clearly for defensive self-justification that Virginia Woolf castigated “Mr. Wells and Mr. Bennett” in her essay on the “common reader” for pandering to ordinary readership. Despite Woolf’s somewhat ingenuous defence of *her* kind of tenuous fiction, virtually no ordinary reader read Woolf while no one stopped reading Wells; and in his time Arnold Bennett was most immensely popular (cf. *The Good Companions*).

Most importantly, without weaving a very subtly tenuous situation into which to place a character, popularly successful novels (that is to say novels that become highly popular and are yet read by a very significant cross-section of literate society) always problematise human behaviour. No reader likes reading novels that treat *him* as insignificant. Human issues such as deviant character, obsessive interest in something that is bound to produce harmful effects on *other* characters, and the eternal issues of love, war, possessiveness and greed and common and real emotions such as dislike and hate, present an inexhaustible source of material for readable fiction. Mere popularity does not signify; mere attenuated political analysis does not signify; fiction that only unthinking readers indulge in and forget about instantly they have closed the covers does not signify; fiction that only a handful of academics read and applaud within their minuscule groups of affiliates does not signify. True ‘narratology’ is a judicious combination of technically and politically aware fiction that simultaneously highlights and engages human values.

Rudyard Kipling, one of the most popular writers of short fiction, analysed this intriguing subject in the story-like “Preface” to a volume of stories titled *Life’s Handicap*. In it, a young Anglo writer becomes friends with an aged Indian sadhu, Gobind. In his time Gobind had been a very accomplished and renowned raconteur of tales, a master of the craft of entertaining and enlightening *common* audiences. So one day the young man asks his advice regarding what he ought to write about. Here is the conversation between the writer and Gobind:

“In what manner is it best to set about the task,” said I, “O chiefest of those who string pearls with their tongue?”

“How do I know? Yet”—he thought for a little—“how should I not know? God has made very many heads, but there is only one heart in all the world among your people or my people. They are children in the matter of tales”...

“Ay, I also have told tales to the little ones, but do thou this----”. His eyes fell on the gaudy paintings of the wall, the blue-and-red dome, and the flames of the poinsettias beyond. “Tell them first of those things that thou hast seen and they have seen together. Thus their knowledge will piece out thy imperfections. Tell them of what thou alone hast seen, then what thou hast heard, and since they be children tell them of battles and kings, horses, devils, elephants, and angels, but omit not to tell them of love and such-like. All the earth is full of tales to him who listens and does not drive away the poor from his door. The poor are the best tale-tellers; for they must lay their ear to the ground every night” ...

[Therefore my] tales have been collected from all places, and all sorts of people, from priests in the *Chubara* [a charitable hospice], from Ala Yar the carver, Jiwun Singh the carpenter, nameless men on steamers and trains round the world, women spinning outside their cottages in the twilight, officers and gentlemen now dead and buried....

This eternally relevant advice will profit any composer of tales in any culture at any period of history. Never will it produce fiction of tenuous clarity of issue or technique too involved or subtle for ordinary readers to comprehend. One other thing is just as clear—the narrative voice, as Gobind tells the writer sahib, the technique of story-telling, is not a dispensable craft. Only a combination of eternally interesting matter and highly successful craft produces fiction that millions read across the entire social fabric. Make no mistake about this: one simply cannot afford to hold a condescending attitude to what millions read and continue to read from generation to generation. That will be a mistake in both moral and political terms, the height of perverse superiority.

Those who ignore the essential and abiding human truth of Gobind's advice—whether writer or critic—cannot comprehend why since the beginnings of human language such narratives have unfailingly engaged human minds in every human community. Local additions may be made to the list of subjects and devices, such as local and topical gods and goddesses or popular character types, social phenomena of current interest, turns of phrase that represent current language habits, and so on. Nothing is interesting to the human mind unless in some important way it relates to recognisable reality; and nothing is interesting to the human mind that does not entice it into traversing the same landscape by the paths taken by the characters in a story. Whether one reads and re-reads American writers like Stephen Crane and John Steinbeck, or British writers like the ones I have named before, the moral seems

very obvious—novels that entertain superficially eventually end up in the class of merely popular or junk fiction; novels that are highly demanding in technique or artistic (like many novels of Henry James) or political argument never become popular in any sense of the term; but novels that tell compelling, thought-provoking and morally and politically serious stories achieve long-lasting popularity. This choice of a comprehensive cross-section of readership defines the Middle Road or the Middle Path. It is this kind of fiction that keeps the literature of a language going, perpetuates it, frequently contributes significantly to development of technique, refines narrative devices, introduces newer subjects, and, mainly, engages the intelligent majority readership because it is serious yet entertaining, entertaining yet instructive, historically significant because it defines current society in ways that history can never do. Most importantly, such fiction highlights the value of *human* concerns, *feeling* reaction and revelation of *both* the uplifting and shameful sides of our race.

As I remarked at the beginning of the present paper, because Professor G. P. Pradhan enjoyed and valued these qualities of fiction, because he was keen to pass on to his students his deep concern for human experience, especially the experience of underprivileged characters, because he made his students see that education in the politics of human relationships and human society may be an enjoyable activity because the awakening was adroitly accomplished, he did callow students like me a great service.

Professor Pradhan was *in* politics, eventually leaving a secure college job to become an elected representative of the people. His politics was neither raucous nor pig-headed, but humane. Yet while he was a pedagogue he made sure that no extreme viewpoint would overwhelm his students, that they would view literature as a human activity, not merely the domain of propagandists or trivialisers of any ilk. He wore hand spun khadi clothes and was

more essentially Indian than most Indian professors who spout *imported* political theories. Yet he did not disdain the enormous benefit writers like Dickens brought to our minds. For him literature was a *humane* art. It had the power to engage the minds and hearts of an audience and therefore it had the right to claim that it would entertain as well as instruct. This was an extraordinary case of sensitisation of readership to the perverse, unnatural, oppressive and unjust side of human life as well as to the feeling and sympathetic side. In a book on drama written in 1922, William Archer the *socialist* playwright said that drama must *only* depict the “surfaces” of life. Quite rightly did T. S. Eliot remind him that it was the *underbelly* of life that drama must reveal²—as must all worthwhile literature, including prose fiction. T. S. Eliot called such deep “realism” a “firm grasp of human experience... (in Shakespeare a terrifying clairvoyance)”.³

Allow me, therefore, to end my historical and generic review of the mainstream of fiction that combined common interest with requisite technical skill, with another telling quotation from the *same* source in Rudyard Kipling’s “Preface” to *Life’s Handicap*:

[said Gobind]: “A tale that is told is a true tale as long as the telling lasts... you know how Bilas Khan, that was the prince of tale-tellers, said to one who mocked him in the great rest-house on the Jhelum road: ‘Go on, my brother, and finish that I have begun,’ and he who mocked took up the tale, but *having neither voice nor manner for the task came to a standstill*, and the pilgrims at supper made him eat abuse and stick half that night”....

² William Archer, *The Old Drama and the New* (1922). Eliot’s rejoinder came in “Four Elizabethan Dramatists” (1924).

³ T. S. Eliot, “Andrew Marvell” (1921).

“In what manner is it best to set about the task,” said I, “O chiefest of those who string pearls with their tongue?”

“How do I know? Yet”—he thought for a little—“how should I not know? God has made very many heads, but there is only one heart in all the world among your people or my people. They are children in the matter of tales.... but do thou this---”. His eyes fell on the gaudy paintings of the wall, the blue-and-red dome, and the flames of the poinsettias beyond. “Tell them first of those things that thou hast seen and they have seen together. Thus their knowledge will piece out thy imperfections. Tell them of what thou alone hast seen, then what thou hast heard, and since they be children tell them of battles and kings, horses, devils, elephants, and angels, but omit not to tell them of love and such-like. All the earth is full of tales to him who listens and does not drive away the poor from his door. The poor are the best tale-tellers; for they must lay their ear to the ground every night.”

~ Dr Sudhakar Marathé

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The Text, the Performance and the Translation Across Cultures: A Study of Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*

Dr Shubhangi Raykar

Those who loved literature and knew the power of literature were happy for Harold Pinter, a very powerful British dramatist, poet and activist when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for sending across a strong message of peace through the presentation of violence and power dynamics through his plays, as much as through silences and dialogues. This was in 2005. Even then I was sad that Vijay Tendulkar, another significant writer in the Indian and may be, the global context, writing consistently about power dynamics, decay and degeneration of values and the silencing and gagging of the weak and the oppressed had not been honoured even with the Jnanpith, the most prestigious Indian award during his lifetime or after his death in May 2008.

There is often an observation made in the context of Indian Literature in English that the Indian Drama in English has not flourished like the other forms. The vibrant theatre activity in Marathi, Bengali, Kannada and Hindi to mention a few of the regional languages does not offer enough to English even by way of translation though there have been translations of the major dramatic texts of Badal Sarkar, Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Satish Alekar and others. The performances of these plays have been far and few. The main reason seems to be that those who know English always have had the regional theatre available to them. Since watching a play is a very effective experience in a completely shared culture one has probably not felt the need to turn to English. So far as drama is concerned English has remained by and large a language of intellectual and informational discourse rather than of creative

expression until recently. In the past twenty years or so one notices a phenomenon of English emerging as a global language rather than a native language of this or that country. This however has thrown up a different challenge to creative writers, particularly, dramatists who may have to shelve the sub cultural nuances of expression and move on to an act of sharing pan Indian and pan global cultures in which the multi media plays a dominant role. In this article, however, my limited aim is to try to analyze what happens to the sharing of a culture specific experience across the text and the performance, and then across the translation, in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, a play that comes to life fully, mainly through performance.

Vijay Tendulkar's career as a dramatist spanned over fifty years. I would like to mention his three landmark plays to suggest that as a dramatist he went on to conceive his plays more and more as performances. *Shreemant*, his first play to go on stage was put up on 12 December 1955. This is a play written for the proscenium arch theatre almost totally dependent on the dialogue, that is language and one, which can be enjoyed in its textual form as well. But the message it gives is quite explosive. It questions the sanity of the society, which tries to maintain the façade of the status of the wealthy. As one moves on to *Silence, the Court is in Session* which was performed on 20 December 1967 in Ravindra Natyagriha Mumbai, one notices a much greater dependence on dramatic devices and dramatic conventions, a greater shift towards the play being conceived as a dramatic performance. The device of mock courtroom drama has been used to silence or gag the accused Miss Benare who is otherwise a chirpy lively and witty woman. It is again the authority of the society represented by the mediocre characters acting as the prosecutors, witnesses and the judge which silences her and deprives her of the opportunity to speak for herself. It is a sharp and disturbing statement about how in the contemporary democratic set up mediocrity controls the atypical

and uncommon individual under the garb of moral code and social mores. In the soliloquy of Miss Benare at the very end this dramatic convention has been stretched to the extreme when she gives vent to her suffering and pain, and reaches out to the audience as she has not been able to do so throughout the trial because of the tension created due to the clever mix up between the imagined and the actual. This play again questions the stock notions of morality and attacks the hypocrisy of basically weak but arrogantly cruel yet apparently friendly people ever so eager to lynch a woman who happens to violate their moral code.

As one moves to *Ghashiram Kotwal* which was first put up by PDA on 12 December 1972 in Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune, one observes that the text is extremely performance oriented. There is no ascent-climax-descent-resolution kind of structure. In fact it is a flat structure, which makes use of juxtaposition, accumulation, expansion and emphasis. Tendulkar's own statement regarding what the play is about should help.

This is not a historical play. This is a non-historical myth presented with dance and music. Ghashirams are the creations of certain social circumstances. These social circumstances and the Ghashirams go beyond time and space. Though the playwright accepts some support from history, he does not intend to express any views on the Peshwai (the rule of Peshwas), Nana Phadanvis and Ghashiram Kotwal as historical personages. If at all this fable conveys any message it is different. (1)

Since the playwright has a myth or a fable in mind one has to consider (a) the play as a construct –the structure and composition of the play (b) the text itself with the stage directions and (c) the possibilities suggested by the text for the audio, visual and compositional aspects. What Tendulkar wants to say is there in the

text itself. How he wants to say it is clear somewhat in the construct of the play and an extension of this is the performance itself. Is that all? Obviously it is not so. The performance is an extension with interpretation, additions, omissions and modifications. Some of these are part of the interpretative exercise while some others are for practical reasons. All these aspects are present in the various performances of Ghashiram Kotwal.

For those who have neither read nor seen the play let me give the gist of it. This is a two-act music and dance drama set in Pune. It makes use of several devices from the early Marathi Sangeet Natak (Plays with songs based on classical music) and various devotional and folk forms. The focus is on the social fabric of Pune in the late 18th century and particularly on the respectable Chitpavan (Konkanastha) Brahmins who indulge in the pleasures that are usually forbidden to them, represented by the Lavanis in Bavanna khani (nauch in the Kothi). Nana Phadanvis the Pradhan of the Peshwas is depicted as a cunning and lascivious administrator (though his historical image has been that of a sharp and wise statesman) Ghashiram, a poor North Indian Brahmin comes to Pune in search of fortune and becomes a victim of the unjust and corrupt system. He plots revenge against Pune Brahmins and trades his beautiful daughter Lalitagauri with Nana to become the chief of Police of Pune city. The second act depicts Ghashiram turning Pune into a police state with draconian laws being implemented with absolute brutality. Ghashiram takes into custody and locks up 22 Telangi Brahmins who come in search of a fortune as he himself had come earlier— all for the paltry offence of eating fruit from his garden without permission— that too, unwittingly committed by them. Most of them die of suffocation. The case reaches the Peshwas and Nana declares the punishment of disgracing and stoning Ghashiram to death, which is gleefully perpetrated by the angry Brahmins.

Let me now try to examine closely what happens between the text and the performance in the original Marathi play.

So far as the structure or the construct of the play is concerned, like the earlier two plays mentioned here, *Ghashiram Kotwal* also seems to be dealing with the binaries. In *Shreemant* it was the individual and the society, in *Shantata* it was a woman and a group of individuals, in *Ghashiram* it is the statesman and his protégé, the group of Pune Brahmins representing, among other things, the flux of life, in which the acts (of innocence as well as violence), the orgies and the ordeals take place. The technique used for establishing the structure is of juxtaposition and contrast based on the exquisite use of the stage space.

In the text there are very systematic and consistent stage directions detailing the playwright's expectation about how the action is to be presented on the stage so far as the visual, aural and compositional aspects are concerned. The division of the stage for particular scenes stating what happens back stage, front stage, up stage, down stage, outside the proscenium arch or at the wing, with the vertical division of the stage etc is clearly stated. Most of these directions have been followed in the performances by P.D.A. or T.A. But the stage directions about the use of certain sounds e. g one of the Brahmins on the wall crowing like a cock to indicate day break, or certain visuals like the torch bearers carrying the torches to suggest night, are completely omitted. Why? One does not know. These were good supports to the verbal description and quite in keeping with the folk tradition. There is a use of masks stated in the Ganapati immersion procession as well as at the time of the wedding procession. It is in keeping with the folk form of Khela. It is also completely absent in the performance. There are some replacements as well in the performance. One example is the Vaghya Murali dance for Lord Khandoba following the scene in which the innocent Brahmin is victimized where the text states that

the incessant chanting of Ganaray goes on. In the first act as the three well-to-do Brahmins prepare to go to Bavanna khani under the pretext of going to the temple a lot of mirth gets generated through one statement after the other continuously thrown out by the Brahmins from the wall. In the second act there are mimes used to illustrate Ghashiram's extremes; e.g. the mime of the dead body being carried to the crematorium and turned off by the guard, as there is no permit to show. Some of it comes through words as in the conversation between the Sutradhar and Ghashiram regarding the delivery of the Sutradhar-brahmin's wife. What starts with the bizarre turns into something very humiliating when a brahmin is not allowed to share private moments with his wife and the wife is seen as a lovebird by Ghashiram. The neighbours act as insensitive witnesses by giving answers suitable to Ghashiram's purposes. They comply with Ghashiram in order to avoid bother.

In the original i.e. PDA and TA, performance of the play, the Brahmins make an entry on the stage from the midst of the audience. Tendulkar's stage direction says that they are standing on the stage with their back to the audience. The gimmick wipes out the distance between the audience and the performers and asserts that all that is going to take place is related to us, the audience as members of society, yet it is not presented as a slice of life but something that is part of a Khel or a piece of entertainment. The modification accentuates what the playwright wants to say. This may not always happen as some modifications or omissions are due to practical problems. In the text of the play for example, the tamasha dance in Bavanna Khani is juxtaposed against the dance of the bamanis with their paramours. The stage is vertically divided. Here, probably the playwright wants to emphasize the widespread immorality. In the performance the laavani is presented in the contemporary dance style from a tamasha film of the 70's and not as a period piece. Since the art of the laavani dancer lies in sexual arousal, though these dancers were not

prostitutes, it would have been more befitting if the dance had not been so overtly sensuous defining erotic appeal in modern style. Which erotic gestures and gesticulations (vibhramas) would cause excitement is culture as well as period specific. Was it a great challenge to present the dance in the late 18th century style? Such a presentation, however, would have carried the message to a discerning audience of how a *closed society* in a way provokes the need for vicarious pleasures. For others the point may not have reached home easily. Again Tamasha being a folk form is constantly at the mercy of what is in demand. The late 18th century style is dead and gone. Presenting a dance in a Tamasha film style is taking the line of least resistance and that is what is done. There is a lot of irony implicit in how the text presents the scene. The Brahmins are insistent on a dance depicting the erotic foreplay between the baman and the bamani. The dancer would have to act and dance like a woman shy, coy and rather reluctant to the overtures of the baman as per the received image of the bamanis. On the stage it does not get performed in such detail. Again Ghashiram, according to the stage direction is to appear as a pot bellied Brahmin with a long tuft on his tonsured head, rather ludicrous in his appearance. In the actual performance only the tonsured head with a small tuft is shown. The potbelly and the dhoti are missing too. The dance of the bamanis on the other section of the stage is completely omitted. Why? Possibly because it's a big challenge. May be, a dance, which would bring out the clandestine aspect of the relationship was difficult to conceive and execute. More importantly it would have been very very explosive: a veritable bomb. The play triggered extreme responses from those who did not understand that it had a universal theme and that a Nana or a Ghashiram came as a part of a metaphor and so did the Pune Brahmins. The socio political dimension of presenting two dominant communities in Pune and Maharashtra in this light was practically risky and detrimental to the sustained presence of the play that had gone on stage. As a

result a scene, which could have been very rewarding and rich, suffered a miscarriage. There are several other dances and mimes in the play that enrich the whole experience of the play and bring out the helplessness of the people who are victims of muscle power, crime, and lust as these go hand in hand. Apart from the rhythmic footwork and slight dancing that goes on throughout the play there are a number of dances and mimes.

1. Ganapati dancing with Saraswati and Lakshmi.
2. The Tamasha dance in Bavannakhani.
3. Baman Bamani Erotic dance in Bavannakhani / the dance between the bamanis and the Maratha Shiledars.
4. Ghashiram's war dance.
5. Nana and Gauri dancing the hunter and the hunted dance.
6. The dance in which Gauri titillates Nana.
7. Continuation of the earlier dance –Nana chases Gauri through the various gardens of Pune.
8. Continuation- Nana Gauri – like Lord Krishna- Radha and his wives dancing around him like milkmaids.
9. Nana and Gauri playing Holi / the colours in erotic way
10. Gulabi performs an extremely sexy dance of colours.
11. The Vaghya Murali Dance after the prayaschitta mime
12. The Brahmins dancing a typical bhondala or navaratri dance of adolescent girls with Sutradhar at the center.
13. Ghashiram's death dance.

The last five of these are from the second act and except for the third all of these are presented very well. As dance is a medium that is culture specific but not totally dependent on language the dances can be pan Indian.

Conceived as a performance these two seem to be completely in tune with the dramatist's vision. The music is almost entirely in the Marathi tradition or at the most in Indian tradition.

So far as the miming is concerned the entire presentation itself is in the *mime* style. But some scenes seem to be conceived as very effective presentations of pantomimes. E.g. (1) Ghashiram being beaten up once in Gulabi's hall and then again outside the Parvati ramana. (2) the scene of the brahmin's ordeal (3) preparations for Nana's wedding. (4) digging out Gauri's dead body. (5) Ghashiram being tortured by the Brahmin mob.

Since mime is a very effective non-verbal visual, language is not necessary and the messages get conveyed very powerfully.

What happens to the text when there is a translation and a performance of a translated text? There are so many possibilities.

1. Translation in one of the Indian languages
2. Translation in a non Indian language
3. A play performed before a non-native i.e. Non Marathi or non-Indian audience with the support of handouts, brief summaries etc.

Since the audience is an integral part of the experience of the performance, it also becomes an important factor when one considers a performance of a dramatic text- original as well as translated.

Ghashiram Kotwal has been translated into several Indian and European languages; Hindi, Kannada and Bengali among the Indian languages- English and German among the European languages. I am aware of its performances in Hindi. There was a Delhi production by Abhiyan in Hindi, which is mentioned by Samik Bandopadhyaya in his introduction to the Oxford edition of *Collected Plays in Translation -Vijay Tendulkar* who thinks that the music weakens the thrust of the satire in the original Marathi play. According to him the Delhi production had a different impact; it had less entertainment value, less music and greater impact as a serious play. I watched the one directed by B.V. Karanth of Bharat Bhavan. It also had less music. It was a powerful presentation. To me, however any performance that drops music, truncates the impact almost completely. Bhaskar Chandavarkar, the music director of the play observes in an interview that music is so much an integral part of *Ghashiram Kotwal* that performances without music are not half as powerful as the original Marathi version. I agree with him. I think the music, the dialogue and the voice culture used in the Marathi play are in a way inseparable because they communicate quite a lot at a sub-cultural level to keep on adding instantaneously layers of meaning, innuendoes and culture specific additives that enrich the magical experience in the theatre. Music is inseparable from the structure of the play, the form of the play as it is conceived. The play is not a serious play but a play which keeps on commenting on the power dynamics and the way they operate by presenting what goes on happening at the surface level in a way which is very entertaining and this is in keeping with the Marathi folk tradition. The bathos, the ludicrous in the situation is brought to the fore as much as the cruelties in it, the first act accentuating the first and the second act bringing out the second aspect.

Language and songs again cannot be ignored. Taking just one example from the English translation I would make my point clear.

The scene of Nana's wedding has (a) a clandestine aspect to it as the brahmins are scared of Ghashiram but eager to attend the wedding. The exchange between them and the Sutradhar is a repetition of a similar scene in the first act as the brahmins secretly prepare to go to Bavannakhani. So far so good. But immediately the Sutradhar begins to sing a song, which is a very good example of verbal irony. It is a wedding song from the play-acting of young girls. He says, 'My Nana is getting married' and goes on to describe the girl in tender terms and the bridegroom as an old bogey. Marathi audiences know a similar song from Deval's Sangeet Sharada and irony reaches home immediately. After this the Sutradhar starts with a song inviting everybody, particularly the women folk to the wedding and parodies Nana's sexuality and his pedophilic tendencies in selecting tender and young girls for sex as well as marriage. At the end there is a song, which is a proper wedding folk song. Here it comes with deviations and distortions. The original song goes on commenting on the arrival of the bridegroom at the wall of the city and how he goes through a series of rituals which he performs before coming to the pandal to marry the girl. All this is distorted by the Sutradhar to bring out the power of money, which ironically, has been stated by Ghashiram himself when he says he would find a suitable boy for his Gauri.

The additional feature here is the voice of Nana. Mohan Agashe who played Nana made use of two different voices. One for the public performances and one for the domestic and erotic exchanges. The latter one was a nasal voice commonly found among the Chitpavan Brahmins of those times, adding a localized edge to the depiction of the character. Much of this would be lost, as the English translation has omitted these songs completely. If there were a loss of subtleties and nuances in the performances in the translated versions in other Indian languages, this would certainly be multiplied in the English translation. In a performance-oriented play the problem is critical.

