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From the Editor's Desk

It is a matter of great delight to announce the appearance of Volume VI of the *Journal of the Post-graduate Department of English* of Maulana Azad College. It is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal that is being published again with the theme of Parerga, a Greek word meaning supplements.

The journal intends to supplement the production of knowledge focusing upon art, architecture, literature, theatre, music, philosophy, film and history. It is particularly interested in material that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries and takes up new approaches.

This issue is a proof of our commitment to interdisciplinarity: It presents a wide variety covering the domains of French literature, Victorian English literature, Indian writing in English, Indian spy fiction, Utpal Dutt's theatre, Thomas Hardy, Indian writing in English in translation, commentary on the art of a contemporary artist Buddhadev Mukherjee, and the history of the revolt by the Andamanese against the British. The journal also introduces a section of Book Review containing two review articles on authors as relevant as Michel Foucault and William Dalrymple.

In an erudite essay Sanjay Kumar looks at the different treatment of the Oedipus myth in the hands of Voltaire, in the process analyzing the intellectual context of the Enlightenment. Using Derrida's concept of repetition, he points out how learning from Racine and Corneille, Voltaire re-moulded the Oedipus story.

Abin Chakraborty analyses three plays by Utpal Dutt, viz. *Kallol*, *Surya Sikar* and *Tiner Talwar*, in the process bringing out the multiple European influences on his dramaturgy and celebrates him as a champion of decolonization.

Anjan Saha brings into focus the obscure courtesan-singer Malka Pukhraj by discussing and analysing her autobiography

Song Sung True delving into the socio-culturally marginalized world of the nautch-girl in the early twentieth-century colonial India. In the process Saha examines the intersectionality of gender, class and power dynamics.

Aliya Halim takes up five Victorian Gothic novels by Emily and Charlotte Bronte, Stevenson, Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker to demonstrate what she calls “Gothic representations of speculative fiction”. The essay attempts at throwing light on how power vested in aristocratic males and the Church invited scrutiny and a critique by these works of fiction.

Daisy Majumdar in her essay on Thomas Hardy takes up six of his popular novels and through an ecocritical lens examines how Hardy’s novels challenge anthropocentrism, highlighting the intimate connection between nature and man, influencing each other. Some of his novels, the author argues, portray the environmental degradation by introducing technology; Hardy’s notion of loving-kindness is added to the discussion.

Laki Molla adds an interesting dimension by bringing into discussion a psychoanalytical reading of Gitanjali Shree’s novel *Ret Samadhi* in translation (*Tomb of Sand*); the mother-daughter relationship represented in the novel is lucidly analysed through the moorings of Freudian and post-Freudian theories of female identity formation.

Subham Patar in his paper on Kunal Basu’s *Kalkatta* takes up the themes of home and belongingness; he argues that for a refugee the idea of home is not a place or space but it is fractured, performative, entwined with ambition, alienation, identity politics and urban marginality. Patar establishes how the protagonist in Basu’s novel through the angst of home and homelessness is compared to a stray dog.

Haradhan Malik in his paper takes up an area that is little explored, that of the spy fiction. Basing his discussion on Amar

Bhushan's *Escape to Nowhere*, Malik focuses scholarly light on the plight of a spy who loses all identity when not in consonance with the state, rendered invisible like the homo sacer or 'bare life' in Agamben's theory. Malik argues that the novel critiques both the act of treason and the cold, impersonal machinery through which the state isolates and removes disloyal subjects.

Amrita Ghoshal reminds the reader of the forgotten history of the freedom fight of the Andamanese against the British, known as the Battle of Aberdeen. Though the rebellion was crushed, largely thanks to the act of betrayal by a convict, the paper establishes the complexity of the colonised island where the indigenous people, the convicts sent to the penal colony and the British formed a complex socio-political reality that cannot be simply explained through the lens of postcolonial theory. The paper brings to the fore perspectives of anthropologists, the status of tribes and the conflict with modernity.

Siddhanta Goswami's essay on a contemporary artist Buddhadev Mukherjee's sketches sends us happily reeling through the quasi-surreal visual imagination of Mukherjee. Goswami argues that Mukherjee's representation of the abject and a trenchant critique of the 'civilised eye' is an exercise in humour, where laughter is a signature of the grim recognition of the postmodern and the posthuman resulting in a new hermeneutic of 'history from below'.

In the Book Review section Somrita Misra takes up William Dalrymple's recently published book *The Golden Road*. While acknowledging how the book highlights the intellectual dominance of ancient India, Misra notes that the book misses any representation of the marginal presences of the Bahujan castes and focuses mostly on Brahminical learning. The question is deep and historians often miss the wished-for data but Misra's review is a pointer in the right direction.

Debabrata Sardar gives us a systematic analysis of Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*. Explaining how Foucault's discussion bases itself on the history of the French society leading to the theorization of the rise of the Clinic as an institution, Sardar points out that 'space', 'language' and 'gaze' are the cornerstones in Foucault's theory. Finally, he elaborates how the ideas of bio-ethics, bio-politics and bio-power bring out a paradigmatic change in medical understanding and how objectification of the patient's body creates a dilemma.

Happy reading!

Niranjan Goswami

CONTENTS

Sanjay Kumar	– Oedipus in 18th Century Paris: A Rewriting by Voltaire	1-23
Abin Chakraborty	– Towards A Transnational Poetics of the Oppressed: Utpal Dutt’s Postcolonial Transformations	24-39
Anjan Saha	– Contextualising A Text: A Courtesan on her lived experiences	40-58
Aliya Halim	– Is Victorian Speculative Fiction a flight from the real? An analysis beyond Fantasy, Supernatural and the Gothic	59-77
Daisy Majumdar	– ‘Brotherhood Bonded Close’: An Ecocritical Perspective on Select Novels by Thomas Hardy	78-94
Laki Molla	– “When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma”: The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Geetanjali Shree’s <i>Tomb of Sand</i>	95-118

- | | | |
|-------------------|---|---------|
| Subham Patar | – The Illusion of Home and Belongingness: Understanding the Idea of Home in Kunal Basu's <i>Kalkatta</i> (2015) | 119-141 |
| Haradhan Malik | – Dragnetted the Invisible: An Exploration of Surveillance, Secrecy and Exile in Amar Bhushan's <i>Escape to Nowhere</i> (2012) | 142-162 |
| Amrita Ghoshal | – The Battle of Aberdeen: A Struggle Erased by Time | 163-187 |
| Siddhanta Goswami | – Buddhadev Mukherjee composes: A slap on the cheeks of history from the top | 188-199 |

Book Review

- | | | |
|---------------------|---|---------|
| | – William Dalrymple, <i>The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World</i> | |
| By Somrita Misra | | 200-204 |
| | Michel Foucault, <i>The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception</i> | |
| By Debabrata Sardar | | 205-212 |

***Oedipus* in 18th Century Paris: A Rewriting by Voltaire**

Sanjay Kumar

ABSTRACT: This article seeks to examine the motivations underlying Voltaire's 18th-century reinterpretation of the myth of Oedipus. The theoretical framework of this article is grounded in Derrida's concept of iterability, which emphasizes that the repetition of a text necessarily entails its transformation, as each new context infuses it with fresh significance. Thus, an inquiry into the fate of the Oedipus myth when adapted by one of the foremost philosophers of the Enlightenment in 18th-century France is both pertinent and revealing. The myth of Oedipus, which features in both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, has undergone substantial transformations across literary traditions. While Homeric narratives depict Oedipus as a ruler who retains his sovereignty despite his tragic origins, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* remains the most renowned dramatization, distinguished by its use of dramatic irony and anagnorisis. Aristotle extolled the play as the paradigmatic tragedy, asserting that it evokes pity and fear through its meticulously constructed plot rather than through spectacle. Since the era of Sophocles, numerous playwrights—including Aeschylus, Euripides, and Voltaire—have engaged with the Oedipus myth, each reshaping it to align with contemporary artistic and philosophical paradigms. Samuel Taylor Coleridge classified *Oedipus the King* among the three greatest literary plots, alongside Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and

Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. However, Corneille (1659), Dryden (1678), and Voltaire (1718) critiqued certain structural aspects of Sophocles' rendition and introduced modifications, notably the incorporation of subplots to enhance its dramatic complexity. These adaptations underscore both the timeless allure of the Oedipus narrative and the evolving interpretative frameworks applied to its retelling. This paper contends that Voltaire's *Oedipus*, first staged in 1718, exemplifies the Enlightenment's approach to reimagining classical tragedy, reflecting the intellectual and theatrical preoccupations of the period.

KEYWORDS: *Oedipus, Sophocles, Voltaire, tragedy, rewriting.*

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the underlying motivations behind Voltaire's 18th-century reimagining of the Oedipus myth. Drawing upon Jacques Derrida's assertion that the act of repetition inevitably alters a text, as each new context imbues it with distinct meaning, this examination seeks to uncover the implications of Voltaire's adaptation. Derrida posits:

Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of the opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks, thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This doesn't suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring. (*Signature Event Context* 97)

So, every sign, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, exists within shifting contexts, lacking any fixed meaning or absolute reference point. How does the myth of Oedipus evolve when reshaped by one of the leading intellectual figures of the

Enlightenment in France? Such an inquiry is both compelling and illuminating, offering insight into the interplay between classical tragedy and Enlightenment thoughts.

The character of Oedipus appears in both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* by Homer. In *The Odyssey*, during his descent into the underworld, Odysseus encounters the spirit of Epicaste, the mother of Oedipus, who reveals the tragic circumstances of her life. Unknowingly, she married her own son after he had killed her husband, an act that led to her eventual suicide. (Book XI, 136) This account is similarly corroborated in *The Iliad*. In the Homeric tradition, Oedipus neither blinds himself nor is subjected to exile following the revelation of his origins. Despite its presence in Homeric literature, the myth of Oedipus is most prominently known through the Greek tragedy *Oedipus the King*, written by Sophocles. While Aeschylus and Euripides also explored the Oedipus myth in their works, only fragmentary evidence of their versions remains. *Oedipus Rex*, also referred to by its Greek titles *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Oedipus the King*, was first performed around 429 BCE and is widely regarded as one of the most extensively analysed texts in classical literature. The play begins with a depiction of a devastating plague afflicting the city of Thebes, a scene that may have been inspired by the historical plague of 430 BCE that affected Athens. In the opening scene, the priest informs Oedipus, the reigning monarch, that both the populace and livestock are perishing, and infants are dying before birth. In response, Oedipus has dispatched his brother-in-law, Kreon, to consult the Delphic oracle regarding possible remedies for the crisis. Upon Kreon's return, he conveys that the plague will persist until the murderer of Laios, the former king of Thebes, is identified and expelled from the city. Consequently, Oedipus undertakes the responsibility of investigating the crime and uncovering the culprit. Due to its focus on unravelling a

hidden truth through systematic inquiry, the narrative of Oedipus may be considered one of the earliest detective stories in Western literary tradition.

Since the era of Sophocles, the myth of Oedipus has undergone numerous reinterpretations and adaptations, reflecting evolving literary and philosophical traditions. Among these, Voltaire's *Oedipus* or *Œdipe*, first staged in 1718, stands as a significant reimagining within the context of Enlightenment thought. The play enjoyed considerable success, having been performed 336 times at La Comédie Française between its debut and 1852, attesting to its enduring theatrical appeal. Although Voltaire is predominantly recognized as a pivotal figure of the Enlightenment, his deep engagement with tragic theatre remains an often-overlooked facet of his intellectual pursuits. His admiration for the dramatic works of Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine—two of the most illustrious playwrights of 17th-century France—shaped his own theatrical sensibilities. His mastery of tragic composition led Frederick the Great to regard him as the legitimate heir to Corneille and Racine's dramatic legacy.

Aristotle, deeply captivated by Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, regarded it as the quintessential tragedy, perfectly embodying his theoretical framework (part 14). He asserts that the tragic emotions of pity and fear should emerge organically from the composition of the plot rather than from mere spectacle or dramatic effects. Aristotle posits that tragic events may occur either with or without prior knowledge, but the most effective tragic action unfolds through ignorance, culminating in anagnorisis—recognition—followed by a reversal of fortune, or *peripeteia*. This moment of anagnorisis in *Oedipus the King* occurs when a messenger discloses the protagonist's true lineage, prompting the realization that the man he had slain was his father and that Jocaste, his wife, is also his mother. Consequently, Oedipus comes to understand

that he himself is the murderer of the very king he has been seeking.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a prominent Romantic poet, ranked *Oedipus the King* among the three greatest plots in literary history, alongside Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. However, Corneille (1659), Dryden (1678), and Voltaire (1718) identified perceived structural weaknesses within Sophocles' original framework and thus introduced modifications to their respective versions of the play, including the addition of subplots to enrich the dramatic complexity. These revisions reflect the shifting dramaturgical conventions and philosophical perspectives that have shaped adaptations of the Oedipus narrative across centuries.

French Enlightenment writers actively challenged political and religious authority by rejecting adherence to pre-established truths. Montesquieu (1689–1755) offered a comprehensive critique of the societal norms and institutions of his era. Rousseau's (1712–1778) theory of the social contract emphasized that legitimate governance must embody the general will of the populace. The publication of the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia* in 1751 marked a seminal moment in the Enlightenment, aiming to consolidate and disseminate knowledge across all domains. In the theatrical works of Beaumarchais (1732-1799), the figure of the valet emerges as a pivotal agent of critique, disrupting hierarchical conventions and questioning the status quo. This transformative epoch is often referred to as the 'Age of Voltaire,' in recognition of the enduring intellectual and cultural influence exerted by this seminal Enlightenment figure. Although the theatrical works of Voltaire are seldom performed in the present day—particularly in contrast to the enduring popularity of his contemporaries Marivaux and Beaumarchais—he was regarded by his peers as the preeminent dramatist of the eighteenth century.

This paper argues that Voltaire's *Oedipus*, first staged in 1718, epitomizes the Enlightenment's reinterpretation of classical tragedy, encapsulating the era's intellectual and theatrical concerns. The analysis unfolds in three distinct sections. The first examines the primary narrative and its subplots, elucidating the ways in which Voltaire's rendition diverges from the Sophoclean tragedy. The second focuses on the characterization in Voltaire's adaptation, highlighting the innovations introduced at that level. Finally, the third explores the thematic evolution of the play, demonstrating how Voltaire reconfigures its motifs to align with Enlightenment ideals and dramatic conventions.

D) STRUCTURAL DIVERGENCE

Derrida's exploration of iterability and citationality suggests that every act of repetition inherently engenders variation, as the dynamic interplay between sameness and difference conditions each occurrence. No repetition is ever wholly identical; rather, it inevitably entails transformation, reinforcing the idea that to repeat something is, in essence, to alter it. While discussing the word iterability, he reminds us that "*iter*, once again, comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity". (*Signature Event Context* 90). Voltaire's *Oedipus* is structured in five acts, comprising a total of twenty-three scenes, adhering to the conventions of 17th-century French neoclassical tragedy. Unlike Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Voltaire eschews the immediate accusation of Oedipus by Tiresias at the outset of the drama. Instead, he replaces Tiresias with a high priest, who delivers the pivotal declaration— "Thou, unhappy Prince, thou art the man" (Act III, Scene 4). The dialogues of Tiresias in Sophocles' tragedy exhibit notable parallels with those of the High Priest in Voltaire's dramatic work:

Tiresias: I seem a fool to you, but the parents
who gave you birth thought I was wise. [...]

Today you will be born. Into ruin.

High Priest: Thou callest me hypocrite, and base imposter;

Thy father thought not so. [...]

To-day shall give thee birth;

To-day shall give thee death: (Act III, Scene 4)

Oedipus is perplexed by the reference to his father, as he questions how Tiresias or the High Priest possesses knowledge of Polybus. The delayed accusation in the tragedy of Voltaire fundamentally alters the dramatic progression, differentiating Voltaire's interpretation from Sophocles' more immediate revelation. Furthermore, following this pronouncement, key figures within the narrative, including Jocaste, Philoctetes, and even the chorus, affirm Oedipus' innocence. In contrast, Sophocles' Oedipus faces a far more relentless and unforgiving fate, underscoring the structural divergences between the two works. Sophocles employs Tiresias, a blind prophet, to create moments of dramatic irony through repeated references to vision and blindness. While Oedipus, despite his physical sight, remains unaware of the truth, Tiresias perceives reality without the need for eyes. Upon uncovering the horrific truth of his patricide and incest, Oedipus blinds himself, symbolically aligning his physical condition with his previous ignorance and expressing his anguish at the prospect of facing his father in Hades.¹ Voltaire, however, could not incorporate this layered irony into his adaptation as the high priest is not a blind figure.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, the plague afflicting Thebes occurs years after Oedipus' ascension to the throne, by which time he and Jocaste have borne four children: two sons, Polynices and Eteocles, and two daughters, Ismene and Antigone. Towards the conclusion of the tragedy, after Oedipus has blinded himself,

he makes reference to his adult sons, who neither appear on stage nor are explicitly named within the play. Their names, however, are mentioned in *Antigone*, another tragedy by Sophocles. In contrast, Oedipus's daughters are included in the list of characters in *Oedipus the King* and physically present on stage. Notably, however, despite their presence, they remain silent, as they are not given any dialogue. In contrast, Voltaire's *Oedipus* presents a significantly altered timeline. The opening scene establishes that King Laios perished four years prior, with Oedipus assuming the throne two years after his death. Towards the conclusion of Voltaire's tragedy, Oedipus announces his intention to relinquish his "country, kingdom, children, all" (Act V, Scene 1), implying that he has more than one offspring. L.C. Knights, in his renowned essay on Shakespearean tragedy, famously posed the question: "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" In a similar vein, one might inquire about Voltaire's *Oedipus*: "How many children had Jocaste?" However, this question differs from that of Oedipus' offspring, as Jocaste's children include Oedipus himself. In Voltaire's adaptation, the exact number of Jocaste's children remains unspecified, making it improbable that Oedipus has four children, as depicted in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, unless he had twice fathered twins. Further complicating this ambiguity, Jocaste's final words in Act V, Scene 6—"Weep only for my son, who still survives"—suggest the existence of only one surviving child. This raises the question of whether she had additional offspring, an uncertainty for which the text provides no definitive answer. Voltaire's omission introduces an element of interpretive ambiguity, underscoring the structural departures from the Sophoclean tradition. Voltaire deliberately refrains from extending the period of uncertainty surrounding the murder investigation, diverging from Sophocles' dramatic structure by accelerating the revelation of Oedipus' guilt.

In his adaptation, Voltaire introduces the character of Philoctetes as the virtuous suitor of Jocaste, whose marriage was thwarted by her father's refusal. The opening scene of *Oedipus* features Philoctetes alongside his companion Dimas—both figures absent from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and entirely Voltaire's creation. Philoctetes laments that he might have vanquished the Sphinx and married Jocaste, yet it was mere circumstance that allowed Oedipus to fulfil this role instead.

O! if the conqueror of the sphinx was doomed
To conqueror thee, why was not I at Thebes?
I'd not have labored in the fruitless search
Of idle mysteries, wrapped in words of darkness;
This arm, to conquest long beneath thy smiles
Accustomed, should have drawn the vengeful sword,
And laid the howling monster at thy feet. (Act II, Scene 3)

Readers familiar with Racine's *Phèdre*, first performed in 1677, may discern a tonal resemblance to Phaedra's lament to Hippolytus. In Racine's tragedy, Phaedra develops a passionate and forbidden love for her stepson, Hippolytus, and reflects on the arbitrary nature of fate. She mourns the fact that the slaying of the Minotaur by Hippolytus' father, Theseus, was merely a stroke of fortune. Had events transpired differently, Hippolytus—not Theseus—would have assumed his father's place and become her husband rather than her stepson. This reversal of fate, contingent upon chance, underscores the tragic irony that permeates Racine's work. In the following passage, Phaedra articulates this sentiment with profound anguish.

Where were you then? Why did he gather all
The mightiest Greeks, and not Hippolytus?
Why, still too young, were you not able then
To board the ship that brought him to our shores?
You would have killed the Cretan monster, vast
And endless though the windings of its lair. (Act II, Scene 5)

It is reasonable to infer that Voltaire's engagement with the works of Racine and Corneille—whether deliberate or subconscious—shaped his dramatic sensibilities. In Voltaire's *Oedipus*, Jocaste urges Philoctetes to flee Thebes, warning him that his life is imperilled following the accusation of murder. Yet Philoctetes, guided by his unwavering sense of honour, refuses to retreat into exile. To depart without contesting the charge would be a betrayal of his principles. Instead, he chooses to confront the allegations head-on, determined to vindicate himself and uphold his integrity. His resolute response to Jocaste underscores the steadfastness of his character and the thematic weight of personal honour within Voltaire's tragic vision.

My station here; I yet am innocent,
But in obeying thee I should be guilty.
Of all the blessings heaven bestowed upon me,
My honour and my fame alone remain
Untouched. O! do not rob me of a treasure
So precious to me; do not make me thus
Unworthy of Jocaste. (Act III, Scene 2)

Philoctetes asserts his innocence but expresses that compliance with Jocaste's request would make him culpable. He pleads to preserve his honour and reputation, fearing that losing them would render him unworthy of Jocaste. This episode evokes parallels with Corneille's *Le Cid*, a tragi-comedy centred on the moral and emotional dilemma faced by its protagonist, Don Rodrigue. In the play, Rodrigue grapples with the imperative to avenge his father's humiliation after he is struck by the father of Chimène, his betrothed. The situation presents a profound ethical conflict: exacting vengeance would likely result in the death of Chimène's father, causing immeasurable grief to his beloved, whereas refraining from retaliation would compromise his family's honour, contradicting the code of chivalry. In a celebrated soliloquy, Rodrigue meticulously weighs the competing demands

of duty and love, ultimately concluding that restoring his family's dignity is paramount. He resolves to seek retribution, believing that only by upholding the honour of his lineage can he earn the respect and admiration of Chimène. This decisive moment underscores the thematic tension between personal allegiance and societal expectations in Corneille's dramatic framework.

The high priest in Voltaire's *Oedipus* claims to have witnessed the spirit of Laios descending upon the altars, angrily declaring that his murder remains unavenged and that his murderer resides in Thebes, thereby causing widespread suffering. (Act I, Scene 3) Similarly, in Act II, Scene 2, Jocaste confides in Aegina about the apparition of her deceased husband, whose bloody and pale spectre appeared before her. The presence of the slain king lamenting his own death evokes a parallel to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the ghost of King reveals the truth of his assassination to Hamlet and says: "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder". (Act I, Scene 5).

In Sophocles' version of the tragedy, the origins of the epidemic are disclosed through the Delphic oracle, relayed to Oedipus by Kreon, Jocaste's brother. Notably, Kreon is absent in Voltaire's adaptation. In *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, Kreon is falsely accused by Oedipus of orchestrating Laios's murder. In Voltaire's tragedy, however, it is Philoctetes who is accused by Araspes, the confidant of Oedipus, effectively replacing Kreon's role in the narrative. Voltaire's decision to introduce Philoctetes as a suspect serves a rationalizing function in the plot. Philoctetes, formerly a lover of Jocaste, still harbours affection for her, and Jocaste similarly retains a sentimental attachment to him. Thus, accusing Philoctetes of Laios's murder appears plausible within the dramatic structure. Nonetheless, in *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus's suspicion of Kreon is equally compelling, given that Kreon, as the queen's brother, might have had motives to

eliminate the reigning monarch. The critical distinction between the two versions lies in the nature of the accusations: whereas Oedipus himself levels the charge against Kreon in Sophocles' play, in Voltaire's adaptation, the accusation against Philoctetes is initiated by Oedipus's confidant. Oedipus, however, never adopts this suspicion and continues to regard Philoctetes as innocent.

Voltaire's *Oedipus* exhibits a certain noble dignity in its characterization, aligning more closely with the ideals of 18th-century France and reflecting the 17th-century conception of nobility. Voltaire was a vocal critic of the perceived lack of propriety and decorum in Shakespearean and ancient Greek drama, a concept known in French as *bienséances*. In the classical theatre of 17th-century France, elements that might disturb the sensibilities of refined audiences—such as explicit depictions of nudity, violence, and death—were deliberately excluded from the stage. By contrast, in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus appears on stage after blinding himself, his face and clothing stained with blood, and remains present until nearly the end of the play. Voltaire, however, adheres more strictly to the principles of *bienséances*—his Oedipus does not appear after his self-inflicted blindness. Instead, in the final scene, it is the high priest who reports that Oedipus has plunged his sword, still stained with his father's blood, into his own eyes.

Another structural distinction in Voltaire's adaptation lies in the presence of Philoctetes, who dominates the narrative until the third act, after which he disappears. In contrast, Oedipus's presence becomes more pronounced in the final two acts following Philoctetes' absence. This shift contributes to a lack of structural cohesion, leading to a certain fragmentation in the dramatic focus. Voltaire himself acknowledged this issue in his correspondence. Among the three classical unities traditionally observed in tragedy—unity of time, place, and action—the unity of action

was particularly compromised due to the inclusion of a romantic subplot between Jocaste and Philoctetes. In a letter to the Duchess of Maine, Voltaire explained that he had reluctantly incorporated the love plot at the insistence of Parisian actors, who refused to perform the play unless a romantic element was present. Notably, the initial edition of *Oedipus* lacked this romantic dimension, but Voltaire's friends encouraged him to familiarize himself with the prevailing tastes of the era by reading Pierre Corneille's *Oedipus*. In Corneille's version, Theseus and Dirce, the daughter of Jocaste and Laios, are depicted as lovers. Consequently, Voltaire modified the cast of characters to suit his artistic and thematic objectives, incorporating new figures while omitting others as necessary.

II) Representation/Re-presentation of Dramatic Personae

Derrida reminds us: "Representation can be understood in the general sense of *Vorstellung*, but also in the general sense of re-presentation, as repetition or reproduction of presentation [...]" (*Speech and Phenomenon* 9) In that sense, Voltaire not only represents the characters of Oedipus by Sophocles but also re-presents them. In one of his letters, Voltaire critiques the manner in which Sophocles introduces the character of Oedipus in *Oedipus the King*, describing it as lacking refinement. He specifically points to the direct declaration, "My name is Oedipus—the famous—as everyone calls me," as an unnecessarily explicit revelation of identity, arguing that there is little reason to assume that the Thebans would be unaware of their own ruler's name and status. Similarly, Voltaire finds the priest's self-identification—"I am a priest of Zeus"—to be overly simplistic in its exposition (*Lettre* III). In contrast, Voltaire employs more sophisticated techniques to introduce these characters within his own dramatic work. In his play, Dimas is the one who tells his friend Philoctetes that Oedipus and the high priest have arrived. (Act I, Scene 1)

Voltaire's *Oedipus* introduces several characters—Philoctetes, Araspes, Aegina, Dimas, Phorbas, and Icarus—who do not appear in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Within Voltaire's adaptation, Philoctetes is depicted as Jocaste's former lover, Araspes serves as Oedipus's confidant, Aegina assumes the role of Jocaste's confidante, and Dimas is characterized as Philoctetes' close companion. In Voltaire's *Oedipus*, it is Dimas who acquaints his companion, Philoctetes, with the dire circumstances afflicting Thebes upon his arrival in the city. Voltaire critiques the narrative logic of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, arguing that it is inconsistent for the priest to inform Oedipus of a crisis that the king would already be aware of. So, Voltaire's adaptation employs a more natural approach, positioning Dimas as the intermediary who conveys this information to Philoctetes, thereby ensuring a more coherent dramatic exposition. Confidants in dramatic literature serve as trusted figures who both receive the protagonist's secrets and offer counsel in crucial moments. In 17th-century France, playwrights frequently incorporated confidants into their works. Voltaire, likely influenced by the plays of Corneille and Racine, utilized this narrative device in his own writings. In *Oedipus*, Voltaire presents the titular character as an exemplary enlightened ruler rather than a sovereign wielding absolute power. He refuses to condemn Philoctetes, challenging the convictions of his confidant, Araspes. Araspes, in response, counsels his master against placing absolute trust in oracles. (Act II, Scene 5) Oedipus pledges to safeguard Philoctetes under all circumstances, firmly believing in his innocence. Moreover, he regards Philoctetes as sufficiently virtuous to be considered a suitable heir to the throne:

I leave my country's kingdom, children, all.
Then hear me now, hear my last parting words;
A king you must have; let him be my choice;
Take Philoctetes; he is generous, noble,
Virtuous, and brave; (Act V, Scene 1)

Thus, Oedipus renounces his homeland, throne, and family, delivering final words of advice. He urges the selection of Philoctetes as the next ruler, emphasizing his generosity, nobility, virtue, and bravery. In his letter III incorporated in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Voltaire critiques the portrayal of Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy, finding it irrational that he accuses Kreon of Laios' murder despite referring to him as "my oldest friend here." Consequently, Voltaire substitutes Kreon with Philoctetes in his adaptation. Aegina, as Jocaste's confidante, serves the critical function of eliciting her mistress's innermost thoughts through questioning. This narrative device effectively exposes Jocaste's internal emotions to the audience. Through her exchanges with Aegina, it becomes evident that, like Oedipus, she firmly believes in Philoctetes' innocence. Additionally, she confides in her confidante that she once harboured love for Philoctetes, though what remains is now merely "the sad remembrance of a conquered passion." (Act II, Scene 2) Her demeanour aligns more closely with the rational characters depicted by Corneille, as opposed to those in Racine's works, where love often reaches an irreversible state.

In Voltaire's tragedy, upon realizing that he is responsible for the death of Laios, the former husband of Jocaste (at this point he doesn't know that Laios was his father also) and the king of Thebes, Oedipus is overcome with profound shame and implores Jocaste to end his life:

Take, take this sword,
The instrument of my unhappy rage;
Receive, and use it for a noble purpose,
And plunge it in my breast. (Act IV, Scene 3)

Oedipus, consumed by despair, offers his sword to Jocaste, urging her to wield it for a noble cause and end his suffering. This response bears a resemblance to Phaedra's reaction in Racine's tragedy, in which she implores Hippolytus to end her life due to

the shame she feels over her forbidden love for her stepson. The words she addresses to Hippolytus are strikingly similar to those observed in Voltaire's work.

Here is my heart. This is the place to strike.

Already prompt to expiate its guilt,

I feel it leap impatiently to meet

Your arm. Strike home. (Act II, Scene 5)

Phaedra, burdened by guilt, offers her heart as the target, eagerly seeking redemption through a decisive blow. Once more, Voltaire's depiction of Oedipus closely aligns with the stylistic and thematic conventions of 17th-century theatre.

In Voltaire's adaptation of Oedipus, Jocaste plays a significantly expanded role, appearing in 15 out of the 23 scenes, with her lines concluding the play. This prominence is largely attributed to the inclusion of a Jocaste-Philoctetes love dynamic within the narrative. Additionally, she is depicted as having ruled Thebes for two years prior to Oedipus' ascension to the throne. Following Oedipus' act of self-blinding by thrusting his sword into his own eyes, the high priest proclaims that Jocaste should continue governing the city. However, rather than accepting this directive, she chooses to take her own life by stabbing herself. This is the method of suicide adopted in Seneca's *Oedipus*. (48) In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, by contrast, Jocaste meets her fate first, hanging herself, after which Oedipus, overwhelmed by his revelation, removes the long pins from her gown and drives them into his own eyes. Oedipus appears in precisely 15 scenes in Voltaire's play as well, though an additional distinction lies in the presence of a soliloquy in Act V, Scene 4, which serves as one of his final moments in Voltaire's rendition.

Voltaire significantly minimized the role of the chorus in his adaptation of *Oedipus*. However, he acknowledged its function as a narrative device that enables principal characters to express their thoughts and emotions to the audience. Aristotle asserts that

“the chorus must be regarded as one of the actors,” underscoring its indispensable role in dramatic composition. While the chorus serves various purposes within a play, its most essential function remains its lyrical dimension.

It can be reasonably concluded that Voltaire’s *Oedipus* represents an effort to construct a more rationalized and philosophically aligned narrative reflective of the intellectual climate of his time. The characterization of Oedipus is notably refined, with the protagonist portrayed in a more morally sanitized manner, the theme of incest deliberately restrained, and the institutional authority of the Church subjected to critique. These alterations resulted in a significant thematic transformation in Voltaire’s reinterpretation of the ancient myth.

III) Thematic Evolution

The question of whether Oedipus himself exhibits characteristics of the Oedipus complex invites a nuanced discussion. Sigmund Freud first introduced the concept in his seminal work *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), defining it as a psychoanalytic phenomenon in which a child harbours subconscious desires for the parent of the opposite sex while simultaneously experiencing feelings of rivalry with the parent of the same sex. More specifically, Freud theorized that during the phallic stage of psychosexual development—typically occurring between the ages of three and five—a young boy perceives himself as competing with his father for his mother’s affection, while a young girl similarly sees herself in competition with her mother for her father’s attention. Freud’s conceptualization of the Oedipus complex may have been inspired by a particular passage in Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*. In this scene, upon learning of the prophecy that he is destined to wed his mother, Oedipus expresses profound fear. Jocaste, in response, reassures him by stating:

It's best to take life as it comes.

This marriage with your mother - don't fear it.

In their dreams, before now, many men

Have slept with their mothers.

Jocaste encourages Oedipus to accept his fate, dismissing fear of marrying one's mother by noting that many men have experienced similar scenarios in dreams. The central argument is that Sophoclean Oedipus remains unaware of his true parentage and actively seeks to avoid both his presumed mother and father, thereby complicating any direct application of the Oedipus complex to his character. Raised by King Polybus and Queen Merope, whom he believes to be his biological parents, Oedipus is oblivious to his actual lineage. Upon receiving a prophecy from the oracle at Delphi foretelling that he will one day kill his father and marry his mother, he is overcome with fear and voluntarily departs from Corinth to prevent such a fate. During his journey, Oedipus encounters Laios, the King of Thebes, and unknowingly kills him in a confrontation. At the time, he is unaware that Laios is, in fact, his biological father. He subsequently encounters the Sphinx, who presents him with a riddle: "What walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three at night?" Oedipus successfully provides the correct answer—Man, who crawls on all fours in infancy, walks upright on two legs in adulthood, and uses a walking stick in old age. As a result, the Sphinx takes her own life by drowning herself, thereby liberating the city of Thebes.

In gratitude for his triumph over the Sphinx, Oedipus is offered the hand of Queen Jocaste in marriage, unaware that she is, in fact, his biological mother. While these circumstances seemingly challenge the direct application of Freud's theory, Freudian psychoanalysis contends that unconscious desires are difficult to refute, thereby leaving room for interpretation regarding Oedipus' psychological disposition. The theme of incest is present but it

is more subdued in Voltaire's tragedy. However, it so happened that when the play was staged, the Regent of France Philippe Duc d'Orléan was rumoured to have incestuous relation with his daughter the duchess de Berry. The father and the daughter, both were present when the play was staged.

