LA PANORAMA

An International Anthology of Critical Essays on Literatures in English and on Media Culture

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Rituparna Chakraborty

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our esteemed Vice Chancellor, who warmly welcomed and assured us of unwavering support for our mission of publishing an international Anthology of Critical Essays on Literatures in English and Media Culture. Our heartfelt appreciation also extends to the University's Registrar, whose enthusiastic encouragement has been instrumental in our efforts. We are truly honoured to have received blessings and encouragement from the eminent figures within the University.

To provide a comprehensive account, let's start from the inception of our endeavour. Our journey began in the midst of July when we convened a meeting with the Chief Operating Officer, Mr. Saurav Adhikari. During this meeting, the Hon'ble COO proposed the idea of publishing either a Journal or an Anthology. Without hesitation, we wholeheartedly embraced his proposal, and he graciously pledged his cordial support. It is essential to acknowledge that the realization of this publication would not have been possible without his foresight and dedication to the idea of publication. We are deeply appreciative of his contributions, and we extend our cordial gratitude to our COO. This achievement reflects the collective dedication of both the Departments, with every colleague giving their utmost commitment to the success of our mission. Special recognition is deserved by individuals like Dr. Moupikta Mukherjee, Prof. Agnideepto Datta, Prof. Debarshi Arathdar, Prof. Anirban Banerjee, and Prof. Natasha Chatterjee, who tirelessly assisted in the editing of the Anthology, even though they were not formal members of the Editorial Board. We cannot overstate our gratitude towards them for their invaluable contributions.

Undoubtedly, one of the most remarkable achievements of the Department in this regard lies in the active involvement of Ph.D. scholars, including Prof. Manas Ranjan Chowdhury, Prof. Arup Maik, and Prof. Masadul Islam. Their voluntary contributions to the editing of the Anthology have been pivotal. Without their dedicated participation in this mission, it would have been impossible to complete the publication of the book within just three months.

Last but certainly not the least, we extend our special gratitude to Prof. Pinaki De, an internationally acclaimed graphic designer, who generously undertook the task of designing the book's cover. Our appreciation for Prof. De knows no bounds, and we are at a loss for words to adequately express our gratitude to him.

FROM THE EDITORS

La Panorama is an anthology of internationally sourced critical essays on Literatures in English and on Media Culture, a collection representing a fairly panoramic spread of critical perspectives. Culled from home and the world beyond, it contains essays on religion, colonialism and postcolonialism, on communication gap, mythology, film studies, media culture, ecocriticism, juvenile literature, romantic literature and a great deal more. The Editorial Board therefore hopes that this anthology will cater to different tastes of different readers in different cultures and locational spaces. What is particularly significant about this anthology is that essays on postcolonialism and related topics occupy a greater space than the other categories. This is significant particularly in the context of Saikat Majumdar's experience in Princeton University:

> Looking back in the past, few theorizations of the relationship between postcolonial studies and the discourses of globalization stand out in my mind as strikingly as that articulated by the professor of the graduate seminar on the subject at Princeton, on [the] very first day of the class: "To the new entrants to the area of postcolonial theory, it is now time to say- 'Hello, its over! Welcome to the discourses of globalization'". (Majumdar 22)

Epistemic violence, to use Spivak's phrase, is evident here particularly because the Professor in Princeton University was authoritatively trying to indoctrinate the idea that postcolonialism as a critical discourse was passe. The number of papers on postcoloniality in this anthology shows that the Professor whom Saikat Majumdar faced was wrong in his dismissal. In fact, such authoritarian dismissals of the continuing relevance of postcolonial discourses is another means of colonization -- another way of exercising power which Foucault conceived of as:

> […] employed and exercised through a net-like Organisation [… in which] not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are like vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault 98)

In this context, Debasish Chattopadhyay's observation may be recalled. Chattopadhyay, in connection with his interpretation of the term globalisation/ "glocalisation" -- a term which Bill Ashcroft et al coined -- criticized: the coinage, glocalisation projects a picture of the absorption of the local by the globe, the centre/headquarters of which is at present Washington D.C.; I would prefer to use the term "locabalisation" instead of "glocalisation". (Chattopadhyay 2-3 *Perspectives*)

Presumably, Chattopadhyay wants the local to absorb the globe, instead of letting the globe absorb the local. However, Chattopadhyay concludes his argument by saying that so long as power is functional,

postcolonial discourse will be present. This perhaps is an answer to the dilemma of a Western scholar, Kerstin W. Shands who posed the questions:

> So, where we are now? Have we reached the stage where not only men but (strong) women, too, "coming from the ends of the earth" can stand "face to face" and proclaim that there is neither East nor West"? Or are we still rehearsing the first line of Kipling's poem only, unwittingly reinforcing the idea that East is permanently East and West is permanently West. (Shands 7)

Kerstin Shands' dilemma is in a sense the dilemma of every individual who has had a postcolonial past. And while no perfect answer may be forthcoming, it is possible that a resolution may be achieved through mutually interactive discussions on postcolonialism. The papers on this area in *La Panorama* represent just such an effort.

Amechi N. Akwanya's essay, for example, belongs to the postcolonial field, as his paper takes a critical look at Achebe's observations and presentation of the society in Nigeria in his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. The title of the essay is self-explanatory -- "'Little People' and the plunging of the 'Little Tales' into Deadly Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*". Akwanya explores how the society in Achebe's novel comprises of two classes – the VIPs who are very important people, the privileged, who are very few in number, but the "assumption of" Akwanya's "paper is that the narrative is fundamentally about the 'little people'. There is a central image to that effect, which as a brief narrative, can be seen to open out to reveal the main lines of the story itself. This metaphor is, therefore, what Paul Ricoeur calls a poetic metaphor, an idea that will supply the theoretical framework for this study".

That the colonial/postcolonial discourse still holds its sway, at least over the Third World countries, can hardly be ignored, as Arup Malik, a new entrant to the Ph. D. programme in English demonstrates in his paper on Mahashweta Devi's *Draupadi*. The central female character in the Indian Epic, the *Mahabharata* was metamorphosed by Devi in her short story, *Draupadi*. The object of Malik's paper is to focus on the various canvases of marginalisation delineated by Mahashweta Devi. What is strikingly significant in this paper is its illumination that in spite of being voiced by the Western academics like Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Mahashweta Devi is still not very much known to her own countrymen. This possibly is another canvas of marginalisation.

Manas Ranjan Chaudhuri in his paper "The Fragility of the Great: A Study of Chinua Achebe's " applies Butcher's translation of Aristotle's term 'hamartia' in assessing the character of Okonkwo. The general notion of interpreting Okonkwo as a tragic hero in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* falls short of perfection if the text is analyzed through the opposite lens of a telescope. Taking a cue from an essay by Debasish Chattopadhyay (2006 *Perspective,* 2. 1), a different viewpoint can be established wherein the apparent heroic greatness of the character of Okonkwo seems to be dwarfed when viewed through a regarding of the marginalized figures in the novel. The aim of Chaudhri's paper is to show how marginalized characters like

Obierika eventually dismantle the honorific centre and represent the voice of a balanced and flexible view of life necessary for survival in an adverse and changing environment. Obierika becomes the mouthpiece of Achebe in dismantling the monolithic perception of the Igbo culture as epitomized by its protagonist. He offers a counter-narrative to the traditional understanding of masculinity in the Igbo society. He is not against whatever is masculine; but is rather indicative of a new value that challenges simultaneously a rigid ethnic notion of masculinity and complements it with a necessary balance. His character, with its softness and flexibility, is a foil to the aggressive manliness of the protagonist which borders on irrationality. The proposition of the paper is that Okonkwo's anarchy lies in his misdirected philosophy of life in trying to be a man of success rather than a man of value in an ethnographic society and also in his inability to adapt to the cataclysmic but unavoidable surge of the White invasion. Obierika's 'eros' in his clear-sighted understanding of the changing ways of life is negated by Okonkwo's *thanatos*.

Inibong I, Uko, in her paper, "The Alchemical Transformation As a Paradigm for a New Self Image in Select Writings by African Women" presents her view that "Women's experiences are similar in many cultures of the world, and they manifest largely in the writings of women of African descent." Though the second clause of this assertion is open to debate, what Inibong Uko argues in her essay is that the oppression and marginalisation that women suffer emerge out of the hegemony of "traditional and/ or religious precepts". Consequently, many women, asserts Ini Uko, try to compromise with men resulting in their interrogations of the justification of their experiences and prevailing ethos, a point where they query the status quo, and then move to practically effect changes. The effect of this realization, as Uko points out, "induces many women to seek and adopt options that project and sustain a new self-image and a credible personality".

Sourav Paul, a Ph.D. research scholar, in his paper explores the often-overlooked issue of homonormativity in Shyam Selvadurai's novel, "Funny Boy." While much scholarly attention has been given to the broader themes of identity, conflict, and colonialism within the novel, the nuances of homonormative experiences and the marginalization faced by characters conforming to societal norms of gender and sexuality have been comparatively underrepresented. Using a critical lens, this paper examines the protagonist's journey as a homonormative individual in a conservative Sri Lankan society and the subsequent challenges he faces. Through a close reading of key passages and an analysis of character interactions, the paper sheds light on how homonormativity, though apparently less visible than other overtly non-normative identities, can still lead to profound feelings of isolation and marginalization. By delving into the complexities of the protagonist's experiences, this paper seeks to broaden our understanding of the diverse manifestations of queerness and underscores the importance of recognizing and validating the struggles faced by individuals whose identities may not conform to traditional expectations. Ultimately, this exploration serves as a reminder that the quest for acceptance and self-discovery extends beyond the boundaries of conventional

norms, making it crucial to recognize the multifaceted nature of LGBTQ+ experiences in literature and society.

Another pro-Achebean, if it may be so called, Kalapi Sen claims that Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, far from being a stand-alone tragic love story, serves as a connecting link between the pre-colonial state of Nigeria embodied in *Things Fall Apart* and the portrait of colonised Nigeria as delineated by Achebe in such of his other novels like *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. The paper also exposes "the tug of war", to use Sen's phrase, between the traditional culture, ethos, beliefs and the hang-over of the culture sedimented post British Imperialism.

Instead of choosing a literary text, Pritha Misra of the Department of Journalism and Mass Media opts for selected samples of Western media to expose how, with the aid of digital technology, or more specifically the easy access to the internet, Western media has been establishing a kind of cultural imperialism throughout the world. This paper examines through a multidimensional analytical framework, the mechanisms through which Western Media, in general, exerts its power in global market. Misra opines that an alternative platform of non- western media has been challenging the status quo, and that the Empire has started writing back.

In a different tone Natasha Chatterjee in her paper, "Cultural representation of women in print media: interdependence and emerging concerns" explores the cultural suppression of women in general in India. She shows how neither print media nor advertisements provide a veracious picture of women's contribution to society. She illustrates how in general mass media in India projects women as either a good homemaker, a docile daughter, a wife and/or mother. If she is a financially independent working woman, she is portrayed as a coquette neglecting her home and her children. The patriarchal bent of our society having prejudices, the girl child is always given less preference in comparison to a male child often resulting in female infanticide. The media consistently reinforces this mentality by portraying clichéd images of the girl child or woman.

The next paper in this volume is "Towards Extinction: Identifying the Realities of the Necrocene in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger"* by Moupikta Mukherjee and Agnideepto Datta. The setting of Adiga's novel is post-independent India and the ambience is the rise of capitalist economy which is consequent upon India's acceptance of neo-liberal ideologies. In this paper, the authors take note of the nation's acceptance of such ideologies, and they reflect on the rise of a capitalist economy. It is shown how economic as well as primary social motivations were transformed to fierce capital accumulation. The intervention of the state decreased, giving rise to an epoch of Indian Capitalocene which, as defined by Jason W. Moore, is an age marked by the cultural, ecological and political power of capital accumulation. Justin McBrien in *Accumulating Extinction: Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene,* further terms this epoch as the Necrocene, "the age of death and extinction as a result of capital accumulation," an age where the human 'bios' lost its intrinsic value and could be any time disposed of, for the fulfillment of the capitalist

motive. Mukherjee and Datta argue that Adiga's *The White Tiger* vividly paints a picture of post-independence capitalist India where the value of human life is lost, all individuals are transformed into '*homo sacers'*. From the child run over by Pinky in a state of drunkenness, to Balram killing Ashok and the slaughter of the entire family of Balram at the end, all acts of death in the novel are related to the economic, social and political framework of the society. As the function of Necrocene is to reframe history through a process of 'becoming extinction' which is not merely a biological process but also an extermination of people through labour or murder, this paper tries to identify how death and extinction is intrinsically related to the capitalist motive and the various necro-realities of the Necrocene, Necropolitics and Necroeconomics, function within this novel as a result of the neoliberal turn.

Tirna Sadhu in her paper, "An-Other Space: Interrogating the choice and portrayal of the subject matter and subject location in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Sidhwa's *The Ice Candy Man* and Masud's *The Clay Bird* (*Matir Moina*)" focuses on the diasporic creative responses which were often silenced by the events of the Partition and in its aftermath. In Bengal/Bangladesh, many of the creative responses to Partition were essentially and actively influenced by Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence. Sadhu's paper thus examines *The Shadow Lines*, *Ice Candy Man* and *The Clay Bird* with relevant implications to the 1964 riots and the 1971 war and other stories narrated from an-Other space. It holds that the diasporic space from which these works can be interpreted have deep connections to the transitional geographical location (which alienate individuals) of the eastern side of Partition.

As instead of bidding adieu to postcolonial discourse, this anthology seeks to validate the continuing relevance of this discourse, it is only logical that it provides space to Rituparna Chakraborty's the paper "Rudyard Kipling: A Profile of his Controversial Life". Chakraborty focuses on Kipling's rather controversial life and has tried to delve into Kipling's dilemma as an Anglo-Indian author, his childhood traumas which had great effect on shaping his persona; the reasons behind his misogyny; his commitment to the empire, his natural adeptness in storytelling and so on. Another important fact highlighted her Kipling's loathing of individualism on the ground that if let alone to act on their own accord, individuals would be likely to precipitate anarchy.

Religion is the focus area of Shantanu Siuli's essay on "Vaughan's Ideology on Repentance, Grief and Mercy: An Epistemological Belief on the Doctrine of Devotion." The argument of this paper is that though Vaughan, like the Hermetists, indicted the grossness of matter, yet he obscured the distinction between spirit and body as defined by matter and the immaterial soul or mind. The paper also tries to redefine the seventeenth century ecclesiastical view of the doctrine of mystical illumination, expounding upon the object of the Divine truth and existence. Through his reading of Vaughan's poetry, Siuli shows how Vaughan meditated the Divine upon three basic principles:

first, the preparation of the meditation, second, the process of the meditation, and third the purpose of the meditation. These are indicated as the fundamental beliefs and notions of Vaughan's way of attaining the Divine.

Religion is also in focus in Sonakshi Mukherjee's paper, "Religion in Contemporary Literature: A Contemporary Study of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road.*" This paper is a scrutiny of the portrayal of religion in contemporary literature through an analysis of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road.* A close reading of the two texts has been done in order to reveal the differences and similarities between the two approaches and attitudes of the two authors towards religion. In the process, an exploration has been made of how religion is depicted and how it influences society in the context of each work. The analysis reveals that both the authors present unique perspectives on religion – with Gaiman highlighting the diverse and fluid nature of belief systems and McCarthy depicting a post-apocalyptic world devoid of traditional religious structures. The essay therefore focuses on a deeper understanding and insight into the evolving relationship between religion and society in contemporary American literature.

Another Ph. D. scholar, Binoy Dangar's paper deals with a selection of poems by Easterine Kire, a prominent Naga author and poet who has carved out a niche for herself in contemporary Indian Literature in English by chronicling the cultural and historical transformation of the Naga people, particularly during the period of their initial Christianization. This paper provides an appraisal of Easterine Kire's poetry as a living portrait of the Naga's early encounter with Christianity and Christian proselytizing. Kire's literary works, including poems, illuminate the complexities of the Naga society's transition from traditional beliefs to Christianity, capturing the profound impact of this transformation on their identity, notions of belief, and social fabric. Through a vivid exploration of themes such as syncretism, cultural amalgamation, and personal narrative, Kire's poetry serves as a valuable repository of the Naga people's spiritual and social evolution. The paper takes note of the thematic and stylistic elements in Kire's poetry which contribute to a nuanced understanding of Naga Christianization, shedding light on the enduring legacy of this historical shift in their collective consciousness.

If Religion has a close association with society, it has an intimate relation with mythology as well. Myths, an essential attribute of religion, is the subject of investigation in Shubham Bhattacharjee and Shreyoshi Dhar's papers. Bhattacharjee in his paper "Folk-tales and Collective Localised Cultural Heritage: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *Jungle Nama*", opines that the myths of 'Bonbibi' and 'Dakkhin Rai' are widespread across the entire Sundarbans region, and holds equivalent traditional and cultural significance for the believers of both Hinduism and Islam. Amitav Ghosh had previously alluded to these myths in his novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), where he had delved into the relevance of the myths in the day-to-day lives of the local population residing in the Sundarbans.

Carl Gustav Jung had opined that myths are essentially culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recesses of the human psyche: the world of the archetypes. Myths represent the unconscious archetypal, instinctual structures of the mind. They represent these structures not in a historical and cultural vacuum, but rather as they are culturally elaborated and expressed in terms of the world view of a particular age and culture. Northrop Frye further viewed myths as the collective attempt of cultures to establish a meaningful context to human existence. Studied is Amitav Ghosh's novel *Jungle Nama* (2021), his adaptation of the tale of 'Bonbibi' and 'Dakkhin Rai'.

Shreyoshi Dhar goes back to the myth of Creation of the World in her essay "Variability in the Tales of Creation Myths: A Study of the Evolution Theory". It is quite evident that there are many versions of the story of evolution across the world, which are popular either in the form of canonical literatures or often in the form of oral stories. In the Greco-Roman world, *Theogony* by Hesiod narrates the story of genesis, while the Christian Book of *Génesis* recounts a completely different story where the omnipotent and omnipresent God moulded Earth out of chaos. On the other hand, the Maori myth of creation highly resembles the Greco-Roman tale. In the eastern context, there are numerous different versions, among which the most prominent one is the tale of the trio Gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma created the world out of himself, Vishnu preserved it, while Shiva formulated the cycle of life and death. However, later in the Victorian age, with the progress of science and technology, the whole theory of creation was looked upon from a much rational perspective based on facts and evidence. This paper demonstrates how the creation myths of the different cultures from the Orient and the Occident differed from one another and how, over time, it went through transformations.

Debarshi Arathdar's paper, "Staring into the Abyss through a Lens: A Study of Meta-Cultural Tropes in Francis Ford Copolla's "Apocalypse Now" is a remediated narrative blend of Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' (1899) and the *topos* of the American War in Vietnam (1955- 75). The paper traces chronologically, the semantic relevance of certain scenes, as the movie progresses, offering a general commentary on the ideological and ontological state of the Vietnam War as re-presented in the movie and reflected by the American culture in general. The adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* turns into a historical revisionism of the Vietnam War wherein certain aspects of the American ethos with respect to the war is upheld as core tenets of the culture that reverberate like the cosmic background noise. The film's significant concern with, Arathdar quotes from Pamela Demory: "heavy-handed symbolism with explicit references to "Heart of Darkness" and its lack of concern with specific political and historical details suggest that the Vietnam war is simply the latest in a long line of corrupt imperialist ventures" as noted by Pamela Demory. Coppola's film progresses through episodic developments that symbolically trace a backward, temporal movement with the forward spatial progression of Captain Willard's company up the river, marking as if a traversal and

journey from civilization to the savage 'heart of darkness'.

The paper takes up the point of the representational capability of film-making as a means of information dissemination wherein the general perception of the war in Vietnam is construed and constructed. By giving us glimpses of Willard and Kurtz's psyche as individuals of war- ridden trauma, the film/text offers an insight into the constructed-ness of such a psyche in the first place, one that relies heavily on the cultural schemas. "The Horror of the west" as described by Philip Lacou-Labarthe on Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is very much present in the narratives wrought within Apocalypse Now, wherein the prototypical western imperialist ideologues are laid bare at the viewer's discretion.

An anthology of critical essays without an article on Romanticism will definitely be incomplete. Two scholars of Ph.D. programme have contributed their papers on Romanticism. Atanu Ghosh in his paper, "The Influence of Wordsworth on Mamang Dai" has explored in Mamang Dai's poems the influence of the English Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Keats. Mamang Dai, a female poet and novelist from Arunachal Pradesh, is still not extensively known to academics in India, leave alone the Western academics. However, she had created a sensation among Indian academics by winning Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 for her novel, *The Black Hill*. She belongs to the 'Adi' tribe of Arunachal Pradesh which is a primitive community and is very close to Nature. They worship natural elements like trees, mountains and rivers. Basically, a nature lover, Dai, in her poems, presents the flora and the fauna and other natural elements as she envisions them. William Wordsworth, one of the forerunners of the Romantic Movement in England, is known for his love for Nature and his Pantheistic creed. Wordsworth believes that God manifests Himself in the elements of Nature, investing them with a 'celestial light'. Pantheism is a doctrine of religious philosophy which believes that God is everywhere and Nature and God are identical. Mamang Dai's poems are unequivocal in their portrayal of natural elements like trees, mountains, rocks, rivers etc. as animated objects, "appareled in celestial light". Ghosh in his paper has selected a few poems of Mamang Dai and races the influence of the High Romantics, especially that of William Wordsworth and John Keats on the Adi poet Mamang Dai.

Masadul Islam another Ph.D. scholar opines like the other critics that most of William Wordsworth's poetry praised Nature or Natural objects in an effort to exalt it. He saw Nature as an accessible Church. His poetry is filled with his pantheistic beliefs that human, Heaven, and Nature are all one and the same, and that Nature is depicted as a copy of Heaven (God). The primary source of intellectual inspiration, spiritual enlightenment, and the infusion of feelings and purpose in his writings is Nature. Through the use of a stylistic lens, this essay probes deep into the rhetorical apotheosis of Nature in four poems of William Wordsworth, including "Tintern Abbey," "Immortality Ode," "The World Is Too Much with Us," and "The Tables Turned." This investigation looks at Wordsworth's

deft rhetorical use to give Nature a 'celestial' 'apparel'. Wordsworth painstakingly creates in "Tintern Abbey" a clear representation of Nature's transformative power, demonstrating its ability to uplift human spirit. The poem "Immortality Ode" delves deep into this topic, demonstrating the poet's skill of rhetorical articulation of the sublime while considering the enduring connection between Nature and the soul. In contrast, "The World Is Too Much with Us" has a critical viewpoint on how people have lost touch with Nature and using rhetorical techniques the poet creates a strong argument against contemporary materialism. Through a stylistic analysis that incorporates imagery and symbolism, this study highlights how Wordsworth's rhetorical nuances confer a divine status on Nature in these poems. This essay illuminates the intricate interaction between rhetoric and the sublime in Wordsworth's portrayal of Nature's transformative force.

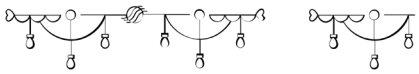
Anirban Banerjee in his paper "Eco-critical Mythology: A Study of Amish Tripathi's Select Novels" caters to a somewhat different taste. As Banerjee observes: Amish Tripathi is a famous name in the contemporary Indian literary world due to his marvelous mythological novels. He has dived deep into the ocean of Indian mythology as his subject matter has moulded it with his contemporary issues, thereby, resulting in an alternate reality, which neither exists in the mythological world nor does it match with our known world. His art of defamiliarization of myths has resulted in the presentation of a parallel world which allegorically brings out various facets of our contemporary world. Banerjee notes that among those different facets, Tripathi brings out the exploitation of nature for the advancement of technology in the contemporary world. Tripathi in his "Shiva Trilogy", which consists of, *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, incorporates the myths associated with Lord Shiva. But his uniqueness, lies in the fact that he brings down Lord Shiva from his deified altar to a humane level, as Tripathi renders the God to a young tribal leader. In this bildungsroman novel of Shiva's journey through a parallel representation of ancient India, Tripathi shows how an advanced civilisation exploits nature to gain immortality and how that affects the life-giving river Saraswati and the people living beside it. By incorporating the burning ecological crisis of river pollution in the backdrop of mythology, Tripathi, observes Banerjee, demythologises the myth prevalent in the society and seems to recreate a new. The purpose of Banerjee's paper is to examine Tripathi's "Shiva Trilogy" from an eco-critical angle and find out how he creates modern myth out of ecological crisis.

Elham Hossain observes, in his paper "Reading Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* Eco-critically", that Environmental apocalypse becomes a common and inevitable phenomenon with the rise of industrial explosion all over the world. As literature grows out of life, it is now, as it was before, getting more and more intersected with the issues related to environmental crises. Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island* offers a narrative of Human life in terms of its relationship with the environment, specifically of the area close to the portion of the Sunderbans in India. Ghosh, true, questions man's irresponsible and short-sighted enterprises for capitalistic profit which fatally blights the

biodiversity and ecological balance of the estuary located in and around the Sunderbans. Nobody can think of himself only in isolation. Trees, rivers, Oceans, animals, even insects are to be thought with as much importance as human beings require. The paper seeks to offer an intensive study of Amitav Gosh's *Gun Island* from eco-critical perspective.

Ecosocialism as Bisweswar Biswas, another scholar of Ph.D. Programme notes, as a branch of Ecocriticism has been occupying a very prominent space in literary criticism. Bisweswar Biswas' paper "An Ecosocial Study of R. K. Narayan's *The Axe* utilises this area of criticism. Ecosocialism as he observes is an idea of society which is free from all kinds of class division. This is mainly established on the perspectives and ecology. Human beings are dwelling in the most favorable relationships with nature. The Ecosocialist Movement set about flourishing in the 1980s to 1990s through developing William Morris's eco-social conception. The Spanish Marxist Manuel Sacristan, French-Austrian philosopher Andre Gorz, British socialist Raymond Williams, American biologist Barry Commoner and economist James O'Connor aided to develop ecosocialism as the theoretical concept. They recommended that a kind of socialism would be needed to protect the environment. In globalized world, industrialization and technological advancement are providing many job opportunities to the digitally and technologically educated people but it is also leading to fast environmental deterioration. While depending on hi-tech mechanism for the hope of greater ease and bigger profit, people are creating unemployment problems. The best example, Biswas asserts, of this is metropolitan cities of the capital city Delhi. Ther is a crucial need for the common people to be aware of the effects of globalization, environmentalism and non-capitalist ideas. In this situation environmentalism has surpassed capitalism. Biswas's study, thus, deals with the ecosocial perspective in R. K. Narayan's short story 'The Axe'. How does he show the burning problems of economic, social and ecological emergency? The focus of the study, as the researcher claims is to explore the impact of globalization on the rural Indian socio-cultural life in this short story. The study is an attempt to bring a new positive vision for the better future of the environment to make a healthy World.

It is a global responsibility to infuse laughter amidst the grave, serious academic discussions**.** Aradhana Bose's paper "Sukumar Ray's *Lakshmaner Shaktishel*: An Appraisal**"** serves the purpose. Sukumar Ray's *Lakshmaner Shaktishel* (The Wonder Weapon)" is an episode from the Ramayana. It tells the tale of Lakshman's mortal injury, leading to his fatal unconsciousness caused by the hit with the wonder weapon, Shaktishel hurled at him by Meghnad, son of Ravana and Lakshman's subsequent revival after the application of herbal medicine brought by Hanuman. The theme is epical and the characters are originally heroic, having the status of Avatar. What is intriguing about Sukumar's work, as Bose unearths, is that not only does Sukumar passes the buck on Ravana instead of on Meghnad for hurling the Wonder Weapon at Lakhshman, but he also endows these epic characters with the traits of human beings – their follies and foibles, idiosyncrasies, frailties,



dishonesty, and what not. Acknowledging Debasish Chattopadhyay's assertion (The Literary Utopias 251) Bose claims what Sukumar has done is exactly the reverse of what Alexander Pope did in *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope made little great but Sukumar made great little. The playwright depreciates the epic characters in order to ridicule the frailties of ordinary humans. The purpose seemingly is not to moralize or to teach but to delight. But Bose's paper attempts to establish a contrary opinion to this conventional perusal of Sukumar Ray.

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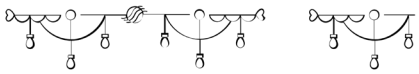
'Little People' and the Plunging of their 'Little Tales' into Deadly Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

Amechi N. Akwanya

Studies of *Anthills of the Savannah* have tended to focus on the great story – the story of the nation, and the major named individual actors in it, particularly the Head of State and his two former schoolmates who are working in his government, Chris Oriko, his Commissioner for Information, and Ikem Osodi, the editor of the *National Gazette.* There is a story, of course, longed for by General Sam, but which does not take place in the space of the work, namely interacting and dealing with the leaders of the great world powers, such as 'the President of United States of America or the Queen of England [because] peasants are impressed by that kind of thing' (16). He would make do with entertaining Miss Cranford of the American United Press at Abichi, his Presidential Retreat (67), and forbids 'talk of complaints and petitions' that would give inkling of the condition of the common people appearing 'in the press' (17). But the great story that is often discussed in published studies of the novel concern what Edward Said calls 'major social and economic outside facts' (*The World, The Text, and the Critic* 177). So, these studies commonly involve automatic collapsing of the story of the novel into the story of a specific national entity. Aghogho Akpome, for example, argues that '*Anthills of the Savannah* and *There Was a Country* … demonstrate a significant – even if not total – narrowing of interest from Nigeria/Africa, to his ethnic group, the Igbo, in a way that radicalises some of his previously well-known positions on postcolonial nationhood' (34). In a similar vein Uzoechi Nwagbara undertakes with respect to *Anthills of the Savannah* 'to demonstrate that Achebe's fiction is a derivative of the corpus of ''verifiable'', realistic literature on militarism in Nigeria's postcolony. That is the ''truth'' about Achebe's fiction' (1).

Since some other scholars see this novel as Achebe's apology to feminist readers for the so-called patriarchal ideology of his earlier novels, it is also frequently discussed as the story of Beatrice, the major female character, and part-narrator of the sequence. Thus, Syed Hajira Begum argues that the 'emergence of femaleness and the woman centered ending of *Anthills of the Savannah*' is not just 'a crusade for sexual and social justice, but a paradigm that articulates a still unrealized striving for self-expression' (95). Similarly, in her study, Espounda 'seeks to find out the role played by Beatrice Okoh in *Anthills of the Savannah* that described the changed status of women in modern African society' (286). These are instances of reductionism, and driven by the need to render the literary text immediately appropriable, and defended by some as suitable to African literature. But it was in fact learned from elsewhere, and is decried by Frank Kermode in his book of 1976 as a product of 'lust for commitment' (104), and by Roger Fowler, with perhaps more impatience than hyperbole, in these words:

There is a dreadful tradition of vapid reviewing which treats novels as if they were unedited,



> uncrafted, windows on life – the reader is supposed to look straight through the words at the pictured characters and settings just as one peers out through a spotless pane on one's next- door neighbour (3).

In an alternative view, the focus is on the text itself as an object of analysis, not something to be *translated* into what it allegedly represents. Hence the socio-political and historical facts found in it are materials used in constructing a work of art, which is *Anthills of the Savannah* itself. The material elements, which may be complete stories and fragments of stories, proverbs, folktale, political history, social events, even scandals, are *functions* – in Durkheim's sense – in the scheme of the work of art. For as Turner puts it, 'the question asked [by functionalism] was always: what is the "function" of a given [phenomenon] in the maintenance of … solidarity' in the given system? (65) On this track, close reading enables perception of many different patterns and trends at work in the narrative. One of the trends that emerges from close reading which is followed up in this study concerns the experiences of ordinary people and their stories. Just as the major characters diverge on the task in hand referencing governance, they also diverge on whether the ordinary people, sometimes called 'the little people' – and their little stories – are relevant in the scheme of things. On this matter Ikem is ahead of everyone else in recognizing the ordinary people – Heidegger would rather call it 'Being-ahead-of-oneself' since this position-taking which engenders care and concern is entirely pre-reflective (*Being and Time* 237). It is concrete experience of the events of the narrative that awakens Chris's and Beatrice's consciousnesses, although always already disposed in this regard, and aligns them to Ikem's position. But there is a tragic blindness even among these good people – *good* insofar as they make good moral choices as they gain insight, for as Aristotle explains in regard to tragedy, 'speech or action reveals the nature of a moral choice; and good character when the choice is good' (*Poetics,* chapter 15). However, they are not able to pull their strengths together because Ikem and Chris, particularly misunderstand each other in the matter of details, although united in their basic attitudes and what might be called fundamental option for the poor. Ikem never gets to know that Chris has what T.S. Eliot's Prufrock calls 'the strength to force the moment to its crisis', as he himself has.

There are 'little people' in this story; and there are references to their 'tales' and 'stories'. Beatrice, in fact, speaks of herself as one of the 'little people'. But she may have been speaking tongue in cheek:

> My name is Beatrice, but most of my friends call me either B or BB. And my enemies–that's one lesson I've learnt from the still unbelievable violences we went through–that even little people like me could also rate enemies. I had naively assumed that enemies were the privilege of the great (*Anthills of the Savannah* 77).

It appears that some of the internal public of the novel count her among the VIP by association

with the former schoolmates of the Head of State, and even with the Head of State himself, in consequence of which this public speaks of all three as her 'trio of lovers' (85).

The contrast between the two classes of personages is brought out in Ikem's rumination at the scene set for the public execution of convicted armed robbers. When he arrives, he finds that:

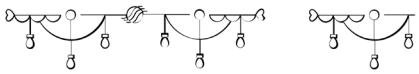
The only room not taken yet was on the raised platform with numbered seats for VIPs and at the four stakes backed by their own little sea-wall of sandbags….

> I began to wonder at one point if I hadn't made a foolish gesture in refusing the ticket for one of those nicely spaced-out, numbered seats, that now seemed so desirably cool. Hardly anybody was sitting on them yet. Isn't the great thing about a VIP that his share of good things is always there waiting for him in abundance even while he relaxes in the coolness of home, and the poor man is out there in the sun pushing and shoving and roasting for his miserable crumbs? Look at all those empty padded seats! How does the poor man retain his calm in the face of such provocation? From what bottomless wells of patience does he draw? (35-37)

'The little people' are here also called 'the poor'. Not only are they poor in resources and lacking in privileges, they are also freely abused by a system that is dedicated to the interests and comforts of the VIPs. They are deprived and neglected; they are *of little or no account* (115), and if they suffer, no one notices.

By virtue of his senior position in the public service, Ikem is entitled to VIP treatment. But as he takes his work as a journalist seriously, he wants to be able to observe as freely and fully as possible the public spectacle in the interest of objective reporting and well-informed analysis. So, he has declined the enjoyment of a privilege his position entitles him to. His declining it, it must be noted, is by way of a *gesture.* The truly privileged have their entitlements which are reserved for them. They do not have to ask or struggle for it – like people we shall see shortly who might be called the middle class, but have given up their middle-class identity, and are in pursuit of the privileges that in Kangan are reserved to its VIPs. Ikem has turned down a privilege reserved for him; he is in fact disgusted by the privileges of the VIPs, given the provocation it presents to the poor for whom he has great sympathy, whose situation is an outrage to him. For he realizes that the system is pitted against them, and the wonder is that they are able to retain their 'calm in the face of such provocation'. He is called a 'revolutionary' by Chris (59), but he is not of the Marxist brand. As comes out in 'his hand-to-hand struggle' with the university community he addresses after his sacking as editor of the *Gazette,* he is more like a Socratic philosopher, posing challenges and questions rather than offering answers and settled positions:

> By nature, he is never on the same side as his audience. Whatever his audience is, he must try



> not to be. If they fancy themselves radical, he fancies himself conservative; if they propound right-wing tenets, he unleashes revolution! (142)

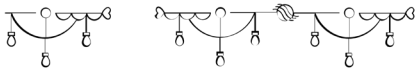
A Socratic thinker, he eschews snugness, somewhat unlike Chris who would not unsettle anything running its course, which explains why he has remained in General Sam's government after it had become clear that it is a charade, 'a fact of which [he is] somewhat ashamed' (2). So although their friendship is deep (37), they are temperamentally dissimilar. Ikem would never tolerate the depth of servility and obsequiousness the members of the cabinet had sunk to in their determination not to forgo the privileges they are allowed, whereas for Chris 'disenchantment with them turned long ago into detached clinical interest' (2). Ikem once again misreads Chris here. Whereas Chris sees himself as occupying an 'observation post' for an inside, and yet detached view, of the government and his colleagues (2), Ikem sees it as nothing less than joining 'a circus show' (108).

Since Ikem scorns privilege, he is morally distanced from the rest of the privileged class, and quite unlike the majority of the educated workers, who are locked in a rat race for whatever privilege they can avail themselves. We read, for instance, of workers going:

> on strike when outdated and outrageous colonial privileges like motor vehicle advances and allowances are threatened; [with] leaders [who] cannot give satisfactory account of millions they collect every month from the compulsory workers' check-off scheme; who never in their congresses attack absenteeism, ghost workers, scandalously low national productivity. Above all, workers whose national president at last year's All-Africa Congress refused to leave his hotel room until an official Peugeot 504 assigned to him was replaced with a Mercedes (145).

The system both worships privilege and is corrupt in the pursuit of privilege and creature comforts; as a result, anti-social practices that a normal middle class might be concerned about, like misappropriation of public and organization funds, absenteeism, ghost workers, and low national productivity are indulged.

Like Ikem, Beatrice is quick to recognize the need for action, but she is not a radical thinker nor an activist. There seems to be about her a dilemma between activism and calm stability. The 'unbelievable violences' she speaks of will tilt her decidedly towards calm stability whereby she is to sustain the role of a tower of strength for the survivors of the 'violences'. Also, she is to learn to identify with the ordinary people in the course of the experiences she lives through, for her apparent slip of tongue in the following reveals much about her sense of self up to the time the crisis of the story is beginning to break out: 'Ikem is as down to the ground, in his way, as either of us. Perhaps, more so ... You only have to compare his string of earthy girlfriends to yours truly ...' (*Anthills of the Savannah* 109). Progressively, she is shedding the veneer of class, with the understanding that like Ikem, she has a job in the government, earns her livelihood from the job, and for the rest had



to do what was required of her, and class had nothing to do with it.

She and Ikem, like everybody else, have 'tales', which they think of as purely personal to themselves, not knowing that they are relevant to what the leader of the delegation to the Head of State from the drought-affected region of Abazon calls 'our tale' (115), that is, 'the story of the land' (114). This leader further explains:

> we all have our little scraps of tale bubbling in us. But what we tell is like the middle of a mighty boa which a foolish forester mistakes for a tree trunk and settles upon to take his snuff ... (114, ellipsis original).

The story of the man who mistakes the middle of a mighty boa for a tree trunk is not completed here. The inevitable recoil is kept in reserve in virtue of the ellipsis, evoking another imagery in which a recoil does happen as follows:

> So, the arrogant fool who sits astride the story as though it were a bowl of foo-foo set before him by his wife understands little about the world. The story will roll him into a ball, dip him in the soup and swallow him first (114).

This is a certain 'translation' or even *paraphrase* of the imagery of the mistaken body of a mighty boa, where the existence or individuality of the individual is at hazard in the face of what was first thought inconsiderable; hardly given any thought, yet it holds in reserve the power to appropriate and make the individual its own. But this is still imagery, not 'plain language'.

On the other hand, the recoil of the boa mistaken for a tree trunk is promised; in fact, it is already unfolding in 'plain language' on the plane of narrative. In other words, the imagery tells the story in a highly compressed form. As Paul Ricoeur elucidates on the relation of a poetic metaphor to the story where it occurs as if a mere distributional unit:

> To speak by means of metaphor is to say something different 'through' some literal meaning. This trait says more than a 'shift', which could still be interpreted in terms of deviation and substitution. In turn, this intermediacy lays the foundation for the possibility of paraphrasing a metaphor by means of other words, some taken literally and others not. Not that the paraphrase could exhaust its meaning: for it is not necessary that a paraphrase be finalized for it to begin. The difference between trivial metaphor and poetic metaphor is not that one can be paraphrased and the other not, but that the paraphrase of the latter is without end. It is endless precisely because it can always spring back to life. If metaphor engenders thought throughout a long discourse, is this not because it is itself a brief discourse? (222-223)

In Paul Ricoeur, of course, metaphor is any 'shift from literal to figurative sense' (222). In this specific

case, the figure is an allegory insofar as it 'makes public something other than itself' (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 19). If this *metaphor* is capable of unfolding into a complex and long story, it is because the paraphrase we have identified does not exhaust it. It does happen frequently in Achebe, as seen in Akwanya, 'Proverb Translation to the Realm of the Story in Chinua Achebe's Novels', that a minimal narrative like a hunter sitting down on what he mistakes as a tree trunk is surprised and swallowed up as the 'trunk' springs into life.

Anthills of the Savannah does not give much narrative space to the telling of the little people's tales, but it gives striking hints. For example, we read of Ikem's outraged remark concerning a complex on which General Sam's regime has lavished many millions to refurbish, dubbed a Presidential Retreat: '[Retreat] "From whom?" I recall him demanding with characteristic heat.

> "From the people and their basic needs of water which is free from Guinea worm, of simple shelter and food. That's what you are retreating from. You retreat up the hill and commune with your cronies and forget the very people who legitimize your authority"' (*Anthills of the Savannah* 67).

Some of the hazards, the people are exposed to include Guinea worm. There is no sign of a health emergency being observed over this hazard, and no policy is put in place to address it or provide the people with clean water to avoid catching the disease. The state does not recognize that there is a public health situation, and those who succumb to it are obviously left to their fates. They suffer as individuals, but in point of fact, it is suffering from negligence that is a failing of the state. Chris calls this negligence backwardness orchestrated by the state itself. There is a telling dialogue where General Sam trivializes the country's underdevelopment, and draws a sharp response from Chris: "This is a military government in a backward West African State called Kangan ...We wouldn't be so backward if we weren't so bent on remaining so ..." (133) The direct connection between the backwardness wilfully maintained in the country by General Sam's government and the sufferings of 'the little people' from disease, hunger, and poverty is not clearly made out by the people themselves especially, with each individual suffering alone. According to the leader of the Abazon delegation, it is by Agwu, the spirit of prophecy granting insight to the storyteller that 'the man will speak and put head and tail back to the severed trunk of our tale' (115).

The story of the land directly impacts the little people through authoritarian and arbitrary rule by General Sam, and abuse and highhandedness by his minions. General Sam is the head of the government of Kangan, his backward West African State, but there is no sign that he has any plans for governance in Kangan, only to sit over it, preferably with the title of president for life in pursuit of which he organizes a plebiscite, where his self-assurance of victory is wrecked by Abazon, one out of the three regions that make up the country. He seizes the opportunity of the delegation from that region to ask for government intervention to assist them because of the drought ravaging the

region for his revenge. Conveniently labelling this delegation a riot, he moves against a peaceful delegation. As part of the news cast in which the suspension of Ikem Osodi as editor of the *National Gazette* – of which he hears for the first time on TV – is announced, we read:

> in another development, according to this smug newscaster dispensing national anguish in carefully measured milligrams, six leaders from Abazon who were involved in a recent illegal march on the Presidential Palace without police permit as required by decree had been arrested. And (in the same development) the office of the Director of SRC had informed the Crime Correspondent of KTV that the six men who had made useful statements were being held in BMSP (139).

The lived experience of 'the little people' is a tale of woe, or as the narrator renders it above, 'national anguish [dispensed] in carefully measured milligrams'. Far from developing policies to alleviate suffering and improve lives, General Sam is intoxicated with the power he wields and is afforded great satisfaction if it impinges upon the people, a case study, so to say, of the New Testament gentile ruler. In the words of Jesus Christ, 'among the gentiles those they call their rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt' (Mark 10.42). The State Research Council (SRC), is secret police has a free hand with people whose loyalty to the Head of State may be in any way suspect. The military has so thoroughly intimidated the people that a young man who narrowly escapes being crushed to death with his wares in the open market by an army truck was subsequently to find 'his voice … and asked, timidly: 'Oga, you want kill me?' Whereupon the driver who is swaggering away replies: 'If I kill you, I kill dog'! (44)

But Abazon was to change everything. The people of Abazon region who were being laid waste to by drought have had the water boreholes being sunk throughout the region to provide pipe borne water stopped after they voted against the idea of a life presidency have drawn the obvious conclusion that the stoppage was in retaliation for their vote. But the Head of State wants this rubbed in. He sends his minions to say to them:

> Because you said no to the Big Chief, he is very angry and has ordered all the water bore- holes they are digging in your area to be closed so that you will know what it means to offend the sun. You will suffer so much that in your next reincarnation you will need no one to tell you to say yes whether the matter is clear to you or not (*Anthills of the Savannah* 116).

Accordingly, the Abazon people have decided to go on a journey of appeasement:

> to Bassa to say our own yes and perhaps the work on our bore-holes will start again and we will not all perish from the anger of the sun. We did not know before but we know now that yes does not cause trouble. We do not fully understand the ways of today yet but we are learning (116).

General Sam's preference is that they should feel the weight of his disapproval of them in full measure, and know that everything depends on himself, whether to continue in their suffering indefinitely, or for any purpose of his own change their fortune. In effect, he thinks of himself as a deity, and moreover, not one that is appeaseable. We see him pained to have to convey these lessons to a member of his Cabinet. The occasion is Chris suggesting that he should pay a goodwill visit to Abazon because of the drought ravaging the region, a thing he had earlier ruled against:

> 'As Your Excellency wishes. But ...'
>
> 'But me no buts, Mr. Oriko! The matter is closed, I said. How many times, for God's sake, am I expected to repeat it? Why do *you* find it so difficult to swallow my ruling. On anything?'
>
> 'I am sorry, Your Excellency. But I have no difficulty swallowing *and* digesting your rulings.'
>
> For a full minute or so the fury of his eyes lay on me. Briefly our eyes had been locked in combat. Then I had lowered mine to the shiny table-top in ceremonial capitulation. Long silence. But he was not appeased. Rather he was making the silence itself grow rapidly into its own kind of contest, like the eyewink duel of children. I conceded victory there as well. Without raising my eyes, I said again: 'I am very sorry, Your Excellency.' A year ago, I would never have said it again that second time ─ without doing grave violence to myself. Now I did it like a casual favour to him. It meant nothing at all to me ─ no inconvenience whatever ─ and yet everything to him (1-2).

This Abazon story has become for General Sam a real *cause célèbre;* and the crisis of this narrative is circling around it: his own regime too is crashing over it, but not before he has driven the people who had to all intents and purposes been cowed to submissiveness to public acts of indignation. Beatrice would find out conversing casually with a taxi driver, after it became known that Ikem had been killed while in police custody, about:

> the planned meeting tomorrow of the Taxi Drivers Union 'to put their mouth into this nonsense story' of Ikem's death. [Adding:]
>
> 'If you get somewhere to go make you go today. Tomorrow no taxi go run' (166).

The Head of State thinks of himself as a deity, but no one serves him out of love, gratitude, or devotion. He compels service by browbeating his underlings or by blatant force. He is the exact opposite of the real deity Idemili of whose legend we read in connection with drought in ancient times, going back to 'the beginnings of things', as *Arrow of God* puts it.

> As it happened, good land was more plentiful than good water and before long some hamlets too far from streams and springs were relieving their burning thirst with the juice of banana

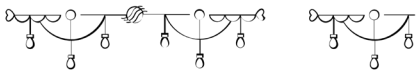
> stems in the worst years of dry weather. Idemili, travelling through the country disguised as a hunter, saw this and on her return sent a stream from her lake to snake through the parched settlements all the way to Orimili (*Anthills of the Savannah* 94).

Idemili takes action to make provision for the needs of the people, even before the people know who to appeal to. The figural here manifests something *other* than itself, but in the sense of something contrasting to itself.

The drought, as has been mentioned, is ravaging one out of the three regions of Kangan. But it turns out to have explosive import for the narrative generally. First of all, it is the cause for the settling of positions around the divide between the class of privilege and 'the little people'. Of the major characters of *Anthills of the Savannah* who have the most abundant opportunities to express themselves, the Head of State, Chris Oriko, Ikem Osodi, and Beatrice Okoh, and are directly involved in the action, Ikem is attitudinally for the ordinary people, and comes close enough to them to observe first-hand and feel their hurts. He is the one, for instance, who observes the narrow escape of the young trader from being crushed to death by a reckless soldier in the army truck.

Ikem has always had the interests of the little people at heart. He is also a radical journalist, and writes 'crusading editorials' in the *Gazette*, including one which had led to the abolition of the firing squad for armed robbers. Even if not an admirer of his, the Head of State had had nothing against him. On the matter of abolition of the death penalty, either both their views had converged or it was by accepting Ikem's arguments on the matter, as Ikem himself had believed. But Ikem appearing in the Presidential Palace at the time the Abazon People are there is seized by him as grounds that he is in league with them – regardless of the fact that Ikem had been sent for by the Ministry of Information to cover the visit. He also calls to mind the negative vote of Abazon in the plebiscite, and despite there being no evidence whatever, convinces himself that it must be the doing of Ikem. His scapegoating of Ikem and ultimate murder of this former friend of his in which he first attempts to involve Chris is because of perceived association with Abazon and its suffering people. Chris becomes tarred with this same brush for failing to join in the persecution of Ikem – and he may have thought Chris's case obvious as he has been bringing up the dire situation of Abazon in cabinet meetings.

Chris is not a class-conscious person. A humanist by disposition, he responds to human suffering by instinct, and although he is of the elite class by birth, probably, he does not seek privilege, or comfort as such. Thus, the reserving of a special padded seat for him at public executions is not likely to attract his notice. He does not attend, and to Ikem's intense annoyance, he is noncommittal one way or the other about the use of a firing squad for public executions; he is non-committal because he had never witnessed it, and 'from all accounts [the people] enjoyed the spectacle'. Ikem is quite wrangling with him mentally when he brings out: "From all accounts! From one account,



mine, Chris never went to the show. I did. And by God he is right about the enjoyment! But, thank God again, also totally wrong (36)."

Chris is not on the side of privilege; he would rather be on the part of the ordinary people, only that he rarely sees them. He gets surprised by them when he does see them. Here is his reaction when he encounters the young student leader Emmanuel:

> He was something else, that boy Emmanuel. Why did we not cultivate such young men before now? Why, we did not even know they existed if the truth must be told! We? Who are we? The trinity who thought they owned Kangan as BB once unkindly said? Three green bottles. One has accidentally fallen; one is tilting. Going, going, bang! Then we become I, becomes imperial We (176).

Chris is *seeing* a person of Emmanuel's kind for the first time; and it drives him to self-analysis, and the conclusion that they had missed something of profound importance in their effort in governance. They had been governing without the people, the very people who, as Ikem would say, legitimize the positions they hold.

This member of the Government of Kangan, quite unlike some other members such as Professor Reginald Okong, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, and the Attorney General who have fortuitously arrived in the corridors of power, seems to have been brought up in the old pre- military elite society, and never having had a want in his life had had no idea 'how the other half lives'. He is to see something of 'how the other half lives' as the narrative pushes to its climax. But as a genuine human being, he is able to understand the situation of the people of Abazon. The only other member of the government who is on the side of Abazon is the Chief Secretary who, however, is afraid to speak up, and leaves Chris to take the heat of the General's displeasure alone. His comment following the sharp rebuke of Chris and the abrupt departure of the President from the meeting is: "He is not in a good mood today…. We'll bring it up again next Thursday, Chris. Don't worry." (8)

There is, however, no next opportunity to bring up the matter. The events of the narrative quickly reach a turning point, as the Abazon shortly arrive outside the Presidential Palace. The Head of State, thanks to his efficient secret police, has had intelligence about their coming and their mission, as he informs his Commissioner for Home Affairs. But it is he himself who makes a crisis out of this event, as he had told the Commissioner:

> 'It is a peaceful and loyal and goodwill delegation ...' 'Oh I am so happy to hear that.'
>
> '... that has come all the way from Abazon to declare their loyalty.' 'Very good, sir. Very good! And I should say, about time too ...'