When it comes to music the problem is even more serious. In the text only some of the songs are provided. The verses in the Dashavatari style, Bharud style, or the sing song style of batavani in tamasha or when an Abhanga gets converted into a laavani in the scene of Ganapati Sthapana in Nana's mahal are all present in the text but the actual Laavanis and the Kavvalli is not given by the dramatist. Here the credit goes entirely to Pandit Bhaskar Chandavarkar for the selection of suitable pieces and music everywhere. How does the transfer of these take place across the sub cultures and across cultures? How does it affect the total impact of the play? The loss is significant. The theatre experience of a translated play is an independent and separate experience with totally different interpretational possibilities but nowhere close to the original one.

~ Dr Shubhangi Raykar

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ENGLISH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: CONNECTING HISTORY TO LITERARY HISTORY

Dr Rajeev Patke

My presentation takes the form of a localized stock-taking of the possible relations between the writing of literary histories and the writing of historical narratives. It is based on the recent experience of co-authoring a literary history of English in Southeast Asia (oddly enough, the first for the region as a notional whole) in which we have tried to provide a comparative account of developments concerning the literary uses to which English has been put, in the last couple of centuries, in various parts of the region referred to commonly as Southeast Asia.

The writing of our narrative surfaced several issues of the broadly cultural and specifically literary kind which impinge upon the nature of, and necessity for, historical explanation, ranging from the merely curious to the puzzlingly enigmatic aspects of the contemporary literary scene in Anglophone Southeast Asia. Any attempt to address these issues provides opportunity for testing a couple of suggestive ideas articulated in 1931 by the German intellectual and critic Walter Benjamin in his essay on 'Literary History and the Study of Literature' on the task appropriate to literary history: 'What is at stake is not to portray literary works in the context of their age, but to represent the age that perceives them—our age—in the age during which they arose. It is this that makes literature into an organon of history; and to achieve this, and not to reduce literature to the material of history, is the task of the literary historian'.

Benjamin's approach is significant in two respects. First, he displaces the conventional notion of the historian trying to reconstruct a theoretically recoverable past with the provocative

idea of historical writing as an attempt at discovering presentiments of what became our age in versions of a fundamentally unrecoverable past. Second, he asks for literature to be treated as an organon of history rather than its material. We are enjoined to think of literature (the canon of texts that we designate as literary writing, along with the implied assumptions and values of that canon) as an instrument with which to build historical explanations, rather than as the material about which historical explanations are to be generated. For Benjamin, the nature of historical explanation declares itself as purposive; that is, it does not subscribe to belief in the notion of knowledge-for-its-own-sake but as knowledge towards specific and provisional ends. The revisionist element of Benjamin's emphases is directed in part at the habit among literary historians of treating their narratives as a sub-set of historical narrative, distinguished from ordinary histories only in the sense of confining themselves to literary materials. In another part, Benjamin directs his revisionism, along lines of force that are at once problematically Marxist and Messianic, against the idea of historical narrative as a mode of archaeological reconstruction, in support of the idea of energizing specific mobilizations between a continually changing present and a corresponding notion of a contingently relevant historicity.

I propose to test the usefulness of these ideas by drawing upon the literary history just concluded to single out several features of the cultural condition of English writing in Southeast Asia as well as the position from which our literary history is written. Each such feature can be framed as a topic about which the literary historian wishes to ask a set of questions, such that any attempt at answers activates possible relations between a past rendered as a potentially plural immanence and a present accessible as its historically contingent realization. Benjamin's way of describing this dynamic relation is to think of the past as looking back in

response to our gaze, and when the two gazes lock we have what he calls a shock of recognition, the shock being the precise locus where new awareness is created: knowledge of how a given present discovers its genealogy in a specific element of the past, a knowing in which the past is reanimated as the incipience and imminence of what was realized as its present embodiment.

Consider, first, the parameters of our literary history: an idea of literary history applied to literary productions in the English language from a region nominated as Southeast Asia. It was simple enough to keep the literary uses of English as our primary concern, even though it meant acknowledging that English existed in the region amidst a plurality of languages whose interactions with English provided a legitimate and relevant topic for further study, which our literary history was obliged to elide, once it had taken note of how English mutated under the influence of local linguistic conditions. But defining the limits of our geographical scope proved less simple: our focus on relating and contrasting the Anglophone literary cultures of Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines) extended further to the inclusion of Hong Kong in our narrative—much to the displeasure of several academics in Hong Kong and at least one of our publisher’s reviewers. Our reasons for the inclusion of Hong Kong illustrate the contingent nature of all explanations within a literary history that nominates a specific idea of region as its geographical boundary: a shared history of colonial influence, and the sheer fact of the spread of English (however slow, limited and divergent in effect) to these four regions.

I move now to a very brief consideration of some of the principal features characteristic of regional literary cultures in English derived from a colonial provenance. All postcolonial nation-states that achieved independence in the latter half of the twentieth century from British and American political control exhibit a set of

common features whose enumeration clears the ground for closer attention to the features that diverge, first between Southeast and South Asia, and second within Southeast Asia. In identifying these, my aim is to illustrate the ways in which specific aspects of the present point to a selective dimension of the past for their explanation.

My plan here is to begin with a set of declarative propositions about contemporary literary culture, then to raise a number of questions concerning each proposition, and then indicate how the attempt to answer these questions involves us in the kind of historicizing explanation that makes our interest in the past contingent on our interests in and approach to the present.

Proposition 1 Creativity in English is widespread but unevenly so in contemporary Asia.

Question 1a: When and how did the aspiration to write in English become established?

Answer 1a: Indians were writing sonnets well before Macaulay penned his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835); Filipinos were writing enthusiastically in English shortly after the Americans began disseminating English all over the Philippines; in British Malaya English spread belatedly, as it did in Hong Kong: the momentum, volume, and self-confidence of literary productions from each region correlates in numerous ways to these origins.

Implication for literary history: the relative belatedness with which English came to be used in the Malayan peninsula and Hong Kong as compared with the speed with which it was assimilated in the Philippines needs explaining; it could be accounted for in terms of the differences in attitude and educational policy between British and US colonial governance.

Q.1b: What, in retrospect, is shared between regions about this aspiration?

A.1b: Each region begins in derivative emulation of the models current in the colonizing culture; then works its way towards issues of self-representation; but takes a lot of time to evolve modes of writing that can be said to be characteristic in a positively unique manner.

Implication for literary history: Derivativeness may be an endemic problem with Anglophone writing from all parts of Southeast Asia, and the factors that enable dependency to be outgrown in time provide literary history and analysis with a challenging opportunity to come up with interpretive explanations.

Q.1c: What are the principal divergences between regions, and how did they come about? A.1c: Filipino writing is the most energetic and wide-spread of the regional literary cultures in English, yet to free itself completely from its American models, and often preoccupied with noting regional sub-cultures or a dream of idealized nationhood that awaits realization, and vastly influenced by the mode of teaching creative writing introduced into the country under US influences, a phenomenon to which there are no counterparts in the British ex-colonies; Malayan writing in English is confined largely to authors who perceive themselves marginalized in the new nation on grounds of race and gender; Singaporean writing remains preoccupied with anxieties about the cost paid for in daily living by the manner in which the state has organized all aspects of civic life towards a specific idea of nation; Hong Kong writing in English remains largely an expatriate activity, reflecting from the margins on the unique features of Hong Kong existence.

Implication for literary history: the literary historian seems required to account for how patterns of cultural practice created during colonial times persist in the various countries of contemporary Anglophone Southeast Asia despite so much that has changed in their cultural circumstances.

Proposition 2 Multilingual creativity is rare in some parts of Asia, less so in other parts.

Q.2a: What are the factors that facilitate multilingual creativity?

A.2a: The capacity of writers to access a plural linguistic inheritance without letting one language repress their other languages: this happens most successfully in the Philippines; and is noticeably rare as a phenomenon in Malaysia and Singapore.

Implication for literary history: the curious difference between widespread Filipino bilingual creativity and its infrequent occurrence in other parts of Anglophone Southeast Asia has rarely been commented upon, and invites interpretive speculations.

Q.2b: What are the factors that inhibit multilingual creativity?

A.2b: Undue deference to the culture and language of the colonizing culture, allied with pragmatic reasons for losing indigenous languages for creative use by acceding to the power of English, both as a creative resource, and as a trans-national language.

Implication for literary history: why indigenous languages shrivel with the growth of English in most parts of Southeast Asia yet lacks explanation, given that they do not suffer this fate either in the Philippines (or in South Asia).

Q.2c: What is the effect of multilingual contexts on literary productions in English?

A.2c: Hybrid varieties of English are spoken in each region of Southeast Asia; but these are not always reflected in literary writing, much of which (with noteworthy exceptions) retain adherence to standard English; truly polyglot creativity is rare, but bilingual creativity is common in the Philippines; only rarely in the rest of Southeast Asia .

Implication for literary history: another topic that awaits fuller exemplification and analysis is the impact of multilinguality on creative practices in English in Southeast Asia.

Proposition 3 The thematic preoccupations in regional literary cultures foreground nation in Southeast Asia (but not in Asia), but do so differently in Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

Q.3a: What are the chief thematic preoccupations of Filipino writing in English?

A.3a: At the risk of oversimplification it can be said that the disappointment of the dream of nation during the period when Spanish rule came to an end and the opportunity to resist the American takeover was lost continues to haunt Filipino writing.

Implication for literary history: A rich vein of material is opened up for comparison when the failure of the dream of nation at the turn of the last century is connected to subsequent political misrule in the Philippines (most notably during the Marcos years) and its impact upon writing.

Q.3b: What are the chief thematic preoccupations of Malayan and Malaysian writing in English?

A.3b: The nature of minoritarian experience in a nation redefined along ethnic lines has been the chief preoccupation of Malaysian writing.

Implication for literary history: the very narrow base of experience that subsidizes Malaysian writing in English, and the lack of interest it has generated among Malay-speaking Malaysians (or the self-nominated bhumiputras of postcolonial Malaysia) invites further discussion.

Q.3c: What are the chief thematic preoccupations of Singapore and Hong Kong writing in English?

A.3c: The costs extracted in daily living at the individual level by the manner in which the State shapes the nation's destiny after Independence continues to preoccupy Singaporean writers; and the nature of urban cosmopolitanism characterizes writing in English from Hong Kong.

Implication for literary history: the degree to which Singapore writing gets bogged down in what can sometimes appear a sterile and romanticized binomialism deserves fuller recognition and debate.

Proposition 4 South Asian authors have an easier and wider global readership than Southeast Asian writers in English.

Q.4a: What literary models and traditions do they subscribe to?

A.4a: Authors from South Asia and Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong worked largely within British conventions and models, although wider influences have been assimilated more recently; but Filipinos continue to write almost exclusively with American models.

Implication for literary history: the limitations of postcolonial national literary traditions can be linked to the models they subscribe to in ways that might appear polemical, but deserves better recognition than it has received so far.

Q.4b: Who do regional authors write for?

A.4b: A certain myopia and insularity affects all parts of Southeast Asian writing in English: Filipinos write for an audience split between readership at home and an expatriate readership based in the US, with very little awareness of other Anglophone readers; an isolation abetted by the local publishing industry; expatriate Singaporeans and Malaysians fare better with overseas circulation than authors writing within Southeast Asia, who continue to suffer under-exposure, compared with authors from South Asia.

Implication for literary history: The problem of the poor circulation of Southeast Asian writing, the reasons why this should have come about, and ways out of this predicament, remain among the most urgent problems that should link authors, critics, academics and the publishing industry in constructive conversation.

Q.4c: What are the factors that hinder the scope for a wide readership?

A.4c: Largely, it is the nature of the colonial relationship, and the dependency it created among regional authors; also, the modest scope of local publishing; the intermittent or minimal participation of international publishers in the local scene; poor awareness of how to develop international access routes for regional authors.

Implication for literary history: questions of value invited debate, specifically whether writing from Southeast Asia appeals to regional audiences and their familiarity with regional cultures in ways that (i) imply its localism of reference is its defining limit, (ii) regional values, tied as they are, to cultural mimeticism, face difficulty in appealing to whatever is recognized as necessary for transnational appeal and international canonic value.

Proposition 5 Drama is the least developed literary genre throughout Asia; while the novel dominates in South Asia; the short story in most parts of Southeast Asia and poetry in Singapore (and Malaysia)

Q.5a: Why has drama been lagging behind the other genres all over Asia?

A.5a: The adherence by most writers to the norms of Standard English, largely eliding regional speech rhythms and intonation, has created a schizophrenic situation concerning the presentation of spoken English which inhibits the naturalism and realism to which dramatic writing is prone in the region, especially from Malaysia and Singapore.

Implication for literary history: the disjunction between written drama and theatre as performative event invite fuller discussion; as does the impasse faced by local drama and television whenever it gets schizophrenic about local versus standard English spoken idioms.

Q.5b: What are the factors that lead to the dominance of fiction or poetry in specific regional literatures?

A.5b: The prestige in which poetry has been held from colonial times has ensured that writers with literary aspirations choose poetry as the most worthy genre, a choice reinforced by their preference for a lyric form that equates expression with self-expression. Fiction is also popular, especially in its realist modes along lines that provide confirmation by the hypothesis proposed by Fredric Jameson in the 1980s that writers from newly-independent nations look to writing for modes of national allegory. The short story dominates in Singapore, and also in the Philippines, but Filipinos, like Malaysian writers, are equally adept with the novel and the short story, while only recent Filipino fiction has

shown itself capable of merging its attraction to historical narrative with various forms of magical realism.

Implication for literary history: the disjunction between literary and popular, or high-brow and low-brow writing needs more explicit critical engagement than it has received.

Q.5c: How do literary forms relate to popular forms of creativity in English?

A.5c: Literary forms are not particularly close to spoken English (with a handful of notable exceptions), except in the Philippines, and popular genres such as the ghost story or the graphic novel diverge from the more conventional literariness of the realist narratives or the lyric poems common in Anglophone Southeast Asia.

Implication for literary history: the tendency for the critical literature on Southeast Asian writing has been to separate discussion of high-brow from low-brow forms of writing; the need for this to be bridged has yet to be addressed fully in the regional critical writing.

Proposition 6 The relation of the creative use of English to the academic study of English diverges widely across Asia and within Southeast Asia.

Q.6a: What are the principal differences between South and Southeast Asia in this respect? A.6a: South Asian writers, especially the novelists, have had much greater success in gaining international attention than writers from Southeast Asia; poetry in English is far more widely practiced in Southeast Asia than South Asia; issues of history and nationhood do not dominate fiction from South Asia (except specific topics like Partition) as much as they do in Southeast Asia.

Implication for literary history: there is a serious lack of comparative critical and historical writing that will link and contrast South Asian and Southeast Asian writing in English, which corresponds to the lack of mutual knowledge of and interest in writing among Asian and Southeast Asian authors (with rare exceptions).

Q.6b: What are the principal differences within Southeast Asia?

A.6b: Filipinos are far more actively multilingual and capable of writing concurrently in several genres than authors from other parts of Southeast Asia.

Implication for literary history: no explanations have been produced, nor much attention given, to this remarkable difference.

Q.6c: What might be the reasons for these differences?

A.6c: This difference remains largely an unaccounted for situation, but is evident that writers in the Philippines think of writing as a vocation almost separate from language and genre while authors in Malaysia and Singapore work much more closely within implied links between vocation and genre.

Implication for literary history: why authors should find commitment to their vocation mediated through genres in one region, but not in another, is a curious difference that invites greater attention than it has received.

Proposition 7 The institutions of literature—the organs of dissemination, critical canons and the relation of regional or local criteria of value relate to transnational institutions and critical canons very unevenly across Southeast Asia.

Q.7a: What are the principal organs of dissemination in regional literary culture?

A.7a: The periodical continues to play a major role in the dissemination of writing, especially in the Philippines; Singapore has an active publishing industry but a rather conservative patronage system; while Malaysian writers in English have until recently lacked local publishers in English; and digital media have recently broadened the scope for outlets alternative to print technology.

Implication for literary history: the nature of regional patronage and tutelage as well as mentoring sorely needs explicit historicizing and comparing, in order for better synergy between writing and the facilitation of its optimization in a given society.

Q.7b: How do regional canons relate to transnational canons?

A.7b: Awkwardly or defensively. Regional authors have reputations that remain largely local (or extending to expatriate authors from Southeast Asia, who have to contend with becoming ghettoized within the literary cultures to which they have chosen to migrate. The reasons for this situation are complex and are rarely confronted within the region explicitly.

Implication for literary history: the issue of canonicity, and the related issue of how regional canons might relate to transnational canons needs more direct engagement by critics, academics as well as authors than it has received so far.

Q.7c: What is the relation and contribution of regional criticism to creative writing? A.7c: Robust and energetic at the level of the anthology and the review, but not very evolved at the level of literary history.

Implication for literary history: No sustained history of Anglophone critical practice exists for any part of Southeast Asia, although surveys of specific periods exist, in isolation from any comparative

orientation – a lack that needs to be filled.

Proposition 8 The discourses of modernity and urbanization dominate all the Southeast Asian literary cultures in English, but the discourses of gender and sexuality, and the discourse of religion, is much slower to develop.

Q.8a: How far do religious affiliations get communicated through regional literary cultures in English?

A.8a: Although Filipino identity is deeply rooted in the Catholicism brought by Spain to the region, religion is not a major theme in the writing from the region; and even less so in Malaysia and Singapore.

Implication for literary history: why religion should be relatively back-grounded in much of the Anglophone writing of the region remains an issue that needs sustained historical and comparative scrutiny and explanation.

Q.8b: How do regional literatures in English relate to the discourses of modernity and urbanization?

A.8b: Urbanization is addressed much more insistently and directly than social modernity; the latter, when dealt with, is taken to be a subset of the former and a function of the history of nation and society. Meanwhile, literary modernization is manifest in regional writing primarily at the level of poets turning to free verse in preference to Western conventions of form and meter (with occasional exceptions); and energies of the experimental kind have been deployed all over Southeast Asia mainly in terms of the problem and opportunity provided by English for individual and communal self-representation rather than renovation of inherited forms and genres.

Implication for literary history: whether literary modernism was a Western import belated to Southeast Asian writing practices needs foregrounding; likewise, the manner in which alternative modernities might be attributed to writing from the region needs fuller exposition.

Q.8c: What are the factors that shape regional discourses on gender and sexuality?

A.8c: Regional writers in English have tended to be conservative in their handling of sexuality and gender; writing that addresses issues of gender and sexuality is recent in provenance.

Implication for literary history: feminist writing and gay writing have both been belated in surfacing in conservative Southeast Asia, hence what regional authors have to add that is new or distinctive to either discourse awaits further debate and exposition.

In conclusion, it could be reiterated that a project in literary history such as the one described above constitutes an attempt to answer specific questions about the scene of writing in a given language as used in a specific region over an extended period of time from a perspective that recognizes any literary history as a provisional and necessarily contingent attempt at the continual task of redefining the present in terms of a specific and periodically revisionist relation with an interpretive version of *a* past (rather than *the* past), a past that Benjamin helps us understand as a potentiality or incipience whose realizations include what we recognize as our continual present tense in time. The role of literary history in shaping awareness of writing practices among authors as much as among critics or academics cannot, therefore, be overstressed.

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NARRATIVE DISCIPLINING OF THE SUBJUGATED IN R.K. NARAYAN'S *WAITING FOR THE MAHATMA* *

Dr Kamlakar Bhat

This paper argues that the conception of 'nation' in R.K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* is restrictive and that this makes it impossible for this novel to render the thematic of nation as a collectivity. The restrictive terms by which 'nation' is conceived in this novel indicates the narrative disciplining of the subjugated characters. The novel attends to the journey from the traditional forms of sociality to a 'new' one: 'nation'. It situates the self-fashioning of the protagonist amidst the efforts at engendering this new identity. Within the social universe of the novel, however, this identity is claimed exclusively for the upper class/caste community. The portrayal of the social universe reveals a politics of disrecognition of marginalised identity groups.

In presenting this argument I adopt a two-track approach to analysis. First I undertake a macro-analysis of the novel in order to establish that the issue of identity is a concern in the novel and that it traces the movement from the traditional forms of identity to a new identity of the collectivity called 'nation'. This I call the narrative framing of the theme of identity wherein the individual's self-fashioning also becomes that of the identity of the community. The second approach undertakes a microanalysis of particular units of the novel. Here, I probe the effects of certain narrative practices on the structuring of collective identity and examine the resultant configuration of nation as a collectivity in this text. One such narrative practice studied here is the narrative gaze, by which I mean the structure of viewing in the text. The decision to see and hear certain actions and not to do so with certain other actions in a representation is narrative disciplining. Another is the narrative

overcoding i.e. the manner in which in the social universe of the novel, sociality is densely marked with the exclusive signs of upper class/caste community. Through a detailed analysis of pertinent microstructures of the text, this paper hopes to build an argument about the construction of 'nation' as a sociality in this novel.

Nations are about borders. They are not only the edges of a nation but also reproduced everywhere. Drawing up borders comes to constitute one nation as against another, one within another, etc. Borders are the lineaments of a nation; but they are crossed, redrawn, pushed up or aside in the narration of nation. While nation is constituted as a narrative (Bhabha, *Nation* 3) – of its origins, of its identity, of its uniqueness, of its presence, and so on – narratives also construct nations (Anderson 25). Even as there can be no nation without others surrounding it – the very nationness being something other than other nations in the self-perception of nations – there can be no nation without many within one. The plenitude it refers to is where various productions of nationness are set up resulting in continuous contestations.

Referring to the 'acts of defining the idea of society', Homi Bhabha says, "It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest or cultural value are negotiated" (*Location* 2). Attending to differences or to ambivalences leads us to view nation as a dynamic domain of intersubjectivity. Construction of nation is not only a process of collaboration, it also involves contestations. In its hybrid, diverse, fuzzy terrain, nation is never a settled identity mark but a space for the production of contingently concrete sense of intersubjectivity, wherein the sense is not 'imagined' but results from practices that are shared – unevenly, fleetingly, floatingly. The iterative eruption of difference in intersubjective contacts alerts us to how nation as a collectivity points not to a seamless singularity, not to a

homogenous society in empty time, but to a conflictual consensuality. Thus, nation as an intersubjective domain is a field of compositeness across oppositions, contract across contradictions.

The examination of the figuration of nation in Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* is undertaken with this notion of nation. In examining the construction of nation in the novel two tropes are important: one is the collective identity that the novel invokes through the social universe emplotted and the readership evoked; second is the othering implicit in the kind of exclusions that the novel indirectly builds into the narrative. The attempt in this paper is to identify these two tropes in Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* in order to specify the construction of nation in this novel.

In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Narayan presents an individual facing a personal crisis that unfolds against the backdrop of a larger crisis. The personal crisis exposes an indolent individual to the processes of social reorganisation of social relations. This particular experience is accommodated into the general frame of the larger crisis, i.e., the independence struggle in the subcontinent. As a story of Sriram's coming of age, the novel traces his involvement with two streams of anti-colonial nationalist politics. He is initiated into Gandhi's satyagraha by Bharati, a girl with whom he falls in love and under whose tutelage he begins to refashion his life. He gives up his old lifestyle in exchange for a nationalist's ascetic life: wearing khaadi, propagating Gandhi's message and spinning the wheel of charka. This initiation into Gandhism takes place when Sriram attends the public meetings of Gandhi during his visit to Malgudi in pursuit of the girl he has become enchanted with. Although Sriram meets Gandhi here and has conversations with him, receiving his advice on what he should do, it is largely as a

‘disciple’ of Bharati that he learns how to be a ‘soldier’ of freedom struggle in the Gandhian way. Thus, Bharati is the mediator between Gandhism and Sriram. It is also significant that Sriram later is entangled with another stream of nationalist politics that is not in consonance with Gandhism. During this phase, it is Subhas Chandra Bose who is supposed to be the guru. But for Sriram, the mediator is Jagadish, a self-styled follower of Bose. Sriram, in a state of lethargic confusion ever since Bharati has courted arrest and is no more around to guide him, yields to the dictates of Jagadish and under his direction becomes a terrorist.