Voltaire is widely recognized as a proponent of rational thought, a defining characteristic of the Enlightenment era. His vision for theatre extended beyond mere emotional catharsis; he sought to create a dramatic medium that would instil values of individual liberty, a commitment to human rights, and the virtue of tolerance. In his work, the critique of institutional corruption—particularly within the Church—is articulated through Jocaste's dialogue:

These priests are not what the vile rabble think them,
Their knowledge springs from our credulity. (Act IV, Scene 1)

Jocaste challenges common perceptions of priests, suggesting that their authority is rooted in the people's willingness to believe rather than true wisdom. This form of religious critique aligns more closely with the intellectual and cultural climate of 18th-century France rather than the traditions of ancient Greece. Philoctetes introduces yet another critical perspective:

That Priests are here more formidable foes,
Because respected, feared and honoured more.
Supported by his oracles, the priest
Shall often make his sovereign crouch beneath him;
Whilst his weak people, dragged in holy chains,
Embrace the idol, tread on sacred laws
With pious zeal, and think they honour heaven
When they betray their master and their king,
But above all, when interest, fruitful parent
Of riot and licentiousness, increase
Their impious rage, and back their insolence. (Act III, Scene 5)

Philoctetes critiques the power of priests, arguing that their

influence often subjugates rulers and misleads the people into betraying their sovereign under the guise of religious devotion. It highlights how self-interest can fuel unrest and embolden religious authorities to manipulate the masses. Eighteenth-century France is notable for its opposition to the divine right of kings. This doctrine posited the monarch as God's representative on earth, thereby granting him absolute authority over his subjects. Rousseau vigorously challenged this concept in his Social Contract theory, which argued that sovereignty is derived from a contractual agreement between the ruler and the people, wherein the populace voluntarily surrenders its general will. Consequently, if the sovereign fails to uphold the terms of this contract, the people retain the right to dissolve it. During the French Revolution of 1789, Robespierre invoked this principle, asserting that the monarchy had violated the general will of the people, thus legitimizing their right to revolt. A similar sentiment is reflected in the words of Philoctetes as he addresses Oedipus.

Kings, indeed, are gods

To their own subjects, but to Hercules,

Or me, they are no more than common men.

And, therefore, little, thou mayst think, should fear

To attack the bravest. [...]

We knew no master, and desired no subjects:

I have made kings, but never wished to be one. (Act II, Scene 4)

The speaker rejects the notion of kings as divine, asserting that they are merely ordinary men to figures like Hercules. He emphasizes his independence, stating that while he has elevated others to kingship, he never sought power for himself. In this context, his rhetoric aligns more closely with the revolutionary ideals of 18th-century France rather than the traditional heroic archetype of ancient Greek literature. It is worth noting that Philoctetes played a significant role in the Trojan War following the death of Herakles. Sophocles notably explored his character in a dramatic

work in which Philoctetes serves as the central protagonist.

CONCLUSION

Voltaire's *Oedipus* presents a reinterpretation of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, altering its structure, pacing, and character dynamics while reinforcing Derrida's notion that repetition inevitably entails transformation. Voltaire delays the pivotal accusation against Oedipus, reshapes the timeline, and introduces ambiguity regarding Jocaste's offspring, distinguishing his version from the Sophoclean tragedy. Drawing influence from Racine, Corneille, and Shakespeare, Voltaire adapts classical themes while maintaining *bienséances* to uphold the decorum of 17th-century French theatre. A significant departure in *Oedipus* is the introduction of Philoctetes, a noble suitor who replaces Kreon's role and adds a romantic subplot that alters the dramatic focus. Jocaste's expanded presence further underscores Voltaire's rationalized and structured approach, integrating confidants and minimizing the chorus to refine character interactions. Voltaire's tragedy embodies Enlightenment ideals, advocating reason, individual liberty, and human rights while critiquing institutional corruption, particularly within the Church. He also minimizes the theme of incest, aligning his adaptation with the moral sensibilities of 18th-century France. Through Philoctetes' defiance of monarchical authority, *Oedipus* resonates with revolutionary thought, reflecting the intellectual climate of the time and emphasizing a departure from absolute rule towards rational governance.

In this article, the texts of Sophocles and Voltaire were examined in English, except for select letters by Voltaire, which were available only in French. This analysis focuses exclusively on Voltaire's innovations in relation to Sophoclean tragedy, while occasionally referencing the adaptations of Seneca and Corneille. A thorough analysis of tragedies inspired by the myth of Oedipus,

as revisited in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, could have potentially uncovered additional significant insights. An essential question explored by both Sophocles and Voltaire is whether there are truths that are better left unknown. Oedipus affirms this notion unequivocally, while Jocaste rejects it. In contemporary times, as we navigate an era of relentless and boundless knowledge acquisition, we must reconsider the implications of this question and its relevance to our pursuit of understanding.

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Oedipus in 18th Century Paris: A Rewriting by Voltaire

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Notes:

1. Shakespeare makes use of this type of irony in his tragedy, *King Lear*, through the character of Gloucester, whose metaphorical blindness is manifested in his misplaced trust in Edmund rather than Edgar. This ironic reversal becomes fully realized when Gloucester loses his physical sight, prompting his recognition of prior moral and perceptual errors. He laments: "I have no way and therefore want no eyes. I stumbled when I saw." (Act IV, Scene 1)

Towards A Transnational Poetics of the Oppressed: Utpal Dutt's Postcolonial Transformations

Abin Chakraborty

ABSTRACT: While postcolonial studies still seek direction from the seemingly oracular pronouncements of celebrated theorists, postcolonial writers have forever addressed their times with that double-vision which even while assimilating the best of colonizer's culture has always managed to stare straight at the problems surrounding his/her own people, those that unmistakably shaped the modes and forms of assimilation. From Jose Marti to Ngugi wa Thiong'o to Mahasweta Devi, postcolonial authors have often embodied a stirring fusion of languages and cultures determined by their own active engagement with their contexts. Utpal Dutt was a part of this tradition and was a polymath genius of gigantic proportions, perhaps to be only compared with Sartre. One of the most fascinating aspects of such genius was his mastery of nine different languages such as Bengali, English, Hindi, Latin, Russian, German etc. and it is natural that such encyclopaedic erudition would lend to his oeuvre a transnational dimension that would best embody the transformative powers of postcolonial societies to assimilate elements from foreign cultures to refashion national futures toward a postcolonial utopia. As one who had spent his formative years in theatre with both Geoffrey Kendall's Shakespearewallah and the IPTA, Dutt, was one of those rare individuals who

applied his polyglot brilliance to respond to the throbbing needs of the people. The paper would seek to analyse three of his plays, *Tiner Talwar*, *Kallol* and *Surya Shikar*, to explain how Dutt's reading of Shaw, Vishnevsky and Brecht would enable him to construct, a 'revolutionary theatre', to envision postcolonial futures, untrammelled by processes of postcolonial subalternization through the mobilization of united popular resistance – both material and ideological.

KEYWORDS: *postcolonial, nation, transformation, multilingualism, revolutionary theatre, transnational.*

INTRODUCTION

Stuart Hall explained that “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. (Hall 112)” Postcolonial literatures across the world have repeatedly enhanced themselves by transforming the cultural capital that colonial conquest has thrust upon them, as manifested by several authors like Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Derek Walcott or Albert Memmi. Dramas based on the metamorphosis of cultural resources drawn from different centres is therefore one of the constant features of postcolonial cultures around the world including India. In fact, the entire history of anti-colonial resistance will throw up innumerable instances of such transformations for conceptualising and organising the modes and means by which decolonization was to be achieved. Indian theatre of the post-independence period has been marked extensively by the fusion of theatrical traditions of the West as well as the exploration of indigenous cultural resources. It is this logic which was foregrounded by Bill Ashcroft who remarked:

The western control over the time and space, the dominance of language and the technologies of writing for perpetuating the modes of this dominance, through geography, history, literature and indeed, through the whole range of cultural production, have meant that post-colonial engagements with imperial power have been exceptionally wide-ranging. The one thing which characterizes all these engagements, the capacity shared by many forms of colonial experience is a remarkable facility to use the modes of the dominant discourse against itself and transform it in ways that have been both profound and lasting. (Ashcroft 13)

Utpal Dutt's (1929-1943) theatre is a remarkable example of such transformations which are based not only on the inherent multilingualism of the Indian society but also on his own polyglot genius which, far from confining him in intellectual ivory-towers, only served to enhance the quality of his political theatre. The paper would explore, with special attention to three of Dutt's plays – *Kallol (Song of the Waves)*, *Surya Sikar (Hunting the Sun)* and *Tiner Talwar (Tin Swords)* – how he repeatedly drew on texts of other cultures and languages to create a theatre that focussed on the national subalterns' probable rise to hegemony.

Despite being born into a wealthy, elite family in which not just Dutt's father but also his elder brothers acted as high-ranking officials of the colonial government, Dutt rejected the scope of being a part of the comprador bourgeoisie and rather, as a resolute Marxist, utilised the cultural privileges his lineage had ensured to fashion a 'revolutionary theatre' which sought to inject socialist consciousness in the exploited masses of a post-independence India which had failed to usher in those dreams of prosperity and fulfilment that had inspired the struggle for freedom. Associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), a cultural organisation of Indian leftist artists, Dutt combined his Shakespearean prowess with passionate socio-

political commitment to create a kind of theatre that would appeal to the subjugated majority while being critical of socio-political inequities. Subsequently, he created his own theatre groups, Little Theatre Group (LTG) and People's Little Theatre (PLT), even as he gained national fame through his cinematic performances, through which he sought to champion popular struggles against tyrannical and oppressive regimes, primarily by utilising episodes of mass struggles from Indian and world history. Since elitist historiography ignored various moments of subaltern self-assertion in the anti-colonial struggle, Dutt argued in *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre* that "It will be our endeavour to rediscover the history which has been distorted and raped by the hirelings of the bourgeois..." (61) in order to infuse 'socialist consciousness' among the masses to reignite their revolutionary fervour:

They [the Indian bourgeoisie] seek carefully to suppress all the great peoples' wars against the British rule that have swept the country for nearly two hundred years. They dismiss in a couple of pages the war of 1857, and make no mention at all of the peasant uprisings of 1776, the Wahabi uprising of 1831, the Mysore wars, and the Santhal rebellion of 1855, the Indigo revolt of 1856-60. Coming to modern times, they scrupulously suppress all reference to the armed uprisings in Bengal and the Punjab in 1905-08, 1920-24, 1930-34. They attempt to obliterate the name of Subhash Chandra Bose from history; they have erased from the history the establishment of workers' rule in Sholapur, the Meerut trial of communists, the strike actions of the Indian workers and the mutinies in the army and the navy ('Weapon', p. 123).

It is in this context that a play like *Kallol* (*Song of the Waves*) becomes so vital. Based as it is on the events of the Naval Mutiny in 1946, the play not only focuses on the valour and heroism of the proletarian sailors who constitute that alternative history

of subaltern self-assertion that elitist historians conveniently ignored, but draws its formal sustenance from plays like Vsevolod Vishnevsky's *We are from Kronstadt* and *An Optimistic Tragedy* which focus on the contributions of the Czars' navy in the success of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. As Utpal Dutt was both a Marxist and a nationalist, he was obviously aware of the resemblance of Khyber with not only the actual mutinying ships of 1946 but with the famous 'Aurora' which had turned its guns against the Czar's palace to ensure conclusive Bolshevik victory of 1917 in Russia. Shardul Singh and his men in 'Kallol' thus exemplify a remarkable fusion which makes them the children of those powerful intersections of history, literature and culture that have recurrently shaped Dutt's theatre and postcolonial theatre in general.

ANALYSING KALLOL (1965)

This becomes evident from the very beginning of *Kallol* which starkly resembles the opening of Vishnevsky's *An Optimistic Tragedy*. *An Optimistic Tragedy* employs two narrators, who, after a resounding overture, state:

Put aside all your business for tonight. A naval regiment that has done its march, now addresses you – our descendants... It proposes that you reflect in silence, that you discover what struggle and death really mean for us... (Vishnevsky 185)

Kallol opens with a similar combination of overture and narratorial address, where the narrator poetically addresses the audience and proposes to unveil before them a suppressed history that not only valorises the struggle of the sailors but also exposes the cunning connivance of bourgeois leaders who conspired with the British to sabotage the sailors' struggle:

আমি নাবিক

আজ বলব ঐ নৌবিদ্রোহের কাহিনী চুপি চুপি।

অহিংস ইতিহাসের চোখে ধুলো দিয়ে,

এই নিভৃত কক্ষে আপনাদের বলি -

কোথেকে এল এই স্বাধীনতা

I am a sailor

I will whisper to you today, the story of the naval mutiny.

Hoodwinking the history of non-violence,

Let me tell you in this secret room

How we got our freedom. (Translation mine; Natya Samagra, 2: 238)

As Dutt has repeatedly claimed, the idea behind such theatrical hoodwinking is to foreground that tradition of popular resistance against diverse forms of injustice which can awaken revolutionary consciousness in the present to effect decisive political action. It is for this purpose that he has repeatedly dramatised various episodes of rebellion and struggle from both Indian and world history, even if those episodes concluded with failure. According to Dutt, the consequent death of a martyr in such a context “creates hope, not despair” as “His death is the beginning of a revolutionary process.” (*Towards*, 54) Not only does Dutt substantiate his argument by referring to the plays of Bertolt Brecht but he also seeks to project such martyrs through a revolutionary realism that takes its cue from Maxim Gorky. Gorky not only spoke of a literary mode that sought “consolidation of revolutionary achievement in the present and a clearer view of the lofty objectives of the socialist future”, but also argued that:

Indeed a time has come when we need the heroic... something, you know, that would not resemble life, but would be higher than life, better, more beautiful. It is absolutely necessary that today's literature begin to embellish life somewhat, and as soon as it does so, life will be embellished, i.e., people will begin to live more swiftly, more brightly (qtd. in Becker 486).

The representation of the struggle of the ratings, led by

Shardul Singh obviously constitutes Dutt's quest for such 'heroic' elements which is boldly emphasised by its remarkable conclusion which shows Khyber's uncompromising struggle as opposed to the sailors' actual surrender in 1946. Such an ending deliberately transcends historical reality to signify the relentlessness of struggle and foregrounds the undying spirit though which Dutt hoped to enkindle many such struggles in present and future. As he states:

To us the RIN [Royal Indian Navy] mutiny is the beginning of a revolutionary process that drove the British to begin plotting with Congress and League leaders, a process that set India ablaze with rebellion, a process that still threatens the Indian bourgeoisie with armed rebellion (*Towards*, 55).

And Dutt's formal justification for such a representation takes him back to Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which too concluded with the relentless struggle of the mutineers as opposed to their factual surrender:

Khyber refuses to surrender for the same precise reason that Eisenstein's *Potemkin* refuses to surrender, though in factual history it did. *Potemkin*'s victory ended in victorious October, 1917, and therefore the precise moment in history when the sailors raised their hands in surrender cannot be considered in isolation, as an absolute be-all and end-all in time (*Towards* 55).

Both form and content thus emerge out of Dutt's own elite social location, which, instead of interpellating him as another 'comprador bourgeoisie' opens up those ambivalent intersections of cultural interactions which ensure both the evolution of Dutt's chosen Marxist political belief, as well as the application of such consciousness through forms that are themselves dependent on such acquired cultural capital which were and still are available to a select few. Dutt thus interpolates the available discourses through his own conscious dramatic enterprises and emphasises

that transformative turn which constitutes a major element of postcolonial being and allows authors to utilise resources endowed by those very structures and discourses they persistently critique.

ANALYSING *SURYA SIKAR* (1971)

Such a critique would have been too parochial had it only taken into consideration colonial history as Indian society remains haunted by problems that have been plaguing it since pre-colonial times such as the problems of caste and gender which are both deftly highlighted in 'Hunting the Sun' which, set during the reign of Samudragupta, offers a trenchant critique of the chauvinistic, Brahminical orthodoxy of the times which acted in collusion with royal administration to ensure the perpetuation of casteist violence and exploitation that served to uphold the veneers of cultural sophistication of the so-called 'golden age'. Alluding to Peter Schaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964), *Hunting the Sun* (published in English in 1972), based on Dutt's jatra 'Samudrashasan' (1970), aptly exemplifies Dutt's transnational, hybridised dramaturgy which borrows with ease from Brecht and Shakespeare in order to transmute them into remarkable explorations of his personal Indian context. The central conflict of the play revolves around the evolving tussle between orthodox Brahminical administration and the rational arguments of Kalhan and his disciple Indrani regarding a heliocentric cosmology. Obviously Kalhan and Indrani's assertions about the roundness of the earth and how it orbits the sun or how the moon orbits the earth, that too with the ancient Indian version of a telescope, recall the actions of Galileo as recorded in history and as immortalised by Brecht in *The Life of Galileo* (1938). However, the representations are based on diametrically opposite approaches. Brecht's Galileo is a great scientist but he is also a lover of food and wine and is mortally afraid of tortures. It is these human weaknesses which

make him rather loathsome in his own eyes and Brecht also refused to present him as a hero. In contrast, Kalhan remains till the end a heroic and almost superhuman embodiment of courage and endurance as despite all the threats issued by the tyrannical Samudragupta or the destruction of books and equipment wrought by general Hayagreeva, he remains steadfast in his scientific convictions and even the molestation, torture or eventual execution of Indrani, almost like a daughter to him, cannot compel him to recant. Brecht's Galileo never faces any such agonising conflict and the most that he can muster is the rejection of Ludovico as Veronica's suitor in order to pursue his scientific ideals which he then compromises by recanting his teachings and submitting to the Church after being imprisoned and threatened with torture and execution. However, both Kalhan and Indrani are characters of the 'heroic' mould who remain undaunted despite severe trials and tribulations.

In fact, the duo of Kalhan and Indrani may be seen as a radical reworking of the Galileo-Veronica pair in *The Life of Galileo*. Just as Kalhan is drastically different from Galileo, Indrani too is completely unlike Veronica who is a rather vain, god-fearing conventional woman with least interest in science. Instead, Indrani is as resolute and undaunted as Kalhan and is superbly well-versed in both science and theology. In fact, it is her crucial intervention, for ensuring the emancipation of Gohil, a lower-caste slave, that initiates the conflict which culminates in Indrani's execution and Kalhan's maiming. While some may object to Dutt's heroic representations, it is only his keen awareness of the extent of authoritarian violence which necessitates such quest for heroism and Brecht's Galileo can afford to be much more practically credible because he never faces such grave crisis but only the prospect of it. The difference is also perhaps down to the fact that unlike Dutt who even spent days behind the bars and

faced attacks on his performances, Brecht successfully escaped the Nazi atrocities and returned only after Allied triumph. As Utpal Dutt explains in an interview:

People who live in this society feel that Galileo's compromise with the ruling class was inevitable, because these are people who go on making this kind of compromise everyday of their lives. They simply identify with Galileo...In fact the same happened with me as well. What wrong did Galileo do? Brecht would have understood if he had to sit in front of the Nazis. But he escaped. Settled in America, Hollywood! Had he remained in some concentration camp or been interrogated by the Gestapo he would have realised what Galileo did and why! (Translation mine; Dutt, *Interview* 375).

This is why Samik Bandyopadhyay remarks that, in case of Utpal Dutt's theatre "it's Brecht's approach, it's Brecht's dramaturgy, it's Brecht's whole dialectic of theatre which is more relevant" (Dutt, *Interview* 375) rather than the arc of the characters. Therefore, though Dutt does not approve of Brecht's portrayal of Galileo he still incorporates into his play the final portion from Brecht's play where Andrea smuggles Galileo's final work on motion beyond Italian borders that he had painstakingly copied from his confined original, despite weakening his eyesight almost to the extent of blindness. Similarly, a silenced Kalhan, despite losing his tongue and being diabolically co-opted into the establishment, is finally assured by Madhukarika that his son Veerak, following the instructions of Indrani has fled from the palace to procure and smuggle away the books in which Kalhan's teachings were recorded by Indrani to effect a Foucauldian "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (82-83). Galileo's teachings also reached the various corners of Europe to shake those foundations of superstition and ignorance which the Church and the feudal authorities wanted to perpetuate but what remains

missing in Galileo's history is the actual rising of the masses which Dutt imaginatively incorporates in his exploration of Gupta history in order to inspire similar uprisings in present and foreseeable future. And it is in this context that the romantically idealised figures of Kalhan and Indrani attain their relevance as they can prepare the masses both for the ordeal they must endure as well as the courage with which they must persevere.

ANALYSING *TINER TALWAR* (1971)

Such influences, assimilation and modifications are a pivotal part of Dutt's dramaturgy and they exemplify how an elite status and consequent reception of English education, instead of creating interpellated mimic men can produce those absolute opposites who would perform such deliberate inversions as would transform elements of colonial culture into assets of stringent postcolonial criticism. The same process also comes to the forefront in Utpal Dutt's *Tiner Talwar* (*Tin Swords*) which was arguably one of his and PLT's best productions. Just as Dutt had taken the central episode of Brecht's play and had modified and refashioned it into a completely original exploration of Gupta history, similarly in *Tiner Talwar* he took the central idea of Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) in order to offer an imaginative representation of the theatrical tradition of Bengal during the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially in the face of colonial assault on native theatre to curb emerging nationalist dissent against colonial authorities, expressing themselves through satires and farces produced by native intelligentsia, often armed with colonial education. Just as *Pygmalion* revolves around Eliza's transformation, from a cockney-speaking impoverished flower-girl, to a beautiful, bedecked speaker of queen's English who successfully impresses the London elite of her supposedly regal lineage, under the tutelage of Professor Higgins and Colonel

Pickering, and the consequent complications, *Tiner Talwar* too focuses on the transformation of Moyna, from a rude, uncultured speaker of kerbstone-Bengali with persistent mispronunciation of 'sh' as 's', into a polished, refined and successful actress on the professional stage of Kolkata which is integrated with the dramatisation of the fate of the fictional The Great Bengal Opera within the matrix of colonial assault, obscene domination over theatre by opulent urban comprador bourgeoisie and the general social ostracisation of both theatre and artists associated with it. Just as Higgins, along with Colonel Pickering, takes utmost pains to ensure Eliza's speedy acquisition of regal English, in complete contradiction to her Drury Lane origins, Benimadhab Chatterjee, the actor-director of Great Bengal Opera, along with other fellow-actors undertakes the enterprise of transforming Moyna from a coarse and foul-mouthed vegetable seller into an actor capable of reciting the most ornate and mellifluous Bengali verse with perfect poise and intensity, as a result of which she achieves such social elevation which makes her as de-classed as Eliza. And just as Higgins and Pickering heartily congratulate themselves on their grand success, Benimadhab too lauds himself on such achievement and remarks with flamboyant bravado:

বেণীমাখব চাটুজ্যে বলছে শিখিয়ে নেবে! বেণীমাখব চাটুজ্যে পাথরে প্রাণপ্রতিষ্ঠা করতে পারে,
কাষ্ঠপুস্তলির চক্ষু উন্মীলন করে দিতে পারে গাথা পিটিয়ে ঘোড়া বানাতে পারে...আমি শিক্ষক,
আমি স্রষ্টা। আমি তাল তাল মাটি নিয়ে জীবন্ত প্রতিমা গড়ি। আমি একদিক থেকে ব্রহ্মার সমান। আমি
দেবশিল্পী বিশ্বকর্মা।

Benimadhab Chatujjye says, he will make her learn! Benimadhab Chatujjye can animate stones, infuse life into wooden dolls and can beat a donkey into a horse...I am a teacher. I create. I make living deities out of heaps of clay. I am almost like Brahma. I am Bishwakarma, the divine artisan. (Translation mine; *Natyasamagra* 5: 90)

Not only does this recall the self-laudation of Dr. Higgins but also takes us back to the actual image of Pygmalion, the sculptor who, with divine blessing, managed to animate his beloved sculpture, which took the shape of Galatea. In fact, the linguistic training of Moyna, the way in which Benimadhab orders others to burn her old clothes and give her a scrubbing bath, the astonishment of all at Moyna's transformation after she is dressed for the role of a princess, the way in which Benimadhab even corrects her pronunciations during her outbursts – all mirror corresponding scenes and incidents in *Pygmalion*. However, all such comic capers are combined with much more sinister realities in Dutt's play which offer a powerful critique of both patriarchal chauvinism and bourgeois commodification. Unlike Eliza who finds love in Freddy and parental protection from his father owing to his providential financial success, Moyna, having been de-classed due to her training, is left without any other refuge, and finds neither romantic fulfilment, nor her previous independence. Instead she is sold off to Birkrishna Da, by Benimadhab, to save his theatre, which destroys her budding affair with Priyanath, the young English-educated playwright who had joined The Great Bengal Opera to voice his rebellious ideas through theatre. Moyna is thus subjected to a life of degradation, lovelessness and physical abuse in order to ensure both the longevity of the theatrical company and her own career as an actress, a fate that resembles that of the famous Bindoini Dasi. Moyna's fate may well be seen as Dutt's subjective and historicised intensification of the questions and fears latent in Shaw's play, which, however, never transcends the world of middle-class morality and attendant devices of *deus ex machina*. Instead, not only does Dutt initially introduce us to the sweeper, a much more downtrodden version of Shaw's dustman, who scoffs at the malaises of Babu-culture and the elitism of theatrical companies, busy with kings and

queens, but he also self-reflexively presents through Priyanath the need to voice through theatre the plight of those sweepers or impoverished starving refugees who were then thronging the streets of Calcutta. It is he who writes a stirring play on Titumeer, to protest colonial atrocities, and though a habitually opportunist Benimadhab initially decides to forsake that play in order to avoid arrest, unlike the makers of 'Gojodanando' (1876) who were accused of sedition, the play ends with Benimadhab slipping into the role of Titumeer and brandishing his tin sword at the face of watchful colonial authorities and sounding a clarion call for rebellion against the raj with his whole troupe. The illusion of theatre thus becomes real and the tin swords become prophetic precursors of future resistance. Produced five years after Utpal Dutt had himself been jailed on charges of sedition; the play also metaphorically pronounces an uncompromising declaration of artistic commitment to a chosen political stance – a significance that is highlighted by PLT's own subsequent performance of *Titumeer* (1978). Unlike the reclusive Higgins, sneering at the word from his study, Benimadhab emerges as an undaunted artist, embodying highest social responsibility, who, along with Priyanath, turns the stage into a site of resistance and contestation by heeding those undermined voices which remain invariably absent from the middle-class drawing rooms which also delineate the limits of Shavian socialism.

CONCLUSION

What emerges in the process is a glimpse of that rich tapestry of Dutt's dramaturgy which unhesitatingly interweaved cultural capital from Russia, Germany or England to produce a revolutionary theatre that resolutely preached revolution by highlighting existing injustices on the one hand and on the other excavated subaltern voices from the past to create the cultural

ambience which fosters revolutionary spirit. His enterprise, in this context, resembles that of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan author who uses his colonial education to explore in vernacular both Kenya's neo-colonial reality and the tradition of popular anti-colonial struggle in his plays and novels, one of which, (*Devil on the Cross*) evolved out of a synthesis between his long fascination with the Faust myth, encountered owing to his colonial English education, and the local legend of Marimu creatures (Thiong'o 80-84). Dutt's own extravagantly expansive oeuvre contains several such instances of cultural cross-pollination which cumulatively create a transnational poetics of the oppressed that also offers a successful alternative to nativist nostalgia by utilising the international outlook of contemporary Bengali literary culture. Since the evolving dynamics of all postcolonial societies entails a constant re-negotiation of boundaries amidst dizzying heterogeneities, a theatre of the future would necessarily have to "think beyond narratives of originary or initial subjectivities and focus...on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha 1). Utpal Dutt would continue to serve as a dazzling paradigm of successful postcolonial transformations, leading to the creation of a transnational poetics of resistance which not only transcends national or regional prejudices but also emphasises the possibility of turning the spectator into that 'Spect-Actor' (Boal P. xxi), who like Benimadhab Chatterjee, would slip out of his expected role and like the sailors of Khyber would keep on firing the salvos to challenge those injustices, which committed theatre everywhere always strive against.

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Contextualising A Text: A Courtesan on her lived experiences

Anjan Saha

ABSTRACT: One of the celebrities among singing ladies who began their lives in the first quarter of the 20th Century, Malka Pukhraj (1912-2004) commenced her journey as a court singer in the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, going on to become an independent performer, whose voice and words were once familiar to millions in the subcontinent. In her remarkable, witty and candid autobiography *Song Sung True* (Kali for women, 2003), she recalls her rich and eventful life – taking us through her childhood, absorption in music, and her gradual understanding of the courtly intrigues. From childhood to adolescence and romance, and finally to married life; the author brings the reader closer to her sorrows and joys, dilemmas and concerns and ends with a moving and poignant account of the acceptance of the old-age. And not since *Umrao Jan Ada*, Mirza Rusva's 19th Century Urdu Novel, has any book so brought to life the world of elite *tawaifs*, the courtesans and singers who adorned the Durbars of Maharajas. This essay delves into the nuanced world of a courtesan's lived experience, as revealed through her personal memoirs. By contextualising her story within the societal, cultural and historical framework in which she lived, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex realities that shaped her life. Through a critical examination of her text, we will explore the ways in which her experiences were influenced by the intersectionality

of gender, class and power dynamics; revealing a rich tapestry of resilience, agency and survival. By centering the courtesan's voice and perspective, this analysis aims to humanize and demystify the often-stigmatized figure of the courtesan, offering a more balanced and empathetic understanding of her reality.

KEYWORDS: *Courtesan/Tawaif, Devadashi, Rekhti, Sadirattam, Ganika, Nauch Girl.*

INTRODUCTION

Malka Pukhraj's Memoirs, *Song Sung True*, begin with the story of her birth in 1912 in a small village called Hamirpur Sidhar, along the banks of the Chenab, at a time when Jammu and Kashmir was still a princely state. Malka was employed at the court of Hari Singh, the erstwhile Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir when she was only nine years old. After she left his court, she moved to Pakistan prior to the Partition, and settled in Lahore, gave private concerts and began singing for the radio. Like her contemporary Begum Akhtar, Malka made a name for herself as a singer of ghazal, thumri and dadra, and she had a long and prolific career. She passed away in Lahore in 2004, but before that she completed her memoirs, which were edited and translated into English by Saleem Kidwai. First published in 2003, *Song Sung True* is a remarkable work of literature that never received its due. Though courtesan performers' voices have frequently been erased, in favour of narratives about them with a significant amount of wilful misrepresentation; this volume in a striking contrast, candidly presents the voice of a courtesan singer telling her own story.

In *Song Sung True*, Malka Pukhraj does more than recount the chronology of her life. While her narrative is marked by pride in her musical heritage and the elegance of court culture, there are

strategic silences that invite deeper critical engagement. These narrative choices are not accidental; rather, they reflect what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson term “autobiographical acts” — attempts to shape the self within specific cultural and ideological constraints (Smith & Watson 4).

Malka Pukhraj rarely names or dwells on the stigma traditionally associated with the courtesan profession. Yet this very avoidance can be read as a subtle response to that stigma. She writes not as a fallen woman seeking redemption but as an accomplished artist asserting her rightful place in cultural memory. This suggests a form of narrative agency that echoes Veena Talwar Oldenburg’s argument in *Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow* (1990). Oldenburg shows how courtesans, through their opulent lifestyles and insistence on dignity, resisted colonial and nationalist efforts to erase or domesticate them. Pukhraj’s memoir similarly resists the impulse to apologize for her background — she instead constructs a self-image rooted in talent, refinement, and selective disclosure. One of the most striking aspects of the memoir is its tonality. Far from being confessional or burdened with regret, Pukhraj’s voice is witty, nostalgic, even irreverent at times. There are moments of veiled pain — particularly in her reflections on the shifting status of performers in postcolonial India — but these are never foregrounded as trauma narratives. This emotional restraint might be interpreted through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s insight on the subaltern voice: that it often appears mediated or partial, especially when navigating structures of hegemonic power (Spivak 5-111). Pukhraj, therefore, does not offer a complete deconstruction of social norms around the courtesan; she instead articulates a life that existed alongside and often in defiance of those norms.

Her self-representation stands in sharp contrast to fictionalized

accounts of the courtesan in Indian literature and cinema. In Umrao Jaan Ada (1899), the courtesan is caught between aestheticisation and moral downfall. Similarly, Hindi cinema – from *Pakeezah* (1972) to *Devdas* (2002) – repeatedly depicts the tawaif as a tragic, sacrificial figure whose redemption lies in death or renunciation. These portrayals, as Ruth Vanita argues in *Dancing with the Nation: Courtesans in Bombay Cinema* (2012), serve nationalist and patriarchal purposes by moralising the courtesan's body and containing her agency. By contrast, Pukhraj's memoir unsettles such clichés. She neither dies a tragic death nor longs for male redemption. Instead, she writes her life from the standpoint of success, resilience, and cultural sophistication. Her account resists the reduction of her identity to either victimhood or deviance. As such, it becomes part of a counter-archive – a self-authored history that challenges dominant narratives about women performers in twentieth-century India.

In this light, *Song Sung True* must be read not only as personal testimony but also as cultural intervention. It belongs to a slowly emerging corpus of autobiographies – such as those of Baby Halder (2006) or Hansa Wadkar (2014) – where marginalised women use the tools of life writing to reconfigure public memory. Pukhraj's memoir is remarkable for the balance it strikes between discretion and disclosure, silence and song, making it a rich text for exploring the intersections of gender, performance, and historical selfhood.

It had been pointed out, that the very first mention of courtesans may be traced to *Arthashastra* in the 2nd century BC:

Ganikas, dasis, and actresses are to be taught singing, playing on instruments like the vina, pipe, and drum; reciting, dancing, acting, writing, painting, reading the thoughts of others, manufacturing scents and garlands, shampooing, and the art of attracting and captivating the mind of others (Burton 39-41).

The text i.e. *Arthashastra* proposes that the state bear the cost of this education and directly employ the recipients; in effect, the ganika of the *Arthashastra* is to turn over her earnings to the state and to receive besides the trappings of a glamorous lifestyle, a monthly salary from the king's treasury. Courtesan figures are available in abundance in South Asian culture, popular and otherwise, making it well nigh impossible to summarise all the various texts and contexts they are represented in, from the Mughal courtesan tale to cult Bombay films from the 1970s and 1980s, from colonial records to *rekhti* - Urdu poetry written by men in women's voices.¹

Yet, most representations of courtesans are not by courtesans themselves. Some, such as the Urdu novel *Umrao Jaan Ada* by the poet and writer Mirza Muhammed Hadi Ruswa, cleverly disguise themselves as being an insider's account. But the fact remains that there are very few texts that directly amplify the voices of courtesans. It becomes necessary then to separate this representation or stories featuring courtesans, from courtesan's own voices. One of the problems with these accounts is that they can be uni-dimensional in their approach. This is why, for instance, as Katherine Butler Schofield points out, the Mughal-courtesan tale betrayed a deeply ingrained fear about the supposed role of the courtesans in the 'downfall of noblemen', should they become overly attached to her, and to the performance of music and poetry (Schofield 157-165).

By contrast, Pukhraj's memoir offers a lived, embodied account of a courtesan's life – one that refuses to conform to the binary of victim or vixen. She does not seek redemption because she does not position herself as fallen. Her narrative is not one of descent but of ascent: from a young girl trained in music to a celebrated singer in Lahore and beyond. This reorientation of the courtesan's journey – from fall to rise-marks a radical shift in

narrative logic. Furthermore, Pukhraj's humour and irony stand in opposition to the solemn, melancholic tone that characterises most fictional courtesans. Her wit becomes a form of self-possession, asserting control over her story and complicating the reader's expectations of who a courtesan is and how she speaks.

From the nineteenth century onwards, female professional performers started to be demonised, first by British colonial authorities and then by elite nationalists. While reformers looked at them as oppressed women in need of rescue (Damsel in distress) and simultaneously as dangerous women, revivalists appropriated their arts repertoires from vocal-music genres such as ghazal and thumri, to dance practices such as *Sadirattam*, which was later sanitised and became Bharatanatyam.² Anna Morcom, in the introduction to her book *Courtesans, Bar Girls & Dancing Boys: The Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance*, claims:

a series of colonial policies and a nationwide purity campaign known as anti-nautch ('anti-dance') targeted devadasis and nautch girls from around the first part of the nineteenth century stigmatising them and ultimately excluding them from reformed performing arts (Morcom 8).