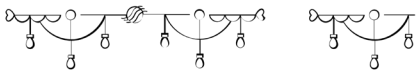
A sudden violent frown on His Excellency's face silenced the Professor's re-awakened garrulity.

"But I have been made to understand that they also may have a petition about the drought in their region. They want personally to invite me to pay them a visit and see their problems. Well, you know--everybody knows--my attitude to petitions and demonstrations and those kinds of things. "I do, sir. Every loyal citizen of this country knows your Excellency's attitude ... Sheer signs of indiscipline. Allow any of it, from whatever quarter, and you are as good as sunk". (15)

In his 'every loyal citizen of this country knows your Excellency's attitude ...', the Minister of Home Affairs has said in effect that the Head of State is Kangan's dictator. He condescends to approve the idea of the Abazon people coming to say their 'own yes', as their leader puts it in his speech where the President has sent them to be entertained. But he greets the recollection of their petition with 'a sudden violent frown'.

He had been stung by the people of Abazon voting against his plebiscite for president for life. Their coming now to say their 'own yes' restores them to the status of 'loyal' citizens, but it is too late to restore the denied title. The title, however, has *content*, namely total power. This is really what he wants; and the people voting one way or another does not in any way touch that. He is going ahead accumulating and consolidating it. What is wrong with the petition is that it seems to him to present a challenge to his absolute power: 'Allow any of it, from whatever quarter, and you are as good as sunk'. Ikem, whose influence as a popular editor of the *National Gazette* he fears, has shown himself to be sympathetic to this challenge by joining the Abazon delegation in the hotel where they are being entertained. Ikem who had so irrefutably made the case against public executions by firing squad was now to have a new cause: it seems that he concluded that he would not risk giving Ikem a new cause, and had to take him out. He then needed to be demonized; along with him Abazon itself, which means its leaders who may be claimed to have conspired with Ikem.

Nor would Ikem as a threat to state security be credible if he were acting alone and the charge against him merely that he is writing and publishing inconvenient editorials. He needed co- conspirators, and further to be doing something really heinous. So 'a peaceful and loyal and goodwill delegation' of citizens has become a march on the Presidential Palace. Chris's effort to disabused any who might be deceived as to the murder of Ikem by the secret police immediately renders him dangerous, He becomes an enemy of the state, to be tracked down and put to silence. But the Head of State is not in total control, as he would have liked, as he awakens hostile forces that sweep him away. Chris survives him only a matter of hours before he is gunned down by a drunken policeman; and this is reflective of the chaos that General Sam has made of the country. These murders, however, follow



one another almost exactly as prophesied by Beatrice:

> I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. No joking, Chris. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you. We are all in it, Ikem, you, me and even Him (105).

The 'pious capital letter' in *Him* (see Clive Scott 210), captures General Sam's imaging of himself as a divine form, the Hegelian Absolute itself.

As very frequently happens in Achebe, the Abazon crisis, though analyzable at the level of incident, also works as a trope. It makes public the crisis in the Kangan nation itself presided over by General Sam. And what in turn has exfoliated as the Abazon crisis is what Ikem has called 'the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being', a poetic metaphor in its own right. In this throbbing heart the little tales of all the little people are comprehended and form one story, 'our tale'. The VIPs alone stand outside this story. Privilege in Kangan marks 'the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, [or take notice of the debility that is lodged deep within] the core of the nation's being' (131).

Although General Sam has dominated Kangan as its dictator, and thought himself a historical force, or maybe even *history* itself in his final chapter the picture is one of utter insignificance. He is:

> kidnapped from the Palace by 'unknown persons', tortured, shot in the head and buried under one foot of soil (203).

He has abused the cause of the ordinary people of Abazon, and tried to turn it into his own cause for the destruction of people who stubbornly have refused him the fealty others of the privileged class render him in exchange for the privileges they enjoy. Chris and Ikem, according to the Attorney General, 'cannot understand how this same boy with whom [they] played all the boyish pranks, how he can today become this nation's Man of Destiny', whereas 'we know our place, we know those better than ourselves when we see them. We have no problem worshipping a man like you' (22). Apparently, those two would not 'accept [his] ruling. On anything', as if there could be a point of view other than his own. But the real point of view is that of the people, who own 'the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being'. He has pitted himself against this bruised heart, instead of connecting to it like Ikem and Chris. Beatrice literally proves that, 'Nwanyibuife—A female is also something' (79) is the connectivity that not only survives the catastrophe, but endures as the hub of this connectivity involving disparate other people. In her own imagery, the relationship is:

> a defensive pact with a small band of near-strangers that was to prove stronger than kindred or mere friendship. Like old kinships this one was pledged also on blood. It was not, however,

blood flowing safe and inviolate in its veins but blood casually spilt and profaned (202).

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Canvases of Marginalisation in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*

Arup Malik

Mahasweta Devi, though not prominent to the western world and also to some extent unknown to some of the people of her own country, yet is one of the most celebrated writers of West Bengal. She is known for her fictional works involving those characters whom the people of the mainstream mostly ignore. In other words, she voices for those who have been voiceless.

> Her stories of the subaltern will live forever as long as there's oppression in the world and the poorest of the poor need a voice. In today's atmosphere of growing intolerance, it's imperative to her work and remind ourselves of her lifelong fight for those who are sought to be silenced. (Datta).

Characters like Dopdi, Dhouli, Shanichari are those characters who do not belong to the mainstream and have been marginalised, and have suffered, deceived, exploited for decades. But it will be unjust to think that Mahasweta Devi has only shown the suffering of these women. Occasionally, Devi delineates characters who have the ability to shake the oppressor and question the manhood of man. The object of the paper is to explore the canvases delineated by Mahashweta Devi of the marginalisation of the outcast, the subaltern, the 'Other'- an area hitherto unexplored.

Devi's sketches of the 'Others' comprise three shades − one is the narrative (story telling), the other is technical (the use of language and the way of her painting) and the third sketch of the marginalisation is symbolic. Various frames of subalternity have been presented through her narration. But what is most significant is that her canvases of the 'Others' obtain greater dimension through her hard, bare, undecorative, and oftener than not ungrammatical language. As if, the Others don't require, or their description does not require grammar. "Name Dopdi Mejhen, age 27, husband Dulna Majhi (deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrahjarh, information whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees…" (Devi 16). The citation has no grammar and the usage of a minimum number of words here is a point to be noted. The ungrammatical, rocky, stony, broken sentence is a pointer to the fact that the description of the marginalised people does not require grammatical sentence, prevailing in the description of the mainstream. In this paper the focus will be on a character created by Mahasweta Devi who was downtrodden at her early life like so many others of her community. She was marginalised in many different ways. She has been exploited culturally, politically, economically, and even sexually. But at the end this voiceless voice voices the spirit of revolt and overpowers her oppressor. The different canvases of marginalisation of the character of Dopdi in Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* taken from the collection *Breast Stories* will be presented in this paper.

The story revolves round the character of Dopdi, a 27 years old tribal woman whom the police is searching. Dopdi and her husband Dulna work as informers to an extreme revolutionary group. They fight for the rights of the tribals. People like Surja Sahu exploit these tribals in the name of giving money but ultimately ends up exploiting them. Dopdi and her group protest against them. Kill them, if necessary. They even defy the Government. The police are unable to catch them in any way. In the story, this causes tension of the police officer Arjan Singh. Later in his place another experienced officer Senanayak has been appointed. In a police operation Dopdi's husband Dulna has been killed but Dopdi is still beyond their reach. Eventually, Dopdi is caught. Senanayak's men tortures Dopdi physically, even sexually throughout the night.

> Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her? (Devi 31).

Senanayak sends for her in the morning. But here the story takes a somewhat unprecedented turn. Dopdi refuses to wear cloth now. She questions and challenges their manhood: "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you cloth me again? Are you a man?" (Devi 33). She uses her own black body against her oppressor making him terrified: "Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid." (Devi 33).

It is clearly understandable that the title 'Draupadi' is taken from a character from the epic, The *Mahabharata*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the Translator's Preface observes:

> The ancient Draupadi is perhaps the most celebrated heroine of the Indian epic Mahabharata. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana are the cultural credentials of the so- called Aryan civilisation of India. The tribes pre-date the Aryan invasion. They have no right to heroic Sanskrit names. Neither the interdiction nor the significance of the name, however, must be taken too seriously. For this pious, domesticated Hindu name was given Dopdi at birth by her mistress, in the usual mood of benevolence felt by the oppressor's wife towards the tribal bond servant. (Spivak 8-9).

It is somewhat peculiar to note that Spivak missed something in the title of the story here. The title itself is self-explanatory, as the name in the title has been distorted, twisted, malformed, molested, if it may be so said, and has been transformed to Dopdi. This is indicative of Draupadi's assault in the *Mahabharata* in presence of her five husbands and so many people. That this tribal black girl is destined to be molested is indicative of Devi's use of the selection of the title of the story and the subsequent distortion of the name Draupadi, "Dopdi" in the story. This is one of the most poignant,

ironical pictures of marginalisation in Devi's work.

It is interesting to note that a similarity is perceptible even in the colour of her skin with that of the *Mahabharata*'s Draupadi. Nrisimhaprasada Bhaduri in his description of Draupadi does not consider her very fair. "Draupadi is a black girl. And for this her another name is 'Krishna' (the word means black in Bengali)" (Bhaduri 312 Trans. mine). In Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi*, Dopdi is also having dark complexion. "Draupadi's black body comes even closer." (Devi 33). In the epic, Draupadi is a wife to five Pandavas. In the game of dice, the Pandavas lost and the Kouravas decided to strip Draupadi in front of everyone. Draupadi helplessly, in vain, tries to urge her husbands to save her. But here Lord Krishna [1] saves her. In Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* the case is different. There is no one to save Dopdi from those policemen. The saviour becomes the tyrant in the story. This Draupadi is not saved by any divine being.

One, even, can notice the significance behind the name of the police officer, Senanayak in the story. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her Translator's Preface to the story in *Breast Stories* says that: "I translated this Bengali short story into English as much for the sake of its villain, Senanayak, as for its title character, Draupadi (or Dopdi)." (Spivak 1). The name Senanayak is not a proper noun or a name, at least in Bengal. It may, therefore, be asked why has Mahasweta Devi used this name which is not usually found in Bengali communities? May be the answer is inherent in the name itself. In Bengali language, the word 'Senanayak' means the Chief of the police or any force/army. So, the name itself symbolises the centre, the grabber of power in the society who can oppress anyone misusing his power. In the story this is what happens, it has been shown that the Senanayak orders his men to torture Dopdi. "At 8.57 Senanayak's dinner hour approached, and saying, Make her. *Do the needful*, he disappeared." (Devi 31).

Mahasweta Devi's beginning of the story is remarkably attractive – to use Devi's technique − that we have a look-out notice for a tribal woman "Name Dopdi Mejhen, age 27". She is wanted dead or alive and the prize money is not small, one hundred rupees. She is "Most notorious female. Long wanted in many…" (Devi 16). But what is the reason for it? Is she a criminal? Or

is she a naked truth in front of the governing power of the society? To know the answer, one has to know the background history on which the story is based.

The story is based on the Naxalite movement. The term Naxalite is derived from Naxalbari, a place in the north of West Bengal. The place was the centre of a tribal peasant rebellion against the oppression of the local landlords in 1967. The landlords, previously with the help of the government officials, used to exploit the poor simple tribal villagers. They used to rob their lands, wealth and livelihood. (Wikipedia). According to the 1971 census, nearly 60% of the population was landless and a vast amount of land had been shared by the richest 4%. (Indian History Collective). But after 1967 under the leadership of Charu Majumder and others many of these marginalised, deprived

people revolted for their basic rights. And gradually it turned into an armed movement against the government because the Naxalites believed that the government was not listening to their pleas. This movement was later spread to many other Indian states and became a threat to the Government.

Draupadi's marginalisation in the story, as it has already been stated, is many faceted. Dopdi's belonging to the tribal class is nothing but the created culture of the dominant class, hegemony. The subalterns' lifestyle has been neatly painted by Devi in the course of her narrative in the excerpt that follows:

> Dopdi was proceeding slowly, with some rice knotted into her belt. Mushai Tudu's wife had cooked her some. She does so occasionally. When the rice is cold. Dopdi knots it into her waistcloth and walks slowly. As she walked, she picked out and killed the lice in her hair. If she had some kerosene, she'd rub it into her scalp and get rid of her lice. Then she could wash her hair with baking soda. (Devi 24).

What is noteworthy in the narrative is that the portrayal of Dopdi here is exactly the reverse of a portrait of a mainstream woman- a mainstream woman hardly does these things. Even after death, the corpse of a tribal is not allowed to have the funeral ritual prevailing in the world of Draupadi. Draupadi's husband Dulna's dead body is denied a proper cremation and is used as a bait to catch the other people in her group.

> Then, leaving Dulna's body on the stone, the soldiers climb the trees in green camouflage. They embrace the leafy boughs like so many great god Pans and wait as the large red ants bite their private parts. To see if anyone comes to take away the body. This is the hunter's way, not the soldier's. But Senanayak knows that these brutes cannot be dispatched by the approved method. So, he asks his men to draw the prey with a corpse as bait. (Devi 21).

In the story *Draupadi,* Surja Sahu, the tyrannical landlord, cunningly took the lands of the tribal villagers. By fraud, he manages to utilise their free labour for his vested interest. Draupadi and her husband Dulna are the victims of this situation like so many others. They are marginalised economically by the power of the privileged class, here represented by the character of the landlord Surja Sahu. They exploit the condition of the simple poor people. Once Dulna said about Surja Sahu, "My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labour to repay the debt." (Devi 27). Even the representative of the democratic government, 'Biddi- babu', was helping in this process of making the tribals economically marginals. "Surja sahu arranged with Biddi-babu to dig two tube wells and three wells within the compound of his two houses. No water anywhere, drought in Birbhum". (Devi 26). These types of Zamindars used to lend money to the villagers for many purposes at a very high rate of interest which they could not repay very naturally and the mainstream people like Surja Sahu grabbed their lands in this way. Mahasweta

Devi delineates this canvas of the oppression of the subaltern by the Centre. Devi's use of language in this context is a graphic delineation of the suffering of the oppressed: "No water anywhere, drought in Birbhum. Unlimited water at Surja Sahu's house, as clear as a crow's eyes." (Devi 26). To the mainstream people these tribals are barbaric people, always at unrest: "Dopdi returns−good; doesn't return−bad. Change hideout". (Devi 29) Another portrait of marginalisation can be seen as Mahasweta Devi shows many restrictions and barriers imposed upon the simple tribals by the society governed by the few upper class people who had name and money. The tribals were treated like the untouchables; and even were deprived of the basic necessity of life − water.

> "What good did you do?
>
> Have I not given water to the village? You have given it to your kin Bhagunal. Don't you
>
> get water?
> No. The untouchables don't get water." (Devi 26).

Within the narrative, Devi's linguistic skill is worth noting. The language seems to be only for the tribals, the Others, the dushads. Not only is the narrative part of the story a canvas of marginalisation, but also the unique use of language of Mahasweta Devi intensifies the proposal of the narrative. One should note Devi's selection of words and use of sentences which aptly justify the theme and intention of the writer to unfold the process of making the tribals 'Other' to the society. The very first sentence of the story testifies to this fact: "Name Dopdi Mejhen, age 27, husband Dulna Majhi(deceased), domicile Cherakhan, Bankrsjarh, information whether dead or alive and/ or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees…" (Devi 16). It is interesting to note that the sentence is not complete as if the tribal woman Dopdi is not a being but a thing, one whose description does not deserve a complete sentence. In spite of the fact that for arresting her dead or alive the Government has announced a lumpsum of money – Rupees one hundred, Devi's language is a revelation of her ironic exposure of the intention of the Government. The Government is ready to spend so much money, but they won't use a few more words. Even if we look closely at the sentence regarding these marginal people, we perceive that the construction of these sentences is not grammatically complete. Only the necessary words are put side by side to convey the meaning. Such instances can easily be multiplied: "Dopdi returns good; doesn't return
– bad. Change hideout." (Devi 29). These types of sentences and their constructions definitely draw our attention because we generally do not come across such sentences used to describe the mainstream people. The portrait, no doubt is unique.

While speaking of the otherness of the marginalised the language specifically draws attention of the readers. The writer Mahasweta Devi herself felt for these people. She went to most of those

places which she selected the location of her story. She was not only a writer but also an activist. She voices for those voiceless people. She went to the remote far-away places of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and came across many poor tribal people and their communities like the Sabars. She has seen their life-style, she heard their language. And she deliberately uses the language of the marginals in her work to make it more lifelike. In this process Mahasweta Devi sketches on her canvases the wretched, distressed condition of the poor people for whom the owners of the buses run "the poor run-down buses, for the poor run-down people, for the poor run-down places". (*Dhouli* 1). In her work the tribals speak their own language which is illegible to the mainstream people. An example from *Draupadi* will prove the point:

> A black-skinned couple ululated like police siren before the episode. They sang jubilantly in a savage tongue, incomprehensible to the Santhals. Such as:
>
> Samaray hijulenako mar goekope
>
> And,
>
> Hendre ramba keche keche Pundir ramba keche keche
> This proves conclusively that they are the cause of Captain Arjan Singh's diabetes. (Devi 18).

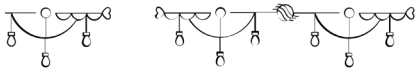
There are also some examples of words spoken by the tribal 'others' voiced by Mahasweta Devi.

> … even in the southeast and southwest corners, one comes across hair-raising details in the eye-witness records put together on the people who are suspected of attacking police stations, stealing guns (since the snatchers are not invariably well educated, they sometimes say 'give up your chambers' rather give up your gun) (Devi 17)

Here the word 'chambers' means gun. Again, in the final section of the story Draupadi says, "Come on, kounter me – come on, kounter me -?" (Devi 33). Here the word 'kounter' means to encounter. (Spivak 15).

The paper may be concluded referring to the beginning of Debasish Chattopadhyay's paper on Mahasweta Devi's *Outcast: Four Stories*: "Despite being 'voiced' in the space of the Western academia by writers like Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, Mahasweta Devi is still not extensively known to academics outside Bengal in her own country." (106). Perhaps the most poignant ironic portrayal of marginalisation is the presentation of this.

NOTE



In Rajsekhar Basu's version of the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is saved by a divine power.

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The Fragility of the Great: A Study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Manas Ranjan Chaudhuri

The general notion of interpreting Okonkwo as a tragic hero in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* falls short of perfection if the text is analyzed through the opposite angle of a telescope. Taking a cue from Dr. Debasish Chattopadhyay (2006), a different standpoint can be established where the apparent heroic greatness of the character Okonkwo is dwarfed when viewed through the lens of the marginalized figures of the novel. The study needs to show how the marginalized characters like Unoka, Nwoye, Ekwefi, Uchendu and Obierika among others eventually dismantle the honorific centre and represent the voice of a balanced and flexible view of life necessary for survival in an adverse and changing epoch. An understanding of the array of alternative philosophies from the standpoint of these minor characters and the inadequacy and incompatibility of Okonkwo in the face of a new dominating religion and a new culture are necessary to comprehend the character of the protagonist in its entirety.

The story of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* revolves round the rise and fall of its protagonist Okonkwo, but an analysis of his character cannot be done in isolation. His character needs to be interpreted in the ethnical context of its historical and temporal location. The novel begins in the late nineteenth century, when the British colonizers had not put their feet in the innermost parts of West Africa like Umuofia, which was populated by the agrarian Igbo community. The novel's main concern is to depict the fall of the Igbo clan and its culture, as enacted through its protagonist, Okonkwo. He was a man of strong will, always trying to conform to the apparent masculine ideology of the Igbo culture –'Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered.'(Ch. 1, p. 6). The narrator builds his character in concrete terms - 'He was a man of action, a man of war' (Ch. 2, p. 9). He made his own fortune as 'his fame rested on solid personal achievements' (Ch. 1, p. 3). He is presented as a successful man - 'Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things' (Ch.1, p.6). The narrator diligently frames the greatness of the protagonist with these eulogistic epithets.

We can quote some relevant interpretations on purpose to support this idea of Okonkwo's greatness. "Okonkwo represents a hyper-masculinized manifestation of his culture's patriarchal ideals."[1] G. D. Killam describes Okonkwo as 'the embodiment of Ibo values, a man who better than most symbolized his race.'[2] C. L. Innes opines: 'the reader never doubts that he is the product of his society's system . . . He is . . . a type of his society.'[3] Abiola Irele emphasizes 'his physicality, all projected outward . . . in such a way as to constitute him as the incarnation of his

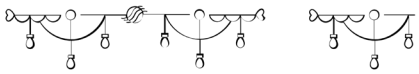
society's ideal of manhood'[4] But his physicality is in total disharmony with any psychological depth or intellectual complexity found in the other great tragic heroes like Macbeth or Oedipus. He is a flat character which is revealed through a detailed analysis of the dichotomy inherent in him as he cannot

unify or overcome this gap which causes his fall. According to Simon Gikandi there is a "duality involved in Okonkwo's construction as a subject: at the beginning of the novel he is represented as a cultural hero . . . a symbolic receptacle of the village's central doctrines. But Okonkwo is notably characterized by his displacement from the Umuofia mainstream."[5] It is true that he could imbibe only the masculine ethos of the Igbo society and deliberately neglected its submerged forbearing nature. His catastrophe, at the end of the novel, lies in this one- dimensional and inflexible attitude to life.

The overreaching narrative of Okonkwo's downfall is the resultant catastrophe of his hubris. Ato Quayson generalizes the prevalent interpretation regarding the cause of Okonkwo's downfall as 'a neurotic concern with manliness'.[6] In his desire to be at the top of the society, he is relentless. As opined by Abiola Irele, Okonkwo has 'obsessive single-mindedness that soon degenerates into egocentricity.'[7]And it is this extremity of his adherence to his male identity, conforming to the masculine discourse of the Igbo community and its male-dominated institutions where the women folk and the so-called 'weaker' males are restricted to the fringes in the hierarchical order. That is the reason Okonkwo hates everything that is not 'manly'. He could not endure any 'feminine' virtues of softness and patience. C.L. Innes marked it as a flaw as he was 'unable to acknowledge the mythic implications of femininity and its values'[8]. Okonkwo's failure to realize and accept the powerful 'female principle'[9] pervading the whole society of Umuofia results in the imbalance of his character and ultimately it leads to his downfall. Thus, it can be logically argued that Okonkwo's representation of the Igbo society is incomplete and myopic as he could not comprehend the essential balance inherent in its cultural, social and religious philosophy of life, shared by the majority of the clan. Achebe himself makes it clear in one of his interviews:

> This is a society in *Things Fall Apart* that believes in strength and manliness and the masculine ideals. Okonkwo accepts them in a rather literal sense . . . [and] the culture 'betrays' him. He is 'betrayed' because he's doing exactly what the culture preaches. But you see, the culture is devious and flexible, because if it wasn't it wouldn't survive. The culture says you must be strong, you must be this and that, but when the moment comes for absolute strength the culture says, no, hold it! The culture has to be ambivalent, so it immediately raises the virtues of the women, of love, of tenderness . . . and holds up abominations: You cannot do this, even though the cultural norms say you must do it.[10]

Okonkwo's notion of the patriarchal discourse of the Umuofian society is based on this male-female binarism. He takes on his shoulder, as if, the burden of upholding the uncompromisable masculine principles. The other characters like Unoka, his father; Nwoye, his son; Ikemefi, his wife are chauvinistically judged by him as deviations from that standard. As a consequence of his rigidity and inflexibility, his relationship with others is shaken. But these figures, as also Obierika,



his friend, in the background posit, affirm and practise alternative philosophies of life. They do not cherish the negative attributes like intolerance, impatience, and violence which, ironically, 'decorate' Okonkwo's character. He is a stellar figure in his society, admired and esteemed highly for his achievements, his strength and courage, but he is not beyond any criticism. We can cite some examples to demythicize his heroic aura. Firstly, during a meeting on the next ancestral feast, Okonkwo insults Osugo, a non-titled common man, but he is highly rebuked for that. His society does not support him at all:

> Only a week ago a man had contradicted him at a kindred meeting which they held to discuss the next ancestral feast. Without looking at the man Okonkwo had said: "This meeting is for men." The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit.
>
> Everybody at the kindred meeting took sides with Osugo when Okonkwo called him a woman. The oldest man present said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble. Okonkwo said he was sorry for what he had said, and the meeting continued. (Ch. 4, p. 20)

Secondly, Okonkwo's thoughtless action is evident in his beating his wife Ojiugo during the sacred Week of Peace, maintained to honour goddess Ani. When even 'a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour', Okonkwo abuses his wife physically:

> And when she returned he beat her very heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the Week of Peace. His first two wives ran out in great alarm pleading with him that it was the sacred week. But Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess. (Ch. 4, p. 22)

His action is a sacrilegious transgression of 'nso-ani' and so, Ezeani, goddess Ani's priest, angrily admonishes Okonkwo for this offence:

> You have committed a great evil. . . The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish. (Ch. 4, p. 23)

Moreover, he attracts criticism from all corners of the society. Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest member in the clan reminds him of the more severe punishment in the past for the same offence. His manliness lacks control of a leader to maintain the equilibrium in a society. His dominant male psychology breeds nothing but violence. Abiola Irele's interpretation is relevant here: "In a way, Okonkwo's way of conforming, besides being an inverted sort of nonconformity, is a perversion. The meaning he attaches to 'manliness' amounts to fierceness, and violence. His insistence is such that he

becomes a menace to his society even within the limits of its code."[11] Thus, the dichotomy between Okonkwo's ideal and his actions are exposed. According to David Whittaker and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (2007), "Achebe creates a tension between the duality of Okonkwo's flawed individual subjectivity and his metonymic status as a 'heroic embodiment' of communal values and ideals, which becomes increasingly problematic as the novel progresses."[12]

Again, the fact that he becomes dehumanized to a great extent, by deliberately suppressing the ordinary softer feelings is exemplified in his participation in the killing of Ikemefuna, the lovable hostage who called him father. His neurotic concern with 'manliness' makes him immune even to the natural feelings of paternal love. Ogbudi Ezeudu forewarns him well in advance, "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death." (Ch. 7, p. 41). However, Okonkwo, though fond of that poor boy, tragically leads the delegation of fierce butchers who are to execute the dictum of the oracle:

> As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his matchet, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (Ch. 7, p. 44).

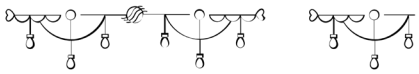
Okonkwo has to prove that he is not weak. Florence Stratton comments, "It is this fear – a fear of femininity – that impels Okonkwo to participate in the killing of Ikemefuna, the act which inaugurates his own decline."[13] This act of savagery is 'cowardice' and it is in sharp contrast to Ekwefi's courageous nocturnal pursuit of Chielo for her daughter's (Ezinma) safety and well- being which exhibits a natural maternal instinct. She has been even ready to defy the god (Agbala) in defending her daughter, when she was waiting outside the cave. But Okonkwo has failed

miserably here, as he forcefully suppressed his instincts and became an active agent in Ikemefuna's ritual killing. Ekwefi's 'manliness' in her bold pursuit has a positive force of humanity, which was antithetical to Okonkwo's destructive 'egoism'. Though his memory bites him back, he cheers himself up once more with his false notion of manliness:

> "When did you become a shivering old woman," Okonkwo asked himself, "you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed." (Ch. 7, p. 47).

Immediately later in a conversation with Obierika his latest act of 'manliness' is reprimanded:

> "I cannot understand why you refused to come with us to kill that boy," he asked Obierika.
> "Because I did not want to," Obierika replied sharply. "I had something better to do."



"You sound as if you question the authority and the decision of the Oracle, who said he should die."

"I do not. Why should I? But the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision."

"But someone had to do it. If we were all afraid of blood, it would not be done. And what do you think the Oracle would do then?"

"You know very well, Okonkwo, that I am not afraid of blood and if anyone tells you that I am, he is telling a lie. And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families."

"The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger," Okonkwo said. "A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm."

"That is true," Obierika agreed. "But if the Oracle said that my son should be killed, I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it." (Ch. 8, pp. 48-49)

Obierika is the voice of balance and common sense in sharp contrast to the recklessness and irrationality of his friend. It is not Okonkwo's, but Obierika's 'human feelings' represent the Igbo community as a whole.

The society's verdict on Okonkwo's inadvertent killing of Ezeudu's son during a funeral ceremony is not sympathetic to him at all as he is exiled for seven years for this accidental killing of a clansman. This is a serious offence against the earth goddess Ani. Okonkwo and his family have to take refuge in his mother's village as he has no place in the land of his father. Uchendu, his maternal uncle, espouses this ritual as a natural one because a child always finds solace in his mother's lap in his bitter time:

A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness, he finds refuge in his motherland. And that is why we say that mother is supreme (Ch. 14, pp. – 98-99).

The proposition that Okonkwo has achieved greatness through his suffering is also minimized when Uchendu reflects on the general condition of human suffering:

You think you are the greatest sufferer in the world? Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life? Do you know that men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children? I had six wives once. I have none now except that young girl who knows not her right from her left. Do you know how many children I have buried - children I begot in my

> youth and strength? Twenty-two. I did not hang myself, and I am still alive. If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has borne and thrown away. (Ch. 14, p. – 99).

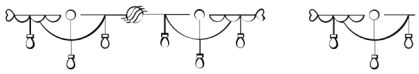
The wisdom of the old man who has firm belief in the nomenclature 'Nneka' which means 'mother is supreme' overshadows Okonkwo and his sole emphasis on masculinity as 'ordinary' and one-eyed. Thus, his function in this novel is that of a moral guide to the 'naïve' protagonist. Uchendu and Obierika are therefore the enlightened margins of the novel who help in exposing the immature centre.

When Obierika apprehended the danger of the white men, no one in Umuofia bothered much about it. When the missionaries first placed their feet on their soil, they treated them as unwanted, marginalized and granting them a piece of land in the 'Evil Forest'. The first Christian missionaries who are tolerant enough are dismissed as womanish by Okonkwo – "a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens." (Ch. 17, p. 110) He felt himself superior to them as a 'male' representative of Umuofia. But this dismissal hit back as a boomerang as in the newly founded church, the already marginalized section of the Igbo society – the efulefus, the osus, and the agbalas, find a place to breathe freely. They shifted their allegiance from an oppressing social

structure to the foreigners. Eventually, the society became weaker and this process of emasculation became fatal both for Okonkwo in particular and Umuofia as a whole. Obierika is prudent enough to realize the predicament. To Okonkwo's optimistic declaration – "We must fight these men and drive them from the land" – Obierika sadly said, "It is already too late." (Ch. 20, p. 128) The powerful colonial British administration forcefully manipulated the subversion of the male -female hierarchy exemplified in the pathetic humiliation of Okonkwo along with other five 'brave leaders' of Umuofia at the court house, when the head massager 'shaved off all the hair on the men's heads'(Ch. 23, p. 142). Then later in the day a messenger 'hit each man a few blows on the head and back. Okonkwo was choked with hate.' (Ch. 23, p. 142) When they were released and came back, their deplorable condition aroused nothing but pity, "But the men wore such heavy and fearsome looks that the women and children did not say "nno" or "welcome" to them." (Ch. 24, p. 144) Okonkwo, disheartened, lamented "worthy men are no more". He remembered the past glories of chivalric fits in the war- "Those were days when men were men" (Ch. 24, p. 145)

In the gathering, Okonkwo expected to stir violent rebellion to seek revenge of the humiliation but, to his utter dismay he discovers his clan had lost its thunder. Their silence bears their effeminate confusion. In his desperation, he unleashes his anger and kills the court messenger. But his disillusionment is almost tragic:

> Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult



> instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: "Why did he do it?" He wiped his machete on the sand and went away. (Ch. 24, p. 149).

Okonkwo's subsequent suicide is the culmination of the process of emasculation. Ato Quayson remarks, "In that sense, the narrative depicts Umuofia's 'castration', with Okonkwo's suicide representing the ultimate overthrow of its masculinity."[14] His suicide clearly illustrates his refusal of a new order and also his incapability to cope with a changing regime. His abject surrender marks the fall of a flawed hero along with the collapse of the old order of his clan's masculine ideology. A man who wanted to reign in lone splendour, died in the most unheroic way, alienated from and rejected by its society, as suicide is a crime against the earth goddess. It is ignominious:

> "It is against our custom," said one of the men. "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried
>
> by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers." (Ch. - 25, p. 151)

Okonkwo's death at his own hands mirrors his falher, Unoka's death - a death that is both shameful and dishonorable. Okonkwo can no longer join the world of the ancestors. It is a grim irony that he ultimately becomes what he hated most to be – "And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death." (Ch. - 25, p. 151). His exasperation has been to erase the stigma of parental identity as his father was a failure as per the social norms of masculinity. Anything exceptional or gentle reminded him of his father and its related shame. So, Okonkwo's psyche was tuned in exactly opposite chord with that of his father:

> But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, and even now he still remembered how he had suffered when a playmate had told him that his father was agbala. That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (Ch. 2, pp. 10 – 11)

The irony is that the most prophetic utterance on Okonkwo's fate comes from this 'effeminate' Unoka, who was then an ailing man, had said to him during that terrible harvest month:

> "Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails alone." (Ch. 3, p. 19)

Ononkwo 'fails alone'. A reader cannot deny the powerful foresight of Unoka.

His relationship with Nwoye is also problematic, because he fails miserably in making a narrow assessment of his son. A one-sided, almost perverse, idea of manliness leads Okonkwo to miss the gentle and reflective nature of his son. The breach in the filial bond is started with the killing of Ikemefuna:

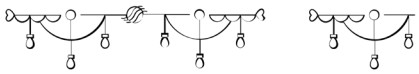
> As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow. (Ch. 7, p. 44)

He could not accept this inhuman custom. His unspoken outrage at and revulsion towards this cruel killing of his friend makes him lonely and gradually he becomes apathetic towards his own society. His sensitive mind could not tolerate also the primitive customs like the casting away of twins into the forest – 'a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul'. (Ch. 16, p. 108) His conversion to Christianity is a final gesture of his rebellion against the rigidity imposed by his father. Nwoye's apostasy is also a refusal to acknowledge and accept the norms of a 'manly' society that Okonkwo represents. Okonkwo realizes his failure as a father. The aporia inherent in his greatness is clearly exposed in the narrator's comment:

> … his son's crime stood out in its stark enormity. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. (Ch. 17, p. 112)

Abiola Irele's evaluation is very precise and apt, "Nwoye thus stands as a symbolic negation for his father, the living denial of all that Okonkwo accepts and stands for."[15] Thus, the dialectical oppositions between Okonkwo and Unoka on one hand and with his son, on the other, mark the defeat of Okonkwo's masculine ideology.

Finally, the deficiency of Okonkwo's philosophy of life is completely unmasked by Obierika, Okonkwo's great friend, as also hinted earlier in my discussion. He is considered as his alter ego who always plays the role of a balancing counterfoil to the protagonist. Though Achebe has endeavoured to uphold a culturally rich Igbo civilization, the indigenous society is not ideal or perfect. Moreover, the dynamics of self-reflexivity is evident in the narrative which makes the



novel complex which is manifested in the character of Obierika. Okonkwo never questions the validity of the cultural ethos and edicts of his clan, but the components of doubt are frequently injected through the minor characters like Obierika. For an instance, in a conversation between Obierika and Okonkwo, they exhibit their characteristic nature:

> 'Sometimes, I wish I had not taken the ozo title,' said Obierika. 'It wounds my heart to see these young men killing palm trees in the name of tapping.'
>
> 'It is so indeed,' Okonkwo agreed. 'But the law of the land must be obeyed.' (Ch. 8, p. 50)

Obierika is the living commentary on the gradual progression of the Igbo society towards its doom. His clear-sighted penetration into the everyday happenings and his sagacious questioning of the validity of some customs of the society were far beyond the capacity of Okonkwo. It is already discussed how he criticizes Okonkwo's participation in the killing of Ikemefuna. His self-reflexive scrutiny of the cruel praxis of discarding of twins into the Evil Forest, considering them something as evil in nature, has a touch of basic humanity. His silent musing on the social sanctioning of such injustices is at odds with Okonkwo's blind adherence to the customs. His dissenting voice is heard at his questioning the logic of the severity of Okonkwo's punishment of exile:

> Obierika was a man who thought about these things. When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led to greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? (Ch. 13, p. 91)

Obierika's skeptical introspection is modern in tone as it is a critique of the inhuman and illogical customs of the primitive African society itself. His judicious but critical evaluation of Okonkwo's descent from a potential hero whose 'fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan' (Ch. 1, p. 3) to a tragic pariah is the outcome of his keen observation and critical analysis. But it should be noted that Obierika never deserted his dear friend despite their inherent contradictions. He provides the means of sustenance and mental support to Okonkwo during his exile. In the final part of the novel his tribute to his dead friend is full of compassion as it sums up the latter's character:

> "That man was one of the greatest men in Umofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog ..." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words' (Ch. 25, p. 151).

We can cite here the relevant comment from Biodun Jeyifo:

> Thus, it is Obierika who registers the falling apart of things; it is Obierika who records the collapse of the most vital identity-forming connections of the culture: kinship, community, ritual and ceremonial institutions. And it is significant that Obierika has to insist on this tragic insight – tragic because he is utterly helpless before its historic, and not merely metaphysical inevitability – against the wilful refusal of Okonkwo to see the cracks in the culture's fortifications:[16]

According to Biodun Jeyifo, the novel 'may be regarded in this respect as a vast doxological compendium of Igbo culture before the advent of colonialism'[17] where Okonkwo only conforms to the single pole around 'doxa'; whereas, Obierika is a complex character who always cherishes his Igbo identity and, at the same time, contributes to the formation of its paradox or 'cultural demystification.'

In fact, Obierika becomes the mouthpiece of Achebe in dismantling the monolithic perception of the Igbo culture as epitomized by its protagonist. In an interview (already mentioned above) Achebe admits his ideological like-mindedness with Obierika:

> Jeyifo: I have always wanted to ask if there is something of Achebe in Obierika in *Things Fall Apart*?
>
> Achebe: Well, the answer is yes, in the sense that at the crucial moment when things are happening, he represents the other alternative. . . Obierika is therefore more subtle and more in tune with the danger, the impending betrayal by the culture, and he's not likely to be crushed because he holds something in reserve.[18]

Obierika's critical voice offers a counter-narrative to the traditional understanding of masculinity in the Igbo society. He is not against whatever is masculine; rather he is the Aristotelian golden mean, who both challenges the rigid ethnic notion of masculinity and complements it with the needed balance. His character with its softness and flexibility is a foil to the aggressive manliness of the protagonist which borders on irrationality. Okonkwo's anarchy lies in his misdirectional philosophy of life in trying to be a man of success rather than a man of value in a primitive society and also in his inability to adapt to the cataclysmic but unavoidable surge of the White invasion. Obierika's 'eros' in his clear-sighted understanding of the changing ways of life is negated by Okonkwo's thanatos.

Thus, the tragic flaw of Okonkwo's character lies in his one-dimensional identification with and his reification of the hegemonic ideals of patriarchal ideology of the Igbo society. The fragility of his greatness comes from his inability to apprehend the dangers of excess and his supercilious denial of both the softer corners of his psyche and the feminine values inherent in his culture. The

centre he used to hold cannot continue anymore and he falls. His apparent heroism is overshadowed by the marginalized characters like Unoka, Nwoye, Ekwefi, Uchendu and Obierika among others with their balanced and human approaches to life. They are used in the novel to expose the aporia of greatness in the character of Okonkwo. His shameful and ignominious death and the subsequent rejection by the society are the manifestation and culmination of his disgraceful downfall.

Endnotes:

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7. Abiola Irele, 'The Tragic Conflict in the Novels of Chinua Achebe' reprinted in C. L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, Washington: Three Continents Press, 1978, p. 11.
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18. Biodun Jeyifo, 'Literature and Conscientization: An Interview with Chinua Achebe' in Biodun Jeyifo (ed.), *Contemporary Nigerian Literature*, Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1988, pp. 12–13.

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The Alchemical Transformation as a Paradigm for a New Self-image in Select Writings by African Women

Iniobong I. Uko

When in the first few centuries, alchemy evolved in Greco-Roman Egypt as a branch of natural philosophy, a philosophical tradition practiced throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia ("Alchemy" wikipedia.org), it could hardly have been imagined that the concept would be transposed onto literary studies. Alchemists sought to purify, nurture and perfect certain rustic materials. That involved changing from an inelegant state to a state of sophistication and value. Commonly, alchemists worked on the transmutation of base materials (like lead) into noble metals (especially gold) ("Alchemy" wikipedia.org). The reference to alchemy in modern discourse is usually in the binary notions of its exoteric practical applications, and its esoteric spiritual aspects.

The exoteric aspect is relevant to historians of physical sciences who explore the philosophical and religious perspectives of events and concepts. The esoteric component is relevant to historians of esotericism and psychologists, philosophers, and spiritualists ("Alchemy"…wikipedia.org). Esotericism permeates the fields of religion, philosophy, arts, literature, and music, and continues to influence intellectual engagements and popular culture. Alchemy is prominently fixated on spiritual development – with consequent states of awareness, completion, and harmony – the merging of the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self to a single essence to allow for the true self to emerge ("The Seven Stages of Alchemical Transformation: A Spiritual Metaphor").

Significantly, while Lawrence M. Principe debunks the popular notion that alchemy is associated with magic, he asserts that the concept relates to a varied set of ideas, goals, practices, and techniques (86). Originating from ancient Egypt, alchemy may be regarded as "the process of transmutation by which to fuse or reunite with the divine or original form" ("Alchemy" wikipedia.org). That involves the conversion of an element from one form to another. Over the ages, different scholars have continued to interpret the phenomenon of alchemy as physical, while others regard it as a spiritual, religious, and psychological concept. Alchemy is variously applied in the course of making significant changes in the trends and the plots of literary works. This notion is relevant in literature as it accounts for the characters' aspirations to the climax of the ideal being, which can be described as the *magnum opus*. The discourse of alchemy as a transmutation, a metamorphosis from one form or state of being to another, either physically or psychologically, is indicative of the continuous striving towards an ideal status. This is a human characteristic.

Within the above context, this study recognizes alchemy as a psychological experience that leads to a physical response. In this connection, the study undertakes the delineation of major characters to trace the stages of their development and note the point of as well as the reason(s) for the changes. It examines Nnu

Ego in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Esi Sekyi in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*, and Beatrice Achike (Mama) in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The paper traces the commonalities or otherwise among these protagonists in the novels, and the approaches they devise to face their challenges. By focusing on the protagonists and the factors that generate the alchemy procedures that they undergo, it is significant to apply psychoanalysis to the analysis of the dynamics that occur which makes these protagonists act or react in the specific ways that give the novels their identities.

In Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego, the daughter of Nwokocha Agbadi and Ona, has an ill fate with procreation. Emecheta weaves a quilt of Nnu Ego's background that reveals a strange incident that turns around to be central to and significant in Nnu Ego's personality and destiny. Her mother, Ona, is the loving wife over Agunwa, the senior wife, who dies from supposed emotional devastation from the prospect of the death of her husband, Agbadi, who is severely wounded from an unusual hunting experience. Obliquely underlying Agunwa's devastation is her knowledge of the obvious love affair between her husband and Ona, the indulged daughter of a fellow chief, Obi Umunna. Within the framework of Ibuza values, "it was bad for her (Agunwa's) moral to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept …" (21). However, at Agunwa's death, the slave girl is unwilling to die along with her, but she is murdered and pushed into the grave by Agunwa's eldest son, actions that his father, Agbadi, condemns and indicts him for. Before her death, the slave girl declares; "thank you for this kindness, Nwokocha the son of Agbadi. I shall come back to your household, but as a legitimate daughter. I shall come back…" (23). That incident has a tremendous impact on Nnu Ego, who is the product of the love affair of Agbadi and Ona. Nnu Ego is born with a mark on her head, akin to that made by the cutlass that Agunwa's eldest son used on the head of the slave girl. Nnu Ego is the reincarnation of the slave girl.

She gets married to Amatokwu, but she is childless and miserable, and Amatokwu's mother gets him to marry another wife who quickly bears children for him. Nnu Ego returns to her natal home humiliated and is shortly packaged and sent off by her father, Nwokocha Agbadi, to an Ibuza man in Lagos, Nnaife Owolum. It is in Lagos that Nnu Ego's womanhood is authenticated as she rapidly gives birth to nine but seven surviving children. With Nnaife as a laundryman for the white couple, Dr. & Mrs. Meers, his income can hardly sustain his family. He is later conscripted into the army, to which Nnu Ego is deeply averse, and she queries the integrity of a typical soldier since he is known to "kill, rape and disgrace women and children …" (88). Wearied by enormous family burdens and Nnaife's abusive tendencies, Nnu Ego begins to query the veracity and validity of the values that she hitherto regarded as significant. While she is having a mental adjustment, Nnaife delivers her a set of twin girls, her second set of twins, and he is unhappy that they are girls, and Nnu Ego

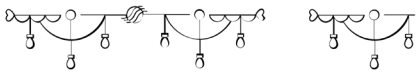
becomes subdued and more inadequate than before and calls into question the values of patriarchy which make the male more accepted and valued than the female. She wonders: "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? …What have I gained from all this [bearing of children]? Yes, I have many children, but what do l have to feed them? On my life? I have to work myself to the bone to look after them. … When will I be free? (186-187). She complains that the woman's life and essence depend on the woman having, especially male children. Her introspection serves as a platform for her to reassess herself and her values, and she protests:

> I am a prisoner of my flesh and blood…. The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die…. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build (187).

The above reveals that Nnu Ego is beginning to be aware of Ranjini Rebera's assertion that "a woman's low image of herself … becomes the source through which society exploits its women. Whether it be through economic exploitation or social exploitation, the low image that most women have of themselves is critical to the kind of acceptance women tolerate when social oppression takes place" (106). Nnu Ego has all along been a victim of both abandonment and social oppression, but her self-consciousness is making her realize the evil in accepting the victim status. Abandonment in this context is as explained by Romanus Muoneke, that "when a husband cannot provide for his family … he is as ineffectual as the one who walks out completely" (170).

While interacting with Mama Abby and Adaku, Nnu Ego expresses hope for a better future for educated women: women who can earn some income as men. Thus, she both sets a template to guide other women in the future and becomes the forerunner for them and the foreteller of the future of women. As the custodian of the principles for a successful and credible future womanhood, Nnu Ego makes pronouncements and also acts *intra vires*. This is an aspect of the alchemical transformation that is characteristic of Nnu Ego in her mission to ideal womanhood: her experiences make her an agent of change; even though she seems trapped in a burdensome marriage, she imagines a better future for women; she envisions a society that is altered from the present one, where women are inclusive members with rights and privileges as their male counterparts. Indeed. Nnu Ego is challenging the notions that a woman attains fulfillment only in marriage, that her worth is determined by her ability to have children, especially sons, and that the man is the head of the family, and owns the wife. Though she is unable to alter her fate or lighten the family load that she bears, she leaves curious questions for future women, especially educated women.

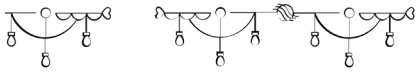
It is, therefore, not out of place to confront Esi Sekyi, a modern African woman, highly educated



and very career-oriented in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* (*Changes*). Her husband of six years, Oko Sekyi, is a headmaster, and deeply in love with her, and desires a warm passionate relationship with her, but Esi is more interested in her job as a data analyst in the Department of Urban Statistics. With men as her immediate counterparts at work, Esi is conscious of the demands on her to work very hard to be able to operate on the same pedestal with them: undertake official trips, get duly promoted, and enjoy all available rights and privileges. These and Oko's expectations of her as wife and mother are mutually exclusive. Oko and Esi have one daughter, Ogyaanowa, and Esi is on a birth control device and is determined not to have another child. Esi seems to note Ali Mazrui's observation that "pregnancy is a moment of life-enhancement for a woman; … [and] also a moment of physical vulnerability …" (222), which she does not wish to succumb to. This frustrates Oko who wishes to have more children. Esi is averse to getting pregnant, having another baby, and going on maternity leave, a combination that would keep her from work, because as Ann Crittenden avers, "many women who go on maternity leave from work often feel cheated, angry and desperate because of how their image and reputation in the office decline due to a long period of absence. The long leave period represents a retreat to domesticity …" (117). This is repugnant to Esi Sekyi.

Generally, as Oko's ideas seem to be consistently at variance with Esi's, there is both dwindling intimacy and diminishing communication in their marriage. Oko tries to rekindle these in different ways and ends up making love to Esi against her wish, an incident that she describes as marital rape, and which is the reason for the divorce that she consequently secures to save her the agony of her husband's excessive demands for her and her time (38). Though Esi feels that the divorce is justified, her grandmother, her mother, and her bosom friend, Opokuya feel that her action is wrong. Her grandmother discloses to her that the two reasons for marriage are to have children and to increase the number of people with whom we can share the joys and pains of life (42). But these ideas are irrelevant to her. She defines what she wants, not based on what society stipulates or expects.

Curiously, Esi gets married to Ali Kondey, a wealthy and attractive Muslim man with a thriving business, and is already married to Fusena. She shares deep romantic moments with Ali initially, and then the relationship gradually loses its luster, and Esi sees less of Ali, whose interest in the marriage also seems to be waning. Ali compensates Esi for his absence with exotic gifts from many parts of the country and the world to which he travels. He surprises her with a new posh car as a New Year's gift after he was away from her all through the Christmas season, and she had felt lonely, desolate, and depressed. Despite Ali's efforts to make Esi happy and see the world through the various glamorous gifts, she requires him and his time, which he seems unable to accord her much as their marriage progresses. In the third year of their marriage, though Esi appreciates Ali's



generosity, she declares to him that she cannot go on the way they have been operating because theirs is not a marriage: "… go home to your wife and children and leave me alone" (159), and Ali leaves her house with a confused mind.

Esi essentially demonstrates a unique strength of personality by the way she takes decisions on matters that concern her. She neither bothers to formally terminate the marriage with Ali as she did the first one with Oko nor does she inform her people at home about the break-up. She is determined to deal with the situation herself. The break-up with Ali affects her – she suffers intense loneliness, often weeps, is always sad, and has a despondent voice and disposition, but she would more readily endure these than have to put up with Ali's way of loving her. However, in her desperate mood, she is still able to muster the courage to resist Kubi, Opokuya's husband, who attempts to seduce her. Esi is cognisant of the authenticity of her grandmother, Nana's notion on gender relations that "a man always gains in stature through any way he chooses to associate with a woman. And that included adultery … a woman has always been diminished in her association with a man. A good woman was she who quickened the pace of her destruction (109- 110). Ena, Esi's mother, indicts her for not relating well with Oko's people, an attitude that is both strange and unacceptable within their culture (111). Esi neither wishes to accelerate the pace of her destruction nor negotiate her freedom with Oko's people since she already knows how they

perceive her. Essentially, she is aware that her obvious desperation for Ali and his absence as a husband are heating her, causing her restlessness and sleeplessness, which have made her recently see a doctor and start taking tranquilizers to induce sleep. This is certainly not a good sign for her, her health, and her productivity at work. By setting aside her second marriage when it no longer serves the purpose that she expects, Esi demonstrates the following:

- That she will not allow Ali to treat her as 'occupied territory' (91) whether or not she continues wearing his ring.
- That she would not choose to fit into Nana's concept of a good woman who diminishes in her association with her man (109).
- Just as her sense of independence makes her alluring and irresistible to Ali, the same trait makes her capable of terminating their marriage when it becomes drudgery.
- That though she criticized Oko because he sought to have too much of her and her time, she also finds Ali unacceptable when he does not make himself sufficiently available to her. That he stays away from her for weeks and then bribes her with fascinating gifts cannot save him from her indictment.