In its emphasis on the everyday life led by Sriram, maintaining a point of view that consistently keeps up with Sriram, the narrative presents a view not so much of ‘the Gandhian freedom struggle’ as M.K. Naik observes (164), but focuses on the process of self-fashioning that Sriram undertakes. Commenting on Sriram’s dalliance with Gandhism, Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out: “There is no mistaking the fact that at the root of Sriram’s nationalistic zeal there is no ideological conviction but an infatuation with a girl who believes in Gandhi’s way” (40). In a similar vein Rumina Sethi has observed that, “Narayan allows the personal to take precedence over the national by showing us his protagonist Sriram’s attraction for Bharati, Gandhi’s disciple, which far outweighs his interest in Gandhi’s political programme” (61). Thus, the narrative concentrates on the particular story of Sriram. But the framework of nationalist politics within which Sriram’s self-fashioning takes place frames the particular narrative against the general one: the particular Malgudi being framed within the general India. Such a framing in the novel is suggested early enough when Sriram spends his first night in Gandhi’s camp, sleeping on a mat without the comforts of his home; he feels as if “he was becoming a citizen of an entirely new world” (331). This transformation is the context

in which the narrative framing of the local into the national is being staged. Sriram is indifferent to the affairs of the world around him and has little interest in people except his grandmother. He lives his life at 14, Kabir Street with little care for the world until his encounter with Bharati. Sriram's involvement with the independence struggle under Bharati's influence is a complete refashioning of his self, as well as a sign of his participation in the national imagination. As is suggested early in the novel Sriram's involvement with the Gandhian movement initiates him into a new journey. When Sriram first meets Gandhi, he is told:

'By the time we meet again next, you must give me a very good account of yourself.'

He laughed in a kindly manner, and Sriram said, 'Yes, Bapuji, I will be a different man.'

'Why do you say "different"? You will be all right if you are fully yourself.'

'I don't think that is enough, Bapu,' said Bharati. 'He should change from being himself, if he is to come to any good. I think he is very lazy. He gets up at eight o'clock and idles away the day.' (329)

As this conversation makes apparent, both Sriram and Bharati are aware that he is set on a road to remake himself: the self-indulgent Sriram coming out into the public arena and beginning to see himself as a 'citizen of a new world.' The imagination of the new world for Sriram does not entail a new territory, but the re-imagining of the same space in a new relationship. In this process Sriram meets a set of people completely unknown to him earlier, although they too are from

Malgudi. Sriram's socialisation thus is merged in the novel with his integration into national imagination.

Sriram's self-fashioning is underlined by his confused state of mind. He is rendered unable to develop steadfast conviction that marks the characters of Bharati and Jagadish, two of his mentors. His engagement with all these diverse discourses is not always passive. His frivolousness and stubbornness often undermine the domination that others seek to have over him. This is well exemplified in the scene where Jagadish tries to indoctrinate him with his "attack the backbone of the British" rhetoric. Sriram's responses that mock at words like 'backbone' do not allow Jagadish to have his full sway. But Sriram can have only petty victories as with the shopkeeper who stores imported biscuits and whom Sriram harangues demanding that he destroy all merchandise that are imported or when in prison, he is able by way of obstinate arguments to stand up to an inmate who is a bully. These minor triumphs apart, Sriram's project of refashioning lead him to subject himself to others' narratives. Sriram's socialisation is not a self-discovering enterprise, but is carried out in relation to others. Tabish Khair, viewing Sriram as paradigmatic of Narayan's self-estranged characters, has observed:

Sriram of *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a good example of a character who lets himself and his actions be defined by others – starting with his Granny, moving on to Mahatma Gandhi, and Bharati, succumbing to vague revolutionary ideas of the photographer Jagadish... Sriram derives his sense of importance from other people. (230-31)

Sriram's inadequate participation in the discursive practices of Bharati, Jagadish and Granny (the three frameworks within

which his self-fashioning is located) suggests a half-hearted socialisation on his part. Though he dismisses his Granny's advice quite readily on many occasions, her logic of self-serving wisdom remains with him throughout. He never overcomes his attachment with the house and the homely life he led there before the arrival of Bharati in his life.

His love for Bharati pulls him into the Gandhian movement and forces him to refashion himself. He spends a lot of time doing the work prescribed by Gandhi, as communicated to him by Bharati. It does not necessarily make him part of the masses as his lonely existence in an ancient ruin indicates. This remote existence, except for some excursions outside to carry out his assignments, project him not as integrating into but alienated from the social surroundings. This is further suggested in the novel by Sriram's dislocation from the town immediately after his involvement with the Gandhian movement. He does not stay in the town but on a hill isolated from any human inhabitation. Sriram's initiation into socialisation has him staying in the sweepers' colony during Gandhi's visit to Malgudi and then in the ruins on the hill. Sriram's new abode is beyond the communally defined space. This outside space is free of the traditional regulation on who comes and goes. In other words, Sriram comes into contact with nationalist politics where the traditional categories of community are being redefined in a space removed from his earlier environs. He receives his first lessons during his stay in the sweepers' colony, which is 'outside the town limits' and then during his active involvement with public politics he is located not only outside home and town but in an isolated place. Throughout his career as a nationalist (of both the Gandhian and Subhas Bose variety) he remains a little suspect in terms of his ideological commitment, and the process this indicates is also that his 'becoming a citizen of a new world' is neither smooth nor is it complete. The theme of 'becoming' a

'citizen' of a 'new' world is indicative of the move from one kind of collective identity to another kind: from the traditional community to the national community. But in Sriram's career this entails not integration of one collective identity into another: he is not moving from his caste specific cultural identity to a national identity in harmony with all the members of the society of his cultural identity. The removal from Malgudi to the 'outside' of Malgudi seems to suggest the fragmentary nature of this reorganisation of collective identity.

Though the narrator keeps the focus on Sriram, only rarely moving beyond his field of vision in the narrative, Sriram is presented in the novel in situations outside his social moorings. His journeys that were usually limited to a few streets of Malgudi are radically extended, culminating in the end in his journey from South to North, to New Delhi. But there is a contained socialisation of Sriram in what the narrative records. The result is that the novel projects Sriram as remaining imprisoned in his provincial imagination. This is brought out forcefully in the sense of estrangement he feels during his train journey to Delhi. Sriram is awed by the foreignness that surrounds him.

Thus, Sriram's self-fashioning to become a citizen of a new 'nation' is a complicated enterprise. His self-fashioning inaugurated by his enchantment with Bharati is severely curtailed by the strangeness he feels in places away from his own. In an allegorical touch, Bharati is projected as the major framework for Sriram's self-fashioning and Bharati's name is explained as the 'daughter of India' (322). By falling in love with Bharati, the daughter of India, the one who knows many languages, the goddaughter of Gandhiji, Sriram allegorically falls in love with 'India'. Though, he is able to redeem his love for Bharati by securing her consent (via Gandhiji's consent) for

marriage, Sriram's commune with 'India' is left uncertain in the novel.

The processes of self-fashioning of the protagonist Sriram in *Waiting for the Mahatma* begins in the subcontinent's pre-independence era and is wrapped up in the narrative after independence. While Sriram moves from a self-indulgent youth to be moulded as a Gandhian volunteer and briefly as an agent of violence against the colonial administration, his trip to Delhi after independence is the end point of this journey. This trip reveals Sriram's inability to relate himself to all the strangeness around him during his travel in the train as well as in Delhi indicating that the project of refashioning of the self as a 'citizen' of a 'new world' is not complete.

The self-refashioning project in the novel however reveals that the novel is concerned with the issue of the formation of the new collectivity of nation. The story of Sriram becomes an allegory for the journey made by people from the traditional imaginations of community to the 'national' imagination. In this context it is interesting to examine the novel's construction of nation. This examination is carried out here with a micro reading of two episodes in the novel which clearly reveal the novel's normative construction of national identity.

In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, there is an episode where M. K. Gandhi comes to Malgudi. The character Gandhi is taken to the palatial house of Mr. Natesh, the chairman of the Municipal Corporation. Many people have assembled here including a number of children. Gandhi, "noticed a little boy and beckoned to him to come nearer" (314). He speaks in Hindi, calling him "Ao... Ao" and then realises that the boy does not understand Hindi so he employs the little Tamil that he has picked up and says "Inge...va" (314). With encouragement from others, the boy

goes to Gandhi. The narrative gives us no detail about the boy. We are not told anything about his appearance, his dress or any such details. In the next paragraph, we come across a similar scene, except in some details. This time too, we are told, “Mahatmaji saw one child standing apart from the rest...” (315). Then we are offered a detailed description of the fellow; a description focusing on his dark features, unkempt appearance, and general dirtiness. This time too Gandhi calls the boy and makes him sit near him and conducts a conversation with the boy. He learns that the boy is the child of a sweeper, an “untouchable” (315). Gandhi later decides to go with him and stay at his hut.

The manner in which these two encounters are narrated needs detailed explication. In the first instance, the narrative *does not see* any detail about the boy. It does not make visible the boy’s physical or social appearance. It thus generalises him. Appropriately, the instance of this boy approaching Gandhi prompts many other children to go and surround Gandhi. Thus, the boy in the first scene is one of the many boys, and he has his own ‘society’ of boys that follows his action, sharing the experience. Children are seen simply as children. Their personal or social marks are not described. Contrary to this generalised viewing of the boy, there is a particularisation in terms of the language used in conversation. The boy is situated in his linguistic milieu when he is shown to understand the Tamil expression “Inge Va” rather than the Hindi expression “Ao... Ao.” The narrative has Gandhi using the Tamil expression and adjusting to the particular linguistic social self of the boy.

In contrast to this, the second scene, which follows the first and repeats the action of Gandhi beckoning a boy, is narrated by inverting the technique. This time the narrative *sees* the boy “standing aloof from the rest”, “a small dark fellow with a

protruding belly”, (314) in particular details. We are given a physical, personal as well as a social description of the boy. He is not generalised but particularised. The narrative makes visible his appearance, both personal and social. The boy approaching Gandhi evokes in Mr. Natesh, the Municipal Chairman and at the time Gandhi’s host, mortal fears of how he would dirty the diwan.

In contrast to the first scene, as against this particularisation, the narrative does not place him in any linguistic milieu. Though Gandhi has a long conversation with the boy, no mention is made of the language in which the conversation takes place. Neither is any mention made of someone mediating their conversation through translation. We are asked to understand that the character Gandhi, who knows not enough Tamil to converse in that language, talks to the boy in great detail. While the narrator reports all this in English, no mention is made as to whether the boy knows Hindi or English to respond totally coherently to all of Gandhi’s queries.

These two scenes seem to reveal a certain narrative practice of the novel. The boy in the first scene and the one in the second scene are projected as different, as occupying different levels of signification. The first one requires no social description while the second one does. The narrative *sees* the particular appearance of the second boy and records it, while it *does not see* anything especially mentionable in the first boy. In this gesture, the first boy comes across as part of the society of the narrative, of the social space from which / for which the narrative speaks. It implies that the first boy requires no detailing and would be internalised by the reader. Hence the narrative seems to indicate that the society, both within the narrative world and the one outside that reads it, requires no description of the first boy. Here already the narrative marks

out the social space it is narrativising as well as targeting. It takes for granted how the boy would appear; hence finds no need to describe him.

In the case of the second boy the narrative gaze is alert, it senses the difference and finds it necessary to describe him and make him visible. This act of making the boy visible is an act of signification of his difference from everything that surrounds him. He is, as we are told, the son of a sweeper and is waiting for his father. None of his people are around in that crowd. The narrative gaze thus points to the boy as wandering into the crowd from outside in the same way as he enters from outside into the social space of the narrative. This foreignness of the boy thus is specifically seen, noted and emphasised by the narrative.

With respect to the language, while the narrative rushes to specify which language is understood and which not by the first boy, in the case of the second there is no such interest. The particularity of translating for the benefit of the first boy is found unnecessary in the case of the second boy. The narrative that is alert to the cognitive aspect in the case of the first boy, takes no interest in the same with the second. It loses all interest as to in which language Gandhi is conversing with the boy or whether the two are conversing in Hindi or in English (the language in which the conversation is recorded and reported). There is no surprise shown at it. In short, the cognitive and communicative aspects of the boy in the second scene are of no interest to the narrative.

This subtle play of making visible and invisible (and audible/inaudible) is one way in which the narrative charts out its social space. The social space within which it operates finds strangeness in the 'untouchable' boy worth describing but has little interest in listening to him. The disjunction displayed here

between *seeing* and *listening* is suggestive of the differentiated mode of cognition practiced in the novel – recognise one by admitting his voice but without having to describe him/her; recognise another without hearing his/her voice. The narrative practice thus seems to mark the boundaries of the social space to which it relates. The social space of the narrative is in that sense exclusive and one that perpetuates certain social practices of the society it is fictionalising. The narrative gaze in novels becomes a significant pointer to its politics of recognition and disrecognition. A narrative is never an innocent or a ‘disinterested’ record. As Sudipta Kaviraj points out, “Narratives are always told from someone’s point of view... Narrative does not therefore aspire to be a universal form of discourse. It draws lines, distributes people... Narratives are not for all to hear, for all to participate in to an equal degree” (13, 33).

We encounter a similar tendency in the narrative practice in the episode which describes Gandhi’s arrival at the sweepers’ colony. Herein, what the narrative gaze picks up and what it elides hints at the social space that this novel opts to operate within and the manner in which that social space is constructed. In this scene, Gandhi, wishing to see the little boy’s house and possibly stay there, arrives at the colony which is located “outside the town limits... where nobody went” (307). The narrative sees the colony in great detail. It is described with reference to all its static aspects. The colony is, we are told, “probably the worst area in the town”; moving from description of the murkiness of the colony, the narrative makes it a point to mention how the scavengers earned “considerable income by Malgudi standards” and how

These men spent less than a tenth of their income on food or clothing... spending all their time around the municipal building or at the toddy shop run by the

government nearby, which absorbed all their earning... in Malgudi, troublesome children were silenced at the sound of their approach (307).

Effectively, all these descriptions make it very clear that the sweepers' colony of Malgudi is *outside* Malgudi, i.e. foreign to it, though it is not another town or village. This foreignness means that the inhabitants of the sweeper's colony are not part of the society of Malgudi, which the novel is fictionally representing, although territorially it falls within the topography of Malgudi. Therefore, the sweeper's colony is territorially counted as Malgudi but those who stay there are not considered a part of the society of Malgudi. As the expression used in describing the colony as a place "where nobody went" suggests, the inhabitants of the colony are counted by the narrative voice as "nobody". This is made amply clear by the blind spot in the narrative view of the colony. Although Gandhi spends his stay in Malgudi in this colony, not a single sweeper enters the narrative. Even the boy who led Gandhi to the colony disappears. The people of the colony are gazed upon along with the dirt and the general disorder of the place. The narrative takes no interest in fixing its gaze upon any one of them, naming them or hearing any of them speak. Its backhanded sympathy for the women of the colony expressed in describing how the men beat their wives expires with that lone comment.

Gandhi stays in one of the huts in this colony, swept and cleaned for the benefit of his stay. Along with him all his volunteers also stay there, in huts that are unoccupied. Gandhi conducts a number of activities during his time in Malgudi, meeting a number of people. No mention is made of any interaction Gandhi may have had with any of the inhabitants of the colony. The narrative thus *sees* and *hears* a very limited portion of the sweepers' society. It fixes their society in its eternity, taking no

interest in the present goes on. Gandhi's presence too does not provoke the narrative gaze to absorb more than what it dislikes about the place. The opening remark about it, "worst area in the town", seems to shut the case as far as the representability of the colony is concerned.

In this episode we see again the same cognitive politics of narrative practice: of recognition and disrecognition. In restricting the cognition of the sweepers' colony, as it does with the second boy in the episode discussed above, the narrative marks its social space, both for representation within the narrative and for consumption by the readers, as one that has no room for the sweepers. The narrative gaze admits them into the narrative only to mark them as unrepresentable or to underline the difference and distance between the social space of the narrative and that of the inhabitants of the sweepers' colony. There is something very interesting about this episode in the novel which locates Gandhi in the sweepers' colony and which shuts itself towards it. Gandhi's message of erasing untouchability itself is subjected to a strange erasure in this episode. The principle of disrecognition of the untouchables in the sociality represented by the novel undermines the narrativisation of the development of national consciousness and also the coming into being of a new collectivity called nation. The novel's exclusionary narrative practice reveals the defeat of the logic of a national community. K. R. Shirwadkar says, "Narayan's vision of life is exclusive. Many of the social groups do not find place in his fictional world. Extremely affluent and wealthy people have no place in his novels but at the same time, he excludes the underdog, the downtrodden" (83). The point I am making is not that there is no representation of the 'underdog', but about the mode of representation of the 'underdogs'. As discussed above, it is not the absence of the sweepers but the narrative disciplining of their representation within the fictional social space that leads to

the conclusion that there exists in this novel an exclusionary narrative practice.

The narrativisation of Sriram's socialisation in the novel touches upon the various social spheres and social codes in a style that is characteristic of Narayan. Reading the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* might lead us to view it as presenting a microcosm of India in relation to the structures of feeling and living portrayed. In fact, such a reading would be consistent with the way in which Narayan's fiction is usually received. For example, commenting on the aspiration towards a harmonious unity under the idiom of Indianness, Fawzia Afzal-Khan has noted that there is in Narayan's fiction,

[...] a harmonious coexistence symbolizing unity, a wholeness, toward which Narayan's protagonists are constantly progressing and which they must achieve if they are to mature fully. The wholeness ... is possible in the Malgudi of Narayan's novels because it is a world rooted in Indian myth and tradition, a town that is still pastoral in its innocence of the political reality of modern, twentieth century India... Here, what matters most is not how the natives deal with the aftermath of political fragmentation, but whether they will achieve an authentic and sincere identity as Indians in an 'authentic' Indian setting. (qtd. in Dharwadkar 246)

The danger of this aspiration in Narayan's work is clear in this novel as it reveals the suppression and disrecognition involved in arriving at such 'authentic' identity of Indianness. The deployment of certain socio-cultural practices as the normative Indian identity comes to be reflected in the use of restricted myths, symbols and cultural practices in the works of Narayan as well as that of the other writers. This reveals how 'nation' comes to be identified with

a collectivity that is restricted sociologically as well as culturally. This politics of disrecognition reflects the hegemonic nationalism's restrictive construction of nation as a delimited community. The delimitation is not merely a matter of diversity but that of active proscription of identity that aims at perpetuating ascriptive hierarchy within social relations. In this novel the exclusionary narrative practice indicates this politics of proscription and perpetuation.

This exclusionary narrative practice has serious implications for the construction of nation in the novel. While the narrative framing of the particular into the general insists on the shift from the traditional categories of collectivity to 'nation', the narrative through its exclusionary narrative constructs the space of nation in a restrictive manner and reserves that space to the members of the upper caste society who are seen as the normative citizens of the emerging new collectivity. The sweepers are seen as 'outside' this space. Thus in its disrecognition of the sweepers, who are admitted as characters but are seen as not forming an integral part of the new collectivity being delineated in the narrative, *Waiting for the Mahatma* reveals the principle of restriction operative in the construction of nation. Gayatri Chakravarty's comment on Narayan is pertinent here: "Narayan is apart from 'the people', a ruefully apologetic but affectionate commentator" (142). This restrictive imagination also challenges the claim of 'nation' as a category of sociality displacing the traditional ones. In so far as the principles of restrictions are still operative, 'nation', the novel seems to imply, is not a form of collectivity that can accommodate members of the society equally.

~ Dr Kamlakar Bhat

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SANE GURUJI AND THE BIRTH OF THE NOTION OF ANTAR BHARATI “MY DREAM OF PRANTABHARATI”¹

Sudhakar Marathé & Ashok Joshi

Sané Guruji conceived the idea of a united India to be achieved by linguistic and cultural integration, calling it at first “Prantabharati” or regional integration. Eventually in his own words it became expanded or applied to the whole nation called India, “Antarabharati” or national integration.

In an increasingly and even militantly, short-sightedly divisive, insular, provincial and colossally corrupt India, the idea has far greater relevance even than when it was first proposed.

Incidentally, the article traces not just Sané Guruji’s personal history in the Independence Movement but, implicitly, also the transformation of well known political parties and their changing ‘ideals’, morality and highly suspect objectives.

The following translation is presented with great feeling for the Indian people who are living in the grip of intellectual, moral and financial corruption.

My Dream of Prantabharati*

Occasionally my friends asked me what my chief objective in life was. I feel that one ought to be able to experience humanity as a whole and that universal equality ought to prevail. These are certainly my ideas: no one superior, none inferior. I do not wish to

* English translation by Sudhakar Marathé, Hyderabad.

¹ Nivdak Sadhana Granthasancha: Vol.1 (23-27). Puné: Sadhana Prakashan, 2007. Article originally published on 7 May 1949.

have such distinctions in my own life at least. I entered the Congress Movement; I was naturally drawn to the desire to contribute towards obtaining our independence. But I really thought of the Congress as a symbol of all humanity. My own nature was indifferent to religious and caste distinctions. I felt deeply for the Congress because it represented everyone equally. When I was in jail in Dhulé in 1930, the great reformer Shankarrao Thakar asked me, "What do you wish to do after your jail term?" I said, "I shall spread true religion among the people. I shall strive to spread the religion of humanity."

I am not a political person

Hitler says in his autobiography, "What its wings are to a bird, politics is to me." Wings are a bird's essence. Jatayu had said to Ravan [in the Ramayana], "My soul is in my wings." So did Hitler feel that politics was his soul. He might not have survived without it. I do not believe that politics is my soul. I do not have the mentality necessary to take part in politics. Even if one wishes to participate in politics with goodwill and along an elevated path, still one must possess earnestness. Besides, one must organize if one wishes to take part in politics. I am incapable of organization. I will certainly proselytise for an ideal, even give my life to that work. But I am unable to forge links here, there and everywhere.

A friend of the Samajvadi Party

Today I am no longer in the Congress. Yet the ideal of the Congress resides in my heart. Where is that Congress now that drew close the poor of the country, converted vast manufactories into national institutions and built tenements for labourers? It lives in my dreams. And since I see that the ideal of the Congress is proximate to the Samajvadi Party, I feel drawn to the latter, feel involved in it. The Samajvadi Party today wishes to proceed along a clean path—

striving to make the Samajvad philosophy prevail. It is working with restraint and idealism. Yet, although I feel faith in it and feel loyalty to it, I am incapable of performing its organizational work. I cannot organize labour: I am incapable of understanding the labour law, resolve or settle their day to day problems, visit the labour officer for them, attend labour court on their behalf, meet government ministers. Nor am I able to organize peasants: I cannot resolve their difficulties, study tenancy law to help them obtain justice, run cooperative institutions. In a way I am thoroughly incapable of such work. So what may be my work and my ideal? I do propagate Samajvad at least in superficial ways by means of my writing and speeches. I also strive to propagate liberal ideas. I really wish that Indians transcended thinking on the basis of caste. If Samajvad is to prevail, caste distinction, regional differences, linguistic differences, all must be forgotten. If a general atmosphere of humanitarianism prevailed, Samajvad will grow.