The imperatives of social reform and the zealous moral climate of British rule in the late nineteenth century in particular, focused intently on matters of female purity. There was also a growing intolerance to 'decadent' feudal practices amongst the increasingly prominent and numerous bourgeoisie, such as men keeping concubines. The dancing girls' ambiguous position as non-married women, who provided artistic entertainment to elite men and were their concubines, became increasingly seen as prostitution. This had far-reaching consequences. Colonial policies that sought to regulate prostitution such as the Contagious Diseases Act (1868) and the Cantonment Regulations (1864) were brought to bear on dancing girls, increasingly stigmatizing

them and shaping their identity as common prostitutes rather than performers.³

In what are known as the Anti-Nautch campaigns, colonial administrators and nationalists came together in their distaste for what they saw as feudal sexual mores. The discourse of social reform was used to stigmatise devadasis and *tawaifs*, their identity as skilled cultural practitioners subsumed by their perceived licentiousness. As a result of anti-nautch campaigns and the demise of the princely courts (which were finally abolished after independence), courtesans and nautch girls suffered both a massive loss of livelihood as well as intense stigmatization. While films such as 'Pakeezah' presents the unhappy courtesan as 'saved' through marriage, this was the truth for very few of them. True, some were able to make independent careers in the early film industry, or through publishing their poetry, or as recording artists, and a small number even continued in the transformed classical traditions of the twentieth century, though their backgrounds remained largely a matter of silence. However, a majority of hereditary female performers either continued as before, but lower down the cultural hierarchy, in what were increasingly illicit worlds of dance, invisible at the level of 'Indian culture'; or they went into transactional sex work, unable to gain a livelihood from dancing. Thus, these communities of hereditary female performers went from dance and music being a more or less compulsory livelihood determined by their birth, to being unable to dance, or struggling to dance. As for the devadasis, following the Madras Devadasis Act (1947) and enactment of laws in other states, they were actually legally forbidden to dance.

In a remarkable double move, the marginalisation of these women paved the way for upper caste/upper class women to enter the "reformed" performing arts (from which the earlier dynamic of transgressive sexuality was now carefully erased). If women

from *tawaif/devadāsi* backgrounds wished to perform in public they had to first attain respectability, by abandoning the *mujra*, moving out of the *kotha* and, ideally, marrying; thus converting themselves from ‘Bai’ into ‘Begum’, or ‘Devi’. From the early twentieth century the classical dance traditions were transformed into a form, suited to modern concert hall performance with audiences and performers from the bourgeoisie. Courtesans or devadasis, as such, had no place in these reformed traditions, despite their historical legacy. From the 1930s, as the traditional professional female performers had been marginalized, women from upper caste/upper class backgrounds started to pioneer dancing as a profession that did not conflict with bourgeois ‘respectability’.

In 1990, Veena Talwar Oldenburg published “Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow”. Before she conducted the interviews with tawaifs, Oldenburg found in colonial records, details about courtesans’ wealth and influence that surprised her. They appeared, surprisingly, in the civic tax ledgers of 1858-77, where they were classed under the occupational category of ‘dancing and singing girls’. It was even more remarkable that they were in the highest tax bracket. The courtesans’ names were also on the lists of property owners (houses, orchards, manufacturing and retail establishments for food and luxury items) subsequently confiscated by British officials for their proven involvement in the siege of Lucknow and the rebellion against British rule in 1857 (Oldenburg 259).

Over the course of the interviews, Oldenburg punctured many common assumptions made about *tawaifs* including the idea that their ‘recruitment practices are shady and unscrupulous’, that had become more entrenched thanks to the popularity of Mirza Hadi Ruswa’s famous novel, whose heroine was kidnapped and sold into a *kotha* - as a child. She finds that several had run away from

“the misery they endured in either their natal or their conjugal homes” (Oldenburg 259). She goes on to describe in detail what she characterises as their resistance to the patriarchy, in their pursuit of a lifestyle, not in conformity with male authority.

Saba Dewan’s book ‘Tawaifaina’, (Dewan 2019) is a chronicle of three generations of a *tawaif* family that also provides a sweeping history of gender and politics in India from the late-nineteenth century to the present day. ‘Tawaifnama’ trains its lens not on the much-discussed land of Awadh and its legendary capital Lucknow, but on an area defined in the popular imagination more by lewd songs and crime than by anything else. The neglected rural district of Shahabad in Bihar is the locale for some of the key characters and elements in Dewan’s book. Narrated in the form of the account of Dewan’s unnamed friend, the grand tale begins with the travails of Dharmman Bibi, the lover of the famed Rajput landlord of Jagdishpur, Kunwar Singh. Trained in the musical arts, Dharmman gives birth to twins whom she must leave in the shelter of her sisters, so she can join her beloved in the battle against the East India Company.

Along with the cultural context of the era, Dewan’s storytelling skilfully portrays the musical traditions of Hindustani classical music, of which the *tawaifs* were traditional custodians. Received from the best masters and *sarangi* players, the rigorous training of a courtesan ensured - as the book points out that the very first gramophone artists and radio singers of the age belonged to *tawaif* backgrounds. Singers, dear to admirers of ghazal and thumri, appear as lifelike yet historical characters throughout the journey of the book, Begum Akhtar and Rasoolan Bai being just two of the many mentioned. Unlike some other feminist scholarship, activism and art around the subject, the book also refuses to characterise *tawaifs* as what Dewan calls ‘postergirls for feminism’. Nor does it gloss over the sexual exploitation of

women of courtesan lineage, instead providing a complex portrait of communities of women who navigated their profession, as well as the adverse situations it sometimes placed them in, to the best of their ability. It shows not only the persecution and targetting of courtesans, but also their collective resilience and the constant negotiations they have to make with notions of ‘respectability’ and the erasure of their cultural legacy.

There are other scholars and writers who have worked on various aspects of courtesan histories, who must be mentioned. Ruth Vanita, author of *Dancing with the Nation: Courtesans in Bombay Cinema* has discussed courtesans’ representation in film; Daves Soneji, author of *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory and Modernity in South India* has traced their histories from the nineteenth century to today. Vanita, through her analysis of 235 films illustrates how the representations of courtesans in cinema had evolved over time; from romantic heroines to vamps and finally to item number entertainers. She also challenges the notion that courtesans were exclusively Muslims, instead emphasizing the hybrid nature of their culture blending elements from Hindu and Islamic traditions (Vanita 13-14). Soneji’s work has compellingly shown that communities of disenfranchised devadasis in South India value dance and their traditional skills and knowledge extremely highly, to the extent that they perform amongst themselves, behind closed doors. For them, dance and music are not just valued as art, but as a way of remembering their former lives as well-regarded performers and the earlier prestige of their community. Women of courtesan communities also expressed sadness for their lost social and cultural status (Soneji 187-188).

In this context, Malka’s memoir is not only rare, but groundbreaking. Here is a courtesan performer writing in the late 1990s, about herself and a time in South Asian history that

sees the breakdown of life in feudal India under princely states and the dismantling of colonialism. Making a comparison with her contemporary Begum Akhtar, Saleem Kidwai pointed out some significant points of commonality: both were known for their rendering of the ghazal, both their careers were managed by formidable mothers; and both eventually married supposedly respectable men, crafting identities for themselves as legendary musicians (Kidwai). There is only one other significant example of a similar work by a woman performer, having somewhat similar background: the 19th century Calcutta stage actress Binodini Dasi who got her autobiography *Amar Katha* published in 1913. As a social and political history, it not only tells us how a female professional performer of her time might have lived and worked, it also bears witness to a significant history of the subcontinent. As a courtesan narrative, it accords a special place of privilege to the application to learning and the development of artistic skill and ability – all of which are extremely important for the upward social mobility and career of a courtesan performer. It provides us with a new way to look at courtesan lives that goes beyond morality tales or narratives of a woman in need of rescue and sympathy; by giving us the story of a highly skilled woman who took pride in her art, earned her own money, and made a name for herself.

While *Song Sung True* is first and foremost a memoir, it is also an act of historical self-fashioning. In narrating her own story, Pukhraj simultaneously curates a memory of an entire cultural world – its music, its language, its aesthetics, and its decline. This dual register – personal and collective – places her work within a broader historiography of performance traditions in South Asia. In this context, comparisons with other self-representational texts become productive. For instance, the reconstructed history of Gauhar Jaan, one of the earliest Indian women to record on gramophone, remains mediated through biographers and

archives. Malka Pukhraj, by contrast, speaks in her own voice, however shaped by editorial and translational frames. Similarly, the autobiography of Hansa Wadkar (Sangtye Aika), adapted into Shyam Benegal's film 'Bhumika' (released in 1977), presents a performer grappling with questions of exploitation, love, and agency. Yet Pukhraj's account differs in its composure; it lacks the confessional agony that often characterises narratives by women performers. This absence is telling, pointing to the multiplicity of ways in which courtesans experienced and narrated their lives.

Malka's memoir moves forward chronologically, with great candour. She shares many personal details openly in this chronicle of her life, including the fact that her father was a gambler, that she was addicted to smoking *hookahs* at the age of four and that her mother disliked her father intensely; and only reconciled with him in order to fund Malka's education in literature and the performing arts, because she wanted Malka to 'become famous'. She recalls her education, first in Urdu and Persian, which she was taught by a distant relative; then in music, by Ali Baksh, the father of the legendary vocalist Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. The pedigree of her teachers is a confirmation of the fact that many *tawaifs* learned from the most established musical exponents of their time. But she had also lamented that, there was none of her age with whom she could play or have any fun during her gruelling dance exercise.

These skills became her gateway, at a very young age to a career as a singer at Hari Singh's court. Malka also provides a tender, emotional portrait of Maharaja Hari Singh, a man who was paternal and kind towards her. Unlike his predecessor, Maharaja Pratap Singh, who would not look at a Muslim until he had eaten breakfast; Hari Singh was described as a man who was just and fair to people of all faith. As one of the few women in Hari Singh's *darbar*, and as a Muslim courtesan singer, Malka

not only had to contend with court intrigue, but also false and slanderous accusations that she had an unhealthy influence on the Maharaja, or even that she was plotting to kill him. Writing against the deliberate myth-making about courtesan lives, she makes it clear that while performers did sometimes have relationships and even marriages, with royalty and noblemen, her own relationship with Hari Singh was one of affection. He appears to have been protective towards her, being moved by her music and berating courtiers if they are harsh with her. The portrait that emerges of him seen solely through her eyes is that of a complex, generous man; who loved to hunt but forbade the hunting of female animals, who loved to cook, who is surrounded by courtiers but has no interest in his second wife.

One of the most notable features of the memoir is its almost complete absence of any overt discussion of stigma. Despite being a woman associated with the world of courtesans – historically viewed with suspicion and contempt in both colonial and nationalist discourse – Pukhraj refrains from any prolonged engagement with the moral disapproval often attached to her profession. At first glance, this may seem like an omission. But upon closer reading, it becomes evident that this silence is a strategy an act of reclaiming narrative control. Rather than defend or justify her life, Pukhraj constructs an account rooted in dignity, artistry, and humour.

This is where Veena Talwar Oldenburg's concept of "lifestyle as resistance" (Oldenburg) becomes instructive. In her widely cited essay on the courtesans of Lucknow, Oldenburg argued that the very manner in which these women lived their luxurious homes, education, independence, and aesthetic sensibilities – functioned as a form of resistance against both colonial and patriarchal attempts to domesticate or erase them. Pukhraj's memoir partakes in a similar resistance. By narrating her musical journey, her early

acclaim, and the cultural worlds she inhabited, she displaces the stigma of “tawaif” with the prestige of “ustani” (Female Version of *Ustaad* or Master Artist). Moreover, the affective tenor of the memoir reveals a refusal to dwell in victimhood. There is pride in her training, affection for her patrons and audience, and even moments of mischief and irreverence. This is a far cry from the tragic overtones often associated with courtesan figures in literature and cinema. In this sense, her voice emerges not only as self-affirming but also as destabilising of normative representations.

Her description of her life as a performer in Lahore, after leaving Hari Singh’s employ, is equally illuminating. She was able to quickly establish herself as a leading performer in the city, someone who is highly sought after for *mehfils* because of her skills not only with vocal music, but also dance and expressive gestures that accompany the traditional tawaif repertoire of thumri and ghazal singing. She spoke with unconcealed pride and a bit of arrogance: “When the other singing ladies from Lahore, including the best known ones, found out that I was to sing at the same function as them, they would plead bad health and withdraw”. This idea of competition between leading courtesan performers is a common feature of courtesan narratives and finds echoes in other such stories, as the rivalry between Siddheshwari Devi and Begum Akhtar. In Lahore, Malka began to receive attention from a variety of suitors, some of whom amused her, while some interested her. Anyone displaying any serious interest was severely discouraged by her mother – an attitude that made sense not just in the context of parental protectiveness; but the socio-economic reality of courtesan households, which were matrilineal and in which successful performing women brought in regular income. However, as Kidwai points out in his ‘Seminar’ article, Malka rebelled against this parental control and sought out male

company when she desired. “Her virtue had first been guarded by a protective Maharaja and then by a determined mother”. he writes, “And it was against this control that she rebelled, first in her fantasies and then in real life. By breaking free when she was ready, she remade life, both as a woman and as an artiste” (Kidwai). It was during these years that she met the man she eventually married in 1944: Syed Hussain Shah. Theirs was a protracted courtship in which he waited for her for many years. Given her status as a performing woman marriage would have been a major decision to make, considering the kind of adverse impact a husband could potentially have on an otherwise thriving career. Ultimately, though Shah was not the man she had imagined in her fantasies about passionate love, she grew tired of having her life surveilled and controlled by her mother and of the risks of having to deal with unpredictable patrons. Her engagement with music did not end with her marriage. Shah was also interested in music and poetry, and she describes evenings they spend in the company of poets such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Sufi Tabassum. In fact, with this partnership, which lasted 36 years until his death, she had the opportunity to explore performance venues that her mother was set against, such as Bombay films.

Although *Song Sung True* avoids overt discussions of shame or social exclusion, it is rich in emotional nuance. Pukhraj’s tone is often nostalgic, especially when recalling the syncretic cultural milieu of pre-Partition Punjab. But nostalgia here does not indicate passive longing; rather, it serves to critique the erosion of artistic traditions and the marginalisation of performers in the modern nation-state. In some moments, the memoir gestures albeit subtly towards a sense of loss, not only personal but civilisational. The displacement caused by Partition, the decline of princely courts, and the rise of bourgeois respectability politics all find indirect expression. These emotional registers align with what

cultural theorists call the “affective archive” (Cvetkovich 86) – memory work that preserves experiences not fully articulated but deeply felt. Gayatri Spivak’s insights on subaltern speech are also relevant here: the courtesan’s voice, shaped by historical silencing, may not speak in the idiom of protest but may instead use irony, anecdote, and silence as tools of subversion.

The later part of her memoirs describes a growing family. The couple had six children, and her musical career continued to thrive. She closes the book with Shah’s death and the unhappy betrayal of one of her sons. Her husband’s loss devastates her; and it is clear through the little she gives away, about her troubles with her son, that his behaviour is deeply painful for her. Despite the grief and bitterness of these chapters, Malka closes out her story with a complete dedication to art. She describes tending to plants and embroidering pictures on canvas, engaging in the latter to enough of a professional standard, that she exhibited them in Lahore and Islamabad. The grand old singing lady was, to the end, a creative tour de force, and her final offering to the world is this chronicle of her own passionately lived life, in the constant performance of her arts.

Writers and journalists often argue that the era of the *tawaif* and her *kotha* is ‘lost’ or ‘forgotten’. On the contrary, as *Tawaifnama* and other pathbreaking research by scholars working in the field has shown, communities of courtesans continue to exist and struggle to reclaim their cultural pasts across India; as traces and imprints of professional courtesans continue to be used extensively in film and literature. Together, these contrasting realities tell a story that is much more potent than just a half-forgotten or misunderstood relic of India’s deep past. Malka Pukhraj told her story, against all the odds. In doing so, she gave the world a gift, that needs to be urgently recognised and appreciated for what it is.

In conclusion, *Song Sung True* is not merely a recollection of an individual life; it is a counter-discursive act that unsettles entrenched stereotypes about courtesans in early twentieth-century India. Through narrative poise, strategic silence, and aesthetic pride, Malka Pukhraj reclaims the figure of the courtesan as an agent of culture rather than a symbol of moral decline. Her memoir invites us to reconsider the boundaries between respectability and art, between silence and voice, and between memory and history. By situating her voice within a rich archive of scholarship – including works by Saba Dewan, Anna Morcom, Devesh Soneji, and Veena Oldenburg – we are better able to appreciate the layered nature of her self-representation. And by contrasting her narrative with fictional and cinematic renderings, we understand the significance of hearing from the courtesan herself not as object, but as subject. As feminist life-writing scholarship reminds us, voice is never given; it is claimed. In *Song Sung True*, Malka Pukhraj claims hers with grace, wit, and an unwavering sense of her place in history.

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Notes:

1. *Rekhti* is a fascinating genre of Urdu poetry where the menfolk spoke in the guise of women, that offers insights into the cultural, social, and historical context of women's lives in pre-colonial and colonial India. *Rekhti* emerged in the 18th century in Lucknow, Awadh, India during the reign of the Nawabs. It was a time of cultural and literary flourishing, and *Rekhti* became a popular form of poetry among the male poets. *Rekhti* poetry explores themes of love, desire, romance, and relationships from a feminine perspective, and poets often used feminine language, idioms, and emotions to create a sense of authenticity. *Rekhti* poetry often critiques societal norms, gender roles, and the status of women in Indian society.

The genre's use of feminine voices and perspectives can be seen as a precursor to modern feminist literature and discourse.

15. The transformation of *Sadirattam* to Bharatanatyam involved significant changes, including the toning down or elimination of certain erotic and sensual elements. For instance *Sadirattam*'s emphasis on Shringar Rasa (erotic sentiment) was reduced, and the dance form was reinterpreted to focus more on spiritual and devotional (Bhakti) themes with a greater emphasis on Hindu mythology. Some of the lyrics and songs used in *Sadirattam* were considered explicit or suggestive, and these were often replaced with more sanitized or devotional content in Bharatanatyam. The costumes and adornments used in Bharatanatyam were also modified to be more modest and in line with the new emphasis on spirituality and tradition. These changes reflect the efforts of pioneers like Rukmini Devi Arundale to revive and reinterpret *Sadirattam* as a respectable and classical dance form, suitable for a wider audience.
16. The Contagious Diseases Act of 1868 and the Cantonment Regulations of 1864 were legislative enactments introduced by the British colonial government in India. These measures had a significant impact on courtesans and the sex trade. Their objectives may be stated as follows: (i) To control the spread of venereal diseases among British soldiers in India. (ii) Registration and regular medical examination of women suspected of prostitution in designated areas. (iii) Detention and treatment of infected women in lock hospitals.

These preventive activities severely restricted the autonomy and agency of courtesans, subjecting them to compulsory medical examinations and detention, reinforcing negative stereotypes and social exclusion. These legislative and administrative activities reflect the colonial government's attempts to exert control over the bodies and lives of courtesans, highlighting the complex and often fraught relationships between colonial power, sex work, and public health. For details see, Ballhatchet, Kenneth A. 1980. *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Is Victorian Speculative Fiction a flight from the real? An analysis beyond Fantasy, Supernatural and the Gothic

Aliya Halim

ABSTRACT: Victorian Gothic literature reflects the history and the various changes taking place in the English society. According to Davison (2009), the term “Gothic” is used to describe a particular type of architecture that is characterized as barbaric, obscure and excess. Later the term was applied to literature. It gained momentum in the eighteenth-century England and was used to build “up images of medievalism- of gloomy, labyrinthine castles replete with secret inquisitional chambers and long buried family secrets” and connoting “the Specters of Britain’s primitive, superstitious, corrupt and tyrannical Catholic past.”

Bowen (2008) talks of the sublime in Gothic literature that was meant to “shock [the reader] out of the limits of [their] everyday lives with the possibility of things beyond reason and explanations.” However, this sublime in Gothic literature is metaphorical because there are transgressions in it. It challenges the boundaries of personal and national identity. The contemporary social concerns are explored through the complex nature of human psyche. The setting, the castle, the uncanny, the supernaturalism, death, fear, dreams and nightmares has a deep social meaning that exhibit “anxieties about racial and social degeneration” prevalent in the Victorian society.

This article examines Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* that demonstrate the Gothic representations in Victorian speculative fiction. These gothic novels scrutinize and critique different social and cultural structures present in the then Victorian society. They question the legitimacy of power vested in aristocratic males and the church. Identity also becomes interrelated to the political and social concerns.

KEYWORDS: *Victorian Gothic, Speculative Fiction, Fantasy, Real, Supernatural, Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the dominant areas of the Victorian speculative fiction is Fantasy, Supernatural and the Gothic. During the Victorian period the idea of "Gothic darkness" was associated with a sense of terror, fear and anxieties about religious obscurantism. This was because of the two great upheavals taking place in European history – the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. The impact of these two events on Victorian England was the creation of the working class and the rise of the French power which symbolized foreignness and all that was terrible, wild and irrational. Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History* (1837) and Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (1969) are eminent works that highlight the influence of the two revolutions on British thought and politics and the socio-economic transformations that took place as a consequence. This in turn affects the themes and tone of Victorian speculative fiction which reflects the anxieties about the degradation of human life and the natural world. Therefore, the idea of the gothic in

Victorian literature is both a reflection on and a reaction to all these historical anxieties.

The Victorian speculative fiction features creatures and beings that embody the societal fears and the consequences of British imperialism. These figures can be seen as representations of the unknown, foreign, or the unchecked scientific progress. It explores the dual nature of human beings reflecting Victorian concerns about identity, morality and the blurred lines between good and evil. This genre is characterized by its emphasis on the supernatural, the mysterious and the grotesque reflecting the darker aspects of Victorian culture and society.

Fred Botting (2014:1-6) comments that the gothic signifies “the writing of excess.” It is that which transgresses “the bounds of reality and possibility.” This paper scrutinizes some significant texts that challenge this viewpoint and show that the gothic representations in Victorian speculative fiction are not essentially subversive and their disorders and transgressions serve to explore the highly constructed order of “national reality” underlying these texts. The gothic novels analyzed in this essay examine and critique different social and cultural structures present in society. They question the legitimacy of power vested in aristocratic males and the church. Identity becomes interrelated to the political and social concerns. The late eighteenth century underwent a transition from the old feudal order to a modern capitalist economy and so identity formation and identity crisis became symbolic of the national crisis that took place because of the French Revolution.

The first text that is analyzed is Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) which explores the tension between the conflicting ideas and feelings in such a way that it does not become a gothic novel in the conventional sense of the term. The plot is complex and falls into three sections that work out the theme of thwarted passion, revenge and final reconciliation between the

two generations of a family. The presence of gothic elements in the story needs an exploration of three factors – the narrative role of Nelly Dean, the passions shared between Heathcliff and first-generation Catherine and the presence of ghosts. Nelly symbolizes and represents domestic order and rationality. She upholds the bourgeois family virtues and tries to establish a norm that excludes those who threaten the notion of domestic harmony. This explains the fact that a gothic narrative such as *Wuthering Heights* conceals an un-accommodated language of rebellion. This is seen in the character portrayal of Heathcliff as a vampire, a “daemonic figure” who is described by Nelly as “an evil beast” and “a goblin.” She regards him as an outsider and also emphasizes his otherness. This shows her inability to understand the relationship that is shared between Heathcliff and Catherine.

Both Heathcliff and Catherine are rebels. Heathcliff’s character presents a gothic ambivalence as he functions both as a bourgeois and an anti-bourgeois figure. After Catherine’s death, Heathcliff becomes malicious which indicates the viciousness of a materialistic society. The contradiction lies in the difference between the characters of Heathcliff and Nelly. Heathcliff turns into a monstrous figure and represents the cruelty of an economic system which contrasts the bourgeois world that Nelly supports. Hence, he has no fixed place within its biological and economic system.

The story examines the tensions between order and disorder which is dominant to the gothic tradition. The novel concludes with the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine haunting the moor signifying a culture’s inability to accept them. The occurrence of supernaturalism underlines the limitations of modern class prejudices and the conventional morality that is used as a tool of oppression. They become timeless spirits who act as a constant reminder of the limitations and drawbacks of the bourgeois culture

of the high Victorian society.

Rena-Dozier (2010: 757-775) explores the gothic elements in the novel and its significance in the context of nineteenth-century literary history. She argues that *Wuthering Heights* is a quintessential gothic novel that challenges traditional notions of love, family and social class. She identifies gothic elements such as the atmospheric setting, complex characters and the themes of love, revenge and morality which contribute to the novel's dark and introspective tone. Dozier applies psychoanalytic criticism to the novel, exploring the character's motivations and emotions that reveal the complex psychological dynamics at play.

Wuthering Heights questions issues on class, gender and money which are pertinent factors that cropped up with the growth and development of the mid-nineteenth century industrial society in Britain. It pictures the impossible reconciliation between agricultural life and capitalism. The story is realistic in setting and visionary in theme as it challenges the materialistic, class-ridden structure of the society of 1847. The narrative also stresses on the need of understanding the role of identity which is essential in realizing the social change. This becomes an issue which is taken up by Charlotte Bronte in her novel *Jane Eyre* which is discussed in the next part of this article.

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) deals with the issues of identity, race, class and gender which play a vital role in the novel. It reflects the socio-economic conditions of the time. The text is characterized by an unusual intensity, constantly moving from Jane's progress in life to the inner pilgrimage of her spiritual life and both meeting in the final union with Rochester. Louis James in his book *The Victorian Novel* (2006:160) comments that, "uniting the actual domestic life and trials of a governess with the Byronic figure of Rochester and the mysteries of Thornfield Hall, the novel was the first work of fiction to use Gothic conventions

to give imaginative expression to the emotional needs of a ‘real’ woman.” Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976:90) commented that, *Jane Eyre* became a seminal work in the development of what she called the “Feminine Gothic” which created a basis for the Sensation Novel of the 1860s.

The character of Rochester’s “mad” wife Bertha Mason who is brought back from Jamaica and is kept locked up in the attic is clearly a gothic figure in the story. She represents the repressed identity of women in the middle-class Victorian household. Her identity is also taken to represent the rejection of the racial “other” who is considered as inferior, immoral, savage and uncivilized within the imperial system. She becomes the external embodiment in the narrative that Rochester and Jane hold within them. Thus, the novel’s use of the gothic is far deeper. The text brings out Jane’s struggle for social and economic visibility. Instead of becoming a slave to Rochester, Jane insists on becoming a missionary and preaching liberty to women enslaved in harems. Jane’s fear of oppression is given voice through the language of enslavement. Gambring (2013: 1-11) argues that the gothic elements in the novel are not merely decorative but rather serve to illuminate the protagonist’s experiences and emotions as well as provide a social commentary. It allows for an exploration of Jane’s emotions, desires and fears and Mr. Rochester’s complex and often contradictory nature.

Jane Eyre exhibits the cruel hierarchical class system present in Victorian England. Through the character portrayal of Jane, the novel portrays the cracks in this system. Jane’s ambiguous class status becomes apparent from the opening chapter itself. A poor orphan living with relatives where she feels alienated from the rest of the family. Jane’s dearth of money leaves her at the mercy of the Reed’s for her sustenance. Jane’s secret reading of Bewick’s *History of British Birds* on a window seat and drawing up the

curtain for privacy is her response to the hostile environment that she experiences in the Reed family. It is an attempt on her part to escape the oppressive atmosphere of the house. Even the book that she reads reflects her sense of isolation and unhappiness. Bewick's book is full of gothic illustrations like demons dancing, skeletons and mysterious happenings which show that Jane's imagination is constructed by the gothic and she will later link Bertha with vampirism. Bewick's book contains tales of horror which fascinates Jane and this too reflects her position within the Reed household.

The novel also explores cultural ownership which is based on class and gender factors. The scene in which John Reed takes the book from Jane and throws it hard at her claiming, "I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves for they are mine" (Chapter I, 9) once again shows Jane's position in the Reed house leading her to become a governess later on in the story. The injustice done and her isolation are further developed when Jane is locked up in the red-room after she attacks Reed. She is dragged away to the red-room resisting her captors like a "rebel-slave." This emphasizes the kind of tyranny she undergoes because of her class status and the corruption and oppression of the upper classes. This is the point where Jane and Bertha become parallel figures. They both experience isolation and are both locked up. Bertha represents a world of rebellion and sexual freedom becoming the other, described as "thick and dark hair", "savage face", "the black eyebrows" and "bloodshot eyes." She is associated with racial otherness, insanity and sexual promiscuity. She represents that which the culture is unwilling to accept and therefore is forced to demonize. Jane too remains an outsider recalling "I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there" and was looked upon as "a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing" (Chapter II, 13).

The novel also interrogates the role and position of governesses in Victorian England. The society cruelly maintained the boundaries between the governesses and the upper-class families by barring marriages between the two groups and trying to desexualize governesses who were often blamed of carrying a dangerous sexuality into the family. They were thought to introduce a kind of moral impurity into the household. This is the situation of Diana and Mary Rivers the well-educated daughters of upper-class parents. Having fallen on hard times they are treated with less regard as the family cook by their employers. Even Jane, before she becomes Rochester's wife has to demonstrate her suitability based on class. This presents the ambiguities of the class system that was widespread at that time.

The novel employs images of race to bring out and develop the tensions between irrationality and rationality that is moral, sexual and cultural. The character of Bertha projects the dangers of female confinement within marriage. Jane approves of her secondary position in comparison to Rochester whom she refers to as "master" and believing that "wealth, caste and custom" separate both of them. Jane becomes anxious when Rochester presents her with new clothes which appeared to her having "a most ghostly shimmer" (Chapter XXV, 240). She becomes aware that her identity will become compromised and she too will become insubstantial and ghost-like. This also reveals the psychological tensions in Jane's mind.

In *Jane Eyre* both dreams and visions along with reason have a validity that provides an access to the inner occurrences of both Jane's and Rochester's psyche. Throughout the story Jane is portrayed as a "fairy" and she describes herself as "a tiny phantom, half fairy and half imp." Her dreams have a prophetic character suggesting her supernatural ability to predict her future with Rochester. Here is witnessed a mixing of realism and fantasy

in the novel.

Both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* provide an avenue for engagement with another strange world conceived of as a reservoir of intensity and irrationality with a kind of foreignness and the binary opposition between domestic and foreign. The inner life and foreignness provide an opening on to history, in this case the European nationalist revolutions of 1848.

The gothic form from 1790 onwards showed a growing concern with the internalization of evil which acquires a close proximity to the self. This takes the form of the double or the divided consciousness. These inner narratives can be explained both psychologically and socially as in the following novels discussed below. For Freud, the double suggests that the self is haunted by the repressed feelings which threaten to disrupt the commonplace notions of everyday reality. The demonization of the particular types of behaviour also made visible the political views of a text. The 1790s was a period in which the fears of and enthusiasm for revolutionary ideas influenced the British gothic. Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) questions the ownership of self. The confusion of typical gothic roles refers to the anxieties concerning possible moral, social and psychological degeneration of the time. The plot focuses on fears raised by the evolutionary theory and questions whether humans have evolved from the savagery of apes and if the cultured Jekyll can return to become the "ape-like" Hyde.

The story opens with a detail of the weekly Sunday-walk taken by Utterson and Enfield. Utterson by profession is a lawyer and belongs to the respectable bourgeois society. A closer look reveals the presence of the gothic mood. Both Utterson and Enfield "looked singularly dull." On their Sunday walks "they said nothing" and only had an appearance of a friend. The opening thus shows a meaningless attachment to the middle-class rituals

symbolizing the emptiness without any experience of pleasure. It is out of this emptiness and vacuum that a character like Hyde is created. There is a particular vitality which is absent in the other characters and thus Hyde becomes the double. Jekyll's first-person narrative becomes a third-person narrative voice, "Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde" (125). Later on, the view that "Jekyll was now my city of refuge" suggests that Hyde is narrating. The sentence, "I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end" (396) claims that it is ambivalent, in the sense that we as readers cannot be sure if Jekyll has killed Hyde or vice-versa.

The novel however does not lose sight of the social conflict that Jekyll and Hyde represent. Jekyll and Hyde symbolize different social classes and hence dramatize the social tensions that characterized Victorian England at that time. Stevenson anticipates Freud who suggests that in fiction the feelings of uncanny can be produced only within the context of the "real." This formulation by Freud permits us to see that the gothic form almost evolves from within realism itself. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a good example of a gothic work whose episodes of uncanny emerges from "the world of common reality." The sense of uncanny experienced by Utterson and Poole is seen in the scene when they notice the cheval glass kept near the tea table which is an object that is out of place and signify the "secret and hidden" truths about Jekyll which is now revealed. The mirror becomes the key to the story as Jekyll uses it to monitor his transformations into Hyde. The mirror image is similarly present in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in the episode of the red-room when Jane looks into the mirror and sees a stranger dressed up for a wedding. The mirror helps to create a sense of nightmarish distortion and is a popular gothic device. The door motif becomes increasingly significant as a barrier not only between Jekyll's public and private life but also

between the two modes of existence.

Edward Hyde becomes the bodily form of the Victorian psychology. Jekyll feels an intimate bond with him and so comments on Hyde that he is “closer than a wife, closer than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born” (370) but who is also thoroughly alien. Jekyll had no need to create his monster – the monster was within him. Hyde is not only the fragmented psyche but he also symbolizes the disturbing truth about human beings’ capability of sudden and gradual transformations. Hyde’s physical appearance evokes the picture of a malignant being belonging to the traditional folklore and fairytale. The character of Hyde, his profession, his nationality, his class status and race and the nature of his crimes remain unspecified and cannot be interpreted by any other characters in the story.

The novel explores the mutability of human identity under the deforming pressures of modernity. It dramatizes and brings out the effects of those pressures. It is this recognition that both “evil and good run strong” in him that motivates Jekyll’s efforts to give each its proper sphere. Jekyll is radically both. He becomes a modern figure in his belief that the innate impulses towards evil cannot be eradicated nor can they be repressed for long. This allows Stevenson to portray a damning picture of the Victorian society in England characterized by repression and hypocrisy. The story draws the picture of men for whom respectability acts as a mask to cover their illicit shameful desires. Jekyll’s flight from hypocrisy leads him to another form of hypocrisy. This dualism and duplicity remain closely aligned in the narrative structure. The novel’s indeterminacy, darkness and pessimism lie in the late Victorian society’s uncertainty about the grounds of ethics in “an age of transition.”

The next text examined in this article is Oscar Wilde’s *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) which is a deeper and a more thoughtful novel than its critics have judged it to be. The story is partly supernatural, in which the characters are not individuals but symbols that move in a shadowy world of wit and terror. Dark desires and forbidden pleasures are at its center. The novel is chiefly a study in the development of Victorian human nature and the main characters are meant to be personifications of the psychological states. The story traces Dorian's development over the span of approximately eighteen years and delves into the dark caverns of his soul. Dorian looks within himself and discovers the presence of not only purity but also evil and corruption. He yields up to the corrupt impulse within him and tries to find joy and beauty in evil. Finally, the vision of evil becomes unbearable to him and he finds himself trapped in a dark underworld from which he cannot escape.

Dorian, as soon as he becomes aware of the evil within himself, sells his soul in a fit of rebellion against the laws of God and nature. This symbolically means that Dorian cannot and never will be able to resist the evil within him. His passion for sin will become the governing factor in his life. He says, "I would give my soul" for the privilege of being young for the rest of his life. He wants to gain absolutism in this way. Later on, when he tries to get back and lead a normal life again, he fails and finally receives his punishment.