Significantly, Esi seems to represent the woman that Nnu Ego envisions in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? (186) Within this perspective, and by Esi's potency of character, focus, courage, and stability, she establishes that she can only cope with the type of man that suits her and her peculiarities. She is decisive and stymies any relationship that fails to serve her needs. Her actions are propelled by her psychological aspiration to be herself, and not please people or conform to any traditional or familial norms at her expense. This means that her psychological disposition of changing with the times makes her different from her friend, Opokuya, on the one hand, and opposed to Nnu Ego, on the other.

As Aidoo's *Changes* is set during the twilight of Ghana's political independence that was characterized by remarkable political, cultural, and economic alterations, Esi also symbolically attains independence from her overbearing husband, Oko, as well as the randy Ali, whose view of marriage is intolerable to her. Being financially independent, she is in control of the factors that operate within and around her; being well-educated and career-oriented, she knows what she wants. She does not acquiesce to the notion of marriage by her mother or grandmother, which would have made her stay on in the repulsive marriage to Oko, or succumb to the capricious passion that Ali offers her. Esi, hereby, oppugns Nnu Ego's image in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and demonstrates that with education and economic stability, the modern woman in Africa must surmount the factors that constrained her foremothers including Nnu Ego. Indeed, Esi's lucid indication that she is an African woman constitutes a concrete response to the omniscient narrator's question "Is Esi too an African woman?" (8) As Tuzyline Allan asserts, "*Changes* pulsates with an irrepressible pioneering spirit, clearing the ground for a new tradition of women's writing in Africa. It is a record of the changing circumstances of women's lives in contemporary Africa, but more importantly, it transcends realistic significance and constructs a psychological blueprint for female portraiture" (179).

The pioneering role of Aidoo's *Changes* and its provision of answers to Nnu Ego's questions in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* as well as Esi's resolve to ensure that "a bad marriage is no longer inherently tragic for women" (Allan 179) find maturation in Beatrice Achike (Mama) in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The novel, like Aidoo's *Changes*, is set in a postcolonial society that is assailed by political turmoil, economic uncertainties, and socio- cultural schisms. From this trajectory emerges Eugene Achike (Papa), an ardent Catholic and religious fanatic whose stern approach to life and morality gets him to physically and psychologically abuse his wife Beatrice (Mama) and children, Jaja and Kambili, and treat them with high-handedness and cruelty.

The whole Achike family seems to grind under the weight of Papa's rigidity, rigorous expectations,

and overbearing strictness: he disowns his father, Pa Nnukwu, who believes in and practices traditional religion, and even though he funds the latter's funeral, he refuses to attend it or be associated with it. He objects to Jaja's decision not to share in communion on Palm Sunday, and anger throws his (prayer) missal at him, but it rather breaks the ceramic figurines of ballet dancers on the étagère. Mama silently collects the broken pieces and does not intend to replace them. Also, as the Igwe visits the Achike family, Mama greets him "the traditional way that women were supposed to, by bending low and offering him her back so that he would pat it with his fan …" (93). But Papa feels it is ungodly to bow except to God. Based on this, as Papa and the family visit the bishop in Awka a few days afterward, Kambili does not kneel to kiss the Bishop's ring, and Papa indicts her afterward, and wrenches her ear in disappointment because she fails to distinguish the bishop as a man of God from the Igwe as a mere traditional ruler.

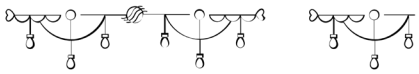
Kambili again fails to live up to Papa's Catholic ideals, when her menstruation starts with cramps on the Sunday after Christmas day, and she eats some cereal to be able to take some panadol tablets. By implication, she violates the Eucharist fast, and in Papa's fury, he inquires:

> Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him? … Has the devil built a tent in my house? (… To Mama) You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharist fast …? (102)

To demonstrate his aversion to his household seeming to be serving the devil, he volunteers to save them from the consequences by whipping them:

> He unbuckled his belt slowly…. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm … I [Kambili] put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back … Papa was like a Fulani nomad – although he did not have their spare, tall body – as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja, and me, muttering that the devil would not win … (102).

Mama and the children seem accustomed to Papa's tyrannical response to anything they do which he objects to or regards as indiscretion on their part. Through a flashback account, Jaja's deformed last finger is also linked to Papa's brutality: when Jaja was ten years old, he took second position in his Holy Communion class, and "Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears, came out supporting his left hand with his right, and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Papa was crying too… Papa avoided his right hand because it is the hand he writes with" (145). Evidently, according to Safoura Salami-Boukari, Papa's violence seems to be motivated by "… the instinct of domination, as well as ignorance of the new religion he embraced without complying with its moral values.… Papa is just an evil-spirited person who wears the mask of a prominent and good-hearted person, considering his popularity in the community (209). He, therefore, constitutes a bogey that



his wife and children must fight to surmount.

As both Jaja and Kambili visit Aunty Ifeoma, their father's sister, in Nsukka, Papa gets to know that his father, Pa Nnukwu, was also in Aunty Ifeoma's house, implying that his children stayed in the same house willingly with a heathen. Consequently, he goes to Nsukka and collects them, and on arrival in Enugu, Jaja, and Kambili find their mother's face battered and swollen. Papa punishes Kambili for having freely stayed in the same house with an unbeliever, his father. He rationalizes that Kambili, being a precious child, "should not see sin and walk right into it" (194).

He makes her get into the bathtub, and he gently pours over her feet boiled water from a kettle, and tells her that "that is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet" (194). All the while, Mama has been watching in silence but is unable to do anything. After that punishment, she offers, and Papa allows her to take Kambili out of the bathtub. As a first aid therapy, she applies salt mixed with cold water on the scalded feet and assists Kambili to the room, and makes her take panadol tablets.

Furthermore, Papa discovers that Jaja and Kambili had returned from Nsukka with the painting of Pa Nnukwu. He is infuriated and tears up the painting. In reaction, Kambili hastens to the pieces on the floor, and strangely, lies on them: "I lay on the floor, curled tight like the picture of a child in the uterus …" (210), and refuses to get up as Papa orders. Papa then kicks her and beats her with his belt, and the metal buckles sting and wound her extensively. She feels transported psychologically from the present agonizing pain, and she hears Mama's low voice saying "Please, *biko*, please" (211). Kambili becomes unconscious and wakes to find herself in the hospital, and feels her whole body on fire. Father Benedict administers extreme unction on her, indicating the severity of her condition. She also writes the term's examinations in the hospital and comes first, but she dreads returning home.

From the hospital, Kambili, along with Jaja, goes for holidays at Aunty Ifeoma's in Nsukka. A few days afterward, Mama arrives in Nsukka unexpectedly in "a yellow unsteady-looking taxi" (247). She looks ruffled wearing rubber slippers, an unironed blouse, and a loosely tied wrapper. She narrates how Papa broke the sturdy wooden stool in their house on her belly. It caused her to bleed profusely, and Papa took her to St. Agnes hospital. She lost a six-week-old pregnancy. On return home from the hospital, she *takes Papa's money and hires a taxi to Nsukka* (emphasis mine). This is a significant experience that marks a turning point in Mama. She assumes a new personality that reveals her in Enugu as changed and free to be herself, not a prescribed personality: she now speaks loudly and smiles willingly and freely, she no longer sends food surreptitiously to Jaja's room but serves Jaja's "food on a white tray with a matching plate" (258). Also, Jaja now dares to defy Papa as he (Jaja) refuses to come from his room to join in the family dinner. Back in Nsukka, both Jaja and Kambili refuse to take Papa's phone call, and according to Kambili in a reversal: "I did want to

talk to Papa, to hear his voice, to tell him what I had eaten and what I had prayed about so that he would approve so that he would smile. … And yet, I did not want to talk to him…" (268). Kambili now sings as she bathes, and feels no restrictions, implying that she has overcome the different flavours and colours of fear which she experienced previously. By all these changes, it is apparent that the name, Papa, is a conceptual cognate of

brutality, inhumanity, and autocracy, all of which connote ideological patterns that are noxious by definition and pernicious by design.

While the children are in Nsukka, Mama calls Enugu to inform them about Papa's death. He is found dead at his desk, and an autopsy discloses that he was poisoned. Mama subsequently confesses to Jaja and Kambili that she poisoned his tea. She started doing that before she visited Nsukka. Papa's death opens up a vista of changes: even though Jaja suffers in jail for three years, Mama speaks authoritatively as she directs Adamu, the gateman, to lock up the gate of the compound and send away all sympathizers; the laughter they share in the family is mirthful and cheery; Mama and Kambili know how to get their lawyer to bribe the judges, the policemen and prison guards in Jaja's favor; Kambili demands and enjoys the Fela music in the car, and Mama does not mind; Kambili establishes that she feels love for Father Amadi.

Prominently, Mama's plan to, and actual elimination of Papa comprise an extended response to Nnu Ego's worries about when God will create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, who will be a full human being, not anybody's appendage (*The Joys of Motherhood* 186). Mama demonstrates a more profound will than Esi's in Aidoo's *Changes* to live a life whose variables she can and must control, and in which she has the liberty to make choices, breathe freely and express herself sincerely. By deliberately killing her husband, Mama, therefore, symbolizes the deepest essence of authentic modern womanhood that does not only evade the invasiveness and terrorism of her male partner as Esi does in her two marriages, but she obliterates the symbol of her invasion and terror. She consistently poisons Papa's tea until Papa dies. She carefully selects the mode to use in eliminating Papa, recognizing Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's opinion that "there are as many ways of killing as there are many ways of expressing patriotic responsibility. To privilege physical violence as a sign of greater patriotic duty is essentially patriarchal, macho, and sexist (24). Mama represents the woman of the future that Nnu Ego envisioned. She sets the stage for matricide as a statement of protest and rebellion among women who suffer spousal abuses. Essentially, in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Mama's psyche is damaged by Papa's cruelty towards her and his brutal attitude towards their children. These merge in complex ways to impose silence and torpor on Mama, and consequently, she demonstrates that for her to attain a new self-image, Papa must give way.

While Mama's alchemic changes are caused by her victimhood status and her pursuit of freedom, Esi's are caused by her highly educated status and career-orientedness, which compel her to devise

for herself a template into which her male partner(s) must fit. There is an onomastic irony in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* as Nnu Ego's life is far from joyous even though she has borne many children (widely believed to be sources of joy). Her evolution to a stage of realization is late:

> Sometimes seeing my colleagues, I wish I didn't have so many children. Now I doubt if it has all been worth it…
>
> She noticed that Nnaife was beginning to refer to them as her children, whom she had borne to kill him before his time (202).

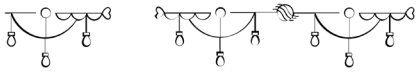
Nnu Ego's regret marks a significant point in the course of her transformation, but it is too late for her, and the operational factors around her impede her long life. Shortly, she dies a dejected woman by the roadside. Indeed, Esi's capacity to effectively manage her situation confirms Mariama Ba's portrayal of the roles of Western education and orientation to include:

> To lift us out of the bog of tradition, superstition, and custom, to make us appreciate a multitude of civilizations without renouncing our own, to raise our vision of the world, cultivate our personalities, strengthen our qualities, to make up for our inadequacies, to develop universal moral values in us
> … (15-16).

Unlike Nnu Ego, Esi realizes her worth from the outset, and pursues her rights: in her marriages and at work. In the former are her reproductive rights and right to copulation (with Oko), as well as her right to credible and sustained companionship (with Ali). In the latter are her aspirations for high productivity, timely promotions, and official travels that her male counterparts enjoy. Esi fully recognizes Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that nature does not define who a woman is. She argues from the standpoint of an existentialist, that it is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her account in her emotional life" (69). For Mama in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, silence is a powerful device that she deploys to negotiate the challenge that Papa constitutes. Silence enables her to evaluate, on the one hand, Papa's damaging roles in the family, and on the other hand, how she can rescue the family. Since she as well as Jaja and Kambili have at different times and occasions suffered from and are scarred by Papa's tyranny, the rightful reaction is to eliminate Papa to surmount and survive him, and also have him pay for all his cruelty to them. Thus, killing Papa gives *a priori* legitimacy to Mama's desire to live in peace and freedom. Indeed, both Esi and Mama transform themselves into models

of African women who, unlike Nnu Ego, try to find answers to their questions and resolve the dominant puzzles that plague them.

From the historiography of the typical African womanhood, through the shifting realities and



altering paradigms of the traditional asphyxia, to the sophisticated modern digital era, emerge new methodologies and pedagogical devices for future generations of African women. Bell Hooks explains this reality in the assertion that:

> Understanding marginality as [a] place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as [a] sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates destructively the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, and there that the freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom one longs for as lost … The struggle … may begin within one's segregated, colonized community and family (150-151).

Bell Hooks, in the above, captures the dynamics of the female victims who have been brutalized by different forms of repression, control, and muffling like Nnu Ego who is burdened by the bearing of many children, and the weight of poverty and spousal neglect; and Esi who faces familial resentment because she is determined to plot her life her style, and Mama, who, along with her son, Jaja and daughter, Kambili, receives the mauling of her husband, Papa. Hooks' perception of black men's attitude towards their women is that they often feel on edge as if their lives are in jeopardy, yet, even in the women's condition of 'powerlessness' the men's capacity remains intact to assert power over black females in a way that is dominating and oppressive, expressing and trying to justify and condone sexist behaviors (74). This study reveals a reversal of Ali Mazrui's contention that "much of divine empowerment of women is life-giving – partly because of the *principle of motherhood* (227). Nnu Ego's eventual regret for bearing many children, yet living a life of misery and rejection demonstrates the invalidity of the above notion by Mazrui.

Indeed, while Nnu Ego feels that having many children has imprisoned her, Esi indicates that marriage outside her terms constitutes a prison for her, and Mama demonstrates as a prison her marriage to an overwhelmingly domineering man who violates her and her children physically and psychologically. The study calls into question Mazrui's statement that:

> … the origins of male dominance do not lie in economic specialization but in military specialization. Women till the land, the means of production, women control the womb, the means of reproduction. But women do not control the means of physical coercion – the spear, the bow and arrow, and later the gun (222).

By Mama's successful elimination of Papa through poisoning in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,* she negates Mazrui's idea of women not controlling the means of physical coercion – hers is not one of spear, bow, and arrow, and the gun, but it still achieves the goal as the others. This seeming

paradigm shift in women's roles and capabilities within the traditional gender relations and social constructs which spell female vulnerability, invisibility, and decrepitude is apparent in Nnu Ego, Esi, and Mama who are conscious of their status, challenges, and potentialities, and also seek ways of liberating themselves from the factors that deny them rights and privileges. These three characters, as analyzed in this study, recognize Eleanor Leacock's notion of "a dichotomy between 'public' labor and 'private' household service masks the household 'slavery' of women" (88). Nnu Ego, Esi and Mama serve as models for contemporary women who are caught up in multidimensional jeopardy in marriage, in the family, at the workplace, and in society.

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"Pigs Can't Fly": Reviewing the Belittled Status of a Homonormative Person through Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

Sourav Paul

In the realm of LGBTQ+ literature, narratives often focus on individuals who defy conventional norms and expectations, boldly challenging societal conventions in their pursuit of love and self- acceptance. While these stories are essential for shedding light on non-normative identities, there exists a lesser-explored facet of queer experience, one that resides in the realm of homonormativity—the quiet conformity to traditional gender and sexuality norms. In the acclaimed novel "Funny Boy" by Shyam Selvadurai, this subtler, yet no less impactful, aspect of queer existence is elegantly portrayed.

Published in 1994, "Funny Boy" weaves a poignant tapestry of identity, conflict, and colonialism in Sri Lanka during a time of sociopolitical turmoil. Amidst this backdrop, the novel invites us to scrutinize the experiences of those who seemingly conform to societal ideals of gender and sexuality, a phenomenon known as homonormativity. Through the lens of the protagonist's journey, we are challenged to reevaluate the dynamics of acceptance and belonging, illuminating the belittled status of homonormative individuals within a conservative social milieu.

This paper seeks to delve into the nuances of homonormativity as portrayed in "Funny Boy" and to shed light on the marginalized status of individuals who navigate the complex terrain of conforming to traditional expectations. It aims to highlight the multifaceted nature of queerness and emphasize the importance of recognizing and validating the struggles faced by homonormative individuals in literature and society.

The paper will explore the concept of homonormativity, the social and cultural context of "Funny Boy," and the ways in which the novel provides a lens through which to examine the belittled status of homonormative individuals. By doing so, we hope to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences in literature and, by extension, to foster a deeper appreciation of the diverse journeys that individuals undertake in their pursuit of self- acceptance and authenticity. "Funny Boy" challenges us to question preconceived notions and biases, urging us to recognize that the quest for love and belonging extends beyond the boundaries of normative expectations and, in doing so, invites us to explore how even "Pigs Can't Fly" when confined by the constraints of homonormative conformity.

The present paper has heavily relied on book chapters and journal articles such as Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya's, Ethnic Unrest in Modern Sri Lanka: An Account of Tamil Sinhalese Race Relations, Gayatri Gopinath's, Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures, Henderson's "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition.", Jeanne Marecek's, "Am I a Woman in these Matters? Notes on Sinhala nationalism and gender in Sri Lanka." Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation. Ed.Tamar Mayer. In a world where society often measures worth against a backdrop of societal norms, the phrase "Pigs Can't Fly" serves as a poignant

metaphor for those who find themselves relegated to the fringes of acceptance. Shyam Selvadurai's literary masterpiece, "Funny Boy," navigates the intricate web of homonormativity, offering a vivid portrayal of a young boy's journey through the turbulent waters of identity, belonging, and love in 1970s Sri Lanka. In this review, we will delve into the intricate tapestry of Selvadurai's narrative, unearthing the profound themes that challenge preconceived notions of what it means to be a "normative" person while shedding light on the belittled status faced by those who dare to defy the confines of societal expectations. Through the lens of "Funny Boy," we embark on a thought-provoking exploration of the struggles and triumphs that accompany the quest for authenticity in a world that often denies the very possibility of one's aspirations taking flight.

Analyzing the belittled status of a homonormative person through Shyam Selvadurai's "Funny Boy" requires a comprehensive theoretical framework that encompasses various aspects of identity, societal norms, and the challenges faced by individuals who defy convention.

Queer theory challenges the binary understanding of sexuality and gender. It examines how society constructs norms around heteronormativity and how these norms marginalize those who deviate from them. In the context of "Funny Boy," this perspective helps us explore how the protagonist's homosexuality challenges and disrupts the prevailing norms in Sri Lankan society. Intersectionality theory, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the interconnectedness of multiple aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. In "Funny Boy," intersectionality is crucial in understanding how the protagonist's experience is shaped not only by his homosexuality but also by his Tamil ethnicity and social class, which intersect to create unique challenges and discrimination. Postcolonial theory examines the lingering effects of colonialism on contemporary societies. "Funny Boy" is set in postcolonial Sri Lanka, and this perspective allows us to explore how colonial legacies, including British-imposed norms and values, continue to influence societal attitudes towards sexuality and gender.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity suggests that gender and sexuality are not inherent but constructed through repetitive acts and behaviours. Applying this theory to "Funny Boy," we can analyze how the characters in the novel perform their gender and sexuality, and how these performances affect their social acceptance and status. Cultural studies provide insights into how culture shapes perceptions and behaviours. Analyzing the cultural context of "Funny Boy," including traditions, customs, and societal expectations, allows us to understand the pressures and constraints faced by the characters as they navigate their identities. Postmodernism challenges grand narratives and explores the fluidity of identity. In "Funny Boy," the characters' evolving identities and relationships reflect postmodern themes, as they reject fixed categories and embrace a more nuanced understanding of themselves and others.

Shyam Selvadurai's 1994 novel Funny Boy shatters many aspects of the heteronormative and

homophobic society of the then Sri Lanka. This novel, cast in a form of Bildungsroman, not only shows the protagonist's physical, mental, spiritual, and sexual development, but also dissects a homosexual identity out of the protagonist, defying the heterosexual compulsions of a society. According to Heidegger, every 'Dasein' or human being along with their respective behaviours are controlled and shaped by the existing beliefs of culture and society. These social practices conform one's role according to their assigned gender and they are expected to perform accordingly. These stereotypical enforcements impede individual choices and enforce their way of living; violation of which can impose punishments. In the present novel, Arjie or Arjun Chelvaratnam's non-conforming sexual awakenings and behavioural patterns are seen as un- stereotypical, and accordingly penalized.

In the first chapter 'Pigs Can't Fly' there are myriads of challenges directed to the protagonist, only to conform to the accepted notions of sexuality and identity. While reminiscing the past, the narrator gives a spontaneous breath to analyse the situations he went through in his childhood: "Yet those Sundays, when I was seven, marked the beginning of my exile from the world I loved. Like a ship that leaves a port for the vast expanse of sea, those much looked forward to days took me away from the safe harbour of childhood towards the precarious waters of adult life."

He articulates their meet up with the siblings at his grandparents and then divided themselves into two groups for free playing. The boys headed forward towards cricket while the girls were happy with the bride-bride game. Arjie always prefers to be with bride-bride game. So, from the very beginning Arjie's choice of a game advocates that he does not correspond or associates himself with the traditional and heteronormative roles assigned by a society on the boys and girls. Later

we can find that this choice of game, wearing the sari and assuming the role of a bride turns him 'funny' in the eyes of his family.

A vivid picture of a homophobic and heteronormative is given where the roles, the dresses as well as the toys and games are classified and imposed for male and female respectively. Even we can see how the spaces of playing are dominates by sexual identities. While the boys were playing in the front garden, on the road and on the fields, the girls' territory was in the back garden, where Arjie freely expresses himself. But it is very interesting to note that, between the two cricket team, one is led by Meena. Meena's intrusion into the boys' game does not disturb much to the family members as it does to Arjie when he subscribes to the bride-bride game. Arjie's choice seemed to have come naturally. Even he does not want to be a female too as the transgender notion confirms. Thus, the homophobic, heteronormative society punishes Arjie for not conforming into the role of a boy, resulting severe punishments from his family.

It is interesting to note that Arjie not only perform the role of bride, in the bride-bride game, but he was appreciated and taken as the leader of that piece by the siblings' sisters' group. His dressing up,

executing the role surpasses everyone in the group. But everything is disposed with the entrance of Kanthi Aunty and her daughter Tanuja, 'Her Fatness'. Through the bride-bride game, the author wants to convey that, this game proposes two girls' marriage, that does not correspond to the idea of heterosexual concept of marriage and reproduction. So, it can be measured that, naturally the notion of a girl's marriage with another girl comes innate within a child until he or she was 'cultured' socially.

With the arrival of 'Her fatness', the concept of heterosexual marriage as opposed to homosexuality is forcibly imposed that a bride or a girl must need a groom or boy to be espoused. Her Fatness earnestly wants to play the bride, as she is somewhat jealous of Arjie, a boy's impersonation of the bride. Even later when the role of a groom is introduced, and she was allotted the role of the groom. Ironically, this child's play also challenges the traditional notion of marriage commencing between a bride and a groom when Arjie (being a boy) impersonates the role of a bride, Tanuja fits into the role of a groom. We can relate this with the trans-marriages happening in today's world. Thus, in the world of innocence again the notions of heteronormativity are challenged by the author's subtle sense of sexuality.

The problem arises, when Tanuja feels that the role of a groom is not lucrative and prestigious enough as compared to the bride, she was dissatisfied. This causes trouble and she brings her mother into this world of innocence. After the intrusion Kanthi Aunty, she violently drags Arjie,

who was on the attire of a bride before the elders of the family. Everyone laughed out loudly (except Arjie's father) at his appearance while Tanuja 's father Cyril Uncle uses the term 'funny' for Arjie. As the elders before did not trespass into the child's world or their games, may be Arjie's femininity were overlooked. His father's femmephobic attitude allowed him to shun the mother as he accuses her for allowing Arjie in her room when she decorates herself to go for an occasion. He prevented Arjie's preference for the use of her jewellery, dresses.

After that incident, Arjie's family violently imposts the masculine traits upon him. Since, then, Arjie is not permitted to go for the bride-bride game, instead he must play cricket with his brother Varun. At Arjie's dislike, her mother bestows this responsibility to Varun his elder son, to make Arjie masculine. At Arjie's failure to perform in cricket, his brother chased him angrily, finally driven again inside the door. So, Arjie was isolated from boy's arena.

When Arjie goes to the girl's arena, although he was accepted by the girl's, Tanuja abhors his presence. The game is somewhat changed now. From bride-bride it turned into bride-groom the generally accepted duo in a marriage. Arjie wanted to be in this game and within the periphery of girls, so now he was assigned with the role of the groom. To remain in the girl's world, almost against his wishes he played the parts of a groom, go to office and not to interfere with cooking and

works that are meant for girls. Tanuja and Arjie fights again over the right of a sari, and finishes it with tearing it. This conflict frustrates Ammachi, the grandmother and Janaki, the maid servant which cost heavily for Arjie in getting physical punishments. Arjie's protests falls on the deaf ears. Frustrated, marginalised, victimized, insulted Arjie leaves the girl's world forever. His painful, pathetic utterance comes out like:

"...then there would be the loneliness. I would be caught between the boys' and the girls' worlds, not belonging, or wanted in either. I would have to think of things with which to amuse myself..."

This incident was an eye opener for him that he cannot fit into society's gender binary and the respective roles that are assigned to boys and girls. As gender stereotypes divide only two separate worlds of boys and girls, Arjie's isolation compels him to create a world apart. This is, that Third Space, which Homi Bhabha suggested to create a new space and identity for one, isolated. This space allows them to transgress, beyond the norms of stereotypical enforcements and gives them a sense of freedom. A freedom of speech and space allows them to voice their joys and uncut expressions and opinions.

Search for an identity is a dominant theme in present literature. Arjie fails to understand that he is different from the socially constructed gender binary. Arjie becomes a victim of this 'normal world', Amma's reply directly articulates the voice of the hetero-patriarchal believes that dominated the world then. The third space provides people like Arjie to create, articulate and give expression to an individual identity. Thus, Arjie's resistance to comply with the enforced identity by the normative powers of society creates his space along with his identity from the first chapter of the novel. Thus, the novel, critiques the 'normative masculinity' and 'stigmatized homosexuality' through the protagonist's sexual awakening.

Arjie's Journey through the Ethnic-Tension, Violence, Social Expectations & Prejudices:

Funny Boy brilliantly portrays the suffering of a 'funny' individual in the backdrop of the Sri Lankan Civil war, concerning the Tamil-Sinhala conflict in 1983. The brutal clash between these two ethnic groups, its aftermath, the government's proactive prosecution of one and covert support to another- all are preserved minutely in this novel. Apart from the brutal death of Ammachi's father, Radha Aunty's traumatic experience while returning from Jaffna, Daryl Uncle's mysterious death, Appachi and Ammachi's horrific death while burnt alive, the burning of Arjie's house, and finally his forced migration to Canada along with his family, all are the consequences of the ethnic tension and violence. But quite interestingly, through this turbulent and catastrophic phase Arjie recognises his true identity. Through his recognition and relation with Shehan, Arjie transgresses this ethnic divide that violates Sri Lanka's Unity. Furthermore, this relation is a prime example of how a love between two marginalised people can transcend all the ethnic barriers of society.

After Arjie's realisation that he neither belongs to the boys' world, nor to the girls', his journey of self-exploration starts. He concentrates, according to his resolution, on the sources to amuse himself. In this chaotic yet crucial time Radha Aunty comes to his life. Through Arjie's disillusionment of Radha's image, the author targeted society's racist concept of beauty. But Arjie's sudden disappointment was eroded when he starts to connect with Radha's liberal thoughts. His effeminacy was not at all questioned, and even Radha was not at all serious about anybody's concern. She allowed him to use his makeups, jewellery, and dresses which his mother prevented him previously. She decorated Arjie with lipsticks, blue eye shadows, untill he looks like a girl. Radha Aunty's acceptance of his 'funniness' makes her closer to him.

The play 'The King and I' was a crucial turn in Arjie's life. Although it narrates a sad story of unfulfilled marriages of inter-racial couple, the hope of performing in this play excites Arjie. The director Aunt Dorris suggests that Arjie 'should have been a girl with those eyelashes'. Thus, the wished gender space and role of a woman which was snatched from him by Tanuja during 'bride-bride', finally returns to him with self-respect. During the rehearsals, for the first time Arjie realises the dirty social notions of ethnic cruelty that can separate even the lovers. A Sinhalese man named Anil, falls for Radha Aunty. Ammachi did not approve their relationship only because Anil was a Sinhalese. Ammachi's dislike for the Sinhalese was rooted in one incident. Once she found her father's disfigured dead body during a riot. Since, then she hated all the Sinhalese. But Radha's desperation touches its acme when Ammachi goes to insult Anil and his family. Radha's liberal and radical views make her transgress all the social boundaries and prohibitions imposed upon her.

But soon, her traumatic experience of returning from Jaffna in a train, also convinced her to label all the Sinhalese into criminals. When Radha was returning from Jaffna, their train was attacked by a Sinhalese mob. Radha Aunty returned with severe wounds and with trauma. This experience changed Radha forever. Arjie's delusion of true love comes to the fore (which does not have a happy ending) and the flag bearers of ethnicity win over it. So, the society and Arjie's family is not only heteronormative, and homophobic but racist too on the ground of ethnicity.

This ethnic conflict through which Arjie was advancing not only decimates Radha's union with Anil, but it too segregates Arjie's mother Nalini and her previous lover Daryl Uncle for being a Burgher man. After Radha Aunty's departure from Arjie's life, Daryl Uncle enters with extreme enthusiasm to him. Daryl Uncle always supports Arjie's habit of reading and unlike the other elders he never gets offended by Arjie's perusal of Little Women (which is considered a girl's book). He learns about how the Sri Lankan social conventions prevented Burgher men from marrying Sri Lankan ladies, despite their love. When Daryl Uncle wishes to go to Jaffna to cover the first-hand reports of ethnic extremism, Nalini, Arjie's mother tried her heart to stop him, but of no avail. Consequently, quiet mysteriously Daryl Uncle's dead body was discovered. The police as well as a

local human rights lawyer advices her to move on, and remain blind and deaf about what is going around. The world of Little Women shatters before Arjie where good triumphs over evil and he starts to undervalue the power of love.

This ethnic conflict also troubles Arjie's personal life too. Arjie for the very first time feels a great attraction towards Jegan and tries to befriend him. Arjie's non-normative sexual orientation is also hinted at this adolescent stage. Jegan becomes favourite to Arjie when one day he defends Arjie's 'difference' when his father abuses him for being 'funny'. But with the declining situation

of Tamil-Sinhala conflict, Jegan had to be fired by Arjie's father for his security. Thus, Arjie's mental estrangement continues. But quite significantly this time Arjie's likings was grown into an adult infatuation towards Jegan. Thus, this ethnic complexity once again took the judgmental throne and depressed him like his mother and Radha aunty (crossed in love).

To squeeze a 'Man' out of Arjie, Robert Chelvaratnam, Arjie's father decides to send him to Queen Victoria Academy and ironically this school awakens his homosexuality more distinctly. Initially this school is a threat to Arjie's sexual orientation and secondly of his ethnic identity as Tamil. The school was notorious for its principal called Black-Tie. Arjie's question regarding his transfer from the St. Gabriel's to Queen Victoria was shunned with arrogance by his father. "The Academy will force you to become a man." This move is the more violent side of fitting forcibly into the construction: the imposition of an identity.

This reply is exactly like the vague absurd answer, in the first chapter given by Nalini, 'Because, the sky is so high and pigs can't fly'. So, the feeling of homophobia and Arjie's supposed femininity was a subject of terror to his father. Diggy's reply confirms this feeling: "He doesn't want you turning out funny or anything like that." Diggy normalises the brutal and ruthless treatment of the Black tie upon his pupils. When Arjie asked why the students do not complain about the harsh treatment, Diggy replies "Once you come to The Queen Victoria Academy you are a man. Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you". So, toxic masculinity forms from enduring torments and remain firm without any sense of pain, trauma and torture

Even there was the poison of Tamil-Sinhalese conflict too. The Vice-Principal Lokubandara, just like the government and administrative forces, supported the Sinhalese and wanted to breed hatred towards Tamils. There was a boy called Selgado, he was infamous for bullying Tamil students. The Vice-Principal secretly supported his heinous act. But there was another boy called Shehan Soyza, who was protecting Arjie from the bully and rash behaviours from Selgado. Previously Arjie was infatuated to Jegan, but this time he was attracted towards Shehan 's physique, long hair, facial expressions, and personality. Shehan was attractive as Arjie believes his face was full of contrasts, and against all kind of restrictions he always pushes forward to deny authority. His long hair invites

his punishments too, but it seemed he was on a voyage to transgress all the prohibitions. It was evident that he derives pleasure in roasting the disciples of Black Tie and gets punished. One day when Arjie witnesses the brutal thrashing of Shehan by Black Tie, his sympathies towards Shehan generates and unknown feelings within him.

Realising that his younger brother breeds a different kind of relationship with Shehan, Diggy warns Arjie to keep safe distance as he is notorious to have sex with head perfects in the off periods. Arjie's reluctance to believe in homosexuality was also hinted primarily. Because in a homophobic and heteronormative society, one has to feel as male or female. Any gender characteristics other than this, are considered as abnormal, strange, and funny. Arjie, being a subject of this same society, complies with this view too. That is why at his brother's suggestion he is perturbed a little bit. Because still he does not have any notions about homosexuality. But Arjie's attraction towards Shehan is exposed in a dream. The dream opens to a pool where Shehan is chased by Arjie, and after being caught, Arjie barely embraces him closely inside the water. The next morning Arjie sees the wetness on his sarong. So, his feelings towards Shehan is now revealed to himself.

One day when Black Tie allows Arjie and Shehan to free, Shehan Kissed Arjie on his lips. Arjie was surprised, as he felt the presence of a tongue against his. Even one day during a hide and seek game in Arjie's darkened garage they engaged in sexual activity suddenly. This sexual act breaks all the bodily and heteronormative boundaries of society. Before this experience, Arjie's male association was only based on aesthetic experiences. But when Shehan's entry into him, the sensual experience he gains, helps him to recognize the physical reality of his own sex, and the mistaken identity he was carrying before.

However, the homophobic - heteronormative society poisons a homonormative mind, by makes the individual feel guilty. Arjie was also trapped into this. An extreme sense of guilt and sin pervades. Somehow Arjie is being persuaded by the thought of this 'unnatural ' act. He was thinking how his mother would react to this when she will aware about this fact. It seems to him a crime, a sinful act, that will bring disgrace to his family. He feels he betrayed the trust and love of his family by doing this. He wanted to relieve himself by crying, his false sense makes him believe that his father's femmephobic attitude as well as his attempts to masculinise Arjie was the right move. When Arjie blames Shehan, Shehan confirms that it is Arjie who touched him first. Arjie's discovery of his homosexuality comes when Shehan flaunts about his own homosexuality: "At least I know what I want and I'm not ashamed of it… I know your type... you pretend that you're normal... but in the end you're no different from me".

With the passing of time, Arjie realises the truth in Shehan's words of having same-sex desires. He gradually recognises his true identity. He says:

"The difference within me that I sometimes felt I had, that had brought me to so much

confusion, whatever this difference, it was shared by Shehan. I felt amazed that a normal thing--like my friendship with Shehan--could have such powerful and hidden possibilities. I found myself thinking about that moment Shehan had kissed me and also of how he had lain on his bed, waiting for me to carry something through. I now knew that the kiss was somehow connected to what we had in common, and Shehan had known all this along."

Thus, his relationship with Shehan not only brings closer his identity to him, but also distances him from his family too. He bursts out in silence: "I was no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me."

Funny Boy records the terrible experiences of a homosexual boy Arjie and his exile from a homophobic, ethnic-conscious society. This novel is a blazing critique of all those social dimensions which restrict an induvial to breathe, act and live according to their wishes. Arjie's transition from childhood to adolescence explores many ways of isolation and marginalisation. He was refrained from playing bride-bride game against his wish, and even was proved a mismatch in a 'boy's game' too. His non-normative sexuality imposes many hardships and sufferings in heteronormative spaces like his home and school. But it is quite ironical that these very spaces that are, Queen Victoria Academy helps him to recognise his sexual identity through Shehan, and in his home or personal garage for the first time he gets the sensual touch of homosexuality from Shehan. These two spaces help Arjie to go beyond the subjugation and the divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. He becomes the one he wanted to be, not his parents or family wants him to be.

Amid the conflict between heteronormative and homophobic organizations (such as family, school) and the non-normative homosexuality of an individual, Arjie becomes the victim of social isolation and thus alienated. But this alienation from the 'normal' society, turns as blessings when he meets Shehan in a school where he was sent only to be fit in the structure of masculinity.

It seems that the gender system in Arie's family was strongly patriarchal. The atmosphere and the decisions of the family revolves around his father. May be for this reason he hates the effeminacy in Arjie and strongly wants to masculinise him by force. But all efforts and attempts submit finally with the recognition of Arjie's sexual identity to himself. Shyam Selvadurai's dedication page of this novel reads like:
To my parents,

Christine and David Selvadurai, For believing that pigs can fly
Funny Boy by Shyam Selvadurai invites us to explore the belittled status of a homonormative person in a society bound by conservative norms and expectations. Through the journey of the protagonist, we have seen how the subtle nuances of homonormativity can lead to profound feelings of isolation and marginalization, even when one seemingly conforms to societal ideals of gender

and sexuality. This exploration has underscored the significance of recognizing and validating the struggles faced by individuals whose identities may not align with traditional expectations. Selvadurai's novel serves as a poignant reminder that the quest for acceptance and self-discovery is not confined to those who defy societal norms openly but extends to those who navigate the complex terrain of homonormativity. In doing so, it calls on us to broaden our understanding of the diverse manifestations of queerness, both in literature and in society. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of LGBTQ+ experiences, we open the door to greater inclusivity and empathy, paving the way for a more equitable and accepting world.

Furthermore, *Funny Boy* also highlights the intersecting challenges of identity, conflict, and colonialism, demonstrating how these broader themes can deeply affect individuals and their pursuit of self-realization. In our ongoing efforts to promote diversity and celebrate the richness of LGBTQ+ narratives, it is essential to embrace and amplify stories like those found within the pages of "Funny Boy." These stories offer valuable insights into the human condition, reminding us of the power of literature to illuminate the struggles and triumphs of individuals who strive to be true to themselves in the face of adversity.

As we reflect on the belittled status of homonormative individuals portrayed in this novel, we are compelled to challenge our own preconceived notions and biases, fostering a more inclusive society where all individuals, regardless of their conformity to normative ideals, can soar freely, like pigs that can indeed fly. Through literature, we find the inspiration and empathy needed to dismantle oppressive norms and embrace the diversity of human experience, ultimately working toward a world where acceptance and understanding are extended to all.

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Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* Today

Kalapi Sen

Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* arrived on the literary scene in 1960, coinciding with Nigeria's political freedom. However, even after a prominent existence in the literary world for over sixty years, and for more than two decades in the academic curriculum, when the novel is taught, it is generally reduced to a mere tragic love story of the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, obliquely hinting at Achebe's comment that *No Longer at Ease* "is a book that has not, in my view, received as good and perceptive attention as it deserves" (Lindfors, *Conversations* 73). Although *No Longer at Ease* is chronologically Achebe's second novel, published two years after his groundbreaking first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), if the "Achebean pentalogy" (Sen) is considered thematically, this book acts as a connecting bridge between his other four novels.

Eustace Palmer was one of the earliest critics to point out that in this novel, Achebe dealt effectively with "the plight of the new generation of the Nigerians who, having been exposed to education in the western world and therefore largely cut off from their roots in traditional society, discover, on their return, that the demands of the tradition are still strong, and are hopelessly caught in the clash between the old and the new" (Palmer 63). David Carroll summed it up better when he proclaimed *No Longer at Ease* to be a "tragi-comic postscript to the moving of events of Achebe's first novel [where] Achebe traces the decline of the hero from brilliant student to civil service convicted of bribery and corruption" (Carroll, 63). These two approaches focussed on the two major themes of the novel which are introduced in the opening chapter and enacted throughout the plot. This article primarily focuses on how Achebe uses these two major issues to connect the two different worldviews in the other novels with two major thematic concerns: (a) a "tug-of-war" between the traditional ethos and imperialism which continues through the emergence of the new generation who are the products of western education, and (b) the corruption that Nigerians begin to indulge in on the eve of achieving political freedom, both enacted through the life of Obi and his interactions with the numerous other characters, both named and unnamed in the book.[2]

The novel opens with the trial scene of Obi introducing the theme of corruption; and the departure of Clara, the "outcast protagonist," (Mezu 218) along with the demise of his mother, Hannah Okonkwo, which indirectly hints at the "plight of the new generation." The narrator reports, "[m]ercifully, [Obi] had recently lost his mother, and Clara had gone out of his life. The two events following closely on each other had dulled his sensibility and left him a different man"

(Achebe, *NLAE* 3). As the novel proceeds, the mystery is unveiled that Clara is an *osu*, an Igbo outcaste, and her relationship with Obi becomes the chief conflict among the societal members of the Igbo community. This traditional taboo of the *osu* caste system, as a concept, was initially introduced by Achebe, in Chapter

Eighteen of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* where the Igbo people of Umuofia were slowly shunning their traditional religion, and embracing Christianity because of certain in-built "faults" in the native religion and culture, which at times, were unbearable. Among the early Christian converts were the parents (especially the mothers) of twin babies, who considered a taboo and abandoned in the Evil Forest. Following them, the *osu* also walked into the church and embraced the white man's faith. But these *osu* converts were not accepted liberally by the "*diala* or the free-born" Igbo who also had accepted Christianity. Ernest
N. Emenyonu sums this hatred towards the *Osu* in "Ode to the Convert,"[3] which Achebe narrates in his first novel. This segregation among the Igbo, had however, not totally been wiped out even after decades of Christian rule and is brilliantly portrayed in Achebe's chronologically second novel bringing out the cultural clash between the "old and the new generation[s]."

New generation Nigerians like Obi, were born and brought up under Christian values and European education no doubt; but *osu* still resided "like leprosy in the minds of [the] people" – an issue hinted at since the initial stage of Clara and Obi's relation, where Clara conscious of her outcaste-status, felt from the very beginning that once the "secret" was revealed, Obi would not marry her. Still, she had been strong enough to doff her relationship off at a crucial stage of her life – when she is pregnant with Obi's child without being married to him. Rather than nurturing any false belief of getting married to a free-born and entering into a cultural conflict with the entire Igbo community, she chose to undergo an abortion and walked out of Obi's life. But Obi's idealistic belief created and nurtured by his Western education and Christianity, refused to accept the cultural clash that Clara knew would occur, from the onset of their relationship. Hence, once Obi's associates came to know of his intention of marrying an *osu*, each and every one refused to accept and support his radicle decision. This objection began with his two friends, Christopher and Joseph (representative of the new Nigerian youth); followed by his parents and finally the entire Igbo community, represented by the Umuofia Progressive Union. Isaac, Obi's father tried to dissuade him by giving him a panoramic view of the status of an *osu* in the community, but failed.

Interestingly, Isaac/Nwoye of *Things Fall Apart*, had himself been a pioneer in his youth who had walked out of his native religion to accept Christianity because of the irrational killing of Ikemefuna, as a father could not accept a somewhat similar revolutionary step that his son was about to take, thus proving Palmer's point that when the new generation youth returned to his homeland, after being groomed in the white man's land, he realized that even if the times have changed since the pre-colonial days, "the demands of the tradition [were] still strong" where the "youth is hopelessly caught between the old and new" (Palmer 63). It is in Hannah Okonkwo one sees the conflict in action. Being a devout Christian herself, Hanna too was not been able to come out of certain cultural bondages of the olden times. Thus, when Obi's decision of marriage is

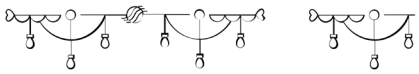
revealed, she won over Obi's apparently firm decision. When Obi met Hannah, in Chapter Fourteen, she threatened to kill herself in case Obi married Clara. She said,

> I dreamt bad dream, a very bad dream one night [… that] termites had eaten up the bed right under me. [….] in the afternoon your father came in with a letter […] to tell us that you were going to marry an *osu*. […]. If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more. If God hears my prayers, you will not wait long. [….] But if you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself. (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 108)

It is quite interesting to note that in spite of these strong oppositions from the characters in the book, in "March 1956, Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly promulgated the '*Osu* caste system Abolition Law' making it an offense, punishable by penal servitude upon trial and conviction of the offender, to call anybody *Osu*" (Emenyonu 40). Yet, these oppositions that Achebe delineated in this novel re-present the entire generation of Nigerians, standing at a state of transition where they could accept a new religion and western education but could still not do away with certain age-old customs and taboos of their indigenous culture/s.

Somewhat similar to the concept of the cultural taboo, is the issue of bribe which was also a concept introduced first in *Things Fall Apart*.[4] Obierika's comments in *Things Fall Apart* revealed how the Igbo people who had embraced Christianity and acquired jobs in the white man's camp and had, in most cases, gone against their kinsmen and become corrupt with the attainment of certain powers. This was an issue which Achebe dealt with in greater depths in his later novels and the initiation of it had begun in *No Longer at Ease*, with a "been-to" being charged for bribery, a major issue that would become entrenched in neo-colonial Nigeria. Though the protagonist is charged against bribery, the issue of accepting bribe was a daily event in the lives of the Nigerians. The practical demonstration of this began with Obi's arrival at Lagos. In Chapter Four as Obi's boat reached the Lagos wharf, he confronted the young customs officer and Obi was asked to pay a bribe for his radiogram.

> A young man, almost a boy, in fact, was dealing with Obi's cabin. He told him that the duty on his radiogram would be five pounds.
>
> 'Right,' said Obi, feeling his hip-pockets. 'Write a receipt for me.' The boy did not write. He looked at Obi for a few seconds, and then said: 'I can be able to reduce it to two pounds for you.'
>
> 'How?' asked Obi.
>
> 'I fit do it, but you no go get Government receipt.'



> For a few seconds Obi was speechless. Then he merely said: 'Don't be silly. If there was a policeman here, I would hand you over to him.' The boy fled from his cabin without another word. Obi found him later attending other passengers. (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* 39)

Followed by this incident was Obi's interview at the Public Service Commission in the next chapter, which was an eye-opener for Obi as to why the youths join or wish to join the civil service. Obi was interviewed by five people in the board among them were "the Chairman of the Commission, a fat jolly Englishman […]. The other four members – one European and three Africans" (45). And one of the African members of the board, who had been sleeping throughout the interview, asks Obi: "Why do you want a job in the Civil Service? So that you can take bribes?" (45) The apparently small incident is indicative of the fact as to how the jobs in the Civil Services were used by educated Nigerians to earn money not through hard work, but through bribery. Additionally, Obi's discussion about Nigerian corruption with his friend Christopher revealed that the "theory that the public service of Nigeria would remain corrupt until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities" (45), was knocked down when Christopher revealed that bribe had captured the minds of the educated Nigerians, along with the old men of the previous generation, who were uneducated. In fact, "To most of them bribery is no problem. They come straight to the top without bribing anyone. It's not that they're necessarily better than others, it's simply that they can afford to be virtuous. But even that kind of virtue can become a habit" (29). Christopher revealed that bribe was a daily affair for the people coming from all the layers of the society, whether educated or uneducated. A small example to prove Christopher's point is the incident that Obi encountered while he traveled to his hometown in a lorry and "[s]ome forty miles or so beyond Ibadan the driver suddenly said: 'Dees b— f— police!' Obi noticed two policemen by the side of the road about three hundred yards

away, signalling the lorry to stop." After a routine check of the papers, the "policeman looked at them critically" and said, "Where your roadwordiness?" In the meantime,

> […] the driver's mate was approaching the other policeman. But just as he was about to hand something over to him Obi looked in their direction. The policeman was not prepared to take the risk; for all he knew Obi might be a C.I.D. man. So he drove the driver's mate away with great moral indignation. 'What you want here? Go way!' Meanwhile the other policemen had found fault with the driver's papers and was taking down his particulars, the driver pleading and begging in vain. Finally he drove away, or so it appeared. About a quarter of a mile farther up the road he stopped. (34-45)

This incident reveals the hard-core reality that bribe had become a convention among the commonplace Nigerians to avoid hazards, making it difficult (or impossible, perhaps) to change the

system. However, unable to convince the policeman to accept the bribe, the driver accused Obi and educated people like him who make things difficult for people (the lower and uneducated stratum of the society) like the driver, who could have easily got away with a bribe of two shillings. He says, "Why you look the man when we want give um him two shillings? [….] Na him make I no de want carry book people [….] Too too know na him de worry una. Why you put your nose for matter way concern you? Now that policeman go charge me like ten shillings." (39)

These scattered incidents related to bribe and corruption taken together help the reader to get a complete picture of the Nigerian society in its pre-independence era, where no job could be done without bribe or reference. Accordingly, in order to acquire a mere scholarship, one had to use unfair means. Accordingly, Mr. Mark, apparently a "minor" character, met Obi on behalf of his sister to bribe him and secure the chances of Elsie Mark appearing before the interview board for scholarship. That the education system had also not been spared from corruption is revealed in Chapter Nine when Mr. Mark visited Obi to make sure that Elsie got the scholarship. After a formal introduction, Mark said, "I've come to consult you about something – semi-official and semi-private" (68) and said, "I have a sister who has just passed her School Certificate in Grade One. She wants to apply for a Federal Scholarship to study in England. [….] But it is like this. I was told that you are the secretary of the Scholarship Commission and I thought that I should see you. […] you know what our country is. Unless you see people" (78-79) jobs are not done. Though Obi refused to indulge in Mark's advances, he ultimately succumbed to the bribe in the form of a twenty-dollar bill as well as the body of a woman in the last chapter, which finally lead him to the court.

Although the novel has been taught for more than two decades at various academic levels, the importance of the tug of war between cultural transitions and the issue of corruption, which form a major portion of postcolonial studies, had been generally neglected. It therefore shall not be incorrect to conclude that in his chronologically second novel, Achebe did not attempt a plain and simple love story which would end in failure. Rather, his intention was quite serious which led him to delineate the aspects of the inter-cultural tiffs that still existed in a society that was much influenced by Christianity and western values through western education and standing on the verge of political independence; and the element of corruption which was also influenced by the imperial rule, giving birth to a neo-colonial situation in Nigeria, in particular and other African cultures/ countries, standing on the verge of achieving political freedom, in general.

Notes:

[1]This article is a revised version of the Plenary Session talk, "Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* @ 60" delivered at the International Webinar on "African Literature, Culture and Orature" organized by the Department of English, Rishi Bankim Chandra College, Naihati; in collaboration

with Departments of English, West Bengal State University, India; University of Uyo Nigeria; University of Nsukka, Nigeria and Dhaka City College, Bangladesh on 22-23 August, 2020. The title of this article has been inspired by the panel, "Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*@60," organized by Thomas Lynn at the Northeast Modern Language Association Convention 2020, March 5-8, 2020, Boston, USA and has been used after Prof. Lynn formally permitted me to do so through an email dated August 13, 2020.

[2]In his two "tradition-based novels," Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1964), Achebe re-creates fictionally, the pre-colonial and the colonial milieus of Nigeria to delineate the slow yet steady entry and eventual progress of the white masters with their religion and governance, into the lives of the Igbo people; where the native religion, culture and their republican system of governance jostle with the new, white societal rules in order to survive. In the last two novels, supposedly his most "political" novels, *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), he treats "events almost exactly contemporary with his writing" (Killam 48), focusing chiefly on the corruption that had engulfed the lives of mostly all the members of the society, after the colonial masters [had] left, with its roots in the "highest echelons of State power" (Lindfors 155).