That necessity draws me to the Seva Dal. Children in the Seva Dal invite other children of all kinds to eat at their homes, Bhangi (Scavengers), Mussalman, Harijan. Learning that they go to their homes warms the cockles of my heart. It seems to me that the Seva Dal is creating a new nation. In any small room in which the children of India eat together, converse together in mutual affection, there resides Mother India. God resides there. I feel deeply for the Seva Dal and Samajvad. During the recent elections in Mumbai I prayed to God at bedtime,

God, please grant success to this party of the poor people. These friends of mine have neither a newspaper organ, nor funds, or government backing. On one side are ranged caste-minded people, and on the other the rich in positions of power. The Samajvadi Party stands between them. The majority of voters is Marathi, yet a Gujarati friend fights the election on their behalf. The success of a Samajvadi

candidate is the success of the idea of Samajvad and its feeling for India. We do not recognize individuals as Gujarati or Marathi. We only consider the ideal or principles of candidates.

It is a great thing that Purushottam Trikamdas won. The growth of Samajvad is a valuable thing for the country.

One of my obsessions

There was a time when I was tempted to leave everything behind and go to live somewhere in the Himalayas. But for one who is embroiled in passions, there is neither God nor religion. Besides, one can meet God in the Himalayas, so why not right here? Meeting with God is tantamount to meeting all that is good and auspicious. One must keep sympathy for others even as one struggles to achieve one's goal. Today I am no longer thirsting to meet God. I am involved in the struggle for my own existence, trying to conquer my own insignificance, passions, selfishness and ego. Whenever I recall God, I bow my head wherever I may be and I find peace. I am thirsty for unity. I consider India the symbol of the whole world. In serving India one also serves all humanity. All religions and civilizations are here. Ramakrishna Paramahansa succeeded in meeting, in realising all religions. Mahatma Gandhi practised all religions in his life. As time passes, we must all experience this integration, this universal unity.

At Trichinapalli

In 1930 we had been incarcerated at the Trichinapalli jail. I had left my job at a school in Amalner and joined the Satyagraha. I had a Bengali friend in that school. In jail I made another friend, Venkatachalam, B.Sc. He knew the Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam languages. He was to be released. So I wrote to my friends in Amalner,

Employ him in our school. We already have a Bengali friend there. He will be our friend from the South. May our school become the symbol of national unity. Many teachers work there who come from all regions of India. The languages of all of them will be heard then. One will be able to understand the civilizations and literatures of these regions.

That is what I wrote. From that time I had a dream, of opening an institution of that kind that will teach unity of the country, allow people to experience it.

We know not ourselves

We have been invoking the idea of a United India. But we know not this India. These are all my regions, all these are my brothers, I shall commune with them all, study everyone—we do not possess such a feeling, do we? Mahatma Gandhi somehow made time, even when busy, to study different languages of our country. Revered Vinoba [Bhavé] did the same. How many of us experience this desire? There is facility to study Russian, German, French and other such languages in Mumbai. But there is not a single institution where one may learn all Indian languages.

Prantabharati

That is why I have had this dream for so long, of establishing a Prantabharati Institute. It must have a neat and beautiful little campus. Ask for it of the government, or accept it gratefully if some kind gentleman donates it. There will be someone well versed in every Indian language. Every one of them will also know Hindi. Literature in every language will be available there. There will be a school attached to it, and a farm, and people plying handicrafts. There will be facilities to learn all Indian languages there. Students will be able to hear all languages, introduced to the literature in

each. There would be journals in other languages to educate all other provinces about India. That has been my dream. Gurudev Rabindranath is a world poet. He established a universal institution, Viswabharati. To connect the whole world together, not allowing the East to remain distinct from the West. One who sets out in the East eventually meets the West. The earth is round, whole. India exists so we may experience the unity of the whole world. But to achieve that, one must experience one's self. The different provinces of India do not know each other, either, do they? The cultural achievements of each, its latest achievements—who knows about them? Prantabharati will perform the loving and devoted service of educating provinces about each other. The institute will display pictures of all the important personalities of each region. They will be introduced to new generations as the makers of modern India.

Fostering all the arts

Alongside literature, the institute will also promote study of the graphic arts, and dance. And education in cooperative work. It ought to become a sacred place in the creation of the new India. That is the beautiful dream before my eyes. Students of Prantabharati will go away in their holidays to small towns and villages, organize meetings and talk to people there. Help clean the environs. Committed young persons will graduate from Prantabharati who will spread the cooperative movement. Country arts and crafts will flourish there, like the game called Katkhel² in the Konkan and a variety of kinds of dance. They will be studied

² Katkhel: A game now rarely played; it was played in Ratnagiri district during the Holi festival. Kat means Kathi or stick. Kats are placed in 4 corners of the play-area. Players of different teams run around gathering the Kats together. The team that collects most Kats wins the game. Sané Guruji obviously knew of the game.

there. Such fun and enjoyment! Service, culture, generosity, knowledge, science and the arts—such solemn outlets for human tendencies will Prantabharati foster.

Where to find the funds?

But how is one to realise this dream? We will need to establish Bhiksha Mandali [bodies that will seek donations, “with a begging bowl”] over all of Maharashtra. Young people in them will go once a week to ask for donations. If there are 100 talukas, four such outings will mean 400 visits to ask for donations. Even if each outing obtained five rupees, the collection will come to two thousand rupees a year. The institution may be run on the basis of that amount. Someone may donate funds. The government is our own, too, so why will they not give an annual grant? I believe that everything will work out beautifully. But unless a beginning has been made, how can I approach the government?

A plea to friends in Maharashtra

I have the urge to roam about Maharashtra, the remotest parts of Maharashtra, discoursing on the Bhagwadgita. And on the last day at each place, ask for assistance to realise my dream. All over the state there are friends who feel affection for me. Will they not be able to help me achieve my ideal? I am spreading my little hands before all Maharashtra. Won't you help me realise my dream? The institution must become the pride of the region. May such an institution rise in my beloved Maharashtra as will teach the elevated ideal of unity!

The Puné Sahitya Sammelan

A literary gathering is to take place in Puné. I shall attend it and pray to all the assembly there to support my dream of Prantabharati. But I am a reserved person. Whether I will be able to

muster the courage to go and speak there God alone knows. Tukaram says, méli laza dheeta kélo déva: if my fear, my make-believe embarrassment vanishes and I stand before all the good people at the gathering in humble courage and ask for their charitable and sympathetic help, I hope you will not laugh at me and ridicule me.

I am but a child of Maharashtra striving to bring about the Unity of All India. The great among us must answer my plea—kéli puravi ali | navhé nishthura kovali—I have hope that the people of Maharashtra will, in tenderness toward a son of the region, and without hardening their hearts against him, fulfil this intense desire, this dream. I am hereby confirming the ideal and objective within my own heart that I shall strive to bring about a concrete Prantabharati. May God give me strength to fulfil this resolve. He alone has power to grant a true craving.

Sané Guruji (24 December 1899-11 June 1950) **

Sané Guruji is the popular name of Pandurang Sadashiv Sané, a very well known and influential twentieth-century Marathi social reformer, freedom fighter, writer, story teller and above all, in the imagination of the common Marathi people, a selfless and pure soul.

He practised humanism and nationalism. In particular, he loved children and cared deeply for their well-being and proper development. Much influenced by the conduct of his caring mother, Sané Guruji wrote a famous novel about maternal love titled Shyamachi Aai (based on which Acharya Atré later made the well-known film of the same title that won the first National Award).

** Introduction to Sane Guruji & research, Ashok Joshi, Goa.

Sané Guruji hailed from Palgad, a small place in Ratnagiri district on the Konkan coast where, like many other families, his family had a meagre living. For higher education he had to move to a bigger place, Puné, where he obtained the much wider perspective on life that characterises him.

Impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and work for the common people of India, as early as 1921 he started wearing khadi clothes. In 1930 he participated in a satyagraha and was imprisoned by the British Colonial government. His later participation in many satyagrahas resulted in prison terms of different durations, the longest lasting 2 years.

Sané Guruji's penchant for truth, justice and equality saw him plunging into the contemporary fight against the heinous practice of untouchability and the prohibition of untouchable folk into the famous Vithoba temple at Pandharapur. This meant that he undertook to fight fellow Indians entrenched in worn-out and unjust practices. In this struggle on one occasion he began a fast unto death. This measure finally changed orthodox minds and the unjust practice came to be forbidden at least in the letter of the law.

He was a creative writer in many genres, the essay, short story, novel and poetry and was a formidable translator. However, he was happiest when writing for and telling stories to young children for entertainment and moral betterment. Many generations of the youth were influenced by his stories and learned important moral and cultural lessons even as they were entertained by the stories.

Known for purity of mind and transparency of heart, Sané Guruji was widely considered a messiah of love. With S. M. Joshi, N. G. Goré and Bhausahab Ranadé, all stalwarts in the Indian Freedom Struggle against British Rule, in 1941 he started an organization for fostering a sense of courage amongst youth called Rashtra Seva Dal.

An organization called Sané Guruji Kathamala was started after his tragic death. Both these organizations are active today and help sustain his memory. The Rashtra Seva Dal volunteers regularly and widely conduct shramadan shibir (voluntary labour camps), an idea and practice he loved and believed in deeply. Many government and non-government organizations practise it also.

Sané Guruji founded Sadhana, a weekly journal. It has been published without interruption for the past 60 years and has, during that time, uncompromisingly helped shape public opinion in Maharashtra on notions of freedom, equality, justice and truth.

~ Dr Sudhakar Marathé & Dr Ashok Joshi

Apart from the facts mentioned about Dr Sudhakar Marathe in an earlier chapter, here are a few more related to his translations. His significant translations include Bhalchandra Nemadé's Kosla as Cocoon, Macmillan, R. R. Boradé's Pachola as Fall, NBT, the English translation of 18 country stories by Vyankatesh Madgulkar, GodéPani and Other Stories, Sahitya Akademi) and the co-edited volume Ajché British Sahitya, OUP. His English translation of G. M. Pawar's biography on Maharshi Shindé (The Life and Work of Maharshi Vitthal Ramji Shindé) is expected to be released by Sahitya Akademi very shortly.

Dr Ashok Joshi taught English Language and Literature for 35 years at Ruparel college in Mumbai and at Post Graduate Centre, Panaji and Goa University after the centre's merger with Goa University. He worked as Professor of English and Head for 11 years from 1992 to 2003 and was also the Dean of Languages for 7 years during that period. He has several publications comprising books and articles, both in English and Marathi to his credit. Special mention must be made of his book, *Caudwell cha Kalavichar* that won the R.S.Jog prize for the best critical book in Marathi as also the Krishnadas Shama Prize given by Gomantak Sahitya Sangh. The other book that

has won him a lot of critical acclaim is the book, *Adhunik Samiksha Siddhant*, written and published in collaboration with Dr Milind Malshe in 2003. It won three prizes, Anushtubh Prize, Ichalkaranji Sahitya Sammelan Prize and R.S.Jog Prize as the best critical book for the year 2003.

Special mention must be made of the fact that both Dr Marathe and Dr Joshi were Prof G.P. Pradhan's students at Fergusson college and bear a special affinity to him on that count.



LITERATURE AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Dr Prashant Sinha

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English explains ideology as “science of ideas; visionary speculation; manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual, ideas at the basis of some economic or political theory or system.” Of these, the last meaning is easily the most useful one for our purpose. But recent “critical theory” has enhanced the connotations of the work to encapsulate almost the entire way of life or mode of thinking of a person or group.

In his well-known book *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, Terry Eagleton condemns Georg Lukacs’s critique of Balzac in *Studies in European Realism* and writes that it “fails to grasp ideology as an inherently complex formation which by inserting individuals into history in a variety of ways, allows of multiple kinds and degrees of access to that history.” He goes on to write in the same chapter: “ideology most typically presents itself to the text as ‘life’ rather than category, as the immediate stuff of experience rather than a system of concepts.”¹ Perhaps we need to enlarge our parameters when using the term.

In this paper, I would focus only on political ideology. Given the immense range and scope of the complex network of relationships between literature and political thought, I will confine my references and illustrations to “canonical” texts from English Literature from Milton to Swift and the Modern English and European Literatures from Chekhov to Brecht. This geographical

¹ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, New ed. (London: Verso, 2006) 69, 81.

expansion in the second case is an acknowledgement of the highly cosmopolitan nature of the literature of this era.²

On the nature of the equation between literature and ideology and on how to judge literary works in relation to the ideologies embedded in them, there exist views which are not only widely divergent but even diametrically opposed to each other. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren write in their chapter on “Literature and Ideas” that “literature can be treated as a document in the history of ideas and philosophy, for literary history parallels and reflects intellectual history.”³ But F.R. Leavis condemns Wellek’s criticism of his book *Revaluations* in *Scrutiny* (March 1937) and says: “Literary criticism and philosophy seem to me to be quite distinct and different kinds of discipline.” He says: “Words in poetry invite us, not to ‘think about’ and judge but to ‘feel into’ or ‘become’-to realize a complex experience that is given in the words.” Responding specifically to Wellek’s comments on “the romantic view of the world” which “underlies and pervades the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley,” Leavis writes of Blake: “it is possible to say with reference to some of his work that his symbolical philosophy is one thing, his poetry another.” He is also critical of Wellek’s defence of the systems of thought of Wordsworth and Shelley and concludes: “Dr. Wellek will hardly bring it against me that I have been unfair to Shelley’s poetry out of lack of sympathy with such a view.”⁴

² As George Steiner puts it in *Extraterritorial*, a typical modern writer like Beckett or Nabokov is an expatriate rather than one rooted in his national culture as, for example, an Elizabethan writer was.

³ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (1980; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982) 111.

⁴ F.R. Leavis, “Criticism and Philosophy”, *The Common Pursuit* (1976; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978) 212, 212-13, 216, 216-17, 222.

The New Critics go beyond F.R. Leavis and its major exponents like Ransom, Tate, Brooks, Wimsatt, Warren and Blackmore totally ignore the ideology of the author when judging the work in terms of its “local texture” or “tension” or ambiguity or “irony” or “paradox”. Thus Cleanth Brooks’s seminal work *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* studies nine well known English poems including *Macbeth* in terms of their “paradoxical” form rather than ideology. Even Chapter 2 on *Macbeth* does not analyse Shakespeare’s views on royalty or governance or political history.⁵ A theoretical work like *The Verbal Icon* (1954) by W.K.Wimsatt embodies the idea of treating the text as a “verbal complex of tensions, ironies, paradoxes and ambiguities:” a poem had to be understood as a “ ‘verbal icon’ whose main reference was to itself.”⁶ Similarly the Russian Formalists, as the nomenclature itself suggests, deal only with the formal or the aesthetic aspects of the work. To them a literary work is primarily a set of linguistic devices.

On the other hand, for the group that Terry Eagleton loosely terms “political” critics, any literary judgement is intertwined with ideological choices and preferences. Marxist, Post Colonial, Feminist, Cultural Materialist and New Historicist schools do not isolate literature from politics. Thus Jane Austen is frowned upon by Marxists because she does not have full length pictures of working class persons, and by the Feminists because her women, even somewhat independent ones like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse do not break the shackles of Patriarchy. For Post Colonial critics, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* reeks of a colonialist

⁵ Cleanth Brooks, “The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness”, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1971) 17-39.

⁶ Peter Barry, “Introduction”, *Issues in Contemporary Critical Theory: A Casebook* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987) 9.

attitude when Jos Sedly, an utter nimcompoop is shown as the Collector of Bogleywalla(a district) in Bengal. A New Historicist like Stephen Greenblatt looks at Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as an embodiment of the British exploitation of the colonized natives to be compared to the then contemporary accounts of the savage treatment of the non-white "subjects" by the Anglo-Saxon masters.

Even generations before these political critics with their theoretical postures, critical practice had revealed political prejudices if not sophisticated ideological bases for literary judgements. Dr. Johnson disliked Milton and criticized his poetry partly because the latter was a republican and a defender of regicide. The 19th century Tory reviewers persistently denounced the Romantics, especially Byron and Shelley for their radical ideological positions. Their political prejudices coloured their somewhat naïve literary judgments. They were crude and unsophisticated, but are they so different from a classical Marxist like Georg Lukacs who condemns Modernists such as Proust, Joyce and Kafka because they do not depict the class struggle of their time?

So we can formulate our central questions as: What is the most desirable way of looking at literature in relation to political ideology? Do we judge a literary work with reference to the political philosophy embedded in it, or evaluate it on the basis of its aesthetic qualities? Can we appreciate an author whose political opinions are antithetical, even despicable to us? Is it possible to admire him for his artistic perfection?

Let us first consider a selection of works which are known to have "direct" political contents. As stated earlier, the first group is from English authors from Milton to Swift, who lived through a time of great political ferment-- the clash between the Stuart Kings and their parliaments, the Civil War and the Commonwealth, the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, the Hanover succession

and the rise of Sir Robert Walpole, the first Prime Minister, effectively ending the rule by monarchs, although George III tried to revive the powers of the King with disastrous consequence for Britain.

Given Milton's active engagement in politics as a republican and his work as the Latin Secretary in the Commonwealth Government as also his Latin writings defending regicide, it is only to be expected that his magnum opus *Paradise Lost* would be suffused with his political ideology. As the author of the argumentative prose works *Eikonoklastes*, *Defensio pro populo Anglicano* and *Defensio Secunda* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, he had consistently opposed the tyrannical rule of kings and defended rebellions against them. It was, therefore logical to expect that he would uphold revolts against God, the Supreme Sovereign as he had unfailingly done against "God's Lieutenants" on the earth. If Blake of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the Romantics, especially Shelley are to be believed, Milton was of the Devil's party without knowing it. Several later critics have upheld this line of thinking when analyzing the grandeur of Satan's character and Milton's sympathy for the fallen angels. But ostensibly his goal was to "assert Eternal Providence/ And justify the wayes of God to men," which is "fulfilled" in the later books of *Paradise Lost*. There is enough evidence for the view that Satan is a villain, and an impressive body of critical opinion has championed this position. It is interesting to conclude this debate by referring to one of the most articulate though not the most reasonable or convincing critic of our time. Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon* calls Milton's Satan the heir of the great hero-villains—Iago, Edmund, Macbeth—and of the darker aspects of Hamlet, the Counter-Machiavel as well. According to him, Milton's God is "pompous, defensive and self-righteous," but "Milton makes our pleasure in Satan, a guilty one, ostensibly insisting upon belief and an overt morality." He also backs William Empson's observation that God "causes all of the

trouble in the first place.” He affirms, “ We hear the rhetoric of tyranny when his God speaks...Milton has made his God sound more like James I or Charles I than like David or Solomon.”⁷ Given the evidence in the poem for both the positions and the complete lack of any agreement amongst the critics on Milton’s politics in it, can we argue that his poem embodies any systematic political ideology, even his own as manifested in his prose works of 1640s and 1650s, let alone those enunciated by Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, the two most prominent English political philosophers before John Locke--or minor writers like John Selden, Philip Hunton and Robert Filmer or the great Bodin from the Continent—who wrote on the issues of monarchy, governance and the rights of the people to rise against the Sovereign?

Moving to another dominant genre of the period, drama, it is only appropriate that we consider Restoration Tragedy rather than the more successful mode of Restoration Comedy. L.C.Knights denounces Restoration Comedy for its total indifference to “the best thought of the time,” and F.W. Bateson counters him by saying that it did not need to incorporate it.⁸ It is easy to see that the influence of Naturalism, Epicureanism and Libertinism and of the philosophy of Hobbes on Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and others was confined to their view of human nature rather than to any political issues. So the logical choice for our study would be a “heroic” tragedy, and Dryden’s *All for Love, or the World Well Lost* as the most acclaimed of the genre, suits our purpose. Dryden, the Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal was known to be a

⁷ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994) 169,171,172, 174,175.

⁸ L.C.Knights, “Restoration Comedy: The Reality and the Myth”, *Explorations: Essays in Criticism mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century* rpt. In *Restoration Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. John Loftis (New York:OUP,1966).

“Royalist” in politics. In both his dedications, the first one to Thomas, Earl of Danby, the Lord High Treasurer (1678) and the second to the Duke of Guise (1683), he condemns those who fought against the Stuarts in the Civil War. In the first dedication, he mentions his “loathing to that specious name of a republic; that mock appearance of a liberty, where all who have no part in the government, are slaves.” For him, the revolt against the king “was striking at the root of power which is obedience. Every remonstrance of private men has the seed of treason in it.” Five year later in the second dedication, he denounces “the malice of false patriots and the madness of a headstrong rabble,” who rose against the king. So we would expect *All for Love*, which is acknowledged by him as a reworking of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* ⁹ to be full of monarchist ideologies and condemnation of those who seek “democratic” liberty. The expectations are belied at the very outset when Dryden omits from his version major political players such as Octavius, Lepidus, Pompeius and their friends and Lt. Generals who figure prominently in Shakespeare. This leads to the exclusion of scenes of political negotiations and planning. As R.J.Kaufmann writes, Dryden’s “depiction of the political community is shadowy.”¹⁰ The only English political ideology of the century which can be seen to have a parallel in this is from Francis Bacon’s essay “Of Counsel” in his idea: “The true composition of a Counsellor is rather to be skilful in his master’s business than in his nature.” Ventidius, Antony’s friend, General and Counsellor is accurately seen by Alexas, the eunuch adviser of Cleopatra as “Firm to his Prince, but as a friend, not slave.” His unyielding opposition to Cleopatra in spite of Antony’s unbounded passion for her, his

⁹ John Dryden, *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*, ed. C.K.Narayana (1978; Madras: Macmillan, 1987).

¹⁰ R.J.Kaufmann, “The Poetics of Terminal Tragedy: Dryden’s *All for Love*,” *Dryden: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1963; New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1980) 90.

refusal to give up advising his prince to abandon his mistress and fight like a Roman general to redeem his honour, his sincerity and steadfastness stand out even more when contrasted with Alexas's willingness to desert his queen to save his own skin. Whereas Plutarch raises political issues, Dryden's play does not have an ideological bedrock. Neither Hobbes nor Bodin nor any minor political theorist can be seen peeping through the play although Bacon does have one sustained application here.

Before the rise of the English novel, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is an important instance of political fiction in prose and can be analysed to probe if a form with the greatest potential for depicting an ideology fully does so. Swift was genuinely involved in both British and Irish politics, was close to certain politicians and sought political appointments. He had written political tracts like *Drapier Letters* and *A Modest Proposal* and engaged in ongoing controversies, especially those involving Oxford and Bolingbroke. Does *Gulliver's Travels* elaborately embody an ideology? All the four voyages depict political conditions in the places Gulliver visits-- Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, Balnibarbi, Maldonada, Glubbddubdrib, Luggnagg, Japan and the land of horses, but the initial locale of Lilliput and Blefuscu furnishes detailed pictures of the functioning of monarchy and court intrigues and conspiracies and graft prevalent among the "secretaries of state" whereas in the last voyage to the region of Houyhnhnms, Gulliver narrates in detail the miserable polity of European countries. Thus in Lilliput, ministers and officials are selected on the basis of their skills as rope walkers and dancers. Both Flimnap, the Treasurer and Reldresal, the principal Secretary for Private affairs are outstanding in performing rope tricks. As numerous commentators have noted Flimnap has his source in the Whig Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. The two political parties, *Tramecksan* and *Slamecksan* i.e. the high heel and the low heel parties represent the Tories and the Whigs respectively, and all the advisers of the king

come from the latter. Equally frivolous is the dispute involving the Catholics and the Protestants, whose equivalents in the narrative fight about whether one should break the big end or the small end of the eggs. In this quarrel, one Emperor lost his life, and another his crown,”¹¹ referring to the execution of Charles I and the overthrow of James II. The king is “too much governed by that favourite” i.e. Walpole. The satire on the English political system, especially the Whig manipulators of it is sharp and pointed, but can we say that the book is an embodiment of the Tory ideology? After all, the book does not condemn the Whig ideology of promoting trade and industry, curtailing the powers of the aristocracy and encouraging the rising middle class. In part IV, when Gulliver describes the condition of England to his master Horse, his castigation of the manufacturing and commercial middle class is nowhere more severe than that of the landed nobility and gentry. He, at one point even reads like a Proto Marxist. To quote Gulliver, “That the rich man enjoyed the fruit of the poor man’s labour, and the latter were a thousand to one in proportion to the former. That the bulk of our people were forced to live miserably, by labouring everyday for small wages to make a few live plentifully.” He further says that England produces more food than “its inhabitants are able to consume” ... “as well as liquors” and “the same proportion in every other convenience of life. But, in order to feed the luxury and intemperance of the males, and the vanity of the females, we sent away the greatest part of our necessary things to other countries.”¹² This “socialism” is not pro-Tory and anti-Whig nor is it a critique of that favourite of Whigs among political philosophers, John Locke. There is no reference whatsoever to Locke’s idea-- as developed in *Two Treatises of Civil Government* --of social contract

¹¹ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (New York: New American Library, 1960) 59.