Dorian's nature is gray that is good and evil are intertwined in a mortal combat within him. He takes pleasure in recognition and celebration of evil within his soul. This leads him to murder Basil because of an overpowering desire for sin and an insane wish to destroy the man who is praying and asking him to pray too. The murder is an illustration to display how Dorian throttles the voice of goodness in him forever. The murder of Basil is a decisive moment for Dorian. Towards the end, the sight of so much evil

becomes unbearable for him and he finds himself incapable to derive any pleasure from his new sins. Having given himself up to evil he ultimately understands and realizes to his horror that he can no longer derive any enjoyment out of it and the dive into the demon universe has become an irreversible process. He becomes imprisoned into the demonic underworld and has only one way to escape it that is through death. When Dorian sticks the blade into his “monstrous soul” he kills himself, which is his only way out.

There is a supernatural element present in the story when Dorian’s demonic prayer is granted. The devil to whom Dorian sells his soul is Lord Henry Wotton who not only exists externally but also as a voice within Dorian. Wotton’s demonic sermon destroys Dorian’s state of innocence and forces him to plunge into the state of experience. Wotton’s paradoxes were only a means to an end. They were the evil brush he used to refashion Dorian in the light of his own soul. He is a wicked and a malicious man who uses his wisdom to seduce and spoil Dorian with his immoral opinions. He gives Dorian the poisonous yellow book which totally fascinates and influences him badly turning him into a murderer. The picture ages and changes while Dorian himself does not. In the end when Dorian dies and his dead body is old and wrinkled the picture recovers its old state magically.

The last novel analyzed in this context is Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) which represents the fin-de-siecle literature that explored the darkest recesses of the then Victorian society and the often-disturbing private desires that lurked behind acceptable public faces. The text addresses issues of representation of gender, race, class, sexuality, degeneration, doubling and nation during the Victorian period.

Franco Moretti citing from *Signs Taken for Wonders* (1817) written by Homi K. Bhabha reads vampirism as a conceit for the workings of the capitalist system. The Count Dracula has

associations with capitalism. In this novel, money symbolizes different ways of exploring class tensions. The Count's physical appearance looks like that of the "archetypical" criminal – "the mouth... under the heavy moustache was fixed and rather cruel looking with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years." The Count, because he is a criminal type, is beyond any redemption. The story's depiction of the horrors of degeneration is not without ambivalence (Smith 110).

Dracula develops this anxiety through the character of the socially well-to-do young solicitor Jonathan Harker who needs to become a man of action. The novel suggests his adherence to middle-class norms that is implied through Harker's profession and his desire for domestic security by marrying Mina who represents the "new woman" full of ingenuity and enterprise. This generates the grounds under which degeneration could occur because paradoxically it appears that it is these very social values which the Count threatens. This refers to one of the essential ironies present in the story that in order to become more "manly" the vampire hunters need to ape the attributes of the war-like Count because the Count possesses the sort of manliness that they need to emulate in order to defeat him. This becomes an irresolvable ambivalence in the novel. This should be seen as a consequence of the specific historical tensions when such "deviant" behaviour was read as indicating the signs of degeneracy.

In *Dracula* the idea of middle-class degeneracy can be overcome by aping the criminal degeneracy which suggests the presence of a mode of doubling which Freud saw as a key element of the uncanny. For Freud, uncanny is characterized by a return of the dead and so the full and complete title of Bram Stoker's novel is *Dracula* or *The Dead Undead*. This explains the anxiety that the dead are not truly dead but they are merely the demonic

and degenerate versions of our selves. The clearest representation of doubling exists between the Count and the Dutch doctor and polymath Abraham Van Helsing. The Count's foreignness aligns him with Van Helsing. The description of the Count by Van Helsing implies that Dracula is intellectually like an early version of himself. This covert doubling between the Count and Van Helsing softens the differences between the vampire hunters and the vampires.

The blood transfusions of Lucy take on an erotic quality because they refer to the ownership of Lucy's body. It also pertains to and represents hysteria and fear. This constitutes an attempt to contain "abnormal" behaviour within recognizable images of "otherness." One of the major themes in this novel is colonialism in terms of class and national significance. Blood that is donated by Holmwood, Seward, Van Helsing and Morris traces a hierarchy of aristocratic, bourgeois, European and American blood that illustrates how central the revitalization of a threatened Britishness is to the story. This colonial presence is ambivalent and is split between its appearance as original and authoritative which betrays these foundations of authority and empowers the colonized subject with a mode of resistance against colonial oppression. This degeneration suggests national decline which had a specific resonance in Britain. The Count's imperial ambitions reflect Britain's imperialistic endeavour which mirrors a kind of monstrosity. The banishment, pursuit and killing of the Count therefore serve to make visible the forms of violence that were inherent in British colonialism. It also turns the vampire hunters into degenerated violent colonizers. *Dracula* then becomes an impossibility that exists only by battenning upon the real.

Stoker's *Dracula* created a modern myth that could embody the fears of its era. *Dracula* is crowded with people, past histories and new inventions. Citing Karl Marx, Moretti (67-85) sees the

story as a parable of capitalism, as “dead labor which vampire-like lives only by sucking living labor.” It reflects England’s vulnerability in a world she no longer dominated. Brantlinger (30-43) argues that gothic literature played a significant role in shaping science fiction. He contends that the gothic tradition’s emphasis on the irrational, the unknown and the terrifying laid the groundwork for the development of science fiction. He remarks that the gothic’s focus on fear, anxiety and the unknown helped to create a sense of unease and uncertainty which is characteristic of science fiction. He offers a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between gothic literature, science fiction and the cultural context in which they emerged.

In the five novels that are analyzed in this article, the unreal textual world of haunted sinister castles, ruined abbeys, convents, graveyards, gloomy hallways and secret chambers with lonely windswept landscapes, ineffable horrors, murder, incest, vice, monstrous dukes and viscounts, malevolent aristocrats and mysterious happenings convey the all too real painful modern extra-textual world of oppression and irrationality. The novels portray a society that is divided by race, class and gender. They draw a realistic picture of the nineteenth century Victorian England with growing poverty and restless population of the poor, increasingly crowded cities with labyrinthine passageways, hidden by-lanes and nightmarish pockets of squalor which are the ill-effects of the industrial capitalism. Thus, fantasy, supernatural and the gothic characterizing these Victorian novels were not realistic for the Victorians but they portrayed the fears and anxieties present in the Victorian society relating to class issues, nationalism, racial purity, empire, the evolutionary boundaries between humans and beasts that had real implications and reflected the tensions of an era of moral uncertainty.

The selected texts discussed in this paper bring out the binary

opposition between the domestic inner life and the foreign. This mode of existence of the Gothic genre is a paradox and continues right through till the end of the nineteenth century. It provides one of the ways to present in Victorian speculative fiction not only innovative characteristics of the social and political world but also what was considered as hitherto hidden or inaccessible realities — chiefly among them are psychological displacements, sexual deviance and scientific discoveries.

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‘Brotherhood Bonded Close’: An Ecocritical Perspective on Select Novels by Thomas Hardy

Daisy Majumdar

ABSTRACT: This paper seeks to explore ecocritical dimensions in select novels by Thomas Hardy, focusing on his deep engagement with the natural world and its intricate connections with human life. Thomas Hardy, a leading Victorian novelist in the late nineteenth-century, had a profound familiarity with nature due to his upbringing in rural Dorset, and this is vividly reflected in his novels. The study takes a look at six of Hardy’s most popular novels, and argues that nature in Hardy’s works is not merely a backdrop but an active force that shapes characters’ destinies, and mirrors their emotional and psychological states.

Through an ecocritical lens, the paper examines how Hardy’s novels challenge anthropocentrism by portraying the interconnectedness of humans and nature, highlighting how human culture both influences, and is influenced by, the physical world. It further analyses Hardy’s perspectives on the impact of technological advancements on the environment, particularly in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, where he critiques the potential for exploitation and environmental degradation, foreshadowing certain modern problems of the intrusion of technology. The paper concludes by noting Hardy’s advocacy for ‘loving-kindness’ towards nature, highlighting his belief in humanity’s responsibility to preserve the natural world for future generations.

KEYWORDS: *Thomas Hardy, ecocriticism, interconnectedness, nature, loving-kindness.*

INTRODUCTION

A foremost writer of nineteenth-century England, Thomas Hardy is remembered chiefly for his deeply tragic novels set amidst the lush natural world of Wessex, a fictional county based on his native Dorset, located in the southern part of England. Hardy was born in the village of Bockhampton in Dorset, and had spent his childhood and youth in the family cottage which was located at the edge of a heath. Hardy was a “nineteenth century countryman” (Millgate 32), travelling everywhere by foot, and becoming intimate with the minutest details of his native landscape. Millgate mentions how Hardy “possessed an extraordinary sensitivity to the sights, the smells, and especially the sounds of the countryside at every hour of the day or night” (Millgate 33). His life at Bockhampton was “still paced by the procession of the seasons, the succession of the generations, and the imperatives of the agricultural and the ecclesiastical calendars. Its markers were lambing time, haymaking, and harvest; the first cuckoo, the longest day, the last swallow; Easter, Whitsun, Christmas; births, marriages and deaths” (Millgate 39). His close relationship with nature and natural surroundings found its way organically into all of his novels: his nature descriptions are memorable, and the interaction of his primarily rural characters with their natural surroundings reflect those of their creator. In his work on Ecocritical Studies, S.R. Sanders states that “... in Hardy’s novels, this landscape is no mere scenery, no flimsy stage set, but rather the energizing medium from which human lives emerge and by which those lives are bounded and measured” (Sanders 183).

Ecocriticism, an “earth-centred approach to literary studies” (Glottfelty xviii), explores how literature engages with the natural

world. This term was first coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay, 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism', and it paved the way for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature that allows for the examination of authors' works in the context of nature and environmental issues. Grounded in the ecological principle that everything is interconnected, ecocriticism aims to study the idea of an interconnected human ecology. Glotfelty, in her work, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, saw ecocriticism as examining the intricate connections between culture and the environment, highlighting how human culture both influences, and is influenced by, the physical world. Though Thomas Hardy was writing in the nineteenth century, and the ecocritical approach was formulated almost a hundred years later, his extensive use of nature and natural descriptions in his works has prompted critics to re-examine his works through the lens of ecocriticism. Isabelle Gadoin notes:

With its emphasis on the natural landscapes of Wessex, and its many warnings about the dangers of the incipient mechanisation of agricultural labour, Hardy's work indeed seems to qualify as a perfect example of a nature-conscious type of writing, denouncing the ravages of the Anthropocene long before the notion was even thought of' (Gadoin).

With due respect to the differences in the environment and circumstances of existence between our time and Hardy's time, Gadoin raises the critical question: "How green was Hardy?" (Gadoin).

Modern critics have used ecocritical perspectives to re-read the works of Thomas Hardy. Notably, Kim Taplin, in her collection *Tongues in Trees* (1989), was one of the first to discuss Hardy's ecological themes, where she analyses *The Woodlanders* alongside works such as *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urb-*

Urbervilles, and *Jude the Obscure*. Ronald Morrison has extensively examined *The Mayor of Casterbridge* from an ecocritical standpoint across his numerous publications (1998, 2007, 2012, 2013), and he has even examined Hardy as an ecocritic in his own right. Jonathan Bate in *The Song of the Earth* (2000), draws our attention to the inherent conflict between traditional ways of life and modern advancements in *The Woodlanders*, while Laurence Buell in his seminal work *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) notes how Hardy’s Egdon Heath functions as a main “character” in the novel. Anna Burton (2021) uses an ecocritical lens to analyse the depiction of landscapes in *The Woodlanders* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* in her work *Trees in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2021). Recent critics have also widened the scope of ecocritical analysis of the works of Hardy. Nathalie Bantz-Gaszczak, in her study of ‘The Art of Analogy in Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* and Other Novels: Hardy’s Eco-Writing’ (2022) explores the profound connection between characters and their natural surroundings. Catherine Lanone’s contribution, ‘Of Furtive Hedgehogs and Steam Machines’ (2022), uses the image of the vulnerable hedgehog, (from Hardy’s poem, ‘Afterwards’), to represent a wider ecosystem of small animals threatened by invasive machinery and human carelessness. Fiona Fleming extends ecofeminist readings of Hardy’s novels by applying the concept of ‘Ecosexuality’ in her essay, ‘Thomas Hardy and Ecosexuality’ (2022), inspired by Elizabeth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle’s ‘Ecosex Manifesto’. Fleming contends that Hardy moves beyond the Romantic notion of Earth as a maternal figure, instead depicting it as a lover.

The scope of these readings of Hardy’s work stems from the uniqueness of his position as a writer in the rapidly changing world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born in 1840, when the rural landscape still relied on traditional agricul-

tural methods, customs and local rituals, Hardy died in 1928, at a time when the world was navigating two world wars, when aeroplanes and motor cars were running, and when rapid technological advancements were changing global perceptions. Hardy thus witnessed both the profound impact of nature on humanity and its culture, and conversely, the ways in which human culture could affect nature and traditional ways of life. This experience shaped his perspective in most of his major novels, especially those that he had categorised as ‘Novels of Character and Environment’.

In these novels, we notice how Hardy frames his characters with images of nature. In *The Woodlanders*, Giles Winterborne’s surname references ‘winter’, and hence, he is ‘Autumn’s very brother’ (*TW* 171), even as Grace (in her nervous despair) romanticises him alternately as a ‘fruit-god’ or a ‘wood-god’ (*TW* 230). The etymology of name ‘Venn’ (in its Germanic origins), refers to the topography of moors and marshes, and thus the itinerant Digory Venn’s name could be translated as ‘one who wanders in the marshes or moors’. One can hardly forget Gabriel Oak’s steady faithfulness to Bathsheba in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, much like the sturdy oak tree. In the same novel, Boldwood’s name suggests the steadiness of wood – but indicates the vulnerability of Boldwood through the idea of porosity inherently contained in wood. Michael Henchard, in his happier days as a journeyman, had dressed in “leggings yellow as marigolds, corduroys immaculate as new flax, and a neckerchief like a flower-garden” (*Mayor* 177). Among the women, Tess has a “mobile, peony mouth” (*Tess* 10), and she had “roses at her breasts; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim” (*Tess* 36). Eustacia’s hair descends on her forehead “like nightfall”, and her nerves are soothed when her hair is caught in the bristles of a native shrub of the heath (*Return* 63). Hardy tends to associate his female characters with pagan imagery, and the maypole dance, a traditional

rural celebration, perfectly illustrates this connection. This dance, involving a pole adorned with flowers and leaves, served as a gathering place for young rural lovers, thus deeply embedding nature within country life and culture. For instance, Tess and her companions are shown dancing around the maypole at the novel’s outset, while in *The Return of the Native*, the maypole symbolises a fresh start for Thomasin.

It is worth noting, however, that Nature descriptions transcend their function as mere setting, or as a means of enhancing the portrayal of characters. Nature, in Hardy’s vision, can act as a ‘character’ in the novel as noted by Laurence Buell: “In such rare cases as Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, we were given to understand that a nonhuman entity like Egdon Heath might be a book’s main “character” or agential force” (Buell 3). *The Return of the Native* begins with a description of Egdon Heath, modelled on the heath beside Hardy’s native cottage at Bockhampton. It is the stage where the drama of the lives of the protagonists is played out, from their romances to their deaths. To Clym, Thomasin and Diggory, children of the heath, Egdon is simply their home and their familiar ground. To Eustacia and Wildeve, town-bred outsiders, Egdon is the opposite: it is hateful and malevolent, and Eustacia intuitively understands that Egdon will cause her destruction – sadly, she does meet her end at a weir close to Egdon. Familiarity and harmony with nature, insists Hardy, is imperative for a character to live in peace: “To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings”, he states, “was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue” (*Return* 66-67); just as Eustacia did not understand the heath, and “only caught its vapours” (*Return* 68). The same could be said of Fitzpiers, in *The Woodlanders*. Fitzpiers is characterised as an outsider, who looks on as a spectator to the lives and activities of Hintock, but can never belong there. His presence is attractively mysterious, though he leaves

a trail of emotional devastation when he leaves Hintock to live with Mrs. Charmond. Hardy places Wildeve, Eustacia and Fitzpiers as decidedly 'urban' in contrast to the natives of Egdon and Hintock. In fact, when Hardy started writing *The Woodlanders*, he initially called it *Fitzpiers in Hintock*, and "the discarded title points towards a civilized Fitzpiers, clearly the outsider, treading on foreign, exotic, folkloric territory, and could almost be glossed as a condescending "Mr Fitzpiers and the Wessex rustics"', notes Peggy Blin-Cordon in her essay, 'An Ecocritical Reading of Hardy's *The Woodlanders*: Supernature and EcoGothic' (Blin-Cordon). Hardy's thought seems to foreshadow the idea that "The condition of the modern man, with his mobility and his displaced knowledge, is never to be able to share this sense of belonging. He will always be an outsider; his return to nature will always be partial, touristic, and semi-detached" (Bate 554).

Just as the beauty and harmony of nature are intrinsic to rural life, so are the storms, terrible weather, harsh landscapes, and crises resulting from the unpredictability of the weather. Hardy also uses nature, landscape and the cyclical nature of the seasons to mirror and drive the emotional and physical struggles of the characters. To Tess, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, her natural surroundings at the Valley of the Froom provide freshness, respite, and the hope for a new life, after she leaves her home for the second time. Here, nature images build an atmosphere of hope: Tess leaves her home on a "thyme-scented, bird-hatching morning of May" (*Tess* 89). The Valley of the river Froom is a "verdant plain", and "the Froom waters were as clear as the pure River of Life shown to the Evangelist" (*Tess* 90-91). Tess heard "a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note, there seemed to lurk a note of joy" (*Tess* 91). Yet, when Angel abandons her, and she is forced to find a new life for herself at Flintcomb Ash, not only does the landscape become inhospitable, the work that Tess must perform

to sustain herself becomes torturous. Catherine Lanone, in her essay, “Exploiting Body and Place in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*”, notes a sense of gendered oppression that Tess faces in Flintcomb Ash:

As if digging swedes in the frozen earth were not harsh enough, the fields are full of stones... Oppression appears in different guises. The women are forced to work outside in all temperatures, and to live in unhealthy abodes. Snow blows into Tess’s bedroom, through chinks in the wall. Wrapped in shapeless pinafores, the girls suffer in the fields, and Hardy literalizes the cliché, to be chilled to the bone: the cold “[chills] their eyeballs” (*Tess* 284) and affects “the surface of the body less than its core”, “penetrating to their skeletons” (*Tess* 284).

Hardy also uses Nature images as an index to the emotional and psychological upheavals in the lives of characters. When Grace Melbury – freshly returned to Hintock after a sophisticated education in the city – confuses ‘bitter-sweets’ (a type of apple) with John-apples, Giles is left wondering whether Grace had forgotten his love for her as she had the apples of her native land (*TW* 35). Bathsheba watches the approaching storm with horror in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and realises her husband’s indifference to the care of her farm and property. Gabriel’s timely intervention and efforts to save her corn ricks also elevates his importance in her life. As they stand together and watch the storm, it becomes a mirror of the storm within Bathsheba’s heart, confused between the love for her irresponsible husband and the dedication of Oak at a time of crisis – the man whose love she had once rejected. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, rain and storm act as a signifier of the impulsive Michael Henchard’s complete destruction: he gambles on the prediction of rain and buys up all the stock, only to encounter fair weather: and he is forced to sell all his stock at the lowest price, ensuring his complete financial

ruin, leading to his eventual tragedy in the novel. Loss is far deeper for the Yeobright family in *The Return of the Native*: in her final, desperate bid to escape her failed marriage and the heath, Eustacia leaves home and seeks the help of Wildeve to travel to Budmouth. On the night of her escape, the weather turns ominous and she realises, finally, that she cannot escape amidst the storm and rain: “Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without” (*Return* 358). Eustacia finally dies in the weir, and Wildeve dies in his attempt to rescue her, a memorable episode in Hardy’s writing which highlights how nature’s power may influence the destinies of the men and women.

Nature, then, is not simply a blind spectator to man’s life in the course of Hardy’s novels. Hardy emphasises repeatedly how Man and Nature are closely bound together in a symbiotic and interactive relationship. Though not a Romantic himself, Hardy does endorse their vision, that Man and Nature are part of the same order, and share a deeply intuitive bond. This interconnect-edness of Man and Nature challenges the anthropocentric view that places man at the centre of the natural world: instead, it posits the idea that Man and Nature are parts of the same whole, and highlights the idea of oneness. Thus, if Nature is determining the lives and destinies of humans, it is inevitable that humans, in turn, will have an influence on the natural world through their actions. This theme is explored in some of Hardy’s novels, especially in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

The nuanced connection between environment and the characters’ destinies makes *The Mayor of Casterbridge* a rich subject for ecocritical analysis. Casterbridge is portrayed as a community deeply rooted in its agricultural surroundings, and dependent on the changes of the seasons, the fertility of the soil, and the consequent success or failure of harvests – which directly impact the

lives and destinies of the characters. A significant aspect explored in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is the introduction of technology and modern methods in contrast to traditional agrarian practices. Donald Farfrae brings in a new seed-sowing machine, and introduces scientific and professional methods in agriculture – which leads to the general benefit of the Casterbridge community. The contrasting characters of Henchard, with his impetuosity, and Farfrae, with his cool-headed reasoning and science, are reflected in their approaches to nature and natural occurrences. Henchard defies years of his knowledge of nature and chooses to trust an unreliable fortune-teller; while Farfrae uses reason, science and sound methods to harness nature, and his methods are in tune with the natural order. Too late, Henchard realises with some bitterness that “... you can never be sure of weather till ’tis past” (*Mayor* 147). The novel thus illustrates how human actions can both benefit from, and be disrupted by, the natural world. Henchard’s impulsiveness and flawed character inevitably led to outcomes that mirror the unpredictable and sometimes harsh nature of the environment.

An ecocritical analysis of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* becomes imperative when we trace the journey of Tess from her state of innocence to a world of corruption; and this journey is metaphorically represented not only in terms of the landscape, but also in terms of human labour and machinery. While the dairy farm at Talbothays is depicted as an idyllic and fertile valley in southern England, with its appealing farm life, routines of milking, butter-making, and cheese production, Flintcomb-Ash – whose name evokes barrenness – is characterized by mud, rocks, hardship, and near-famine conditions. The villainous Alec D’Urberville reappears here, and resumes his pursuit of Tess. Even the farmer at Flintcomb-Ash, Groby, is shown to be unsympathetic and authoritarian, unlike the kind Dairyman Crick at Talbothays. An implicit

comparison is further made between Flintcomb-Ash and Talbothays in the way in which machines are depicted. Machinery plays a limited role in the novel, with horses and horse carts serving as the primary means of transportation. In fact, Tess's tragic journey in the novel is directly driven by an economic necessity arising from the death of the family horse. Modern machines appear only sparingly: the train transporting milk from Talbothays to London and the threshing machine at Flintcomb-Ash. For the most part, contemporary farming technology is not available in the agricultural practices in Wessex. Talbothays does employ some modern equipment, such as hand and horse-powered butter churns, but these are compatible with traditional agricultural practices and do not pose a menacing threat to the agricultural way of life already in place.

However, the threshing machine at Flintcomb-Ash is depicted as a demanding, almost monstrous entity requiring constant attention, as emphasised by descriptions such as "the red tyrant... which was to act as the *primum mobile* of this world", which kept up a "despotic demand" on the girls who were running it (*Tess* 284-285). This machine becomes an all-powerful presence that dictates the rhythm of work. Tess is worn out by the "ceaselessness of the work" (*Tess* 286), and she received no respite as she was the only woman who could feed the machine swiftly. Hardy deliberately uses these images to convey the monstrosity of a human-made object that was built to exploit a certain section of the human population (the workers), while it directly benefited the other (the farm owner). The imposing and uncontrollable nature of the steam-powered threshing machine stands in stark contrast to the more traditional and peaceful operations of the dairy at Talbothays. Hardy's vision of the new threshing machine foreshadows certain modern problems of the intrusion of technology: while machinery allows for more efficient cultivation and pro-

cessing of agricultural products, leading to greater productivity, it also carries the potential for the intensification of farming practices. This could potentially lead to soil depletion, changes in land use, and a less sustainable relationship with the environment in the long run. Catherine Lanone further notes that the images associated with “the red tyrant” align the machine with colonial and patriarchal exploitation. Her ecofeminist perspective on *Tess* notices how the engineer who deals with the machine is once again the urban outsider, who “was in the agricultural world, but not of it.” (*Tess* 283) – indicating the attitude of a coloniser not in interaction with the “natives” and the “aborigines” (*Tess* 283), but rather using them as a means to an end. She states:

It is clear that for Hardy, the machine is beginning to colonize the rural South. And in so doing, it also colonizes the woman’s body, creating a proto-ecofeminist association between the countryside and the female worker’s body. Just as the landscape must respond to new notions of productivity, all year long, work is part of sexual harassment. Farmer Groby selects Tess for such particularly harsh work because she has resisted him on the road to Flintcomb Ash; and it is no surprise that Alec should reappear and watch her as she toils on the threshing machine. The machine makes the patriarchal system worse, instead of making women’s work a little easier. (Lanone)

Thus, the ecocritical dimensions in these novels by Hardy assert that nature operates not merely as a setting but as a dynamic force deeply interwoven with human existence and fate. Employing an earth-centred lens, the ecocritical approach examines this intricate relationship between humanity and the environment, underscoring the interconnectedness of culture and nature, a connection richly evident in Hardy’s work despite predating the formal field. Having witnessed the transition from a traditional rural society to an era of rapid technological progress, Hardy’s

novels reflect the reciprocal relationship of nature and humanity. However, since Hardy was not satisfied in merely depicting an interconnected relationship between humanity and nature, he was also looking for ways in which man could take charge and work actively towards improving this interrelationship. A strong believer in meliorism, Hardy believed that humans were not only a part of Nature, but had potential within themselves to act as a guardian to nature. Blessed with higher powers of intellect and empathy, man, according to Hardy, had a responsibility to protect nature and preserve it in its best form so as to be able to pass it on, undamaged, to future generations. His philosophy with regard to the natural world was based on his concept of loving-kindness, as he states in his 'Apology' to *Late Lyrics and Earlier*:

[L]ooking down the future these few hold fast to the same: that whether the human and kindred animal races survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe, or whether these races perish and are succeeded by others before that conclusion comes, pain to all upon it, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces – unconscious or other – that have “the balancings of the clouds,” happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often (*Apology* 557-558).

The term 'loving-kindness', oft-repeated in his novels, is drawn from the Biblical idea: in the Book of Psalms, the Hebrew word 'chesed' is used to describe the love of God when it is expressed through acts of kindness, and 'chesed' was first translated into English as 'loving-kindness'¹ in the Coverdale Bible of 1535². Hardy, who knew the Bible intimately, appropriates the religious implication of the word and instead, gives it a secular significance in an age of receding religious belief. Thus, instead of

the loving-kindness of God, it is man’s actions based on the principle of loving-kindness that assume supremacy in Hardy’s view; for it is the only means by which man may secure his rightful place within the natural world which he had the power to protect.

As we read the works of Hardy, it becomes amply clear that this quality of loving-kindness is something that he valued highly. It is a quality that is found in almost all his characters, and especially in his tragic protagonists. What is remarkable, is that even in the most adverse of circumstances, the characters do not forgo their humaneness, and do not hesitate to be kind and generous to nature’s lesser fortunate creatures. When, for instance, Gabriel Oak realises that all his sheep had died in a tragic accident, “his first feeling now was one of pity for the untimely fate of these gentle ewes and their unborn lambs”, for Gabriel Oak “was an intensely humane man” (*FFMC* 44). Similarly, Jude experiences a “magic thread of fellow-feeling” with the rooks that he has been entrusted to scare away from Farmer Troutham’s field – and instead of chasing them away with a clacker, Jude allows them to feast on the rick of the past year’s produce of corn. When he is caught in the act, he is smacked soundly by the farmer: yet, he still does not fail to be kind to the earthworms lying in clumps on the ground, and steps carefully to avoid squashing them with his foot. The narrator comments:

[H]e was a boy who could not bear himself to hurt anything. He had never brought home a nest of young birds without lying awake in misery half the night after, and often reinstating them and the nest in their original place the next morning. He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning, when the sap was up and the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy. (*Jude* 11)

Later we see him killing a rabbit to prevent its agonising

death after it is caught in a steel trap. Similarly, even though Tess is at her utmost wretchedness and feels that she is a victim of life's unfairness, she pauses her suffering to care for pheasants that had been shot down by a hunting expedition, but had not yet died. With an "impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself", Tess proceeds to break the necks of the pheasants with her own hands, so that they may be swiftly put out of their misery (*Tess* 244). Tess's profound connection to nature is evident in her deep empathy for suffering animals. She perceives their helplessness and physical pain as far exceeding her own struggles, and this strengthens her resolve to endure her difficult life. Acts of loving-kindness from characters are also directed towards individuals who are less fortunate. An instance of loving-kindness occurs when Michael Henchard, as Mayor of Casterbridge, acts kindly towards the mother of his employee Abel Whittle, despite often expressing anger at Abel himself. This loving-kindness is returned in kind by Abel Whittle, who becomes Henchard's only companion in his final days.

Thus, Hardy's extensive focus on Nature in his writings, often including a subtext of preservation, is evident. Moreover, he clearly champions the quality of loving-kindness in his characters, particularly when expressed through the nurture and care of the natural world. In his writings, the intimacy that is reflected with Nature is a reflection of his own intimacy with Nature. In his *Life*, an incident is narrated of Hardy using "large dead leaves, white chips left by the wood-cutters, or pieces of stone and slate" in those times that he "felt volumes", but found himself without access to paper (*Life* 96). The increasing mechanisation of our world and the relentless encroachment of human greed upon nature amplify the significance of Hardy's message today. In this age marked by a capitalistic exploitation of nature with utter disregard for preserving our planet, it is important to remember

that man and nature are bonded together inextricably, and just as Nature nurtures all life forms, it is also man’s duty to care for the natural world, and to preserve it for future generations. In the modern, potentially godless age, Hardy finds a solution in ‘A Plaint to Man’, and suggests how it is best to rely on an emotional bond of brotherhood with each other, and with the natural world: The fact of life with dependence placed On the human heart’s resource alone, In brotherhood bonded close and graced With loving-kindness fully blown, And visioned help unsought, unknown (*Poems* 326).

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Notes:

1. Psalm 36:10 first used the term loving-kindness:

O spredde forth thy louynge kyndnesse vnto them that knowe the, & thy rightuousnes vnto the that are true of hert

2. While the King James Bible popularized the single word "loving-kindness" its origin in English Bible translation lies earlier. The Coverdale Bible of 1535, a collaboration between Myles Coverdale and William Tyndale, introduced the phrase "loving kindness" seventy-five years before the King James Version. The King James Version's contribution was to combine Coverdale's two words into the single term now in use.

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” : The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand*

Laki Molla

ABSTRACT: The paper aims to explore the formation of female identity in a patriarchal society and the different aspects of the mother-daughter relationship that breaks through many fundamental boundaries structured by the society. It is a study that fuses Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Literature. The strong emotional attachment of the mother-daughter relationship goes through various stages such as the development of the sense of self-in-relation, empathy, relational self, body-image, sexuality, jealousy and rivalry. It also helps for the model of future relationships. The first part of the Paper makes a theoretical enquiry into the development of this relationship from the perspective of Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Besides criticizing Freud’s lack of interest in women’s sexuality, the section traces the post-Freudian thoughts about women, mothering and mother-daughter relationship by theorists such as Helene Deutsch, Nancy Chodorow, JV Jordon, JL Surrey, AG Kaplan and JB Miller. The second part, through a close reading of Geetanjali Shree’s 2022 Booker prize winning novel *Tomb of Sand* (translated into English by Daisy Rockwell) traces the complex aspects of mother-daughter relationship and the patriarchal domination of

women in traditional Indian society. The study shows how the daughter in the novel helps the octogenarian mother to find a new rhythm in her life waking from the immobile state of the tomb of sand and in that process, they not only interchange their identities but also lose and rediscover their identities.

KEYWORDS: *Mother-daughter relationship, Sexuality, Self-in-relation, Body-image, Psychoanalysis.*

INTRODUCTION

“Before they were mothers

Leto and Niobe

had been the most

devoted of friends”

From Sappho, “Before they were mothers”.²

A well-known 17th century English proverb tells that your son is your son till he gets him a wife, but a daughter remains your daughter throughout her life. The most influential relationship in a woman’s life is the mother-daughter bond. Often serving as the child’s primary caretaker, the mother serves as the daughter’s primary object of identification and role model, sometimes for the rest of her life. In addition to growing psychological independence and autonomy, there may be aspects of fusion or intense emotions of attachment, connection, and mutuality as part of the maturing process. The paper deals with the complexities in the relationship between the mother and the daughter and the transformation of identities. Famous American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich considers that the great unwritten tale between the mother and the daughter is the emotional involvement or the cathexis. Nothing in human nature is likely more charged than the energy exchange between two physically similar bodies, one of which has toiled to give birth to the other while the other has

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

lain in amniotic bliss inside the other. She views motherhood as an institution of patriarchy, a female experience influenced by the norms and expectations of men:

All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman’s body Most of us first knew love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman. (11)

In the chapter “Motherhood and Daughterhood” that forms the core of her book, Rich argues that the knowledge that is shared between mother and daughter is “a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other” (236). There is also desire that unites them – “desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage, to become individuated and free” (236). This strong relationship is “minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy”. Rich mentions *King Lear* (a celebrated play dealing with the Father– Daughter conflicts); *Hamlet* and *Oedipus* (both discussing the complex relationship between mother and son) and points out “no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture” (237). In her polemical book, she also mentions of Eleusinian rituals, which declared that a mother’s power could “undo rape and bring her (daughter) back from the dead” and celebrated the reunion of mother and daughter. In light of the above theory, my present paper aims at the exploration of the many facets of the mother-daughter relationship – the intimacy and distance, personal and universal, its specific and unique characteristics by focusing on Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sands*. The paper explores how the novelist uses the mother-daughter bond to comment on the broader themes of identity, memory and the cultural change. The daughter helps the mother reclaiming her identity by supporting her to venture

into an unconventional journey across the country. The journey of the mother can also be interpreted as an exploration of her self – breaking down previously unexplored barriers and opening new doorways. The daughter – an independent, modern woman tries to make the mother open-minded and free like her. By citing examples from the text, the paper shows how the relationship between Ma and Beti is about losing and discovering identities.

MAJOR STREAMS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL THEORISTS

In psychoanalytic theory it is generally believed that compared to father-son, mother-son, or father-daughter partnerships, the mother-daughter relationship is more complex and troublesome. About women and about mother-daughter relationships, we have four major streams of psychoanalytic and developmental theorists based on the historical background of their era:

The First group of theorists follows the traditional Freudian theories on the psychology and development of women. It includes Helene Deutsch's argument that mother-daughter bonds are detrimental to daughters' normal growth to adulthood.

The second group of theorists asserted that they were vehemently against Freud and frequently rejected psychoanalysis. They continued to hold some of the most derogatory, frequently self-deprecating, and blame-based opinions about mothers, women, and mother-daughter relationships and considered motherhood as a means of domination of women by the patriarchy. Major theorists include Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Friday.