[3]"He received the missionary and accepted the Word,

He tossed away his chi and and purchased the Holy Book. He delighted in the teachings and

professed the Trinity –

He taught lesser folks about the new ways and universal brotherhood, And augmented his zeal

with gifts to the poor and needy.

But once, when he had to kneel in prayer with an Osu, He chose to sit down,

And when the man sitting beside him was Osu He shuddered and stood up

And rather than drink from the Lord's cup with an Osu He renounced his faith, rolled his loin

cloth;

Facing his chi, his ofo firmly clutched, He fell back on the ole time religion."
Emenyonu, Ernest N., "Ode to the Convert" quoted in "African Cultural Taboos: A Case Study of the Osu System among the Igbo of Nigeria," Appendix, *Approaches to Nigerian Literature: Selected Essays*. Kraft Books, 2020.

[4]In Chapter Twenty, Obierika, Okonkwo's friend informs how the white masters were solving issues related to land disputes on the basis of bribe. When Okonkwo enquires, "What has happened to

that piece of land in dispute?" (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* 126) Obierika replies, "The white man's court has decided that it should belong to Nnama's family, who had given much money to the white man's messenger and interpreter […] How do you think we can fight our own brothers who have turned against us?" (126)

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Cultural Imperialism in the Digital Age: Analyzing the Dominance of Western Media in Global Markets

Pritha Misra

In today's interconnected world, media has become a powerful tool for transmitting culture, values, and ideas across borders. However, this increased connectivity has also raised concerns about cultural imperialism, wherein dominant Western media disproportionately influences and shapes global cultures. A global environment in terms of economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions gave rise to cultural imperialism. It addressed the various facets of human existence, particularly in the Third World where the dominating paradigms are neo-colonization, coercion, and suppression.

The phrase was first used to explain the post-World War II "independence" wave of new states emerging from colonial servitude in neo-Marxist discourses in cultural, media, and postcolonial studies in the 1960s. Although it has broad application throughout human history, it was sparked by the works of nationalist revolutionaries, revolutionary theorists, and their supporters in the 1950s and 1960s. Herbert Schiller was a leading Western thinker of cultural imperialism in the West. In the 1970s, the Non-Aligned Movement and UNESCO both adopted and supported the idea.

In the words of Oliver Boyd-Barrett, the phrase could refer to a discipline of study that examines all connections between phenomena classified as "cultural" and "imperialism." These include cultural adjustments that are (1) imposed on a weaker entity and (2) result from contact, conflict, and resistance between stronger and weaker entities. They also include (3) assimilation of social practices that the stronger entity encounters in the weaker entity, and (4) original hybrids that exhibit cultural traces from both stronger and weaker entities.

Marshall McLuhan gazed into his crystal ball and imagined a time when the world would resemble a little village, but perhaps he never fully understood the undercurrents resulting from these globalisation processes. Few people were aware of the emergence of globalisation when it did, and today the argument is made in favour of or against it. At the local, governmental, and international levels, there is a sweeping wind of change that has been prompted by the whims of globalisation. In a time when the tension between integration and separation pulls at every issue that is relevant to international relations, (Rothkopf:39) observed that "Globalisation has

economic roots and political consequences, but it also has brought into focus the power of culture in this global environment the power to bind and to decide."

According to (Reddi :315), culture is a people's way of life and is made up of both historical and contemporary traditions, beliefs, values, and practices that are reflected in the music, dance, drama, clothing, public tastes

and values, and religious practices of a particular social system. Patterns of childbirth, marriage, and death are also important cultural indicators. It might be seen as a part of a wider social system that receives from and contributes to other subsystems. It is a very individualised or emotionally charged word for imperialism. Schillar(1976:9)defined "Ideological Imperialism" and "Economic Imperialism" as "the sum of the process by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominant stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and occasionally bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the value and structures of the dominating centre of the system" (MattLeart, 1994).

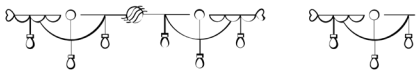
The McBride Commission's president and one of the reformists, Sean McBride of Ireland, "readily admit that imbalance in information" is a result of the West's essentially monopolistic control over newswires and technology. They advocate for a comprehensive reform of the international system because they are aware of the negative social and political implications that unchecked West actions may have. The structuralists assert that the West's ambition to maintain hegemony over formerly colonised regions is the root of the world's information imbalance (Schiller, 1976:2-9). They contend that less indirect methods of political and military control have given way to communication domination. Galtung John and Herbert Schiller are two powerful backers.

'Cultural imperialism' is a word with a very recent history. In the second half of the 20th century, it appears to have emerged alongside other terms of critique in the 1960s and has dominated many intellectual discussions on a global scale. According to Tomlinson (1991: 3), the cultural imperialism "must be assembled out of its discourse" In his opinion, the phrase is made up of two phrases that are both extremely troublesome and intricate. Without a doubt, the term "culture" refers to complex meanings and procedures. Williams (1983) describes it as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language." In its broadest sense, the term "imperialism" refers to the imposition of one state's rule over the territory of another.

The Schiller (1976) cultural imperialism theory is the foundation of this phenomenon, according to which "Western nations dominate the media around the world, which in turn has a powerful

impact on Third World cultures by imposing Western views and thereby destroying their native cultures." The majority of media (film, news, comics, etc.) are produced by Western civilization because they are economically strong, and the rest of the world buys from them because it is cheaper as a result of first meeting domestic needs and then tripling sales and profits from the global market.

In his book Mass Communications and American Empire from (1969), Herbert Schiller outlined the argument for cultural imperialism. According to him, the post-World War II era has been marked by an increase in American supremacy on a global scale. The British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese colonial empires were no longer in existence, and a new American empire had taken



their place. The economic heft of this new empire emanates from transnational firms with US bases, as well as the communications know-how that has allowed Americans to assume leadership positions in broadcasting networks and communication systems.

The dominance of Western media in global markets can be attributed to several mechanisms:

Digital Platforms and Distribution Networks: Global digital platforms like Netflix, YouTube, and social media giants facilitate the dissemination of Western media content to a worldwide audience. These platforms often prioritize content with higher production budgets, which Western media can afford more easily.

Language and Cultural Barriers: English, as a dominant language in the digital space, gives Western media an advantage in reaching wider audiences. Subtitles and dubbing might not capture the cultural nuances of non-Western societies, making it easier for Western narratives to **Economic Power and Production Quality:** The economic power of Western media conglomerates enables them to produce high-quality content that attracts global audiences. Non- Western producers often face financial constraints, limiting their ability to compete effectively. The dominance of Western media in global markets has significant implications for local cultures:

Homogenization of Cultural Identities: The pervasive influence of Western media can lead to the erosion of local cultural identities, as audiences are exposed to standardized Western narratives and lifestyles.

Underrepresentation and Stereotyping: Non-Western cultures are often underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing cultural hierarchies.

Loss of Language and Traditional Knowledge: The spread of Western media can contribute to the decline of indigenous languages and traditional knowledge, further marginalising non- Western societies.

The Impact of Netflix on Local Film Industries:

Background: Netflix, a prominent Western streaming platform, has rapidly expanded its global reach in recent years, making its content available in over 190 countries. This expansion has had a significant impact on local film industries worldwide.

Case Study: South Korea's film industry, often celebrated for its distinctive storytelling and cinematography, has faced challenges due to the dominance of Netflix. Korean filmmakers have had to adapt their content to fit the preferences of a global audience, often incorporating more Western

elements to appeal to Netflix's international subscriber base. While this has led to increased global visibility for Korean films, it has also raised concerns about the potential dilution of their unique cultural narratives. Additionally, smaller, less economically robust film industries in other countries may struggle to compete with the financial resources and global reach of Netflix, potentially leading to a decline in local film production.

Impact: The case of Netflix in South Korea highlights how the digital age has allowed Western media platforms to influence and shape content production in non-Western countries. This can lead to a homogenization of cultural content and pose challenges to the preservation of local cultural identities in the face of Western media dominance.

The Spread of Western Social Media Platforms:

Background: Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, all originating from Western countries, have become ubiquitous worldwide. Their widespread use has had a profound impact on how people communicate, share information, and perceives global culture.

Case Study: China offers a compelling case study of how Western social media platforms have struggled to gain a foothold due to government regulations and the presence of local alternatives. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are banned in China, leading to the emergence of indigenous platforms like WeChat and Weibo. The Chinese government's strict control over internet access and content has limited the influence of Western social media on Chinese society, preserving a distinct digital culture that aligns with the country's political and social values. China's internet landscape has been tightly controlled by the government through the "Great

Firewall," which restricts access to foreign websites and social media platforms. Western social media companies face challenges in entering the Chinese market, allowing domestic alternatives to flourish.

Impact: The case of China demonstrates how government intervention can mitigate the influence of Western social media platforms and allow local alternatives to thrive. It also highlights the potential for digital isolation and the development of parallel digital cultures when local regulations create barriers to Western media penetration.

The phenomenon of cultural imperialism in the digital age, as exemplified by the dominance of Western media in global markets, is a complex and multifaceted issue with profound implications for cultures worldwide. Through an examination of historical context, impacts on local cultures, and case studies, this research paper has shed light on the challenges posed by Western media's pervasive influence and underscored the urgent need for a more balanced and equitable media

landscape.

In the historical context, we observed that the roots of media globalisation extend back to the colonial era when Western powers used media to exert control and influence over their colonies. In the digital age, this influence has intensified due to the global reach of Western media conglomerates and the widespread use of English as a lingua franca. These historical underpinnings have set the stage for the dominance of Western media content in the contemporary global media landscape. The impact on local cultures has been significant. Western media's overwhelming presence has led to cultural homogenization, marginalisation of indigenous traditions, and a sense of cultural inferiority in non-Western societies. Moreover, it has contributed to cultural dependency, where local populations increasingly adopt Western narratives and perspectives, potentially eroding their own cultural identities.

The case studies of Bollywood and K-Pop illustrated the real-world manifestations of cultural imperialism. Despite their success and popularity, both industries must contend with the overwhelming influence of Western media. Bollywood struggles to maintain its distinct cultural identity in the face of Hollywood's dominance, while K-Pop's global rise demonstrates the assimilation of Western influences even within a niche genre from South Korea.

The findings of this research paper underscore the importance of addressing cultural imperialism in the digital age. While exposure to diverse cultures through media can be enriching, a more balanced media landscape is needed to preserve and celebrate the richness and diversity of global cultures. Initiatives that support local content creators, foster cross-cultural dialogue, and promote cultural authenticity are vital steps in countering the homogenising effects of Western media dominance.

In conclusion, cultural imperialism in the digital age challenges us to rethink our approach to media globalisation. It calls for a recognition of the value of cultural diversity, the preservation of local traditions, and the empowerment of non-Western voices. It is a call for balance in the media landscape, where cultural exchange is celebrated without erasing the identities of nations and communities. To achieve this, collaborative efforts from governments, media organisations, and consumers are essential to ensure that the digital age is characterised by cultural enrichment rather than cultural erosion. The future of our global cultural mosaic depends on our ability to embrace diversity in all its forms, even in the digital realm.

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Cultural Representation of Women in Print Media: Interdependence and Emerging Concerns

Natasha Chatterjee

Introduction: Print Media and Portrayal of women in the Victorian Era.

In the chronicles of the United Kingdom, the Victorian Era was the period of Queen Victoria's reign, from 20th June 1837 until her death on 22nd January 1901.

During this period women were depicted in the print media as "Champion of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity". All the eminent newspapers of that era strengthened the expectation that women should be loyal, committed and obedient to the males in their lives along with maintaining the house and look after their children. After these commitments if they had some spare time they devote it for the welfare of others. The women of this era generally showed altruistic characteristics.

They were literally prohibited to get involved in the public sphere of work, business or politics if they were keen to maintain their humble reputability.

During the last part of the Victorian era not many women were holding high- school diploma degrees, Only 6 percent of women graduated from high school. Women who were engaged in the reporting of newspapers were very few. Despite of the fact that number of women were more than the number of men who graduated from high- school, because men usually used to enter the labor force in their teens to earn a living for their families. Women entering colleges were fewer than men, though they were more educated. Only 2 percent of the populace had a college degree, so generally it seemed that women were more educated than the men.

But all the major newspapers didn't show the true picture of the society, the readers would never know through the print media that a significant number of women were high school educated or part of the workforce. The year 1900 witnessed a little bit more than 2 percent reporters were female, but they were not free to write the factual news, they were isolated and anticipated to write for women's pages, which usually contained columns and articles about cooking, relationship issues and women's social roles, such as news about fashion and beauty tips etc. In other words, only a restricted and unrealistic representation of women was depicted in the papers.

Role of women in the Print Media:

The print media has become more astounding and commercialized with the advent of electronic media. Print media performed a vital part in igniting the flames of freedom among the masses. However, the newspapers of the present time don't give women the same importance. Women are

often allotted a small space on a weekly basis. There is a pre-conceived notion that women are least concerned about the general occurrences or current affairs as they are more predisposed towards their other area of interests such as beauty tips, recipes, fashion, relations, furnishings, luxurious items and latest commodities for women. Among the various women affairs or issues covered, the maximal news reported relates to the brutality against women. These kinds of news are mostly given more importance or exaggerated to draw the attention of the readers and to increase the sales figure of the newspaper. News related to women get a space in the front page if the news is related to victims of rape, murder, case of domestic violence, suicide etc. Whereas the news related to the achievements of women do not find a space there. Print media did not do justice to reality or truth of a women's life their struggles or victories rather they often show a bias picture making her a object of sexual or sensual desire. News relating to the rights of women, about women who can be ideals or role models for others who build their own empires without any male support from the scratch hardly get any space. Therefore, it is quite clear that from the way she is portrayed makes her a woman who lacks knowledge, power, wealth, someone who is always dependent on the male. The representation of women in print media is as follows.

Women's portrayals are titillating who seduce men. Women are seldom portrayed as intelligent, confident individuals having a mind of their own.

Courtney and Lokeretz (1979) inspected reflections of women in magazine advertisements. They set forth that women were seldom represented in out of home working roles:

1. Very few women were depicted as professionals o successful entrepreneur.

2. Women were shown as dependent individuals who cannot roam freely outside their homes and always look for the support of men to accompany them.
3. Women always seek protection from men.

4. Men usually view women as sex objects or as someone who takes care of domestic chores.

5. Women were mostly seen in advertisements for selling beauty products, cooking food, cleaning, clothing, apparel, medicines, and home appliances etc.
6. The advertisements for Cars, bikes, travel, alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, banks, industrial products, industrial companies etc, were mostly done by males.

Saswati and Soumya (2012) disclosed that patriarchal mindset is revealed in the way women are

represented in print media. Advertisers have leveraged on aesthetic appeal of women to entice the attention of the audience.

Narcissist behaviour can be seen in women due to the atrocities and oppression towards them in the patriarchal society. Women are generally not given their due respect or rights which most of the time leads to such behavioral patterns. Women under narcissistic disorder often see themselves as victims, become insecure, competitive and jealous etc.

So, it is quite comprehensible that the way society wants women to be is someone who is dependent, homemaker, caregivers not having any ambition of their own in life.

Any issues related to women are reported with preoccupied notions, that is, without proper investigation women are blamed in any given situation without any reason or fault. Often news related to women are exaggerated with sole intention to increase readership. The news reporters lack empathy and ethics they don't consider news related to women are of much significance, they are just taken for granted. The outcome to this is the complete falsification of the image of women in our society.

The real struggle of the women, who are working to earn a living are not given much importance rather news related to fashion, glamour, actors, sensual photographs dominate the space of newspapers.

Even in advertisements the way women are portrayed is quite incorrect. Women are objectified and these images are derogatory to the image of women. However, the scenario has changed in the last one decade. The print media has witnessed remarkable growth, simultaneously the issues related to the women population has also increased manifold.

The women journalist, reporters, along with efforts of government played a major role to back up women's movements, NGOs are to be praised for addressing women's issues and development. They make efforts so that the voice of women is not suppressed. This constant pressure to enculturate to the norms of the society, segregation from the society, not getting equal rights from the very childhood may make women self- centered, lacking empathy for others and may even

show narcissist behavior in them. This happens as a result of compensating the feelings of inadequacy and loneliness.

In the recent times we have seen that the mindset of the print media has become more and more progressive. Nowadays we can find lead stories on women entrepreneurs also we can find article or analysis on the poignant issues of women in print media. But there is a long way to go so that women get equal importance in the print media because they consist of half of the population, so they must also get equal space in print media.

Apparently, it can be seen that representation of women in print media is exiguous as well as sticky. The content that we can find in the print media is influenced by the values, norms and protocols of the society. In other words, the message that we get from the print media is largely influenced by the gender outlook of the society.

Not only in developing countries but all over the world, women face many challenges and struggle a lot to get equal rights in education and work. The patriarchal society influences all areas from education to culture, political structure to economics. Gender bias is prevalent in all the segments of society. Gender roles are imposed by the society and this has a vast influence on every individual from a very tender age. Predominantly it can be seen that family, educational institutions, social circumstances and mass communication tools instill gender roles. Moreover, it can be observed that societal expectations are far more from women with their roles of mothers, wives, and daughters.

The need of the hour is to give ample importance to the right kind of news like more issues that can have a positive impact on the population, which can motivate other women to achieve more, this kind of news can easily come on the front page of the newspaper and can play a major role in the development of the nation. Women journalists are attempting to alter the sexy, misrepresent image of women in the print media but until and unless the mindset of the reader change it will remain impossible to change the scenario.

Politics plays a pivotal role in the progress of the country as well as it is the most vital component of success of the newspapers. In politics women are rarely given the due respect as well as importance over the male population. News related to women artists, dancers, actors or hot models in titillating photographs get a chance in the last page of the newspaper. Different newspapers allot one page in its Sunday supplement to women related issues or stories. Besides all these sports page carries news on women sports personalities once in a blue moon. The women

constitute of the half of the population but they are allotted only a single page once a week to address the issues of women. This is a case of biasness against the women population.

Conclusion:

For many years it has been observed that there has been a lot of research and discussion on the topic of media portrayal of women. On the basis of several studies conducted on the representation of women in print media, it has been reported, that predominantly women are objectified, however, still some segments showcase the empowered status of women in media. Despite of many controversies on this topic, this scenario has not changed till date. Lately with more and more women becoming educated and empowered and taking up jobs in various fields where previously men used to have monopoly, the print media along with broadcasting and online media have attempted to be friendly and have become more sensitive towards women issues. These changes are also due to the fact that now women workforce is engaged in reporting, editing and publishing the news. Nevertheless, it can be seen that though there is increase of female

population becoming financially independent, but it does not have that much impact on the issues of gender inequality. It has been observed that though the print media can easily break the negative stereotypes of representation of women it is busy in objectifying and derogating the roles of women. Similarly, the advertisements in the print media depicts women in acquiescent roles while men are showcased as leaders. Women are often reckoned only for their aesthetic worth. Print media has commercialized the body of women and thereby setting beauty standards for the female readers as well as the male audience. These trends pose as a deterrent in the path of empowerment of women in general. It makes women more vulnerable to fall prey to the exploitation of female sexuality and in turn becomes a catalyst for increase in crimes against the female population. Though it has been noted that the intensity of rising vulnerability in print media is less as compared to other forms of media such as web media, broadcasting, social media, mass media, television, digital media etc. This is due to the fact that they can easily blend technology to distort female body images. On the basis of all the points that have been discussed above it is clear that still there is a major issue in the perspective of the people regarding the image of women of the modern society. The children of the younger generation must be raised in such a way so that they have respect for their mother, sisters, wife and daughter. Thus, the sole objective of the print media should be to present the matter relating to women in such a way that should not by any means degrade the status or image of women. Further the media should put emphasis on the portrayal of equal and rightful role of women in society. To change this scenario

the media should be closely monitored along with this the boons and banes must always be pointed out to avoid derailment from the right path.

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Towards Extinction: Identifying the Realities of the Necrocene in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Moupikta Mukherjee and Agnideepto Datta

In the intricate tapestry of modern society, the interplay between economics, the human body, and mortality gives rise to a complex phenomenon that has been aptly termed "death capitalism." This concept encapsulates the unsettling fusion of capitalism's reach with the most intimate aspects of human existence—the body and its ultimate fate. As Zygmunt Bauman observed, "Modernity has brought about a 'liquid' character to human life," a liquidity that not only shapes the contours of life but also seeps into the very fabric of death itself (Bauman 17). This dynamic intertwining of capitalism and the human body unveils profound questions about ethics, commodification, and the limits of human agency.

The commodification of the human body within capitalism stretches far beyond its material form. As French philosopher Michel Foucault noted, "Our body is our general medium for having a world" (Foucault 137). Within the capitalist framework, this world-construction takes on an economic dimension, where bodies become commodities to be managed, marketed, and manipulated for profit. From the fashion industry's relentless standardization of beauty to the medicalization of cosmetic enhancements, capitalism's influence on the body is a palpable manifestation of the broader consumer-driven ethos (Foucault 136). This has culminated in the "beauty myth," a term coined by Naomi Wolf to describe the profitable industry that capitalizes on women's insecurities about their bodies, thereby maintaining a cycle of consumption (Wolf 11). The concept of death capitalism probes even deeper, unraveling the way capitalism extends its grasp beyond the boundaries of life. The business of death, with its funeral industry, organ trade, and digital afterlife, starkly exemplifies capitalism's persistence into the realm of mortality. Zygmunt Bauman's notion of the "liquid modernity" is starkly echoed in the transmutation of death from a traditional, immutable endpoint to a fluid experience that is increasingly managed, mechanized, and monetized (Bauman 3). Death capitalism's intrusion into the process of dying and the rituals of mourning raises ethical concerns, as the sanctity of death becomes entangled with the profit motive. The emergence of the Capitalocene, characterized by unprecedented ecological disruptions and human-induced environmental crises, can be traced back to the profound influence of capitalism on shaping the relationship between humanity and nature. Capitalism's pursuit of relentless economic growth and profit maximization has catalyzed widespread environmental degradation and resource depletion (Moore 73). As Foster argues, the

inherent logic of capitalism, grounded in the perpetual accumulation of capital, often disregards ecological limits and fosters a culture of exploitation (12). The commodification of nature within capitalist systems has accelerated deforestation, increased carbon emissions, and driven species to extinction, underscoring the transformative impact of capitalism on the Earth's ecosystems (Moore 108). Moreover, capitalism's tendency to exacerbate social inequalities further deepens the environmental crisis, as marginalized communities disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental hazards (Harvey 119). In essence, the

Capitalocene stands as a testament to capitalism's pivotal role in reshaping the planet, underscoring both its remarkable capacity for economic expansion and its disregard for the delicate balance of the natural world.

The advent of the Capitalocene has engendered a profound impact on the human body, unveiling the intricate interplay between capitalist modes of production and the corporeal realm. As industrialization and consumerism burgeon, health disparities have magnified, illustrating capitalism's ability to mould bodies into sites of exploitation (Sparke 235). This phenomenon echoes Foucault's concept of biopolitics, wherein power is exercised over populations through control over life processes (Foucault 139). The commodification of healthcare, driven by profit motives, has created a system wherein access to well-being is stratified, reflecting capitalism's divisive ethos (McNay 54). Moreover, the Capitalocene's rampant environmental degradation has led to health repercussions, with pollutants disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Haraway 34). The concept of biopower, as delineated by Foucault, elucidates this nexus by highlighting how governing entities assert dominance over populations' biological processes (Foucault 139). The Capitalocene magnifies these dynamics, as corporations exploit bodies for profit, and systemic inequalities are etched onto flesh and biology. In sum, the confluence of the Capitalocene and Foucault's biopolitics unveils a critical lens through which to decipher the corporeal toll exacted by capitalism's voracious grasp. The transition from the Capitalocene to the Necrocene, as articulated by Justin McBrien, unveils a grim trajectory where capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit intertwines with ecological degradation to propel humanity toward a future characterized by death and destruction. McBrien's framework underscores the acceleration of environmental crises under capitalism, emphasizing the Anthropocene's transformation into the Necrocene through escalating ecological violence (McBrien 189). The Capitalocene's voracious resource extraction and disregard for ecological limits exacerbate the entropic processes within the Earth system, hastening the Necrocene's ominous arrival (McBrien 190). The commodification of life under capitalism, echoed by McBrien's interpretation, culminates in a necropolitical landscape where the accumulation of capital thrives at the expense

of ecosystems and marginalized communities (McBrien 36). The Necrocene emerges as a manifestation of capitalism's necrotic logic, where exploitation, death, and environmental collapse coalesce (McBrien 191). In essence, McBrien's conceptualization illuminates the harrowing convergence of capitalism's rapaciousness and the ecological decay that portends the dawn of the Necrocene. What emerges as the central theme is the concept that the human body, often referred to as 'bios', has undergone a devaluation, becoming intricately entwined with the dynamics of the economy, profit generation, authoritative control, and a complex web of power structures within society. In Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008) engaged within a game, the individuals find themselves in a scenario where both the essence of the human self and the fundamental life force,

'bios', often undergo obliteration. This transpires without the intrusion of any overarching political upheaval or tumultuous event that would otherwise mould and define their lives in that precise moment.

The White Tiger is a novel written by Aravind Adiga and published in 2008. It is a darkly comedic and satirical narrative that explores the stark contrasts between India's social classes and the corrupt underbelly of its economic growth. The story is presented as a letter from the protagonist, Balram Halwai, to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, who is about to visit India. Balram, who refers to himself as *The White Tiger*, addresses the Premier as an equal and shares his life story as a means of exposing the harsh realities of India's social and economic landscape. The novel *The White Tiger* written by Aravind Adiga is set in modern-day India and revolves around Balram Halwai, a poor and ambitious young man from a rural village. Balram's family is trapped in a cycle of poverty, and he is determined to break free from it. Through cunning and manipulation, he secures a job as a driver for a wealthy family in Delhi. He serves the Stork family, consisting of Mr. Ashok Stork and his wife Pinky Madam. As Balram becomes more familiar with the opulent lifestyle of the upper class, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the hypocrisy, corruption, and exploitation that define it. He witnesses the stark contrast between the privileged few and the vast majority living in squalor. Balram's resentment grows, and he begins to plot a way to escape his servitude and claim his own piece of the economic pie.

One pivotal event that drives Balram's decision is a hit-and-run incident. While driving intoxicated, Pinky Madam kills a child from a lower-caste family. Balram is aware that the Stork family will use their connections and wealth to evade justice. This event serves as a turning point, solidifying Balram's determination to break free from his servile role and become his own master. Balram hatches a daring plan to murder Mr. Ashok and steal a large sum of money. He successfully executes his plan, abandoning his role as a loyal driver and embracing a life of crime

and corruption. He starts his own business using the stolen money and gradually rises to power within the emerging economy of Bangalore. The novel's title, *The White Tiger*, refers to a rare and exceptional individual who rises from the darkness of poverty and servitude to become a predator, a successful entrepreneur who refuses to be trapped by societal norms and expectations. Balram sees himself as the embodiment of this metaphorical white tiger. In his letter to the Chinese Premier, Balram discusses the challenges he faced, the moral compromises he made, and the corrupt system that perpetuates India's inequalities. He is unapologetic about his actions, believing that he had to be ruthless to escape his predetermined fate. Through his narrative, Balram provides a searing critique of the social and economic disparities in India and the lengths to which individuals will go to secure their own survival and success.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga is a thought-provoking novel that delves into the complexities

of class, corruption, and ambition in modern India. Through the character of Balram Halwai, the novel explores the choices individuals make in a system that often offers limited options, and it sheds light on the harsh realities faced by those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Death is a repetitive element in the novel there are numerous deaths occurring throughout the novel, homicides too. The death of the poor girl, run over by Pinky in a fit of drunkenness to the murder of Ashok by Balram. These deaths starkly illustrate the unequal power dynamics at play, with these individuals' bodies ensnared by the class distinctions imposed upon them. Within capitalist neoliberal societies, the striking disparities in attention directed toward the deaths of the rich in comparison to those of the poor symbolize a deeply rooted societal imbalance. While the demise of the prosperous often garners extensive media coverage, replete with tributes and memorialization, the passing of impoverished individuals frequently meets with apathy, consigned to mere statistical data. This stark divergence underscores a troubling reality: in a system that exalts the accumulation of wealth, an individual's value appears to be gauged by the contents of their bank account. Amidst this preoccupation with capitalism, the narratives of the less fortunate remain marginalized, their struggles disregarded, and their deaths eclipsed, perpetuating an unending cycle of societal neglect that warrants our rigorous scrutiny.

In the epoch of the Capitalocene, the profound disparities in the perceived worth of life between the impoverished and the affluent are glaring reminders of capitalism's omnipresent grip on our existence. As Karl Marx so aptly stated, "Capital is reckless of the health or length of life of the labourer, unless under compulsion from society" (Marx 88). This observation encapsulates the essence of capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit, often at the expense of the lives of the working class. Furthermore, Marx's insight extends to the heart of the matter when he asserts, "The more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes" (Marx 131). In the Capitalocene, this notion becomes a harsh reality for the poor, whose labour fuels the capitalist machine, yet they often struggle to access the very fruits of their labour. Their lives are reduced to mere cogs in the profit-driven engine, where the value of their existence is eclipsed by the relentless pursuit of capital accumulation by the wealthy elite. In this unrelenting landscape, the Capitalocene continues to amplify the stark divisions between the rich and the poor, reinforcing the notion that under capitalism, the value of one's life is inextricably tied to their economic status. Pinky Shaw runs over a child on the street while she is drunk. When the child loses her life, it goes unnoticed, and the status quo remains unaltered. Remarkably, the system even goes so far as to set its machinery in motion to obscure the significance of the event and conceal the matter from scrutiny. Balram, who had so far been the loyal employee and had no participation whatsoever in the event of the homicide, is now asked to take the responsibility and serve the consequences of the homicidal act committed by Pinky. This underscores the persisting reality that the lives of those with fewer material accumulations are often assigned lesser value.

Consequently, the punitive measures that might have been imposed on Balram would likely have led him down a similar path as the girl who tragically lost her life.

In the realm of political and biopolitical significance, it becomes evident that the boundaries between long-term imprisonment and death blur into an unsettling convergence. Michel Foucault's work on the dynamics of power reveals that both mechanisms serve as potent instruments for control and domination within society. Imprisonment, characterized by the restriction of one's freedom and rights, often stands as a close cousin to death in its capacity to strip individuals of their agency and humanity (Foucault 164). Furthermore, Giorgio Agamben's exploration of the "state of exception" sheds light on how the suspension of legal norms in situations of long-term incarceration can render individuals politically insignificant. Within such a state, people exist in a liminal zone where their rights are suspended, effectively transforming their lives into a form of living death, devoid of political significance (Agamben 37). In this light, both long-term imprisonment and death emerge as powerful tools through which the political apparatus can exert control and diminish the significance of individual lives, highlighting the intricate interplay between power, life, and death in our biopolitical landscape.

In contemporary political landscapes, the concept of "necropolitics," as articulated by Achille Mbembe, emerges as a critical lens through which we can understand the stark disparities in the valuation of human life, particularly concerning the marginalized and impoverished. Mbembe's ground breaking work highlights the troubling phenomenon where state power extends beyond the management of life, crossing into the terrain of death. In his seminal book "Necropolitics," Mbembe explores how oppressive regimes and power structures often wield the ultimate authority not just in governing life but also in determining who lives and who dies (Mbembe 79). Within this framework, the impoverished find themselves ensnared in a complex web of systemic devaluation. Their lives, marked by poverty and vulnerability, are rendered expendable in the eyes of the powerful. The state's capacity to regulate life and death becomes a strategic tool for maintaining control, often leading to the abandonment and even extermination of marginalized communities (Mbembe 83). This narrative is epitomized by Balram, the young girl on the street, as well as his fellow villagers and even his own family, all trapped in what he describes as a state of perpetual "darkness." While Balram has succeeded in eluding the clutches of destitution, the relentless forces of poverty persistently attempt to reclaim him. Their existence remains devalued and disregarded.

Henceforth, the fragility of these lives ushers in an era akin to what we may term the "Necrocene." This epoch gravitates around the omnipresent spectre of death, with characters existing in a state of mere survival, overshadowed by the palpable sense of life's inherent worthlessness. Consequently, this prevailing sense of death underscores the intricate workings of the political landscape, wherein class distinctions are underscored by the ever-present threat of mortality. The accumulation of

wealth, central to human existence within this society, is intrinsically tied to this culture of death. As a result, the entire economy of this civilization becomes permeated by this shadow of mortality, causing various political and interpersonal relationships to become entangled within this economy of death. This paradigm can best be comprehended as the "Necrocene," a progression from the earlier notions of the "Capitalocene."

Death isn't limited to exerting its influence solely over the political dynamics of the impoverished; it also entwines itself within the lives of the wealthy, albeit in a manner nuanced and distinct from that experienced by the less privileged. In the words of Balram, who poignantly refers to the marginalized as the "people from the darkness," this relationship with mortality for the affluent strata of society bears a complexity uniquely its own. The necroreality that underpins the lives of the rich and affluent unfolds with distinct nuances. Take, for example, the case of Ashok, whose fate takes a chilling turn as he falls victim to Balram's murderous act. Ashok, driven by an intense desire to break free from his predetermined destiny as one hailing from the "darkness," experiences a profound epiphany. His realization centers on the opportunity to escape the inescapable curse that society has placed upon him. At the heart of this transformation lies a

substantial sum of money intended as a bribe for a high-ranking minister. The very nature of this money, tainted by its intended use as a tool of corruption, serves as the catalyst that liberates Balram from his self-imposed ethical constraints. In this pivotal moment, he resolves to resort to theft as a means of securing his own emancipation from the shackles of his existence. Ashok's life ultimately succumbs to the inexorable embrace of the "necro," unleashing a cascade of consequences that reverberate far and wide. The aftermath of this tragedy, wrought by the influential family's actions, stands in stark contrast to the aftermath of the girl's tragic accident. Unable to apprehend Balram, the repercussions of his actions manifest in a brutal and unforgiving manner. Back in his remote village, his entire family becomes the unfortunate victims of a merciless massacre. This grim event gives rise to yet another chilling episode of necroreality, where the boundaries between life and death blur, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake. Consequently, Balram manages to evade his predetermined fate and surmounts the formidable barriers of his social class. He emerges as the quintessential embodiment of a marginalized individual who has redefined the political landscape to his advantage. Within the overarching framework of the necrocene, we witness the transformation of someone once considered a potential victim into a figure who orchestrates a momentous event characterized by a transcendence that extends beyond the boundaries of mere survival. This event, in its essence, becomes emblematic of a necroeconomic renaissance, signalling a profound shift in the dynamics of power and agency.

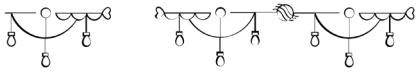
In the tumultuous era of the Necrocene, the relentless interplay of power relations has brought human life to the forefront of existential contemplation. Within this delicate framing of human

existence, the prominence of power division, particularly rooted in class distinctions, emerges as a pivotal driving factor shaping the evolving storyline. In echoing the poignant words of Michel Foucault, "Power is not wielded from above but circulates throughout society, inscribing itself into every facet of human life" (Foucault 34). The Necrocene, with its alarming environmental crises and socio-economic disparities, accentuates this concept. Power manifests not only in corporate boardrooms but also in the inequities that dictate access to clean air, water, and sustenance. The Anthropocene goes beyond being just a name; it serves as a conceptual lens through which we can gain insight into humanity's connection with the natural world (Stubblefield 1).

As humanity grapples with the dire consequences of unchecked power dynamics in this epoch, the pursuit entails us towards rectifying these injustices and towards the attainment of a more equitable and emancipated society. Indeed, the Necrocene has laid bare the vulnerabilities and

inequalities that permeate our societies, challenging us to address the systemic disparities that threaten the survival of our species. Within this narrative, we discern a nuanced portrayal of a character who emerges from the clutches of oppression and, in a dramatic turn of events, orchestrates a transformation in his favour. Yet, in doing so, he becomes the direct instigator of a fatal act, taking Ashok's life. Aravind Adiga navigates the ethical complexity of this character's actions, offering a narrative that blurs the boundaries between a Machiavellian figure and a modern-day Robin Hood. What becomes apparent in Adiga's storytelling is that this character, despite his ascent across class lines, rationalizes his actions based on his deeply personal ethical convictions. This ethical ambiguity shrouds him in a moral haze, leaving readers pondering the intricate interplay of power and ethics in his journey. Indeed, he orchestrates a daring escape with the funds acquired through Ashok's demise, yet paradoxically, he retains a lingering sense of empathy for those who now toil as his employees in the burgeoning enterprise he oversees in Bangalore.

In this narrative, Adiga intricately weaves a tapestry of moral complexity, presenting a character who defies easy classification. He is neither wholly Machiavellian nor purely a Robin Hood archetype. Instead, he emerges as a character at the intersection of conflicting ethical realms, embodying the tension between personal conviction and the consequences of his actions, all while navigating the shifting dynamics of power and class. In closing, the Necrocene stands as a stark reminder of the intricate web of power relations, particularly along class lines, that shape human existence in these critical times. It beckons us to heed the wisdom of scholars and thinkers, and to collectively strive for a world where power is harnessed not for the enrichment of the few, but for the flourishing of all life on Earth.



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An 'Other' Space: Interrogating the Choice and Portrayal of the Subject Matter and Subject Location in Selected Texts

Tirna Sadhu

According to Gyanendra Pandey, India saw the birth of the Nehruvian ideal of a modern, secular, welfare state, which was guiding a rising population toward socialism and secularismthrough the gentle arts of persuasion, education, and democracy. Pandey also indicates that inthe 1980s, strong right-wing movements in Hinduism (and Sikhism) emerged with the fundamentalist and absolutist forces that were present throughout the world. In their own "civilized suburbs," this decade had seen the defenseless parade and spectacular acceptance of dangerous types of violence.

1947's riots gave rise to latest subjects and their positions. This fact alone made it necessary to reevaluate the conventional understanding of history which is an activity with a constant subject. Families, people, and communities across the subcontinent were tasked with reinventing themselves in the wake of the Partition catastrophe. They had to struggle against fresh concerns over and over again, gradually rebuild faith, trust, and hope, and forge new memories and histories that, in some people's eyes, are best forgotten.

Partition characterized Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus as either butchers or cunning people who are unreliable and anti-national. Men, women, and children who are a part of these communities yet come from different castes, classes, occupations, language and cultural backgrounds have been identified by their Sikh-ness, Muslim-ness, or other identity since 1947. or Hindu-ness over extended periods of time throughout the subcontinent. Not to forget that at regular intervals the Christians were treated in a similar way.

An account of the attacks' ferocity and the speed with which they swept from the towns to the countryside was once written by a British general. Attacks were fiercer, more untamed, and more unforeseen than ever in Rawalpindi and Multan. Large groups of Muslim peasants from several outlets and villages attacked Sikh and Hindu homes and businesses in the countryside, destroying and looting them. In some places, men, women, and children were beaten or slashed to death, or burned alive indoors, where brutality was practiced to an extreme. Males being forced into conversion and females being kidnapped has been a typical occurrence. By the end of April 1947, it was noted that the official estimates that the number of refugees in Punjab were about 80,000. As well as Delhi and the UP, this material was aimed at central and East Punjab.

In remote areas of Punjab, Hindus and Sikhs banded together in their heightened animosity of all Muslims, which over time evolved into organized conflict.

According, to Pandey, the Sikh leaders exhorted every living Sikh to "give his [sic] best in the cause of the Panth which is covered in courageous glory by the numerous sacrifices of our martyrs" and to "give his

[sic] best in the spirit of sacrifice, chivalry and bravery as exhibited and demonstrated by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh Ji."

Urbashi Butalia's stories of Partition are also fraught with the horrifying images of trauma, pain and violence so much so that it was extremely difficult for her to document her experienceson paper. Time and again records prove that the unrepairable damage incurred by Partition hadhad to become an inseparable part of a refugee's, or an immigrant's, or a survivor's or a victim's life to such an extreme that Partition can be rightly be identified as an unfinished project.

The concept of an 'Other' space in literature is a multifaceted and dynamic subject that explores how authors choose and depict subject matter and subject locations in their texts. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the key themes and discussions surrounding the portrayal of 'Other' spaces in literature, focusing on the choice of subject matter and subject location. By examining a selection of relevant texts and critical works, this review seeks to shed light on the various ways in which authors engage with 'Other' spaces, the motivations behind their choices, and the implications of these portrayals.

The term 'Other' spaces in literature refers to settings and subject matter that deviate from the norm or challenge established conventions. These spaces often involve marginalized or underrepresented communities, cultures, or perspectives. 'Other' spaces can encompass a wide range of settings, from physical locations such as foreign countries or rural areas to psychological or metaphorical realms that disrupt conventional narratives.

Authors often make deliberate choices when selecting subject matter for their works. These choices can be motivated by various factors, including personal experiences, social and political contexts, and artistic objectives. The portrayal of 'Other' spaces through subject matter selection can serve as a vehicle for exploring themes of identity, belonging, and cultural diversity. For example, the works of authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Jhumpa Lahiri delve into the immigrant experience, offering insights into the challenges and triumphsof individuals navigating 'Other' spaces in foreign lands.

Subject location plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative and the reader's perception of 'Other' spaces. Authors may choose to set their stories in specific geographic regions or withinconfined spaces to convey a sense of confinement, isolation, or displacement. The subject location can also serve as a backdrop for exploring broader social, political, or environmental issues. For instance, postcolonial literature often highlights the impact of colonialism on subject locations, shedding light on the struggles of colonized peoples. The portrayal of 'Other' spaces in literature raises questions about power dynamics and representation. Authors, particularly those from dominant cultural backgrounds, must navigate the responsibility of accurately representing 'Other' spaces

without exoticizing or essentializingthem. The risk of reinforcing stereotypes or perpetuating biases is a constant concern, emphasizing the importance of authenticity and cultural sensitivity in literary depictions.

Literary works frequently intersect 'Other' spaces with other dimensions of diversity, such as race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. This intersectionality adds layers of complexity to the portrayal of 'Other' spaces and underscores the need for nuanced, multidimensional representations. Authors who successfully navigate these intersections contribute to a richer understanding of the diverse human experience. The portrayal of 'Other' spaces in literature is a dynamic and evolving field of study, encompassing a wide range of subject matter and subject locations. Authors make deliberate choices in their depiction of these spaces, driven by personal, cultural, and artistic motivations.However, the responsibility of accurate representation, avoiding stereotypes, and addressing intersectionality remains central to the discussion. As literature continues to evolve, scholars and writers must critically interrogate the portrayal of 'Other' spaces, recognizing the profoundimpact these representations have on our understanding of diverse human experiences.

The paper hopes to state the fundamental tenants that initiated Partition and discuss the subsequent effects of the same across boundaries from time then to time now. Said's Orientalism, Menon and Bhasin's first hand documents of Partition as a feminist activist would one at a time theoretically substantiate the ongoing argument about the exile, the silencing of the Other, the dislocated identity that the aforementioned texts (Ghosh's Shadow Lines, Sidhwa's The Ice- Candy Man, Masud's "The Clay Bird") have pertinently figured out through the variety of characters and conditions. Urbashi Butalia's narratives about her life as Partition victim as recorded in *The Other side of Silence* would draw a reflection of how Indianness had been purposefully divided into Bengali-ness and Muslim-ness.

There is a long line of Bengali writers to have provided creative responses to the 1971 War. The scarcity of the English responses in way challenges or demeans their existence. Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* remarkably documents the violent, historical and silenced responses to Partition. Despite spending a portion of their life in South Asia, members of the Indian diaspora in the United States, including Amitav Ghosh, have been found to have documented the reactions to Partition. Undoubtedly, this calls into question the selection of the subject and setting. This inquiry takes into account the interaction between the peripheral space of diaspora and the silent and muted Bengal Partition. These writers' reactions don't take up either the space of their place of origin or that of a total outsider who is viewing the historical event from afar. Therefore, it can be rightly said that diaspora finds themselves in an-Other space.

This argument makes room for the Third space which indicates both the 'in-between' and the 'beyond' that allows openness and otherness to reign. As a result, this place is both a threat anda

source of affirmation for the "hyphenated people of the Diaspora," as the filmmaker T. Minh-ha Trinh put it. a location where one is able to see the clear division between the centre and the periphery but still feeling that they are an important component of the entire.

In light of the aforementioned contention, *The Shadow Lines* portrays the effects of Partition from the perspective of a protagonist who was not present for it. The story takes place in both India and London, but the setting in 1947 receives less attention than the grandmother's tale and the death of the protagonist (Tridib) during the Dhaka riots in 1964. The story occupies a distinct space as a result of the usage of these obscure 1964 occurrences. The novel thus createsa connection between diasporic writing and the Bengal Partition. The narrative sees the marginalised subject giving voice to the marginal subject.

The grandmother's and other people's quiet and concealment around Tridib's passing are comparable to the official history's silence regarding savagery in the narrative of human advancement and emancipation.

Ice Candy Man discusses how India's Partition had intensively juggled and uprooted the dreams of innumerable leaving behind betrayal of human trust and indomitable vacuity of lifeless air.

In her work, Sidhwa expresses her worry for her Parsi community, the women's status in Pakistani society, and the ongoing fight for survival and dignity. She draws attention to the fact that division is imminent and that the issue of allegiance pervades Parsi culture. Before Lahore witnessed the Partition of India, the eight-year-old Parsi girl who serves as the child narrator

Lenni lived a happy existence with her family. Lenni. Lenny hurts herself on one leg; Dr. Bharucha repeatedly applies plaster, but the outcomes are never as expected. The kid's recovery was impossible, not even after surgery. Lenny's parents are reassured by Dr. Bharucha that he would eventually regain his regular gait. Before Partition, Lahore was home to members of many communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsis.

The child narrator is deliberately introduced to show how with the child growth the world around her was also subject to enormous changes. Sidhwa portrays participants of the Quit- India Movement and the Muslim League, latter of which had been inspiring the Muslim Community to call for a separate country for Muslims, as active in undivided India. Even though the phrase "Pakistan Zindabad" was regularly shouted in the streets, there was still unbroken communal unity. The heated argument between Mr. Singh, Lenny's neighbour, and British police officer Rogers at a dinner scene at Lenny's house foretold future conflicts. Peoplehad started to speculate about Pakistan, and minorities had started to talk about moving to saferareas. In the distance, rioting between Muslims and Hindus were beginning.

The split that India was about to experience was evident. This picture reminds readers that the novel that opens in 1942 had lived a united India which was an illusion versus the reality of Partition. The Salvation Army band is described by Lenny as a terrifying caterpillar that disintegrates into people as it approaches her. Lenny creates a dream land for herself to evade the dread that the real world provided and to survive the insecurity related to being a child witha deformity. However, her growth and consciousness forced her to confront reality in the end,a moment when her illusions were shattered.

The ice-candy-man is a popsicle vendor, a poet, Lenny's loyal friend, a romantic in his pursuit of Ayah, and a spiritual prophet. His persona changes throughout the story to support the illusion of his various identities. In actuality, the novel depicts him to be a vengeful power- hungry individual who uses cruelty and deceit to further his own interests.

Sidhwa prominently records the trauma and the triumph of being forced to survive in the Third space, an 'Other' space where reality demanded her child-narrator to learn to fight theoppressive patriarchal society and the tyrannical hold of the Pakistani government. The victimsand survived were merely bystanders whose bravery and fortitude were forgotten. However, the chosen and taken up space, has given eternal life in a well-known book. According to LouisHarrington, those who inhabit an-Other space defy the dominant narrative to present an alternative.

The three distinct approaches have been noted to have framed the Bengali Muslim identity are: Bengaliness, Muslimness and popular religion. Middle Age in Bengal had witnessed the advent of ethno-linguistic identity of the nation termed as Bengaliness. Bengaliness had been realized through Bengali literature and culture that had reached its peak in the 1960s. Specifically the Bengali language movement had resulted the birth of the nation in 1971. Evidence suggests that Muslimness as a religious identity was felt in the 19th century Bengal by an Islamic reformist movement. Finally, the Pakistan movement in 1910-40s in British India identified Muslimness as a religious identity.

With this ongoing debate regarding the historical background and ethnic identity the independent filmmakers began to advocate for Bengaliness with the intention to homogenize the nation through the nationalist narratives of Bengaliness. In this process they were othering Muslimness on the filmic narratives. As a result, the gap between the two conflicting identity approaches were widened.

The most celebrated popular religious cult existing in peripheral Bengal society is Baulism that encompasses three liberal approaches of the religions – Buddhists Tantrism, Islamic Sufism and Vaishnavism. Baulism is therefore a unique blend of devotional and liberal religious cult.With these ideas in mind, "The Clay Bird" by Tareque Masud can suitably be analysed to havescreened and constructed the three approaches of Bengali Muslim identity.

The film portrays the birth of Bangladesh as a nation through the curious eyes of a pre-teen named Anu. Apart from the political incidents, the film successfully documents all the three identity approaches of Bengali Muslims through the life of the pre-teen Anu and the queasy variety of incidents surrounding his life. On being the son of an orthodox Muslim villager named Kazi Majharul Islam, he was sent to madrasah in order to stop him from watching 'Hindu rubbishes' (religious and cultural events and festivals) along with his 'secular' uncle Milon. The madrasah, the breeding ground for radical Islam, did not allow Anu's long hair, hewas made to wear the madrasa uniform, and his name was changed from Anu to Muhammad Anwarul Islam. Of all the mates, Rokon was his only friend who had a hideaway place in the jungle with a lot of odd collections. The barbaric treatment that Rokon receives at the later partof the film raises question about the politics of religion and the form of rationality. Kazi's scholastic Islam relegates him into the broader Muslimness part of identity whereas his brotherMilon later in the film transforms into nationalist Bengaliness part of identity.

Kazi disliked his wife singing and sewing a bird in a handkerchief. His obstinate preference for homeopath instead of modern allopathic treatment had been the sole cause of Asma's (Kazi's daughter) death. He doesn't even want to keep the window of the house open, through which he assumed certain un-Islamic element may get inside.

The West Pakistani military attack on civilians in Dhaka in the midnight of March 25, 1971 forced people to flee from the capital of East Pakistan and to shelter themselves elsewhere. Kazi believed that the military was coming to assure peace, protection and security to their peripheral village. The belief stopped him from running elsewhere, the next morning the housewas found destroyed and burnt by military with Kazi lying prostrated at a corner of the damagedhouse, blankly gazing, at the tiny homeopathic pills in their glass tubes, those same which failed to save his daughter.

The strict, rude and orthodox Baro Hujur (senior teacher), who thought Islam to be a complete code of life represented the Muslimness approach of identity versus the soft and loving Ibrahim Hujur (junior teacher) who did not prefer Jihad to uphold Islam in society as political extremism for him was not the job of a teacher of madrasah believed in Sufism (a stream of popular religion). Ibrahim Hujur reminds Halim Mia that Islam in Bengal was not introduced by sword but because of the creative and poetic invitation to Islam by Sufi saints, people converted to Islam.

Tareque Masud's agreement and preference of popular religion creates the privilege to discuss the background and characteristics of the aspects of the identity, which is perhaps never explored by other independent filmmakers.

As of the tittle of the film, a clay bird was gifted to Asma by Anu which she was to force to hide as Kazi was strongly against any form of idolatry. The bird falls down from inside of theroof the

morning after the military onslaught. The word 'clay bird' is heard in a song sung by a female bayati in a village concert. The clay bird symbolizes the central theme of the film thathuman being is made of clay and the soul is connected to a free bird. The soul encaged in a body of limitations, of fragility, of vulnerability holds the intense desire for freedom. The claybird laments:

"Why did you infuse my heart with longing

If you didn't give my wings the strength to fly?"