¹² Ibid. 271,272.

and the right of subjects to rebel against the sovereign should he violate the terms and conditions of the contract.

The “Modern” period in European Literature is also marked by great political ferment, covering as it does the time from the Imperial expansion and consolidation of European Authority in Asia and Africa, the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the rise of Fascism and Nazism, the Great Depression and the Second World War. Just as Bacon, Hobbes and Locke dominated the ideological ferment of the 17th Century England, Karl Marx and other socialists and their antagonists permeated the political theory of this period, although strands of Liberalism including the thinking of John Stuart Mill and his followers deeply influenced the political ambience from Gladstone to Churchill in England, and Bismarck to Stalin in “Europe”. If we consider E.M.Forster and George Orwell in the first half of the 20th century English Fiction, we have in *A Passage to India*, *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *Animal Farm*, two major political novels and a fine political allegory to examine.

G.K.Das in his perceptive study of E.M.Forster’s India refers to Forster’s criticism of the Utilitarian, the Evangelical, the Burkean and the Platonic ideals of the British Empire,¹³ and three out of these four must be seen as “political” ideals or theories. But can we say that the novel incorporates either an anti-colonial ideology or a specific theory of colonialism? As Shamshul Islam writes in *The Chronicles of the Raj*, Forster is not the diametric opposite of Kipling.¹⁴ If Kipling is a diehard Imperialist, Forster is not exactly a

¹³ G.K.Das, *E.M.Forster’s India* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

¹⁴ Shamshul Islam, *The Chronicles of the Raj: A Study of Literary Reaction to the Imperial Idea towards the end of the Raj* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

crusader against the Empire. *A Passage to India* exposes the brutality, the oppression and the injustice of the British colonial rule in India, but it does not suggest that the English rulers withdraw from India. There is no Indian nationalist hero in the novel to take over the reins from the colonial masters. Most of the Indian characters in the novel are flawed and prejudiced, some of them even ridiculous. A quick glance through the sequence of events and the action of the novel bears all this out. At the “bridge party”, an Indian couple befriend Adela and Mrs. Moore and promise to send their carriage for them to bring them to their house, but they do not keep their promise. On the other hand, when these two English women visit Fielding, and the latter takes Mrs. Moore away to show her the college, Ronny, who comes during their absence feels unhappy with Fielding for leaving Adela alone with two Indians—Aziz and Godbole. His attitude shows the colonial mistrust of the ruled, but Godbole only adds to the Englishman’s contempt for the Indians. When the visitors are leaving and they say that they missed Godbole’s song, he starts singing in a comic manner and detains them. Aziz is equally bad. He asks Fielding, “have you any illegitimate children?”¹⁵ Then he comments on Adela Quested: “She had practically no breasts,” and Fielding “found a touch of bad taste in the reference to a lady’s breasts.” (117). When these ladies visit Marabar Caves at the invitation of Aziz, Fielding and Godbole miss the train because Godbole’s *pujah* delayed them for the appointed time. Adela’s charge that Aziz tried to molest her in the cave brings out the worst in both the English rulers and the Indian subjects with the admirable exception of Fielding. “He was still after facts, though the herd had decided on emotion. Nothing enrages Anglo-India more

¹⁵ E.M.Forster, *A Passage to India* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin) 116. Subsequent references are to this edition and page numbers are given in parentheses in the text itself.

than the lantern of reason if it is exhibited for one moment after its extinction is decreed.” (162) McBryde, the Superintendent of Police “was the most reflective and best educated of the Chandrapore officials”, but his theory was: “All unfortunate natives are criminals at heart, for the simple reasons that they live south of latitude 30°” (164) At the trial, he keeps on talking of “the natural gestures of an inferior race” (216) to establish that Aziz was expected to molest Adela. The English women and Major Callendar, the Civil Surgeon are violent in their expression of anger and hatred of the “natives”. On the other hand, Godbole is totally indifferent, almost ridiculously so to the plight of Aziz. Immediately after the episode, he asks Fielding: “I hope the expedition was a successful one” and talks of his plan to “start a High School there on sound English lines, that shall be as like Government College as possible.” (172,173). After Aziz wins the case and Fielding requests him not to press for twenty thousand rupees as damages, Aziz responds that she has to sign a statement to the following effect: “Dear Dr. Aziz, I wish you had come into the cave; I am an awful old hag, and it is my last chance.” (245) Any one can see the impropriety of the demand. In fact, all his supporters behave in an unreasonable manner. They were “discovering new grievances and wrongs, many of which had no existence.” (253) Thus if the British are the oppressors, the Indians are not much better than them. *A Passage to India* is not a statement of a colonialist or an anti-colonialist ideology.

On the other hand *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of Orwell appears to be an overtly political novel. It has generally been interpreted as an uncompromisingly anti-communist piece. The inner circle of the Party members, the outer circle to which the protagonist Winston Smith belongs and the proles who lead almost subhuman lives have been seen as pictures of the ruling elite and the populace in the Soviet Union and other communist countries. The image of the Big Brother resembles that of Joseph Stalin, the persistent references

to the enemy of the state echo the denunciation of not only Trotsky but also other “anti-party” leaders like Rykov and Bukharin by the Stalinist regime. During the purges they were also forced to confess their “crimes” in a manner in which the Soviet regime persecuted the dissidents. The technique of surveillance shown in the novel was prevalent in the communist countries. Similarly the enormous military spendings of the USSR in spite of its comparatively weak economy vis-à-vis the USA has a parallel in the novel in that here a hierarchical order could not exist in a society in which everyone was wealthy. So the masses had somehow to be kept poor, and this was done by spending all the mechanical means of production on military goods, and cutting down the number of consumer goods available. The economic condition of the state is absolutely miserable in spite of the three year plans which bear a striking resemblance to the five year plans of the Soviet Union. After Winston Smith is arrested, the various stages of the torture inflicted on him by the guards, the party officials, then in the pain chamber, through the rats and finally in Room 101 severely castigate the Soviet state. Moreover, the novel gives us a graphic picture of the way in which history is falsified and rewritten. The three slogans of the party were, “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength.” One function of the department in which Winston works is to destroy certain “records”, to replace them by new “records,” to create new “facts” and to rewrite “history”. Thus the relationship of Oceania to the other two states keeps on changing, and the people are told one day that the neighbouring state has always been a friend but soon it is announced that the two nations have been constantly at war with each other. The ultimate truth about this state is voiced by O’Brien: “one does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship”

because “the object of power is power.”¹⁶ This indeed is a severe indictment of the communist state. Nevertheless, a nagging question arises: Is *Nineteen Eighty-Four* an attack only on the communist set up, or is it directed against all totalitarian states? After all, the state informers including children who denounced their own parents to the police represent not only the Soviet but Nazi apparatus as well. Orwell’s depiction of “Thought Police” has no equivalent in any communist country. Again a telescreen is more likely to come up in a highly developed technological society like the United States than in a comparatively backward communist country. So the novel, though distinctively anti communist, is not exactly an embodiment of a pro capitalist ideology. In his *Brave New World Revisited*, Aldous Huxley writes: “George Orwell’s 1984 was a magnified projection into the future of a present that contained Stalinism and an immediate past that had witnessed the flowering of Nazism.”¹⁷

In fact, Orwell’s allegorical fiction, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* is more overtly an attack on Bolshevik Russia. The parallels with both leaders and events are pertinent and sustained. Thus Major is Vladimir Lenin, and the pigs as a whole represent the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which takes control of the country. The two top leaders who follow Major i.e. Napoleon and Snowball represent Stalin and Trotsky respectively. The attempt of Jones to recapture the farm resembles the Civil War that the Bolshevik Government had to fight from 1918 to 1921. When the debate between Snowball and Napoleon on the former’s plan to spread the revolution culminates in the hounding out of Snowball by dogs

¹⁶ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949) 266,267.

¹⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Vintage, 2004) 4.

especially nurtured by Napoleon, we are reminded of Stalin getting the better of not only Trotsky but all his rivals with the help of his secret police. Several animals being made to confess their “sins” and then getting killed is like Stalin’s rivals being made to confess their “crimes” and then executed. The terrible shortages on the farm and the ruthless suppression of all forms of dissent represent Orwell’s vision of the conditions in the Soviet Union. The animals still think that they are better off than during the time of Jones: “Truth to tell, Jones and all he stood for had almost faded out of their memories. They knew that life now a days was harsh and bare, that they were often hungry and often cold, and that they were always working when they were not asleep. But doubtless it had been worse in the old days.”¹⁸ The political problems, however, are not confined to the Bolshevik state. Thus Napoleon is finally called the Leader, which is a literal translation of the “Führer”, the term used for Hitler, the “Duce,” the title Mussolini was addressed by and the “Caudillo”, General Franco’s designation. Obviously, here the parallel is with Fascist and Nazi states. In fact, the name Napoleon for Stalin, though “taken” from Trotsky, indirectly refers to the French Revolution of 1789 and the later revolution of 1848, both of which were eventually followed by dictatorships/monarchy of Bonapartes. Undoubtedly, both the works of Orwell are distinctly anti-communist (anti-Soviet Union), but the attack is not confined to Russia after 1917. Moreover, these books denounce the practice rather than the theory of communism.

The genre of drama compels us to go outside England to the Continent, given, as discussed earlier, its broadly cosmopolitan rather than national or insular character. Anton Chekhov’s *The*

¹⁸ George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963) 74. I have also used *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945; London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

Cherry Orchard, a great showpiece of Modern Realism/Naturalism¹⁹ has been claimed by political ideologies of both the right and the left. The Marxist critics have hailed Chekhov as a champion of the “progressive” cause, who is happy that the feudal class, to which Liubov Ranyevskaia, Gayev and Simeonov—Pishchik belong, is uprooted, has lost all its clout and almost become extinct. The class is not only lazy and decadent, it has for generations lived off the sweat of the serfs. All its prosperity was built on the brutal exploitation of peasant labour. In a speech which in the Soviet productions was hailed as the final judgment on the feudal system and received thunderous applause from the audience, Trofimov—seen as a heroic figure with Stanislavsky himself often playing the role—tells Anya with great eloquence:

“Your grandfather, your great grandfather and all your forefathers were serf owners— they owned living souls. Don’t you see human beings gazing at you from every cherry tree in your orchard, from every leaf and every tree-trunk, don’t you hear voices? ...you’re living in debt, at other people’s expense, at the expense of people you don’t admit further than the kitchen... we must first atone for our past...”²⁰

So when Lopakhin, the merchant, the son of a former serf, who could not even be “admitted to the kitchen,” the “much-beaten, half-literate Yeromlai, the lad that used to run about with barefeet, in the winter” buys “this estate, the most beautiful place on God’s earth”(384), the Marxists see it as a desirable development in the

¹⁹ I prefer the term “realism” to the more widely accepted “naturalism” mainly in order to avoid any confusion with Zola’s and Maupassant’s “Naturalism”.

²⁰ Anton Chekhov, *Plays*, trans. Elisaveta Fen (1959; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982) 368. [Act II of *The Cherry Orchard*] Subsequent quotations are from the same text and page numbers are given in parentheses.

progress of the Russian society from the feudal order to the capitalistic order which will subsequently be replaced by the socialist order.

On the other hand, as many Western critics have interpreted it, the play can also be seen as an elegy for the passing of the aristocratic graces and culture and taste that Lyubov and Gayev represent. Not only they, but Simeonov-Pishchik and Ania have a certain finesse and cultivation that the nouveau-riche Lopakhin completely lacks. After announcing at the party that he has bought the cherry orchard, he says it in the presence of Lyubov that all of them should “wait and see” him “take an axe to the cherry orchard, just you see the trees come crashing down” (384) He offers money to Trofimov because he is “in a position to do it” and rightly confesses: “I’ve no manners”(388). Worst of all, he starts cutting down the orchard even before the family of Lyubov has left the place. This ambivalence of attitude is confirmed by Chekhov’s own statement that he was “of no sect.” As Elisaveta Fen summed up in her introduction to his plays, “He was, after all, the least dogmatic of writers.” (34)

The more categorically political, Bertolt Brecht is emphatically claimed by the Marxists, but can we trace in his best plays, a dogmatic, doctrinaire Marxist political ideology? Amongst his greatest plays like *Mother Courage*, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Galileo*, on whose “literary worth,” there is near unanimity, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is generally perceived as **the** Marxist play. How far is it so? The Prologue set in Summer 1945 has a very Soviet setting with the members of two Kolkhoz villages with a delegate of the State Reconstruction Commission from Tiflis trying to arbitrate their dispute over the possession of a valley. All the comrades guided by the Specialist decide that the farm should go not to the original owners, but to those who can make better use of it- a really genuine Marxist

stance. The concluding moral by the singer, Arkadi Tscheidse is also distinctly communist:

What there is shall go to those who are good for it,
Children to the motherly, that they prosper,
Carts to good drivers, that they be driven well,
The valley to the waterers, that it yield fruit.²¹

There are numerous vignettes in the first part of the play that reinforce the Marxist ideology: the tyranny of the Governor, Georgi Abashwili and the bungling of the Persian wars are instances of the feudal mismanagement. When Grusha tries to buy milk for little Michael, the Old Man charges for “a little pitcher of milk,” two piastres instead of half a piastre or one piastre, which is the fair price; he simply shows in action the rule of demand and supply which is the bedrock of the capitalistic market economy. The Marxist view of religion as the opium of the masses is portrayed in the hypocrisy, the greed and the complete incompetence of the monk, who got drunk in a tavern. The entire wedding ceremony becomes comic when the Monk begins his address: “Dear wedding and funeral guests! Deeply touched, we stand before a bed of death and marriage.” (161)

The second story, which centres on Azdak, attacks the bourgeois system of justice and demonstrates through his judgements that in this system only a crazy judge can pronounce fair verdicts. Some of his landmark judgements are delivered after conducting the trials in a most unseemly, even ridiculous manner. Thus the first time, we

²¹ Bertolt Brecht, “The Caucasian Chalk Circle”, *Parables for the Theatre*, trans. Eric Bentley (1966; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982) 207.

All the quotations are from this edition and page numbers are mentioned in parentheses in the body of the text.

see him as a judge, Azdak begins by stating: "In consideration of the large number of cases, the Court today will hear two cases at a time. Before I open the proceedings, a short announcement--I accept." (183) Nevertheless, the Blackmailer, although he paid the bribe, is found guilty and punished. The invalid who files a suit against a doctor, whose medical education he had financed, for treating patients free is fined "one thousand piastres." The court tells the doctor: "You have perpetrated an unpardonable error in the practice of your profession: you are acquitted." (185) The second sitting again commences with Azdak saying, "I accept" and this time the innkeeper paying the money, but the judgement saves the stableman, accused of raping the innkeeper's daughter-in-law. Azdak "gave to the forsaken

All that from the rich he'd taken." (187)

In the final, the crucial judgement, Azdak again begins the proceedings by saying "I accept," and then he says, "The Court wants to know the lawyers' fee" (198) Although he provokes Grusha and fines her for contempt of court, he gives Michael to her, and hands over the estates, for which the Governor's wife wanted the child, to the city. Instead of divorcing the old couple, he signs the wrong paper and divorces Grusha and her Peasant, which again is perfect (poetic) justice, though in a garbled version.

Nevertheless, everything in the play is not in consonance with doctrinaire Marxism. The melodramatic (the so called "oriental") scene in which Grusha crosses the wobbly bridge while her pursuers, the tougher soldiers—the Ironshirts are afraid to do so, is a dramatization, like Katrin's beating the drum in *Mother Courage*, of individual heroism rather than organized mass action. It is also odd that Azdak is allowed to continue as a judge even after the Princes consolidate their hold over the country. Thus, even as the

play is suffused with Marxist views, it is not absolutely an embodiment of pure Marxist ideology.

So it can be surmised that even plays, novels, “fairy stories” and the epic poems which are often seen as statements of certain political ideologies are not always or at least not entirely so. Most of them contain elements which are exceptions to the dominant political position developed in them.

How do we evaluate the worth of literary pieces of a “political-ideological” nature, especially if the philosophy has an internal logic and consistency? The question posed by Wellek and Warren was: “How clearly and systematically were philosophical views held by poets and other writers?” After having attempted an answer, we need to consider his next question: “Can poetry be judged according to the value of the philosophy which it adopts or according to the degree of insight it shows into the philosophy it adopts?”²²

Among the works which we have just examined, John Milton in *Paradise Lost* Books I and II projects a view of liberty and tyranny which differs from that in the later books. Dryden is consistent, but the consistency comes partly from the discipline he has imposed upon the work by adhering to the unities of time, place and action. Swift’s political vision “darkens” as we move from Part I to Parts II, III and IV, especially IV, but it is a gradual change, and at no point does it deny the validity of the “political” position espoused earlier. *A Passage to India*, *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *Animal Farm* do not betray any major inconsistency in the political vision. *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* also do not contain any abrupt changes and departures in their political stances, and their

²² Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* 114.

ideological ambiguities are a part of their very fabric. Thus *Paradise Lost* is less coherent in its political ideology than the other works just considered, but that does not make it less valuable or canonical than *All for Love* or *Gulliver's Travels* or the modern works we have examined. W.B. Yeats pertinently wrote in *Mythologies* that “we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.”

One trait that all the texts we have analysed share in common is the absence of any ideology akin to Nazism or Fascism or Fundamentalism that we may consider inhuman or reactionary or reprehensible. But now we can consider three of the most acclaimed English—including American—poets of the first half of the 20th century, who were known to espouse “reactionary” ideologies: Yeats, Pound and Eliot. George Orwell writes in his essay on Rudyard Kipling: “Kipling is a jingo imperialist, he is morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting. It is better to start by admitting that and then try to find out why it is that he survives.”²³ We will approach these poets—practitioners of a genre we have not so far analysed in the modern period in a similar, though not identical manner.

W.B. Yeats was contemptuous of the Ireland of priests, merchants and clerks. The revolutionary fervour that he acquired under the impact of Maud Gonne had blossomed into the committed nationalism of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, but it was followed by an ambivalence—in fact a reaction to her unrestrained and militant patriotism—that is manifested in his view of the heroes of the General Post Office take over of Easter 1916. By the time, he married Georgie Hyde-Lees, he assumed a conservative stance that

²³ George Orwell, “Rudyard Kipling”, *Dickens, Dali and Others* (1946) rpt. in *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism* ed. Wilbur S. Scott (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1962) 161.

coloured “A Prayer for my Daughter” and many subsequent poems. Now, probably under the influence of Lady Gregory, he saw any hope for civilization only in the aristocratic tradition: “in custom and in ceremony.” As a Tory, nothing that he wrote later can be classified as “progressive.” Thus in “The Seven Sages” he condemns “Whiggery”:

What is Whiggery?

A levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind.²⁴

In “Parnell’s Funeral,” he shows his undemocratic contempt for the populace when he says: All that was said in Ireland is a lie

Bred out of the contagion of the throng (175)

In fact, even earlier, he condemned the common people and never ceased doing so. He wrote in “These are the Clouds”

The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie (ll.3-6) (145)

His opposition to equality is revealed in the phrases “the leveling wind” (l. 5 of “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”) and “roof leveling wind” (“A Prayer for my Daughter”l.5) “Blood and the Moon” shows Yeats’s admiration for Burke’s opposition to “mathematical equality” (l.12) Much later in “Church and State,” he reveals his contempt for the masses:

²⁴ W.B.Yeats, “A Prayer for my Daughter”, *Selected Poetry*, ed. A Norman Jeffares (Calcutta: Rupa, 1992). The same edition is used for other poems and page numbers are given in parentheses.

What if the Church and the State
Are the mob that howls at the door!'(ll. 9-10) (333)

Yet he remains perhaps the greatest English poet of his time: a poet who wrote lines like:

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity (ll. 5-8 of "The Second Coming") (235)

Or

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs,
And how can body, laid in that white rush,

But feel the strange heart beating where it lies? (ll. 5-8 of "Leda and the Swan") (260)

Or

O chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance ("Among School Children' VIII ll. 5-8) (263)

The appeal of Yeats comes from the "design" of his poetry, the beauty of his diction, the music of the lyrics, the richness of the mythology and finally from the sheer passion, intensity and sensuousness of his poems.

Ezra Pound, the central figure among those who ushered in “Modernist” poetry was an avid Fascist, an admirer of Mussolini who would broadcast regularly on behalf of the Italian dictator against his own American government. His *Cantos* including the Pisan *Cantos* make blatantly prejudiced comments on Jews and Judaism. He finds in Jewish usury, the source of many problems of the world. Yet he remains a brilliant poet. His extraordinary intellectual penetration and range and “keen poetic ear” make him a “pivotal” modernist. A poem like “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” dazzles us with its ingenuity and artistry, and the “Envoi” to the poem achieves the somewhat rare distinction of improving on the original poem: Edmund Waller’s “Goe Lovely Rose.” So on one hand, we have Canto XLV on *usura* which has lines like “usura slayeth the child in the womb” and “It slayeth the young man’s courting”(ll.43,44)²⁵: lines, which in spite of the attempts to interpret the word “usura” as greed for money have undeniable links with the traditional Jewish profession of money lending at high rates of interest. On the other hand *Cantos* themselves have exquisite or evocatively sensuous lines like

Salmon-pink wings of the fish-hawk
Cast grey shadows in water,
The tower like a one-eyed great goose

Cranes up out of the olive-grove (*Canto* II ll.149-52 and 1595)

The author of a “reactionary” prose work like *Jefferson and / or Mussolini* remains with his “diversity of forms,” his striking

²⁵ Ezra Pound, “Canto XLV”, *Concise Anthology of American Literature*, ed. George McMichael, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1985) 1597.

The quotations from Pound’s poetry that follow are from the same edition and the page numbers are indicated there.

imagery, his “innovative techniques” and his astonishing sweep and range of allusions a vibrant figure in modern poetry.

T.S. Eliot, the other great expatriate American Modernist poet (and playwright and critic) again embodies not only traditionalist but regressive if not reactionary political positions.

That he is a Royalist in politics is not very important, but his anti-semitism and his staunch defence of ecclesiastical “political” authority do matter. The poet who wrote lines like

The Jew squats on the window sill, the owner
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp: (“Gerontion” ll 8-9) ²⁶

was no less anti-semitic than the poet he admired no end—Dante whose “Inferno” (in his *Divine Comedy*) shows many Jewish prophets in a poor light. At the same time, Eliot remains the dominant figure in Modernist poetry. The metrical variety and composite/“fragmented” style, the richness of literary allusions and the striking use of myths make a poem like *The Waste Land* the most notable instance of Modernist poetry. Much of Eliot’s non-dramatic poetry attains greatness on the strength of sheer formal virtuosity including technical innovations, experiments in language and rich allusiveness.