While maintaining their identities as psychoanalysts, the third group of theorists – best represented by Nancy Chodorow, and the fourth group, best represented by Jean Baker Miller and her colleagues at The Stone Center – challenge conventional theories regarding female development, mothering, and mother-

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

daughter relationships. In addition to incorporating perspectives on women and their development mostly from interpersonal or object relations theorists, both recognize the significance of early psychoanalytic challenges to Freud’s beliefs regarding women. The primary distinction between these two schools is that, although the third group maintains ideas and terminology from conventional conceptions of development and psychoanalysis, such as drive theory, the Oedipal complex, the significance of the pre-Oedipal period, and the notion that autonomy and separation-individuation are key indicators of healthy adult development, the fourth group virtually completely rejects traditional psychoanalytic and Western developmental terminology and theory, particularly the idea that autonomy, separation-individuation, and detachment from primary relationships are necessary for the development of the adult self and healthy maturation.

WOMEN AND MOTHER–DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP: SIGMUND FREUD AND HELENE DEUTSCH

Although Freud freely acknowledged that he did not know much about women, his theories on female development are still quite prominent today and have influenced cultural stereotypes and jokes about them, such as “penis envy”³ and “castrating women”.⁴ In Freud’s theories a “sense of inferiority was attributed to the woman because of her [alleged] envy for the penis” (212). During Freud’s time, Vienna’s (and Central Europe’s) anti-Semitic, anti-feminist, and racist sentiments viewed the circumcised penis of the male Jew and the “truncated penis” or clitoris of all women as “defective” sexual organs.

In a series of papers published between 1925 and 1933, Helene Deutsch embraced and developed Freud’s views regarding women. Her work culminated in a very influential two-volume book titled *The Psychology of Women* (1944, 1945). Deutsch

wrote extensively about narcissism, masochism, and passivity, which she believed to be the biologically based basic aspects of the feminine psyche. Deutsch also addressed the issues of women who took on “masculine” roles and denied their feminine position “as servant of the species”. According to Deutsch, the girl’s ability to grow up in a healthy way was hampered by her devotion to her mother (but not to her father) during pre-puberty; “the condition of ‘psychic infantilism’ found in many adult women represents the outcome of an unresolved attachment to the mother during pre-puberty” (9). Although several of the early psychoanalysts strongly disagreed with the traditional Freudian views of women, society suppressed these views, and it was not until the second feminist wave of the 1970s that mainstream psychoanalysis was ready to listen to them.

REJECTING CONVENTIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY AND MAINTAINING ANTAGONISM TOWARD MOTHERHOOD

According to theorists like Dorothy Dinnerstein, Jane Flax, and Nancy Friday, the early feminist movement’s prevailing position was a strong dislike and criticism of Freudian theory. It was believed that political, economic, cultural, and social elements of patriarchal society were the cause of women’s oppression. Until the 1970s, the narrowly defined role of women as primarily an asexual caregiver and an all-powerful, exclusive mother resulted in both an idealized view of the ideal mother – one who is selfless, devoted, and giving – and a tendency to blame the imperfect mother for all that is wrong with society, with the way her children turned out, and in particular with her daughters and their limitations. Paradoxically, many early feminists shared the traditional Freudian viewpoint of Helene Deutsch and other early feminists who sought to challenge the dominant social

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

constraints on women’s roles to motherhood by viewing mothers as detrimental to their daughters’ normal development. Early feminists generally held the views, to use the phrase by Nancy Chodorow, that “mothers are the agents of their daughters’ oppression” and “women’s mothering is perhaps the central feature in the reproduction of gender inequality” (*Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* 81). Nancy Friday emphasizes mother blaming in her work and Dinnerstein considers that mothers are both victims and carriers of patriarchal culture.

The majority of modern feminist publications, particularly since the 1990s, have highlighted the benefits of mothering (and parenting), pointing out that while some women may decide not to have children, many women aspire to become mothers and find motherhood to be a joyful and transformational experience. The discussion now centres on how to best balance and integrate motherhood with work, other relationships, and personal needs; whether or not to shift child-rearing responsibilities from the nuclear family or the isolated mother to the larger society; and whether or not a more egalitarian family structure is necessary, with fathers bearing a far larger share of the burden than has traditionally and even now existed.

CHANGES TO CONVENTIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Some of the most profound and intricate theoretical psychoanalytically oriented books on gender and motherhood have been produced by anthropologist, sociologist, feminist, and psychotherapist Nancy Chodorow. Her seminal work *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1999) has influenced both intrapsychic and interpersonal attitudes in the general public about mothering and the reproduction of mothering through female growth. Chodorow

questions and criticizes conventional psychoanalytic theories, but instead of completely discarding them, she rethinks and alters them with a focus on object connections. In her reformulation of classic Oedipal theory, Chodorow emphasizes the significance of the pre-Oedipal phase in the formation of a sexual body-ego and gender identity. According to Chodorow, girls' growth (as opposed to boys') and their ability to parent, especially mothering, are predicated on radically different experiences, responses, and demands with regard to their mother. These differences "cut off or curtail relational possibilities for parenting in boys, and keep them open and extend them in girls" (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 91). She contends that specific issues in female development, including separation and individuation, as well as ego and body-ego boundary confusion, are caused by the unique bond between mothers and daughters throughout the pre-Oedipal stages. As she states "A girl does not simply identify with her mother or want to be like her mother. Rather, mother and daughter maintain elements of their primary relationship which means they will feel alike in fundamental ways" (110).

According to Chodorow, women are more likely to identify with others, have a more robust fantasy life, are more intuitive and observant, and have a less strict and punishing superego that is more susceptible to influence from others. These are the presumptions of classic psychoanalytic beliefs. She concludes that women's role as mothers and the ways in which mothers create what Chodorow refers to as asymmetries in the relational experiences of boys and girls are the reasons for the inequalities between males and females. In order to prepare for involvement in the public realm, these distinctions cause men to define themselves as distinct from others, have strict ego borders, and repress and deny connections and interactions. In the private realm of the family, women are more capable and dedicated to the roles of

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

wife and mother because they perceive and identify themselves as continuous with and connected to others, with fluid and porous ego boundaries. In her most recent works, Chodorow expands on her belief that the mother-daughter bond is incredibly potent and “contributes in profound ways to the creation and experience of self” (vii). Chodorow has become interested in focusing, from a more clinical perspective, on the special mother-daughter relationship, where subjective meanings and unconscious fantasies influence the experiences of the mother, daughter, and other mutually constructed relationships, rather than pursuing theories that are more universalizing or generalizing.

SELF-IN-RELATION OR THE INTEGRATION OF ATTACHMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUTONOMY: NEW APPROACHES TO FEMALE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES

In her 1973 book *Psychoanalysis and Women*, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller questioned traditional psychoanalytic theories of women’s deficiency and defectiveness and instead offered fresh perspectives on female development that recognized and celebrated women’s strengths. Miller brought up the issue of women’s historical undervaluation in respect to the particular subject of mother-daughter relationships. Women were perceived as having limited and constrained societal responsibilities, existing only to serve others, particularly males and children, and mothers were seen as a threat to their daughters (and sons). According to Miller, these representations of mothers and women influenced a daughter’s conflict and distance from “the most significant person in her life who is also the figure from whom she builds an image of herself as a feminine being” (392).

Miller and a number of other professionals with training in psychoanalysis founded The Stone Center at Wellesley College

to create a new psychological theory of women. The growth of “self-in-relation” and the growing ability for relationships to become more complex, as well as for mutuality and empathy, are the simple core of the developing idea of this school. As opposed to Chodorow, whose articulate and scholarly analysis of how women become mothers and whose modifications of classical psychoanalytic theories are rooted in object relations theory, the Stone Center theorists accept that object relations theorists recognize the power of relationships, but they disagree with the fact that they retain the language of drive theory and destructive impulses and show relationships as secondary to the satisfaction and frustration of drives. According to a number of Stone Center theorists, the mother-daughter bond served as the blueprint for future relationships. These include Irene Stiver, who argued against the idea of the Oedipus complex for female development, Jordan, Surrey, and Kaplan on women’s development of empathy, Janet Surrey on relational self’s growth, Jean Baker Miller on women’s development of the sense of self-in-relation, and Kaplan and Klein on the relational self in late adolescent women.

Classical psychoanalytic theories of female oedipal tendencies are thoroughly contested by Irene Stiver. The concept that most girls turn away from their moms is not supported by any systematic clinical or academic investigations, according to Stiver. Rather, research shows that girls have different attachments to their fathers than to their mothers from a very young age, that women have different but equal superegos, that girls continue to feel passionately throughout their latency years, and that current research on female sexual function does not distinguish between vaginal and clitoral orgasms. She believes that castration anxiety and penis envy, where fear and jealousy are the motivating factors, are inferior to the self-in-relation paradigm, which emphasizes reciprocal empathy and empowerment. According to Stiver,

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

adult women in psychotherapy are likely to criticize their moms, highlight her flaws, and fight to avoid being like her. According to her, these women have close and frequently difficult ties with their mothers. According to Lewis and Herman’s theory, which Stiver quotes, daughters’ understanding of how their fathers’ attitudes and actions devalue and demean their moms is the main cause of their rage and lack of empathy for them. Additionally, the daughter connects with the aggressor because she is angry that the mother did not fight harder against this devaluation.

Studies on women’s self-development in late adolescence have been written by Kaplan, Gleason, and Klein. They point out that psychological growth is associated with greater autonomy, independence, separation, and competitive achievement according to conventional developmental and psychoanalytic views. Women’s sense of self emerges by internalization of experiences of increasingly complicated relationships characterized by empathy, reciprocal identification, and care for preserving the relationship rather than through separation. According to Jordan et al., “conflict is a necessary part of relationships, essential for the changes that must be made so that the relationship and each person in it can change and grow” (125).

THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN *TOMB OF SAND*

Ek muddat se teri yaad bhi aayi na hamen,
aur ham bhul gae hon tujhe aisa bhi nahin.
(I have not thought of you for ages,
but it’s not as though I’ve forgotten you either.)
Firaq Gorakhpuri.⁵

Geetanjali Shree’s 2018 Hindi novel *Ret Samadhi* (translated in English by Daisy Rockwell in 2022 as *Tomb of Sand*) tells the

narratives of Indian women who have struggled for their freedom and liberty in the society which has been dominated by patriarchal ideals. The mother-daughter relationships form the core of the novel and show the challenges and complications that women face in their daily lives in an Indian society. It describes how Indian women have broken free from their traditional practices and started to struggle for their rights in society. The story, divided into three parts, tells the tale of Ma, an 80-year-old woman who, after her husband's death, recovers from a deep withdrawal from life, only to discard the life she had led up until that point and pursue a new path with new vigour and energy with the help of her daughter, referred to in the novel as Beti. At the very beginning of the novel, Shree tells us the story in an evocative manner:

Two women: one mother, one daughter, one growing downwards, the other growing upwards. One laughs and says, I'm growing smaller by the day! The other is saddened, but says nothing when she sees herself growing bigger. (12)

“CHARHI JAVANI DADI NU” : THE OCTOGENARIAN MA

Set in a North Indian city in contemporary times, the novel begins with Ma lying on her bed with her back turned to the doorway in such a profound condition of seclusion that her family members are unable to interact with her. She was always looking at the wall with her back to the doors and in that manner, her back became a wall itself. It was certainly the result of the death of her husband whose “presence was still felt, even in death” (15). In the poignant description of the novelist:

She was a bundle, shrinking ever more from moment to moment, sending out a scrambled signal from within her vast quilt that she was still in there somewhere. The bundle scrunched-up on one side, then slid up a bit, then down, then over there. Was

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

she testing to see how far she could spread herself? Or was she just turning her face away, turning her back on her children and grandchildren, and in the process dragging herself towards the wall to press against it with all her few-years-shy-of-eighty might to see if she could slip into it entirely? (15-16)

The wall has become a symbol of her confinement in a traditional male-dominated society. Living at the house of her civil-servant son, she was mechanically repeating the phrases—“No, now I won’t get up”—at the coax and cajole of the family members. But that bundle of quilt in bed had its own hidden desires and ripples: “The noes of the dying hold their own secrets. Their own dreams” (23). At the arrival of the daughter, the desires find their wings: “Every time Bede’s sister pauses in this pose at his door, the thought flashes through her mind – have I been acting until now, or am I just about to start?” (32). Regarding the octogenarian Ma, the author says in an Interview:

Ret Samadhi—Tomb of Sand—was triggered by an image, the quite mundane image of an old woman lying always in bed with her face to the wall and back to the world. Once the image planted itself in my mind it began to stir my interest and curiosity more and more. Whatever could be going on in the old woman’s head? Had she turned away from her family and life and was awaiting her end? Or, when she looked like she was trying to bury herself alive into the wall by creeping up closer to it, she was actually thinking of the world on the other side and burrowing a hole through the wall to emerge on that side and reinvent herself? That is how the novel began—the tale telling itself—and as I shadowed the old woman, she started taking the initiative, shaping up as the woman all set to embark on a new life and doing the wonderful things she did. (Shree)

BADE – THE OPINIONATED SON

When Geetanjali Shree depicts the interactions between Bade and Beti, she satirically explains how ordinary Indian men yell and speak to women in an oblique manner by pointing out that he shouts loudly when he sees her. Shouting is a tradition that has been practiced for thousands of years by the oldest sons. This illustrates how patriarchy and the underlying male oppression it entails have longstanding historical roots and have persisted for many decades. Although Bade's true mood never reached a boiling point, it is believed that Bade's father roared from the heart. The father had yelled until he retired, at which point he passed the yelling to his son and had been rather quiet himself. (46)

A man may bring the bread home, but the woman actually prepares the food with that bread, something that the male chauvinistic society fails to recognize. In addition to the fact that being a homemaker is a full-time job, she is not even respected by others. The narrator points out that although Bahu used to look after Ma, no one ever showed her the respect she deserved, and she felt abandoned for years. Even though she was the essential and vital component that drove the primary wheel of the house, Bahu never felt comfortable in her own husband's home as she says, "My home has never been my own" (205). Nobody, not even the servants, cared about her opinions. For example, when Bade instructs servants to prepare parathas and she instructs them to prepare khichdi, Susheela, the servant, prefers to prepare parathas over khichdi, which is extremely disrespectful and degrading to her because she is the one who makes all of the decisions and manages everything. The typical attitude of the Indian society towards its women is expressed by the novelist in an appropriate way:

Some say this is a new age. Others say that when it comes

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

to women, it’s always a new age. New Age. Meaning things have changed for women. (Things always change for women). Women are no longer in the roles they used to be in. (They’re always in new roles). (231)

But at the same time, Shree is very optimistic towards the ability of the women: “And always, at least once, every woman, whether this one or that one, whether small or big, finds herself at the door, one foot poised in the air, like a dancer striking a mudra, a pose, in order to reenter that home or door which she has renounced and already left far behind” (231).

“BITIYA RANI BARI SIYANI”: THE DAUGHTER

The daughter, called Beti in the novel, is ten years younger than the son Bade. Shree describes that “as a child she was made of no” – always doing the opposite what people wanted from her. She wanted to become someone not like her mother – “I’m not you” (52). Although she still resembles her mother, she has developed a distinct personality in addition to maternal femininity. She is presented here as a contrast to her mother. Chodorow’s theory, which contends that the daughter attempts to differentiate herself from her mother out of fear of absorptive loss, can be used to understand it. Beti, the willful and headstrong daughter of Ma who wants to transcend the long-standing patriarchal customs and tries to develop her self-image, is described with tender indulgence by the novelist: “Daughters are made of wind and air. Invisible even in moments of stillness, when only the very sensitive perceive them” (37). The mother wants her daughter’s star to twinkle brightly: “All egotism and success on one side, mother-daughter on the other” (241). The daughter knows her mother more than anyone else in the house. All resistance of the mother vanishes with the skills of her hands: “A path opens with no. Freedom is made of no. No is fun. No is nonsensical. Nonsensical, but also mystical” (52). In

a major departure from societal norms, Ma, the widowed mother who is expected to remain in her son's house, decides to shift to the house of Beti. And it was at Beti's house that Ma embarks on a renewed life with the companionship of Rosie – a transgender who works as a catalyst for the last stage of Ma's journey. Beti is full of love and sympathy for the old mother. Ma comes to Beti's house and out of exhaustion falls asleep instantly and begins to snare softly. Shree expresses the feelings of the passionate daughter: "Poor, bewildered Ma, thought Beti, becoming the mother now. Tears welled up in her eyes" (241). The profound intensity of the mother–daughter bond is emphasized in many places in the text.

Very symbolically the second section of the novel, when Ma came to live with Beti, is titled "Sunlight". It is Beti, the daughter (the light in the life of Ma) enlightens and colours the dark and faded life of Ma. She tries to create Ma according to her self – "This is the door that opens to reveal a world created by Beti alone" (237). The "walls" of Bade's house is replaced with the "doors" of Beti's house. The idea of freedom and openness is hinted at and emphasized at the very first sentence of the section:

The first thing you see when you open the door to Beti's flat is the green belt beyond the balcony at the end of the long open hallway, and above that, the blue canopy of sky. The sight brings peace to closed eyes, and might even inspire them to open. (237)

The open-minded, independent and modern daughter Beti is here the reflection of the traditional Ma – both emotionally and symbolically. Beti is like another self of Ma – one that can continue her existence. This transformation of Ma can be interpreted through Chodorow's idea of "double identification". Chodorow claims that because the mother connects more with her daughter than with her son, she prevents her daughter from being independent and separating from her. The dual identification that comes with mothering is the cause of this strong bond between

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

mother and daughter: “A woman identifies with her own mother, and through identification with her child, she (re) experiences herself as a cared-for child” (47). A woman will replicate her own mother’s nurturing of her as a daughter by identifying with both her mother and her daughter. This double identification, according to Chodorow, is gender specific; a woman will feel that her daughter is the kid for whom her mother cared (that is, herself), but she won’t feel the same way about her son, at least not as intensely: “Given that she was a female child and that identification with her mother and mothering are so bound up with being a woman, we might expect a woman’s identification with a girl to be stronger” (47). In Shree’s novel, it is the daughter who tries to shape the mother the way she liked. Beti helps her for sponge baths and vows to “bring her slowly back to life” (241). Together they were having tea on the balcony. Every time Ma gets up to go to the bathroom, Beti is always at the ready. She even sacrifices her meetings with her boyfriend KK while Ma was in her flat. Beti is so engrossed and obsessed with Ma that other people have no place in her world, not even KK. Shree poignantly expresses the coldness of the relationship between Beti and KK after the coming of Ma:

The halting of Beti’s body. When KK sneaks in. A halting that steps away and stands at a distance. KK is pleased. He had run into Rosie and Ma downstairs.

I sent them to go wherever they wanted in my car, there’s no one here, just you and me, and I have the key.

Where? Beti is anxious.

Here. KK pulled her close.

Where is ... Amma...? she asked between his forced kisses... They’re going to a festival by a lake, KK whispers between lustful kisses... His lips felt dry and sticky to Beti. Get back. She pushed him away. Someone will come.

A cat, a mouse, a crow? KK rolled her onto the mat.

Amma...she tried to say.

'Is she hiding in here somewhere? KK's hands are insistent, joking on his tongue.

She is everywhere, Beti's body said, but her voice burst out: Get away, what if she comes back? (425 -26).

This bond between Mother and Daughter gets a new dimension with the coming of Rosie. The introduction of Rosie – the transgender called by Beti as Rosie Bua is described as “barrelling in like a fresh gust of wind” (310). She became a regular visitor to Ma and changed the old woman in a way that is not liked by the unconventional Modern Beti. Ma became more dependent on Rosie than her own daughter. When Beti advised Ma to unwrap the towel from her head, Ma was reluctant to do so saying that Rosie advised her to wrap the hair in a towel for a while to dry it and otherwise the breezes spirit away the nutrients, making the hair dull. Rosie also liberated Ma from “the height-shrinking-daily sari-wearing frustration” to a strange gown-like dress. Beti notices that “Maji” has changed to “Baji” for Rosie. Beti who considers herself liberated, is unprepared for the discomfort she experiences at Rosie's regular visits. Beti is now annoyed to find her Ma a girl on sixteen, and not an old lady going on eighty. Not only the clothing, but also the food habits of Ma got changed, she started taking sips of wine. This suspicious view of the bond between Ma and a transgender by the so called “progressive” daughter shows the middle-class hypocrisy in Indian society. This attitude can also be interpreted from Chodorow's double identification. And here Beti who reshaped the character of Ma after rescuing her from Bade's patriarchal domination looks at Ma's attachment with Rosie with envious eyes.

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

“AMMA TRANSFORMS INTO CHILDISHNESS AND BETI INTO MATURITY”: THE REVERSAL OF ROLES

In the house of Beti, the mutual role between Ma and Beti got reversed – Beti became the mother and made Ma her daughter. She is full of sympathy for the old mother and vows to bring her back to life. At the house of Beti, Ma had his beginning of the second life – the old mother of Bede’s house wakes up in Beti’s house as a child and eager to discover the new world. The novelist writes,

Ma lifted her hands in the air as if to embrace the light-soaked dots which caressed her face. She ran her tongue over her lips so she could taste their warmth. Babies are eager to stuff anything into their mouths...But the gaze has no age, and in her gaze twirled a top that set off roaming through this new world. (243 - 44)

“No, I won’t get up” has changed into an emphatic “Yes”. Gradually Ma began to walk on her own and this took Beti to the seventh heaven. The two enjoy watching films together and laughing awkwardly at the Western kissing. Beti also accepts the disturbance of her relationship with KK as she “knew, though perhaps only subconsciously, that a mother and a girl-friend cannot exist in the same body” (273). The intimate-yet-far relationship of Ma and Beti is described by the novelist in an excellent way: “Daughter. You love her. You fear her. Now you see her. Now you don’t” (37).

This reversal of roles in Mother-Daughter relationship is very much akin to the concept of ego-boundary confusion. Referring to the generational recurrence of women’s ego boundary weakness and guilt, Chodorow says,

A mother, on the one hand, grows up without establishing adequate ego boundaries or a fine sense of self. She tends to experience boundary confusion with her daughter, and does not

provide experiences of differentiating ego development for her daughter or encourage the breaking of her daughter's dependence. (59)

The mother in Shree's novel changes the way her daughter wants after she shifts to her flat. The daughter also tries to fulfill Ma's desires sacrificing other relations. But in the course Ma becomes independent and accepts Rosie as her closer companion. When the child sees the mother as distinct and "not me", ego boundaries—a feeling of psychological separation from the outside world—and a bounded body ego—a sense of the body's predictable boundedness and permanence of physical separateness—emerge. This happens as a result of recurrent experiences of the mother's absence as well as physiological maturation. After the death of Rosie, Beti realizes the deep impact Rosie had on Ma. The unseen presence of Rosie annoyed Beti: "Now Beti watches with curiosity: it is as if Ma has turned into Rosie herself. Rosie whispers into Ma's ear: Now turn right, now left, and Ma turns" (569). She notices the loss in her mother which she cannot recompense:

The worm she had become crawled into a corner and died with Rosie. Now Beti was a soft velvety sunshine, spreading out warm like a shawl over Ma to protect her from the coming chill, softly cosying her. (514)

Beti no longer bears the daily transformation of the mother. She accompanied her in Pakistan to give her elderly mother some small shred of happiness in the final stage of life. She discovers that "this woman" "thinks of no one but of herself" (634). She began to miss KK terribly. Her final realization is: "This is not my story, but hers, I have no part in it" (633).

CONCLUSION

Mother-Daughter relationships are both a natural and challenging

“When did I become me, and I am me, or have I become Ma” :

subject of study when it comes to the creation and maintenance of gendered identities in a society. According to Adrienne Rich, it is difficult to accept and strengthen both the mother and the daughter within ourselves. Because patriarchal beliefs have pushed us to divide, polarise these images, and transfer all undesired guilt, wrath, shame, power, and liberation onto “other women”. Modern Indian literature, particularly that of women writers, instead of elevating the mother to the status of superhuman, portraying her as a human person with all of her frailties. Gita Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Anita Nair, and Manju Kapur are among the new crop of Indian women novelists who highlight the predicament of modern women, particularly their attempts to break free from the matrilineal social structure. Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* is an influential addition to the genre that celebrates women emancipation. Harish Trivedi compares this novel with Nirmal Verma’s *Antim Aranya* (translated into English as *The Last Wilderness*) and Krishna Sobti’s *Samay Sargam* (translated into English as *The Music of Solitude*) in the sense that it has an old woman as its protagonist (Jaipur Literature Festival 00:03:35 - 55).

After her debut novel *Mai*, Shree again comes with a more mature treatment of motherhood after twenty-five years in *Ret Samadhi*. The eighty years old mother had removed all her layers and finally became simply herself untouched by the thoughts and concerns of any other. The common perspective of the family members is that at eighty, Ma had turned selfish. Beti – the daughter finally realizes with a total shock how little they all knew about Ma. It reminds us of Jorge Luis Borges whom Shree refers to more than once: “The world is not fully knowable”. It is interesting to note that Shree chose to refer to the major characters of the novel with their relationship identities rather than any proper names. Perhaps, with this she emphasizes

the idea that our family life really determines our identity and this is all important in our lives. In the last stage of Ma's journey, there is finally the acknowledgement of a sense of identity buried in the sands of time, of rediscovery and of redemption for Ma – a heart which finally decides that it is never too late to follow its own path. Anything worth doing transcends borders, gender, socially sanctioned norms and roles, age-appropriate behavioural conventions, taboos and restrictions that condition and entrap us. What Geetanjali Shree said, in his conversation with Seema Chishti, seems to be an apt conclusion of this paper,

My writing is for humanity and love. You are writing means you believe in people, in the world, and in yourself. Even when you are writing about sorrow, you have the hope that you will overcome that sorrow. (Quint Hindi 00:11:42-55)

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Notes:

1. Shree, Geetanjali. *Tomb of Sand*. Translated by Daisy Rockwell. Penguin Books, 2022, p. 465
2. Greek poet Sappho’s “Before they were mothers” provides a moving analysis of how relationships and identity change as people move through different phases of life. It examines motherhood as a whole and how it affects female friendships. The poem can be accessed at <https://allpoetry.com/Before-They-Were-Mothers>.
3. Prior to being aware of the anatomical differences between girls and boys—specifically, the presence or absence of the penis—Freud believed that young girls and boys were undifferentiated during the pre-Oedipal phase. The girls were believed to have “penis envy”, which is based on Freud’s theory that girls desired to have a penis and either lost it or will grow one.
4. A pivotal moment in the psychoanalytic description of the masculine

subject occurs when the little boy notices that his mother has “no penis”. Even though this is a startling sight, it is not perplexing because the mother is instantly perceived as “castrated,” “mutilated,” and lacking everything that a man without a penis would have. This horror at the sight of the mother’s “mutilation” causes unpleasant castration fear and the sad renunciation of the desire for the mother.

5. Raghupati Sahay (mostly known by his pen name Firaq Gorakhpuri) is referred to by Geetanjali Shree in her novel *Tomb of Sand*. The following couplet is used by Shree at p. 135 in the novel.

The Illusion of Home and Belongingness: Understanding the Idea of Home in Kunal Basu's *Kalkatta* (2015)

Subham Patar

ABSTRACT : The idea of “home” does not offer a definite and concrete definition, as this particular term always demands a nuanced and multi-layered understanding of the aspects associated with it, such as, location, meaning, symbolism, emotion and belonging. However, many scholars admit the presence of a fixed and specific place/space of home, with which the assumptions of home are associated. Again, many writings on home studies explore other fundamental aspects of home by going beyond its physical structure. The idea of home invites more debate when it is viewed from the perspective of the migrants’ lives, as human mobility complicates the idea of home, resulting in a new debate between being at home and homelessness, belongingness and non-belongingness within a new form of political-cultural-economic ecology. Kunal Basu’s 2015 novel *Kalkatta* offers a gripping exploration of the intersecting themes of migration, refugee resettlement, alienation, identity, belonging and the process of home-making through the narration of the protagonist Jamshed Alam aka Jami. The novel, by going beyond the confinement of dwelling, illustrates the notion of home as not merely a physical space and problematizes the assumptions associated with home, such as, belonging,

identity, aspirations, emotion and performance. This paper seeks to explore how for a refugee, the idea of home becomes a contested space that is fractured, performative, and intricately entwined with ambition, societal alienation, identity politics, and urban marginality. This paper also argues that home, for the refugees, is not confined within a place or space, but it seems like a process, an endless search which they continue throughout their lives.

Keywords: *home, belonging, homeless, alienation, Kolkata, Kalkatta.*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of “home” does not offer a definite and concrete definition, as this particular term always demands a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the aspects associated with it, such as, location, meaning, symbolism, emotion and belonging. The notion of home invites more nuanced debate when it comes to study the migrant lives. Different kinds of human mobility, such as economic migration, internal and transnational mobility, refugee crisis etc., complicate the idea of home, resulting in a new debate between being at home and homelessness, belongingness and non-belongingness within a new form of political-cultural-economic ecology. Earlier in the migration studies, scholars have problematized the idea of ‘home’ keeping its association with ‘homeland,’ the loss of connection and past life in the country of origin after displacement. However, recent studies on home and migration tend to focus on ‘home’ as not a physical space in homeland but as a process of home-making, tied to the notion of belongingness (Blunt and Dowling; Miller). It has been argued that, the notion of home to the first-generation refugees/migrants throughout the globe, is marked by a sense of nostalgia, romantic association with homeland and a pain and regret for separation.

To them, the loss of home is a permanent loss, often characterized by traumatic condition, lifelong mourning, and the presence of the past in the present. However, on the other side, the following generations, growing up in the host country, always accomplish a wishful longing for their 'imagined home,' as they try to adapt and assimilate with the culture of the host nation.

Kunal Basu's 2015 novel *Kalkatta* offers a gripping exploration of the intersecting issues of migration, refugee resettlement, alienation, identity, belonging and the process of home making through the narration of the protagonist Jamshed Alam aka Jami. Jami, a second-generation Muslim refugee grows up on the Zakaria street, an underbelly of the city of Kolkata, after being smuggled into the country as a child from Bangladesh. Placing Jami in a precarious condition between societal exclusion and his continuous attempt to survive, Basu explores the fragility of belongingness and the condition of being at home. The novel by going beyond the confinement of dwelling, illustrates the notion of home as not merely a physical space and problematizes the assumptions associated with it, such as, belonging, identity, aspirations, emotion and performance. This paper seeks to explore how for a refugee, the idea of home becomes a contested space that is fractured, performative, and intricately entwined with ambition, societal alienation, identity politics, and urban marginality. This paper also argues that home, for the refugees, is not confined within a place or space, but it seems like a process, an endless search which they continue throughout their lives.

Home and Belonging in Trans-national Migration: Indian Context

It is historically true that the South Asian countries, especially the Indian subcontinent, after World War II, have witnessed the largest trans-national population flows, a great influx of refugees

and displaced persons. The partition of India in 1947 and the independence of Bangladesh, erstwhile East Pakistan from West Pakistan in 1971 have caused two of the world's largest cross-border migration in twentieth century. India witnessed an influx of refugees from both sides of the country in 1947 and 1971. These two incidents and the concomitant violence of forced migration compelled over 10 million of people to be uprooted from their homelands, resulting in the trauma of displacement and homelessness. The memories of homes and belonging to the homeland continued to haunt the first-generation migrants, mainly Hindus, non-Muslims and untouchables (*Namashudras*) both from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The common aspect which binds these episodes of forced migration is "a sense of rootlessness and bereavement resulting from loss of home and homeland" (Singh 60). For the refugees, the concept of home becomes "a mythic place of desire," a place of "no returns even if it is possible to revisit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin" (Brah 192). Cartier and Lew opine that, "following a change in home, old and new places often vie for 'homeness', and as each new place becomes more of a home, each old home comes to hold a sense of 'past homeness'" (278). To these 'uprooted' people their past homes and belongings are coloured by the "elements of romanticization" (Vander Veer 7), and are remembered through memory.

Scholars of migration studies have attempted to conceptualize the notion of home in the migratory process by going beyond its physical structure, what is known as house. Boccagni offers a novel perspective to study the home-making process of the refugees by understanding the notion of home in association with sedentariness and mobility – moving and making a home. He conceptualizes his notion of home as "both a material environment and a set of meaningful relationships, re-collections and aspirations to be

emplaced, successfully or not, over space and time” (xxiv). For the displaced, the making of a home, according to him is a “search,” which indicates a continuous negotiation with the previous home in the place which was left, and on the other hand the refugees’ unending attempt to make a home in the new place. To Boccagni, migrants’ home is a relationship and a site of belonging to a place which is “performative” and “interactive,” marked by “security, familiarity and control” (7).

Living in a Liminal Space: Home-making and Quest for Identity in *Kalkatta*

The novel *Kalkatta* (2015) begins with the first-person narration of the protagonist Jami’s birth history in a refugee camp in Dhaka, Bangladesh and his arrival into the city of Kolkata, India as a member of a refugee family with his parents and physically challenged sister, Miriam. Jami’s family has crossed the border twice – first, his grandparents were forced to migrate from Bihar, India to the then East Pakistan due to the violence against Muslims after 1947 Indo-Pakistan partition; and second, his parents with Jami and his sister move to India again, come to a city “praised by one and all, and called by various names: Kolkata, Calcutta, Kalkatta” (Basu 7). After the arrival at the city, they manage to arrange a shelter for their own at the Number 14, Zakaria Street with the help of the local political leader of the ruling party, Uncle Mushtak. The whole space of Number 14 where the displaced families like that of Jami live, is controlled and monitored by Uncle Mushtak and his mother, who force the people to join and serve their party and to work for their factory. The living condition of Jami’s family on Zakaria street is nothing better than that of the animals in zoo – confined, subjugated and marginalized, as is evident in Jami’s mother’s statement, “We’ve come from the jungle to a zoo” (23). Primarily, it is the Number 14 at the

Zakaria Street which addresses the particular location of Jami's home. Many scholars have attempted to conceptualize 'home' in association with a particular 'place' (Easthope; McDowell; Proshansky et al.). Mary Douglas's 1991 essay emphasizes the notion of location of home when she writes, "The question is not "How?" nor "Who?" nor "When?" but "Where is your home?" (289) – thereby highlighting one of the fundamental aspects of home – the presence of a fixed and specific place/space with which the ideas of home and belonging are associated.

To understand the complex notions of home and belongingness, it is important to look at the family and its members, as the family, in most cases, is the very first source of belongingness which transforms a place into a home. In this context, I would like to refer to the sociologist Thomas F. Gieryn, who notes three "necessary and sufficient" features that define a place as home: "a geographical location, a material form, and investment with meaning and value" (464-465). However, home as a place, having a geographical location can be "variable and multiple" (Kusenbach and Paulsen 3), meaning a person can have more than one home in multiple locations, the location of the home can be changed in due course of time, and "that home is a matter of degree and can be missing altogether" (3). The second component, "material form" of a home, meaning the bundle of "stuff" that constitutes a home, can also be variable, varying from "an overbearing amount" to "absolute minimal," from "institutional furnishings" to "the natural trappings of a cave," and from "generic," to "natural" (Kusenbach and Paulsen 4). The third feature, the "investment with meaning and value", invested in the location of home and the material form, is the core reason for making the home as a place of belonging, emotional attachment, safety, security, and thereby creates a complex sentiment of home that leads to a relationship which connects the inhabitants with

the particular place (Kusenbach and Paulsen 4).