Masud addresses the issue of freedom vs various forms of human limits, including socio-religious and political ones, as a variety of characters pursue various forms of freedom. The pursuit of an identity that was meant to be free was apparent throughout the entire country. The relationship between the soul and the body was underlined in the movie, which also paid homage to Sufism.

As a result, the shifting patterns of intercommunal relations reveal a pattern of intercommunal harmony between Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims during the Partition era. During the eve of Partition, the ever-increasing sense of agitation and suspicion between them had led to in the irreparable communal discord during Partition, and the image of reconciliation was evoked by the dawning of understanding between them in the post-Partition era, which was still far off in the distance.

In the broken world of confusing identities and fake nationalism, Amitav Ghosh wished to challenge the boundaries and lines that we have come to regard as real. He did this by weavinga larger narrative about challenging preconceived notions into the story about a family's history.

Sidhwa establishes connections with people who broaden her perspective and empower her to make wise choices based on her newly discovered compassion and love.

Finally, Masud advocates the ability of popular religious culture to embrace both progressive and modern Bengaliness and conservative Muslimness. It can be assumed that the Hindu and Muslim people in Bengal have been able to gather under the tree of popular religion.

Therefore, the survivors continue to adapt and adjust themselves in a space that they can never term as their own. But, are fortunate enough to possess the choice of portraying who they are amidst all newer challenges and inhibitions.

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Rudyard Kipling: A Profile of His Controversial Life

Rituparna Chakraborty

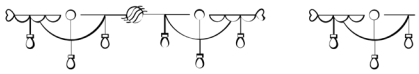
The ambit of the Anglo-Indian literature certainly occupies a significant space even in the vast and ever-increasing domain of English literature. It is because this branch of literature, which may be phased out in different stages in terms of its diverse subject matter and import, has a few stories of its own in connection with India under the British Empire. In the first place, it means the trove of literature produced during the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by a segment of British administrators, missionaries and soldiers who, in the course of their services for the empire, wrote about their experiences even as they often suffered from a traumatic sense of identity crisis. Yet there can be no doubt that having lived for a long time in an alien and exotic location in connection with their services, at least quite a few of them came to be imbued with a rather tottering feeling of affinity for India. But even then, they could hardly ever transcend their racial /national complex, thereby falling short of a genuine sense of belonging.

Anglo-Indian literature, the height of whose achievement was in some remarkable works written by Rudyard Kipling, ‘’was’’, in the account of *The ConciseCambridge History of English Literature*: ‘’written for the public at home as much as for the British in India.” But even if one critic argues that the interest of the Anglo-Indian literature for post- modern readers is largely historical, this is no reason for undermining the literary value and importance of this literature. This is because its best writers like Kipling were themselves painfully alive to their inescapable solitude. Indeed, they were very much alive to the charismatic aura of India and equally aware of the cumbersome weight of the past and the unrequited prospects of the future. According to *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, ‘Anglo-Indian literature meant also the literature written in English by Indian themselves, many of whom had been educated both in India and in England, and who had thus the advantage possessing of a cosmopolitan view. And finally, it meant the literature written by those like the poet Henry Louis Vivian Derozio - the author of *The Fakeer of Jungheera* (1828), who, Eurasian by blood, were Anglo- Indian in the literal sense.” (Sampson 734)

Kipling’s grandfathers on both his paternal and maternal sides had been Wesleyan preachers and this proselytizing streak may have been inherited by Kipling. As he himself wrote to his cousin

Florence Mac Donald: “Three generations of Wesleyan ministers … lie behind me…the pulpit streak will come out.” (Cited in Wilson 7).

John Wesley the harbinger of the Wesleyan methodism was well known for the gospel of work and ardour. Kipling may be supposed to have inherited these instincts from his ancestors. He also might have inherited from them the idea of clothing thoughts about life and war in the biblical language



of the psalms and the proverbs in particular.

Kipling's mother's family was a cultivated one where studies and music used to be conducted at a pitch higher than in typical Victorian households. It was a family whose members were sociable and witty. Nevertheless, as Angus Wilson observes, his great-grandfather's dictate held sway in the family: "never a moment unemployed or triflingly employed.'' (Wilson 8). All through his life, Rudyard Kipling too acted in conformity to this maxim.

The reasons why Rudyard showed a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm about his ancestral roots in which lurk quite a few curious stories of his life, are various. One reason may be that since his young adulthood in India, he ideologically eschewed radicalism and abhorred pacifism, which had much to do with methodism. He presumably developed a sort of revulsion against this theological belief for its denouncement of soldier hood which has always been grand and glorious vocation in Kipling's estimation. In his story *Soldiers Three*, a soldier called Learoyed rues the fact that from hearing chapel folk talk about soldiery, one might "think that soldier was next door an' other side to hang in'.'' (Cited in Wilson, 9). Kipling's aversion to his ancestral roots may be because of the fact that any dwelling on personal heredity would be an assertion of the personal traits of a man's identity, rather than an acknowledgement of fealty to Nation, caste and race, which Kipling believed to be the real repositories of a man's true strength and loyalties. Kipling believed that any excessive emphasis on genetic determination was to trivialize a man's own responsibility for his doings and undoings.

Born in Bombay in 1865, Rudyard Kipling, was blessed with a culturally affluent parentage. His father John Lockwood Kipling, a designer, and an architectural sculptor, Curator of the Central Museum and Principal of the School of Art at Lahore and a profound authority in Indian crafts and customs, may have supposed to enriched his son's mind with a feeling for the cultural heritage of India. Kipling's mother Alice Kipling had artistic connections of her own, notably with William

Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites. One of her sisters married Edward Burne-Jones, a Pre-Raphaelite artist, who was given to an idealized eroticism and the evocation of ideal dreamworlds that were completely removed from the realities of life.

In April 1871, when Rudyard was still a small child, the Kiplings left India for a visit to England. Alice gave a perfunctory excuse in defence of this rather abrupt visit, that "she was able to be with John and help him with his work." (Wilson 17). Whatever may have been the actual reason behind this sojourn, it turned out to mark a catastrophic turning point in Rudyard Kipling's life. For before their return to Bombay, the Kipling couple left the nearly six-year-old Rudyard and his sister Trix, then a toddler a little above three years in age, under the care of two strangers, Harry Holloway and his wife, at Lorne lodge, a boarding house in South Sea. In his autobiography *Something*

of myself, Kipling described the house as "House of Desolation" (cited in Nandy 66). Why the children were not placed in the care of their affluent and refined aunts was a thing of mystery. Of course, it may have been that the aunts were not receptive, or that perhaps Lockwood and Alice Kipling were reluctant to ask for such a favour from their rich relatives. There may have been one major reason, however, why the Kiplings sent their children into a virtual exile at a time when they required parental affection and care. This was the general apprehension, very much prevalent among Englishmen in colonial India, that, half-caste ayahs and native servants of all kinds would influence British children into speaking native dialects more easily than English and in making them more Indian than European. Indeed, as Jad Adams writes in his book *Kipling: A Life* "Kipling – Rud baba to the doting servants- learnt to speak Hindustani as naturally as English, or even more so, and had to be corrected when he used the vernacular in his parents drawing room." (Adams 7). In *Something of myself*, Kipling confessed that he spoke English "haltingly translated out of the vernacular idiom that one thought and dreamed in." (cited in Adams 7).

The Kipling siblings' long stay at the South Sea lodge proved to be particularly disastrous for the hyper-sensitive Rudyard. The mistress of the lodge Rosa Holloway, was never an affectionate mother substitute to the young children. Instead, she and her thuggish son Harry bullied the strong-willed, defiant and often uninhibited Rudyard. Their brutality towards Rudyard had such a telling effect upon him that he finally had a "severe nervous breakdown made more horrible by partial blindness and hallucination" (Nandy 67). This might have irredeemably affected him, had his mother not arrived in England in March 1877, and rescued him from that "Hell". The story of the little boy flinging up an arm to ward off the cuff that he had been conditioned to expect, when his mother came to kiss him, good night is perhaps the most indicative of the trauma that the boy Kipling had suffered during the whole South Sea episode. This story, whether true or fictive, tells us of the psychosomatic dichotomy that Kipling's banishment created in the equation of the mother-child tie. As Kipling's sister Trix was to write in a letter: "…We felt that we had been deserted, 'almost as much as on a doorstep' …There is no getting out of that as we often said." (Cited in Nandy 66).

The story of Kipling's traumatized psyche, resulting from aunt Rosa's persecution of him, may be read as a conflict between the idea of childhood liberated and the first declining hunch of sinful childhood to be repressed and chastened in the Victorian and Calvinist concept of the Mistress of the "House of Desolation".

Critics like Edmund Wilson fear that Kipling's soul-wrenching experience in South Seas, cut such a deep wound in his psychosis that he could hardly ever extricate himself from his horror in remembering Aunt Rosa's instruction in the idea of sinful childhood's subjection to eternal damnation. In *With the Nightmail* (1904) one of his science-fiction views of the future world, the narrator looks back to "the horrible old days when men were taught that they might go to unspeakable torment after death."

(Cited in Wilson 32). In the story, *They,* the blind childless woman rues being scorned cruelly. The narrator comments: "I was silent, reviewing that inexhaustible matter- the more than inherited (since it is carefully taught) brutality of the Christian people, beside which the mere heathendom of the West coast Nigger is cleaned and restrained. It led me a long distance into myself.'' (Cited in Wilson 33). In fact, Kipling was rather impervious to the minutiae of English Christian theological beliefs. The fact comes alive in the indignant tone in which Kipling recounts in *Something of Myself*, his sickening impression of the "House of Desolation'': "It was an establishment run with the full vigour of the evangelical as revealed to the Woman. I had never heard of Hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors…." (Cited in Wilson 27).

In *Something of Myself*, Kipling wrote that his nauseating experiences in the south sea "drained me of any capacity for real, personal hate for the rest of my days. So close must any life-feeling passion lies to its opposite.'' (Cited in Wilson 33). There is a lot of controversies and debate about whether the bleak, distressing South Sea episode instilled in Kipling personal hatred such as he could never overcome it. Jad Adams, in his *Kipling: A Life*, observes Kipling was so severely psychologically damaged by his experience that "he could always view them with renewed bitterness, and he was a champion hater all his life." (Adams 12). Nevertheless, there is at least one-story *Ba, Ba, Black sheep, published* in the sixth of the *Indian railway library series*, where Kipling's acrid disdain of his grisly South Sea memories vehemently explodes in his own impersonation as a little boy, treated as ignominiously as he was and remarks on the effect of the experience: "when young lips have drunk deep of the bitter waters or Hate, Suspicion, and Despair, all the Love in the world will not wholly take away that knowledge.'' (Adams 12). These and many other aspects of the hate question, so closely related to the life of Kipling, shall be rolled out in detail with matters, myths etc. in our latter chapters to be devoted to an elaborate discussion on the very crucial issues of castes, class and gender as reflected in the crucible of Kipling's myriad work and life.

A child's vision, whether it transforms a tiny space into a microscopic universe or contracted into a shady nook lulled by reverie, lies deep into the core of Kipling's imagination. We find it to have been manifested in his *Something of Myself*. The book informs us of his early boyhood experience with a Bombay of bright colour and aromatic fervour; of his rather tremorous reminiscences of his strolls with his Goan Christian ayah and his Hindu bearer. Kipling knew that he was just as much happy as his other counterparts of the Anglo-Indian community, left to be taken care of by servants and "seen only by their parents on a regular evening visit to the drawing room." That this happiness of his was indeed a disguised glumness is made evident in one of his stories of Anglo-Indian childhood, *His Magesty the King*, in which one Mrs. Anstell says when asked about her little son's happiness: "These things are left to Miss Biddums and, of course, she doesn't ill-treat the child.'' (Cited in Wilson 3-4). One point must be made clear that how so ever supposedly idyllic

Master Kipling- menials relationship might have been, the unavoidable social hiatus which always remained frightfully in between them because of its class and racial basis, can by no means be ruled out. My introspection in terms of this class – racial discord between the young master and his servants despite their apparent closeness can be backed up by Kipling himself, who, displayed quite a racist apprehension about the "dangers posed by native servants to English children in the reeking atmosphere of the servants' huts, he soaks in Asiatic vices and meanness through every pore of his little white skin".(The Pioneer in December, 1885) (cited in Wilson 4).

Rudyard's academic life virtually opened with his admission to United Services College at West Ward Ho, a public school which was essentially instituted as a training ground for those who would later clear army entrance exams and qualify for imperial services. Tough games and Sports and ragging, forming an essential part of this school, were not the cup of tea for a poor- sighted, bibliophile, imaginative and a bit arrogant Ruddy. Anyway, in this United Services College he formed a very warm and amicable trio together with two other boys, Beresford and Dunsterville , whom he first fictionalised in Magazine stories published in 1897 -9 ; later issued as Stalky and company dedicated to his loving headmaster Cormel Price. Other Stalky stories came out in 1929. In the stories, Dunsterville who went on to be a soldier, is Stalky, whom Kipling hero-worshipped as his adolescent idol; Beresford, who later became a civil engineer is William M'Tuck and Beetle is a self-portrait. Their juvenile adventures concerned a sort of animal pleasure with getting out of school bounds for poaching and teenage experiments with tobacco and alcohol. More dramatised than real, the Stalky stories however, uphold the Kiplingian perception that the tricks, japs and feats of daring savoured by the boys had had their contribution to the training for those who would maintain the empire. Thus, we see that even in the very prime of his life, Kipling had a sort of ontological enamourment of an allegiance to his nation's colonisation and empire building, whose justification hardly ever pricked his conscience, although he suffered the ravages of a bifurcated identity, caused by the effects of his Indianness upon his English origin. Kipling strenuously endeavoured to impress upon himself the imperious belief that to colonialise India under the British imperialism was the ''white man's burden''; but Kipling had never been able to overcome this confusion about which side of the fence between the empire and India, his existence was actually enshrined. In fact, he was divided by his bi-culture, by his not so white complexion, by his psychotic ostracisation from the main stream of his country's purely white higher echelon, and ironically by his inevitable proximity to the soil and soul of Indian heterogeneous milieu. It is from this point of view that we need to telescope into his class, caste, race ideas and attitudes when we will go over to the chapter related to the issues.

Kipling's association with the law-dodging social underdogs during his out-of-bounds academic life curiously went in the formation of his code that "minor law-breaking was to be an important bolt-hole for the over-pressured man in society; by breaking petty laws, he would be stronger and

more able to keep the mysterious Law that governs all human beings.'' (Wilson 43). In the process of this code formation, he was interestingly seized with an idea that infringement of law was well discernible irrespective of all classes including "the Indian collie and the pathan and private soldiers and Hobden, the poacher (though of course each with his own caste) ….'' (Wilson 45).

The narration of Rudyard's rather unheroic academic career with just a few are references, the first being the United Services College boys' tersely pragmatic view of what Jad Adams calls "imperial mission". That is reflected in Kipling's boyhood idol Stalky's brutal reaction to the school sergeant Foxy's mourning for a former pupil: "… . It's old Duncan…Fat Sow Duncan killed on duty at something or other kotal… They cut'em up sometimes … poor, old, fat sow: …. "How many does that make t us, Foxy? Mr. Duncan, he is the nineth.:"(cited in Adams 18). Such cruel composure and caustic responses to the loss of a schoolmate might have hardened the Stalkies into impassive sentinels of the British imperialism, but it certainly shows them in a very lurid light of inhumanity. And if this be a part of Kipling's coinage 'Stalkyism', then it obviously repels any sensitive soul. The other reference is about Kipling's failure to have an access to Oxford, which is why he certainly envied his cousin Stanley Baldwin having gone to Cambridge. Conspicuously, Oxford men who feature in some of his stories, are presented in an unfavourable shade. For an instance, we find Kipling to have sketched in his story, *To be filed for Reference*, an Oxford man, Jellaluddin McIntosh as a vain bibulous and drug-addicted loafer; in *The Honours of War* (1911), Kipling sneers at a character called Wonterner because of his ridiculous boasting of being an Oxford man. However, Kipling had no reason to resent as in 1907 he was crowned together with Mark Twain, an honorary Oxford degree.

Kipling matured enough in the United services College. At the institution he developed his love of male comradeship which forms an essential part of his several works. He inculcated unfortunately a hero-adoring proclivity and set about weaving a pattern of foiled amore with strong women. Love came into his life only to leave him more lonely, more cynical and more confounded than he had ever been before. Jad Adams comments in connection with Kipling's foiled romance with a girl named Florence Garrad: "Kipling was instantly smitten with a love that would last 11 years and inform his attitude to women for the rest of his life." (Adams 19).

Kipling's arrival in Bombay in October 1882 may be metaphorically described as his long- cherished return to the "paradise" from where he had been long confined to the "House of Desolation''. Kipling now embarked on a journalistic career as the sub-editor of the Civil and Military Gazette. It was his training as a journalist that indeed triggered his emergence as a writer.

In the course of following a gruelling routine of turning news agency telegram into printable copy, Kipling mastered a bonanza of experiences of India's natural and socio-political milieu and learnt how to deal with the sensibilities of different communities and castes, He mingled with the rank

and file and bagged technical information , speech-patterns and stories about people – the White Christians of the Empire ,Muslims , Hindus and members of the Reform Atheistic movement of the Brahmha Samaj. All these experiences of multifarious colours were to become the fabric of his Indian stories. In *Something of Myself*, Kipling, while recapitulating his night-wanderings, writes: ''I would wonder till dawn in all manner of old places – liquor shops, gambling – and opium-dens which are not a bit mysterious, wayside entertainment, such as puppet shows, native dances;" (cited in Adams 29). An early biographer, Lord Birkenhead commented that it was during his journalistic life that Kipling "conceived his life-long devotion to the army, and his intense veneration of the man of action to the detriment of the thinker and the intellectual." (Cited in Adams 31). Much of the brutality of Kipling's work, if viewed from a psychological stand point, seems to be attuned to Kipling's willingness to supress his finer feelings in order to befriend the beefy giants, able and willing to die for the empire.

In his perusal of Kipling's literary exploits, George Orwell points out that what Kipling wrote about "the long service, mercenary army of the late 19th century'' as well as about the "19th century Anglo-India'' is "not only the best but almost the only literary picture we have. He has put on record an immense stuff that one could otherwise gather from verbal tradition or from unreadable regimental histories.'' (Sampson 740).

The substantiality of Orwell's observation on Kipling's contributions needs to be assessed in the light of his work, more fictional than poetic.

Kipling's first published story *The gate of the Hundred Sorrows* was printed in the Civil and Military gazette in September 1884. It is the rambling stream of consciousness monologue of an Anglo-Indian opium addict, caught in a dragnet of moral degradation and hopelessness. Kipling's next two stories, published in Quartette, a Christmas 1885 Supplement to the Gazette – *The Phantom Rickshaw* and *The Strange ride of Morrow-Bie Jukes*, are woven into a web of Indian Gothic- a lurid depiction "of the Dead who were alive" (cited in Adams 36), to quote Kipling himself.

With the publication of his first mature book of verse, *Departmental Deities*, concerned with Anglo-Indian life, Kipling rose to eminence as well as censure because of his satirical depiction of Her Majesty's Raj being administered by a self-serving autocracy. Then came into light his *Plain tales from the hills* on November 2, 1886. The stories deal with natives and native life, army annals and Shimla episodes featuring one Mrs. Hauks Bee, a charismatic woman who weaves in her mien sparkling wit and malice and mischievousness, all used by her to secure advancement for her second-rate young toadies.

Oscar Wilde's review of Plain *Tales* in *The 19th Century observes:* "…as one turns over the pages of *Plain Tales from the Hills*, one feels as if one were seated under a palm tree reading life by super

flashes of vulgarity. The jaded second-rate Anglo-Indians are in exquisite incongruity with their surroundings. …. He [Kipling] is our first authority on the second-rate." (Cited in Adams 42).

Kipling was much –travelled having made his home in four continents. He may be said to be a Francophiliac, despite the proverbial Anglo-French animosity. Anyway, towards the end of 1880, he left India, his alma matter, to nestle for good in Sussex, England, most probably because of his bi-cultural ambivalence and also because of his instinctive imperialistic pull. He might also have found India – or Anglo-Indian society no longer captivating for him. By late June 1880, he wrote: "I am more than ever set in my determination to go home and quit the Pi [Pioneer]…" (cited in Adams 54).

The metaphoric cornucopia of Kipling's literary gifts showed itself in its plentitude in England; most ironically it was here that the grave of his creative genius as well as his life was entrenched. However, with Mcmillan's publication of the much-quoted *The Ballad of East and West* in December 1889, Kipling was enshrined on the podium of poetic acclamation. Even Tennyson applauded Kipling as a young poet of "divine fire".

In the Savile club in London a rendezvous of literary luminaries like Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde, Kipling felt at ease with the conservative Hearties rather than the avant garde Decadents, although the latters like Wilde were no less enthusiastic about the values of Empire than Kipling was. Kipling lampooned caustically those "who talked about the aims of Art, / and theories and goal/ and moo and coo with women folk/ About their blessed souls." (Cited in Adams 64).

In the best part of his literary career, Kipling wrote a remarkable poem "Barrack Room Ballads."

Starting with "Danny Deever" in February 1890. As in several other fictional works and verses by him, so does this verse work resonates with Kipling's empathic identification with the common soldier, and strangely with the native people, although they always undergo the acrid savour of the coloniser's tyranny through the batons and bullets of the common soldiers. A few lines from "Danny Deever" may be quoted in this context: "They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away, / and they're hangin' Danny Deever in the morning …" (Kipling 171).

Jad Adams is of the opinion that children appear to have opened a spring flowing with narrative in Kipling's creative life. Needless it is to mention that it is the '' Mowgli stories'' in *The First and The Second Jungle book*, and much more remarkably in *Kim,* that children play heroic roles, transport us into a mesmeric world where the Eden of innocence and the dusty world of worldly guiles seem to shake hand with each other. Anyway, what ultimately rules the roost in Mowgli's animal world and Kim's human world, is the Empire's virulent "Game of Power'' and "Tooth and Claw''.

Other than these remarkable fictional works, there are quite a few more stories which legitimately

call for elucidation to explore Kipling's moral and socio-political perspective in terms of colonial India, the very historiography in which the stories are written.

Kipling's life was tempestuous and rocked violently by extremely painful inner-contradictions caused by his Indianized "orientalism'', caused by his bi-cultural predicament, by his cynicism and a pathetic Hubris. Equally enormous was his personal tragedy. His ghastly childhood memories of humiliations in the "House of Desolation" haunted him forever and affected his ''pen''. His unavoidable frustration with love became a constant haunting in his life. The first world war that stimulated Kipling's creative fervour for the last time, obviously because of his Nationalist-Imperialist bias, mercilessly devoured his beloved son John. Kipling wrote "My boy Jack'' with all the helplessness of an "orphaned'' father: "Have you heard news of my boy Jack?
/ Not this tide/ When d'u think that he'll come back? /Not with this wind blowing and this tide?'' (Cited in Adams 168). His dear daughter Josephine had died while he and his wife Carrie were in America. Such irrecoverable misfortunes together with his disenchantment with his own imperial illusion tragically stunted and sapped all his creative brilliance. In a self-tearing verse, Kipling wrote "if any question why we died, tell them because our father lied.'' (Cited in Adams 173).

The first English writer to have lifted the Noble Prize, Rudyard Kipling, despite being reasonably indicted for his racism, misogyny and imperialism, is still an enigmatic figure of immense literary, socio-political and psycho-analytical interests for the scholars and researchers on literature. "Kipling was often seen as an apologist for the empire: George Orwell famously called him a 'prophet of British Imperialism.' This was not without justification. But he did possess a genius for storytelling." (Vii, An introduction by Ruskin Bond in *In Black and White* by Rudyard Kipling).

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Vaughan's Ideology on Repentance, Grief and Mercy: An Epistemological Belief on the Doctrine of Devotion

Shantanu Siuli

Henry Vaughan, a Welsh poet, philosopher and a supreme believer of devout Anglican by heart, was born on 17th April 1621/22 at Newton St. Bridget in Llansantffraed of Brecknockshire, of whose Thomas Vaughan (of Tretower) and Denise Jenkin, having been a parent. In 1638-40, they went to Jesus College, Oxford for further studies, and after two years, in 1642 Henry went to London for the study of Law, but was called to return soon due to the outbreak of the Civil War. After his returned from London, he started practicing alchemy by his brother Thomas' influence, and remained himself busy with new experiments of different alchemical combination, and became gradually successful as a true practitioner. History does not corroborate the fact whether Henry Vaughan had a genuine medical degree or certificate, but the fact is genuinely true that he was a successful practitioner of alchemy and became renowned at his place by the river Usk, Brecknockshire. By the year 1646, Henry married to Catherine Wise, a Welsh woman, and after becoming a father of four children (1 male child Thomas and 3 girls Lucy, Frances and Catherine) spent a happy family life at Newton St. Bridget till the untimely death of his wife, Catherine.

In 1650, Henry Vaughan published volume 1 of his masterpiece, *Silex Scintillians,* for which he has been remembered nationally and internationally. He, due to the untimely death of his first wife in 1653, in 1655 remarried to Catherine's sister Elizabeth, but there is no authentic record about their children of second marriage. On the same year Vaughan published his Second Book of *Silex Scintillians* (1655).

During his career Vaughan had gone through different experiences and incidents that led him to turn the kinetics of his secular journey into the sacred one. The untimely death of his beloved brother William by the year 1648, the sudden death of his first wife Catherine, defeat of Catholicism by the Protestantism, banned of Common Book of Prayer, subsequent removal of both Matthew Herbert and his brother Thomas Vaughan from their religious offices- all seemed like a pestilence and malignant indication to him, forcing him to change his direction and route of secular into the sacred. These morose and downcast events in the social, political and religious age during which Vaughan lived in the city among his fellow people and relatives, gave him uncontrollable sorrows and pains.

In fact, Vaughan's transformation from the domain of Jacobean neoclassical poets to the Mystical (from the deepest connotation of the term *Metaphysical*) one is the exposition of his reaction to the English Civil War. Vaughan, when the English Church was outlawed and uncontrolled by the influx

of Protestantism, kept his deep faith on Anglican Church, like that of his master George Herbert. He wanted to keep the tradition of the Church of England not by objectifying God inside the church but rather by subjecting the living as well as non living entities around and beyond the church, signifying the deep manifestation of his God. Vaughan's primary concern, during 1650s- 1660s, was to inculcate the new faith and belief in Divine into the hearts of his people who were basically unknown to the fact that the existence and presence of God might be possible around them.

We must agree with the fact that Vaughan's way of penetrating the existence of God beyond church is noteworthy and straightforward, assimilating the voices of the Book of Common Prayer and Herbert's ways of meditation into a new unified sensibility and decorum of English Church of the modern world. In fact, his was the different roads, an unknown and unfamiliar path to follow the Divinity. Miss White, in this aspect, has rightly justified the fact that "Vaughan is unique too in having been born in the country with picturesque and beautiful scenery about him" (Simmonds 93). His passion and interest in nature is to discover and define the purpose of the hidden truth behind this aesthetic and decorative world, clarifying the object of the Divine truth and existence without any doubt. Vaughan's primary aim, through his devotional prayer, is to make sense of Him in His every creation and to praise significantly with emotion. The idea that the material world is the reflection of the immaterial is the chief concern of Vaughan's poetry, and searching rather than finding the true object of Divine is his supreme concern throughout his masterpiece *Silex Scintillians.* Vaughan's works related to man's frailty.

Before writing this paper, I have encountered different criticisms on Vaughan's works, his ideas, philosophy and overall introspective attitudes to nature having keen connection to humanity. I have scrutinized extensively Elizabeth Anne Acker's research paper "*God in Darkness: Mysticism and Paradox in the Poetry of George Herbert and Henry Vaughan",* demonstrating the general

view of the two poets' apparent mysticism and also analyzed what the mysticism is called from their ideological and systematic point of view. Then I have studied Elbert N. S. Thompson's article "*Mysticism in Seventeenth- Century English Literature",* exhibiting the concept of holiness and supreme purity of human soul required for attaining the grace of God. This article symbolizes the different aspects of mysticism and sources practiced since the last segment of the fourteenth century England. Apart from that I studied Karleen Middleton Quin' M.A. thesis "*Henry Vaughan Silurist: The Indwelling of God in Nature",* published by the Department of English of McGill University, Montreal in 1960, which demonstrated Vaughan both as a mystical poet as well as a hermetic philosopher who believed the concept of mysticism more than that of being a pious Anglican.

From Canon Beeching's introductory notes of *Poems of Henry Vaughan Silurist (Vol. II),* several information relating to Henry Vaughan's personal life and career have been flashed out to deliver

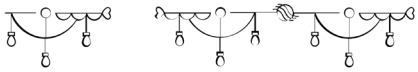
and set up a structure of Vaughan's biography. Beeching's works helped this paper to gather some invaluable materials over the character and deep philosophy both of the mind and the writings of Henry Vaughan. In fact, Don Cameron Allen's published paper *Vaughan's 'Cock-crowing' and the Tradition* demonstrates that one of the ways to find entry into Vaughan's country is to make our approach down the kind of traditional avenue the poet himself trod. This paper helped a lot to summarize the ideas on Vaughan's reciprocal thoughts. After that reading of M. M. Mahood's *Poetry and Humanism* has portrayed a valuable service in attempting to outline and interpret against their traditional background several of Vaughan's symbols and image clusters.

The fundamental aim of attaining and experimenting such a number of primary and secondary materials, to analyze the issue as well as to give some impetus too to the present relevance of this study, is and has been a great challenge for me since the beginning of writing this critical paper.

Vaughan's shift from secular to sacred demonstrates many factors, firstly letting him closer to the nature to vivify the primary concern of how Divinity would be attained and understood; secondly, made his knowledge clear that nature is the manifestation of God; and thirdly keep him more alert of the fact that due to the unknowing veil, human beings are unable to capture and have the grace of Divine. Vaughan keeps his faith on Anglicanism and is formulating and governing the ideas of Herbert to some new extents. Vaughan can be rather must be classified, what Mary Clayton Lanford briefly noted, 'as a man of intent on entering heaven by the narrow gate ("that a door may be opened to him in heaven")' (3). His religious transformation was heavily and influentially made first by reading Herbert's *The Temple* and secondly by the indirect effect of what is supposedly known as 'Hermeticism'. Vaughan also allocates the ideas of Herbertian ethics of devotion and evangelical thoughts, confirming his own journey towards the Divine, and assuming that his poetry might be able to soothe the laden and oppressed heart of the Christian.

The first duty of man ordained and brought forth into this world for that end, as Vaughan idealized, is to know his creator, and being known, to confess Him, and to resign his life which is the wonderful and peculiar gift of God, to the service and worship of the Giver; that what he received by God's free donation, may be employed in true devotion, and what was confessed upon him in the state of wrath and unworthiness, may be an obedient resignation make him glorious and beloved in *Soul Disposer of Life and Death*:

> Doe not goe, Thou know'st I'le dye, My Spring and Fall are in Thy Booke! Or if
>
> Thou goest, doe not deny
> To lend me, though from far, one looke !
>
> (Lines 1-4)



It is our best course, to bestow our greatest care upon the soul. Let the safeguard and the defence of this, take up all our forces; let it be not only our cheapest, but our soul delight. R. A. Durr, in this regard has pointed out 'our supreme duty is what we owe to God, and the next to it appertains to the soul' (61). By the unspeakable tenderness and mercy of God, the good we do to our souls, is the most acceptable service and sacrifice that we can offer unto Him. Shall the soul only be a stranger to those proper remedies ordained for it by the Physician? Yes, rather if so, many things are provided for the body, let the provision for the soul be far more abundant; for if it was truly said by some, that this freshly frame is the servant, and the soul the mystery. Let us employ all our innate forces, and all outward auxiliaries for the preservation of this, if we manage and defend if faithfully, we take care for, and protect the entrusted pledge and purchased possession of God:

> My sinners long since have made Thee strange, A very stranger unto me;
>
> No morning-meetings- since this change- Nor evening- walks have I with Thee.
> (Lines 5-8)

There can, therefore, be no cause for sparing and laying up, where salvation is forfeited, what gain or profit can be hope for? Or wherein shall the true treasure be laid up, or wherewith shall he receive it, when the soul's vessel, and the storehouse of eternal joys is utterly ruined and broken? Let us therefore while we have time, labour for true riches, and make earnest hast to that holy and heavenly commerce, which is worth our looking and longing after. As Vaughan simply belied that eternal life may be obtained in a very few days through holiness of life. The short accommodation of the life has but short effects. It is clear then, that the eternal life is most blessed. Vaughan vouchsafed that as for the present short life, it is so very short, that it is with all most miserable. It is distracted with many evil defects, for that there is in all the whole world that is so uncertain, so various and so replenished with trouble, as the course of this life:

> Why in my God thus hard and cold, When I am most, most sick and sad?
>
> Well-fare those blessed days of old,
> When thou dids't heare the weeping lad!
>
> (Lines 9-12)

Vaughan's devotion to nature as the supreme entity and manifestation of the Divine is apparent, letting his readers to visualize the fact that God created the universe and give all the creation the potentiality to have His divine life spark, irradiating the shadows of the laden and sinful heart. He is probably and deeply acknowledged by the notion of hermetic idea that God is the truest incarnation

of light, heat and the truest fire, for He still remained within these elements. In fact,

his world is unique and distinctive too with a deep profundity of celestial objectivity and vigour, scattering and spreading over the repulsive order and system of 1640s to 1650s.

Vaughan, a seventeenth century worshipper of Nature, discovered that God is available on earth and can be seen by ultimate faith with irresistible belief, keeping him alert and conscious about the contrasting nature of both the light and the darkness, referring him the ordinary Christian life, and reminding him of his mystical awareness of God. James D. Simmonds has noted brilliantly that, 'Vaughan's *Silex Scintillians* is a journey on the earth in search of God to restore his refractory and imperfect heart, presenting himself as the classical victim of dissociated sensibility and romantic agony' (9). Neither the modes of sensibility nor the symbolic imagination invites ambiguity or ambivalence in the poetry of Vaughan. His 'sad delight with hope and thought' has nothing in common to that of Crashaw's notion of theology. He had the firm belief in his heart that one day he would be elevated by God's mercy and be loved to scatter the message to the world:

> What though some clouds defiance bid, The sun must shine in every part.
>
> Thou I have spoyl'd, O spoyle not Thou, Hate not Thine owne deere gift
>
> and token! Poore birds sing best, and prettiest show,
> When their neast is fallen and broken.
>
> (Lines 15-20)

It is therefore but fit, that the temporal life should look still towards the eternal, that through the one, you may passé into the other. Let us last of all cast off all those things which make this life in respect of their employment but very short, but in respect of cares and sorrow very long. Let us, Vaughan additionally argued, reject, and resolutely condemn this uncertain world by the grace of God, and the more uncertain manners of it, wherein the peasant as well as the prince is seldom safe, where things that lye low are trodden upon, and the high and lofty totter and decline. Vaughan's primary concern was to, as J. C. Shairp aptly argued, 'verify whether he himself would

be eligible to be the effective member of the Divine committee to maintain an uninterrupted relationship with God' (89):

> Deare Lord! Restore Thy ancient peace,
>
> Thy quickning friendship, man's bright wealth; And if Thou wilt not give
>
> me ease
> From sickness, give my spirit health!

(Lines 21-24)

The taste and texture of the hermetic doctrine is aptly followed and nurtured by Vaughan in this poem and his other poems too, for he was greatly imbued with the main stream of Christian tradition, and in this regard Frank J. Warnke argued that 'Vaughan's Hermeticism almost always appears within a framework of orthodox Christian reference' (Simmonds 19, 20). Basically his aim, throughout *Silex Scintillians,* is to enter the invisible blur of veil to attain the Divinity with a unified whole. He finds in himself disorder and rebellions like that of the condition of the entire England, was totally baffled and bewildered to examine how to define the existence and presence of God and the evangelical pleasures that would cherish his scattered mind (Quin 56).

In *The Book* Vaughan earnestly requests God to be graced, merciful to those who reciprocate His omnipresence among His entire creation, for Vaughan was going to arrest his deep sacramental charm and ecclesiastical aspects with the notion of very diction of soul during its transformation. He confessed, with his firm belief and observance too, to God to be the best paper on which his good and warm fortune would be measured, what J.C. Shairp noted aptly 'to safeguard the soul from damnation and cling to His eternal grace and love to finalize its very place at heaven' (105)

Thou knew'st this paper, when it was Mere seed, and after that but grass;

Vaughan was always concerned to find his own ways of praising to God that was quite rather significantly different to that of Herbert (Lanford 3). Vaughan knew and believed by heart that only the sincerest and pleasant behavior is responsible and necessary to obtain the grace and inspiration of the God to have produced a perfect work and art. He was deeply imbued with his nature and circumstances:

Thou knew'st this Tree, when a green shade Covered it, since a Cover made,

And where it flourished, grew and spread, As if it never should be dead.

By the brilliant and skillful use of this line, Vaughan's intension was proved and established sincerely, and thereby filtering his deep connotation of the Divine revolving around his mind. The fact may be acknowledged that Vaughan's poetry is deeply inspired by and the product of his contemporary world, defining a bright and sparkling vision, scattering the central thought into various ways to

project and vivify the very relevance of the main idea (Simmonds 20). Thereby his poems are that of rescued exaltation and limitless joy and love for his Savior.

The primary concern of Vaughan's 1655 edition of *Silex Scintillians* was to refine and reawakening the Christian teaching, penetrating the veil in between his physical sinful body and his God, and thus establishing, through his exemplary life, the manifestation of God as the Creator of His every creation. He always wanted to meet himself in solitude to arrest the conscience of the existence of the God, symbolizing his deep aroma and power of mysticism, transcending, what Miss Underhill rightly observed in this regard, 'the limitations of the individual one to devote and surrender oneself completely to the ultimate reality' (Richardson 4):

> O knowing, glorious spirit! When
>
> Thou shalt restore trees, beasts and men, When thou shalt make all new
>
> again, Destroying only death and pain,
> Give him amongst thy works a place,
>
> Who in them loved and sought thy face!

To Vaughan, present is always filled up with the past to visualize the probability and likelihood of the future, and thereby to be effectual to the mystical aspects of the Divinity was his fundamental concern (Shairp 123). Vaughan's constant aim is to find out the presence of God in His every creation, roaming around the natural objects through the lens of his mystic eyes and philosophy, delving out some ideas of misconception of the feelings God into the matter of facts with evangelical thoughts, and thereby always trying to locate the objects of the principles and fundamental existence of God.

The modern world should and must be measured and treated with the basic and fundamental ideology and decorum of the entire study that has been made and prepared structurally, for the dilemma, insecurity, impatience, and conspiracy since the beginning of the modern eras, are introspective germinated and ill-tempered the growing and pleasant tendencies of the religiosity and divinity of the modern world. The mapping and idealization of the religious individualism, through different communities of this world, is the primary and basic issue of every domestic and international violence, which has been spread the essence and aroma of treachery, fortitude, abjection and seamy side of the religiosity of the present ages of today's world.

Reading, thinking, then analyzing and then applying the concept and cognition of the seventeenth century British devotional poet Henry Vaughan, at least during the ghastly and baffling situations of the modern eras, tried to help us to up lift the moral laxities and erosion of the devotion and divinity

inside the minds of the humankind of the present world to set up the concept of peace, prosperity and loyalty of entire humankind through a broader lens of brotherhood, where Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Muslims, Persianism, Hebruism, Buddhist, Jainism, Sikhism will be coexisted with the bond of the purest form of love, grace, belief and gratitude to one another.

The birth of the ultimate conscience and ethical points of this divine mystic of the seventeenth century must and would be established at the cost of emotive senses and experiments of the present situations of the devotion and divinity of the modern textures and temperaments of the religions, and then this will be the greatest achievement to the contexts of the entire religion issues of the modern world, which will soothe the complexities of the gradual degradation of the modern minds from where every, as it is believed so, evils import germinate and temperate.

Jonathan F. S. Post, in this regard, brilliantly added '… he falls within an established doctrinal thought of Christianity that regarded the ear and not the eye as the superior sensory organ. The intimacy Vaughan establishes with Christ is simple, sensuous and stunning and by suggesting the wonders of devotion, he is able to trace out imaginatively 'the fullness of the Deity' (Post, 1982: 159, 207). Dorothy Lucy Graham, in this regard, after delineating Vaughan's overall justification and keen observation of nature with God, summed up 'it may be that Vaughan whilst posing that extreme inner alterness found ease in a great external rigidity and was able to devote himself to his profession and domestic affairs and love more as other men. As a man he may have gained the equivalent what he lost as a poet' (145).

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The Portrayal of Religion in Contemporary Literature A Comparative Study of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road.*

Sonakshi Mukherjee

Religion as a theme of literature has long been in vogue. There is also no exception in twenty-first- century literature. In their books *American Gods* and *The Road,* contemporary authors from the first decade of the twenty-first century like Cormac McCarthy and Neil Gaiman have explored religion and its influence on society. This essay will look at how these authors, who are from the first decade of the twenty-first century, depict religion and define its place in society in their individual works. The various themes and motifs found in each novel will reveal how religion affects the characters and society, as well as contrast and compare the authors' viewpoints on religion.

Religion has significantly shaped societies throughout human history, providing individuals with a framework for understanding the world, their place in it, and relationships with higher powers. It also fosters belonging, identity, morality, and community, shaping moral and ethical norms, laws, and governance. Religious institutions often provide education, support, and social services to communities in areas lacking government services. However, when distinct groups of people share divergent beliefs, religion may also be a dividing factor that sparks hostility and prejudice. It can be used to defend prejudice, violence, and persecution of people who hold different ideas, as seen by historical occurrences like the Crusades, the Inquisition, and contemporary religious- based terrorism. Additionally, religion has been losing ground in several countries around the world, particularly in Western societies where secularism and individualism have risen to prominence. Growing conflict between conventional religious beliefs and contemporary secular principles is the result of this. As a result, its impact is still a point of contention and dispute in modern culture.

It's crucial to examine how modern writers present religion in their works for a number of reasons. First of all, since literature, in Aristotle's words, is "an imitation" of society, a mirror of society, modern writers frequently reference and comment on the religious and spiritual practices and beliefs of their time. One can learn more about the shifting dynamics between religion and society and the ways in which religious beliefs and practices are changing through time by looking at how

these authors portray religion in their works. The portrayal of religion in literature can be a powerful tool for understanding and exploring complex religious ideas and themes. Literature can offer unique insights into religious experiences, beliefs, and practices that may not be accessible through other sources. Studying religion in literature fosters interfaith understanding, promoting sympathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity, while addressing the fundamental objectives of religion to maintain peace. Literature portrays religion as a critique, offering alternative perspectives and critiques, challenging dominant ideologies and

sparking discussions. Comparative studies of Gaiman and McCarthy support this assertion.

Le style est l'homme - Style is the man. Neil Gaiman's literary style uses mythological and fantastical elements to create intricate, imaginative worlds. His dark, whimsical writing explores identity, morality, and the human condition, emphasizing the importance of dreams and imagination in shaping our lives. Gaiman blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, creating a sense of magic and wonder in everyday life. Cormac McCarthy's literary technique uses sparse, poetic language to convey complex ideas and emotions. His works explore themes of violence, cataclysm, and despair, with morally ambiguous characters struggling in harsh environments. McCarthy's writing is notable for vivid imagery and powerful depictions of hostility. Despite their bleakness, McCarthy's writing also evokes transcendence and hope, as characters find meaning and purpose in adversity. Both Gaiman and McCarthy have significantly contributed to contemporary literature and influenced writers today.

In *American Gods*, Shadow Moon, a former convict released from prison after his wife Laura's death. He works as Mr. Wednesday's personal assistant, where he fights against the New Gods. Shadow encounters various characters, including Anansi, Morrigan, and Anubis. As the conflict escalates, Shadow struggles to reconcile his beliefs with the surreal world and confronts his past and the truth about Laura's death. It may be inferred that *American Gods*, a complex novel exploring faith, identity, and belief, with vivid characterization and imaginative world-building, makes it a popular classic in contemporary American literature. *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman explores the intricate relationship between religion and human experience, contrasting Old Gods like Odin and Anansi with New Gods like Media and the Technical Boy. Gaiman highlights the cultural histories of Old Gods and their marginalization, causing disconnection and alienation in the modern world. Gaiman's Shadow explores faith and identity in the surreal world of Old Gods,

confronting the impact of beliefs and religions on his worldview. The novel highlights the potential for purpose and meaning in uncertain times, but also warns against blind faith. (Gaiman, 2002)

Neil Gaiman depicts numerous different religions and mythology in *American Gods,* including Norse, Egyptian, African, and Native American. Gaiman examines the complicated and frequently contradictory beliefs and traditions that make up the human experience through the persona of Shadow, who acts as a sort of everyman figure. The New Gods, who stand in for technology and modernity, have gained prominence while the Old Gods, who symbolize the conventional beliefs and mythologies of human history, have been marginalized and forgotten. Gaiman argues that this fight between the old and the new is a microcosm of a greater war between tradition and modernity and emphasizes the peril of accepting new ideas and ideologies without considering their implications.

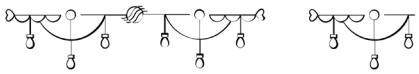
Another illustration is the figure of Mr. Ibis, who stands in for the ancient Egyptian deity Thoth. Mr.

Ibis is in charge of preparing the deceased for the hereafter at his funeral parlour in Cairo, Illinois. Mr. Ibis presents a distinctive viewpoint on dying and the life hereafter through his interactions with Shadow, highlighting the significance of customs and rituals in preparing the soul for its journey. Gaiman employs vivid and evocative language throughout the book to create a rich and engrossing universe with recognizable characters and challenging topics. *American Gods* offers remarkable insights into the nature of believing and the complexity of the human situation by examining the role of religion in influencing the human experience**.**

In *American Gods,* Gaiman presents the influence of religion on society as a complicated and diverse phenomenon. According to the book, religion may be a source of solace and inspiration, giving individuals a sense of direction and meaning in a confusing and uncertain world, which can be justified in the line "There was only one guy in the whole Bible Jesus ever personally promised a place with him in Paradise. Not Peter, not Paul, not any of those guys. He was a convicted thief, being executed. So don't knock the guys on death row. Maybe they know something you don't"**(**Gaiman, 79). It also draws attention to religion's drawbacks, such as its propensity to incite conflict and divide among various communities through the line "Would you believe that all the gods that people have ever imagined are still with us today? … And that there are new gods out there, gods of computers and telephones and whatever, and that they all seem to think there isn't room for them both in the world. And that some kind of war is kind of likely.."(Gaiman, 157)

The idea that religion may be used as a tool for power and control is one of the novel's major themes. The Old Gods, who stand for conventional beliefs and mythologies, are constantly under attack by the New Gods, who represent technology and modernity. The New Gods do this in an effort to win the support of the populace and preserve their authority and influence. Gaiman also examines how religion influences, how a community and its members define themselves in the context of religion. The book examines the nuances of race and ethnicity in America as well as how religion can either unite or divide people via the figure of Shadow, who is half-black and half- white – a symbolic representation of the duality within the society divided between religion and modernity. For instance, the African trickster God Anansi symbolizes the difficulties faced by African Americans.

The Road, on the other hand, comprises a father and son travelling across a post-apocalyptic world that has been devastated by an unidentified catastrophe. They are forced to face their own mortality and the nature of faith and hope in the face of tremendous sorrow as they try to survive in this harsh and brutal world. In the novel, religion is portrayed in a grim and dreary post-apocalyptic world where the few remaining people's top priority is survival. The book tackles the underlying concepts of faith and spirituality in a society devoid of hope and meaning rather than presenting any particular religious practices or beliefs. The father and his young son are portrayed as struggling



to maintain their humanity in the face of overwhelming despair and horror. While the father is depicted as holding on to the hope that they will find a better future, the son struggles with the questions of morality and the existence of God in a world where so much evil and suffering exist.

The absence of any overtly religious symbols or imagery is one striking facet of how religion is portrayed in *The Road*. The novel's gloomy and minimalist literary style mirrors the desolation and emptiness of the post-apocalyptic world, and the lack of any overtly religious references implies that faith and spirituality have either been lost completely or have been corroded. Despite this omission, the book nonetheless poses important concerns regarding the nature of faith and its place in people's ability to survive and bounce back from adversity. The novel indicates that even in the absence of any overt religious beliefs or practices, faith and spirituality may nevertheless play a significant part in preserving humanity and morality. This is done by depicting the father and son as battling to keep their humanity and sense of morality in the face of unthinkable misery.

A subdued portrait of religion is what the author wants to delineate in *The Road* and religion here is presented as a relic of the past, a faded memory of a bygone reality. The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where religion is just one of the many remains of civilisation that have been reduced to their most basic forms. A scene in which the father and son stumble across a group of individuals who have turned to cannibalism in order to survive is one instance of this representation. The group's leader's reply to the father's question about whether he believes in God is depressing: "There is no God, and we are his prophets." The ironic overtone here is unmistakable as this sentence implies that in the post-apocalyptic world, where survival is the primary concern, religion has been replaced by a cruel nihilism.

A passage in which the father muses on the character of God in this new world is another illustration of this portrayal: "If there is a God out there, then he has turned his back on us. And if there isn't, we are actually by ourselves". This statement emphasizes the desolation that permeates the story and the gloom of the post-apocalyptic setting. It also implies that in this new world, the traditional faiths and beliefs are no longer relevant, and that mankind is left to consider the purpose of life on its own. Despite this depressing image, the book makes the case that religion and spirituality may still be crucial to people's ability to survive and bounce back. This is demonstrated by the father's determination to uphold the "fire" of morality and human decency in the face of overwhelming gloom and hopelessness. There are good guys and terrible guys, the father informs his son in a sentence that encapsulates this concept. The good folks are us. This notion implies that moral concerns and the fight between good and evil continue to be essential to the human experience even in a society where religious beliefs have been lost or degraded.

Religion has a complicated effect on the people in *The Road,* as they struggle to find purpose in a devastated world. For instance, the father is shown as a man who has given up on God and is

trying to make sense of the harsh realities of the post-apocalyptic world. He says to his son, "I don't know what we're doing,*"* in one scenario. I have no idea what we are doing anymore. This sentence emphasizes the father's sense of hopelessness and confusion as he searches for a purpose in a seemingly hopeless world. The father nevertheless maintains a sense of morality and human decency, which he views as a source of comfort despite his lack of faith.

The son, on the other hand, appears to have a more innate affinity for spirituality and faith. He says to his father, "I don't want to be one of the bad guys*,"* in one scene, implying a desire to uphold moral principles above the brutal realities of their circumstance. This statement also emphasizes the son's inherent goodness and faith in the prospect of salvation, in spite of the obscene darkness of their environment. In general, *The Road* depicts religion as a subtle and multifaceted component of human experience that is moulded by the harsh reality of the post-apocalyptic world. The father has lost his faith but yet has a sense of morality and decency whereas the son appears to lack these qualities.

The various ways that religion is portrayed differently in *American Gods* and *The Road* are a reflection of the two works' different styles and subjects. In *American Gods,* religion is shown as a multifaceted and dynamic cultural entity that has been influenced by human history and imagination. The book examines a variety of religious practices, from early mythology to contemporary consumerism, and makes the argument that each of these practices expresses a particular conception of the divine. The war between the old gods and the new gods, who stand for the shifting values and beliefs of modern society, is the novel's main conflict. The novel poses concerns about the nature of religion, identity, and cultural legacy through this clash.

In contrast, religion is portrayed in *The Road* as a highly subjective and personal experience that is moulded by personal trauma and suffering. The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where an unidentified catastrophe has largely wiped out humanity. A father and son are the main characters, and they are on a desperate quest to survive in this hostile environment. They run into a variety of people along the route who have turned to religion as a coping mechanism for the destruction all around them. The book, however, makes the point that these kinds of faith are frequently flimsy and insufficient, unable to offer a genuine sense of hope or purpose in the face of such a tremendous loss.