Similarly *Murder in the Cathedral* idolizes Thomas a Becket, glossing over his flaws depicted by both Tennyson and Anouilh in their dramatic versions of the events²⁷. It condemns the “Royalists” as uncouth, unprincipled politicians and supports Becket’s defiance

²⁶ T.S.Eliot, *Concise Anthology of American Literature* 1606.

²⁷ Anouilh’s play *Becket, or the Honour of God* was completed as late as in 1959 two decades after *Murder in the Cathedral*.

of civil laws in England. Although Becket's murder brought him everlasting and dazzling glory as a martyr, History has defended Henry II's attempt to impose a uniform civil law in England—as a play like Christopher Fry's *Curtmantle* shows. Becket as the Archbishop, defended Church courts and resisted the endeavour of the king to bring the clergy under the jurisdiction of the state system of laws. The worst punishment that the Church could award to a clergyman was to defrock him, and Becket resisted the attempt to further try a defrocked priest even for acts like murder on the ground that one could not “be punished twice for the same offence.”²⁸ In fact, this was one issue on which Becket refused to ratify the Constitutions at Clarendon in 1164. Eliot's play makes the second Tempter sound like a villain, but there is a point to what he tells Becket when he persuades him to resume his chancellorship. Then he says, Becket can

Disarm the ruffian, strengthen the laws,
Rule for the good of the better cause,
Dispensing justice make all even, (Part I ll. 348-50)

This is what Becket did before he became the Archbishop, and what Henry is trying to do now in his attempt to bring both the Baron's courts and the Church courts under the jurisdiction of the King's courts. So Eliot's support for Becket's cause must be seen here as “fundamentalist,” but in spite of that, *Murder in the Cathedral* is a great play. Eliot's brilliant use of the chorus, in fact an extremely articulate chorus, the classical structure with its economy, the sheer eloquence of his dramatic poetry, the neat balancing of Part I against Part II, the deft use of the prose speeches of the Four Knights at the end to make the play contemporary in the manner of

²⁸ Neville Coghill, “Brief Synopsis of the Historical Situation” *Murder in the Cathedral*, ed. Coghill (1974; Delhi: Oxford UP, 1983) 142.

the Epilogue of Shaw's *Saint Joan* and the unwavering focus on the theme of martyrdom lift the play to a high level of excellence.

Thus from our examination of several literary works from two politically eventful periods separated by nearly two centuries, we have seen that we cannot judge the worth of a literary piece in terms of the political ideology embedded in it, but can do so only on the basis of its aesthetic qualities. Even the novels, poems and plays that are of a "political" nature are not theses elaborately and accurately explicating specific ideologies, and they can be evaluated only on literary rather than ideological bases.

~ Dr Prashant Sinha

Dr Prashant K. Sinha retired as a Professor of English literature from the Department of English, University of Pune in 2005 after a career spanning 26 years, having taught at Patna, Delhi and Central University, Hyderabad besides Pune. Dr Sinha's special area of interest has been modern English and American drama, though he is well-known for his scholarship in other areas of English literature too. He has several books and articles to his credit. Special mention must be made of his edition of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, an anthology called *Vintage Shakespeare* consisting of seminar articles on the renowned playwright that was reviewed internationally. His most recent contribution is an article on Luigi Pirandello in a book being written on playwrights who have won the Nobel Prize.



THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

Gayatri Mendanha

Why does a writer write and for whom? Is it the creative urge seeking fulfillment or the heart seeking justice for injustice? Is it for a change of ideology in the mind-set of the reader or for the simple pleasure of sharing the adventures of mind and spirit? Eminent Urdu writer, Ismat Chughtain said of her writing, “I have never seriously taken it to be my mission to reform society and eliminate the problems of humanity; but I was greatly influenced by the slogans of the Communist party as they matched my own independent, unbridled, and revolutionary style of thinking...”¹ The human person is a hermeneutical being that relates to things first of all because they *matter* to who we are and not because they are abstract ideals. We seek and strive to find our own unreachable stars and battle our own shadows. It’s a personal journey, uniquely affected by our embodied situatedness, yet one that can only be expressed in the collective. The writer imagines, creates and moulds into being characters from all s/he sees, hears and feels. Whitman expresses this, “Speech is the twin of my vision, it is unequal to measure itself,/ It provokes me forever, it says sarcastically,/ *Walt you contain enough, why don’t you let it out then?*”² This is a call, an almost sacred duty. Inspired, the writer writes of his/her dreams in thought made language. S/he tells us of who s/he is.

The writer is not an isolated subject. S/he writes in and through a cultural horizon. These coloured spectacles are studied by literary

¹ Rakshanda Jalil, “Saying Boo to the Who’s Who,” *The Times of India* The Crest Edition, 12 May 2012: 18

² *The Whitman Reader*. Ed. Maxwell Geismar (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1955), 48.

critics and sociologists who transcend the work to dive into its deeper shades. Beyond the story extends his worldview; within and beyond the writer is his/her society. A writer is affected by the society s/he is thrown into and in turn in the act of writing affects not only the literary tradition but his/her society itself. Whitman concluded his preface to the first edition of *Leaves* with: "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."³ Yet, in Whitman was also the strong, ravenously individualistic streak that defines his work. He lays bare and naked the man and the poet, his country, the very grass at his feet and the ocean of life. Thus, Whitman addresses us in *Song of Myself*, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself,"⁴

The writer is not an isolated subject. S/he writes to you, the reader, who is not an isolated reader but is in turn uniquely and collectively affected by society. And the reader is no isolated stranger, for as Whitman writes, "what I assume you shall assume/For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."⁵ Literature is the direct voice of the author to his/her reader. It is a dialogue, a fusion of horizons, a *social* exchange within a social and political set-up. A writer by his/her very nature is socially committed but is not primarily a sociologist or reformer. S/he cannot be compelled to champion social issues or write in aid of the downtrodden.

The Dalit writer writes of discrimination, the feminist of denial and the tribal of life. Each paints a picture, each tells a tale that s/he is driven from a rage within. The collective unconsciousness is the muse

³ Donald D. Kummings , *A Companion to Walt Whitman*. (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 464 .

⁴ *The Whitman Reader*. Ed. Geismar, 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21

that possesses the writer. The creative daemon is at work that baptizes its mediums— *prophets and dreamers*. Language is the medium and yet, literary style is the tool. Literature is not a dry statistic; it pulsates with energy and life. This is the “difference between the writer and the journalist...whatever the level of his consciousness, the writer must adopt a personal trope, an engaging craft, through which he can indirectly state his distaste towards the inhuman policies in the society.”⁶ It is only words and yet it can rouse a generation or change an era. Literature engages the reader, invokes his/her faculties, offering a reality that calls into question our pre-understandings while delighting us with its imagery. With the suspension of disbelief, readers are catapulted into a world of the writer’s creation, to a world believable in its truth yet magical in its mystique. Author E. E. Sule writes, “I enjoy *Arrows of Rain* and *Invisible Chapters* not for their socio-political messages, but for the unique metaphors and fresh language of the novelists.”⁷ The joys of literature may complement social commitment, research and dedication but cannot be sacrificed to them. The creative daemon gives expression to the social animal: this is the unwritten process that every writer abides by in the telling of his/her truth. Literature is primarily a work of art and may secondarily be a vehicle of social or political discontent.

Heidegger, the German philosopher, wrote “in the constant awareness that such writing is a human act, the enactment of a human possibility...”⁸ To put in skilful words the beatings of the human heart - in this lies a writer’s endearing charm and revered worth. Classics are born that endure through the ages and enlighten,

⁶ E. E. Sule, “Beyond Social Commitment, Meaning and Audience: Towards the Soyinkanisisation of Nigerian Literature” May 4, 2007 <<http://www.africanwriter.com/articles/116/1/Beyond-Social-Commitment-Meaning-and-Audience-Towards-the-Soyinkanisisation-of-Nigerian-Literature/Page1.html>>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*. (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 31.

enthuse and delight in cultures and countries alien to their own. This adventure is not one of bookish theory but is the experience of reality as it is revealed to one who is open to its secrets. "Commitment may be expressed also in the writer's search in himself for authenticity, reaching deep into himself to the place where truth lies"⁹ to gain intellectual, spiritual, moral and social freedom. Gaining insight, searching and learning are endeavors that writers achieve in putting pen to paper, venting truths as experienced. Whitman says, "Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity, / When I give I give myself."¹⁰ His work compels the reader to understand him and see his world as he saw and believed it. Good literature in turn frees the reader to be him/herself, journeying to the interior to ask questions, "What is man anyhow? what am I? what are you?"¹¹ It's a journey in self-awareness and transformation that in turn influences who we are and the stories that our lives tell. These existential revolutions affect our society and proclaim ideals of freedom, truth and expression or of oppression and hatred. Good literature opens up realms of possibility, inviting the reader to awaken to questions reframed and made personal. We are drawn into a reality that uncovers facets of ourselves in *Tintern Abbey*, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* or Kamala Das' *An Introduction*.

This, transformation of the individual and society rests not only on the writer and literary critic as Matthew Arnold believed but "...the teacher has as important a role to play as the poet and the critic, but then a teacher of literature is a critic of literature even when he

⁹ Gaither Stewart, "LITERATURE: COMPROMISE AND COMMITMENT", Rome, September 2002 <<http://www.southerncrossreview.org/20/stewartessay.htm>>

¹⁰ *The Whitman Reader*. Ed. Geismar, 57.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

doesn't write."¹² Thus, literature calls out, moulds and nourishes its reader with manna harvested from ethnic and national differences out of which is born a variety of literary expressions and social change. In turn, we as readers, critics or teachers become agents of a social change that is both individual and collective...

~ Gayatri Mendanha

Gayatri Mendanha teaches Philosophy at Flame, Pune. Gayatri holds Masters' degrees in both English and Philosophy. She wishes to pursue her Ph.D on Sant Kabir. A talented youngster with an equal zest for poetry and spirituality, she is amongst the very recent ex-students of the Department of English, Fergusson college who has contributed to this volume.



¹² C. D. Narasimhaiah, "Criticism and Culture", *Literary Criticism: European and Indian Traditions*. Ed. C. D. Narasimhaiah, (Mysore: University of Mysore), 225.

MODERNIST WRITING AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES: AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE*

Dr Rajeev Patke

I wish to begin with an idea adapted from the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who wrote in the 1960s about the relation of literature in English to the reading and teaching of the Western literary canon outside the West: what we read (and teach) should have some relevance to *who* we are, *when* we are, and *where* we are. Ngugi spoke in terms of the accommodations we make between the Western literary canon and writing in English from other cultures and societies. His approach retains its significance to this day: we are academics living and working in Southeast Asia, at the beginning of the twentieth-first century, and it is appropriate for us to exercise a degree of self-awareness about what is entailed in being part of the institutional processes and intellectual apparatuses through which literature in English is mediated in society as part of an educational system.

What I have invoked as the Ngugi Principle acquires particular relevance when we consider the discourses which describe the contemporary practice of literature in the expanding concentric circles constituted by Southeast Asia and Asia. The teaching of literature in English outside first-language (and predominantly monolingual) Anglophone societies works in the shadow of two formative powers or influences, colonialism and modernism, whose effects and consequences are with us today in ways that differ radically from how they work in the Anglophone contexts of Britain and the US.

European colonialism operated in a very wide realm, geographically, historically, and in terms of the ways in which it affected politics, economics, religion, language and culture. As a

process it was both gradual and complex. It began with exploration and trade, and ended up with the political, economic, cultural and linguistic dominance of various European nations (followed later by the US) over the peoples, societies and cultures of Asia, the Americas, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Oceania. It began in the 16th century, and its effects and aftereffects are still with us today. It created settler cultures in all parts of the world in which local ecosystems were suited to European settlement and indigenous populations were sparse and easily decimated or confined: as in the Americas, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. In regions that were densely populated and ecologically incompatible with European expectations, colonialism led to exploitative and managerial rather than to settlement cultures: as in Asia, Africa and Oceania. In such non-settler cultures, the cultural influence of Europe affected language use and shaped the perception that access to Western languages was an enabling privilege: hence the canonization of the Western literary tradition in Asia; hence the emulation, adaptation and transposition of Western genres, modes, styles and conventions in the Asian uses of English for literary purposes.

On the positive side, European (and later, American) colonialism brought Western ideas of reason, organization, knowledge and progress to the colonies, along with awareness of Western technologies, culture and literature. On the negative side, colonialism was exploitative, guilty of double-standards (denying to their colonies the privileges they took as natural to themselves), and fuelled Western cultural hubris while it deflated and disabled self-confidence among the colonized, producing imitativeness, servility, dependency, self-alienation and resentment. Overt forms of colonialism came to an end gradually: starting with decolonization in the first half of the 19th century for South America, followed by autonomy for settler colonies, and

independence for Asian and African colonies and the Philippines in the years following World War II. The less obvious and more deep-rooted effects of colonialism did not end with political decolonization. That is where the idea of “post-colonial” comes in (with or without the hyphen): to describe mind-sets and predicaments which constitute a mix of assimilation and resistance to the enduring influence of colonialism, and produces hybrid sensibilities which aspire to a sense of identity and autonomy in the context of rapid and asymmetrical globalization.

Awareness of how colonialism affected cultures, both the colonizing ones and the ones that got colonized, gives rise to the fundamental logic of the creation of a relatively new academic sub-discipline, postcolonial studies. What then is postcolonial studies? How did it come about? And why does awareness of this relatively new academic discipline matter to students and teachers of English in Asia (and outside Asia)? It could be said in brief that postcolonial studies arose as an academic discipline that had assimilated the impact of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and the prior work of intellectuals from Europe’s colonies, such as Aime Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and many others. Their work, and hence the discipline, creates awareness of how Europe and its colonies were mutually implicated in the transformation of societies, cultures and mindsets on either side of every colonial encounter over the entire period from the 16th to the 21st centuries. It could also be recognized in passing that the agenda and methods of the discipline overlap partially with the approaches of Marxism, Feminism and Poststructuralism.

We turn next to the question of how ideas concerning the “postcolonial” can relate to, and provide fresh insights into, ideas of the “modern” in all its refractions, such as “modernity”, “modernization”, “modernism” and “modernist”. We might say that “modern” is used generally to evoke vital elements of the

contemporary in a loose and flexible manner; whereas, “modernity” refers in a more specific sense to the Utopian desire to maximize human progress through the application of human reason to nature and humanity, societies and institutions, on the basis of ideas that had their historical origin in European Enlightenment thought of the 18th century. “Modernism”, in contrast, is a retrospective term which describes a set of tendencies in the arts and writing of the late 18th and early 20th centuries which sets itself in an antithetical or oppositional relation to the European project of “modernity”. Modernism articulates a sense of crisis within modernity, a rupture in the self-understanding which Immanuel Kant had identified as the key feature of the European Enlightenment. While modernity operates in the spheres of the social, the economic, the technological and the conceptual levels of thought and action, Modernism represents an aesthetic revolution resulting from an acute degree of self-reflexivity about European traditions of representation in writing and the arts, which leads to a break from those traditions.

Modernist writing and art was also shaped by the often ambivalent and sometimes involuntary reactions of modernist writers to the transformations produced directly or indirectly in societies and sensibilities by colonialism. During the last two centuries of world history, the utopianism underlying the project of ‘modernity’ suffered a series of shocks, reversals and self-doubts as it became interwoven with the parallel development of European colonialism. Refractions and diagnoses of this twisted relation contribute to the complex effects produced in many (though by no means all) modernist writing (and art).

When it comes to the relation between colonialism and modernity, as examined from the perspective of postcolonial studies, it is recognized that while colonialist capitalism brought a version of modernity to the colonies, it did so as part of an exploitative system

that produced inequalities in development which have remained characteristic of the global geopolitical system after World War II. The global phenomena of modernity and imperialism were closely but asymmetrically connected. Thus, while modernism could be described, in part, as a historical crisis of cultural and aesthetic self-reflexivity, the finding (or making) of connections between modernism and colonialism places the two phenomena in a relation of mutual illumination: that is part of the task undertaken by postcolonial studies. Therefore, if we ask, what does postcolonial studies contribute to our reading of canonical texts which exemplify an interaction between modernist and postcolonial mindsets and techniques, the answer is: postcolonial studies encourages us to treat a literary text at the interface between colonialism and modernism as articulating a problem for which it proposes itself as a solution. The business of the alert reader or teacher could then be defined as the task of (a) identifying both the problem and the solution, and (b) conjecturing plausible reasons for the identification. My approach is based on three sources: the German Romantic writer Novalis, the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin and the American poet John Crowe Ransom. What these three sources help articulate are three refractions of the same basic question: what can we identify in a literary text as its “implicit necessity to exist” (Novalis)? What is “the task corresponding to the idea of the solution” as which the literary text exists (Walter Benjamin)? What does the literary text arrange for us as “the kind of knowledge by which we must know what we have arranged that we shall not know otherwise” (John Crowe Ransom)?

The next part of my argument entails two steps. The first step involves the selection of representative texts in which postcolonial experiences and predicaments interact with modernist techniques and mind-sets. Such a selection helps one illustrate the specific forms that the general question can take. The second step involves clarification of how answering the question in the case of each

specific text contributes a nuance to our understanding of the relation between colonialism and modernism in a contemporary context that is at once postcolonial and postmodern.

Speaking of an author as identifying a problem and developing a poem, play, or story as a solution to that problem is a mode of discourse whose benefits can be best explained through examples, which I enumerate below, each in relation to the question it asks: thus, for example, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) asks for, and provides, the unremembered story of what happened to the first wife of the man we meet as Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Pramodya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet* (1980-88) raises the question of what modernity might mean for the peoples colonized by the Dutch in Indonesia. Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983) asks how the cost of repression might surface in the fundamentalist Pakistan of the 1970s. And, finally, Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) wonders if a belated awareness of the path taken by colonialism and patriarchy in Africa and elsewhere might make a new Defoe retell the story of his Robinson Crusoe in a way that would be more ethical and true to history.

Let us consider each example briefly by expanding on the implications of approaching a text through an interpretation of its implied questions. In the case of our first Asian example, Pramodya, the single major question posed by the four novels can be phrased in these terms: what might modernity mean for the peoples colonized by the Dutch in Indonesia? The specific issues that can be said to be brought to a focus by the question are: How could the Dutch subjugate peoples so rich in their cultural heritage? What might be the role of education, and the choice of language in education, if Southeast Asian peoples were to have heroes to lead the struggle to overthrow colonialism? What might be the roles for cultural and racial hybrids, and for women, in such developments? And what might be the worst enemies of such aspirations?

Interestingly enough, the final novel answers the last question by focusing on an individual caught between assimilation to colonial institutions and self-awareness of the corrupting influence of such assimilation. The narrator of the final novel, Pangemanann, remarks bitterly on how the enlightenment promise of progress (the idea of modernity) was reduced to its opposite by agents of colonialism such as himself: "The great teachers beautifully taught about the enlightenment of the world that would be brought by the Renaissance, the *Aufklärung*, about the awakening of humanism, about the overthrow of one class by another that was begun with the French Revolution when the feudal class was removed by the bourgeoisie. They called on the people to side with the progressive march of history. And meanwhile, I was sinking into the disgusting colonial mud" (*House of Glass*, 46–7).

Our next example of an Asian text that uses modernist techniques in a postcolonial situation is Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983). Rushdie's relation to modernist technique is evident in its narrative self-reflexivity and its use of symbol and allegory as an alternative to narrative realism. We can identify the question posed by the novel in this way: How might the cost of repression surface in the fundamentalist Pakistan of the 1970s through feminine agency? The intrusive persona used by Rushdie as the refracting lens of his narrative remarks quite pointedly, "This is how religion shores up dictators; by encircling them with words of power" (251). What makes the implicit question posed by the novel postcolonial in orientation is Rushdie's assimilation to Western norms, which makes him critical of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism: "I tell myself this will be a novel of leavetaking, my last words on the East from which, many years ago, I began to come loose" (28). The sympathetic relation between postcolonial and feminist thinking underlying the novel is exemplified in its focus on the notion of "sharam/shame", which in the society represented by the novel is associated with womankind, thus reinforcing the homology

between patriarchy, colonialism, fundamentalism and xenophobia as forms of discriminatory authoritarianism whose oppressiveness breeds oppositional violence. Frederick Jameson has argued that writers from the "new" nations often feel compelled to writing what he called allegories of nation, a view that might seem to fit Rushdie's novel, though it has been forcefully challenged by Aijaz Ahmad.

The (post-)modernism of the novel is manifest in the relation of intertextual critique between the feminine fantasy at the heart of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and her own bleak diagnosis of despair. The question posed by the novel: What might be the untold story of the first wife of the man we meet as Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847)? Rhys writes as a creole "white nigger" (85) whose protagonist is stigmatized for her racial hybridity by whites as well as colored people, so that when her marriage is betrayed by a white English husband more intent on her property than on love or fidelity, there is little left for her but the insanity & death we glimpse in *Jane Eyre*.

Coetzee's novel brings about a significant interaction between postmodern techniques & self-reflexivity applied to a postcolonial predicament. The question posed by the novel: How might we retell the story of Robinson Crusoe in a manner more just to Friday and to the women left out of Defoe's novel? The intertextuality of the novel acts as a critique which questions the structure of the fantasy subsidizing the foundational myth of Robinson Crusoe as the type of individual who can recreate the archetypal structures of modern European civilization even in the wilderness.

Coetzee's novel offers a multiple corrective to that fantasy: his Foe is depressed; his woman is endlessly talkative & permanently in search for a daughter and a narrative she can bring into existence; & his Man Friday is about to open his mouth and speak what the

white man cannot ventriloquize for him. Coetzee's way of answering the question makes room for multiple recognitions: that colonialism was a form of paternalistic authoritarianism that confined women and the colonized to a subaltern silence which cannot last forever. When woman and Friday speak, the colonialist Foe will have to be consigned to the background.

Having looked briefly at four novels, two set in Asia, one in the Caribbean and one in South Africa, what can we conclude about the relation of modernist writing and postcolonial studies from a perspective that is both Asian and contemporary? First, modernism as a retrospective period concept modulates into a set of strategies and techniques, a repertoire of possibilities that writers from the formerly colonized parts of the world can transpose to their own, later, and different, circumstances. Second, when modernist techniques are applied to postcolonial predicaments, the results sharpen the power of modernism to provide a critique of Western modernity, a model of progress whose limitations and problems are as clearly visible as the alleged good done to the contemporary world by a single and West-derived model of development. I end by echoing sentiments expressed in the 1990s by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who expressed reservations about "whether the order of life current in the West is really the wave of everybody else's future" (1995: 140). He catalogues "the ills attributed to the modern form of life as it has taken shape in the West" as a caveat to aspiring postcolonial nations intent on "joining the ranks of the industrial powers, getting rich, getting healthier, getting skilled, getting armed." He warns that the price can entail "Secularism, commodification, corruption, selfishness, immorality, rootlessness, general estrangement from the sources of value" (1995: 142). It is a price that we might all want to be wary of.

~ Dr Rajeev Patke

Details about the author are given in an earlier article by him
in the book



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LOCAL VOICES, GLOBAL DISCOURSES

Kunal Ray, Meena Aier

Fundamentalism, largely by the misfortune of its repeated usage in modern language, leaves one with a bad aftertaste. Post 9/11, any talk of fundamentalism has been restricted to the Islamic world and the constant flux in its so called 'political revolution'. Ironically enough, the term 'Fundamentalism' emerges from the practice of defending Christian higher power beliefs from the wretched annals of modernity that was observed in the late 19th Century US. More striking is the fact that 'Islamic Fundamentalism' as a term and as a definition was coined by American journalists and academicians alike in the 1980s to describe the political dialogue and practices of the Middle East dictators. Fundamentalism, in this respect, came to be viewed as a human construct that is fanatic, rigid in its unwavering loyalty to inflexible, byzantine and more importantly, irreducible beliefs.