In the case of Jami, “the investment with meaning and value”, invested at the Number 14 makes him share a strong sense of belongingness and emotional affection towards his home and family. It is his mother who first ignites his ambition of becoming a “true Kalkatta-wallah” by securing a good and respectable job like the Bengalis living in the city. She dreams that “My Jami will show us his real worth. Just wait till his exams are over” (50). His mother’s presence and dream occupy a large space in his consciousness, that forms his belonging to his family and Number 14. Whenever he roams the city or interacts with his friends who are allegedly recognized as “most wanted criminals of Kalkatta” (21), he always hides his misdeeds to his mother as he thinks, “that would’ve surely spoiled her dreams of Kalkatta” (31). Apart from his “Ammi”, Jami has a strong bonding with his sister Miriam aka Miri, whom he considers “my best friend” (26). Miri always tries to make Jami understand the lives of the refugees, orphans and the people who are left out and inspires him to be a financially stable person in the city. Financial stability and having a home of one’s own can liberate a refugee from her condition of homelessness and help her “live like everyone else lives in Kalkatta” (228). One of the reasons of Jami’s sense of belongingness, comfort and home about the Number 14 is its role as a protective space for him and Miri, where “others do not have access” (Fathi 981), as their parents feel “safer here than at the camp, not having to keep up a constant watch to protect their girl from pimps and their boy from agents who might take him away to race camels in Arabia” (30). To illustrate an individual’s nuanced feeling and belonging to the location of home, Jan Duyvendak suggests three aspects of home: “familiarity”, “haven”, and “heaven” (38-39). For “familiarity,” Duyvendak indicates a person’s thorough acquaintance with a place that has been evolved over the years. Though, familiarity

may have a negative impact in some cases, yet by and large, it is associated with “feelings of comfort and the reduction of fear” (Kusenbach and Paulsen 4), having a close resemblance to what Tuan (1974) called “rootedness” and Heidegger (1971) conceptualized as “dwelling”. The second aspect, “haven,” having a positive impact upon individual, involves a feeling of “safety, security, and privacy, which most often relate to the micro level of the house” (Duyvendak 39). Haven is commonly viewed as a comfortable experience, a home and is commonly associated with Tuan’s (1996) notion of the “hearth” and Bachelard’s (1958) metaphor of the “nest.” In this regard, the Number 14 in the earlier days of Jami can be analysed as what Duyvendak calls “familiarity” as the place assures the sense of comfort and security, and “haven”, as the Number 14 “pertain[s] to feelings of safety, security, and privacy...” (39). Boccagni’s insightful exploration of the concept of “familiarity” in the process of home-making is also relatable here, where he explains that both at cognitive and emotional levels, familiarity refers to “space, stability, routine, continuity or even permanence ... the connection made between the domestic space and larger settings.” (7).

In spite of living a life of a refugee in the most common way, they, from the very first day of their arrival, foster a wishful aspiration – becoming “a true Kalkatta-wallah and Kalkatta-wali” (Basu 8), by having a home of their own. Home is a place which confirms one’s own agency and subjectivity, allowing one to live freely from the “rules and expectations placed upon them in the public or work worlds” (Kusenbach and Paulsen 8). The philosopher Edward Casey argues that the place is “constitutive” in nature with the association of a sense of self, and vice versa, “the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence... but also more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, *there is no place*

without self and no self without place (684, *emphasis original*). Jami's sense of loss of the self is characterized by his loss of agency at Number 14 as their 'home' is not permanent, forcing him to be haunted with a feeling of homelessness, as he narrates, "I hadn't thought of Number 14 as temporary, like a refugee camp that we might have to leave one day. ...even if we had to leave, it wouldn't be the end..." (Basu 64). This sense of being homeless is again highlighted when Uncle Mushtak, "... [their] protector had turned into a landlord" (86), demands rent for staying in his house at Number 14. Their process of home-making and reclaiming the agency in the city of Kolkata starts with the recognition of their legitimacy in the city, having a valid identity card, "you have a fixed identity, you become a *real* person" (53). To acquire that legitimacy, Jami's birth certificate is issued with the help of Uncle Mushtak, though illegally, in order to take admission in school to fulfil his aspiration of a bright career in the future.

With an official identity card, on one hand, Jami becomes a citizen, an insider of the country, but on the other, he always feels a sense of alienation in the same society. This peculiar position between an insider and an outsider is, for him, always creating "a tension between being at home but not belonging to it" (Fathi 987). His sense of belongingness expands to the community building with the other Muslim refugee boys of his age, likes of Rakib, Munna, GG, Bobby, in order to overlook the residential exclusion and religio-cultural marginalization, faced by him in his each and every negotiation. Jami's engagement with his community can be understood by the argument of Alund and colleagues, that asserts "a shared consciousness of institutionally embedded residential segregation and social subordination creates a sounding board for claims for social justice as a major expression of what home-making among contemporary youth is about" (137). In this way, the second-generation refugee youths, in an urban space,

by fighting against the societal inequalities and alienation, claim their right to, and form their identity in the city space through “...everyday creative struggles of home-making and through building support and solidarity communities” (Fathi 987).

Apart from participating in a community with a shared consciousness, the refugee youths also include their support and belonging to a football team in their process of home-making, as “home can mean a locality ... have developed attachment to a neighbourhood square or to a local football team” (Lloyd and Vasta 1). Jami and his friends also develop such kind of attachment to a local football team, Mohammedan Sporting Club. Jami says, “as supporters of Mohammedan Sporting Club, we were regulars at football matches” (Basu 40). In this context, Paul Dimeo’s statement is important; he states, “Football has the capacity to unite communities, produce and reproduce identities, maintain and shape social formations, and to create identities of a specific nature that draw upon wider social issues in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways” (105). Jami’s feeling of affection, belonging and community, produced by the football club, is thwarted by his mother, as he narrates, “Ammi didn’t like us supporting Mohammedan Sporting. She thought we should back a proper Bengali club like East Bengal...” (Basu 40). This oppositional position of Jami and his mother regarding supporting a football club, can be understood from a broader perspective of refugees’ identity politics. Historically speaking, Mohammedan Sporting Club, at the time of India’s anti-colonial struggle, was seen as a platform where the peaceful coexistence of two communities – the Hindu and the Muslim was challenged and consequently, it became a site for “transition from community to communal in Bengal football” (Bandyopadhyay 137). The football team, by performing on the field, was able to instil a sense of rage and animosity into the young Muslim supporters against the Hindu

population. On this communal tension on the maidan, Suranjan Das aptly remarks, "...the Mohammedan Sporting Club in football matches enraged Muslim feelings which were expressed in sporadic violence against the Hindu" (Das 170). Hence, Jami's mother never wants to see his son as a supporter of a football club which is historically associated with communal violence. Despite being a Muslim, she keeps aside her religious identity and includes herself within the broader corpus of refugee identity, assimilating with the other East Bengal refugees in the city of Kolkata. Her appeal to Jami to support East Bengal football team is for the establishment of their social identity, asserting, "refugees must support refugees" (Basu 40), as after partition, the East Bengal Club was formed to represent the cultural self of the Hindu refugees and to "win against the 'other', that is, the West Bengali Hindus" (Bandyopadhyay 173).

Jami's sense of belongingness and being at home with his family members at the Zakaria Street gets disrupted when he starts working first as a masseur at the Champaka, and then as a gigolo, a male prostitute in order to fulfil his mother's dream of becoming a "true Kalkatta-wallah". Visiting the affluent localities of Kolkata, shopping at the high-rise malls, spending time at the café with his "customers", compel him to emotionally detach from what he knows as his 'home'. His engagement with Monica Goswami, one of his 'customers', having lunch and dinner in the fancy hotels with her, wearing branded clothes and exploration of the glamorous Kolkata make him to forget the dark alleys of Zakaria street, losing the belongingness to the Number 14 and affection towards his mother. His profession and detachment with his family members turn him into a "stranger in Number 14, living like a refugee in [his] own family" (Basu 96). After knowing his profession, his mother also gives up dreaming of her Jami becoming a "real Kalkatta-wallah, the son who'd end the

struggles of three generations” (153). Hence, Jami’s ambition of becoming a “true Kalkatta-wallah” by performing as a gigolo and consequently his detachment with his family can be understood as his journey from belongingness to non-belongingness, being at home to homelessness, and eventually, at some point of time he also feels that he “didn’t have a permanent address any more” like the stray dogs in the city (278).

Home in Everywhere: Feeling of Home and the Unhomely Self

Debate on the notion of home, in most cases, exclude the experiences of the prostitutes, as scholars think that the prostitutes disrupt the notion of home by violating the norms of traditional and heterosexual home. Selling of sexual services, as Hubbard argues, “outside the ordered institutions of the family and the home ... has come to represent a threat to heterosexual norms” (204). The prostitutes vehemently defy the norms of home-making, first by placing the sexual encounters, which is strictly considered a homely experience, at the commercial space; and secondly, commercial sex is viewed as a contrary notion to the process of home-making, as the latter is regarded as a process of “creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging” (Blunt and Dowling 23). However, the prostitutes’ move from one place to another, leaving one home to attend another, can be best understood by following Bhabha’s idea of “unhomely self”. Bhabha conceptualizes “unhomely self” as not a condition of homelessness, rather a peculiar feeling of home when one is homeless and a sense of homelessness when one is at home. The person who is unhomely always moves, physically as well as emotionally, from one home to another, as an everyday practice of her life against any kind of displacement and subjugation.

In this novel, the protagonist, Jami, to fulfil his mother’s

dream, chooses the profession of a “gigolo, male escort, toyboy, playboy...” (Basu 110). Hailing from a dark underbelly of Kolkata, Zakaria Street, which is infamous for being a place for the most wanted criminals, Jami after becoming a gigolo, experiences his visibility, presence and also his public recognition in the public space, that he always longs for. It is evident in his narration when he says, “People pay attention to you when you’re with a beautiful woman, doormen salute and open doors; rather than throwing down a menu, waiters unfold napkins on your lap” (83). His intimacy with Monica creates a sense of belongingness and comfortability, through which he recollects his childhood memories of his mother, as during shopping, he thinks, “she seemed like Ammi” (84). Again, at some point, Monica’s presence in his life seems more requisite than that of his mother, as he does not wish to return to Zakaria Street from the comfort zone which he creates with Monica. He regrets, “Losing Mrs Goswami meant more than missing out on dinners in five-star hotels and returning to my old world with Ammi’s leftovers” (96). Here, home for Jami, is a liminal space of conflicting experiences, centred on the binary oppositions of camaraderie and segregation, privacy and publicity, marginalization and belongingness, strangeness and familiarity. It is the “unhomely self” of Jami, who dwells between home and homelessness, challenging the normative notion of home and dwelling. As Bhabha opines that the “unhomely self” does not mean being homeless, but conveys “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place” (142), blurring the boundary between the home and the world. Again, in this profession, a person always has to anticipate threats from the external world, in the forms of police, police informer or the other groups of the same profession. Jami is also aware of these threats from the external world, as he describes, “Gigolos were known to be vicious to poachers. The street

belonged to them along with all those who were looking for some night action” (Basu 214). Hence, on one hand the street seems like home to the gigolo, and on the other, they feel homeless on this same place because of the “the spectral presence of ‘others’ in the home” (Bennett 964). As a ‘product’, leading a life of a gigolo, Jami continues to move from one customer to another, from “North to South Kalkatta” in order to give “treatment to [his] parties” (Basu 120), leading to the feeling of experiencing home neither here nor there, yet also here and there. It is his profession, which makes him financially stable, wearing good clothes, allows him to be able to buy anything for his Ammi and Miri and to feel a “true Kalkatta-wallah”. As an unhomely self, he yearns for home everywhere by moving from one place to another; to him, home has become, “a rather generalized notion of an “elsewhere” that constitutes the real place of belonging” (Olwig 216).

Into the Mainstream: Gaining and Losing of Home and Belonging

Jami’s identity as a refugee and a member of a religious minority community leads him to be perceived as a ‘stranger other’ in the public space of Kolkata, the city, which is famously regarded as a place of Bengali intelligentsia. Indeed, the city is rich in Bengali culture, but it is also true that the city hosts an ample number of people who are not Bengali, belonging to different ethnic groups. As a second-generation refugee, unlike his parents, Jami participates in various social and cultural groups, gets acquainted with many persons, mostly affluent, residing in the city, whom, he considers as the specimens of real Kalkatta-wallah. His engagement with the people from different socio-cultural groups blurs the line between the home and the world as well as between the first and the second-generation refugees. Understanding and experiencing “the values, traditions and practices of the society”,

is a tactic, adopted by the second-generation migrants in order to settle in the new place, which leads to reconfiguring of “individual and collective identities” (Vasta 42). In this process, migrants are very often perceived as “the stranger”, “the other”, as their sudden presence in the society causes a sense of eeriness to the settled citizen.

In the case of Jami, his place of residence, that is, the Zakaria Street, has already been disregarded as a place of criminals, and his religious identity places him in a vulnerable position, where he repeatedly experiences the lack of recognition and belongingness, what Vasta calls “a stranger at home” (42). It is evident in the speech of Nasrin, wife of the political leader Dr Sala, when she remarks, “All Bangladeshis are thieves!” (Basu 17). Again, when Jami gets a job in a passport company, named “Galaxy”, he becomes aware of how Muslim citizens are treated during the process of issuing their passports, simply suspecting them as terrorists. As Rajesh Sharma of the Galaxy Passport Company tells Jami, “There’ll be many more checks by the police ... we could get into trouble if a terrorist was arrested after a bomb blast and it so happened that his passport was arranged by one Rajesh Sharma of Galaxy helped by his subagent” (62).

Jami’s longing to become a “true Kalkatta-wallah” is based on his feeling of an outsider and the lack of recognition and belongingness in a society which is culturally dominated by the Bengali people. His aspiration to become a Kalkatta-wallah is surely a step towards climbing the predominant power hierarchy in the society in order to gain recognition and to uplift himself from the “stranger other” to a familiar one in the city. In this regard, he encounters as well as experiences some psychosocial changes during the process of acculturation and assimilation, which can be viewed as a tactic where a migrant individual creates contact with the members of majority group and vows to adapt

their social and cultural values in the host land. Acculturation and assimilation, to a migrant, who is culturally bereaved, assists to “gain a semblance of equilibrium”, resulting in the formation of a sense of belonging to the new homeland (Bhugra and Becker 22). Jami, in order to assimilate, comes into contact with a Kalkatta-wallah, Anirban Mitra, who illustrates three rules of becoming a crucial member of the city. They are:

Rule number one, you have to believe that you know everything. It’s a must. ... Number two, you must accept that rumours are more important than facts. ... Rule number three requires that you make a grand gesture every now and then. (67)

Another one, Deepti, with whom Jami meets in a gathering of a poetry group in Mandira’s house, tells him:

There are only three absolute requirements, nothing more, nothing less. First, owning an original painting from the great Bengal school, not a fake, mind you. Something like a Jamini Roy or even Hemen Majumdar, ... Second, you need to properly display all twenty-five volumes of Tagore’s works, even if you haven’t managed to get through any one of them. ... teach your cook the fine art of making a pure vegetarian meal without a hint of fish or fowl. (140-141)

After a close engagement with these so called “true Kalkatta-wallah[s]”, Jami understands that these people who can spend time by discussing poetry, art and culture, propose their thought in a way that is completely based on theoretical abstraction, devoid of any practical and real-life experiences, “A Kalkatta-wallah has learnt to drive his thoughts away from things that hang like a cloud over Zakaria Street” (219). Jami builds a relationship of trust and belonging with people like Anirban, which he considers “a comfortable home” (169), but eventually, the sheer hollowness in the thought process and attitude of these people makes Jami

feel the same lack of recognition and belongingness again. In this context, John W. Berry's observation on the process of acculturation can be noted, as he opines that the very process of acculturation includes a psychological model of going towards, moving against and moving away from a stimulus. The process of acculturation always needs an interaction between two cultures and most of the cases, the dominant one influences the other; however, during the adaptation, there is a possibility of rejection or deculturation (Berry 25-30).

All through his life, Jami experiences the futility of his aspiration, the lack of recognition and constantly feels the sense of non-belongingness and homelessness. He realizes that being the son of a refugee parents, it is impossible for him to own a home for himself, to be a "true Kalkatta-wallah" in the city of Kolkata, as he thinks, "it is impossible for a son and grandson of refugees to live normally in Kalkatta" (255). Gradually his sense of belongingness fades away, and it is again recovered when he meets Pablo, the little son of his friend, Mandira. He discovers that his own situation and that of Pablo are the same, as they both are stuck in a vulnerable state with no one by their side; "neither of [them] had friends or a future in Kalkatta" (255). His sense of belongingness to Pablo is similar to what Duyvendak refers to "heaven", the third feature of home, "a public place where one can collectively be, express and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent" (38). Here, individual is allowed to embody "shared histories" and it itself becomes "a material and/or symbolic place with one's own people and activities" (38). The home here is not limited to one's own self or household, it goes on to extend its boundary to encompass a wider arena that includes public locations, such as neighbourhoods, cities, regions, and even the nation states. Hence, the concept of home is interpreted in terms of its association with belonging, safety,

privacy, comfort, desire and community. The self-effacing love and affection for Pablo reaffirms his sense of belongingness, and that is so strong that he vows to quit his profession as a gigolo and lead a life of a gentleman. He feels a different sensation when he enters Mandira's house to spend time with Pablo, as this house does not compel him to be alert and treat him as a product. The presence of Pablo in the house creates a sense of being at home for Jami, as he feels:

It invited me to stay for no reason. As Pablo and I became friends, I had felt something strong inside, making me think of every reason to keep on staying, as if leaving him would mean giving up something I'd lost long ago. (210)

Jami's sense of belongingness and being at home, that revolves around Pablo, is again shattered by the child's mother, Mandira, when after knowing his profession as a gigolo, she does not want to continue any connection with him, however, he is extremely keen to clarify to her the reason behind choosing a profession of a gigolo. In a monologue, Jami vehemently illustrates his failure to secure a respectable job that he always wants; his destiny of being brought up in a refugee family subdues him in achieving his dream. As he says, "The *real* story, I'd tell her, hadn't started with Monica but the day Abbu left Geneva [a refugee camp in Dhaka for Bihari Muslims] to take us across the border to Kalkatta" (307). From the cover design onwards, Basu, through the text of *Kalkatta* repeatedly exploits the image of stray dogs to indicate the homeless condition of people like Jami, who want to achieve the 'home' but fail repeatedly. The death of Jami hit by a running taxi draws the connection between his ultimate fate and that of the stray dogs. As Jami in his last monologue, says:

Just like our first night at Number 14, I'd seen a giant form taking off noisily from the branches. It had silenced the dogs, but not the screeching tyres of the Devil taxi setting off down

the lane in a headlong rush to complete one last errand. Thus far, I had managed to stay clear of its path but had known that it'd come calling someday. It'd be impossible to avoid that moment, because of the pain that would've numbed all other sensations by then. None though, could've spotted the danger, until the Devil's breath was too close, burning hot over my face. The blow was unexpected. It shot me off my feet like a rocket, sending me up and flying high, higher even than the gulmohar. (309)

CONCLUSION

The understanding and interpretation of Jami's experience in the city of Kolkata as narrated in the novel *Kalkatta*, enable one to understand the life of the refugees in the city, who are forced to live in a ghetto, leading a life in the most unpleasant way. Their continuous struggle to accomplish a life of a respectable common citizen is always thwarted by the sense of lack of recognition and belongingness. From his childhood, Jami, a second-generation refugee, is brought up in the poverty-stricken refugee ghetto on the Zakaria Street, experiences alienation, a sense of homelessness and non-belongingness in the society. He is influenced by the predominant autonomy of the Bengali culture and consequently tries to climb the inherent power structure of the city to be a "true-Kalkatta-wallah". From making friends in his locality to getting associated with the affluent individuals in the city, he continues his search for home and belongingness. To him, home is not a place that is associated with dwelling, but a quest, which he carries on till his last breath. However, at the end of his life, he finds his resemblance to the stray dogs as he remains homeless and feels the lack of belongingness and recognition, and this ultimate identification leads to his realization that he is "one of many creatures that inhabited Kalkatta..." (309).

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Dragnetting the Invisible: An Exploration of Surveillance, Secrecy and Exile in Amar Bhushan's *Escape to Nowhere* (2012)

Haradhan Malik

ABSTRACT: Amar Bhushan's fiction *Escape to Nowhere* is based on a true story, rooted in the world of Indian intelligence that brings forth the harsh reality of the intelligence agency (CEU). This text highlights the agency's methods of investigation, its diplomatic dealings with foreign agencies on international matters, and the internal conflicts within the organization. The plot of this novel is centered on the character Ravi Mohan, a senior officer in the agency who has been placed under surveillance for some suspicious deeds, but what unfolds later is severe. He is illegally transmitting secret data to foreign agents and violating national trust. The novel presents betrayal not as a result of personal trauma or mental collapse, but as an ideological and political act that challenges the boundaries of state loyalty. It is a narrative that exposes the dynamics of betrayal and institutional control within India's intelligence community. Through the methodical internal surveillance operation mounted against Ravi, Bhushan highlights how bureaucratic institutions respond to

internal threats not through public confrontation, but through silent investigation, procedural containment, and institutional erasure. The novel depicts the state's power as embedded in its ability to detect and neutralize dissent invisibly, without the need for spectacle. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of surveillance and disciplinary regimes and Giorgio Agamben's theory of *bare life* this paper argues that Ravi Mohan becomes a subject excluded from the protection of institutional law but included within the scope of state control. His condition as a fugitive, untried yet condemned, reflects how modern states manage dissent by rendering individuals politically invisible. This study argues that *Escape to Nowhere* critiques both the act of treason and the cold, impersonal machinery through which the state isolates and removes disloyal subjects.

KEYWORDS: *Intelligence Agency, Surveillance, Betrayal, Bare Life, Control, Exile.*

INTRODUCTION

In the post-millennial era, Indian literature has witnessed a surge in spy thrillers. These narratives extend beyond the life-threatening adventures of heroes at home and abroad, delving deeply into the internal conflicts and complexities within intelligence agencies. Indian spy fiction is situated at the intersection of literary creativity, political intrigue, and national security. While it is believed that the worldwide narrative of espionage was shaped by the Western corpus of spy fiction, dominated by characters like James Bond and George Smiley, Indian spy fiction originates from a distinct set of historical, political, and cultural contexts. A

distinctive portrayal of secrecy, patriotism, and treachery on the Indian subcontinent is attributed to the genre, which is rooted in postcolonial anxieties, border tensions, and the covert operations of intelligence organizations such as RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) and IB (Intelligence Bureau). Unlike its Western counterparts that often glamorize the lone, morally ambiguous agent, Indian spy fiction frequently grounds its protagonists in institutional frameworks, where loyalty to the state is tested against complex bureaucratic, ideological, and personal dilemmas. The narratives are shaped not only by the Cold War legacy but also by India's own geopolitical realities, partition, insurgencies, terrorism, and cross-border espionage, particularly with Pakistan and China. Authors such as Amar Bhushan, Mukul Deva, and Hussain Zaidi have contributed to the emergence of Indian spy thrillers that blend realism with fiction, combining procedural detail with emotional and moral conflict. These texts explore the silent wars waged within and beyond the nation's borders, shedding light on how the intelligence community operates in the shadows, far from public scrutiny. The genre also raises critical questions about the limits of loyalty, the nature of surveillance, and the ethical ambiguities of statecraft. Unlike others here Amar Bhushan's *Escape to Nowhere* captures the intricate plot of bureaucratic surveillance on Ravi Mohan and also the inner conflicts within the agency. It is a fictionalized account of a real-life espionage case within India's intelligence agency, RAW (Research and Analysis Wing). The novel is set in New Delhi and follows the quiet, tense unraveling of an internal betrayal in the country's top-secret security machinery. The story centres on Ravi Mohan, a mid-level officer working in a counterintelligence unit. Despite his calm demeanour and decorated service record, Ravi's activities raise internal suspicions. The senior leadership receives an anonymous note suggesting he may be leaking

classified information to a foreign agency. Rather than arresting or confronting him directly, the agency decides to monitor him silently. Thus, begins a covert internal operation, led by Jeevnathan, the head of the internal security unit. Through intense surveillance, tailing, bugging, and psychological profiling CEU attempts to confirm Ravi's guilt without alerting him. As the operation unfolds, Ravi appears increasingly anxious and isolated, yet his motives remain ambiguous. The novel documents the systematic nature of this internal dragnet while keeping the actual betrayal frustratingly ambiguous until the end. Eventually, Ravi vanishes without a trace, escaping surveillance just as evidence begins to mount. His disappearance reinforces both the strength and the limitations of bureaucratic intelligence operations. He becomes a fugitive, a symbol of ideological and institutional breakdown. Keeping this narrative in this analytical study, some questions may arise – how does this novel represent the mechanisms of internal surveillance within state intelligence agencies and create paranoia in his mind? What led him to be a dissenter? And to what extent did the disciplinary apparatus attempt to normalize Ravi invisibly? This study will interrogate the ambiguity surrounding Ravi's isolation, whether it was a result of intentional withdrawal or a consequence of institutional exclusion. This study will also analyse to what extent Ravi Mohan can be interpreted as a figure of Agamben's "bare life," and how his erasure illuminates the logic and mechanisms of power within the modern state.

GOVERNING THROUGH CONTROL AND EXILE: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

In modern critical theory and political thought, the relationship between state power, secrecy, and surveillance has emerged as a significant area of inquiry. Michel Foucault's ideas about power, knowledge, and discipline are very important for understanding

how modern states run their governments through control systems that are often unseen but very common. He says, “Knowledge comes from power; power and knowledge directly imply each other” (Foucault 27). Foucault rethought power not as something that comes from a sovereign but as a network of relationships that are practiced through institutions, practices, and knowledge systems that affect how people act (Foucault 1977). The idea of surveillance is very important to this study, especially Foucault’s use of the “Panopticon” as a metaphor and model for modern disciplinary societies, where people internalize the gaze of power and self-regulate in response (Foucault 1977). People who are constantly aware that they are being watched are more likely to control their behaviour. Traditional sovereign power is shown in public and is often violent. Panoptic power, on the other hand, works through uncertainty and not being seen. This creates a state of awareness and permanent visibility that makes power work automatically (Foucault 1977). This invisible gaze is present in many places, such as jails, schools, hospitals, and the government’s control system as a whole. This makes bodies submissive that follow rules without being forced. It says in his writing, “He who is in a field of visibility and knows it is responsible for the limits of power; he makes them play out naturally on himself” (Foucault, 202). For Foucault, surveillance is a productive force that changes not only behaviour but also identity and social order. He says, “Power is exercised rather than possessed... it is a relation that can only be realized in action” (Foucault 1980, 98).

Regarding surveillance, it is said that “surveillance is not just a tool of control; it is also a mechanism that makes certain kinds of knowledge about people, which in turn makes certain kinds of subjects” (Lyon 2007). Lyon’s research builds on this idea from Foucault by focusing on spying as a form of power that changes the way people interact with each other and creates new

identities. People are always aware that they could be watched by the government's secret surveillance systems, which creates a panoptic awareness that changes behaviour and identity. But you cannot fully understand surveillance without also understanding the role of secrecy, which is a key technique in state apparatuses. Secrecy is the information that is kept secret and Coady (2012) looks at it critically and says that secrecy is more than just keeping information from other people. It is also a relationship idea that shapes political and social realities by defining the limits of what people know and what they do not know. In this situation, the government uses secrets to hide how it controls things and to give the impression that it is all-powerful and unpredictable, which strengthens its authority (Bigo 2008). It seems that secrecy and surveillance work together in a way that is like a dialectical relationship, as surveillance tries to make people visible to the government, but secrecy keeps the public from seeing the full scope and methods of surveillance, which keeps power imbalances in place. While talking of these, the one concept is very important to expound here is the "viewer society" which shows a change from overt discipline to more subtle and widespread forms of power that seep into everyday life and create a self-disciplined culture based on the fear of being watched (Mathiesen 1997). So monitoring is not just a way to keep people in line; it is also a complicated social technology that changes identities and social relationships, creating new kinds of subjectivity that both fit with power and fight it. Also, new research shows that privacy is lost and spying gets stronger in the postmodern state, where technological progress has made state control more widespread and subtle (Haggerty & Ericson 2006). These changes support Foucault's idea of the "disciplinary society" changing into a "surveillant assemblage" with widespread and constant surveillance that goes beyond the usual separation of public and private (Hag-

gerty & Ericson 2006). Bigo (2008) calls this the “ban-opticon,” which means that the government controls things by combining openness and privacy, keeping things safe by showing and hiding things. This duality makes traditional ideas of authority harder to understand and blurs the lines between what is legal and what is illegal. It is important to point out that secrecy in surveillance is not an accident, but a purposeful tool of power. According to Clive Norris and Gary Armstrong (1999), secrecy lets the government “control narratives, frame social realities, and govern populations through managed knowledge.” This shows that surveillance and secrecy work together to create a political technology of control. This way of handling information creates a tension between being seen and not being seen.

Foucault’s idea of “power-knowledge” also shows how monitoring and keeping secrets are connected to the rules that decide what people can know, say, and do in a society. *Escape to Nowhere* is a powerful case study that shows how surveillance technologies and hidden government operations work. The story shows how people internalize monitoring systems and figure out who they are while being watched all the time. The link between power and knowledge is what modern forms of government are based on and this interaction is clearly shown in *Escape to Nowhere*, where secret government information and covert surveillance practices create a culture of fear and control while also opening for resistance and subversion. This way of looking at things not only helps us understand the text better, but it also sheds light on important issues like pushback and the moral issues surrounding surveillance in the modern world. Within the panoptic framework, secrecy acts as a contrast to the openness of monitoring, creating a tension that keeps power in place. This imbalance keeps the state’s epistemic edge, which lets surveillance happen in secret while people don’t know what kind of sur-

veillance is going on or how far it goes. Because of this balance between secrecy and openness, the state's power stays hidden, which strengthens control through psychological and intellectual doubt.

Whereas Foucault examines how the body is disciplined (in prisons, schools, hospitals) through surveillance & normalization, Agamben builds on Foucault's concept of biopolitics; he critiques and reorients it through his own analysis of sovereign power and bare life. This philosophical transition shifts the focus from the regulation of life to the abandonment and exclusion of life. 'Agamben argues that although Foucault's analysis of power touches on the connection between legal (juridico-institutional) and biopolitical models, it never fully confronts their deep, hidden intersection. This intersection, where sovereignty (the power to rule and decide life and death) meets biopolitics (the management of life by the state) is the blind spot in Foucault's work and in Western political thought more broadly (Agamben 1995). Here, Agamben's project is to uncover this "vanishing point" the hidden origin of sovereign power, where the state includes "bare life" (pure biological existence without rights) within its political logic. Agamben says that modern politics is based on a strange situation called the "state of exception." In this situation, a person's life, which he calls "bare life" is kept outside the law, but at the same time, the state still controls it. So, bare life is both excluded from and included in politics. This hidden contradiction is actually the foundation of modern political systems. When the line between normal law and the state of exception becomes unclear, bare life enters the center of politics. It is no longer just something the state controls; it becomes part of political struggles. People who were once powerless have now become both the target of state power and the voice that challenges it. At the same time, two things happen. On one hand, the state continues to control peo-

ple as biological bodies with respect to their health, birth, death, and population control. On the other hand, in modern democracy, people start to demand rights not just as citizens, but as living human beings. These two movements of state control and people's fight for freedom may look like opposites, but Agamben says they are actually connected. Both are focused on bare life, which has now become the centre of political life. The life that was once pushed to the edge is now the heart of both power and resistance. He argues that modern states create a "state of exception" where they can strip people of legal rights without appearing oppressive. For him, exclusion is a legal-political decision on who is a citizen and who is "homo sacer" (excluded from law but still controlled). He uses "*homo sacer*" as a metaphor for modern individuals who are excluded from political life but still controlled by the state. People are taken under constant surveillance or control, but with no legal recourse. Although their works intersect, they also diverge in important ways. Both theorists emphasize how power today often works through invisible structures, surveillance, norms, and legal frameworks rather than overt force. For Foucault, the body is subject to disciplinary power (schools, prisons, hospitals) and for Agamben, the body becomes "bare life", stripped of legal and political identity. Both agree that the body is where power becomes visible. Foucault focuses on biopolitics and the discipline of how power shapes life through norms and institutions. Agamben re-centers sovereign power, the power to decide exceptions, i.e., who is excluded from the law and made killable.

READING *ESCAPE TO NOWHERE*

Amar Bhushan's fiction, *Escape to Nowhere* (2012), possesses a different kind of narrative structure as it is not divided by chapters but by days. It consists of 96 days and an epilogue. In 2023, Vishal Bhardwaj made a film on it named *Khufiya*; however, the

film differs significantly from the original novel. *Escape to Nowhere* is a gripping spy novel by Amar Bhushan, a former Special Secretary in the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), India's external intelligence agency. Set within the high-stakes world of espionage, the novel draws inspiration from a real-life incident involving the mysterious disappearance of an Indian intelligence officer suspected of spying. The story unfolds that Jeevnathan, the head of the Security Division, navigates a web of loyalty, betrayal, and institutional dysfunction when suspicions arise about a senior analyst, Ravi Mohan, possibly leaking sensitive information. What makes the novel compelling is its insider's view of the workings of Indian intelligence, its ethical complexities, and the psychological toll on those tasked with protecting national security. Bhushan presents a realistic portrayal of the bureaucracy, secrecy, and personal cost behind espionage, not through action-packed chase scenes, but through subtle tensions, conversations, and moral dilemmas. *Escape to Nowhere* is not just a spy thriller; it is a sobering meditation on the blurred lines between duty and deception, rules and relationships, and the cost of doing what is right in a system that does not always reward it. The narrative intensifies when Venkat, a young and junior officer in cyber operations, breaks the usual chain of command and directly warns Jeevnathan about the suspicious actions of Ravi Mohan, a senior analyst. Venkat says that Ravi has shown too much interest in secret cyber tools and had links in the past with a journalist who might have been working for another country. These actions suggest that national security could be at risk. Venkat's decision to speak to Jeevnathan also shows how difficult it is for junior officers to report wrongdoing in a system where accountability is often ignored. The bureaucratic agency is an institution that follows strict rules, codes of conduct, and a fixed ideology. Everyone who belongs to it is expected to follow these rules. If some-

one breaks them, they may be classified or labelled. According to Michel Foucault, such categorization is not neutral—it is a political act. Institutions label people and place them into fixed roles such as the mad, the criminal, the sick, the deviant, or the normal (Foucault 1978). This is what happens to Ravi Mohan: when he takes his position against the rules of the agency, he is labelled a deviant—a spy or traitor. Then Jeevnathan orders Kamath to start watching Ravi, but to keep it secret. After three days of spying on Ravi Mohan, the watchers give Jeevnathan a lot of reports and photos. Most of Ravi's meetings are with relatives or fellow officers, often in fancy restaurants, though not related to his own department and he does not meet anyone suspicious during travel. It seems to Jeevnathan that they are missing something, so he says, “You are missing out on two or more needles in the haystack” (Bhushan, 54). Jeevnathan cannot shake off a growing sense of unease; the thought keeps returning to him, making him feel increasingly uncanny. Once surveillance is initiated, it becomes evident that Ravi Mohan leads an unusually extravagant lifestyle. He frequently invites fellow desk officers to lunch or dinner at five-star hotels—behaviour far removed from that of a typical officer. His medical treatment, social connections, and general conduct suggest a life of privilege and access that seems out of place. Naturally, questions arise: where does he get the resources to sustain such a lifestyle? These questions continue to trouble Jeevnathan. Although Ravi has served in several foreign postings and making international contacts is expected in his line of work the extent of his connections and his overall lifestyle still appear suspicious. No other officer behaves in such a manner. To some extent, Ravi seems to be violating the agency's ethical norms or ideological framework. It is as if he deliberately resists or subverts the disciplinary structure of the organization. This deviation from institutional expectations raises red flags, making it

necessary to place him under surveillance.