While both books examine how religion affects how people feel and define themselves, they do it in very different ways. While *The Road* presents religion as a frail and frequently ineffective response to the horrors of a post-apocalyptic world, *American Gods* embraces the diversity and complexity of human religious traditions. In the end, these disparate depictions of religion represent the various styles and topics of Cormac McCarthy and Neil Gaiman, respectively, and they point to the variety

of techniques that modern authors might use to tackle this intricate and nuanced subject.

Religion has a big impact on society and the characters in American Gods. The novel examines how religious convictions affect personal identity as well as the social, cultural, and political climate of American society. While the new gods in the book symbolize contemporary technological and consumerist values, the old gods in the story stand for conventional beliefs and traditions. The struggle between these two forces reflects the shifting views and ideals of modern society and poses significant issues regarding the place of tradition and legacy in a world that is changing quickly. The novel's depiction of how religion affects society includes the way that popular American culture has ignored and forgotten the ancient deities. As the character Mr. Wednesday states: "This is the only country in the world that worries about what it is... What it means. The rest of them know what they are. No one ever needs to go searching for the heart of Norway. Or looks for the soul of Mozambique. They know what they are*." (*Gaiman 89)

The novel's characters experience a great deal of religious influence, which shapes their goals and identities. The main character, Shadow, is first dubious about the existence of gods and religious ideas, but as the plot develops, he finds himself becoming more and more involved in the struggle between the old and new gods.As he learns about the strength and value of tradition and cultural history, his encounters cause him to reflect on his own identity and views. As Shadow observes: "People believe, thought Shadow. It's what people do. They believe. And then they will not take responsibility for their beliefs;they conjure things,and do not trust the conjurations. People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales."(Gaiman,153)

In The Road, religious people are encountered by a father and son as they travel to deal with post-apocalyptic destruction. Religion is examined as a unique, subjective experience shaped by trauma and suffering. One example of the impact of religion on the characters in the novel is the way that the father struggles to maintain his own faith and hope in the face of overwhelming loss and suffering. As the father says: "If he is not the word of God God never spoke*."* This quote suggests the father's desperate attempt to cling to his faith, even as he questions the very existence of God. *American Gods* portrays religion as a dynamic force shaping society and identity, while *The Road* portrays it as a fragile response to post-apocalyptic horrors.

Cormac McCarthy and Neil Gaiman have quite different approaches to religion in their writing. Gaiman depicts a world in American Gods where gods exist and have an impact on people's actions, but McCarthy depicts a world in The Road where God's existence is questioned and there

doesn't seem to be much hope for humanity. In American Gods, Neil Gaiman presents religion as being diverse, with a variety of gods from various nations and religions coexisting in the same universe. He emphasizes the notion that gods are products of human belief and that, just as belief evolves through time, so do the gods. McCarthy, on the other hand, gives a gloomy image of religion

in The Road, where the protagonists' belief in God is put to the test in the face of tremendous suffering.

According to the statement, "Gods die," Gaiman's viewpoint on religion in American Gods is one of acceptance and respect for other religious perspectives. And when they genuinely pass away, no one mourns them or remembers them. Although killing ideas is more difficult than killing people, it is nevertheless possible. GAIMAN (164). McCarthy, on the other hand, takes a skeptical and doubtful stance in The Road, as evidenced by the phrase, "If he is not the word of God God never spoke." 97) McCarthy Overall, McCarthy's representation of religion is more critical and questioning, whereas Gaiman's is more inclusive and embracing.

In conclusion, the representation of religion in modern literature is a rich and complicated subject that necessitates in-depth investigation and examination of specific works. Both Cormac McCarthy's The Road and Neil Gaiman's American Gods present distinctive viewpoints on the place of religion in culture and how it affects certain people. The authors encourage readers to reflect on their own perceptions of religion and its role in society as they explore topics of belief, faith, and human connection in their writings. McCarthy's image of religion is more doubtful and sceptical than Gaiman's, which emphasizes diversity and inclusion. However, both authors explore the effects of religion on society and the individual in their writings, challenging conventional religious ideas. Determining how religion is portrayed in contemporary literature is thus a crucial and continuing discussion that has the potential to offer light on the nuanced and dynamic relationship between religion and contemporary society.

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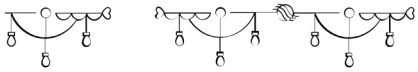

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Easterine Kire's Poetry is a Living Portrait of the Initial Christianization of the Nagas: An Appraisal

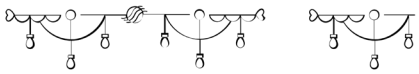
Binoy Dangar

Religious thinking has influenced the writings of the poets since long past. Almost in all countries the poetical works touched the religious ideals which have somehow shaped the cultural life of the people of a particular place. In English poetry we have plenty of examples which have been directly or indirectly incorporated themes of Christianity with references to Bible and God. In the Old English period Caedmon and Cynewulf wrote Christian poetry. Later the metaphysical poets like John Donne, George Herbert wrote about God. Thereafter John Milton, Gerard Manley Hopkins and many others wrote poems about God and His creation with abundant Biblical allusions. In India the poets wrote religious poetry referring to Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

North East Indian English poetry is viewed as the representation of history, culture and nature by the majoritarian intellectuals who study the poetry of this region. But North East Indian English poetry also reveals the influence of Christianity in their culture and beliefs. Earlier before the advent of Christianity the tribal people of North East India practiced animism. When the British intruded this area they tried to Christianise them.

In December 1872 an American Missionary Edward Winter Clerk was successful in converting some Naga people into Christians. That was the beginning. Nagaland is a state where one can count 1708 churches and this proves the influence of Christian religion on the life of the people. In 2022 the people of Nagaland celebrated the 150th year of the coming of Christianity in Nagaland. At the initial stage of Christianization, the Naga people used to enter the thatched chapel for prayers keeping their weapons and spears outside. Prayer to God made them realize the beauty of peaceful living and the mystery of harmony in the creation of God.

Easterine Kire is a novelist, poet, short story writer and translator from Nagaland. Her novels have been analysed again and again from different perspectives by the literary scholars. Most of the scholars have focused on the themes of culture, history and feminism in her fictional writings. Her fictions are based basically on these subjects. Her poetry is smaller in quantity than fiction and has been paid less critical attention by the academic intellectuals. Her poems deal with themes of nature, personal quest, religious beliefs, Naga culture and history. In this article I have selected a few poems from her book *Jazz Poetry and Other Poems* (2014) to point out the direction at which her Christian thoughts work in the poems with reference to the Christianization of the poet's native



place Nagaland. These poems are 'God's Church', "The hunter's net", "African God", "Norwegian God", "Silences", "Old Poem", "Australia", "Confession" and "Ascension day".

This paper has heavily relied on book chapters and journal articles such as, "Reviving memories of the Naga freedom struggle: A Study of *Bitter Wormwood* by Easterine Kire", "Stories as Hope: Retelling of Naga Folktale and Myth in Easterine Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud*", "A Peek into the spiritual world of Nagas through the eyes of Easterine Kire" and "Imagining Ethnography and Cultural Perspectives: A Study of Easterine Kire's Sky is my Father and Don't Run My Love"

The paper shall situate Easterine Kire's poetry within the context of postcolonial literature. The Naga people's history of colonization by the British and subsequent conversion to Christianity is a critical aspect of their postcolonial identity. Kire's poetry reflects the complex intersections of colonialism, Christianization, and indigenous identity.

The paper shall employ feminist literary theory to explore how gender plays a role in Kire's portrayal of the Christianization of the Nagas. Through the scope of this paper the agency of Naga women would be assessed within this historical and religious context, as Kire's work often highlights the roles and experiences of women in Naga society. Cultural studies as a framework will be used to examine how Easterine Kire's poetry portrays the cultural and religious transformations that occurred during the Christianization of the Nagas. The paper will investigate the tensions, negotiations, and syncretic elements that arise as Christianity interacts with Naga traditions and belief systems. The close reading of the specific Easterine Kire's poems, directly or indirectly address the Christianization of the Nagas. The language, imagery, and symbolism used in these poems to uncover the poet's perspective on this historical process will be analysed.

The paper shall provide historical context for the Christianization of the Nagas, including the arrival of Christian missionaries, the conversion process, and the impact on Naga culture. This will help readers understand the backdrop against which Kire's poetry is set. The paper shall apply critical theory for examining the power dynamics, resistance, and identity politics at play in Kire's portrayal of the Christianization of the Nagas. Her poetry challenges dominant narratives and constructs alternative perspectives. To explore how readers from different backgrounds and

perspectives interpret Kire's poetry. Kire's work successfully provides an impact on contemporary discussions surrounding religion, identity, and decolonization in the Naga context. By employing this theoretical framework and methodology, a comprehensive appraisal of Easterine Kire's poetry as a living portrait of the initial Christianization of the Nagas, can be conducted by taking into account the literary, historical, cultural, and social dimensions of her work.

In the poem 'God's Church' the poet has merged the Christian and Non-Christian culture of the Nagas. The Church building is a holy place of structure for praying God and divine blessings. It is

a concept brought by the missionaries in the life of the Naga people in the nineteenth century. The poet Easterine has always said that they practice a nativised Christianity which is an amalgam of both the cultures. So, in this poem we get natural things replaced by the traditional church buildings of Christianity. God not only resides inside the church. He has His abode in the outside physical world of the tribal people who invent divinity in the Sky, Trees, and Green Grass:

This wide blue sky

Is the dome of his cathedral This soft green grass
The altar to praise him at ('God's Church')

The prayer songs of the church are replaced by the wind songs. Natural elements play an important role in the spiritual mechanism of the tribal people. They attribute divine dynamics to the forces of Nature. Thus, the poem shows that the artificial church building can be built in the open space of Nature with the help of spiritual imagination.

The poem 'The hunter's net' has also Biblical references as the poet alludes to the book of Ezekiel at the beginning of the poem. The poem is concerned with the sins and virtues and the judgment of God. This entire concept is again linked to a tribal livelihood term that is hunting. The Missionaries came to Nagaland with a declared or overt purpose of transforming the tribal vengeful cultural practice into a peaceful soul searching hub. Before the Missionaries came the Naga people were confined to their own indigenous world of fighting among themselves for trivial reasons of showing bravery. The missionaries took them away from this narrow conflicting world to a God loving peaceful world of Christianity. The poet in this poem has used the phrase 'hunter's net'

which may be said to be a pun. In one sense it is the Christian concept of punishment and reward. God is represented as hunter spreading nets to catch and punish the wicked and to reward the virtuous. It is always blissful to fall in 'the hunter's nets of love'. But when He spreads his nets to catch the wicked and declare 'the king will be killed in Babylonia' the sinners become afraid of sins and treachery. The moral teaching is to be noted in the poem and this is required for a peaceful society. On the other hand, the tribal people are largely associated with hunting catching and killing for their livelihood. It also bears their mark of identity. So, in the poem by merging God and hunter the poet has incorporated the dual doctrine of Naga Christianity – native and foreign practices.

The poem 'African God, Norwegian God' brings into discussion the nature of African tribal concept of God and the Norwegian European concept of God. In 'the Dom cathedral' God is very much formal maintaining proper etiquette of prayers and rituals. Peace and stillness are required with the burning of candles and the prayers of the devotees make them light hearted. It is also required to bear a cross for the devotees. On the other hand, the African Church God is less formal. The poet

has mentioned Julius Lester's 'Black Folktales' from where the idea of God is derived in the poem. God is addressed here as Mr. God who smokes 'a pipe and has a wife'. Incidentally the traditional Naga villagers used to smoke pipes before the entrance of Christianity. Here the silence is not maintained for prayers. Instead, the dancing and singing are the modes of praising to God. The poet is advocating the variety of approaches to God in the poem.

The poet has used silence as the prerequisite in the prayer to God in the poem 'Silences'. Silence is needed to surrender oneself to God and to light the burden of heart. Such a prayer is always soothing for the storms in our lives. Easterine Kire has talked of silences in many of her poems. Noise is a negative force which does not work in time of communicating to God. Candles and frankincense are purifying agents of souls speaking to God in their silent voices. Therefore, we need to light these while praying to God. This poem makes us learn about Christian ways of prayers to God and carries religious connotations.

The poet's approach to God is suggested through a tone of whole-hearted submission as the speaker in the poem 'Old Poem' presents herself as a child trying to understand the ways of God. God's ways are everywhere in the play of Nature. The visionary poet can see the presence of God beside her and therefore she says, 'I'm sitting by your side'. She wants to give a place to God within her heart and therefore invites Him 'come on in dear lord.'

God is seen as the creator in the poem 'Australia'. Beautiful creatures are the contribution of God for the harmony of aesthetic vision. The Christian concept of creation of the garden of Eden is here hinted at in the poem with the poet's remark 'God made Australia' for the sweet and soothing is to be found among the astonishing movements of animals like kangaroo, platypus and echidna. At the same time the musical instrument 'didgeridoo' invented by the aboriginal North Australians is imagined as played first by God. The poem 'Coorong camp' is also an expression of gratitude to God for the speaker feels the day as the first day of creation as if God has wind and sky under his control in the much praised beauty of the place Coorong in Australia. Coorong National Park in Australia is famous for its beauty of physical surroundings with its flora and fauna. The wind, the sky, the morning and the night all are imbued with God's fresh touch.

The poem 'Confession' is a direct appeal to God for forgiveness. The concept of sin, confession and forgiveness are typical of Christian religion. It depicts the universal human condition of being involved in sins in earthly life. In literature we have plenty of examples of such stories depicting sin and confession like James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and Marlow's *Doctor Faustus* (1592). The poem deals with the awareness of privately committed sins and punishments. Even the physical ailments are related to the commitment of sins by an individual. The earthly human activities are to be controlled by this religious doctrine in order to achieve a harmonious and peaceful living. The Nagas were indoctrinated with this Christian concept and the

poet is advocating the positive role of such ideals in the resolution of conflicts within and without in this poem. The poet prays for patience and faith to God in order to see a bright future and enjoy the beautiful earth like 'unhurriedly listening to the seagulls returning' while travelling in a boat.

The poem 'Ascension day' depicts the poet's vision of God in a lonely surrounding when the poet-speaker is alone by the seaside. The poem reflects on a Christian festive day which is the 40th day of Easter. The poem creates an ambience for the vision of God. In many of her poems the poet has suggested that to have a communion with God silence and solitude is important. The speaker in the poem says that 'I'm alone by the water/watching/ God walking the docks.'

The presence of God and Biblical thoughts in the poetry of Easterine Kire is a result of the Christianization process that Nagaland encountered in the nineteenth century. The English medium schools run by the missionaries have injected the language and religious doctrines into the young minds. The process of prayer making, functions of Church, devotion to God and expressing gratitude to God for each and every creation in the Earth have been learnt at the early stage of life. This dominant Christian thinking has certainly shaped the poetic mind of Easterine Kire. Therefore, her poetry is tinged with the positivity of God's presence and Biblical references with optimistic moral tone.

In conclusion, Easterine Kire's poetry stands as a remarkable and insightful living portrait of the initial Christianization of the Nagas. Through her poetic oeuvre, Kire skillfully captures the multifaceted aspects of this historical transformation, shedding light on the complex and profound impact of Christianity on the Naga people. This appraisal has highlighted several key points that underscore the significance of Kire's work in this context.

Firstly, Kire's poetry serves as a valuable historical document that allows readers to delve into the past and gain a deeper understanding of the early Christianization process among the Nagas. Her poems provide a vivid portrayal of the struggles, conflicts, and adaptations that occurred as the Naga society transitioned from its traditional beliefs to Christianity. Secondly, Kire's exploration of themes such as syncretism and cultural amalgamation reveals the intricate interplay between the old and the new belief systems. Her poetry showcases how the Nagas fused elements of their indigenous cultures with Christian teachings, resulting in a unique blend of spirituality and tradition that continues to shape their identity to this day. Thirdly, the personal narratives woven into Kire's poems offer a humanizing and intimate perspective on the Naga people's experiences during this transformative period. By giving voice to individual stories and emotions, Kire connects readers on a deeply empathetic level, fostering a greater appreciation for the complexities of this historical journey. Moreover, Kire's poetic style, characterized by its lyrical beauty and evocative imagery, enhances the emotional resonance of her work. It invites readers to immerse themselves in the Naga

landscape, culture, and spirituality, making the poems not only informative but also emotionally engaging.

In essence, Easterine Kire's poetry is a living testament to the enduring legacy of the initial Christianization of the Nagas. It serves as a bridge between the past and the present, enabling contemporary readers to grasp the profound significance of this historical transition in the Nagas' collective consciousness. Through her artistry, Kire has preserved and celebrated the Naga heritage, offering a unique perspective on the forces of change and adaptation that have shaped this remarkable community. In doing so, she has not only enriched the world of literature but also contributed to a deeper understanding of the human experience in the face of cultural transformation.

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Folk-tales and Collective Localized Cultural Heritage: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *Jungle Nama*

Shubham Bhattacharjee

In his essay titled "Instinct and the Unconscious" (1919), Carl Gustav Jung first coined the term 'archetype'. Jung rejected Locke's notion of the 'tabula rasa' which stated that the overall psychological development of human beings is dependent entirely upon their experiences over time. Rather, Jung argued that there were certain inherent universal experiences, which he termed as the 'collective unconscious' present in all human beings, such as love, fear etc. which aid in forming their overall experience. Jung termed this as an 'archetype'. Jung opined that myths are essentially culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recesses of the human psyche: the world of the archetypes.

Myths represent the unconscious archetypal, instinctual structures of the mind. They represent these structures not in a historical and cultural vacuum, but rather as they are culturally elaborated and expressed in terms of the world view of a particular age and culture. Maud Bodkin in her book *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934), speaks of interpreting literature in terms of recurring myths and motifs, which she refers to as 'archetypes', which Northrop Frye elaborates further in the essay "Archetypal Criticism: A Theory of Myths" in his work *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957), wherein he views myths as the collective attempt of cultures to establish a meaningful context to human existence.

Traditionally, myths comprise narratives which play a pivotal role in developing the collective cultural heritage of a society. Myths are generally spread in the form of folklore, and can be both religious and secular in nature. Folk-tales, as opposed to canonical literary texts, are largely apocryphal in nature, which have been passed down the centuries via the oral tradition. They usually comprise of myths and legends, which serve as important cultural markers of a particular society. The earliest instances of folk narratives in India dates back to the *Panchatantra* (2nd century B.C.) and the *Hitopodesha* (9th century C.E.). Amongst other parts of the country, the folklores emanating from Bengal had originally been assimilated and compiled by Rev. Lal Behari Dey in his collection entitled *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (1883), which proved to be pathbreaking in

cataloguing and preserving the rich cultural heritage of Bengal, and also in the future studies of folk narratives.

One of the primitive and long surviving myths of Bengal is the one revolving around Bonbibi and Dakkhin Rai. This is native to the people living in and around the Sundarbans region, who are dependent upon the forest for their everyday needs. Bonbibi is widely regarded as a benevolent angel by the people of the

Sundarbans, and revered equivalently by both the resident Hindus and Muslims, making it a classic example of the practice of cultural and religious hybridity. Nilanjan Chakraborty states that "the Hindu-Muslim syncretism in the narrative of Bonbibi is crucial to understanding the way culture functions in the Sundarbans." (Chakraborty, 140)

Bonbibi's blessings are mostly sought by the local honey-collectors and the woodcutters before they venture into the forest, in order to protect them against tiger attacks. It is widely construed that Dakkhin Rai (meaning Lord of the South), the demon king and a sworn enemy of Bonbibi himself appears in the form of a tiger and preys upon human beings. The myth of Bonbibi finds mention in several works such as the *Bonbibir Keramati* (the magical deeds of Bonbibi) or the *Bonbibir Jahuranama* (glory to Bonbibi). Bayan Uddin and Munshi Mohammad Khater are among the earliest poets renowned for having worked on the subject in the Bengali language. These works, however, were not written in the traditional dialect of the upper class educated Bengali elites. Rather, they were produced in the colloquial version of the language. In a letter to J.D. Anderson in 1914, Tagore writes thus about the commonly spoken Bengali language:

> You may hear it on the lips of street singers, in the hymns of religious devotees, in the rhymes of the nursery. It cannot, I admit, yet swagger into polite society, with a caste-mark of printer's ink on its pale forehead! But its throat throbs with song; its bamboo flute tweetles softly in the village street; where the ceaseless torrent of popular song bursts into spray … no such inspiriting song can be heard in the great still pools of conventional poetry. (Tagore 1045)

These works comprise of two major episodes i.e., Bonbibi's battle with Dakkhin Rai and the story of Dukhe. In his environmentalist novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Amitav Ghosh exemplifies two versions of the story of Bonbibi. In *River of Fire* (1959), Qurratulain Hyder comments that Bonbibi is actually the daughter of Prophet Muhammad named Fatima, and she is worshipped as the guardian spirit of the Sundarbans by the forest dwelling Muslims of Bengal.

Bonbibi is widely regarded as the daughter of a fakir from Mecca named Ibrahim. When his first wife Phulbibi failed to reproduce any children, Ibrahim married Golalbibi with Phulbibi's consent, albeit with the condition of catering to a demand of hers in the future. Simultaneously, God envisaged to send both Bonbibi and Shah Jangali for a divine purpose, and ordered them to be born as the children of Ibrahim and Golalbibi. When Golalbibi became pregnant, she was left stranded in the forest by Ibrahim, as per the desire of Phulbibi. Golalbibi subsequently abandoned Bonbibi in the forest and left only with Shah Jangali. Bonbibi was brought up in the forest by a doe. Ibrahim finally realized his mistake after seven years and took back Golalbibi along with Bonbibi and Shah Jangali to Mecca.

The legend goes that once, while praying, Bonbibi and Shah Jangali received two magical hats,

with which they were transported to the "country of eighteen tides" (atharo bhatir desh) in India. However, according to another version, they reached the "country of eighteen tides" with the help of the angel named Gibril. Upon reaching there, Shah Jangali offered the adhan, or the call to prayer. At that time, the Sundarbans was ruled over by the demon king Dakkhin Rai. As the sound reached his ears, he sent his friend Sanatan Rai to investigate further into the matter. When Sanatan brought the news about the two of them, Dakkhin Rai at once decided to chase them out of his kingdom. As he was preparing for the ensuing battle, his mother Narayani stopped him and instead went to the battle herself. After a fierce war between the two, Bonbibi defeated Narayani. However, out of mercy, she returned half the kingdom to Narayani and Dakkhin Rai. Subsequently, Narayani and Bonbibi became good friends. While Bonbibi ruled over the inhabited part of the Sunderbans, the control of the deep forests rested with Dakkhin Rai.

The story of Dhona is also an integral part of the folklore. Dhona and Mona were two brothers who collected honey for a profession and lived in a village named Barijhati. Dhona intended to go on a journey deep inside the forest in order to collect honey, but his brother Mona refused to accompany him. He then took Dukhe, a poor shepherd boy along with him. Prior to their leaving, Dukhe's mother asked him to seek for Bonbibi's intervention if they were in any grave danger. When the two of them reached Kendokhali, an area under the domination of Dakkhin Rai, Dhona forgot to make an offering to him. As a consequence, for three days he was neither able to collect any honey nor wax.

On the third night, Dhona had a vision of Dakkhin Rai in his dreams, where the latter asked him for a human sacrifice. Reluctantly, the greedy Dhona consented to sacrifice Dukhe. Therefore, after collecting sufficient wax and honey, he left Dukhe in the jungle and returned home. As Dakkhin Rai approached Dukhe in the disguise of a tiger, he started invoking Bonbibi. Upon hearing his call, Bonbibi came to his rescue along with her brother Shah Jangali. The latter defeated Dakkhin Rai and chased him all the way to the place where Bara Khan Ghazi lived, who was able to persuade Bonbibi to not harm Dakkhin Rai. In return, Ghazi gifted Dukhe with precious items, while Dakkhin Rai gave him adequate wax and honey. Dukhe was escorted all the way back to his village by Seko, Bonbibi's pet crocodile. Upon his return, Dukhe spread the cult of Bonbibi.

The folklore surrounding Bonbibi is predominant in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, *Jungle Nama* and also finds mention *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. *Jungle Nama* is a graphic verse novel illustrated by Pakistani-American artist Salman Toor. Sheila Kumar mentions in an article in *The New Indian Express* that "the artwork by Salman Toor is more striking than pretty, drawing the reader into the menacing world of Dakkhin Rai, the abjectly pitiful world of Dukhe and his mother, showing how man and nature aren't exactly cohabiting peacefully." (Kumar) True to the genre of graphic novels, the backdrop of the *Jungle Nama*, too, is filled with

sequential art, which serves as a visual portrayal of the entire narrative.

The *Jungle Nama* is a rendition in verse of the tale of Bonbibi. It is constructed in a poem-like style, akin to a rendition of the rhythmic flow of the original legend. On an average, each line consists of twelve syllables, and each couplet has twenty-four syllables with a caesura after each line. While Amitav Ghosh had previously not published any of his works in verse, in an interview with *India Today*, he stated:

> I last wrote poetry as a boy … but poetry, in the modern sense, helps you express your innermost feelings in verse. This is more a form of narrative. The meter carries the narrative on its own. You can say that Jungle Nama is about many things, but it's also about the magic of meter ... The story of Jungle Nama is about the necessity for limits, for humans to recognize boundaries. And meter does exactly the same thing with words. It forces you to recognize basic forms of expression and the need for boundaries. That is exactly what the story became for me. (Ghosh)

The *Jungle Nama* is divided into seven chapters, followed by an afterword which narrates the original legend. The book opens with a prologue describing the topography of the Sundarbans, which encounters socio-economic factors such as illegal immigration, etc., the region historically has a tryst with poverty.

In fact, Amitav Ghosh stated that the idea of writing *Jungle Nama* can be traced back to a trip Sundarbans which he had undertaken with a group of local villagers in 2000. It was here that he witnessed the locals performing a ceremonial worship of Bonbibi beside a set of tiger pawprints on the mudbank. Ghosh opines that the culture of the local people of the Sundarbans is based upon maintaining an equilibrium between nature and human needs. In this context, Ghosh states their day-to-day practices and customs emphasize upon the necessity to control greed, which Ghosh believes to be an important lesson for the entire world, especially in the battle to conserve the climate.

The primary theme of the *Jungle Nama* is gluttony and its associated dangers, where Ghosh concludes that the story is all about the need for human beings to understand their limits and act accordingly. According to him, *Jungle Nama* also deals with the theme of ecological misadventure which is of utmost relevance vis-a-vis the 21st century crisis of climate change. Debapriya Basu mentions in an article in *The Telegraph* that "Ghosh's work has always been concerned with the environment; raising an eloquent and impactful voice against humanity's great derangement." (Basu)

Ghosh utilizes the ancient legend of Bonbibi as an allegory for the environmental crisis. According to the literary critic Shreevatsa Nevatia, the text asserts that the Sundarbans are facing the harsh effects of climate change. Nevatia further elaborates that Dhona's desire to plunder the southern parts of the forest is only akin to how human beings treat the natural resources on this planet. In an

interview with *India Today*, Amitav Ghosh opined – "It's one of the places where you can see that the earth is alive, that the earth is really Gaia, a living entity. You see erosion. You see deposits being laid in front of your very eyes." (Ghosh)

The author further argued that the story is also reflective of how capitalism has produced materialism, which in turn gave birth to the climate crisis which might just end up destroying humankind in its current form. He asserts –

> Capitalism only survives in circumstances of discontent. It makes people want more, more and more. And now, you know, we are the endpoint of that wanting more. It has brought us to this planetary catastrophe that is going to end human civilization as we know it. (Ghosh)

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Variability in the Tales of Creation Myths: A Study of Select Evolution Theories

Shreyoshi Dhar

Creation myth also known as cosmogenic myth attempts to narrate the beginning of the world. Man of all ages possesses an inherent curiosity of his origin. There are numerous variations in the narration, subscribing to the theme of birth. The term myth etymologically has its roots in the ancient Greek mythos, referring to any kind of speech, narrative, fiction, myth, or plots. The English people adapted the word in anglicized form very similar to other European languages in the early 19th century, using it as a scholarly term for traditional stories concerning the history of the beginning of mankind and other supernatural beings or events. Subsequently, the Greek term μυθολογία was incorporated into Late Latin by an author named Fulgentius in his 5th century seminal work *Mythologiæ*, denoting the modern concept of Classical Mythology.

Creation myths most frequently feature as part of religion and mythologies. Religious leaders from the very beginning have used these legends as a medium of reducing common people to a subservient position to gain prominence in the social structure. Almost all the versions of these tales have a common statement pronouncing that man has been created by God, spirit, and other supreme beings, with whom these priests or clergymen have a direct connection, being in possession of some supreme powers. Nevertheless, delving into the cause of creating the stories will definitely unravel the truth that these narratives were actually written as a literary venture to entertain people as most of these tales were meant to be enacted on stage as part of a festival or carnival. However, different circumstances have led them into the culmination of a very vital institution called religion.

There is a common opinion that mythologies differ from one culture to another due to the geographical distance and lack of communication in the time they were being conceptualised, but interestingly, often we come across narratives of entirely different cultures having their individual versions of creation tales with a very similar plot.

In the Western world, the ancient Greeks are known for their panorama of cultural heritage and tradition. They have influenced the entire Western literary world altogether. The history of ancient Greek literature is categorised into three periods – Archaic, which is considered till 6 Century BC; Classical period, i.e., 5th and 4th Century BC; and Hellenistic and Greco-Roman period, 3rd

Century BC onwards. Hesiod (Greek *Hēsíodos*/ Latin *Hesiodus*), one of the earliest Greek poets, also

known as the father of Greek didactic poetry, is mainly famous for his epics that have survived, namely the *Theogony*, narrating the myths of the Greek gods and goddesses and *Work and Days*, which is a description of peasant life.

Hesiod in his seminal work *Theogony* recounts the tale of the cosmology of the world. Following the instructions of the Muses, as acclaimed by himself at the beginning, he starts mentioning the emergence of Chaos (Chasm) and Gaia (Earth), followed by Tartara and Eros. Gaia first bears Uranus (Heaven/ Sky); the Ourea (Mountains) and Pontus (the Sea). She later unites with Uranus to give birth to three sons with a hundred arms; each known to be Hecatoncheires and three Cyclops, who are one-eyed creatures. The fearsome appearance of the children terrified their father Uranus and he began to hate them. He then decided to hide them in the hollow of the Earth, which grieved the mother Gaia. Unable to bear any more, she addressed all her sons to change their destiny but unfortunately no one answered except the youngest one Cronus (Kronos). They soon hatch a plan to revert the situation. Mother Earth makes an adamantine sickle with which Cronus ambushes Uranus and castrates him, thereby freeing all his siblings. Eventually, he becomes the king of Gods.

The narrative continues charting the genealogy of numerous Gods and Goddesses, nymphs, heroes, and monsters. Interestingly, history seems to repeat again. Worried about the ultimate fate of his father, Cronus attempts to secure his throne by committing the same mistake as his father. He gives birth to a number of children with Rhea but swallows each one of them right after their birth. This repeated action made Rhea feel helpless each time. At last, when she gave birth to Zeus secretly, she gave him to Gaia to raise him and tricked Cronus into swallowing a stone wrapped with a cloth. Zeus grows up on the island of Crete far from his father and comes forth after a considerable period of time to rescue his siblings by overthrowing his father and by casting him; in the process it was Aphrodite, who took her birth.

Thus, the poem extending genealogical catalogue of the universe's earliest gods and heroes explores the power dynamics that work between men and women, thereby establishing the fact that to enable stability and order in the universe, power needs to be transferred from men to women.

The Māori Mythology refers to the legend of the Māori tribe of New Zealand. They were the settlers from eastern Polynesia, who arrived in New Zealand in several waves of canoe voyage sometime between 1250 and 1300. They have inherited their rituals and beliefs from the Polynesian homeland and presented their version of the creation myth, describing in their concept of the origin of Gods and people along with a vivid description of natural phenomena, the weather, the stars, the moon, the fish, the birds of the forests, and the forests themselves.

The Māori creation epic is very similar to the Greco-Roman version where again we witness a tension between parents and offspring. It features the tale of a similar primordial couple named

Rangi or Ranginui, the sky father and Papatūanuku or Papa, the Earth mother, who always used to lock themselves in a tight embrace and this resulted their children to be born in darkness between them. Unable to bear the continuous darkness any longer, all of them decided to separate their divine parents and fill their world with light. Each gave their own suggestions. Tumatauenga (the god of war) proposed to murder both their parents, while Tāne-mahuta or Tāne-nui-a-Rangi (Tāne) opined to just push them apart so that at least Mother Earth remains close to all. Tāne's suggestion was accepted by all other siblings except Tāwhirimātea, as being the guardian of winds and storms, he feels threatened that it might cause his kingship to come to an end with the parents being separated. Nevertheless, being the minority, his voice was completely ignored by all others. However, the task of separation seemed quite difficult. All the children gave their sincere effort to accomplish the action, but each one failed. Ultimately, it was Tāne who could succeed in placing his shoulder against the Earth and his feet against the sky and thereby pushing with great strain with his upper and lower parts of his body. Both the Sky God and Earth God cried out in pain as they bleed heavily during the process, which gave rise to the sacred colour of the Māori tribe. Even blood spills on the forehead of Tuma, which is known as Kokowai, the sacred red Earth that spilt at dawn**.** Finally, the primordial couple gets separated, resulting in a clear distinction between Sky and Earth.

The story progresses with Urutengangana, drawing the attention of all others at the missing element Ira Tangata, which will aid in the creation of the female race. All the siblings made a vivid search covering all lands and water bodies. Unfortunately, they all failed in their attempt. Upon finding no other way, they consulted with their mother, who unable to bear the pain of her children especially Tāne, divulges the truth of a location named Kura-waka. Soon, all the siblings make a

trip to the place, where they successfully find the element buried in the earth. They all started to dig it out in order to contribute to the creation of a woman along with her form. The elder son of Papa gives shape to the body, while the younger ones add flesh, fat, muscles, and blood into it. Finally, Tāne breathes life into it. The earth formed maiden named Hine-ahu-one thus takes its birth.

The Māori myth features elements which run parallel to the Babylonian version of the creation myth. In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonians narrate the tale of Marduk, who is commissioned to fight his mother, Tiamat, very similar to the Māorian Tuma, who separated his parents. A commonality that characterises all the three creation myths is that the younger generation in order to establish their own existence fights a battle against their older generation, which accounts in blood shed and violence.

The Supreme Being called Io, the ex-nihilo, i.e., out of nothing, also finds His ambiguous and mysterious mention in the Māori myth, and is known to create Ranginui and Papatūanuku out of the void. The Christian creation myth mentioned in the Biblical Book of *Genesis* also begins with God, the Supreme Being, who created the heaven along with the Earth, which was a complete void

and had no form. Everything was chaos at the start and God said, “Let there be light and there was light.” (*Genesis* 1:3) Seeing that the light was quite good, He separated light from darkness, calling the light ‘Day’ and the darkness ‘Night’. The evening and the morning were thus formed in the first day. On the second day, God again made a declaration. He explained – “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters”. (*Genesis* 1:6- 8) Immediately the water above and below the firmament got separated. The firmament was named Heaven.

The third day came when God ordered to gather together the waters on one hand and all the lands on the other hand under the heaven. Along with that the Earth brought forth grass, herbs, yielding seed, and the fruit tree, having its seed in itself. On the fourth day, the day was separated from the night and two great lights, sun and moon were created, the brighter one to rule over the day, while the lesser light is to rule over the night. The stars were also created alongside. On the fifth day, moving creatures were created that had life and could fly in the open firmament of heaven above the Earth. Apart from them, were whales and other living creatures that were meant for the water bodies. On the sixth day, similarly cattle and other beasts were created for the lands. Next, He

made the first man Adam after His own image from dust and thereby breathed life into it and made it to dominate over all the other living creatures that covered the water bodies and the land. He gave man the entire Garden of Eden, which He planted eastward. He allowed man to have a control over every element in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which was also planted in the midst of the garden. He warned him that the day he will consume the fruit, he will die. It was the seventh day, when God finally realised that His work is done and hence He decided to take rest and bless the day and it got sanctified.

The creation stories of the Eastern regions of the world are quite different from that of the Western tales. All the Abrahamic religions in their mythologies describe the world to be concocted out of nothingness following the God’s will and have clearly stated that very similarly it will again end in the same nothingness once again in the future. Nevertheless, Oriental religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism envisaged the world as eternal, passing through phases of creation and destruction. Hence, as the matter of fact, ‘beginning’ here refers not to the beginning of a phase, rather to the beginning of the entire world itself. At this point, the difference lies between the Abrahamic and the Oriental mythologies, recounting tales of genesis. While the Oriental tales consider the process to be eternal, linear, and repetitive, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions feature no definitive timeline. Hinduism believes universe to be millions of years old. The very concept of the belief in reincarnation in Hindu mythology pronounces that this universe is not the first place that has come into existence and at same time will also not be the last place.

The plurality of Hinduism has accommodated a number of customs, traditions, and beliefs from numerous communities, which likewise facilitate a range of stories about the beginning from the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Puranas, and some other philosophical narratives. They have come down from generation to generation

as oral tales; often which exhibits considerable variations.

Brahma, the creator, according to the Hindus, has created the universe out of himself, while Vishnu has taken up the responsibility of preserving it. Since the cycle of birth, life, and death is the natural law of the universe, Shiva is destined to destroy the world and the cycle will continue with Brahma again conceiving the universe.

According to the early Vedic hymns, society was conceived as 'purusha', being united from four different categories of human beings – the knowledge-keepers forming the head; the arms being formed from the land-owners; the trunk being made up of market-controllers; while the feet from the service-providers.

Later Puranic tradition explains a recurring event where human culture is realised as the creator Brahma and it passes through the four phases, namely 'Krita' (childhood), Treta (youth), Dvapara (maturity), and 'Kali' (old age), which lead finally to 'Pralaya' (death), further leading to the entire rebirth cycle. Death here is contemplated as a flood that destroys all except Manu, the first human, along with the Vedas.

Brahma or Prajapati prefigured to be the father of all living creatures are considered to have given birth asexually to 'mind born' sons called the sages, who later married different women to produce offspring. The son of Brahma Rishi Kashyapa is known to have given birth to different creatures being married to several women – fishes are born to Timi; snakes to Kadru; while birds to Vinata. Interestingly, all the male forms including Brahma can be conceited as metaphors for mind, being implanted into the female 'matter' and getting unified together to create embodied life. This union of mind and matter give rise to Tantra. On the other hand, Shiva is also credited for creating the world (nature) with Shakti. Krishna at the same time is claimed to be the source of life as well, having two yoni or wombs – mind and matter. The most surprising diversion which can be observed in the Hindu mythology from the Abrahamic tales is that often it is mentioned in *Upanishad* as well as Vedic hymns that God came later than man.

The *Puranas* has a multifaceted claim that it was mind that came first and after a long sleep when Vishnu woke up, the world came into being with a lotus growing from his navel on top of which Brahma sits alone. Feeling isolated, he started creating various living creatures one after another, being unaware of his origin. The Vishnu worshippers seem to believe that he has brought out the world from the bottom of the sea and conjured up Goddess Lakshmi to be churned out from the ocean of milk. Nevertheless, the worshippers of Shiva considered that he, being the pillars of fire and embodiment of consciousness having no beginning or end, is the infinite origin who enables all finite forms to take their shape as Brahma taking the form of a swan as well as Vishnu could neither reach the tip nor the base.

The Buddhist mythologies have no definitive story of creation; rather according to them existence is endless, having no beginning or end. All individuals are indeed born again and again, going through pain and suffering throughout many lives. Only 'Nirvana' can free them from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Buddha believes in six realms into which a soul can be reborn – heaven, the abode of Devas and Gods, realm of humanity, of Titans, of the hungry ghosts, the animal realms and finally that of hell. Apart from it, regarding the creation of cosmos, Buddha would only state that both the beginning and the end of the world are withhold within the concept of Samsara, i.e., the cycle of repeated birth and death.

Jainism has a very strong opinion regarding the creation of the universe. According to them, universe has always existed and will continue to exist, being regulated by cosmic laws. The Loka, the framework of universe, is consisted of five parts – the supreme abode of Gods, the upper world for celestial bodies, the middle world for mankind, the lower world for demons, and the base for the lowest forms of life. Very close to the Hindus and the Buddhist scriptures, Jains also conceptualise historical time as cyclical.

Apart from the notion of time, while comparing the Occidental and Oriental tales of genesis, it can be easily observed that they vary from each other in their fundamental process of evolution. The Occident myths follow the tradition of exclusion; i.e., the progress of generation is not through succession rather through extirpation of the older generation by the younger generation, while the Oriental tales are inclusive in nature, having almost no rivalry or violence between generations.

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Staring into the abyss through a lens- a study of meta-cultural tropes in Coppola's Apocalypse Now

Debarshi Arathdar

Francis Ford Coppola's "Apocalypse Now" released in the year 1979 re-presents a rock and roll invasion of Vietnam by American forces. As Mariam Hansen observes "The filmmaker as field marshal, the production as journey, mission, spectacle of martial dimensions, the affinity of cinematic and military techniques and the war itself as a media event" (Hansen 123) has accompanied the movie all through its production to its release and even beyond.

The film is an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" that deals with Belgian ivory trade in Congo. Alike to Marlow's retrieval of Kurtz up the Congo River, Coppola's Captain Willard undertakes a similar journey, in fact a spiritual one that takes him up the Nung River to assassinate Kurtz (played by Marlon Brando in the film). As Milton J. Bates notes, "his 'Apocalypse Now' attests to the continuing influence of the New England Way even as it deplores the harmful consequences of that influence" (Bates 13). The film builds its ideological and ontological impetus on the American frontier myth with its roots deeply entangled in Puritan ways of life.

Coppola's film carries the majority of American ethos with the war in Vietnam and its constant search for recuperation and sense-making by narrativizing and myth- rebuilding, often to disproportionate ends. The film's significant concern with "heavy-handed symbolism with explicit references to "Heart of Darkness" and its lack of concern with specific political and historical details suggest that the Vietnam war is simply the latest in a long line of corrupt imperialist ventures" (Demory 343). However, the war in Vietnam lies in closer lieu to the aftermath and extension of the cold war and is perhaps better contextualised in the same rather than lodging its metaphorical lenses in colonial and imperialist ventures as have often been the case with its representations in film.

Coppola's film progresses through episodic developments that symbolically trace a backward temporal movement with the forward spatial progression of Captain Willard's company up the river, marking as if a traversal and journey from civilization to the savage 'heart of darkness'. As

John Hellman rightly observes, in Apocalypse Now, Coppola uses the "hard-boiled detective formula" (Hellman 430) as a means for transforming the river journey in the 'Heart of Darkness' into an investigation of both American society (represented by the army) and American Idealism (represented by Brando) in Vietnam. With all the portrayals of the west-coast culture on display in the film centring on surfing, go-go

dancing, rock music and drug-habits; the viewer experiences Vietnam not as a separate culture but rather Vietnam as a resisting object of the hallucinatory self- projection of the American culture.

The film begins with the sound of helicopter rotor traversing from left to right in the screen with The Doors' 'This is the end' beginning the exact moment the napalm is dropped in the background treeline. The helicopter has often been characterized as a step-up in the warfare procedure that lends America a significant hand over their French counterparts in dealing with the Vietnamese guerrilla warfare techniques and as Lawrence Suid notes, becomes the metaphor for American experience in Vietnam. Surely, as we shall see further ahead in the film narrative, Captain Kilgore's helicopter titled "Death from Above" is an apt description for the American strategy that used approximately 14 million tonnes of bombs and lethal devices alongside 72 million litres of defoliants in the war. The next few frames pan through a napalm induced fire burning through the wilderness with Captain Willard's weary face and his hotel room being juxtaposed in the same frame. The following montage not only serves to elucidate the impact of the war on Willard's mind but also to blend the domains of landscape and mindscape into an indistinguishable and integrated whole. He begins a monologue, perhaps a dialogue with the viewer, in a voice-over narration written by Michael Herr. We see several anxieties of Willard manifest in the next few frames, for example- the anxiety of going back home as he peeps through his window slit and notices he is still in Saigon, the anxiety of non-action resulting in loss of masculinity for he feels he is 'getting softer' and finally the anxiety of the enemy as he says "every minute I stay in the room I get weaker, every minute Charlie squats in the bush, he gets stronger".

Captain Willard played by Martin Sheen also represents the typical puritan in temperament who enters the terrifying wilderness of the 'self' in his hotel room in Saigon and behaves as one who is profoundly aware of inner disturbance, conflict and guilt. "What are the charges?" is the first thing he asks to the military police who come to fetch him to Nha Trang for the mission. On further reaching the general headquarters stationed at Nha Trang, Willard and the audience are debriefed about the mission and introduced to Kurtz via his voice recordings, the first of which again evokes an imagery for the puritan sentiment of sacrifice and persistent toiling towards salvation, and I quote the recording: "I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor, that's my dream. That's my nightmare." We watch how the higher officials paradoxically praise his humanitarian nature while at the same time deeming his ideas and methods as 'unsound'. Kurtz's 'unsoundness' lies primarily in his separation from the community and communal authority as mediated by his military supervisors. Willard accepts the mission of terminating Kurtz as he "must be eliminated because his methods are deemed "unsound" by military and civilian intelligence. Their unsoundness lies primarily in his separation from the community and communal authority, as mediated by his superiors. Whereas Willard is an assassin under orders, Kurtz is an assassin who recognizes no

authority beyond himself" (Bates 10). The dialectics of Willard and Kurtz are then the two sides of the Puritan ethos, representing the one who has gone haywire although after practising intense self-defined discipline in the wilderness and the one who regains sanity and spiritual insight from the same experience.

The next episode transports us to Willard and his patrol boat company comprising of the boat captain named Chief, the surfer Lance, the French recruit who is called Chef for his exquisite cooking skills and the 17-year-old 'clean' as they witness Operation Arc light in effect before landing on shore. On landing upon the shore, Willard and his crew are surprised to see live-filming in action and are taken aback when told to act normal as if they had other options. The scene is a commentary on the nature of the vastly televised war in Vietnam and perhaps a commentary on the problematic of the frame as a representational medium as Susan Sontag notes, since it is the director Coppola himself who is both embedded and out of it at the same time. A subtle critic of the non-existent strategic hamlet program that had been dissolved by the early 60s is shown in accordance to Stanley Karnow and David Halberstam report on the Pentagon Papers. Ngo Diem and Ngo Nhu used the Strategic Hamlet program for their own corrupt uses denying the peasantry needed weapons and security as the villages were often constructed quite afar from their working fields.

Lieutenant Colonel Kilgore, from first of the ninth Air cavalry division, is introduced in the next frames as he gets down from his helicopter and orders to bomb the treeline back 100 yards in order to "give him some room to breathe". Kilgore is built on the other American myth of the cowboy taming the wild as is evident from his classic Stetson hat with a yellow scarf around his neck and his nostalgia for the good old cavalry days. Colonel Kilgore influences the scene with almost a rock and roll vibe, a nihilistic monger who couldn't care less for the war than his whimsical fantasies. He is one who dehumanizes the Vietnamese by tagging them with playing cards or rather as he calls them 'body cards while tending to the women and children at the same time for med- vac. Kilgore exhibits the huge gap between theory and praxis, when on discovering a Vietcong. holding his guts from pouring out he proceeds to the feed him water from his own canteen but spills it on hearing the news of Lance the surfer being present. The following scene is significant in the sense of showing the white man's moralist burden as he exhibits more altruism towards the VC than the ARVN. Perhaps, the destroyed church in the background symbolizes not only an apocalyptic loss, but a loss that must be instantly supplemented by other logocentric models, as we see an informal prayer session being carried out in the open by the soldiers.

Later at night during the camp fire, when Col. Kilgore becomes aware of the presence of good six- foot peaks ideal for surfing, he becomes excited and finally convinced to escort them to Vin Drin Dop. Although the place is 'hairy' and heavy with artillery wherein they had previously lost a soldier, Kilgore is much more interested in surfing stranger waters for he knew the stakes and

had a clear estimate of the overwhelming American firepower. It might even be another nostalgic symptom to revisit and relive California beach times prior to the war. When Lance and others point out the 6 feet high waves zone as charlie's point, Kilgore replies "Charlie don't surf!" as if an American way of asserting the capture of not only Vietnamese land but also their waters and waves.

The next episode takes us through the raid of Vin Drin Dop while Kilgore blasts Richard Wagner "Ride of the Valkyries" in the loudspeakers because it "scares the hell out of the slopes". Slope is an acronym for Silly Little Opium Peddling Easterners. In Wagner's opera, the Valkyries are a group of Virgin warriors riding winged horses whose task is to transport the fallen heroes to Valhalla, i.e., Odin's afterlife Hall for the slain. They represent the spirit and harbingers of death in norse mythology. Michel Maslowski notes how in the following scene "both the discourse of the war and the humanitarian discourse become devalued by the practice of barbaric murders perpetrated to the soundtrack of Richard Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries" (203). Kilgore after repeated bombing on the village is amazed by the resilience of the Vietnamese as he remarks

"Don't these people ever give up!" Col. Kilgore is one who affectively registers the smell of napalm in direct correlation to victory. His distraught sense of aesthetics and morality is not only reflected in his concern for surfing the perilous waters but also his stark lack of concern for the 'other' as he doesn't hesitate to blow them back into the stone age for the sake of better surfing conditions. The next scenes are perhaps the only strictly comical scenes with petrified surfers in the sea under command by Col. Kilgore while mortar shells splash around them. The reluctance of Lance to surf the same water who excuses himself as an artist who is way too good for sloppy waves is ultimately the result of dropping napalm that caused turbulent disturbances and wind vortex along the shoreline. The vortex then becomes quite aptly a metaphor for disorder - the American incompetency of not living up to both their practical and fantastical engagements in the war, as is exemplified by Kilgore's frustration. It wasn't a rock and roll war as Kilgore would have it or Coppola would show it, perhaps it was everything else than the rock and roll syndrome.

Captain Willard and his crew further travel up the Nung River into Hau Phat (pronounced how fat in the American way) what Milton J Bates notes as "an appropriately named oasis of excess" (10). Willard and his crew stumble upon the United Service Organisations (U.S.O.) show in a stage filled with phallic structures resembling missile-heads. The show features the rock impresario Bill Graham and three playboy bunnies dressed as a cowboy, an American-Indian woman and a cavalry trooper of Indian-American hybrid. The following event is a reward on behalf of the smooth execution of operation brute force and is based on the American ideology of the sex-as-success paradigm. The absurd conflations of past and present, the hybridity in the costumes of the playboy bunnies is perhaps a reflection on the absurdities of American Policies in Vietnam. We must remember that it was with the precise dis-agreement over American policies in Vietnam that Kurtz ventured out on

a path of his own. In the Hau Phat scene, we witness another racist remark by Willard that captures the mentality of the American soldiers in dehumanizing the Vietnamese soldier as an irreconcilable other; as Willard says "Charlie's idea of great R&R was cold rice and rat meat".

In the redux version of the film the crew further stumbles upon the playboy bunnies' group as they proceed towards the Do Lung Bridge wherein Willard exchanges 2 barrels of fuel for a couple of hours filled with sexual frenzy with the bunnies. It is funny to note this addition as Willard had stopped at Hau Phat precisely for fuel, which he gives away here, as if compensating for the incomplete R &R show of the bunnies. As Willard and his crew travel further up the river they come across a Vietnamese boat transporting vegetables where they mistakenly shoot upon the innocent villagers and then tries to tend toward the injured girl, it is as Coppola notes "We'd cut them in half with a machine gun and give them a Band-Aid. It was a lie. And the more I saw of them, the more I hate lies" (Coppola, 1979). Coppola later stated in a 2006 interview that the scene was inspired by the "notorious My Lai massacre" where ordinary people were killed ruthlessly as he concluded, "Who is to blame? We all are to be blamed".