In the constant harangue of the 'American national security' and the 'war on terror', it becomes quite easy to be lost in the multiple narratives of ideologies and political realities. Most novels addressing these issues therefore, staunchly support one perspective, one cultural reality, seeking to strengthen their narrative while making the existence of the other cultural realities subservient. Much like the idea of fundamentalism, these novels are based on irreducible beliefs, in the quest for something that they are not entirely certain of – power maybe? Dominance, respect or revenge? Within politically motivated novels, the dividing lines between these factors blur and they no longer resemble mutually exclusive identities. The characters within these stories too, more often than not, embody this confusion and amalgamation of identities, of having to choose between the two political world camps – Pro US and Anti US.

In this barrage of the 'US v/s us', *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* proves to be a breath of fresh air, providing readers with a strong political voice which ironically, is strengthened by its bare honesty and simplicity. Conflicting identities - emerging from deep confusion over one's political ideologies and nationalist sentiments - form the crux of the novel. Changez (Urdu for Genghis) perhaps embodies this deep confusion through and through, beginning perhaps, right from the matter of his name (he's named after the famous Mongol Emperor who invaded Pakistan and therefore, does not fall under the genial ambit of a traditional, fundamentalist Pakistani). Any believing Muslim wouldn't name his son Changez, and any believing Muslim son wouldn't choose to be identified with the name Changez. The adjective "reluctance" is rather provocative in this context. Reluctance becomes a way of life for the protagonist of this novel and this attribute extends to different spheres including his religious practice and faith.

Changez, through his journey to America and the successful start of his career at Samson Underwood & Company, lives and epitomises the American Dream. His is an immigrant's story and largely American fiction in contemporary times is being rightly shaped by immigrant narratives. He critiques America on various levels (for instance, when he compares the lack of respect shown by his fellow American graduates at Greece to the traditional, respectful Pakistani customs and traditions) yet, he seeks to be an American while at Manila in order to command the respect of the locals. The ambivalence in his attitude is also reflected in his reluctance of adopting completely the role of a business professional, of being detached from the plight of his clients and being completely rational and focusing on the 'fundamentals' of his approach. His dilemma comes across powerfully in the city of Valparaiso in Chile, while trying to value a publishing firm. Changez finds himself unable to concentrate on his work on account of his preoccupations and also owing to the 'powerfully atmospheric' charm of the city.

Moreover, “a sense of melancholy pervaded its (Valparaiso’s) boulevards and hillsides”¹, reminding Changez of Lahore in its many poetic layers. Changez realizes that he feels sorry for Juan-Batista, the chief of the publishing company, thereby unable to rationalize his thoughts, incapable of enveloping himself in the irreducible ‘fundamentals’ of the company. Another arresting feature of the novel is the writer’s association with his city, Lahore and the spirit of the city is beautifully captured through the monologue which hints at the socio-cultural climate of Lahore breaking away from the conventional image of a terror-ridden locale as nursed by the Western Media. This connection largely humanises the narrative.

While in this constant flux of identities, Changez also experiences moments of deep doubt and shame for living the American Dream while his beloved motherland is targeted by the very same country that provides him with his livelihood. At Manila, this confusion becomes very apparent when he sees himself through the hostile eyes of a local, who considers him to be an American – prosperous, yet cruel, generous yet intolerant and ignorant about the rest of the world. His confusion of identities is also clearly echoed in his ambivalent feelings towards America: in his first few days in New York City, he realizes that comparisons between America and Pakistan did “more than trouble him- they made me (him) resentful.” (19) American progress and prosperity in the face of the atrocities imposed by America on his own country and the larger part of the Islamic world enrages him – the ‘vast disparity’ between this beautiful monster called America and the desolate melancholy

¹ Hamid, M. (2007). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Penguin Books: London, 63.

All subsequent references in the article are to this edition. Hence only page numbers are given in parentheses

of Pakistan makes him “ashamed”(19). The almost palpable tension in the plot further adds to the debate on identity crisis.

But perhaps, his loathing towards the country that gave birth to his love and the country that provided him with an opportunity to succeed and prosper escalates and becomes very apparent only post 9/11. The overt “American fever” (35) that grips New York makes him realize that he was and will always be a New Yorker, but never an American; New York in all its metropolitan glory, enables him to feel at home, to feel comfortable hovering in the midst of his multiple identities, while America as a nation continually seeks to confine him to one particular identity. Erica’s abandonment along with America’s abandonment of Pakistan in its time of need makes Changez admit that he did feel a twinge of pleasure watching the World Trade Centre go down. It was the first time he ever felt truly powerful as a Muslim in a country that often imposed sanctions and curbed the Islamic world progress – for the first time, he could truly believe that America could be brought to its knees. He is shocked by this sentiment, but doesn’t see the need to hide it from the American. His attachment to Pakistan, and the anger of being rejected (and perhaps disillusioned) by the American dream finally manifests itself physically when he starts growing a beard as a “protest on his part, a symbol of his identity, a reminder of the reality he left behind”(59). Often, he would find himself being subjected to angry glares – which eventually, made him defiant and resilient. He would walk down the streets of New York, looking to pick a fight, goading anyone and everyone to come tearing at him because of his beard, his identity.

These physical manifestations of the protagonist’s anger and disillusionment with America (and perhaps the Pakistani fundamentalist ideology in part) blend in with the depiction of the American. The author, by not providing the American with a distinct voice, makes the readers perceive the American’s

mannerisms and thoughts through Changez's eyes. By doing so, the author gently mocks yet provides a piercing depiction of America's perception of the Islamic world. Often, the American is described as being jumpy, overtly suspicious and ill at ease in a country that seems (to him) to hate his presence. The narrative technique employed by the author enables the reader to perceive and digest the political undertones that follow a major part of the story.

The narrative also enables the author to factor in layers of subaltern discourse in the text. Changez's frank admission of his ambivalence towards America and his irritation with the Americans wanting to pin him down to a particular, restricting identity, all echo of subaltern discourses. Changez, as a successful Pakistani, a reluctant businessman and a reluctant fundamentalist finds himself excluded from the hegemonic nature of America's knowledge and meaning systems. Changez in his monologue comes across as a reserved yet zealous person, who is often at odds with what the world (or rather, the hegemonic forces) seem to want from him. This is evidenced when he describes the corporate recruitment process at Princeton – "Every fall, Princeton raised her skirt for the corporate recruiters who came onto campus and – as you say in America – showed them some skin"(6) where he describes himself as a "perfect beast....tan, succulent, seemingly defiant of gravity..."(6) He is poetic at once and highly pragmatic at the same time, suggesting that the identity crisis he faced was ever present, his "Western education"(5) - a hegemonic education encompassing the ideals of objectivity and rationality in Pakistan combined with his immediate family environment and Pakistani values (embodying the beauty of emotion) always made him sit on the fence, not quite sure which camp to join yet. His motherland was never good enough for him, but America never lived up to its expectations either.

In a country that has experienced nothing but strife and colonization since ancient times; it often becomes hard not to be protective. Pakistan has witnessed nothing but strife and constant colonization from opposing forces for a larger part of its history. Its split from India post-Independence too emerged from the 'one Muslim nation' identity imposed and permeated by Jinnah – a Muslim who did not follow the 'fundamentals' of Islamic religious ideology – perhaps, exhibited Pakistan's constant need and search for an autonomous identity. The dictatorial regimes experienced by the native Pakistani citizens post-Independence served as a disillusionment of the visions of prosperity and glory that Jinnah inspired.

A Pakistani's disillusionment with the motives of the rest of the world stems from these perceived notions of constant colonization and deep hidden pride. An average Pakistani's disillusionment also stems from disappointment of being left behind, while the rest of the world marches resolutely ahead. There is perceived jealousy and animosity with its nemesis – India, and a certain amount of disappointment and frustration with the politics of fundamentalism prevalent within the country. For a very long time, the citizens of Pakistan found their voices restricted, their freedom of expression curbed. An average Pakistani could never supply the world with narratives that could counter the dominant 'fundamentalist' view perpetuated by the West. The recent spate of voices emerging from deep within the layers of Pakistani contours – Hamid, Mohammed Hanif, Nadeem Aslam to name a few – provides the rest of the world with another perspective. It opens up avenues for the long repressed and ostracized Pakistan to voice her scars, her misfortunes and attempt to correct the misconceptions held by the rest of the world. It is also a new beginning in fiction writing from a country with authors who explore local stories to narrate global tales.

Mohsin Hamid, through the *Reluctant Fundamentalist* attempts to challenge the dominant world political ideology. The politics of the novel and the novelist become apparent through this – the protagonist's dilemma and war of identities reveals a major part of the political divide experienced by the Pakistani citizens. The unique first person narrative style adopted by the author also provides the reader with the ability to perceive a Pakistani's dilemma with no interference from the voices of the other characters. Changez's confusion and a large part of his anger stems from all of the factors discussed above and much more. In a complex scenario of increasing global connect and rising suspicions (and divide) between the Islamic world and the West, Changez often finds himself pulled in different directions, unable to stay true to one of his identities. Mohsin Hamid, through Changez, provides an insight into the political disillusionment felt by the average citizen, perhaps in every corner of the world, thereby making it a political novel that is truly universal in nature.

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MERCHANT'S *YARAANA* AND SUKTHANKAR'S *FACING THE MIRROR*: PROBLEMATIZING THE QUEER TEXT*

Dr Raj Rao

In 1999, Penguin India, which had set up operations in the country in the late eighties, surprised the publishing industry and readers in general by issuing two potentially inflammable titles. The first was *Facing the Mirror* with the subtitle 'Lesbian Writing from India'; the second, *Yaraana* with the subtitle 'Gay Writing from India'. The former volume was edited by Ashwini Sukthankar, whom the book described as a Bombay-based writer and activist born in Bombay in 1974, and educated at Harvard where she studied Comparative Literature. The latter volume was edited by my friend Hoshang Merchant, poet, Zoroastrian, with a PhD on Anais Nin from Purdue University in 1981. On returning to India, Merchant first taught at the University of Pune where he was victimized by the authorities on account of his sexuality, and then at the University of Hyderabad from where he retired in 2012. Mercifully, the two books did not create a controversy when they were released. They were not burned or banned. It's not as if they weren't noticed—there were reviews of the two books in every major Indian newspaper and news magazine, and most of the reviews were favorable. However, the fact that the books were written in English, which is read by few, may have spared them the ordeal that Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* (made in both English and Hindi) suffered just the previous year (1998) when it was released in cinemas all over India.

It has been twelve years since *Facing the Mirror* and *Yaraana* were published. Last year (2010), Penguin reissued an expanded *Yaraana* with a new subtitle: Gay Writing from South Asia. (To the best of my knowledge, *Facing the Mirror* has not been reissued). In my capacity as a professor and a writer, I have lived with the two

books these past twelve years, using them as invaluable course material for courses I have offered in my own university (again, the University of Pune), as well as universities in Germany and Canada. Additionally, in the case of *Yaraana*, my own work, three poems from *BomGay* and two stories from *One Day I Locked My Flat in Soul City* appears in it.

In this article I propose a thesis vis-à-vis the two books and attempt to prove it. It is that although *Yaraana* and *Facing the Mirror* are both anthologies of writing based on the theme of same sex love, the resemblance between the two books ends there. The two anthologies, when read in conjunction with each other, enable us to see that the terms 'lesbian/gay' and 'queer' which most lay people believe to be synonymous with one another, are actually radically different formulations in terms of the theories they represent. The two books, then, when properly conceptualized, should make it possible for us to ask of non-heterosexual people whether they are lesbian/gay OR queer, just as we might ask people if they are straight/heterosexual or gay/homosexual. Penguin India itself was probably unaware of the distinction when it published the two anthologies in 1999.

In order to prove my thesis, I turn to two constructs used by Sukthankar in her Introduction to *Facing the Mirror*. These are the constructs of 'lesbian' (which, for the purposes of my argument, would also include the construct 'gay') and that of 'writing'. The first construct is concerned with the question of identity, the second with that of language. Sukthankar uses a third construct, viz. 'Indian', which concerns the question of nationality. I shall not touch upon this in my article, though it also has serious ramifications for the politics of sexuality in India, especially because, as Ruth Vanita says, in India "modern homophobia is deeply intertwined with modern nationalism." (Bose & Bhattacharya, 2007: 347).

Sukthankar says about her project: "...When we talk of 'Indian lesbian writing' the term is in conflict with itself; the very theme which tries to draw this book into a whole is challenged from within by the words and lives of the women who wrote for it." (Sukthankar, 1999: xviii).

Merchant does not use tropes or constructs in the same sense as Sukthankar in his introduction to *Yaraana*. However, one of his oft-quoted views expressed in the Introduction has to do with the 'universalisms' propounded, not by religion, not by bio medicine, not by law, but by the mass media. He writes: "In India, the MTV culture has done the country's homoerotic culture a disservice. It has projected plastic women like Sophiya Haq and Alisha Chinai onto the adolescent male imagination...Your baker, butcher, banker, bus conductor, neighbor could all be very ordinary and also very gay...It has also put many young men out of the gay circuit, forcing them prematurely into the arms of women." (Merchant, 1999: xiii).

A fundamental difference between *Yaraana* and *Facing the Mirror* is that while all the twenty or so contributors to the former write under their own names, and reveal their surnames or last names, the majority of contributors to the latter write under assumed names or pseudonyms, and in any case use only first names. The only (well-known) contributors who use their real names, together with their last names, are Ashwini Sukthankar, Giti Thadani, Ruth Vanita, Mita Radhakrishnan, and a few others. This implies, for one, that the majority of contributors to *Facing the Mirror* are not out of the closet, for there is a close connection between naming and identity and for lesbians to conceal their true names may indicate that for them, their sexual preference for persons of their own gender does not constitute an identity. As one contributor to the anthology puts it, "I just want to *be* gay; I don't want to attend conferences about it." (Sukthankar, 1999: xxix). Or, to formulate

that differently, lesbians and gays who derive their identity from their sexuality must of necessity come out of the closet. Furthermore, an assumed name or pseudonym is also, at the end of the day, an alias. Aliases are frequently used by persons whom the State would define as 'criminals' or 'terrorists', as the Dalit writer Laxman Gaikwad so poignantly proves in his autobiographical work, *The Branded*. Thus, the lesbian contributors to *Facing the Mirror*, unlike the gay contributors to *Yaraana*, are willing to see themselves as outlaws.

This is where the antithetical words 'lesbian/gay' and 'queer' come into play. In terms of identity, the contributors to *Yaraana* (that include me) are unabashedly gay. Our pride about our (gay) sexuality would motivate us to be seen, for example, at Gay Pride marches, held at one time only in the West, usually in the last week of June to commemorate the anniversary of Stonewall, but now in several Indian metropolises such as Calcutta, Delhi, Bangalore and Bombay. The contributors to *Yaraana* thus attempt to mainstream themselves by taking on heteronormativity, and substituting it with what may be termed 'homonormativity'. Likewise, they may be said to replace homophobia with 'heterophobia' and misogyny. Merchant's introductory remarks, quoted above, may be described as both 'heterophobic' and misogynist, for he describes women (like Sophiya Haq and Alisha Chinai) as "plastic women", and complains about young men being prematurely driven into the arms of women, thereby depriving them of the right to choose with whom to sleep. Such a strain would also be present in many of the other selections in *Yaraana*, including Mahesh Dattani's play "Night Queen" (57-71), where the women in the play, who include Raghu's old mother and his sister Gayatri, are given no agency.

In marked contrast to the minoritizing words 'lesbian/gay', the universalizing term 'queer' refers to a destabilizing of (hetero)normativity, achieved through an all-encompassing

resistance to norms. The basic characteristic of queerness is that it is opposed to replacing one form of normativity with another. The moment anything that begins as a resistance to norms becomes a norm in itself, it ceases to be queer, and it is up to the queer subject to negotiate the tricky business of normativity in such a way, that the decentralizing trait of queerness is not lost. By using assumed names/pseudonyms/aliases, the contributors to *Facing the Mirror* may be said to endorse the oppositional idea of Gay Shame. In doing so, they succeed in destabilizing both normativity and heteronormativity, emerging as women with a queer 'identity' rather than a lesbian identity.

The other construct used by Sukthankar is that of 'writing'. In his book *Sex/Text*, Hoshang Merchant says: "Gender is genre...the third gender will produce a third (new) genre, not prose, not poetry, not fiction, not fact, not discourse, not effusion, but a mixture of all these." (Merchant, 2009: 28). The statement, I believe, couldn't apply more to the selections in *Facing the Mirror*. Let us begin by posing a question: what is writing? The literary establishment would probably answer the question by informing us that writing is (published) poetry, fiction, drama and nonfiction, to cite its most prominent forms. Now let us examine what editor Sukthankar has to say about the selections included in *Facing the Mirror*. She writes:

"The pieces that were produced for this book...might not be writing in the purist's sense...Women sent in poems scribbled on scraps of paper and hidden away for years, extracts from journals, love letters—astonishing artifacts in a world which consumes and discards the written word like any other mass-produced commodity. Other women asked if they could record their narratives on tape for us to transcribe, since they were either not literate, or had spent so many years using the written word as a shield of prevarication, that writing to reveal and express had

become impossible. Again, it might be argued that this genre, whatever it is, is not writing. But for the purpose of this compilation, 'writing' signifies the gritty imperfect media through which the body, with its yearning and its suffering, spoke out; the process through which our lives, put into the tangibility of words, could be made public." (Sukthankar, 1999: xxi).

In a way it is ironic that Ashwini Sukthankar, with her degree in Comparative Literature from Harvard University, should be the editor of *Facing the Mirror*. This is because presumably at Harvard, what would be admissible into the curriculum would be the canonical text rather than the queer text, with strict emphasis on the normative genres of writing—poetry, fiction, drama and nonfiction. This is not to suggest that, Sukthankar's disclaimers notwithstanding, none of the pieces in *Facing the Mirror* qualify as 'writing' in the conventional sense. Yet, a close reading of the poem "Leaving" (73), for example, by a poet who simply uses the initials A.G. in place of her name, gives one the feeling that the poem is no poem because it has neither rhyme, nor meter, nor imagery, nor figures of speech, but reads rather like chopped prose:

*We strain against each other,
She, trying to thrust me out
Me, stubbornly resisting.
I want to stay with you...please
I don't know the world outside
I can't face it on my own
I'm not yet ready
ready to be born.
Mm, mm...Dhuk, dhuk
Muffled sounds filter through
to relieve the monotony
of her frantic screams and keening.
She is wiser*

*and bigger and stronger than me—
it's a losing battle—
I'm out!
No wonder I feel like crying.*

The language construct of *Facing the Mirror* goes beyond the issue of genre. It also concerns the idiom employed by the writers, which is not 'decorous' but 'gross'. Consider the following evocative passage from "The Complete Works of Someshwar P. Balendu" (267-286) by Qamar Roshanabadi (the title parodies you-know-who):

"As soon as I was old enough to find out where it could be done, I had my breasts cut off...I begged the nurse to give me something for the pain. More, I begged, more, more. The syringe pricked me once, twice, thrice, the blessed prongs of the trishul of the lord of yogis, om om om. Then I was able to close my eyes and let the agony flow into a mirror of glass...

I forgot how long they kept me there, in the filthy general ward. The bandage became stiff as a Kurukshetra warrior's shield. Thread by thread I pulled it loose from my wound. All around me the suffering people called upon deaf gods for water, for mercy, for death...

I was not sure, but I thought my breasts might have been thrown into the municipal dustbin, buried in mango peels, egg shells, tea leaves and crusted sanitary napkins until dogs or a sweeper's broom found them, ripening in the heat...

My cousin...told me about a villager who worked on her uncle's farm. One hand was pulled into a threshing machine during harvest. Chopped off completely. Someone picked it up from the wet red heat, but stole the ring. The villager screamed all the way to the district hospital, carrying the hand in her father's turban."

This distinction between ‘subtle’ and ‘gross’ writing applies to other forms of ‘marginal’ literature as well, such as Dalit literature, especially in Marathi. The late playwright Vijay Tendulkar once confessed at a book launch in Bombay, for example, that he rebuffed the Dalit poet Namdeo Dhasal who approached him with his poem *Golpitha*, saying that he did not understand his idiom, which was ‘crass’. This, though both writers wrote in the same language—Marathi.

On the other hand, when we turn to *Yaraana*, we find that all the heavy-weight male writers in the volume stick to the normative genres of literature. The list is as follows:

Poets: Firaq Gorakhpuri, Sultan Padamsee, Namdeo Dhasal, Hoshang Merchant, Rakesh Ratti, Vikram Seth, Adil Jussawalla, Dinyar Godrej, R. Raj Rao and others.

Fiction Writers: Bhupen Khakhar, Kamleshwar, Firdaus Kanga, R. Raj Rao and others.

Nonfiction Writers: Ashok Row Kavi, Hoshang Merchant, Manoj Nair and others.

Playwright: Mahesh Dattani.

In terms of idiom, the majority of pieces in *Yaraana*, with their expressive elegance and formal control (with the possible exception of my own work) would confirm to T. S. Eliot’s dictum that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion;” (Eliot, 1976: 58).

The conclusion that we must come to, then, is that if gender equals genre, then it is the women writers in *Facing the Mirror* rather than the men writers in *Yaraana* who successfully produce a queer text.

Judith Butler speaks of gender as performance, based on an authoritative naturalization of heterosexuality. She rejects the idea of a queer continuum because feminism, whose agenda is gender equality as opposed to sexuality per se, subsumes lesbianism, thereby perpetuating the male/female binary among gays/lesbians (Butler, 1994: 1-26). Taking her cue from Butler, Ranjita Biswas points out that mainstream feminists are “reluctant to re-examine the notion of naturalized heterosexuality” (Bose & Bhattacharya, 2007: 278). By deduction, then, the patriarchy prevalent in mainstream heterosexual society is replicated in lgbt (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender) society. Perhaps that is why the identities of the gay writers in *Yaraana* and the lesbian writers in *Facing the Mirror* are so radically different, the former moving towards an essentialist ‘homonormativity’, and the latter concerned with an anti-essentialist destabilizing of heteronormativity. That is why, although the two anthologies came out at the same time, around the turn of the century, and were published by the same publishing house, they are poles apart in structure, execution and design.

In an interview given to the gay journal *Gay Pied*, Michel Foucault says that one must “be set on becoming homosexual...” When probed about the meaning of the intriguing statement, Foucault elaborates on it as follows:

“Saying ‘one must be set on being gay’ puts oneself in a dimension where the sexual choices that one makes are present and have their effects over the whole of our life. I also mean that these sexual choices must at the same time be creative of ways of life. To be gay means that these choices spread across a whole life; it’s also a certain way of refusing existing life styles; making sexual choice the operator of a change of existence. Not to be gay is to say: ‘How am I going to be able to limit the effects of my sexual choice in such a way that my life doesn’t change in any way?’ I would say that one must use sexuality to discover or invent new relations. To be gay is

to be in a state of becoming. To respond to your question, I would add that it is not necessary to be homosexual, but it is necessary to be set on being gay.” (Lotringer, 1996: 363-370).

To Foucault, to be set on being gay would mean that one uses one’s gayness as a tool with which to perceive things creatively, and lead a creative lifestyle that would translate into, and cover the entire gamut of activities from artistic designer living to sexual experimentation. It is here that gays and lesbians often come into conflict with one another, and render the likelihood of a queer continuum impossible. This is because, as Ranjita Biswas explains, the supposed affinity of gay men “for sexual pleasure as evident from their investment in anonymous lovers, pederasty and their preoccupation with ageist standards of sexual attractiveness has drawn flak from lesbian activists and feminists alike” (Bose & Bhattacharya, 2007: 278). While mainstream feminists would interpret this as patriarchy, no different from the patriarchy (and double standards) of straight men, lesbians would tend to view it as promiscuity, responsible, among other things, for the AIDS pandemic in India and other parts of the world. Promiscuity becomes synonymous with patriarchy by this formulation, and unites both lesbians and feminists in their condemnation of male homosexuals as men with scant respect for stable, committed relationships. And what makes gay men more gullible than their straight counterparts is the fact that the potential for ‘sleeping around’ among the latter is at least held in check by the institution of marriage, with its conventions of fidelity and monogamy. Gay men have no such bindings.