Surveillance is the central theme in this narrative. The word *dragnetting* is used to show how subtly the investigation is carried out to uncover the suspect hiding in plain sight. As suspicion grows in Jeevnathan's mind, he deploys several operatives to find any unusual behaviour in Ravi Mohan's activities. When these efforts yield no solid results, he instructs Kamath to start phone tapping. From these intercepted calls, Ravi appears to have regular conversations with relatives and colleagues, gathering information on various topics. This phone tapping is the first major move by the CEU's higher officials. Some of Ravi's questions to other desk officers raise concerns, as they have nothing to do with his assigned duties. Ravi's repeated access to information from other desks reflects the concept of the "ban-opticon," which combines both openness and secrecy to create an atmosphere of constant suspicion and control. Although Ravi intentionally gathers information, not everyone around him is aware of his motives. However, some officials eventually understand what he is doing and bring him under suspicion. While Jeevnathan's team try to pinpoint any wrongdoing, they cannot gather solid proof, which increases their frustration. These covert operations are carried out without formal permission from Chief Wasan, though he is aware of them. At first, the Chief is hesitant due to ethical concerns. However, Jeevnathan's experience and stubbornness pushes the operation forward. Later, hidden cameras are installed in Ravi's office, which reveals terrible things. He often photocopied documents collected from other sources and stored them in his brown leather bag. The team collect data from the photocopying machine. Despite this, they still cannot find any conclusive evidence to arrest him. Even surveillance cameras were placed in his car and eventually in the corridors and rooms of his apartment. This shows how modern states use surveillance in private spaces to

gather secret information, thereby creating “zones of indistinction” where legal and moral boundaries become blurred. This enables governance through uncertainty and ambiguity (Stoler 59). Still, all efforts lead to a wild goose chase. Meanwhile, agents also follow him to the places he visited and record the people he met. But none of this produces any concrete proof. To go even further with this Foucaultian view regarding deployment of agents, it is that modern surveillance is a “multiplicity of gazes” that are built into institutional and technological networks that work without centralized state control. This suggests that power is spread out and not centralized (Ball and Webster 56). The story shows a surveillance state that is not one central thing, but is spread out and includes bureaucratic agents, technologies, and social actors who are all involved in watching and controlling. The constant presence of the state and its desire to watch, control, and silence in *Escape to Nowhere* shows a basic idea of biopolitics, which is the modern form of power that, as Michel Foucault says, “takes life itself as its object” (Foucault 1978, 143). The story shows that power does not just control or stop people from doing things; it also sorts, manages, and organizes them through a set of tools that affect their lives on a personal and social level. Foucault’s idea of biopolitics is a big change in how power is used. It goes from sovereign power, which means having the right to kill, to biopower, which means having the power to “make live and let die” (Foucault 2003, 241). As the story goes on, the government’s actions of monitoring, identity theft, and movement restrictions are seen as biopolitical interventions that plan the lives of people who are both valuable and disposable in the national security system.

Ravi’s real paranoia and sense of moral dilemma surface when his personal assistant is caught with sensitive files, which are then kept for investigation. Around the same time, some officers and Kamath in the agency inform him that a senior official

was under surveillance for secretly dealing with foreign agents and transferring classified information. This fits with O'Malley's (1996) view of secrecy as an important part of the "carceral archipelago," where information is broken up and only some of it is shared to keep the logic of monitoring and discipline going (p. 74). So, the text's look at disinformation is not just about lying; it is also about how knowledge is strategically controlled to make people obey through partial exposure and hidden truths. Despite being under strict surveillance, Ravi Mohan manages to escape India with his wife. Two U.S. agents, Gilbert and Angelién, help them flee through Nepal. They change their identities and use fake passports to travel. They were promised permanent residency in the U.S., but it turns out to be false. As the novel states, "Ravi was left to fend for himself and live the remaining years of his life without any status — refugee, naturalised or illegal immigrant" (ibid., 325). He has no legal identity in the U.S. and he cannot get a job. He has to rely entirely on financial support from his children. The U.S. government gives him no help, and the Indian government completely disowns him, even though he once worked for it. The Indian government dismisses Ravi from service under Article 311(2)(c) of the Constitution, citing national security concerns. The Indian intelligence chief summons Douglas Walters, the CIA Station Head in Delhi, and demands to know whether Ravi's defection was an official CIA operation or the work of rogue agents like Gilbert. Walters denies any knowledge of Gilbert or Angelién and promises to investigate. A week later, Walters reports that the CIA has no involvement and that no one named Gilbert or Angelién works for them. He also says that U.S. immigration has no record of Ravi or his wife under either their real names or assumed names entering the country. The U.S. denies everything, leaving the Indian agency powerless and uncertain. Ravi Mohan's condition, as described in this extract from

Escape to Nowhere, is one of complete ruin—both personally and politically. After defecting from India to the United States with the help of foreign agents, he becomes a man without a country, without a legal identity, and any official protection. The Indian intelligence agency sees him as a traitor who leaked classified information, but they are unable to formally prosecute him because the evidence is too sensitive to reveal in public or in international courts. As a result, the agency's attempts to arrest or extradite him fail repeatedly. To cover their failure and show that they are still in control, Indian officials stage a superficial campaign to track him down, but collapse when agencies like Interpol and the U.S. State Department demand proof that cannot be shared without exposing intelligence operations. Even Ravi's assumed name—Roben Singh—becomes part of a failed asylum plea in the U.S., where judges go back and forth on whether to believe his story. Despite his escape, he finds no stability in the U.S. either. He is stuck in a legal and political limbo, unrecognized by official documents, with no job, no legal status, and a life dependent entirely on his family's support. Meanwhile, the Indian media turns the entire case into a spectacle, criticizing the intelligence agency for incompetence, infighting, and even possible complicity. Journalists and commentators accuse senior officers of either helping Ravi escape or failing to stop him due to their internal power struggles. Speculation spreads that Ravi had information that could expose a wider network of corruption and espionage involving top officials, and that is why arresting him was never seriously pursued. This exemplifies what Giorgio Agamben (1998) calls the "state of exception," a place where the law is suspended to protect the law and life is left without any political value but still under sovereign control (Agamben 6). Here, there is no longer a clear line between enemy and citizen. Life is dangerous, depending on the government's decisions and smart hiding. As the story goes on, the char-

acters become bio-coded beings that can be moved, watched, and erased. In this condition, a person's life—what Agamben calls “bare life”—is placed outside the protection of the law, yet it remains under the control of the state. This means that bare life is simultaneously excluded from and included within the realm of politics. This shows a dark parallel between keeping secrets and controlling life itself. Foucault's study of biopolitics also shows that modern states depend on more than just force. They also depend on making norms, which include how to classify populations, their health, their identity, and their danger. Nikolas Rose (2007) goes into more detail about this by saying that biopower works through “vital politics,” which means that people are forced to control their own biological existence in a way that makes sense for the government (52). This relationship is clearly shown in *Escape to Nowhere* through the conflict between people's free will and adopting identities that the government gives them. Biopolitical calculations constantly tell the characters whether they should be loyal, patriotic, or traitor. This shows how life is entangled in a surveillance system that sorts existence into three groups based on usefulness, loyalty, and risk. The government thinks it knows everything about people, including their moves, thoughts, and pasts. This is not just an epistemological claim; it changes what lives are worth living and what bodies are disposable. In the book, the government makes sure that the lives of spies, migrants, and double agents live in a constant zone of non-recognition, somewhere between being legal and being thrown away. Their deaths are not recognized, their identities change, and their lives are used for statistics or strategy, but they are never fully human in the moral world that the government approves of.

In the end, Ravi's life becomes a portrait of betrayal turned back on itself. He betrayed his nation, but the country he defected to denies knowing him. He becomes a ghost in both countries—

unwanted, undocumented, and forgotten. His condition reflects a tragic fall from a high-ranking intelligence officer to a man without a name, status, or future.

CONCLUSION

In *Escape to Nowhere*, the narrative of Ravi Mohan's betrayal is not merely a personal act of disloyalty but a revealing case study of how modern states function through systems of surveillance, secrecy, and categorization. The novel exposes the underlying operations of state power, where visibility and invisibility, inclusion and exclusion, are strategically manipulated. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories, we see that Ravi's actions and eventual erasure are shaped by a disciplinary society that regulates individuals through constant observation and internalized control mechanisms. Institutions like the intelligence agency operate not only through coercion but also through the normalization of behaviour—producing obedient or “docile” bodies. When Ravi breaks the code, he is immediately reclassified, not as a rational subject, but as a deviant and a threat. This reflects Foucault's notion that categorization is a political act, shaping identities and determining who is deemed normal, sick, criminal, or disloyal. Furthermore, the novel also resonates with Giorgio Agamben's concept of *bare life*—a form of existence that is excluded from legal and political protections yet remains under state control. Ravi, once part of the institutional system, is cast out when he no longer serves its ideological interest, becoming a figure who is both inside and outside the law. His disavowal symbolizes the modern state's capacity to operate in a “state of exception,” where traditional rules are suspended, and individuals can be stripped of all rights while still being subjected to surveillance and control. The state thus governs not only through visible laws but through zones of indistinction, where moral and legal boundaries

are blurred. Secrecy and surveillance function together in a dialectical relationship: the government keeps its methods hidden while demanding complete transparency from its citizens. This asymmetry preserves the epistemic advantage of the state, reinforcing power through uncertainty. The spy system, as shown in the novel, does not just monitor enemies but also creates them through suspicion and categorization. Ravi's fate illustrates how individuals are reduced to functions within the security apparatus, and once they fall out of line, they are rendered invisible—erased both physically and politically.

Ultimately, *Escape to Nowhere* is more than just a spy thriller. It is a critical text that dramatizes how contemporary governance operates through invisible networks of control, how knowledge and secrecy are tools of domination, and how individual lives can be turned into expendable bodies—*homo sacer*—at the altar of national security. Through the lens of Foucault and Agamben, the novel can be read as offering a chilling commentary on the nature of power in the modern world: diffuse, calculated, and embedded in the very systems we trust to protect us. In this sense, Ravi Mohan is not just a traitor—he is a reflection of how modern states produce betrayal, suspicion, and abandonment as a part of their functioning logic.

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The Battle of Aberdeen: A Struggle Erased by Time

Amrita Ghoshal

ABSTRACT: The *Battle of Aberdeen*, fought on 17 May 1859, was one of the earliest and most important uprisings by indigenous people against the British colonial rule in the Andaman Islands. The Great Andamanese, one of the original tribal groups of the islands, led this resistance. For centuries, they lived in harmony with nature, untouched by foreign powers. This changed after the British established a penal settlement at Port Blair in 1858, following the Revolt of 1857. The settlers cleared forests and interfered with tribal lands, leading to growing tensions between the British and the Andamanese. The situation reached a climax when around 1,500 armed islanders planned a direct attack on the British at Aberdeen. The plan was uncovered by Dudhnath Tewari, a convict who had escaped and lived among the Andamanese. Although he had married into the tribe and adapted to their way of life, he secretly warned the British authorities. His message gave Superintendent Dr J. P. Walker enough time to prepare defences. The attack was strong and sudden, but the British forces were able to defend the settlement. This battle resulted in the deaths of many islanders. The British suffered few losses and praised Dudhnath Tewari, granting him a pardon. After this event, the islanders never again launched a large-scale attack. Future British officials, such as Captain Haughton, worked on building friendly relations with the tribes. In independent India, 17 May is now observed to honour the bravery of

the Andamanese. The Battle of Aberdeen is a reminder that not only kings or armies, but also tribal people, have fought bravely to protect their land.

KEYWORDS: *Battle of Aberdeen, Great Andamanese, British Empire, Dudhnath Tewari, tribal resistance, penal settlement.*

INTRODUCTION

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a remote archipelago in the Indian Ocean, remained for centuries beyond the reach of major kingdoms, largely due to their geographical isolation, dense forests, and difficult sea routes. Independent and self-sustained communities lived here in harmony with the abundant flora and fauna, developing their own systems of survival and cultural practices. To the outside world, however, the islands carried an air of both allure and mystery. Old sailors, veteran voyagers, and legendary travelers described them either as the “Island of Gold” or the “Island of Good Fortune,” while others feared them as lands of unholy secrets. Historical accounts mention the disappearance of ships in the surrounding waters, raids by sea marauders, and the fierce resistance of indigenous Negrito tribes who protected their territories from outsiders, giving rise to the fearful Indian epithet Kalapani. Today, this storied archipelago stands as a Union Territory of India, comprising 572 islands, of which only 37 are inhabited. Strategically positioned at the crossroads where the Bay of Bengal meets the Andaman Sea, the islands occupy a unique maritime location that has historically shaped their significance and attracted colonial interest. Figure 1 highlights this geographical distinctiveness, reinforcing the centrality of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in regional history, navigation, and geopolitics.

In the 2nd century CE, the renowned Greco-Roman geographer Claudius Ptolemy (circa 100-170 CE) made early

mention of the Andaman Islands, describing their inhabitants as cannibalistic beings, a depiction that would echo through the annals of ancient cartography, casting the islands in a shadow of dread and mystery. Several centuries later, in the 7th century CE, the Chinese Buddhist monk and pilgrim I-Tsing (635–713 CE) chronicled his impressions of the islands during his voyages. He referred to the region as the Land of Naked People and used the term *Andaban*, a linguistic precursor believed to directly indicate the Andaman Islands as we know them today (Mathur, 1968). By the 9th century CE, Arab voyagers such as Abu Zayd al-Sirafi and Sulaiman al-Tajir, both active around 850 CE, recounted stories of the islanders' savage customs. Their accounts, passed along through maritime trade networks and oral narratives, often emphasized practices of cannibalism and hostility toward outsiders. In the late 13th century, the famed Venetian explorer Marco Polo (1254-1324 CE) encountered the Andamanese during his passage toward the East. He depicted the islanders as untamed and primitive, attributing to them beast-like features and a savage hostility toward outsiders, an image that deepened Europe's foreboding perception of these remote and enigmatic isles. The early 14th century brought similar observations from Friar Odoric of Pordenone (circa 1286-1331 CE), a Franciscan missionary whose extensive travels across Asia led him to the Andaman coast. He, too, depicted the native tribes in bestial terms, suggesting they bore resemblance to animals and practiced ritualistic cannibalism. In the 15th century, Italian traveler Niccolò de' Conti (1395-1469 CE) journeyed to the islands and documented harrowing tales of native hostility. He described scenes in which trespassers were seized, dismembered, and consumed, narratives that cemented the islands' reputation in early European imagination as a perilous and uncivilized frontier (Kar 17-23).



Figure 1. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands form a natural divide between the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean

Source: *andaman.gov.in*

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are home to six ancient and culturally distinct indigenous tribal communities. Among them, the Jarawa, Onge, Sentinelese, and Great Andamanese are traditionally classified as of Negrito origin, while the Nicobarese and Shompen are generally regarded as belonging to the Mongoloid group. Though the Negrito peoples exhibit physical

features reminiscent of African populations, and the Mongoloid groups resemble Southeast Asian communities in appearance, the true origins of these tribes remained an anthropological mystery for centuries. Only in recent times have genetic and archaeological studies begun to unravel the deep migratory roots and unique evolutionary paths of these isolated peoples. One often-circulated theory echoed even by early colonial administrators such as Archibald Blair (1752-1815) suggests that the Andamanese may be the descendants of African slaves. According to this account, a Portuguese vessel transporting enslaved Africans was shipwrecked off the Andaman coast centuries ago, leaving the survivors stranded on the islands with no means of escape or return. However, this explanation does not reach far into antiquity, as the Portuguese only entered the Indian Ocean trade network in the early 15th century, following Vasco da Gama's voyage to Calicut in 1498. Given the relatively recent timeline of Portuguese maritime expansion, this theory lacks the deep historical grounding required to explain the genetic and anthropological distinctiveness of the Negrito populations of the Andaman Islands, whose ancestral roots are now believed, based on modern genetic research, to trace back tens of thousands of years to early human migrations out of Africa (Mukherjee 16). Genetic research reveals that the Andamanese are descendants of the earliest wave of modern human migration out of Africa, which occurred approximately 70,000 years ago. They stand today as the last living representatives of a pre-Neolithic Southeast Asian population, preserving genetic and cultural lineages that have remained remarkably isolated over millennia (Portman 1: 101; Mathur 156).

The Great Andamanese, one of the earliest known inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, exhibit distinctive physical and physiological traits that have long intrigued anthropologists and

ethnographers. Characterized by a deep skin tone, so dark as to appear nearly black and their complexion is smooth and consistent with tropical adaptation. Their hair is woolly and tightly curled, often growing in dense, spring-like tufts, a trait shared with certain indigenous African populations. In terms of physical stature, the Great Andamanese are notably short. Historical records document that a tribal male of unmixed lineage typically stood at an average height of approximately 4 feet 10.5 inches (around 149 cm), with a body weight of 96 pounds (roughly 43.5 kg). Females were even shorter, averaging about 4 feet 6 inches (approximately 137 cm) in height and weighing 87 pounds (about 39.5 kg) (Mandal 40). Their petite build is reflective of a long adaptation to the insular rainforest environment, where mobility and heat regulation are essential. One remarkable physiological feature consistently noted among the Great Andamanese is their elevated basal body temperature, which often hovered close to 100°F (37.8°C). This characteristic was particularly pronounced in younger men and women and may have been a biological adaptation to the humid, equatorial climate of the islands. Another notable physical characteristic is steatopygia, a condition involving the accumulation of fat on the buttocks, which is particularly prominent among the women of these communities. This feature, commonly found among several African autochthonous groups such as the Khoisan, is thought to be an ancient genetic adaptation for energy storage. (Stock and Migliano 720) In the case of the Andamanese, its visibility was further accentuated by their traditionally naked lifestyle, shaped by their tropical forest habitat and cultural norms that required no clothing.

The ten distinct tribal groups of the Great Andamanese were traditionally settled across defined territorial segments that stretched along the narrow arc of the Great Andaman archipelago. This island chain, running predominantly in a north-south orientation for

approximately 350 kilometers, is remarkably slender, measuring only about 50 kilometers at its widest point. Such a linear and constrained geography naturally led to the formation of isolated cultural zones, where each tribe occupied and maintained its own ecological niche and territorial identity. This segmented distribution fostered diverse linguistic, spiritual, and ritual practices among the groups. While they shared certain pan-Andamanese cultural traits such as a reverence for natural spirits and animistic traditions, each group developed its own unique cosmology, mythology, and clan-based belief systems. These were shaped by the specific resources, landscapes, and micro-environments of their territories. The groups including Aka-Jerah (or Jero), Aka-Bo, Aka-Khora, Aka-Pucikwar, Aka-Jowoi, Aka-Kede, Aka-Kold, Aka-Bale, Aka-Cari (or Chari), and Aka-Bea formed a culturally diverse mosaic of indigenous life. Each tribe maintained its own dialect, spiritual customs, totemic associations, and deep ecological knowledge (Radcliffe-Brown 98). The Khora, Jero, Cari and Bo resided in the northernmost areas, while groups like the Kede, Jowoi and Pucikwar settled in the central regions, and the Kold, Bale and Bea lived in the southern territories. As outlined in Figure 2, the Great Andamanese tribal communities were historically organized into northern, central, and southern varieties, each associated with specific geographic zones and linguistic identities. This classification supports an understanding of the complex sociocultural fabric of these ancient people.

For centuries, the Great Andamanese lived as hunter-gatherers, sustaining themselves through traditional means deeply rooted in their natural environment. As semi-nomadic tribes, their daily life revolved around the forests and coastal waters of the Andaman Islands. Using handcrafted tools, they hunted terrestrial animals and marine life, while foraging for fruits, roots, and tubers to meet their subsistence needs. Hunting, fishing, and gathering

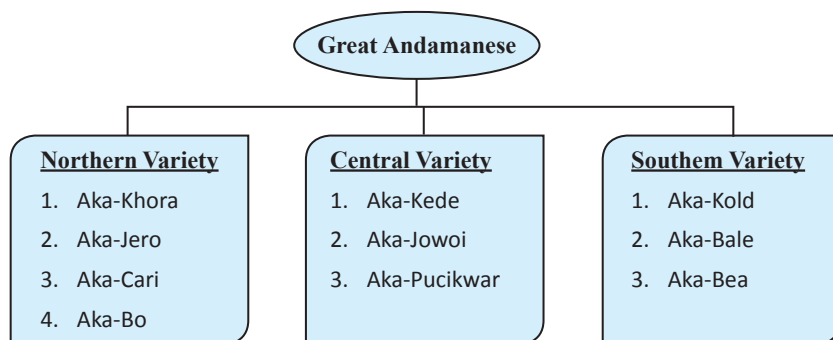


Figure 2. Ethnographic Classification of the Great Andamanese Tribal Communities

were not merely economic activities but integral to their cultural identity and rhythm of life. Due to their semi-nomadic lifestyle, the Great Andamanese, who have traditionally been classified as part of the Negrito racial group, did not build permanent shelters. Their movement across the forested archipelago was guided by seasonal availability of food and game, making mobility an essential aspect of their survival. They typically stayed in a given area for a few weeks, engaging in hunting, gathering, and fishing, before relocating to a new site. As a result, their dwellings were temporary and adapted to the natural environment. They often took refuge beneath large trees or built makeshift huts using palm leaves, tree bark, and other readily available materials. These structures were designed for easy assembly and disassembly, reflecting their deep ecological knowledge and adaptive skills. This nomadic pattern of habitation was not merely a reflection of economic necessity but also an expression of their close bond with nature and the cyclical rhythm of life in the Andaman forests (Portman: Portman 1: 215). The religious beliefs of the Great Andamanese have long intrigued ethnologists and remain a subject of deep anthropological interest. Their spiritual worldview can be broadly described as simple animism, rooted in a profound

reverence for nature and its forces. They believe that all elements of the natural world, both living and non-living, such as animals, trees, rivers, mountains, and even the wind, possess a spiritual essence. Central to their cosmology is an anthropomorphic deity named Puluga, who is not considered a distant or celestial figure in the traditional sense. Unlike gods who dwell in heaven, Puluga is believed to reside atop Saddle Peak, the highest mountain in the Andaman Islands, located on North Andaman Island. Puluga is considered the invisible overseer of human actions, a guardian spirit who punishes wrongdoing and ensures moral balance. This belief system is passed down orally through generations, deeply intertwined with myths, taboos, and ritual practices that reflect the Great Andamanese people's intimate connection to their natural surroundings and ancestral traditions. In traditional Great Andamanese society, the division of labour between the sexes is distinctly delineated, reflecting a structured yet cooperative way of life shaped by centuries of subsistence living. Men are primarily responsible for hunting and fishing, securing meat and marine resources for the group, while women gather wild fruits, roots, and tubers from the forests, ensuring a varied and nutritious diet. Communal cooking during feasts is usually undertaken by men, while the daily preparation of family meals falls to the women. The task of collecting firewood, essential for cooking and warmth, is carried out exclusively by women. The social structure of the Great Andamanese reflects a patriarchal pattern, wherein each local group is led by a male chief. Although a woman cannot assume the role of chief, the wife of the chief holds a corresponding position of authority among the women, albeit her status is acquired through marriage rather than personal distinction. Although male leadership is dominant, women retain specific rights: no husband can arbitrarily abandon his wife or claim her personal property. Divorce, while uncommon, is



Figure 3. Map of the Gulf of Bengal, taken from the Map of the Eastern Ocean Published by Order of Maurepas in 1740 (<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231616066/view>)

permitted without social reproach if it occurs prior to the birth of the couple's first child. This pragmatic approach to social order and gender roles illustrates the nuanced balance within traditional Andamanese society, shaped by environmental demands and cultural continuity. Owing to their geographical isolation, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands remained largely untouched by the outside world and served as the ancestral home of the Negrito

populations for thousands of years. This seclusion endured until the latter part of the eighteenth century, when explorers and settlers from the so-called civilized nations began to take interest in the region (Radcliffe-Brown 102).

The *Carte du Golphe de Bengale*, created in 1740 by the distinguished French cartographer Jacques-Nicolas Bellin, was part of a broader French initiative during the eighteenth century to chart the Indian Ocean and its adjoining regions with strategic precision. Figure 3 exemplifies the colonial cartographic initiatives of 18th-century France, underscoring the strategic maritime interests in the Bay of Bengal and foreshadowing the imperial competition over the Andaman archipelago. Commissioned under the authority of Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de Maurepas, Bellin's map reflected France's growing maritime ambitions and its commitment to expanding geographic knowledge of overseas territories (Suwannathatsa et al. 185).

Several decades later, between 1777 and 1787, British marine surveyor John Ritchie carried out extensive surveys of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. His work, commissioned by the British East India Company, aimed to improve navigation and establish colonial control in the Bay of Bengal. Unlike Bellin's earlier efforts, which were largely based on second-hand reports and compiled cartographic sources, Ritchie's charts were derived from first-hand observations and systematic measurements. His detailed and accurate mapping of the region greatly enhanced British nautical understanding and facilitated safer maritime operations in these strategically important waters. Though unconnected to Bellin's French charts, Ritchie's surveys represented a significant advancement in British cartography and played a key role in colonial maritime policy. In 1783, Captain Thomas Forrest brought the Andaman Islands to the attention of the British East India Company, highlighting their strategic

importance in the Bay of Bengal. He formally requested the Governor-General to grant him a ship on freight, with the objective of undertaking a voyage to the Andaman Islands. His intent was to initiate peaceful contact and establish communication with the indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago. Forrest's proposal reflected the Company's growing interest in expanding maritime influence and securing navigational routes in the eastern waters during the late eighteenth century. In 1788, Captain Buchanan once again urged the Governor-General to recognize the strategic importance of the Andaman Islands and emphasized the necessity of their thorough exploration and survey. During his earlier voyages, Buchanan had observed sections of the coastline of Great Andaman, which prompted renewed interest in the archipelago. This time, the administration at Fort William responded with greater seriousness. Consequently, Lieutenant Archibald Blair of the Indian Navy was entrusted with the task of conducting an extensive survey of the islands. For this mission, he was placed in command of two vessels, the *Elizabeth* and the *Viper*, and was issued comprehensive instructions to chart the Andaman Islands, marking the beginning of a more formal British presence in the region (Portman 2: 101; Mathur 134). In 1789, Lieutenant Archibald Blair conducted a comprehensive survey of the Andaman Islands. Following this, on 12 June 1789, he attended a meeting of the Governor-General in Council, where it was resolved to establish a British settlement on the islands. The primary aim was to develop a fortified harbour at minimal expense, which could serve as a safe haven for His Majesty's naval squadron in the Bay of Bengal during times of conflict or distress. The settlement was also intended to provide refuge for shipwrecked sailors and protect them from potential attacks by the indigenous inhabitants. Furthermore, it was believed that a British presence in the Andamans would help curb the activities of

Malay pirates operating in the region. Importantly, the proposed settlement was not conceived as a penal colony, but rather as a civil establishment, modelled after existing British outposts in Penang and Sumatra, with labourers and craftsmen sent to prepare and cultivate the land. In September 1789, Lieutenant Archibald Blair sailed to the Andaman Islands with a group of artificers, labourers, and soldiers to establish a British settlement at Port Cornwallis (now Port Blair). Following the Governor General in Council's directive, Captain Alexander Kyd, then Surveyor General of India, along with Lieutenant Colebrooke, was tasked with conducting a comprehensive survey of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and other harbours in the Bay of Bengal. Blair oversaw both the survey and the development of the settlement, and by 25 October 1789, a redoubt was constructed and the British flag was raised, marking territorial claim. In June 1790, approximately forty aboriginal islanders, likely of the Aka-Bea tribe, attempted an assault on the settlement, which was thwarted by the seizure of their canoes. In November 1792, on the advice of Commodore Cornwallis, the settlement was relocated from Port Cornwallis near Chatham Island to a more strategically advantageous harbour in the north-east of North Andaman. However, a severe monsoon in 1795 significantly deteriorated the health of the settlers. Many labourers, including the surgeon and officers, fell ill. Consequently, the settlement was abandoned in May 1796. At the time of its closure, the colony housed 270 convicts and around 550 men, women, and children, including European artillerymen and sepoy guards (Mathur 136). All were relocated along with their belongings, primarily to Penang.

In 1857, the First War of Indian Independence erupted, posing a significant challenge to British colonial authority. In the aftermath, numerous freedom fighters were imprisoned across various regions of India. Recognizing the strategic isolation

and geographical suitability of the Andaman Islands, the British administration identified them as an ideal location for housing convicts and political prisoners. Consequently, a committee was constituted to evaluate the feasibility of re-establishing a penal settlement on the islands. The committee comprised F.G. Mouat, G.R. Playfair, and J.A. Heathcote. Following the committee's favourable recommendation, the British Government instructed Captain H. Man, Executive Engineer, to proceed to Port Blair and undertake initial preparations for the settlement. Meanwhile, Dr J.P. Walker was appointed as the first Superintendent of the proposed penal colony. On 4th March 1858, Dr Walker arrived at Port Blair accompanied by 200 convicts, thereby formally marking the beginning of the new British penal settlement in the Andaman Islands. The aftermath of the 1857 uprising and the subsequent establishment of the penal settlement at Port Blair in 1858 brought forth a series of significant challenges (Chakraborty 45).

The establishment of the penal settlement at Port Blair in 1858 (Majumdar 87) was strongly opposed by the native Andamanese people. As the British tried to expand their control, several conflicts occurred between the settlers and the island's original inhabitants. In February 1858, two British officers and one Indian officer from a survey ship were killed by local tribesmen on one of the smaller islands in the Andaman group. During the first year of the settlement, many convicts tried to escape into the forests (Mouat 42). However, most of them died either from harsh conditions or were killed by the Andamanese, who viewed them as intruders. On 5 March 1858, another clash happened between the islanders and the crew of the British survey brig, in which one officer was killed. It was reported that the conflict may have been caused by a midshipman on the ship. More violence followed in the coming months. On 25 April 1858, an attack by settlers led to

another skirmish where several Andamanese were injured. Then, on 9 June 1858, a group of islanders armed with bows and arrows launched a sudden attack on a group of unarmed sailors, although luckily no one was killed. These early incidents showed the deep mistrust and resistance of the Great Andamanese people towards the British presence, as they tried to protect their land and way of life from outside interference. On 5 July 1858, Lieutenant Templer of the Indian Navy, who was stationed in the Andaman Islands, pursued a group of Andamanese canoes near the coast. During the chase, one of the islanders, frightened by the approaching armed boat, shot an arrow at the settlers. In response, the British party returned fire, killing the man. Templer seized three canoes and proceeded to a nearby Andamanese camp located close to the beach. There, his men destroyed several huts. In the resulting conflict, five or six Andamanese people were killed. Later, with official permission from Dr. J.P. Walker, the Superintendent of Port Blair, Lieutenant Templer went on to destroy around forty more huts belonging to the Andamanese. This incident highlights the rising tension between the British colonial settlers and the indigenous population, who were increasingly threatened by the occupation of their ancestral lands. The year 1859 marked the beginning of the second phase in the resistance of the indigenous people of the Andaman Islands against colonial occupation (Chakraborty 47). Determined to defend their homeland, the Andamanese launched three planned attacks on the British settlement within a short span of five weeks during April and May of that year. The first major attack took place on 6 April 1859. On that day, around 248 convicts, who had been deployed to clear the jungle, were suddenly attacked by nearly 200 Andamanese warriors armed with traditional bows and arrows. Three convicts were killed on the spot, and six others were wounded, one of whom later died in hospital. In addition to inflicting casualties,

the Andamanese seized a significant number of tools, clothing, and cooking utensils from the convicts before retreating into the forest. This event was one of the earliest coordinated efforts by the Andamanese to resist the growing intrusion of colonial settlers into their ancestral territory. On the afternoon of 14 April 1859, a large and well-organised group of approximately 1,500 Andamanese launched a sudden and fierce attack on the convict labourers (Mathur 166). Unlike earlier encounters, many of the attackers were armed not only with their traditional weapons such as bows and arrows, but also with knives and small axes, indicating a more deliberate and intensified effort to resist the colonial presence. The convicts, who were engaged in clearing land, were completely outnumbered and unprepared for such a large-scale assault. As a result, they were unable to defend themselves effectively. Three convicts were killed immediately, and six others sustained serious injuries during the attack. This incident highlighted the growing determination of the indigenous people to resist foreign intrusion into their territory.

On 23rd April 1858, nearly ninety convicts managed to escape from Ross Island and made their way into the dense forests of the Andamans. While some perished due to the hostile response of the aboriginal inhabitants, others attempted to flee the forest in search of safety. Among the few who succeeded in their escape was Dudhnath Tewari, a sepoy from the 14th Infantry of the Bengal Army, who had been convicted of mutiny and sentenced to imprisonment in the Andaman Islands. Tewari took refuge with the Great Andamanese and remained with them for over a year. During this time, he learned their language and assimilated into their way of life, adopting their customs and practices. He even married a Great Andamanese woman named Leepa, and the tribe treated him with remarkable kindness and hospitality (Mathur 170). While living among them, Tewari became aware of plans for

a coordinated attack by the Great Andamanese against the British settlement. On 16th May, he observed a group of Andamanese arriving by boat at the encampment where he had been living. These two boats were loaded with axes, tools, and utensils, items clearly looted from earlier raids on the colonial settlement. From this, Dudhnath inferred that the group was preparing for another attack, likely with the intention of plundering more tools and supplies. Soon after, a contingent of approximately 250 armed Andamanese men set off in around twenty canoes from that location. After reaching the shores of the main island, this group was joined by another band of aboriginal warriors, who were accompanied by Sadloo (Mathur 175), another escaped convict. Together, the combined force made camp roughly two miles from Aberdeen on the afternoon of 16 May 1859 (Saini), with the clear intention of launching a coordinated assault on the British settlement the following morning. Under the cover of night, Dudhnath Tewari and Sadloo (Sadloo was an escaped Indian convict who, like Dudhnath Tewari, had fled from the Penal Settlement at Port Blair) quietly slipped away from the Andamanese encampment. Moving with caution through the forested terrain, they reached the convict station at Aberdeen around 2:00 a.m. on 17 May 1859 (Saini). Without delay, they alerted the authorities about the impending attack by the Islanders. The warning was immediately conveyed to J.P. Walker, the Superintendent of the Penal Settlement. However, the information came with such urgency that Walker had barely enough time to take full defensive measures before the assault by the aborigines began.