The next episode in line is the one at the Do Lung Bridge near the Vietnam-Cambodia border that truly gives an impression of Robert J. Cardullo's remark: "This is a trip film, an acid war" (214). We witness yet another faulty line of American War Policy in Vietnam as stranded and hallucinated soldiers engages in a sisyphus-like toil of repairing the bridge, only to have it blown apart by Charlie at night. We witness a nostalgic re-enactment of the Second World War with its trenches and traumatized shell-shocked soldiers who have been left without a commanding officer with ample rounds of ammunition to wreak havoc beyond comprehension. The insanity and the quick recursion to primitive self-hood exhibited in such instances as Saul Steier notes "subsumes the war under a bizarre and nostalgic appeal to the universality of the "primitive" in all of us and a tacit accusation that a hypocritical pretence at morality has the consequence of sapping the will necessary to activate the primitive, a will without which we can never hope to win a war" (115), the epitome of which is perhaps seen in Kurtz himself.

The redux version released in 2001 also includes a significant footage of the French plantation as they travel closer towards Kurtz's camp which Walter Murch, the sound editor notes as "an interlude to give you some emotional, political background as to why the Americans were there in Vietnam. [...] Because the French had been there before and had come to this tragic end". We see the proper funeral rites of Mr Clean who died in an ambush being executed in the plantation territory; the salutatory rites being performed by the only black person left i.e., the 'Chief'. The French exhibited a nostalgic burden of their losses and the will to not repeat them as Hubert De Marrais, the chief patriarch notes "Second World War-lost, Dien Bien Phu-lost, Nigeria-lost, Indochina-lost, but here we don't lose, here we retain our land". We also notice a similar frontier myth of the Americans

being expounded by the French in a different context as Vietnam, as De Marrais notes how with the help of the Vietnamese, alike to the Native American's early mutual

relations with the Puritan settlers, in precisely how 'they' had converted something out of nothing. An ironical scene arises when DeMarrias asserts how it is the land that keeps them together as families and the camera zooms out to show the deserted dinner table. Coppola paid significant effort in construing the realities comprising a proper French dinner scene, wherein one woman, Roxanne, functions like The Intended in Heart of Darkness: she is an object of beauty and desire, and she is representative of European decadence and death. The French plantation therefore posits "a symbol of the intrusion of European culture in a faraway colonial setting, a 'text' that Willard finds and attempts to read" as noted by Pamela Demory.

Alike to Marlow's commentary on women in Heart of Darkness as being embodiments of both naiveness and representing the beautiful face of a corrupt civilization. Apocalypse Now Redux similarly associates corrupt civilized values with women. One of the most dramatic differences between Redux and Apocalypse Now is the number of women in the film. In Redux, women are central presences in the two longest added scenes - the medevac helicopter scene (where the Playboy bunnies are stranded) and the French Plantation scene. And yet, as with Heart of Darkness, their presence is paradoxical: on the one hand, they remain "out of it" - not instrumental to the main plot or to the war itself.

As Willard travels up the river, we see various instances of fog and colourful smokes haunt the scenario often illuminated by napalm fire. Such images invoke the archetypal biblical 'fog' that was the sign of God's presence during Mosses procession through the desert. However, the death of God has already been announced quite early on in the narrative as "cosmic darkness and infernal fire are two different things. The warm colours and the symbolism of fire in the film create a different image of the world- what we are seeing is no longer just a revelation of nature, we are given a conclusion about the world's diabolic character, a judgement" (Maslowski 206).

The final episode in the film is Willard's encounter with Kurtz with only two of his crewmen left

i.e. Lance and Chef. Kurtz, a Green Beret colonel who had enrolled in Airborne at the age of 38 for the sake of keeping his soldier rigor intact is a renegade, an egoist and also a puritan separatist in flight from the American equivalents of Egypt and Babylon. Kurtz deliberately chose the Cambodian Wilderness as a means to his own unspecified salvation and was obsessed with an impending sense of apocalypse alike to the New England puritans. The inscription "Apocalypse Now" on the temple steps is reminiscent of the Tate La Bianca murders by Charles Manson's

family that had left the words "Helter Skelter" (Manson's term for Armageddon) on the fridge door of the murdered family. Kurtz in east Kampuchea seems bent on a similar project with a similar set

of devotees who are literally savages. Kurtz is described as a "poet-warrior" by the photo-journalist played by Dennis Hopper; he is one who reads Eliot's poetry aloud with all its modernist elements of fragmentation and spiritual distraught-ness, especially The Hollow Men with its ominous epigraph "Mistah Kurtz-he dead" and its repeated "This is the way the world ends". The end for Kurtz as echoed in The Doors' song is his "only friend". He is one who doesn't want the end with a whimper but a bang as Willard notes his wish of dying "like a soldier and not some poor wasted rag-assed renegade". Kurtz's temple-scape with decapitated bodies and severed heads foreshadow the reign of the Khmer Rouge, although the information about the genocide wasn't public yet.

Willard while being caged inside Kurtz's premises faces his first instance of corporeal vulnerability in a truly foreign land, especially on having Chef's severed head thrown into his lap while being gagged and tied down. Perhaps, the following instance is a part of Kurtz's training mechanism for the hardened puritan- the Jungian archetypal shadow in conversation with the lighter side of the self. The photojournalist interestingly mentions how all of it is simple dialectics as is evident from Kurtz's monologue on befriending horror- "for horror and moral terror are to be made friends with and if not, they are to be truly feared as in the treatment of an enemy". The presence of Frazer's 'The Golden Bough' and Weston's 'From Ritual to Romance' influences the film as Gerard Gillespie notes how "Conrad's Marlow has the role of the bearer of secrets from a dark alien realm. Coppolla adds more explicit dimensions to this role by fusing it with the Grail legend, as this is treated in Weston's book From Ritual to Romance" (81). Kurtz is the fisher king who awaits Willard's arrival and grooms him appropriately for the role of his assassinator, while lecturing him on ideas of freedom and agency.

Kurtz exhibits the typical white man's burden syndrome, but in the process ends up becoming the biggest burden on either side of the civilization line perhaps arising from a mis-reading of the very situation and context itself. As Nguyen Khac Vien observes: "the presence of Frazer's Golden Bough is misleading to be appropriated in Vietnam contexts it may depict the life of certain tribes at some given epoch and not the men living in the mountains of Indochina at a time when Washington was trying to enrol them for service" (43). Kurtz's greatest fear is being judged and being memorialized in the wrong manner, as is evident from his letters back at home and his remarks to Willard as he says, "You have no right to call me a murderer. You have a right to kill me. But you have no right to judge me". Kurtz who leaves the message of dropping the bomb and exterminating everyone, recalls the position of the New England Puritans during King Philip's war where exterminating the American Indians began to seem more prudent than converting them. The parallel narratives of the bull slaughter and that of Kurtz invokes his idea of death being a ritualistic sacrifice. As Marsha Kinder observes: "Perhaps this totemic relationship serves as a substitute for the identification between Kurtz and his ivory in the original story. But Coppola uses it to give an ironic twist to Willard's romantic quest, where the slain dragon turns out to be another version of the self, i.e., an

alter ego of Willard. (18)" He survives as a reflection; refusing to replace Kurtz as a false god, but echoing his dying words of horror.

In the film, "Kurtz represents the primitive part of every human being, the part that is suppressed into the subconscious. He becomes what Jung calls the Shadow archetype, meaning the evil side to us all that we prefer not to acknowledge" (Maslowski 208) for it has already been mentioned that "his intelligence is clear, it is his soul that is ill." Unlike the New England Puritans however, he has no illusions that his end will precipitate a new millennium. His apocalypse as Milton J Bates notes, is both now and forever; an immanent rather than an imminent event situated in the middle and not the end of history. Although the Montagnard ritual offers a way out of the dead end, Willard chooses not to take it and sticks to the linear puritan way that rejects any pagan myth dealing with the idea of eternal recurrence.

"The Horror of the west" as described by Philip Lacou-Labarthe on Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" is very much present in the narratives wrought within Apocalypse Now. Coppola recalls his indebtness to the novel more than the Milius script, of which he carried a green paperback version all the time and made additions, omissions and extra notes on the same. As William Hagen observes, "any film about Vietnam that followed the traditions of realistic narrative filmmaking (especially of war films) would be working against a collective sensibility that had arrived at different preconceptions of what was authentic", which is especially evident in Apocalypse Now. Although the film captures a surrealistic experience of the war, it is precisely in the exaggerated portrayals of the same that it diminishes the gravitas of the subject and opens up a different realm of discourse altogether. One that exposes the ontic of re-presentation wherein one is always,

already narrativizing from a particular position; hence baring the cultural schemas that comprise the *topos* of such an act.

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The Influence of William Wordsworth on Mamang Dai's Selected Poems

Atanu Ghosh

Mamang Dai, a female poet and novelist from Arunachal Pradesh, is still not extensively known to academics of India, leave alone the Western academics. However, she had created a sensation among the Indian Academics by winning the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 for her novel " The Black Hill ". Her mother tongue is Adi[1] which is a non - script language. Her graduation in English literature from Gauhati University,Assam, facilitates the process of creative writings in English language. It may be inferred that Dai's creative instinct was highly influenced by her intimate association with English literature. That the Romantic Period in English literature was the formative influence on Mamang Dai can easily be traced in her literary works as a whole. The High Romantics in general and William Wordsworth, the pioneer of the Romantic Revival in English literature, in particular had a great influence on Mamang Dai. The objective of this paper is to unearth the romantic elements in Mamang Dai's selected poems, consequently exploring the influence of the High Romantics, especially William Wordsworth. This is somewhat a novel area, a rather untrodden path, unexplored till date.

The poems of William Wordsworth and Mamang Dai may not immediately appear to have much in common. The former was born in England in the year 1770 and the later was born in Independent India in the year 1957. Apart from the fact that India was once a colony of England, there are very few similarities between these two countries. Not only their countries, but also their societies, cultures and lifestyles are different. Even though they are not contemporaries, Wordsworth and Dai write poems based on nature. William Wordsworth, one of the forerunners of the Romantic Revival in England, is known for his love of Nature and pantheistic creed. The word "Pantheism" is derived from the ancient Greek words 'pan' and 'theos' where 'pan' means 'all' and 'theos' means 'God'. (Reese) The Concise Oxford Dictionary defined "Pantheism" as " the belief that God is identifiable with the forces of nature and with material substances". (COD 987) It is a doctrine of religious Philosophy which believes that God is everywhere and Nature and God are identical. Wordsworth believes that God manifests Himself in the elements of Nature, sometimes investing them with, to use Wordsworth's own words, "apparell'd in celestial light" (Wordsworth 293). Incidentally, one may recall what Wordsworth said about the function of himself in the Preface to his collaborative work with Coleridge - *Lyrical Ballads*:

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose incidents

and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. (Gupta 478)

S. T. Coleridge, too, in his *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 14, acknowledges:

In this idea originated the plan of the "Lyrical Ballads"; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural. (Gupta 496)

Mamang Dai belongs to the 'Adi' tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. This tribe is a primitive one and is very close to nature. They worship natural elements like trees, mountains and rivers. Basically, a nature - lover, Dai, in her poems, presents the flora and fauna and other natural elements. In fact, her attitude to nature is parallel to that of Wordsworth, since like Wordsworth, she too beholds in natural elements and objects, the heavenly features.

From the above discussion, one may easily realize that Dai's poems are influenced by 'Romanticism' in English literature. As there are probably thousands of definitions of Romanticism, it is of no use to define the term afresh. Rather, some of the common characteristics of Romanticism will be helpful to treat the affinity between the High Romantics in English literature and Mamang Dai. The salient features of Romanticism are: (1) Subjectivism (2) Emphasis on imagination (3) Love of nature (4) Love of common man (5) Nostalgic adherence to the past (6) Quest for ideal (7) Escapism (8) Longing for the permanent and sorrow for the transient etc.

Let us take the above - mentioned features of Romanticism one by one and discuss the parallelism between the High Romantics and Mamang Dai by giving examples from their poems. The first feature is subjectivism. Romantic poets are very subjective in their approach to life. Thus, Wordsworth expresses his feeling of joy when he sees rainbow in the sky in the poem "My heart leaps up when I behold":

My heart leaps up when I behold A Rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began; So is it now I am a Man;

So be it when I shall grow old, Or let me die! (Wordsworth 261)

In the same vein, John Keats in his poem "Ode to a Nightingale" feels pain by being too happy with the joy of nightingale's song:

My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains My sense, as though of hemlock I had

drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains (Gupta 291)

It is quite common to feel happy at the happiness of others. But what is strange here, the speaker's heart aches because he is too happy. Keats' subjectivity and sensitivity are foregrounded here. Similarly, Mamang Dai, in her poem "No Dreams", is feeling restless, sleepless and dreamless, notwithstanding the beautiful scenes of nature at night:

The days are nothing.

Plant and foliage grow silently, at night a star falls down,
a leopard leaves its footprints,
But I have no dreams

The wind blows into my eyes sometimes, it stirs my heart

to see the land so plain and beautiful, But I have no dreams (Dai 18)

Besides subjectivism, the above examples give ample evidence to the second feature of Romanticism- emphasis on imagination.

The third feature is love of nature. It is ingrained in the Romantic poets and they want to return to nature. But Wordsworth not only loves nature, but also introduces himself in "Tintern Abbey", "The Prelude" and other poems as "Nature's Priest". As mentioned earlier, Wordsworth's name is synonymous with "Pantheism". Nature is no longer a beautiful presence to Wordsworth, but a living entity representing the God. Every object of Nature is a part of Divine life and the God's mysterious presence is universal in Wordsworth's poem "Immortality Ode":

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream, The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem

Appareled in celestial light,

The glory and the freshness of a dream. (Gupta 176)

John Keats, another major Romantic poet, in his poem "Ode to a Nightingale", speaks about the beauty of nature in a moonlit night:

And haply the Queen - Moon is on her throne, Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. (Gupta 294)

Mamang Dai hails from Arunachal Pradesh which is a paradise for nature - lovers. Naturally, Dai's poems are full of happy images taken from natural landscape. Thus, in her poem "Song of Dancers", Dai delineates nature in the following manner:

The cloud is in love with the mountain. The blue crest wrapped in stillness bears this

addiction of air and water, the mark of rain on the steep jungle
the mysterious of the path in her valleys,

and the silent space of her memories. (Dai 19)

The next feature is love of man, especially downtrodden. In Wordsworth's poem "Resolution and Independence", an old man, whose body is bent double because of his age and whose profession is to gather leeches, is given a mighty stature by Wordsworth. The old man sets example by simply doing his duty with perseverance:

He with a smile did then his words repeat; And said, that, gathering leeches, far and wide

He travelled; stirring thus about his feet

The waters of the Ponds where they abide. "Once I could meet with them on every side;

But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may". (Wordsworth 271)

Similarly, in her poem, "The Missing Link ", Mamang Dai speaks of hapless hill men, who are illiterate and who are waiting for the letters of their near and dear ones, perhaps doing job in distant places. They don't know how to read letters and hence, they are waiting for someone to read letters on their behalf: "And in the villages the silent hill men still await / the long-promised letters, and the meaning of words " (Dai 12)

The next feature is nostalgic adherence to the past. John Keats, in his "Ode to a Nightingale ", feels nostalgic when he listens to the song of the nightingale bird. The voice of nightingale that he listens to now was heard in the ancient days by higher and lower classes of people. The song appeals greatly to Ruth, the Biblical character. It also reminds one of the medieval magic and charm:

> The voice I hear this passing night was heard In ancient days by emperor and clown
>
> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
>
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home, She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
>
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
>
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (Gupta 295-296) The same nostalgia haunts

Wordsworth in his "Immortality Ode":

> But there's a Tree, of many, one,
>
> A single Field which I have looked upon, Both of them speak of something that is gone;
>
> The Pansy at my feet
> Doth the same tale repeat: (Gupta 178)

In the poem "A Stone Breaks the Sleeping Water", Dai is nostalgic about childhood which goes away quickly. This hard fact is realized by her when the season changes and a stone breaks the sleep of water:

> Nothing vanishes so surely as childhood, the life of clay, the chemistry of colour, This I
>
> realize in the season of dying,
> in the month of red Lotus
>
> When a stone breaks the sleeping water, (Dai 21)

The next characteristic of Romanticism is quest for an ideal. In Keats' poem "Ode to a Nightingale", the speaker wants to go to the ideal, beautiful and perfect world of the nightingale which is free from " the weariness, the fever and the fret"(Gupta 293) of the human world. He goes there, albeit temporarily, by poetic imagination: "Away! Away! for I will fly to thee, / Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy" (Gupta 293). But he has to come back to the real world because there is always an attempt to reach the ideal but one cannot either reach there or

stay there for long.

Though in a different vein, Dai, in her poem "Remembrance", questions the quest for ideal. She criticizes the wishful thinking of the present generation of people who always think that there dwelling and environment will remain in ideal condition. This serious questioning actually lay bare to her longing for the ideal:

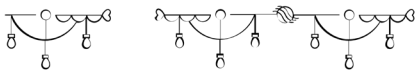
> Why did we think it was trivial that it would rain every summer,
>
> that nights would be still with sleep and that the green fern would uncurl ceaselessly by
>
> the roadside.
> Why did we think survival was simple,
>
> that river and field would stand forever invulnerable, even to the dreams of strangers, for
>
> we knew where the sun lay resting
> in the folded silence of the hills. (Dai 16)

The next feature is Escapism. The Romantic poets want to escape from the hard reality of life. In our real life, there are so many hardships that one wants to escape from there to take refuge temporarily in a peaceful abode where there is no pain and anguish. Thus, in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale", the speaker wants to escape into an ideal world leaving a painful real world:

> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
>
> What thou among the leaves hast never known, The weariness, the fever, and the fret
>
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan; Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray
>
> hairs,
> Where youth grow pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;(Gupta 293)

In the same vein, Dai, in her poem "No Dreams", wants to escape into the big mountains surrounding their land in Arunachal Pradesh and to enjoy the beauty of the hills washed with light and listens to the song of the river where love floats:

> If I sit very still
>
> I think I can join the big mountains In their speechless ardour
> Where no sun is visible
> the hills are washed with light. The river sings



love floats!

love floats! (Dai 18)

Another feature of Romanticism is the longing for the permanent and sorrow for the transient. In John Keats' poem "Ode to a Nightingale", the speaker wants to escape into the beautiful and permanent world, but at the back of his mind, he cannot forget pain and suffering of the transient world:

And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known, The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan; Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray

hairs, Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow. (Gupta 292- 293)

In the same way, Dai, in her poem " Sky Song", contrasts the sky with standing tall trees, children playing in the field, women talking, men predicating harvests. The sky represents a higher power's presence which is the permanent thing in human life, in spite of changes in seasons, people and places. It is contrasted with transient things like trees, children, men and women:

The evening is

the greatest medicine maker testing the symptoms

Of breath and demise Without appointment

writing prescriptions in the changing script
Of a cloud's wishbone rib,

in the expanding body of the sky. We left the tall trees standing We left the children

playing.

We left the women talking and men were predicting good harvests or bad,
that winged summer we left,

racing with the leopards of morning. (Dai 22)

In conclusion, it may be said that, being a resident of the verdant greenery of Arunachal Pradesh, it is not at all surprising that a highly sensitive person like Mamang Dai will fall in love with nature, will escape into the eidetic world of nature. From the lap of nature, she visualizes the kaleidoscope in natural beauty. Thus, it is not very difficult to find an affinity and parallelism between Mamang Dai and the High Romantics like Wordsworth and Keats. But now we live in a world full of pollution and violence. In order to get back peace and tranquility, the need of the hour is to return to nature physically and enjoy the beauty and serenity of nature mentally in the poems of Mamang Dai and the High Romantics.

Notes:

Adi - Adi is a dominant collective tribe living mainly within the districts of East Siang, West Siang, Upper Siang and Dibang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh. The literal meaning of 'Adi' is 'hill' or 'mountain top'. Their language is Adi which is a non-script language. In the Adi tribe, a family is the basic unit of social organization and nuclear.

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'Celestial lights' in Selected Poems of Wordsworth: A Study in the Poet's Use of Rhetorical Devices

Masadul Islam

One of the pillars of Wordsworth's poetic vision is his belief in pantheism, the philosophical perspective that holds that there is a divine presence in every part of the natural World. Wordsworth skillfully infused his lines with the spirit of pantheism through his use of language and structure, forging a strong bond between people and nature. The paper examines the idea of pantheism from a stylistic perspective in a few of William Wordsworth's poems, including '*Tintern Abbey*,' (1798) '*Immortality Ode,'* (1807) *'The World is too Much with us,'* (1807) and *'The Tables Turned.'*(1798) Wordsworth's writings frequently demonstrate a great affinity between nature and the divine, demonstrating his conviction that the natural world has spiritual meaning. This paper seeks to show how Wordsworth uses stylistic devices to portray the idea of nature's transcendence through an analysis of stylistic aspects including personification, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism, repetition, anaphora, parallelism, diction, syntax, etc. The article will illuminate how Wordsworth's stylistic decisions help to portray nature as a divine entity, elevating it to a level of veneration and apotheosis in his poetry by exploring his word choice, vivid imagery, and distinctive sentence structures.

The paper will also delve into a few of these literary techniques, explaining how they contribute to the pantheistic views of the poet and how he uses them to generate awe and reverence for the natural world. It reveals the complex layers of language that Wordsworth used to build a symbiotic relationship between the human spirit and the environment it is surrounded by through an examination of specific textual examples. It tries to identify and examine the particular stylistic components that Wordsworth used in his poems to convey the idea of pantheism. The paper seeks to understand how Wordsworth's use of symbols in his poetry functions as a means of expressing his pantheistic philosophy. This study also examines Wordsworth's diction and tone in order to determine how his poetic language is consistent with pantheistic aspirations.

The Paper reviews and synthesizes previous research, critical evaluations, and scholarly viewpoints on the poems' treatment of the pantheistic concept. This literature study aims to offer a thorough summary of the ideas and interpretations that have developed over time about the

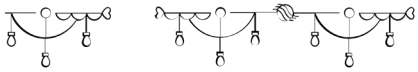
investigation of pantheism in Wordsworth's poetry. The review seeks to contextualize and situate the current study within the larger academic discourse on this topic by looking at a variety of scholarly works.

The autobiographical poetry "The Prelude" (1850) by Wordsworth offers insights into the poet's thoughts, ideas, and experiences, including his pantheistic beliefs. One can gain a clearer grasp of the poet's rhetorical techniques by examining particular passages from the poem. The collection of essays in" The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth," (2003) edited by Stephen Gill, covers a variety of topics related to Wordsworth's poetry, nature, and pantheism, as well as his philosophical and spiritual themes that may be useful to recognize and analyze his use of rhetorical devices for expressing pantheism. Stephen Gill's other works like "*Wordsworth and the Victorians*" (1998) and "*Wordsworth's Revisitings*" (2011) offer insightful discussion on his pantheistic treatment of nature. A classic article by M.H. Abrams called "*Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*" (1971) explores the pantheistic and transcendental aspects of Wordsworth's poetry and other works of Romantic literature. Though there has been exhaustive treatment of the 'what' of this process of apotheosis of nature, the 'how' is much neglected. So, this paper aims to fill this gap through a stylistic analysis of the select poems mentioned above.

Wordsworth's poetic insight into the natural world and the human condition is revealed through his strategic use of rhetorical tropes that give his poetry its expressive and emotive resonance. The rhetorical devices that Wordsworth employs elegantly present his ideas in order to appeal to the intellect and emotions of their audience. An examination of the use of these tools and techniques would clarify how they contribute to the poet's pantheistic philosophy in particular ways. For instance, Wordsworth frequently uses anaphora in his poetry to emphasize the ubiquity of divinity in nature through repetition. Anaphora is used in "Ode to Immortality" (1807) to emphasize how everything is connected in the pantheistic poem. Lines like "Thou art" or "All things" are repeated, for instance, to emphasize and demonstrate the divine's omnipresence in nature. The concept that the divine is an integral component of the world rather than something separate from it is reinforced by this repetition. Personification, which enables Wordsworth to give human characteristics to inanimate objects, emerges as another crucial tool in his depiction of pantheism. In "*The Tables Turned*" (1798) he writes,

> "Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:
>
> We murder to dissect." (ll. 26-28)

Wordsworth personifies abstract ideas by assigning "meddling intellect" and the act of "murder" to human activities, serving as a vehicle to show the effects of dissecting and scrutinizing the natural World. Additionally, Wordsworth uses imagery as a powerful instrument in his depiction of Nature to powerfully convey his conviction in the existence of the divine. He uses precise imagery in "*Tintern Abbey*" (1798) to capture the core of Nature's transcendence:



And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused. (ll. 94-97)

His pantheistic idea of a divinity permeating all of creation is well communicated through these phrases, which generate a vision of an all-encompassing, intertwined presence. The metaphorical connection between profundity of thought and artistic expression is well carried out through the use of personification, symbolism, exaggeration, anaphora, imagery, and other linguistic devices.

Personification:

The rhetorical technique of giving non-human components human characteristics is known as personification.

Wordsworth personifies nature in "*Tintern Abbey*" to illustrate his pantheistic viewpoint. "Steep and lofty cliffs" are described as having a "presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts." (ll. 96-97) Here, the speaker gives the cliffs human-like attributes such as presence and the power to make him or her happy. The idea that nature may have a significant emotional impact on how people perceive and feel the world is better communicated with the aid of this personification.

In "*The Tables Turned*" Wordsworth personifies Nature to emphasize its loveliness and spiritual presence:

"One impulse from a vernal wood May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can." (ll. 21-24)

Wordsworth makes the implication that nature has intrinsic wisdom when he attributes to a "vernal wood" the capacity to impart knowledge about human nature.

Wordsworth illustrates his pantheistic viewpoint, which sees divinity in Nature, by personifying Nature as a living, spiritual entity in "*Immortality Ode*":

"Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own; Yearnings she hath in her own

natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother's mind." (ll. 78-8)

Here, Earth is personified as possessing "yearnings" and a "mother's mind," suggesting that it can provide care and direction for humanity.

To emphasize their importance and relationship to spirituality, Wordsworth personifies the natural elements in "*The World is too Much with us*":

> "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is
>
> ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" (ll. 2-4)

Here, "Nature" is personified as possessing things or having the ability to own them, reflecting the notion of Nature as a living thing with free will.

Imagery

Using sensory-stimulating words to conjure up vivid mental images is known as imagery. Wordsworth uses imagery to reinforce his pantheistic beliefs by illustrating the beauty and spiritual

dimensions of nature, as seen in these lines from "*Tintern Abbey*" -

> "While with an eye made quiet by the power
>
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, We see into the life of things" (ll. 48-50)

The metaphors of an "eye made quiet" and seeing "into the life of things" highlight a deeper understanding of the natural world than is possible through simple observation.

In the poem "*Immortality Ode*" the lines

> "The Rainbow comes and goes, And lovely is the Rose,
> The Moon doth with delight
>
> Look round her when the heavens are bare, Waters on a starry night
> Are beautiful and fair"; (ll. 10-15)

The striking visuals of a rainbow, rose, moon, and starry night draw attention to the allure of nature.

Similarly in the poem "*The World is too Much with us*" the lines "The winds that will be

howling at all hours, And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers; For this, for

everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not". (ll. 6-9)

The contrast between the peaceful yet forceful parts of Nature is created by the imagery of "sleeping flowers" and "howling winds," which encourages readers to reflect on their relationship with nature.
Metaphor:

"*Tintern Abbey*" is renowned for its vivid and rich use of metaphor to express the poet's feelings. He used the metaphor of "wreaths of smoke" to express the passing of time and the transient aspect of human existence, for example. The "steep and lofty cliffs" represent the difficulties and barriers encountered in life. The "wild secluded scene" stands for the peace and comfort he discovers in nature. Wordsworth uses these analogies to paint a rich and complex picture of his relationship with nature and his own inner sentiments.

In "*Immortality Ode*," the lines - "Our noisy years seem moments in the being / Of the eternal Silence" (ll. 154-155) have used the metaphor of "eternal Silence" to symbolize the length of time and the contrast between our transitory life and the eternal character of the cosmos. Another example of a metaphor is seen in the song "Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might / Of heaven-born freedom," (ll. 121-122) where the child's "heaven-born freedom" stands for the innocence and unadulterated state of childhood.

Wordsworth uses metaphors in "*The Tables Turned*" to contrast the benefits of firsthand knowledge in nature with the limitations of classroom instructions

Anaphora

Anaphora is a literary technique where a word or phrase is repeated for emphasis at the start of subsequent clauses or phrases.

Anaphora is used a several times in "*Tintern Abbey*," adding to the poem's cadence and reflective tone. . One notable example is the repeated use of the phrase "These beauteous forms" in the several lines serves as an anaphora that emphasizes the poet's connection to nature and its impact on his inner thoughts and feelings.

Anaphora in "*The Tables Turned*" is used to emphasize the speaker's thesis about the advantages of first-hand experience over textbook learning.

"Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books; Or surely you'll grow double:

Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks; Why all this toil and trouble?" (ll. 1-4)

The repeating phrase "Up! up! my Friend" in these lines invites the reader to put down their books and get close to Nature.

"*Immortality Ode*" highlights the cyclical nature of existence and the relationship between childhood and immortality through its use of anaphora. Here's an illustration:

"But for those first affections,

Those shadowy recollections" (ll. 148-149)

The enduring and transformational power of these early memories and experiences are emphasized through the repetition of the phrases "Those first affections," "Those shadowy recollections," "Are yet the fountain light," and "Are yet a master light"

Symbolism:

The poem "*Tintern Abbey*" is full of symbolism and expresses the poet's thoughts on nature, remembrance, and the passing of time. The phrase "wreaths of smoke" stands for the passage of time and the transient character of human existence. "Steep and lofty cliffs": These represent the apex of spiritual and emotional experience as well as life's difficulties and obstacles. "Wild secluded scene": This image represents the peace and tranquilly found in nature as a contrast to the hectic pace of metropolitan life. The concepts of recollection, reflection, and the mystical bond between people and environment are all emphasized by these symbols.

"*Immortality Ode*" explores themes of childhood, memory, and the relationship between the natural environment and spirituality, and is rife with symbolism. The metaphorical "fountain light" represents the illuminating influence of early memories and experiences that continue to direct and mould one's perspective throughout life. The phrase "glory of the rainbow" reflects the ephemeral and transitory character of happiness and beauty in the world, mirroring the transitory character of life itself.

Symbolism is employed in "*The World is too Much with us*" to criticize society's materialism and disconnection. "Getting and spending" suggests that people are overly focused on acquiring wealth and possessions. It symbolizes an excessive attention on material pursuits. "Sea" stands for the wide, powerful natural world in contrast to the constrained, human-centered concerns. These images highlight the speaker's dissatisfaction with society's prevailing norms, where consumerism has eclipsed respect for the natural world and spiritual ties.

The poet uses symbolism in "*The Tables Turned*" to contrast the benefits of firsthand knowledge

with the limitations of classroom instruction. The phrase "Up! Up! My Friend, and Quit Your Books" represents the speaker's call to action, urging the friend to abandon scholastic endeavours and interact with nature

The poem's fundamental message - about the value of firsthand experience, the insights nature may offer, and the limitations of relying entirely on book knowledge—is influenced by these symbols.

Parallelism:

"Parallelism" is the use of related grammatical constructions or linguistic patterns to add harmony and rhythm to writing.

Parallelism appears in "*Tintern Abbey*" in a few places, which helps the poem's rhythm and structure. Here's an illustration:

> "Five years have past; five summers, with the length Of five long winters! and
>
> again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs." (ll.1-4)

The repeating of "Five years," "Five summers," and "Five long winters" in these lines establishes a parallel structure that highlights the passage of time and the poet's return to the same place.

"*Immortality Ode*" employs parallelism to produce rhythmic and well-balanced structures. The following lines provide an example of parallelism:

> " Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
>
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come From God, who is our home." (ll. 62-65)

The similarity between the phrases "Not in entire forgetfulness" and "Not in utter nakedness" in this sentence serves to highlight the idea of the soul's connection to a higher spiritual dimension and the idea of continuity after death.

Parallelism is heavily employed in "*The Tables Turned*" to produce well-balanced structures and rhythmic rhythms. Here's an illustration:

> "Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
>
> Come, hear the woodland linnet, How sweet his music! on my life,
> There's more of wisdom in it." (ll. 9-12)

A balanced rhythm is produced in these lines by the parallel construction of "Books!" and "Come, hear the woodland linnet," followed by "How sweet his music!" and "There's more of wisdom in it," The speaker uses this parallelism to contrast the perceived repetition of literature with the wisdom found in nature.

In the conclusion, a fascinating interplay between nature, spirituality, and human experience is shown through exploring pantheism in William Wordsworth's poetry from a rhetorical viewpoint. Wordsworth effectively conveys the deep connection he saw between the natural world and the supernatural through the employment of rhetorical elements including imagery, metaphor, parallelism, and symbolism. A rich tapestry of the spiritual resonance of nature and its beauty is expressed through vivid imagery. By portraying nature as a living representation of the divine, metaphors help to bridge the gap between the concrete and the transcendent. Harmony is evoked by parallelism and well-balanced structures, which also reflect the interdependence of nature and humanity. His verses contain carefully woven symbolism that reveals levels of significance and encourages reflection on the true nature of reality.

A doorway to a fuller comprehension of Wordsworth's poetry is opened by the rhetorical study of his pantheistic viewpoint. The profound oneness he sensed between the material world and the spiritual realm is attested to in his lyrics. Through the use of rhetorical devices, this unity encourages readers to consider their own relationship to nature and spirituality and implores them to find the sublime in the commonplace. The pantheism of Wordsworth is ultimately examined via a rhetorical lens, which heightens our understanding of the poet's creativity and emphasizes the timeless importance of his writing in helping us achieve a more harmonious relationship with the world.

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Eco-critical Mythology: A Study of Amish Tripathi's Select Novels

Anirban Banerjee

Literature represents society and authors throughout the age has used various mediums to present their contemporary situations in their works. Modernist authors used myths in the modern context to emphasize their point. Similarly, Amish Tripathi throughout his novels presents burning post-millennial problems, like oppression, class-struggle, rape, pollution, power mongering and so on. But in Amish Tripathi's work we can see a difference from other contemporary works. Contemporary authors use myths in modern context, whereas, Tripathi uses myths to mythologise our contemporary life, he presents post-millennial problems in the context of myths. To present these problems Tripathi uses the myth of Shiva in his "Shiva Trilogy", consisting of three novels, namely, *The Immortals of Meluha*, *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. Tripathi's representation of these myths is not mere retelling of those well-known myths, rather he modifies them significantly. Those significant changes are deliberate and makes it a whole new story. In the "Shiva Trilogy" we can see how Shiva and other deities are represented in a humanly way so that they come down from their heavenly altar. This way readers can relate to them as the deities show humanly qualities, like, anger, jealousy, love, grief and so on. The supernatural stories also become quite natural, as they are presented by Amish as a blend of science, geography and history. Tripathi uses modern problems to help us relate to them more easily. In spite of presenting the myths in modern context, Tripathi uses modern stories in the mythological context. Tripathi shows the contemporary life through the lens of mythology. Similarly, in the Shiva Trilogy, Tripathi makes significant changes to the actual story of Shiva. There deities like Ganesh, Kali and others are made Nagas, an oppressed community who struggle for their existence and later finds aid from Shiva and together they form a revolution to stop the use of Somras, an elixir of life that gives long life to the upper-class people, but also creates factory waste which pollutes the environment and the people connected to it. This is where we come to the point where we see an uncanny similarity with our contemporary ecological crisis. Now in this paper we shall try to see how Tripathi mythologises or adds the ecological issues into the mythopoesis of Hindu pantheon.

Before we move on to finding answer to the question, we must look into some research works done

on the novels of Amish Tripathi. we can refer to some research papers, where researchers have given various points of views regarding Amish Tripathi's novels. Here we must refer to a paper entitled, "Rewriting Myth: A Critical Analysis of Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy" by Vikram Singh. In this paper he has pointed out how Tripathi has contextualised the myth and used "fantasy mode", which Vikram Singh does not explain in his paper. Throughout the paper, he has given a detailed textual analysis of the novels and pointed out the things Tripathi did in his novels, but does not explain why and how he does it. He begins the paper by pointing out the revolutionary changes brought about by authors like Amish Tripathi, Ashok Banker, Ashwin Sanghi in contemporary Indian literature in English. Singh says that authors like Tripathi broke the elitism of Indian literature which was held up by authors like Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie. Tripathi, according to Singh, caters to the middle class with his mythology-based "bollywoodized" fantasy literature. Singh says that Tripathi's target audience is the English- speaking youth to whom he brings the mythology in such a manner that they can enjoy it or relate to it.

Next in line is another research paper by Neha Kumari and Dr. Rajesh Kumar, entitled, "Daydreaming and Popular Fiction: A Critical Assessment of Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy as a Seminal Piece of Popular Fiction". This paper is devoted to the age-old struggle between popular literature and canonical literature. Neha Kumari takes help from Sigmund Freud's ideas on popular culture as presented in the book Creative Writers and Day-dreaming. Throughout the maximum portion of this paper is dedicated to the struggle where it is presented how popular literature is defined by its number of copies sold and how the same literature can become a canon once it proves its ability to cater to the audience from different eras. Therefore, the distinction and class division which is made among the readers of popular literature and canonical literature as semi- educated readers and highly educated readers respectively is baseless. Neha Kumari in the later parts of her paper talks about Tripathi's novels and the elements in it that makes it a popular literature and how he makes the distinction between high and low culture in literature blurry.

Abhinaba Chatterjee in his paper, "Humanizing Theography through Mystical Mythology: Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy" brings out a very interesting point of view while analysing Tripathi's novels. Chatterjee begins his paper with a discussion on secular literature and mystical literature. He says that, by default, we connect mysticism with religious literature, because it is a trend calling any literature mystic if it talks about something beyond life, something supernatural or if it sees nature as a charade that points towards an "Absolute". Throughout ages authors have tried to humanise mysticism, by connecting the experiences of life scientifically with mysticism. But Chatterjee points out that throughout the past century scientific revelations have shifted far away from real life experience and that is why it is hard to connect scientific revelation with mysticism and find a connection with human life. Humanism is a rationalist outlook, where one focuses more

on the human life rather than anything supernatural. In Tripathi's novels this mysticism which was ever present in Indian mythologies, finds a humanistic turn, as he presents those mystic characters and their mystic karma which has deep philosophical significance on the human plane. Tripathi's Shiva indulges in deep philosophical discussions which reflect the mystic revelations of Vedanta, Upanishad, Vedas, and Puranas, while smoking pot or even swearing at times. Tripathi successfully connects theological mysticism to scientific revelations of life thereby humanising it.

A similar view about the novels of Amish Tripathi can be seen in the paper "Humanly Gods or Godly Humans: Representation and Anthropomorphism of Mythical Characters in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy" by Aritra Basu. Basu's paper does not talk about humanization of mysticism but he does echo Abhinaba Chatterjee in his view about humanising mythical characters in Tripathi's novels. Basu points towards the representation of the marginalised through mythological characters like Shiva, Kali, Ganesh, all of which are representatives of mainstream Hindu mythology. But Tripathi successfully transforms these characters into marginalised people of some unknown history. Talking about marginalisation brings us to another paper by R. Vijaykarthic and S. Garret Raja Immanuel, entitled, "Deformed Bodies and Posthuman Alterity: A Foucauldian Critique of Social Construction in The Immortals of Meluha by Amish Tripathi". In this paper the researchers analyse the first novel of the "Shiva Trilogy" with help of Michael Foucalt's theory about the role and operation of power in our society. At the beginning of the paper the theory is discussed in detail, where Michael Foucault's theory of power contradicts the theories of Marxism and Feminism who always sees power as a repressive force. Foucault on the other hand sees power in two different forms, repressive power which is exercised with the help of law and police; and normalising power which is exercised through the ideological level, where the subjects find themselves in a place where they think just like the power wants them to considering it the truth which must be obeyed. The researchers then point out the oppression that happens upon the marginalised characters of the novel. Not only the marginalised, but also the society in the centre also finds itself manipulated by the normalising power. They follow the strict rules set by their predecessors, considering it the dharma or truth. The researchers thus see the novel not as

any mythological novel but as a novel that serves as a critique of contemporary society. Taking cue from them I shall try to put my point by studying Tripathi's novels from an eco-critical angle.

To reach the targeted answer now we have to find out what exactly Tripathi tells in his novels. We have already mentioned earlier that Tripathi's "Shiva Trilogy" consists of three novel dealing with the mythology associated to Lord Shiva. In the first novel of the trilogy, *The Immortals of Meluha*, Tripathi presents Shiva as a young Tibetan tribal leader, who is disturbed due to the constant warfare with neighbouring tribes and the harsh weather of Himalaya, where not a single soot can

be produced. At the meantime Shiva is visited by an emissary of a land called Meluha, named Nandi, who promises Shiva of a more fertile and flourishing country. So, it is evident that Shiva here understands the value of environment and how it affects the lives of people. So, when he first enters Meluha, the first thing that he notices is the beauty of the land, that happens to be a parallel representation of Srinagar. On the first night there, he and his tribesmen are provided with an elixir, which he later comes to know as *Somras*, an elixir that gives longer life to the consumer. After Shiva consumes the elixir, he finds out that all his scars and physiological defects are magically cured. But he also finds an additional effect in his throat, which had turned blue due to the effect of *Somras*. Due to that blue complexion of throat, he became the prophesied hero, *Neelkanth*, an incarnation of Lord Rudra. He gradually finds out that this elixir is produced in a factory, and this elixir is provided to all the citizens of Meluha, which in turn makes them live much longer than normal human beings. This naturally sounds very profitable and that is what Shiva believed in the beginning. He even fought against a terrorist group known as *Nagas* to protect the *Somras*. The *Nagas* is known as cursed human beings who have turned into monsters due to their 'sin from previous births' and now lives on the land south of Godavari, in the midst of Dandakaranya, as they are prohibited to enter the "sacred" land of Meluha. But as the plot moves into the second novel of the series, *The Secrets of the Nagas*, we along with Shiva come to know that the *Nagas* are actually children of Meluhan citizen and they are just some normal human beings born with their deformity and that is why they are left outside of the 'perfect' Meluhan civilisation. It is said in the novels that Sati, wife of Shiva, was a widow before marrying Shiva and that she had given birth to a stillborn child. But to the utter astonishment of both Shiva and Sati, Ganesh, the leader of the *Nagas*, turns out to be the child of Sati, who was born with deformities and that is why he was left in secret by Sati's father and the king of Meluha, Daksha. Even more shocking is that he was brought up by Kali, the queen of the Nagas and sister of Sati, whose existence was also kept

hidden from everyone. Now, Shiva starts searching for the reason behind this birth of Nagas. Gradually, Shiva comes to know that people of an eastern state named Brangaridai, another parallel representation of Bengal, were suffering from a plague during the summer seasons each year and the pain of the people could only be lessened by a medicine procured by the *Nagas*. Shiva now came to know about a shocking revelation from his close friend Barahaspati, who had been researching the side effects of the *somras*. Brahaspati informs Shiva that the *somras* is the only reason behind the sufferings of both *Nagas* and the people of Barangaridai. It is also responsible for the drying of the river Saraswati, as a large amount of water from the river is used in the process of producing *Somras*. Brahaspati explains to Shiva that,

> We (Meluhans) used to believe the Somras blessed one with a long life by removing poisonous oxidants from one's body. But that is not the only way it works… It also works on a more fundamental level. Our body is made up of millions of tiny living units called

> cells. These are the building blocks of life… They combine to form organs, limbs, and in fact, the entire body… These cells have the ability to divide and grow. And each division is like a fresh birth; one old unhealthy cell magically transforms into two new healthy cells. As long as they keep dividing, they remain healthy. So, your journey begins in your mother's womb as a single cell. That cell keeps dividing and growing till it eventually forms your entire body… this division and growth has to end sometime. Otherwise, one's body would keep growing continuously with pretty disastrous consequences. So, the almighty put a limit on the number of times a cell can divide. After that, a cell simply stops dividing further and thus, in effect, becomes old and unhealthy… every cell reaches its limit on the number of divisions at some point or the other. As more and more cells in the body hit that limit, one grows old, and finally dies… (Shiva asks) Does the Somras remove this limit on division? … (Brahaspati answers) Yes. Therefore, your cells keep dividing while remaining healthy. In most people, this continued division is regulated. But in a few, some cells lose control over their division process and keep growing at an exponential pace… (Shiva asks) This is cancer, isn't it? … (Brahaspati replies) Yes, … This cancer can sometimes lead to a painful death. But there are times when these cells continue to grow and appear as deformities — like extra arms or a very long nose. (Tripathi 15-16)

With this explanation Shiva becomes sure that this *Somras* and the excessive desire to live longer is the only reason that the Nagas has to suffer, Saraswati River has to dry down and the people of Brangaridai has to suffer. Tripathi, through the voice of Brahaspati, explains how excessive use of water from Saraswati River is drying down its flow resulting in the desertification of Rajasthan. Brahaspati explains,

> … we Meluhans choose to believe that the Saraswati is dying because of some devious Chandravanshi conspiracy. This is not true. We are actually killing our mother river all by ourselves. We use massive amounts of Saraswati waters to manufacture the Somras. It helps stabilise the mixture during processing. It is also used to churn the crushed branches of the Sanjeevani tree. I (Brahaspati) have conducted many experiments to see if water from any other source can be used. But it just doesn't do the trick.' … 'When Somras was being made for just a few thousand, the amount of Saraswati water used didn't matter. But when we started mass producing Somras for eight million people, the dynamics changed. The waters started getting depleted slowly by the giant manufacturing facility at Mount Mandar. The Saraswati has already stopped reaching the western sea. It now ends its journey in an inland delta, south of Rajasthan. The desertification of the land to the south of this delta is already complete. (Tripathi 17)

Tripathi further explains through the voice of Brahaspati, how the factory waste from the

manufacturing of *Somras*, affects the people of Brangaridai through the water, in which the waste is disposed,

> Branga had been suffering continuous plagues for many years, which had killed innumerable people, especially children. The primary relief thus far had been the medicine procured from the Nagas. Or else exotic medicines extracted after killing the sacred peacock, leading to the Brangas being ostracised even in peace-loving cities like Kashi… (Brahaspati explains) 'The Somras is not only difficult to manufacture, but it also generates large amounts of toxic waste. A problem we have never truly tackled. It cannot be disposed of on land, because it can poison entire districts through ground water contamination. It cannot be discharged into the sea. The Somras waste reacts with salt water to disintegrate in a dangerously rapid and explosive manner… What seemed to work was fresh river water.
>
> When used to wash the Somras waste, over a period of several years, freshwater appeared to reduce its toxic strength. This was proven with some experiments at Mount Mandar. It seemed to work especially well in cold water. Ice was even better. Obviously, we could not use the rivers of India to wash the Somras waste in large quantities. We could have ended up poisoning our own people. Therefore, many decades ago, a plan was hatched to use the high mountain rivers in Tibet. They flow through uninhabited lands and their waters are almost ice-cold. They would therefore work perfectly to clean out the Somras waste. There is a river high up in the Himalayas, called Tsangpo, where Meluha decided to set up a giant waste treatment facility… It was established in a completely desolate area along the Tsangpo. The river flowed east, so it would go to relatively unpopulated lands away from India. Therefore, our land would not suffer from the harmful effects of the Somras… The Meluhans kept track of the people living along the Tsangpo. There were no outbreaks of disease, no sudden deformities. The icy river waters seemed to be working at keeping the toxins inactive… It was believed the Tsangpo flowed into those lands and became the main Burmese river, the Irrawaddy… When it was discovered that Tsangpo means "purifier" in the local Tibetan tongue, it was considered a sign, a divine message. A solution had been found… the upper regions of the Brahmaputra have never been mapped properly. It was simply assumed that the river comes from the east; because it flows west into Branga. The Nagas, with the help of Parshuram, finally mapped the upper course of the Brahmaputra. It falls at almost calamitous speeds from the giant heights of the Himalayas into the plains of Branga through gorges that are sheer walls almost two thousand metres high… You can well imagine that it is almost impossible to navigate a river course such as the Brahmaputra's. But Parshuram succeeded and led the Nagas along that path. Parshuram, of course, did not realise the significance of the discovery of the river's course. Queen Kali and Lord Ganesh did… It *is* the Tsangpo… The Tsangpo flows east only for the duration of its course in Tibet.

> At the eastern extremities of the Himalayas, it takes a sharp turn, almost reversing its flow. It then starts moving south-west and crashes through massive gorges before emerging near Branga as the Brahmaputra… The cold waters of the Tsangpo dilute the poisonous impact to a degree. However, as the river entered India in the form of the Brahmaputra, the rising temperature reactivates the dormant toxin in the water. Though the Branga children also suffer from the same body-wracking pain as the Nagas, they are
>
> free from deformities. Sadly, Branga also has a high incidence of cancer. Being highly populous, the number of deaths is simply unacceptable… (Shiva replies) Divodas told me (Shiva) the Branga plague peaks during the summer every year. That is the time when ice melts faster in the Himalayas, making the poison flow out in larger quantities. (Tripathi 18-21)

Therefore, it is evident to both Shiva and us that the factory waste of *Somras* factory and the elixir itself is affecting the geographical feature of the land and the human beings living on the land also. It is even mutating the genetic features by promoting cancerous diseases. Does not these features sound similar to our contemporary world? It does. We shall now try to decode the metaphor of *Somras* in this text to understand Tripathi's allegory.