In the popular TV serial *Emotional Atyachar* aired on UTV Channel, the majority of episodes featured men as cheaters who cheated on their girl friends/wives, while only a fraction of the episodes portrayed women as cheaters. Thus, in imitating mainstream heterosexual women in their need for emotional stability, and their

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social censure of most forms of transgressive sex, the lesbians, including those who have contributed to *Facing the Mirror*, face a contradiction. What they need to negotiate is how normativity, including heteronormativity, can be destabilized by its very antithesis, stability.

It's like wanting to have one's cake and eat it too.

~ Dr Raj Rao

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S *CHITRANGADA*: "MOULDING THE PERFECT ANDROGYNE"

Chitra Sreedharan

"I am Chitra, the king's daughter. Perhaps you will remember the day when a woman came to you in the temple of Shiva, her body loaded with ornaments and finery. That shameless woman came to court you as though she were a man. You rejected her; you did well. My lord, I am that woman. She was my disguise. Then by the boon of gods I obtained for a year the most radiant form that a mortal ever wore, and wearied my hero's heart with the burden of that deceit. Most surely I am not that woman."¹

Chitrangada's cry, "I am not that woman"- also the title of a poem by Pakistani woman poet, Kishwar Naheed, captures perfectly the cry from the heart emanating from numerous women, battling the imposition of false selves on them by the demands of 'fitting in', be it in a contemporary set up or a custom-ridden society. While Naheed uses it to describe her sense of being a misfit in a contemporary society all out to glorify the typical poster girl- the woman "selling you socks and shoes"² as the truly 'liberated' woman, the fiercely independent Chitrangada is burdened by the demands of gender-stereotyping in ancient India. Naheed, while denouncing the oppressive measures adopted by men to silence

¹Rabindranath Tagore, *Chitrangada* (1914; New York: Macmillan, 1926) 20.

All subsequent references from the text are from this edition. Hence, only page numbers are given in parentheses.

² Kishwar Naheed, "I am not that Woman" in *An Anthology of Commonwealth Poetry*, ed C.D. Narasimhaiah (1990; India: Macmillan, 2000) 244.

the female voice, avers how women still managed to hold their own and emerge triumphant, in spite of their seeming submissiveness. Tagore's *Chitrangada* is again imploring her man to go beyond appearances and accept her on her own terms, rather than falling for the images she has tried to project.

That Rabindranath Tagore was an iconoclast par excellence is proven through most of his literature, including the famous collection of poems, *Gitanjali*, which won him the Nobel Prize exactly one hundred years ago. The above excerpt from his well-known one-act play, *Chitrangada*- in fact a dance-drama that first came out in 1892 and translated into English in 1914, gives an insight into the progressive outlook of this multi-faceted genius. At a time when women in India were barely beginning to acquire education, thanks to the efforts of many social reformers and reinforced by some of the political reforms brought in by the British, Tagore brought out a play that speaks volumes about the equality of men and women, busting through the gender stereotypes found in most literature written by men as well as women, be it in the East or in the West. True to his romantic vision, Tagore is able to weave in his progressive concerns into a tender love-story that also emphasises the need to go beyond appearances and superficial beauty to capture the beauty of the spirit. As is the case with most great literature, we realize that the play, therefore offers a holistic view of life by accommodating intellectual, psychological, emotional and spiritual concerns, instead of focusing only on narrow didactic or ideological concerns.

Tagore picked up this little-known story from one of India's greatest epics, the *Mahabharata*, a work that contains several progressive elements alongside numerous conformist ones. This story however does not contain any radical elements as it comes through in the *Mahabharata*. But Tagore readapted it to suit his own purposes, giving us a tale that is truly thought-provoking

without sacrificing on any of its emotional or exotic elements. In the original, Chitrangada was a beautiful Manipuri princess, the only daughter of King Chitravahana, who has brought her up as a son and groomed her to be his successor, in lieu of any male heir to his throne. When Arjuna during the course of his wanderings in fulfillment of a penance sees her, he is instantly smitten by her charms and asks for her hand. The King agrees on the condition that Arjuna would forsake the son born to them to perpetuate his maternal grandfather's race. In spite of the obsession with a male progeny, one finds a slight element of nonconformity coming in here, in breaking with the usual practice of patrilineal descent through the father's side.

Tagore, however, transformed the story subtly, refusing to make the heroine beautiful from the beginning and divesting her of the 'beauteous' mask at the end, allowing her 'true self' to shine through. Possibly, only Charlotte Brontë before him had dared to pick a 'plain Jane' as a heroine in her well-known novel, *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, as she wanted to prove to her sisters that a heroine could be made attractive in spite of lacking conventional good looks. Passionate, diminutive Jane Eyre won the hearts of the nineteenth-century reading public through the intensely romantic tale that Brontë brought out, offering a hero who was equally plain-looking (even ugly), though masculine- the dark, brooding, melancholy Rochester who was a trend-setter in the long line of Byronic heroes that followed, becoming an instant hit with women readers in particular. Tagore, of course, picked a typical hero in Arjuna- handsome, charming, a champion among warriors, the bravest of the brave. However, he comes into the play in the peaceful guise of a hermit who still manages to capture Chitrangada's heart by the first look that he throws in her direction, amused and contemptuous though it may be. Chitrangada describes the first flowering of love that wakes up the feminine

side of her in these words: “Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me.” (4)

When he reveals his identity, she realizes that “the one great idol”(4) of her dreams stood in front of her, the man whom she had always yearned to challenge in combat and prove herself an equal in wielding arms. Ironically, her first encounter with him not only leaves her tongue-tied, but makes her ashamed of her manly garb and the prowess that she had prided herself on up to that point. So, she tries to instantly ‘feminize’ herself and goes to meet him donning “bracelets, anklets, waist-chain, and a gown of purple red silk”(4). She is however uncomfortable in this new avatar – as she appropriately puts it, “The unaccustomed dress clung about my shrinking shame.”(4) The garb may have changed, but she still cannot make herself agreeably ‘feminine’ to win over Arjuna. In fact, her self-consciousness at her ‘masculine’ presumptuousness in proposing to him and his firm rejection of her on the pretext of a vow of celibacy only deflate her womanly heart, making her even more determined to shake off her ‘masculine’ conditioning. Her next attempt to continue her wooing by appealing to Madana, the God of Love and Vasanta, the youthful Lord of the Seasons to bestow her with beauty and charms to aid her in capturing the invincible Arjuna may seem to be very conventional after all. The shrew being tamed, domesticated, surrendering herself totally to the brash hero, and unleashing all her feminine wiles to trap him–haven’t we seen it all before? The other versatile genius, Shakespeare who gave us an intelligent, dignified Portia, also gave us the shrew, Katherine tamed by Petruchio, an Ophelia pining for her Hamlet, a Desdemona done to death by the man for whom she gave up everything, or a gentle Cordelia, who despite her outspokenness and forthrightness (or probably because of it), still gets sacrificed at the altar of patriarchy, owing to her tender heart and caring nature.

So what makes Rabindranath Tagore different? First of all, the fact that the play does not follow a conventional plot-line from this point onwards by showing the master being 'mastered' and the typical 'they lived happily- ever- after' kind of ending. Yes, the play does have a happy ending, but it comes not as a result of Chitrangada's sudden transmutation, but after she realizes the futility of attempting such a spurious metamorphosis, and goes back to her original self, persuading Arjuna to love her for what she 'is', rather than for what she tried to 'become'. Arjuna, of course, is instantly bowled over by the "apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman"(6) that he spots near the lake, as Chitrangada emerges on the borrowed feathers lent to her for a year by Vasanta. Tagore gives us a superbly poetic passage, invested with a dream-like quality as he describes her rare beauty through Arjuna's eyes:

It seemed that the heart of the earth must heave in joy under her bare white feet. Methought the vague veilings of her body should melt in ecstasy into air as the golden mist of dawn melts from off the snowy peak of the eastern hill. She bowed herself above the shining mirror of the lake and saw the reflection of her face. She started up in awe and stood still; then smiled, and with a careless sweep of her left arm unloosed her hair and let it trail on the earth at her feet. She bared her bosom and looked at her arms, so flawlessly modelled, and instinct with an exquisite caress. Bending her head she saw the sweet blossoming of her youth and the tender bloom and blush of her skin. She beamed with a glad surprise. So, if the white lotus bud on opening her eyes in the morning were to arch her neck and see her shadow in the water, would she wonder at herself the livelong day. But a moment after the smile passed from her face and a shade of sadness crept into her eyes. She bound up her tresses, drew her veil over her arms, and sighing slowly, walked away like a

beauteous evening fading into the night. To me the supreme fulfilment of desire seemed to have been revealed in a flash and then to have vanished. . . . (6)

The passage beautifully captures through Arjuna's detached, yet admiring discovery of her beauty, the awed 'discovery' of her beauty by Chitrangada herself. Yet the veil of sadness that creeps into the eyes speaks volumes about the inner ambivalence, as the new found external 'makeover' is at the cost of the internal, natural shape that she possessed. The illusory nature of the experience, the superficiality and temporality of the custom-made package seem to be apparent to both the characters. Chitrangada's disturbed state gives an insight into the immense pressures put on women due to cultural stereotyping. One realizes that men too are at the mercy of these stereotypes, as Henrik Ibsen pointed out through his portrayal of Torvald Helmer in his play, *A Doll's House*. Any sign of emotion, tenderness or vulnerability are seen as a sign of their weakness, of being emasculated. The Mahabharata, of course, busts through this stereotype as well by showing the macho Arjun slipping into the role of the emasculated Brihannala, where he is forced to adopt a woman's body and shape in order to live out a curse. It however proves beneficial to him in order to live incognito in exile. The story also gives an insight into the androgynous nature of man and woman in order to get a complete experience of the self.

Although Tagore does not allude to the story here, he does reveal the androgynous nature of the self within both Arjuna and Chitrangada. If Chitrangada is willing to forsake all her achievements at the altar of love, so is Arjuna. All his vows of celibacy vanish into thin air as he falls prey to her celestial beauty. By his own confession, she has "dissolved" his "vow even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity". (8) He is ready to forsake all "fame, the pride of prowess" that he finds "vain"

compared to her- “You alone are perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman!”(9) Evidently, Tagore the romantic going overboard in his depiction of Cupid’s handiwork and excesses, one would say. Yet, the realist in him is also at work throughout. Arjuna’s passion barely lasts for a year, as he then begins to yearn for the joys of hunting, waxing eloquent as he grows nostalgic about the hunting expeditions that he went out on with his brothers. Chitrangada, in fact is instantly repulsed when he offers up all for her tinselly shape:

Oh, shame upon you! What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself? Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, in these milk-white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity? Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love; this is not man's highest homage to woman! Alas, that this frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the light of the deathless spirit! Yes, now indeed, I know, Arjuna, the fame of your heroic manhood is false. (9)

While it is often improper to confuse a character’s point of view with the authorial point of view, one feels that Tagore’s sense of empathy and oneness with his female protagonist cannot be overlooked here. Through her, he seems to be baring not only a woman’s multiple yearnings, but also offering a glimpse of the ideal man-woman relationship. At no point does he show Chitrangada as immune to the demands of the body, though she is equally vocal about the demands of the spirit- “To face that fervent gaze that almost grasps you like clutching hands of the hungry spirit within; to feel his heart struggling to break its bounds urging its passionate cry through the entire body--and then to send him away like a beggar--no, impossible.” (9) One realizes that the struggle here is not so much between the body and the soul, but the resistance and

counter-resistance from within produced by the taboos placed on women on such free expression of their carnal desires. Many of Charlotte Brontë's Victorian readers were actually shocked by the fact that her heroine, Jane openly confesses her physical attraction and love for Rochester even before he declares his and that she actually takes the initiative in the 'Proposal' scene. Being a male writer, Tagore is under less restraint and interestingly, gives his heroine one of the most sensuous passages in the play to reveal the waking up of her sensual impulses:

The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering Malati bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast, my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept. And, suddenly in the depth of my sleep, I felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers of flame, touched my slumbering body. I started up and saw the Hermit standing before me. The moon had moved to the west, peering through the leaves to espy this wonder of divine art wrought in a fragile human frame. The air was heavy with perfume; the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake; and with his staff in his hand he stood, tall and straight and still, like a forest tree. It seemed to me that I had, on opening my eyes, died to all realities of life and undergone a dream birth into a shadow land. Shame slipped to my feet like loosened clothes. I heard his call--"Beloved, my most beloved!" And all my forgotten lives united as one and responded to it. I said, "Take me, take all I am!" And I stretched out my arms to him. The moon set behind the trees. One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy. . . . With the first gleam of light, the first twitter of birds, I rose up and sat leaning on my left

arm. He lay asleep with a vague smile about his lips like the crescent moon in the morning. The rosy red glow of the dawn fell upon his noble forehead. I sighed and stood up. I drew together the leafy lianas to screen the streaming sun from his face. I looked about me and saw the same old earth. I remembered what I used to be, and ran and ran like a deer afraid of her own shadow, through the forest path strewn with shephali flowers. I found a lonely nook, and sitting down covered my face with both hands, and tried to weep and cry. But no tears came to my eyes. (10)

The ecstasy is followed by an intense agony that does not even afford her the luxury of crying. Obviously, what seems to irk her here is the choice that she has to make between her twin selves—she has to give up the self that she has grown up with, because it is supposedly seen as unnatural and contradictory to the new womanly self that she is now discovering. Therefore, the flight from self. We are reminded here of Charlotte Brontë's other heroine, the beautiful proud Shirley Keeldar who was given a masculine name and grew up avoiding the typical gender conditioning, by virtue of being an heiress (having lost her parents very early), possessing an abundance of money and power. The waking up of the intense love impulse for her equally capricious lover, Louis Moore is often offset by her fear of losing her independence. After her engagement to Louis, her wan, disturbed look gives rise to the comment that she is like a "chained denizen of deserts"³, denigrated to domesticated environs. Chitrangada similarly begins to perceive her body as her "own rival" and abhors the "hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him" (11),

³ Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (London: Haworth, 1929) 657.

All subsequent references from the text are from this edition. Hence, only page numbers are given in parentheses.

revealing the growing fragmentation of self although she still longs for sexual fulfillment. What saves Chitrangada is the realization of the inner fragmentation produced by the artificial cultural conditioning: "Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love-all the kisses for which my heart is athirst." (11) The recognition strengthens her resolve to reveal her "true self" (11) to Arjuna, regardless of the consequences.

Even though she desists from immediately discarding her new avatar on the persuasion of Madana and Vasanta, Arjuna too begins to observe her subtle difference from other women. A small, yet revealing comment about the way conditioning works comes through the remark he makes on seeing her weaving a garland, "skill and grace, the twin brother and sister, are dancing playfully on your fingertips"(12)- the former obviously seen as a male attribute and the latter, as female. Aren't both an essential and intrinsic part of all human beings? Do we need to categorize them? One may find a kind of domestication in the task that she has undertaken, but Chitrangada clearly reveals her distaste for domesticity or even leaving her parental home in the conversation between the two in Scene IV: "Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten." (12) Like a lot of Tagore heroines who are children of nature, this one too cannot withstand a life of herded domesticity. The only way for her to reconcile herself to her new role is by seeing herself as preserving the independence and evanescence of nature's beauty. She describes herself variously as an "enchanted deer", a "wild creature", "fleet-footed spirit of beauty", a "magic deer" that runs ever free and untouched", or as a dewdrop that has "neither name nor destination"(14). One can trace parallels here

again with Brontë's Shirley whose lover describes her as a "pantheress", "the child of a breeze and a flame", "the daughter of ray and rain-drop" (648). It is Chitrangada's feeble attempt to fight off her sense of loss of identity and the claustrophobia she feels at the external trappings she has donned to woo her lover, but paradoxically indicative of a growing depersonalization, even dehumanization. Ironically, even though she describes herself as an elusive wild creature that can never be tamed, one can clearly sense her agony at being entrapped in a new, unfamiliar role.

Fortunately, Arjuna too begins to tire of merely leading a life of pleasure and his beloved's refusal to be pinned down to a local habitation and a name makes him more restless, and eager again for a life of action and achievement. It is at this point that he begins to hear of Princess Chitra's exploits. The villagers describe her as "the terror of all evil-doers", "our father and mother in one"(16). Chitrangada's efforts to dissuade him from paying any attention to the absent, accomplished, but plain princess, only strengthens his resolve to meet this woman the people describe as a "man" "in valour", and "a woman in tenderness"(17), the perfect androgyne as it were. This prompts Chitrangada to vent out her suppressed resentment by pointing out it is this combination that produces the "greatest misfortune"(17) for a woman. As long as she reveals only her womanly charms, she can be happy. Her "learning and great achievements" (17) are of no use to her. She reminds Arjuna that even he "would have passed her by without deigning to look at her" (17). The crowning affront comes when she contemptuously asks him, "But have you grown so weary of woman's beauty that you seek in her for a man's strength?"(17) We find a role reversal as also a reversal of power equations in her refusal to let Arjuna go even for a short while to fulfil his "Kshatriya's work"(18), with a retort that many women would like to put to their egoistic and possessive partners:"What if I refuse to let you go, if I keep you entwined in my arms? Would you rudely snatch yourself free and

leave me?"(18) Her contempt for the way the world perceives a woman who chooses to be different is revealed through the ironical tones in which she describes Chitra, the "unfortunate creature", "obscured", "unfulfilled" as she lacks the chief womanly attribute of "beauty"(18)- such a woman may draw admiration in other roles, but no man would be willing to accept her in a romantic or conjugal relationship.

But this is where Tagore abandons the plane of realism to take us towards his dream ending of the ideal man-woman relationship. Arjuna, undeterred by his seductive beloved's protestations, continues to articulate his vision of the elusive Princess:

I seem to see her, in my mind's eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair one, like a serpent reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumbrous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath. (19)

Arjuna's speech espouses all the ideal qualities usually bestowed on the hero, the Prince Charming who rides into the woman's life and sweeps her away into Cloud Nine by a show of his strength and daring. Obviously, it is his quest for his 'anima', his feminine archetypal self to complement his 'animus' (the masculine archetypal self), the search for the perfect 'Ardhangini' (the word better-half seems inadequate here to describe the sense of equality contained in the Indian term), a role that neither Draupadi, nor

Subhadra would be able to fulfil. Draupadi comes through as a strong woman in her own right, and we have an insight into one of the radical elements in the Mahabharata in the form of Draupadi's polyandrous marriage to all the Pandavas, a rarity in a patriarchal set up. As per legend, it is Draupadi's desire to find a husband with all the desirable masculine qualities in a previous birth that leads her to accept all five men in the present birth, sending out the message that no individual could ever attain perfection, no matter how heroic. What is worth noting here is that a woman had as much freedom as a man to spell out the qualities she desired in a partner. The same dimension can also be seen in Sri Krishna aiding and abetting his sister, Subhadra's elopement and subsequent marriage to Arjuna. Yet, these women are still dependent on men to assist them in their quest. Draupadi still needs an Arjuna, a Krishna or a Bhima to avenge the humiliation meted out to her by the Kauravas.

This is where Chitrangada stands out as different. Not only does she make Arjuna accept her on her own terms, she can support self, husband and an entire kingdom, when freed from the compulsion to appear vulnerable and mindless to seduce her man! "If I stand up straight and strong with the strength of a daring heart spurning the wiles and arts of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fir, no longer trailing in the dust like a liana, shall I then appeal to man's eye?" (19), she asks Arjuna. When assured by Arjuna that he wishes to know the "ultimate you, that bare simplicity of truth" (19), Chitrangada finally casts off her hateful appearances, and stands revealed in her simple, dignified, earthly shape in Scene IX, bringing us back full circle to the eloquent speech quoted at the beginning of this essay. As she discards all her artificial avatars to reveal herself in her simple, but majestic splendour, she describes it as an "imperfection which yet is noble and grand" (20). Her final speech that unites Tagore's real and idealistic, ideological and philosophical concerns goes to the very

core touching us both by its emotional quality and balanced perspective on love and marriage. If the lines “The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life.” (20) have an exaggerated sentimental quality about them, the next lines spell out the true nature of an average woman, while articulating her immense potential to be man’s equal:

I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self...(20)

It is indeed a tribute to Tagore’s visionary potential that he is able to adapt and transform a simple tale from an equally visionary and realistic text to give us a woman protagonist who is so real, human and progressive enough as to transcend the boundaries of space and time to stand on par with any liberated heroine of the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Perhaps, Tagore was actually forced to transform the tale as he did, owing to the reduced social status of women in the nineteenth century, as compared to their status in ancient India, a point that would be true not just of Indian women, but of women even from so-called progressive countries such as England and the United States. The nineteenth century as Anglo-American feminist critics have shown was amongst the most prudish and backward societies in this regard, as the whole concept of the ‘domestic angel’ arose during this era. Women had to be delicate, airy, and vulnerable, yet rise above all the fallibilities allowed to men, and be loaded with all the virtues required to exalt them to an ethereal level. Any woman who refused to kowtow to the norms would instantly be denounced as a “demon”/“monster”.

It is in this context that the above lines from *Chitrangada* clearly send out the message of women's equal right to be fallible, and an equally innate capacity for physical and moral courage as men. In fact, *Chitrangada*'s ability to win her man without any form of self-sacrifice or disintegration of self is a feat that one rarely comes across even in modern or contemporary literature. As Kishwar Naheed's poem reveals, one kind of stereotyping has given way to another, and both are equally unreal, shackling and exploitative in their own ways. Similarly, a work like Margaret Atwood's, *The Edible Woman* reveals how most liberal feminists in the 1960s and '70s were forced to rethink their positions as freedom may have brought women the liberty to break free from morals, but was nowhere close to giving them parity and compatibility with their male partners. The only choice for many of them lay, therefore, in abandoning all thoughts of love and marriage to pursue their careers as her protagonist Marian Montgomery does at the end of the work, a choice that men rarely have to make. What makes it more agonizing for Marian is that she isn't exactly enamoured by the career choices that she has anyways, the plight of most average women then and today.

This is where Rabindranath Tagore's *Chitrangada* comes across as a breath of fresh air, as he is also able to give us a satisfying love story without sacrificing any of his feminist concerns, thanks to his holistic view of human nature. He gives shape to the perfect androgynous identity that is innate within human beings mainly through his oneness with his female protagonist, although we get glimpses of it in Arjuna too as he takes a break from his manly activities to explore the life of the senses and feelings. And through a union of the two lead characters, Tagore is also able to envisage the dream equality between men and women in the best traditions of liberal feminism. The recurring Quest myth in literature generally symbolizes the quest for self that can be seen as the ultimate quest in life, a message that comes through here in no

uncertain terms, as Chitrangada repeatedly emphasises the need to look beyond appearances to capture the beauty of the spirit. This accounts for the enduring popularity of this simple one-act play that has been interpreted and reinterpreted and presented by different groups in the form of a dance-drama and turned into a film too recently by the late Bengali director, Rituparna Ghosh. All in all, it is not the “pastness of the past”, but “its presence”⁴ that one senses through this work that had a relevance when it was created, has a relevance today and will continue to do so as long as men and women are unable to shake off their social conditioning to allow their individual selves to shine through.

~ Chitra Sreedharan

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⁴ T.S.Eliot, “Tradition and the individual talent” in *English Critical Texts*, eds. D.J.Enright and Ernest de Chickera (London: OUP, 1963) 294