The events of 17th May 1859 marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Andaman Islands. The confrontation between the British colonial authorities and the Great Andamanese tribes on that day is now known as the *Battle of Aberdeen*. It was the most

organised and large-scale resistance mounted by the indigenous islanders against colonial intrusion (Das and Mukherjee 70). Dudhnath Tewari's timely warning played a crucial role in averting disaster. Thanks to the intelligence he provided, the colonial authorities were able to act swiftly, divert essential resources, and reinforce vulnerable points across the settlement. His defection ultimately helped suppress what could have become the most formidable challenge to British authority in the islands. As soon as the warning reached him, Superintendent Dr. J.P. Walker ordered Lieutenant Colonel Hellard, commander of the Naval Guard, to proceed immediately to the guard ship. Lieutenant Philbrick was also dispatched to offer artillery support. At the same time, Walker instructed the convicts working in the settlement to bury all spare tools and implements and to gather on a hilltop near the coastline for potential evacuation to the ships. One group of aboriginal warriors, approaching along the shoreline, was halted by defensive gunfire. However, another group managed to break through despite heavy fire from Hellard, who had already reached the guard ship by then. This group succeeded in reaching the main convict station and held control over it for nearly thirty minutes. During this brief occupation, the aborigines took anything of value, including tools, clothing, utensils, and supplies. Their hold on the station ended when Lieutenant Warden and his team arrived to assist the defenders and eventually forced the attackers to retreat. Several members of the aboriginal group were killed or seriously wounded during the skirmish. However, none of the British settlers suffered significant injury. The assault was ultimately unsuccessful, and the British quickly regained control. Following this encounter, the colonists tightened their grip on the islands. Although minor hostilities continued, the indigenous people were never again able to launch an attack of such scale or organization (Mathur 174). The British proceeded with their

unchecked exploration, expansion, and exploitation of the Andaman Islands in the years that followed. Following the events of the Battle of Aberdeen, the British administration took the extraordinary step of recommending a full pardon for Dudhnath Tewari. Dudhnath Tewari was a sepoy in the 14th Regiment of Native Infantry. On 27th September 1857, during the Indian Rebellion of 1857, he was convicted of mutiny and desertion by a British military commission at Jhelum. As punishment, he was sentenced to transportation for life, along with penal labour in irons. In accordance with this sentence, he was deported to the Penal Settlement at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, where he arrived on 6th April 1858. Upon arrival, he was registered as Convict No. 276. In an effort to demonstrate the perceived generosity and fairness of Imperial rule, the British authorities in Delhi officially granted Dudhnath Tewari a full pardon. By aligning himself with the British administration, Dudhnath Tiwari came to be remembered as the “Hero of Aberdeen.” Having spent some time among the Great Andamanese, he became aware of their plans to attack the colonial settlement at Aberdeen. Choosing to inform the authorities, he played a decisive role in safeguarding the nascent penal colony. His timely intervention was recognized by the British as an extraordinary act of loyalty, and he was celebrated as a protector of the settlement (Saini). In acknowledgment of this contribution, the colonial administration granted him clemency, formally releasing him from his life sentence and setting him free.

The assault on Aberdeen later came to be known as the *Battle of Aberdeen* within the Port Blair settlement. Undeniably, it marked the most intense and serious confrontation between the British settlers and the indigenous Andamanese. It was the most resolute and determined offensive ever launched against the colonial establishment on the islands. The scale and organization

demonstrated by the Andamanese during this attack, particularly their unified hostility and tactical coordination, presented a significant concern for the colonial administration. As a result, such uprisings had to be considered carefully in all future security and administrative plans for the penal settlement. However, no such large-scale and concerted attempt was ever made again by the aboriginal population following the Battle of Aberdeen. It is believed that the Andamanese, having experienced the strength and retaliation of the colonial forces, came to recognize the futility of such armed resistance against the British Empire (Mathur 1968).

A new chapter in the history of British-Andamanese relations began following the departure of Dr. J.P. Walker in 1859. His successor, Captain Haughton, placed significant emphasis on establishing peaceful and constructive relations with the indigenous Andamanese communities. To this end, Captain Haughton issued a set of clear instructions to both officers and convicts, outlining the appropriate conduct during any interaction with the island's aboriginal inhabitants. He mandated that the Great Andamanese were never to be disturbed or harmed unless they made a clear and hostile move towards the settlement or work parties operating in the forested areas. At the same time, Haughton made it known that any unprovoked attacks by the Great Andamanese on the settlement would be dealt with firmly and without hesitation. Despite his readiness to act in defence of the colony, Haughton was equally committed to pursuing a policy of conciliation. He expressed his firm intention to make every possible effort to foster goodwill and cooperation with the tribes. Encouragingly, under his administration, the first signs of improving relations began to emerge. Faint indications of goodwill were observed particularly with the Aka-Bea-da tribe. This culminated in the first recorded friendly contact with them on 27 February 1860,

marking a significant step forward in the colonial government's attempts to build a more peaceful coexistence with the native population. M.V. Portman, a British officer and anthropologist closely associated with the Andaman Islands, observed that the Great Andamanese believed the British settlers to be too powerful to defeat in open combat. British officials gradually came to understand the sentiments and socio-cultural practices of the Great Andamanese and adopted certain preventive measures to avoid provoking hostility (Portman 1: 57). At times, tensions arose when British officers declined to provide additional food supplies to the tribes. Such refusals occasionally triggered anger among the Great Andamanese, leading to sporadic attacks. Nevertheless, the British administration, adhering to a broader policy of restraint, deliberately avoided responding with aggression or bloodshed. Their objective was to prevent the tribes from perceiving the settlers as enemies, which could have incited further plundering or violence. On 15th January 1861, during one such confrontation, six members of the Great Andamanese community were captured by British authorities. In an experimental move, three of them were sent to Burma (present-day Myanmar) for a few months to be trained in English, with the hope that they could serve as intermediaries in future communication between the colonial government and the indigenous population. Tragically, one of the three died shortly after contracting an illness. The remaining two, however, failed to acquire any meaningful knowledge of English during their time in Burma. Despite this, the experience left a significant impact. The compassionate treatment they received from the British authorities fostered a new sense of respect and trust. Upon their return, they shared their experiences with their fellow tribesmen, which led to a noticeable shift in perception towards the settlers. By 1862, this cautious and humane approach by the British administration had successfully laid the groundwork

for establishing more amicable and stable relations with the Great Andamanese (Mathur 169).



Figure 4. Memorial of the Battle of Aberdeen

Source:<https://dt.andaman.gov.in/DetailNews.aspx?newsid=ru0BUv7CFWpX7OjkDB9RGI+0J5VZTz VmZAZJ/VE/mP0=>

Figure 4 captures the commemorative site at Port Blair that honours the valiant resistance of the Great Andamanese during the Battle of Aberdeen. The memorial stands as a poignant reminder of indigenous resistance and postcolonial recognition of subaltern agency. After India gained independence in 1947, the Government of India officially recognized 17th May as a day of commemoration for the Battle of Aberdeen, one of the most significant confrontations between the indigenous Andamanese and the British colonial administration. This date is now observed

annually to honour the courage and resistance of the aboriginal Andamanese who fought valiantly against the oppressive forces of British rule. In tribute to their bravery, a memorial was erected in Port Blair to preserve the memory of those who laid down their lives to defend their homeland. The monument stands not only as a symbol of their indomitable spirit but also as a reminder of the resistance offered by India's indigenous communities in the broader struggle against colonial domination.

The Battle of Aberdeen was neither the saga of a king's conquest, nor a tale adorned with the grandeur of glittering weaponry or royal ambition. It was a battle fought by subaltern people, the indigenous Great Andamanese, against one of the most powerful imperialist forces of the time – the British Empire, then at the height of its global dominance. This confrontation was not a conventional war, but a symbolic act of resistance by a marginalized community determined to defend its land, culture, and autonomy against colonial intrusion. It revealed the resilience and courage of those who were historically silenced or ignored in the mainstream narratives of Indian history. Therefore, the Battle of Aberdeen must not be allowed to fade into obscurity within the pages of India's glorified past. It deserves rightful recognition as a testament to indigenous resistance and as a reminder of the lesser-known struggles that contributed to India's larger fight against colonial rule.

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Buddhadev Mukherjee composes: A slap on the cheeks of history from the top

Siddhanta Goswami

ABSTRACT: This essay is a reading of Buddhadev Mukherjee's figure compositions axled on a mode that is engaged as humour. By questioning this humour this essay moves on to think how this mode is a result of a hermeneutics based on a civilized eye in relation to a polite society that composes polite way of performing in public space that Mukherjee challenges.

Such a challenge opens up a critique of 'myth of progress' of modernity in relation to a metropolis that turns affectual relationship to abject. This essay aims to trace this abject through a cognitive function i.e., gaze that Mukherjee critiques through his figure compositions opening up a critique of a polite boundary in a metropolis showing a history from below.

KEYWORDS: *Affect, Alterity, Post-colonialism, Post-humanism, Decolonial/Anti-colonial studies.*

INTRODUCTION

In Buddhadev Mukherjee's figure composition 'Man XII', a hand raises a dictum pointing itself at a lying human being. The image unfolds a dialogue based between the hand and the sleeping corporeal body-subject creating a poesis of subalternity built on a language of discipline but is corporeal body-subject really

affectively listening? That is to ask; is body-subject aware of the hand? The human body reveals a certain kind of discipline, hands and legs stretched neatly and the head stiffened a little to stage as if discipline has been internalised but is it as a reaction due to an omnipresent hand that corporeal body-subject cannot see but always already is engaging? Does it fully provide us with a knowledge of whether corporeal body-subject is aware of the hand or not? If so, is it a dialogue or a relation based on negative dialectics?

The awareness that ‘Man XII’ unfolds a certain kind of realisation that opens up a question of an internalisation of a discipline further asking whether it is a willing internalisation — is it resulted by an awareness that someone is watching from a central tower i.e., a potentiality about a human being can be watched anytime — thus internalising a discipline becomes a process that further regulates their behaviour through which a certain kind of knowledge is formed. This knowledge churns an aesthetic of a corporeal body-subject that is a reaction produced by the work of disciplinary institutions which came up in the last couple of centuries.



Man XII by Buddhadev Mukherjee, Art Exposure Gallery

This hand provides an interesting queue to read Mukherjee's series '*Either you run the day or the day runs you*' a series of figure compositions where Mukherjee explores human beings in their daily chores. These chores are variedly engaged, sometimes making it clear what a person is engaging-in, other times little unclear, only made to engage as a walk, at another time these are festooned in a juxtaposition which for Mukherjee becomes an important technique for unfolding class structures of a metropolis. Often enough expression of a character is muted offering an un-potentiality to engage with a character completely. This un-potentiality ethically potentializes a restriction in configuring a location of a character that could have had unfolded a sympathetic gaze when read from a vantage point i.e., looking down by acknowledging an identity by staging such as a cultural identity – thereby restricting any scope of engaging about how a human being engages with a collective. These engagements as readings comes around in Mukherjee's figure compositions which may be understood by varied poetics. Mukherjee's figure compositions are sometimes quirky, then muted, often blank, situated within an interplay between dark and light colours making a reader ask oneself: How must I engage?

This question leads a reader to think of bodies as a site that at a first glance is engaged as humour but one ponders next why humour? To answer this, one turns to one's own systematic aesthetic/pedagogy that has trained an eye to be civilized framing another question: Is it humour to a civilized eye? There are questions but no easy answer as one engages with Mukherjee's figure compositions — only questions revealing failures of the hullabaloo of civilizing mission, the emancipation project. When the direction of historiography is changed— that is instead of from top to below one initiates a search from below to top— then we observe a turn within, i.e., how neo-colonial governmentality, and globalization have been successful failures.



Image 1. from the series Either you run the day or the day runs you by Buddhadev Mukherjee

Myth of progress: Working in a metropolis.

Mukherjee's figure compositions are caught in a movement. This movement is directed towards a horizon yet to be touched concocting a reactionary understanding to/of a metropolis where everything should always be on the move to unfold a condition about a behaviour that has developed in a metropolis, i.e. a movement that is designed by a progress based on a myth. This progress makes us think of Francois Lyotard's 'Postmodern Condition' as a question posed: What substantiates this progress based on a myth? our attention should be turned to a metropolis. Lyotard in the foreword of the now famous book¹ has written how a post-modern condition can only happen in a high society and a high society can never be out of a metropolis because a metropolis as engaged from a perspective of 'post' enlightenment/renaissance was festooned to give a tangibility to a staged progress. Jurgen

Habermas understood a metropolis, i.e. a space where Lyotard's postmodern condition is located as a space that is simply designed by what he called 'empirical-sciences' as opposed to 'empirical-analytical sciences' — a condition of skilled labour as a reaction of new science, humanities, civil-service in creating a new world that is plastic in its depth but glitters as gold.



Image 2. Either you run the day or the day runs you

The opening of a metropolis generated an understanding of skilled labour, and with the coming of new kind of jobs, social institutions, festooned in composing a polite society based on an upward mobility created a boundary within which discourses about discipline became a priority. The very construction of purity (within a polite society) then was a self-discursive understanding, a perspective that could potentially be realised by a gaze² offering hermeneutics based on discursive binary oppositions; polite/impolite, civilized/native, regional/global.

Mukherjee's figure compositions remind one of these boundaries very clearly particularly by an engagement of a metropolis that is a presence in absence. Mukherjee locates his characters in the foreground of a background, i.e. the background as a metropolis that becomes a presence in absence that is in a relation to the bodies composing this movement. This movement when read as a sign reminds us of Laurence Berlant's work 'Cruel Optimism.' Berlant defined a kind of optimism that is never ending. She had defined Cruel Optimism in these words:

Cruel optimism is when what you want is the very thing that's hurting you, but you can't let go because it also represents your dreams. (Berlant 2011)

Mukherjee's specific figure compositions offers themselves to be read by a perspective of 'cruel optimism' is unfolded by a forward movement. These movements happening within a spatiality of/under progress of a myth provides a critical queue to think of a history from below — Mukherjee engages in most of his images in unfolding a role of affect as a reaction to/within modernity. What kind of an affect is this? One realises how this very affect is not based on a reciprocation as ideated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, i.e. this affect is unlikely a relation based on reciprocation; rather it unfolds as an affect based on a dictum of subalternity that castigates human beings. i.e. a relation based on objectification, turning affect into abject.

Abject as understood by Julia Kristeva³ is neither a subject nor an object but something that is expelled from the self that disturbs identity, system and order. To think in these terms, one engages with an understanding about how Mukherjee's figure compositions are outside of this boundary and to locate them inside *the* boundary, must the bodies become a site of humour? This, then, engages us to think, at what cost humour arrives in the modern world. In seeking an answer to this question, one would be made to think of a technique that Mukherjee frequently uses in his work that is juxtaposition: a technique that one has engaged

enough in the works of the European surrealists.

LOCATING CHARACTERS INSIDE A DISCURSIVE PURITY: MEDDLING IN MODALITIES: JUXTAPOSITION IN A METROPOLIS

Mukherjee uses juxtaposition as a technique to engage with binaries that is a credo of a metropolis. A metropolis engages in a manichaeian view i.e., black/white, good/bad, ugly/beautiful modes of living that is always within and never out of a binary – flexing dictum from advertisements. A man with a gigantic fish is one of the images in a canvas that unfolds a relation of human being to labour. This relation from a Marxian perspective might make us engage with labour as ‘estranged’ unfolding a discursive understanding of supply to a demand, that alienates worker from work. The weight of the fish dismantles a balance opening up a queer space that is a non-normative way of performing in a public space; gazed by a civilized eye within a polite boundary might trigger a laughter and the civilized folks could be encountered laughing.



Image 3. A cut shot from Mukherjee's *Either you run the day or the day runs you*

One of the images unfolds a man holding a chisel on the move with a quirky smile on his face as another man is attached to a chisel framing an insistence to unfold the quirky smile (Refer to Image 3.) The quirky smile then becomes a self-expression that reveals a man not bothered by the unstable position of the Other – apparently exposing a rush under a myth of progress that reveals a kind of numbness of an affectual relationship in which the Other is seen as an object. The composition offers us to think how subalternity functions in layers unveiling the smile that also critiques a civilizing mission, at large, modernity.



Image 4. Either you run the day or the day runs you

In Image 4 a swimming pool is composed in which a human being is relaxing as the pool situated within a plate is being carried by another human being. The composition develops a dialogue with a potential understanding to a relation of subalternity that is based on the promise/as a reaction of/to modernity (Refer to Image 4. The composition on the right towards the bottom) On

one hand, we have a human-being carried by another human-being on a plate signifying a reactive action construing a space about a modern institution assembling the/within a myth of a modern life. On the other hand, it is through juxtaposition that Mukherjee composes a relation based on subalternity in this composition.

The action of the human being carrying the plate located within a modern institution, i.e. a human being at work as a binary opposition to a human being at leisure. Moreover, when this is located within the boundary of purity, one intends to turn towards a Marxist reading that would offer an interpretation of how urban spaces intensify capitalist exploitation, concentrating on wealth and labour while deepening class divides based on capital⁴.

It is this class division that is engaged through this image unfolding a relation based on subalternity; as ideated by Ranajit Guha as phenomenological — i.e., a relation out of which two voices are formed, the greatness of one voice over the other composes a subaltern voice⁵. The human being relaxing on the pool embodies a greater voice in relation to a sign i.e., leisure, compared to the man carrying a plate situated within a system designed by discipline⁶ looking to framed concepts shaping ‘transcendental’ as an ‘empirical.’

Performing Queer: Body as an Identity: Un-Locating a character: Mingling with Expression

The civilized class creates a boundary, everything one thinks as not-civilized is out of this boundary. In that way, to think of Mukherjee’s compositions as engaging in humour is a gaze of a civilized folk trying to keep their space free as an essential understanding of discipline. But when these corporealities are inside the boundary and as a result of it if their bodies become a site of critique of the civilizing mission, how does the single image function here?

A closer look would make us think of single images that do not engage in any kind of juxtaposition; to say, a man walking

unfolds Mukherjee's insistence to think away from a dialogue about critique of coloniality's/neo-colonialism's civilizing mission restricting an essential understanding of bodies outside of a boundary into becoming a cultural identity. Mukherjee attains this by engaging in single compositions to create a moment that has been engaged as a 'now' moment⁷ by the Phenomenologists, taken by Jacques Derrida following up a queue from Edmund Husserl to think of a moment when a corporeal body-subject engages in an encounter and how such a thought changes ontology to form a new epistemology (in other words living in praxis). Thoughts from a perspective of identity (sign that develops a hermeneutics) make us think of Derrida's idea that identities are never fixed. Such a thought provides us a queue to think of what is seen in the single images as a moment that Mukherjee records that was not *the* same in the bygone time and shall be not *the* same in the coming moment, and as so, this possibility of openness, if read as change remains/becomes a leitmotif for Mukherjee in composing single figures.

There is little scope in this essay to analyse why there is a bear in one of Mukherjee's canvases. What is an animal doing amidst humans in a metropolis? Is it an animal? Or can one develop a reading about how Mukherjee's composing of what is engaged as 'animal' serves as a potential reading of a 'transcendental', i.e. did Mukherjee compose a thought of a corporeality about *being-an-animal*? But attention to humour makes us think how, if it is humour — how this gaze is being composed from an eye that has been pedagogically civilized that otherwise can be engaged as realism. And when it is realism, then one is in an unethical engagement in a metropolis working within a wider framework of modernity that finds a place in Mukherjee's canvas.

This essay aimed to read Mukherjee's compositions from a perspective of humour in situating humour within a "deconstruction" method. Such a thought attempted to unfold how humour in Mukherjee's figure composition works as a mode



Image 5. Either you run the day or the day runs you

that can be read within a framework of realism. This realism unfolds as to how humour becomes a gaze to look at Mukherjee's compositions thereby posing a question: Who is looking? This 'who' engaging with humour unfolds a gaze situated within a framework of civilized class.

Notes:

1. See 'The Postmodern condition' by Francois Lyotard.
2. This essay attempts to read 'gaze' as one of the cognitive functions that provides a tangibility composing a discourse of politeness. Other cognitive functions can very well be engaged from a perspective of 'transcendental' shaping 'empirical' aspect of living.
3. See Julia Kristeva's 'Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.'
4. Refer to Volume 2 of *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx.
5. An otherwise reading of this composition also unfolds how corporeality at work unfolds a regular functioning that also unfolds a possible potentiality

Buddhadev Mukherjee composes: A slap on the cheeks of history

to think of corporeality from a perspective of Berlant's 'cruel optimism.'

6. A Foucauldian perspective makes us think of how institutions develops a mode of affect (willing or unwilling) that shapes 'transcendental' (from a perspective of existential philosophy) shaping 'empirical.'
7. This moment comes up by Edmund Husserl's ideation of 'phenomenology' as science in his Zurich Lecture. This 'now' moment is a moment that is an encounter with 'a' world that develops a hermeneutic. To think about this from a perspective of identity makes us think how identity formation when thought from a perspective of 'transcendental' shaping 'empirical', i.e. 'being' to 'becoming' —how 'becoming' is dependent on a relation of self and the Other (I and what is not-I); when seen from a perspective of Mukherjee's single compositions, it makes us think how these single compositions catch a credo of a 'transcendental' time as opposed to a 'temporal' time that was not the same in the bygone moment and will not be the same in future horizon; possibility is based on an impossibility of a reduced hermeneutic.

Book Review

Somrita Misra

Name of the Book: ***The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World***

Author: **William Dalrymple**

Publisher: **Bloomsbury**

Year of Publication: **2024**

Number of Pages: **479**

In the Nineteenth century, at the peak of its colonial powers, the British would often refer to the Indian subcontinent as their “jewel” in a “crown” of countries that comprised the empire. Henceforth, well into the twentieth century, it was fashionable to call India, the “crown jewel” of a once great empire. However, very few people were aware that India was once actually a “crown jewel” in the heart of the ancient world; from c.250 BCE to 1200 CE the performing arts, liberal arts, sciences and trade of India illuminated the entire world, from the Red sea to the Pacific Ocean. William Dalrymple, in his latest book, *The Golden Road*, forges a path through this metaphorical and literal “golden road” of Indian civilization; Dalrymple writes about the intellectual superiority of India in the ancient world and how India transfigured the disciplines of Mathematics and the Sciences through its invention of numbers and concepts. Dalrymple begins the book by delineating the cultural empire of ancient India: “. . . for a millennium and a half . . . from about 250 BCE to 1200 CE, India was a confident

exporter of its own diverse civilization, creating around it an empire of ideas which developed into a tangible 'Indosphere' where its cultural influence was predominant" (Dalrymple 3).

Dalrymple goes on to write about the "soft power" of India and how Indian music, literature and dance veritably transformed Asia. In fact, the entire book is divided into different sections of India's intellectual and economic greatness: the vast "sink of precious metals" that India held, the huge number of merchandise that India exported, the colossal Nalanda library and the scholastic greatness of the Sanskrit language. The literal golden road that Dalrymple writes about stretched from the Roman Empire in the west to Korea in the far-east. Dalrymple's argument is that this "golden road" became the means for India's intellectual hegemony; the book begins with the spread of Buddhism, which became a fundamental tenet of faith in China, Korea and Japan, and goes on to trace the extraordinary influence of Sanskrit, "the language of the Gods in the world of men" (Dalrymple 3). Finally, Dalrymple delineates the astronomical and mathematical inventions that India contributed to the world: the decimal system, algebra and trigonometry. Along with chess, classical music and dance, these intellectual developments reached far and wide, even penetrating the backward doors of the Christian Europe.

As all readers of Dalrymple will know, he is a born storyteller and tale weaver. While reading a non-fiction tome like *The Golden Road*, the greatest danger for the reader is boredom. However, there is not a dull word or page in the book; the chapters fly by as the reader rushes across the contours of ancient India and journeys across the currents and crosscurrents of Buddhism, Hinduism, Sanskrit and Persian palimpsests. In many ways, the book is a eulogy and a tribute to the syncretic tradition of a land that Dalrymple fell in love with as a young journalist and correspondent. However, while reading the book, a few questions disturb the

mind of the reader: was it only the Brahmins that dominated the scientific and cultural mindscape of ancient India and, if so, why does not Dalrymple critique it? Is Sanskrit alone “the language of the Gods”? Where is the informed criticism about the elite and exclusionary characteristics of the Sanskrit language? Dalrymple willingly overlooks these disturbing questions and glorifies the Brahmin body of *rishis*, saints, scientists and thinkers: we read about Aryabhata, Brahmgupta, and Pliny. But we do not read about the vast masses of Bahujan caste that Dalrymple acknowledges yet refuses to do any elaborate research about.

The earlier books that I read by Dalrymple, covering subjects of imperialism and trade anarchy, explored the nuances of diasporas and diversities; for instance, in *The Last Mughal*, (a book about the lost glory of the Mughal empire revolving around Bahadur Shah Zafar) there were brilliant intercessions of Hindu intellectuals and Sanskrit Pandits in the midst of Persian greatness. These intercessions or marginal presences are missing in *The Golden Road*; the entire book is a hagiography of Brahminical wisdom and greatness. There is a lot of focus on Buddhism in the book which does serve as a counter to Brahminization; indeed, there are wonderful anecdotes about the intermingling of Chinese and Indian schools of thinking and a glimpse of costal monasteries and ‘Ghantashalas’. But the overwhelming themes of the book remain centered around upper caste figures and ideas. A multi-religious, multi-regional and multi-causal approach is missing in the book. Dalrymple blames the decline of India’s golden period on British colonialism and its proponents. However, here too, there are oversights: what about Orientalist thinkers like William Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins, Henry Colbrooke, James Princep and David Hare? These names are not mentioned even once.

What Dalrymple does is to dismantle the colonial construct of India’s history and, for that, he deserves full credit. The Del-

hi-centric Islamic history, too, is subverted by him and the reader gets a fascinating insight into a different world of India: a world of Buddhist thinkers, Chinese traders, lavish caves of Ajanta and Ellora and the vast labyrinth of Nalanda. The readers learn interesting tidbits of information along the way: the trading of pepper by South Indians in exchange for Italian wine and olive oil, the luxurious wealth of the monasteries, and the magnificent trade expeditions of the Buddhists. We read about Fibonacci's use of Indian numbers, the rise of Indian accounting which, in turn, led to the rise of banking, and the manufacturing of 'wootz', the steel that was exported to Arabia for sword making. Dalrymple achieves a lot in the writing of *The Golden Road*: he creates a historical book that truly exposes lost nuggets of a period forgotten to the world, especially the western world. After all, if Archimedes is a household name, then why should western children not be familiar with Aryabhata, the mathematician who gave the world the very system of numbering? Whatever lacunae there are in the book, mainly Hindu and Brahminical hegemony, may be attributed to an ambivalent nostalgia in Dalrymple for an India that he truly pines for and, hence, needlessly glorifies.

Dalrymple's love and respect for India is exemplary, especially so, as he is a white man, a Scot. There is no hint of white condescension in his writing and that itself is a refreshing change. Ancient history becomes an interesting subject, something that many an Indian historian has been unable to achieve. Reading about the characters and figures in the book is almost like reading about beloved mythical figures; Dalrymple weaves a tapestry of fairy tales and fables around a forgotten people and a forgotten time. Reading Dalrymple makes one remember that history writing too can be thrilling and suspenseful, and that history is far from dry or dull. Writers like Dalrymple make history enjoyable and lovable and recreate the lost worlds of ancient times. The

reader need not always even be convinced of Dalrymple's arguments to enjoy the book; it is fascinating just to immerse oneself in the wonderland of ancient India and its beautiful people. So, dear readers, do go out and buy a copy of this enriching book from your nearest bookstore! You may agree or disagree with Dalrymple on his tenets, his biases, and his treatise but you will, nevertheless, embark on a fascinating journey of a little traversed ancient road, a road that intellectually and economically once shone bright in the map of the ancient world.

Book Review

Debabrata Sardar

Name of the Book – *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*

Author - Michel Foucault

Translated by – A.M. Sheridan

Publisher - Routledge Classic

Year of Publication (French) – 1963

Year of Publication (English Translation) – 1973

Number of Pages - 229

The very first sentence of the ‘Introduction’ to the book *The Birth of the Clinic* by Michel Foucault is, in fact, conceptually more central than prefatory to his primary argument. Foucault says, “The book is about space, about language, and about death; it is about the act of seeing, the gaze.” (Foucault 3) The successive sections of the ‘Introduction’ and the chapters of the book connect these three basic concepts – ‘space’, ‘language’ and ‘gaze’ with the historicity of clinic, and theorize how a modern nation state participates in the conceptual formation of diseases and their treatments, Foucault’s approach is genealogical. In all his major works including *The History of Sexuality*, *Madness and Civilization*, *Discipline and Punish* Foucault interrupts the established object relations, poses questions to their a-priori existence and uncovers the process of their historical developments. To quote the author, “A detour is necessary” (Foucault 9) for understanding each discourse which

operates in an apparently seamless flow. In *The Birth of the Clinic* too, through discourse analysis Foucault traces the genealogy of clinic as a historical space of pedagogy and politics, and explains how human body becomes a site of knowledge and spectacle.

The book is divided into ten chapters. Each chapter while emphasizing a particular issue, organically contributes to the development of Foucault's central concern. A very significant part of the discussion is the way the author locates his arguments within the larger spectrum of the French national history. For obvious reasons the French society felt the tremor of pervasive change during the latter half of the 18th century which continued through the 19th century as well. Foucault's discussion on the transformation of medical perception from the nosological to the pathological does not happen only at the schematic level. Rather, the author connects various legal acts and provisions emerging in France after the revolution with the changes happening in medical perception. The concept of modern clinic itself becomes a historical phenomenon.

The first three chapters detail on the earlier understanding of diseases and their treatments. By referring to Francois Sauvages and Philippe Pinel, the two noted physicians in 18th century France, Foucault comments that the common medical perception during that time was nosological. Diseases would be understood as certain symptoms, depending on their species and genera, separate from human body. It was rather abstract theorization of diseases on the basis of certain imagined two-dimensional figures in tabular forms. A disease was more like a portrait away from its specific activities, configurations and mutations in an individual organ. Two years before the publication of *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault published his first major work *The History of Madness*, and there for the first time the author spoke about illness, about mental illness to be more specific. Foucault's analysis of

mental illness in that book makes frequent references to Philippe Pinel who again appears in *The Birth of the Clinic* in relation to his discussion about nosology. The theory-based abstract medical perception of the 17th and early 18th century France which Foucault critiques in many of his works has its literary reference in Shakespeare's plays. Thus, when the physician in Act 5, Scene 1 of *Macbeth* tells the attendants "Foul whisperings are abroad. Unnatural deeds/ Do breed unnatural troubles. Infected minds/ To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets/ More needs she the divine than the physician" (Shakespeare 221) to describe Lady Macbeth's delirium, he probably is guided by this nosological view of diseases and their treatments.

Chapter 4 onwards Foucault records a very significant shift in medical perception. The shift is from primary spatialization to secondary spatialization, from tabular intervention to tissular intervention. "The Free Field" (title of chapter 3) of the production of medical knowledge which identifies, observes, measures and locates disease in the body of an organism starts shaping hospitals and clinics in the modern sense of the terms. In chapter 5 Foucault writes about several political and intellectual catalysts like Thermidor and their convention, Article 356 of the Directoire Constitution, the proposition of the psychologist Cabanis, etc. to locate this shift within the general political history of France. In this new perception, diseases are no more understood in their abstract tabular forms, but are seen as some concrete bodily conditions visible, measurable and describable through anatomical findings. The very bedside of the patient became a space medically more important than ever before. Diseases became spatialized in the patient's body, and the patient's body became a subject of minute scrutinization for the physician. With this development, specific parts of human anatomy like, bone, tissue, blood vessels, etc. got additional importance for more precise understanding of the

disease. Autopsy and dissection became vital medical methods. The insides of the patients' bodies are brought to form important medical knowledge. Foucault uses the phrase 'medical gaze' for this entire process which pathologizes the human body and hierarchizes medical relations. Thus, the clinic as a space for medical training and treatment is born which legitimizes objectification of human body through the medical gaze.

Foucault's medical gaze, which he elaborates in chapters 6 and 7 brings a paradigmatic change in medical perception. The ideas like bio-ethics, bio-politics, and bio-power emerge in the field of medicines. Objectification of the patient's body invokes the questions of the rights of the patient which should not be put to infringement. At the same time, objectification is also necessary for detecting the disease. The patient's body has to be an object of investigation for the doctor. The debate still continues. The 2003 Bollywood movie *Munna Bhai MBBS* invests a substantial section of the movie to address this intriguing question. When the Dean of Imperial Institute of Medical Studies, Dr. Asthana in his very introductory speech asserts "*Doctor ke liye patient sirf ek بیمار sharer hai, aur kuch nehin.*" (A patient is just an ailing body for a doctor, nothing else), he subscribes to this view of objectifying a patient's body. On the other hand, Munna Bhai, the hero of the movie speaks for the need of empathy, love, and compassion etc. alongside medical intervention for the effective recovery of the patient. In the article "The Phenomenology of Objectification in and Through Medical Practice and Technology Development" published in 2023 in *the Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* Fredrik Svenaeus writes "Objectification is no doubt a real problem in medicine and it can lead to bad medical practice or, in the worst case, dehumanization of the patient. Nevertheless, objectification also plays a major and necessary role in medicine, the patient's body *should* be

viewed as a (malfunctioning) biological organism in order to find diseases and be able to cure them” (Svenaeus 141). Medical gaze thus constitutes a vital medical dilemma. Michel Foucault marks the genesis of this dichotomy in *The Birth of the Clinic*. He also points out the role of language in the construction of disease. Vocabulary of pathology is an inalienable part of the system. Using Saussure’s concept of ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ Foucault says that the vocabulary of pathology acts like linguistic signifiers to visibilize the disease concealed inside the patient’s body. The new relations of power and knowledge in the field of medicine get strengthened with semantic intervention.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 collectively highlight Foucault’s critique of the new medical system. Whereas the new perception is more scientific and systematic, to a large extent it undermines the subjectivity of the person and leads him to subjection. The patient becomes both the subject and the object of study which sometimes may cause dehumanizing experiences for the person. Nonetheless, with the emergence of the clinic, Foucault notices “Disease breaks away from the metaphysic of evil, to which it had been related for centuries...” (Foucault 209). With the birth of the clinic diseases get scientific identity. But the new method of treatment also gave birth to the idea of normative health. The rise of clinical studies not only identified illness in human bodies, but also generated knowledge about normality. The concept of a healthy, non-sick person became the model to be followed by others. Two distinct categories were born – the normal and the pathological. In the 18th century medicines were targeted to remove the disturbances in the bodily functioning, but in the 19th century medical gaze imported the concept of normative culture. As a natural binary to the pathological, the normal got aligned with the healthy, strong, physically fit persons, and illness started to be defined in terms of lacking. Any person not falling with the parameter of the normal

got identified as ill. So, the discourse of the normal, born out of clinical judgment became oppressive to several categories of people. The deaf, the blind, the mute – all got medicalized. The discipline known as the Disability Studies (DS) of recent times is also critical of the culture of normativity. When Lennard J. Davis in his book *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (1995) says that “To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm”, he probably refers to that binary of the normal and the pathological. Another very significant contribution of Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic* is its take on the geography of human body. By frequently using the terms like space, geography, spatialization, regionalism, Foucault actually speaks a lot about medical geography or health geography. The way the author analyses tissular spaces, spatialization of diseases in the three-dimensional figure of human body, *The Birth of the Clinic* becomes one of the primary readings for the researchers of health geography. Chris Philo in the article “The Birth of the Clinic: an Unknown Work of Medical Geography” aptly says that “If *The Birth of the Clinic* is not transparently a work of medical geography - a thoroughly pioneering and inspirational one -then I do not know what is.”(Philo 17) So, Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic* is not merely a work of medical history, it is an empirical study which encompasses multiple other disciplines.

The Birth of the Clinic, since its publication, has continued emanating critical discourses about illness, human body, medical ethics and power. Particularly, Foucault’s concept of bio-power is an immensely intriguing one. His theory explains the complex mechanism through which the technology of state power controls and regulates birth, morbidity, sexuality and similar biological functions of its citizens. Nivedita Sen’s take on the connection between the advent of clock and the emergence of human ability index in terms of mechanical time during the colonial period

in the book *Family, School and Nation* (2015) resonates with Foucault's idea of bio-power. Sen speaks about how in the 19th century clock would work as an instrument of bio-power to differentiate between useful and useless bodies by measuring the ability index of the persons concerned. Gayatri C. Spivak's idea of "epistemic violence" in the field of postcolonial discourses is directly connected with Foucault's bio-power and the politics of knowledge. In Spivak's view, "epistemic violence" is that form of violence which is carried out by colonial force to disapprove of non-Western values. It produces certain discourses of truth and knowledge which validates only those which are politically useful to the colonial power. Nivedita Sen's human ability index, Spivak's epistemic violence and Foucault's bio-power, thus highlight the same state mechanism which governs the bodies of its citizens by effectively employing bio-power and political surveillance.

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