To understand the allegory used in these novels by Amish Tripathi, we need to go back to the ancient myth associated to Lord Shiva, the time when all the gods and demons came together to churn the ocean to find the elixir of life, *Amrita*. According to myths, Lord Shiva is famous for many things, such as, his third eye, trident, his matted hair and his blue coloured throat, all of which are used by Tripathi in his novels. Before we know about the myth of Neelkanth we have to know the myth about *Samudra Manthan* or the churning of the seas. According to myths from *Bhagavad Purana*, *Vishnu Purana* and *Mahabharata*, once upon a time *Devas* (Gods) and *Asuras* (Demons), the two ever battling supernatural sects collaborated in order to churn the sea to find out Goddess Laxmi and the nectar of immortality, *Amrit*. They used Mount Mandar and settled it upon the back of the tortoise avatar of Lord Vishnu and then with the help of supernatural snake Vasuki they started churning the sea. But before finding out all the riches, *ratnas*, Goddess Laxmi, Lord Dhanvantari, divine weapons and the nectar of immortality, the very first thing that came out of the churning was *Halahala*, or the poison. The poison was so potent and damaging that neither of the two sects, Devas and Asuras were able to get away from its effects. As all the beings were suffering from the poison, Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma requested Lord Shiva to take measures. He, being the destroyer of evil, drank all the poison. But the poison was too strong even for Lord Shiva, and he started becoming blue all over his body. Then Goddess Parvati came to his help. According to some myths she breast-fed him, so that the poison lost its potency and stayed only in the throat of Shiva, making it blue. According to some other myths, the Goddess placed herself in the throat of

Lord Shiva blocking the poison from entering the body. Thus the poison remained in the throat and made it blue, giving him the name *Neelkanth*. However, there is also another possibility that this was a story made up in the post-vedic era, as in the *Vedas*, Lord Rudra is sometimes addressed as *Neelgriva*, or the blue-throated. (Chowdhury NP)

Therefore, we can understand the distinction between Tripathi's narrative and the original myth. Shiva's throat turned blue due to the use of *Somras*, the elixir of life in Tripathi's novels, whereas, in the myths Shiva's throat turned blue with the use of *Halahala*, the poison, not the elixir of life, *Amrita*. Shiva consumed the poison which could end the world, not the elixir of life that would cure him or make him live longer. On the other hand, there is the use of the term *Somras* for the elixir of life, instead of *Amrita*. According to different sources, *Somras*, is an intoxicating pleasure drink which had some medicinal purposes. *Vedas* and different scriptures mentioned that Lord Indra and other gods cherished this drink which was made by churning of *Soma* leaf and mixing it with *Dadhi*, or milk-made product. Therefore, *Somras*, was basically a pleasure drink and not an elixir of life. What Tripathi is trying to say by this deliberate misplacement of words is that, the Meluhan people were intoxicated to the longer life and the perks that came with it. They were intoxicated to such an extent that the infertility and deformity of the next generation, destruction of the nature, epidemic of an entire state did not matter. Now taking this cue we can relate this issue to our contemporary world, where urban capitalist people are gradually destroying the nature for money, as they are intoxicated to the economic flourishment of their bank accounts and the consumers are intoxicated to the products and amenities that come at the cost of the mother nature. Just like the Meluhan milieu, our contemporary consumers are also intoxicated to the perks of this lazy life so much that they do not care about the nature and the people associated with it. And the effect of this can be seen in our next generation who suffer from numerous genetic diseases and we too suffer from cancer due to our fixation for technological advancement. Our generation is like the *Nagas*— deformed, not only physically, but also psychologically. Just like the desertion of Rajasthan in Tripathi's novels, we have seen and are also seeing the scarcity of water in numerous metro cities of India. As Kaushik Deka reports in *India Today*,

> In the summer of 2019, Chennai's reservoirs ran dry, forcing the government to truck in 10 million litres of water a day. For a city that gets an average of 1,400 mm of rainfall a year, more than twice what London receives, this was unprecedented. And not just Chennai, cities across India have been facing acute water shortages due to massive
>
> population growth and rapid, unplanned urbanisation. A 2018 study published in Nature projected that by 2050, Jaipur would have the second-highest water deficit in the world, with Chennai at #20. A 2020 report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) projected that 30 Indian cities would face a 'grave water risk' by 2050 due to sharp increases in

> population. The situation is already alarming. In the 91 most important reservoirs tracked by the Central Water Commission, storage levels have never crossed more than half their total capacity in recent years.

More alarmingly, the long-term, indiscriminate extraction of groundwater is making water tables fall rapidly in most Indian cities. According to a study by the Centre for Science and Environment, 48 per cent of India's urban water supply comes from groundwater, and in seven of India's 10 most populous cities, groundwater levels have dropped significantly over the past two decades. (Deka NP)

This report makes us realise that Tripathi's parallel representation of desertification of a land due to the scarcity of water in Saraswati River is not outlandish, rather very much relevant. Now, to address the issue of pollution of river water due to the factory waste we can say without hesitation that this is not new to India. India, being a river-based civilisation, are very much dependent upon the water bodies for the economy and agriculture. But we have become so much enticed to the industrial advancement that we have turned our life-giving rivers into large drains—

Gallons of sewage emanating from Delhi's industries and human habitats are rapidly turning the Yamuna into a drain, say environmentalists and conservationists.

> Selvarajan, a noted environmentalist and promoter of Green Circle, a Delhi-based NGO, told The Sunday Guardian. "Every day, Delhi's industries and human habitats add up to 850 million gallons of sewage into Yamuna though its 22 big drainage outlets spread across the capital.

According to the findings of a research conducted by Selvarajan and his organisation Green Circle, almost 80% of the entire Yamuna's pollution is happening within the 22 km stretch of the total length of the river which is shared by the capital.

Explaining the alarming situation of the Yamuna, Selvarajan said:

> Most of the untreated or partially treated waste water is entering into Yamuna through the Najafgarh drainage only. The untreated water entering into Yamuna through this drain constitutes around 60% of the total pollutants coming in the river from Delhi. He added
>
> The Delhi government's plan of installing interceptor in the drainage is yet to become fully operational. However, the interceptor is a good step, but these interceptors would only prevent the additional waste water coming from the new drains and it will not reduce the existing waste water in the river.

Even a committee appointed by the NGT, had recently come up with its report which said that there has hardly been any improvement in the situation so far, as most of the installed infrastructure to prevent pollutants from entering the river, is not working properly.

> The city generates almost 900 million gallons (of sewage) per day, but the 36 treatment plants at 22 locations have a combined capacity of 700 MGD. Most of these sewage treatment plants are almost dysfunctional and, in realty, these plants are together treating only 400 MGD of sewage, the NGT appointed committee's report reads. (Jha NP)

Now we can clearly understand that Tripathi's "Shiva Trilogy" is not just some random mythological novel series that contextualises myth. It is rather a clever endeavour to present our contemporary crisis in the garb of myth. Tripathi is born and brought up in this Indian society and therefore, is well aware of the fact that Indian culture is based upon the various myths and *Sthalapuranas*, or folklores and the inhabitants of this culture is more inclined towards those mythological stories which appeal to them more than any factual data. Tripathi, thus uses these myths and defamiliarises them with contemporary issues, thereby making a parallel universe that simultaneously gives glimpses of contemporary issues with a tint of mythology. As Claude Levi- Strauss said that the smallest of unit of any myth or folklore is a mytheme which remains intact in all circumstances, and the relationship of the mytheme with others changes accordingly. Similarly, the tiny mythemes of Hindu pantheon have remained the same in Tripathi's novels and the contemporary issues has become new mythemes which has been intertwined in such a manner that they apparently become unrecognisable and indistinguishable. Thus, Tripathi mythologises the ecological crisis of our contemporary world by making them part of a modern myth.

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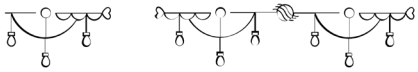
Reading Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* Eco-critically

Elham Hossain

Amitav Ghosh writes from the space of 'in-betweenness' created by cultural crosscurrents. But unlike many diaspora authors, he writes about historical and climatological issues of his home country India which, in broad canvas inevitably, gets intertextualized with the global issues. In all his fictions, he chooses a broad canvas encapsulating ever burgeoning issues of global warming, environmental disaster, rampant crony capitalism, displacement, dispossession and diaspora. Global warming and its fatal consequences affect not only an individual community but also the whole world with all its devastating power and it threatens to turn the world into a dystopia. In the present circumstances, transnational economic migration becomes a common phenomenon about which "Ghosh appears to believe that transnational spaces are a constant inhuman history and always productive of hope as well as despair, or of hope transcending despair" (Alam 322). However, integrated human endeavor and sincere thinking of everybody's interest in terms of equality irrespective of space, history, myths, cultures and countries can hopefully save this planet from further impending disaster. Due to natural disasters, the amalgamation that creates multicultural situations and cosmopolitanism conspicuously challenges nationalism of the individual community and constantly melts down the social, cultural and economic borders among nations.

With the triumph of corporate economy, unbridled and desperate urbanization and industrialization throughout the world, irrespective of the First World countries and the Third World countries, poses a threat to the environment whose disruption will obviously bring about the disruption of human existence. As literature usually feels the pulse of time and addresses it, it cannot evade the issues of environment and hence, it occupies a major portion of its canvas. In the present mode of knowledge system, interdisciplinary nature of the whole knowledge system, due to its persistent intertextuality, challenges the monolithic disposition of literature, and consequently, location of humans requires reconsideration for its underpinning with culture and surrounding nature. Under such circumstances, "environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection" (Garrard 14). Actually, culture and environment are inextricably intertwined not only in the construction of a new society but also in the formation process of a discourse.

As an environmentally conscious author, Amitav Ghosh appears to experiment with the relationship between environment and humans. Due to his training in anthropology and ethnography and dividing



his life between the USA and India, he rightly claims to be a vast observer of the changes of both economic and environmental areas. Because of his transnational imagining, the story of his *Gun Island* drifts between India and Italy, the former is a Third World country and the latter a First World country and exclaims that environmental catastrophe affects both types of countries at different degree. With the rise of industrialization environment turns hostile to the humans who continuously in the name of economic development always challenge the environment. Sometimes religious biases instigate humans and places them upon nature and all other animals with the superior status and consequently, environment turns into a phenomenally worst sufferer and undergoes the stigma of every desperate capitalist hegemony that will inevitably challenge human beings' survival on this planet. Sometimes myths that place humans over the nature spoil the partnership between these two parties. In this connection, Ogaga Okuyade refers to Ali Mazrui who in his documentary asserts:

> … there existed in traditional society a partnership between humans and nature. Some animals were domesticated while others roamed wild. Humans relied on animals and plants for sustenance- food in crops and fruits, fish and animals, firewood for cooking, timber for building, and more. Man held aspects of nature sacred- mountains, rocks, rivers, trees. The forest was the home of ancestors. In the religions of Africans, nature became an integral aspect of their spirituality in the form of groves, thus giving the environment a spiritual dimension. But with the coming of Christianity and Islam to Africa, the natural world became a servant of man rather than a partner because of an aloof God, leaving man to control and exploit nature. The result of the Western and Islamic intrusion into Africa and the superstitious and other practices of Africans led to the massive environmental degradation of the continent. (vi)

The excerpt emphasizes the study of theological realities, too, pervading with a community since religious impulses serve as a decisive force of the relationship between it and its religious rituals and belief system. Besides, theological hypothesis works considerably in compartmentalizing the environment into humans and animals and establishing human's superiority upon animals and environment.

Like Ghosh, many authors have focused on the interconnection between humans and nature. Ben Okri in his fiction *The Famished Road* exhibits how industrialization causes deforestation and transforms the local people into marginalized slum dwellers. Manik Bandyopadhyay in his *Padma Nadir Majhi* (*Boatman of the River Padma*) depicts how nature shapes a community by deciding its livelihood, way of life and even controlling its destiny. Besides, these authors have portrayed the partnership and negotiations between nature and humans. But Amitav Ghosh mostly concentrates on the apocalyptic forces of nature and exhibits how humans trigger up nature to take up a cruel role against them. *Gun Island* makes an exquisite amalgamation between literature and

environmental issues. In this text, as it appears, the author very meticulously addresses the issue of environmental disruption which, directly or indirectly, is an outcome of humans' inconsiderate activities instigated by the profit-making propensities. If viewed from ecological perspective, none can imagine his/her existence without considering the issue of the conservation of the environment because the eroding impact of environmental catastrophe is not confined to a particular location; it rather affects the whole ecosystem. The Sunderbans popularly assumed as a natural shield of both Calcutta and Bangladesh appears to be at the risk of losing its biodiversity. Not only the Sunderbans but also various coastal areas of the world are now frequently visited by natural calamities, such as unpredictable seismic activities, wild fires, mass deaths of marine animals, intolerable rise of global warming, unnatural migration of animals and infestation of corrosive worms and insects which were in the past not found in the localities.

Contemporary environmental imagination is manifested through the journey of Deen Dutta from Calcutta to Italy. He collects and sells out the manuscripts of rare books. His commercial journey takes him from India to Los Angeles and Venice. In fact, his business of old manuscripts metaphorically interprets his dealings with memories which fundamentally bridge the past with the present and the future. These memories interpret appocalyptic rhetoric of environmental crisis. While moving between memories and empirical experiences, he meets people from different cultures and different lands. Pya, a Bengali-American woman requests him to set an expedition to an archaeological site, the temple of snake goddess Manasa, in the midst of the Sunderbans. Local people call it 'Bonduki Sadagarer dhaam' or 'the Gun Merchant's shrine'. Deen learns from Nilima that at present a Muslim boatman looks after the 'dhaam'. Nilima tells him how myth assimilates diverse belief systems and communities:

> … if it was strange for him, as a Muslim, to be looking after a shrine that was associated with a Hindu goddess. The boatman had answered that the dhaam was revered by all, irrespective of religion: Hindus believed that it was Manasa Devi who guarded the shrine, while the Muslims believed that it was a place of Jinns, protected by a Muslim pir, or saint, by the name of Ilyas. (15)

Myths like nature connect diverse people irrespective of belief systems and cultural differences and social locations. Hindus and Muslims are correspondingly able to come together only through myths as myths manifest conversations and dialogues with history and preserve the archaeological wealth of human civilization. When myths are divided humans and their communities are divided because they contain 'a psychological truth'. For the extensive understanding of history and heritage, it requires an in-depth study of myths as they preserve the seed of a community's epistemological and aesthetic genealogy, feeling and concept. Religion varies but the heritage is always the same, especially for the people of this Subcontinent. Myths explain 'natural order and cosmic forces'.

But when the fit of capitalist hysteria along with eschatological disposition takes humans in its grip, they stand against each other and even against environment because environment then stands opposite to their interest and challenges their chaotic diversity. Environmental apocalypse does not spare even myths which connects human histories. The loss of myths is similar to the loss of human histories. Ghosh's mythopoeia of Manasa Devi interprets how environment apocalypse threatens the myths of a community.

In the Sunderbans, however, Deen encounters Tipu and from him he comes to know that his world of imagination does not match the real world. It is totally opposite to what he thinks of it. Tipu whom Pya, in the past, took to the USA and got him admitted into a school appears to be a precautious boy. In the USA he did not continue his study and came back to Calcutta without any academic certification. In Calcutta she got Tipu admitted again in a school where he once beat a boy who reproached him as he was from the dalit caste and consequently, he left his studies permanently. Pya is affectionate to Tipu because his father who was her employee was killed in a violent storm while trying to save her life. However, while visiting the 'dhaam' in the middle of the Sunderbans, Deen came to know the stern adversities in the midst of which the people in coastal areas wrestle to survive. Rafi, a fellow worker of Tipu, teaches Deen how only absolute love and ceaseless efforts can restore the force of life. His ceaseless and sincerest effort brings Tipu back to life after he was bitten by a King Cobra in the shrine of Manasa. The bite of the King Cobra metaphorically interprets the breach of harmony of the relationship between humans and the environment. Due to the apprehension emerged out of man's penetration into wilderness, wild animals are having a crucial change in their behavior. This breach in the harmony of juxtaposition between humans and environment also challenges the narratives or stories which constructs human history and knowledge system. It is, in fact, undeniabl;e that the loss of stories dislocates human discursive genealogies of power, affects the "formation of discourses and practices" (Howarth 82).

In this connection, Cinta helps Deen hold the missing link of stories. She conveys her conviction about the power of stories to Deen saying:

> ... only through stories was it possible to enter the most inward mysteries of our existence where nothing that is really important can be proven to exist-like love, or loyalty, or even a stranger or an animal. Only through stories can invisible or inarticulate or silent beings speak to us, it is they who allow the past to reach out to us. (127)

Stories espouse the past with the future standing on the vantage ground of the present. True, the feeling of belonging to a territory, a language and a culture can be experienced through stories, emerging out of the amalgamation of the constituents of a nation state. But environmental catastrophes pose a threat to these stories in the way that the formers tend to bring about displacement and dispossession by melting down the demarcation marks that distinguish one community from another. For example, the Snake Goddess's temple that Deen visited earlier is subsequently wiped out by a devastating cyclone rising from the Bay of

Bengal. The extinction of the temple which appears to be a symbol of cultural synthesis between the Hindus and the Muslims conveys the distinct architectural style of the seventeenth century Indian civilization and it synonymously refers to the extinction of "many legends, some of which are linked to the figure of a merchant" (126). The merchant represents an insoluble riddle that invites diverse people with creeds to meet on a common platform of singular identity, free from xenophobic reactions, stigmatization and alienation. Every old artifice is a repository of myths and legends that define a community and its legacy is inherited by everybody. But the devastation of these legacies by the environmental apocalypse threatens the integrity among diverse communities.

The legacies borne by the people are being threatened by the infuriated nature which, according to Cinta, is turning demonic. In course of conversation with Deen Dutta, she exclaims, "That the world of today presents all the symptoms of demonic possessions" (216). On the day when Deen, Cinta, Pya and Lubna were going to meet the illegal immigrants floating on the sea in a blue boat, they were suddenly caught up by a tornado and very narrowly escaped it. All of them in the bus apprehended that they would have inevitably no escape from impending death. Deen exclaims:

> And suddenly as it had begun, the hailstorm passed and the sun appeared. Soon steam began to rise from the melting hail; it was through shimmering, mirage-like fog that I finally made my way to the hospital. (246)

Unpredictable natural calamities occur as an impact of impudent human activities. Frequent natural disasters side by side with human disasters are the inevitable consequences of the inconsiderate and unwise human activities that destroy nature and at the same time bring about a threat to the human existence.

Natural disaster causes human disaster. Due to the destruction of environment, ecosystem collapses and it induces frequent natural catastrophe to the countries adjacent to the oceans. Under such adverse circumstances, a huge number of people are forced to be displaced constantly. They leave their habitation and turn into floating immigrants and in search of living for survival go to the cities, especially metropolitan cities. City loses its harmony because of over population that challenges the better living condition. The narrator of the *Gun Island* Deen reflects on the occupation of these displaced people. Many women living in the rural areas adjacent to the Sunderbans are sometimes forced to choose prostitution for their living. Even when they leave their habitations and come to Calcutta, most of them continue the same occupation for survival. They are left with no hope of better living, as these people are "increasingly marginalized during the current period of industrialization and urbanization" (Bechtold 375). The means of production are owned by the capitalists who are mostly responsible for environmental apocalypse.

Again, as deliberated above, ecological disasters pose a threat not only to humans but also to their

stories which are the ingredients of human existence. Amitav Ghosh digs out the intertexuality of different versions of stories like an archaeologist and makes the silence speak out the unfamiliar, and unheard speaks out the truth which remains engraved under the chunk of popular version of

'wonder tale', mostly constructed by fantasy. The legend that Deen knows about the Bandook Dwip or Gun Island goes upside down on the face of the deconstructive findings and convincing interpretations of Cinta. Deen possesses a concrete cognition that 'Bandook' plainly refers to gun, but Cinta in her paper presented in the conference explores how Venetian language got enriched in contact with Abaric vocabulary owing to the commercial enterprises of the Venetian merchants in Levant, Egypt and North Africa. Due to their commercial interactions, many Arabic words got an access into Venetian language. Hence, 'bandook', an Arabian word, is derived from 'Banadiq' and also becomes "al - Bunduqayya" "Which still remains the proper name for Venice in that language" (136). Besides, 'bunduqayya' refers to guns, hazelnuts and bullets. For this, the literal meaning of bandook dwip or Gun Island, that Deen knows, is vehemently challenged by Cinta's findings as she emphasizes that it is the island of the Venetian merchants, "foundry of the old ghetto" (136). Cinta thoughtfully elaborates:

> And through Arabic the name of Venice has travelled for afield to Persia and parts of India, where to this day guns are known as bundook- which is, of course, none other than "Venice" or "Venetian"! (137)

Even the central figure in the legend whom Deen calls 'Bonduki Sadagar' is dismantled as "The Merchant who visited Venice" (138). Again, the name of Land of Palm sugar candy receives an apocryphal entity from Cinta's anthropological and archeological explorations. In Bengali the island is called 'Taal-misrir desh'. Deen translates it as 'land of palm sugar candy' as he calls 'misri' sugar candy. But Cinta opens up Deen's eyes to the truth lying hidden in the corridors of history that the word 'misri' has been derived from 'Misr', an Arabic word for Egypt. She interprets in the tone of interrogation, "societal prejudices a stereotype and intertwine personal and societal identities" (Azmitia 291). She challenges Deen's conception, "perhaps crystallized sugar is known as 'misri' because the process had come to Bengal by way of Egypt?" Hence, the 'sugar candy land' may have the intensive possibility to refer to Egypt. Even the name of Captain Ilyas which sounds like a Muslim name is logically, through an intent examination of the sign like 'Alif' from Arabic alphabet inscribed on the wall of the temple of the snake goddess Manasa, is proved to be that of a Jew. Cinta tells Deen that the first letter from Hebrew alphabet is 'Alif' and the name Ilyas is very common among the Jews. In addition, a thorough and synchronic and diachronic analysis of all the resources offered by Deen as his source of confidence digs out the then

mercantile enterprises by the venetian, Portuguese and Arabian merchants, and at the same time exhibits how histories, cultures, languages and even stories got intertextualized among themselves

in the evolutionary process of human communities, running through trans-regional dialogues, a very common train of the migrant humans. Consequently, due to the constant displacement of human stories logocentrism with regard to its involvement with space, time and context is challenged by the deconstructive and fluid conceptualizing process of epistemology.

True, destruction of eco-system poses a threat to the logos of the community which makes people think to be at home. Millions of people lose their homes because of the rise of the sea level and due to too much salinity, their land adjacent to coastal areas turns abortive. Cities in the developing countries can't accommodate and rehabilitate the huge number of rootless people and provide them with income generating activities. As a result, social evils spread like mushroom as unemployment leads to the involvement in anti-social activities. Under such circumstances, many people migrate to the First World countries, mostly illegally. Such migration is frequent from the Global South to the Global North, a different geo-political context in which the migrants fall into "marginal spaces, always attached to the particular form of temporality; an impermanence that clings to the building even though displacement seems never-ending" (Burn 127). Gisa, Cinta's niece, takes up a project to make a documentary on the immigrants from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan via Libya and Egypt, and Deen is offered the job of a translator. Because of his engagement in such a job, Deen finds how miserably the migrants try to enter Italy. From his conversation with Rafi and Bilal, he knows how cruelly the migrants are treated by the border guards of different countries. Not only that, after undergoing a hazardous journey if a migrant survives all these cruelties, then ultimately, he falls into the fathomless pit of corrosive ambivalence between being and non-being. He turns into a diaspora and lives in the corridor of cultural identity which makes him sway between being and non-being and always dehumanizes him.

Ecological change brings about changes in man's living, location and language. It challenges borders and tends to bring people from diverse locations to a specific space and thus makes the present world a melting pot, leading to the intersectionality of diversities. While the narrator in the *Gun Island* happens to be in Venice on his assignment as an interpreter to Gisa who intends to prepare a documentary about the illegal immigrants living in 'Italy, one day he narrowly escapes a fatal accident. A slab of masonry falls just in front of him from an under-construction building.

Rafi, a boy whom the narrator met in the Sunderbans, is held responsible for this incident as he was working there. While Deen engages in conversation with Rafi regarding the accident that he narrowly escapes, the latter takes him to a 'Lubna Khala'. In course of conversation with Lubna, Deen comes to know that she is from Madaripur, a district of Bangladesh, the ancestral district of Deen. His ancestors also left the district for India in 1947 during the great partition. On the other hand, Lubna explains the cause of her leaving her homeland. She informs him that their house was devoured by the river *Arial Khan* and all their properties were destroyed by a devastating cyclone.

Not only a Third World country located in adjacent to the sea but also the cosmopolitan cities of the First World countries are under the threat of being inundated in future due to the rise of sea level as a consequence of the burgeoning global warming. While describing Cinta's apartment the narrator exclaims:

> Of late the floods had become so frequent that the residents had more or less stopped using the front entrance: they now went in and out through a walled garden at the back, where there was a small door that had once only been used by trade's people. (164-165)

Due to the collapse of the earth's chain of seasons and harmony, people from Third World Countries fatally fall victim to displacement. It is true that the mass means of production are in the hands of the First World countries and so the people from the Third World countries usually have the tendency to go there in search of employment. There they very often fall victim to various kinds of exploitation. Even they sometimes lose their kidneys and other valuable organs of their bodies to the smugglers and goons and it is even worse than the slave trade which dehumanized humans for centuries through the deliberate construction of fake hierarchy and social stratification. Despite all these hazards on the way to the dream countries, immigrants are forced to rush into uncertainties only for survival on the face of the threat of being extinct in the devouring womb of nature an outcome of the desperate mission of maximizing profit of the capitalists. Environmental disaster breaks down not only the external world of humans but also shatters the inner self of the victims. Trauma caused by natural disasters led humans to neurosis. Pya is carrying traumas emanated from natural calamities. Tipu's father, Pya's helping hand, was killed in a storm while trying to save her life. In the minibus by which she along with other people was travelling with a view to rescuing Tipu and other immigrants from the blue boat, she behaved frantically on the wake of tornado. She exclaims and tells Deen:

> "It's not that I scarce easily," she said. 'It's just that I had a terrible experience once, in a storm. It was a cyclone, not a tornado… I'd thought I'd gotten over it but I guess I haven't. May be I never will'. (256)

Arrogance of anthropocentrism, especially with the First World Countries emanating out of their overweening self-righteousness serves as a hubris which is followed by the nemesis that affects all. The power game in the First World countries commodifies the illegal immigrants Illegal immigrants are commoditized by the law enforcing agencies of the host countries and Italy where the major portion of the novel's plot sets, is one of them. In this connection, Pei Palmgen's may be referred for concretizing the interpretation. In a research paper Pei Palmgen makes an in-depth study of the conditions of the illegal immigrants in Thailand. In this paper Palmgen exclaims that the refugees in this country are to negotiate always with the police and pay money to them every month as they threaten detention. A refugee committee is formed there and if any refugee fails to pay the cash bribe,

he or she contacts the committee that comes forward for help. Palmgen refers to several Rohingya and one of them was a roti seller who informed him "identical accounts of paying police officers from three departments in their district five hundred Thai Baht (about 15 US dollars) each per month, for a total of 1500 Baht out of their monthly income in order to work without being arrested" (219). Similarly, a community also develops in Italy among the Bangladeshi illegal immigrants and Lubna is one of the key persons there. Lubna and her people give legal and financial support to the illegal immigrants.

Further, eco-criticism is not a monolithic study and hence, it encompasses within its trajectory the exploration of the drive behind urbanization by the power structure. Different advertizing agencies take capitalism's power for granted in terms of world-wide industrial revolution and generation of job opportunities. As economy is getting corporatized, its strength and impact are now being diffused widely and it is covering a huge network of manpower. True, money begets power and power constructs and controls knowledge. Hence, the corporate capitalists are now advertising and making the people think that all their enterprises are being undertaken for the elimination of poverty from the face of the world. They are successful to a great extent in getting the people brainwashed by virtue of their advertisements that capitalism is the right weapon now to fight back poverty. Bourgeoisie works as an all-ready party and fights back any discourse that tends to challenge the omnipotence of the capitalism's hegemony. Hence, in the novel while Piya after

observing the bad impact of the refineries on the banks of the tributaries in the Sunderbans on the bio-diversity uploads a post in the social media, she is even rebuked as 'bitch' and 'foreign whore' and blamed that she is trying to stop development:

> Ever since she'd started speaking out against the refinery upstream of the Sunderbans her social media fees had spilled over with angry messages: 'Why u trying to stop poor people getting jobs bitch? Who paying u to stop development? Go back where you came from foreign whore.' (177)

As capitalism is not a monolithic discourse, it plays ambiguous roles. It deludes the public with the term 'development' but it does not clarify the paradox that development is never equivalent to change. 'Change' is a different term which brings about a shift of the paradigm of ideologies, ethical status and attitude as per the demands of spatial as well as temporal conditions. Development of a society does not truly mean the change of a society because for changing a society a community's cultural and aesthetic improvement and innovations are a must. Only infrastructural development cannot ensure a better life unless and until it is intimately associated with cultural and aesthetic changes. But capitalism is producing hegemonic knowledge which tends to construct the identity of the 21st century humans who sway between temporal and spatial. It appears to be "a mode of power, for the cosmopolitan 'world citizen', the project of European civilization and the goal

of cosmopolitanism has been to produce a notion of the "universal" that could erase difference" (Grewal 178). This politics of erasure of differences deludes humans and makes them think that capitalism is a benevolent mode of economy working for the betterment of all. But the reality is that it is more preoccupied with its own profit maximizing enterprise.

In the same vein, capitalist modernity, for its chameleon-like nature assumes any shape required for exploiting labour and resources. Commoditization, compromise with power-structure for minimal government intervention and creating a wage-earner class constitute the essence of capitalist modernity. In this connection, Bartolovich asserts:

> 'Third World' has literally been transformed into a battery of (highly regulated) objects for metropolitan consumption. Such commodification, an ineluctable consequence of the globality of contemporary capitalism, goes hand in hand with the greater exploitation, of labour- power and resources, across the inter nation division of labour" (14).

The politics capitalist modernity shocks Piya who is concerned about the dump of toxic effluents into the river by the refineries as it contaminates water and causes mass deaths of Irrawaddy dolphins and other marine animals. It also impacts heavily upon the living of the fishermen living in the estuary of the Bay of Bengal. Directly and indirectly, it compels the people to leave their habitats and go to the nearby towns and cities that will collapse the harmony of urban life. Besides, due to the destruction of biodiversity natural calamities will frequent the coastal area, another cause of multiplying the number of homeless people. These homeless people will come to the cities and the First World countries where because of staunch competition they will be compelled to sell their labour at cheaper price to those who are mostly responsible for ecological disasters. They are the beneficiaries of ecological disasters in the way that the more carbon emission means the more production or manufacturing and the more people will be ousted from their habitats in coastal areas due to the rise of the sea level and consequently, the more cheap laborers they will get to move the wheel of their economic advancement faster.

Also, ecological disruption mostly emanated from the capitalist enterprises, causes displacement of human location. It is metaphorically depicted through the condition of Rafi, Tipu, Bilal and Kabir. These boys from the coastal areas of India and Bangladesh try to penetrate into a European country, but unfortunately Kabir drowned in the sea. Tipu in Turkish border disappeared. Rafi somehow, after passing one year in jail, is capable of surviving in Italy. Besides, internal politics of the European countries infuriate the hooligans against the migrants. Rafi was one of the victims of the hooliganism. He is beaten mercilessly and left at the street unconscious. Life is never easy for these unfortunate and illegal migrants abroad. They even do not get the semi-legal status and it facilitates the First World economy because, in such situation, their labour is not protected by labour regulations and thus they can be forced to work longer hours and do hazardous jobs with less pay.

Not only that, these migrants living in foreign countries like Italy is also handled roughly by the local *scafistas* or goons. Rafi was once compelled to borrow some money from a *scafista* who forces Rafi to repay the loan with an incredible amount of interest. But the cruel irony is that these *scafistas* do not want honestly that the borrowed loan should be repaid by the borrower because his failure will give him chances to blackmail him in many ways. As he fails, he is beaten and left unconscious in the street. Later, the narrator Deen Dutta is confirmed by a diminutive young man

in Lubna Khala's office, a Fozlul Hoque Chowdhury about the matter. Brutality of the *scafistas* interprets the complex hierarchical classification or the asymmetrical binary divisions of the Italian society manifesting the imperial hegemony in the era of globalization which, in terms of economic and cultural exploitation, can aptly be termed as the re-colonizing mission of the capitalist countries. Eurocentric form of globalization generates postcoloniality which "… premised on the marginalization of the nation in the economic and cultural domains" (Krishnaswamy 3). It is true, in the world divided into centre and margin capitalism's hegemony desperately causes derangement and communalism. Capital and social status run hand in hand as Karl Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* assert, "To be a capitalist, is to have not only a purely personal, but a social *status* in production" (58). They further declare, "Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion" (58). But in a compartmentalized society the laborers are always alienated from the bourgeois private property as the "average price of wage-labour is the minimum wage…" (59). The *scafistas* in the capitalist Italy represent the bourgeois capitalists who decide the wage labour of the semi-legal immigrants like Rafi, Bilal and many others who are engaged in the jobs that the local Italians will not do with the same wages as these boys do. Thus, the First World countries which are mostly responsible for the emission of huge quantity of carbon-di-oxide, CFC and many other ozone layer corroding gases are the major beneficiaries of the consequence of ecological catastrophe.

True, derangement in social, political and economic life bears an intimate connection with topographical phenomena. Disruption of ecosystem brings about disruption in human existence which is mostly controlled by the capitalist modernity. Displacement, migration, practice of social evils like human trafficking is not the issues to be deliberated in isolation. Ghosh, of course, "defies simple categorization…" (Gunning 181). They can be addressed effectively and collectively if the infestation of natural calamities and the reasons behind them can be addressed properly. The rise of crony capitalism, corporate economy and corporate power-structure are mostly responsible for the evils emanated from derangement in ecosystem. For the solution to all these problems, humans must go back to the origin from where all the ingredients emerged because "From the beginning salvation comes" (286). It does not mean that humans will not move forward with the drive for material development. It rather claims eco-friendly development hand in hand with positive changes without which human survival will conspicuously be at stake. Through Deen's multicultural identity and

cosmopolitan entity, it appears that as the world has become a singular

location of the world community and as humans' movement covers the whole world due to the economic enterprises, the challenges on the part of the environment must be addressed collectively to ensure a secured life on this planet.

In fine, Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* offers a counter discourse against the capitalist modernity and capitalism's hegemony, and produces a narrative that interrogates the capitalist conceptions of the Global North and Global South. Development is congenial to humans as long as it is equally distributed between these two halves of the world. Any kind of development which is attained at the cost of ecosystem is fatal not only for the Global North but also for the Global South. On the whole, none can deny that for a better life on the earth conservation of ecosystem with its entire communities of species is a must as the harmonious interactions among them can save humans from displacement, dispossession and derangement.

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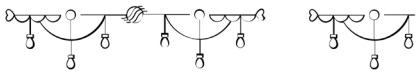
An Ecosocial Study of R.K Narayan's *The Axe*

Bisweswar Biswas

Ecosocialism is an effort to provide a progressive alternative to what Karl Marx called capitalism's destructive progress. It precedes an economic policy founded on the extra economic and non- monetary criteria of ecological equilibrium and social needs. It is mainly based on the Marxist critique of political economy and the fundamental arguments of the ecosocial movement. It does not confront the capitalist system rather it helps to grow productivity socialism which avoids the issue of natural limits. It extends the new field of research and social practices. Ecosocialism means socialism plus an anxiety for the environment. It refers the balance of nature to economic life. The aim of it is to create socially justice society without damaging the environment. David Pepper remarks that eco-socialism is anthropocentric, humans require a non-material interaction with nature and that it (nature) should not be dominated or exploited but rather managed for the collective good. It includes the discussion about ecology, nature, cause of social exclusion, environmental degradation, sustainable development and ecosocial development. It also refers the harmonious co-existence with nature. According to O' Connor, the aim of ecological socialism is a new society based on ecological rationality, democratic control, social equality and the predominance of use value over exchange value. It would focus the people's fundamental needs; protect the environment and the professional value of harmony between nature and human beings to build a social equality. It shows that how do financial practices reproduce social relations to capitalism and obstructs the inevitable transformation to production based on environmental and social values. It is the urgency of people to aware environmental protection and to protect ecological rights. Eco-social work can link between the ecological development and ecological needs. Here is an attempt to discuss about the rural Indian socio-cultural life and the impacts of globalization on living beings as well as nature in R.K. Narayan's short story 'The Axe'.

The problem is that the ecologists do not pick up an account about the intrinsic contradiction between the accumulation of profits and expansion of capital by some selfish capitalist and the preservation of environment. Marx and Engles were very much conscious about the environmental destruction caused by capitalist model of over production. They trusted that the main goal of socialism is not to produce more things but to give free time to human beings to expand potentialities. It is important to know what ecosocial issues are embedded in the short story. What

effects of the globalization on the mundane earth are? Why do we reside in coherence with nature? And how do we (living beings) dwell in harmony with each other in the lap of nature on the mother earth? Here Narayan deals with beyond society and polity to include an ecological atmosphere of the house of Old master where Velan has lived for long time. It is far away from the bustle of socio-cultural urban society.



But with the change of owner how misery descends in his life. He realizes that his days in the garden are over. Mechanism has taken the place in the name of industrialization. Recently, if you look at the Koppal district, PM2.5 rate shows AQI 118 and PM10 rate displays AQI 111 wherein ozone constitutes AQI 104. So what we find is that through industrial globalizations are creating job opportunities on the other hand it is also eating up into the vitals of our life namely the fresh air. The present study thus makes analytical probe into the short story 'The Axe' of R.K. Narayan which was set against the very urban district of Karnataka and attempts to reveal the whole destructive processes. It also aims at showing how the degradation of nature took place, thereby almost putting an end to the agro-based generation.

Industrialization has good effects as well as the deteriorating consequence. It is eliminating the unemployment problems. It provides many job opportunities for the jobless people. Economic development is fulfilled by the growth of industrialization but it creates environmental degradation and our existence is threatened. Indiscriminate development of industry pollutes the environment very badly. As a result, natural things have disappeared. The positive economic and communal outcomes of increasing growth have been accompanied by ecological degradation. Core natural resources will be destroyed day by day with the development of science and technology. We are bringing on our own doom by the excessive use of current technology. Although it temporarily solves the growing unemployment problems but it is wasting away with present day labour. There is a lot of discussion and debate on the issues but it is the need of hour to aware the people to repair the damage on the environment. The need of the study is to focus the non-violent dismantling of capitalism and the effects of industrialization on the living beings as well as the environment. Due to globalization and industrialization many gardens, trees and buildings have been reduced. This has caused a lot of damage on the environment. It has also influenced on the available land resources. Vast garden, fertile fields have been taken to make for the new buildings in the name of development. While human beings may enjoy for the new innovations, these can have evil effects on the socio-ecological system. The heterogeneous problems demand unique antidotes to protect the existed natural resources and above all environmental ecosystem. R.K. Narayan's 'The Axe'

is not the mere the story but an alarming bell which makes the people aware of the destruction of nature that has already begun in the name of destruction. He shows the contemporary eco-social issues of the society that are inseparable part of nature. He was thinking deeply about the contemporary social and environmental problems which were caused by the result of capitalism, globalization and its concomitant industrialization. This will be realized by the examination of ecological, social, cultural and literary influence on Narayan.

A lot of work has been done on the short story 'The Axe' written by R.K. Narayan. The researchers say that it is required to focus on the ecosocial perspective in the natural environment in literature.

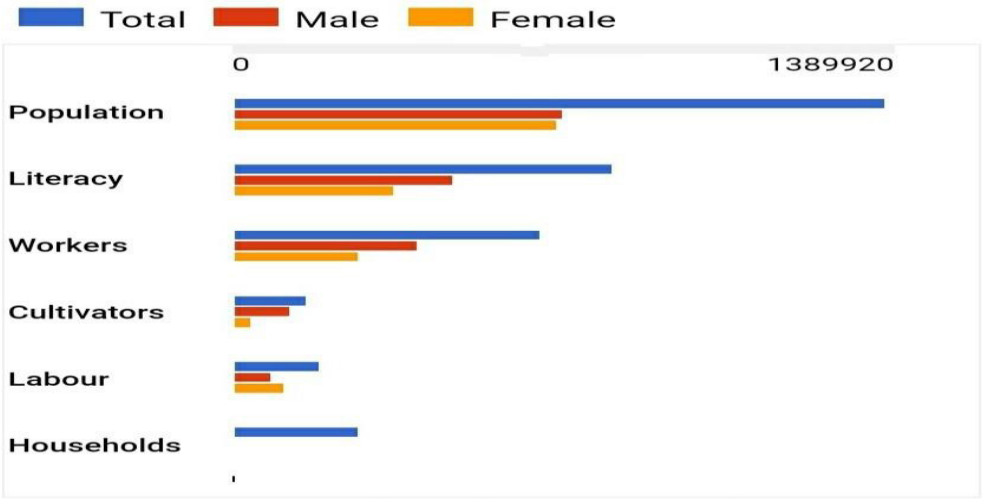
Most of these reviews are of the individual works. This present analysis will centre on some of the literary perspectives that have not yet been explored in the short story. Noojilla Srinivas and T. Ashok state in the article 'An Ecocritical Study of R.K. Narayan's short story: The Axe' that how does R.K. Narayan show his ardent love for nature, love of velan, protagonist of the short story for plants and garden and how do some selfish men destroy the nature in the name of development. Velan is showed as the similar character as shakuntala in Kalidasa's 'Abhijana Shakuntalam'. Velan is depicted here as a true son of nature and Narayan is displayed as a true nature writer. Rajesh Kumar Mishra describes in the article 'Development versus Nature Reading RK Narayan's 'The Axe' as an Ecocritical Discourse' that how he expresses his fervent love for nature and the agony for the environment which is being demolished in the name of progress. He also tells that the protagonist Velan lives in all his life in the lap of nature. The love of Velan towards the garden, trees, flowers and birds are also referred to here. It also states that in modern time people are detaching from the nature in the name of progress. Vidod R. Shende shows in the article 'The Theme of Control and Independence in R.K. Narayan's The Axe' that it attempts to explore the subject matter of independence and control and how does the life of the protagonist Velan move from kuppal to malgudi and how does he live independent by controlling every situation such as good and evil. This also displays that Narayan's vision from the common man's view point. Here irony plays a crucial role to move forward the story. The happiness and prosperity of Velan are also depicted here.

The research work would be depended upon primary and secondary sources. The source of the primary data is collected from the short story 'The Axe' which is taken from R.K. Narayan's short stories collection 'Malgudi Days'. The data collected through the secondary sources are books, magazines, journals, newspapers, the authentic information from internet and websites. It is explanatory research which would try to analyze using ecosocial perspective. Qualitative analysis method is used for the present study specially for employing textual analysis in the light of research problems. The method is also employed in order to discover the way in which Narayan has presented the view on the concepts of ecosocial study by gathering the materials from selected short story.

The increasing awareness of ecological crisis and the movement developing since 1960's, has presented a concept that the existing social and economic order is able of promising continuous progress for all. R.K. Narayan depicts the ironies of Indian socio-cultural problems in human life and peculiarities of human and nature coexistence. He was very much concerned about the demolition of natural world caused by the rapidly increasing number of urbanizations, industrialization and modernization as the result of globalization. Though his concern is mainly sociological still his intention is to aware people. His short story, 'The Axe' is narrated in an unnamed third person narrator and cantered on Koppal district in Karnataka. He dislikes the contrast between the simple poor working-class people and wealthy owners. He shows the two- care of environment and social

equality inevitably linked. He also expresses the contemporary issues of human society- alienation from nature in the name of development of the society. The processes of destruction have already begun long ago. He gives us a word of caution through his short stories. The story revolves around Koppal district. In the past, it was called to as 'Kopana Nagara'. A World heritage centre Hampi covers some areas of Koppal district. He understood that the natural environment of Koppal was on the verge of destruction. Industrial progress has replaced manual labour. Computerized people get more opportunities than the labour class people. In recent time, it causes a great threat.

If we discuss the last few years of Koppal district then this will be clear. According to 2001census, population of Koppal district is 1196089, out of them 603312 are male and 592777 are female. 2.26% of total population of Maharashtra was of Koppal district. On the other hand in 2011census, population of Koppal district is 1389920, out of them 699926 are male and 689994 are female. This district population constituted 2.28% of total Maharashtra population. There was change of 16.21% in the population compared to population as per 2001. In the previous census of India 2001, Koppal district recorded increase of 24.84% to its population compared to 1991. As technology advances, population growth is observed here.

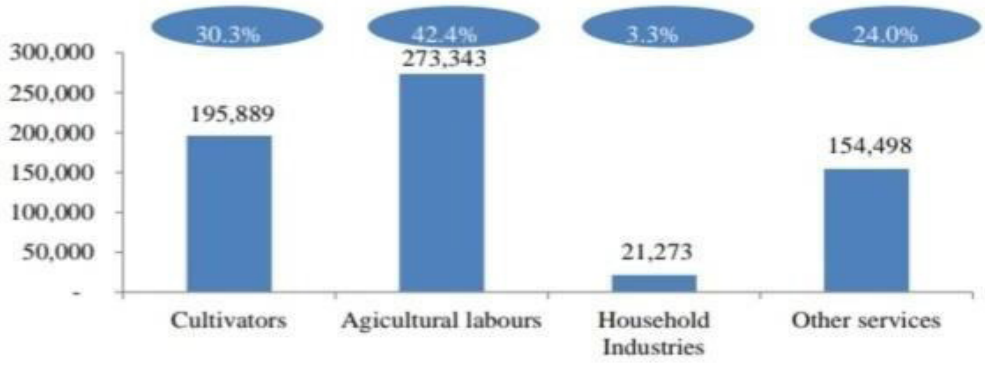


Koppal barchart on population, literacy, workers & households

The effect of literacy rate also is noticed here. In 2001, the literacy rate was 54.01%, out of them 68.42% were male and 39.61% were female. With the advancement of industry and technology, the job opportunities have increased. Therefore the education rate of people also increased. In 2011, the literacy rate is 68.09%, out of them 78.54% are male and 57.55% are female. A change in the sex-ratio has been observed along with the increase in education level. 986 female per 1000 male in 2011are compared to 983 female per 1000 male in 2001. Despite all these improvements,

agricultural farming is still there. But mechanism has taken the place of mental labor. Recently computerized hi-tech people are getting more and more opportunities than the other labor class people.

Figure 180: Koppal district's worker profile, as of 2011, in thousands



Source: Census 2001, Census 2011. Numbers are estimated.

Velan's life has prospered and he is much contended. After leaving home, Velan felt very happy to have some work to earn money. His work helped the old man to demolish the weed that covered the land in the garden. He tore up the unwanted trees by hands in the scorching sun. All the undesirable plants were gradually vanished. Three sides were marked off for expanding the garden and plenty of various colour flowers. Velan made a pile of the compost, shown the seeds, implanted the trees, trimmed the branches and watered the plants twice a day. The blooming of flowers and the growth of the garden equals the happiness and prosperity in Velan's life. We have a 'silent' man labouring away in his role without any praise, casting with thinking for cost-cutting. But when old master died, Velan agonizes for the garden and says "what is to happen to the garden and to me?" It puts a new appeal on the central proficiency of social workers who don't feel safe in hi- tech mechanized world. He is very much scared to think about the future of the garden because he knows very well that old master's sons are not good as his master. He immensely loved the garden and the plants which he planted. The motherly touch of the nature never allows going away from her which was happened with Velan. Velan came to this house many years ago. The lives of working-class people were vastly affected for the years but they couldn't be separated from nature. He loves very much to trees, birds and flowers etc. in the garden. He claimed nothing more of life. In his garden life, he has never tackled for any complexity. He is a very simple man who leads his life in very simple way in the lap of nature and natural things where he feels heavenly happiness. According to Henry David Theoreau, "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." Thus,

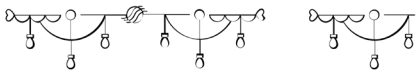
the writer also deals with the rural simple, happy and very highly socio-cultured life in the garden without any bustle of globalized modern society.

The house became old and named it as 'haunted house' and people avoided it. The house with the garden was sold to a commercial buyer by the old master. Domestic business gradually transforms into international ones. The new owner wanted to demolish the house and removed the garden except for a few trees for the boundaries. They wanted to make some houses without leaving space instead of garden and sold them (the houses) in high prices. There is a huge transformation to the people's attitude. A big house with garden has changed into small houses without keeping a blade of grass suggests the change in the man's lifestyle for the impact of modernization, where there is no relationship left between man and nature rather man totally depends on mechanism. As the result of globalization, commercial value to the land is increased in the name of real estate business. Here Narayan deals with how the land becomes valuable commercial wealth and how it becomes expensive than the garden which is the essential part of nature. Plants, gardens, lands and horticulture have been destroyed by some self-indulgence people. Day by day raw materials from nature are reducing. Thus he indicates in the name of modernity, how people is changing their lifestyle from nature. Instead of afforestation, people repeatedly cut the trees in the name of urbanization. As a result, the environmental balance has destroyed. It also changes the socio- economic structure of the society. Due to modernization, wild animals are depriving of their dwelling places and they attack the human beings. Loss of trees also increases pollution level of the environment. It has led to numerous environmental concerns such as landscape intrusion, air pollution and noise pollution etc. Various attempts were made by the forest department to check deforestation and to carry on our plantation activity which Velan has done in the garden. But some greedy, selfish persons have stopped him and used to fulfilment their requirements. Narayan warns the common people that there will be no life at all without plants.

In the last portion of the story, we see how time has changed the harmonious relation between man and land which is the inseparable part of the nature. Land is the essential natural resource that plays a significant role in the growth and survival of human beings in the society. At first man used it as the fruitful and productive resource and the place of dwelling. But now it is used as the wealth which has great commercial values for the purpose of industrialization. As the result of globalization, urbanization and industrialization have changed all the scenario of the so called 'human world'. In modern time, the emotional bonding has no place which we can see between the garden and Velan in the short story. It is not a pure industrialization but the effect of the greed of some selfish man. It transfers away from agriculture-based economy. Individual labour is replaced by mechanized mass production. Industrialization has resulted in urbanization and pressured on environmental and social problems. The effects of industrialization have changed a village into an urban scenario. The garden which represents rural culture is removed by the commercial traders and there they will make high-rise buildings which are the symbol of urban culture. They did not need tree or garden rather they want to make the building for the use of commercial purpose. The manly

sentiment with the tree has no value to them. But for Velan, who himself is a nature child, has a special regard to nature. This episode deals with the fondness and love of Velan towards the trees in the garden over many decades. It shows the coherence between man and nature and how do they dwell in harmony with each other in the social environment. But it is demolished by the hands of some greedy and selfish person in the name of commercialization, modernization and development. It is symbolically exposed through the cutting of axe. 'Axe' is the symbol that indicates to decay the environmental balance and the amicable relationship between man and nature. Here the protagonist of the story Velan cannot put up with the circumstances and become very distress and decide to leave the place. Though some selfish people have better economic opportunities for the so called 'industrialization', but a vast population mainly simple working class people face the problems. It creates income inequality. Industrialization leads to increase in demand for natural resources by destroying environmental sustainability. As a result of industrialization, some farm labours are unemployed which is happened with the protagonist Velan in the story. To Velan the garden is the whole heavenly world where he spent most of his life with the plants but industrialization may be driven by the foreign investment and spoilt his life and at last even drove away from his dreamy world. Here Velan is the representative of the working-class people. Actually, they have not so much profited from it rather they have lost their jobs. It pushes back them and becomes 'jobless'. They have less job security and dignity. Thus, the writer feels the essence to express his concern and highlights the eco-social awareness worldwide.

Ecosocialism states that capitalist economic system is not sufficient with social and ecological needs. Ecosocialists accept that capitalist system is the main reason of environmental deterioration, social eviction and inequality through globalization and colonialism. Narayan portrays the contemporary eco-social concerns and issues of the society. He tries to show that with the hands of western dictator, private individual controls and owns the means of production for more profit. They don't think about the environment. They only work for the sake of selfish personal profit. In present time mechanism has reduced the manpower. Earlier man has been more connected with nature, but in present time he is gradually isolating himself from nature in the name of modernization, industrialization and urbanization that are the main cause of the economic and social challenges. But Velan as a true son of nature spends most of his lives in the lap of nature with trees and plants and he treats them as his own children in the story. In the last portion of the story the writer wants to express a message that man is disturbing the nature in the name of globalization. Globalization has made various changes in our lives. It is impossible to reverse at all. Foreign companies take over all the natural resources and in the name of industrialization; they destroy the natural eco-social system. But the solution lies in the impact of mechanisms which can keep great impact on environment. Globalization itself can support to make a good economic condition and a better eco-friendly structure of the environment. It is about the competition where some private companies



can lead in being eco-friendly and it will inspire other to follow the path for the upcoming days. But some greedy people block to do so. He displays through the character of Velan that we should love and protect trees. Here Narayan warns the people to resist themselves and plant more trees to create the healthy environment and to protect our planet for near future.

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Lakshmaner Shaktishel of Sukumar Ray: An Apprisal

Aradhana Bose

Sukumar Ray (1887-1923), the son of Upendrakishore Roychoudhury and father of Satyajit Ray, the great filmmaker, literary scholar and music composer, attained name and fame in the world of children's literature in Bengal. His father was a man of "multi-sided genius revealed in his writings, songs and illustrations as well as in his work as a painter". (Chakraborty, Rima 101) Sukumar, popularly known for his children's literature had been deeply influenced by his father's creativities and flair for literary creation. He is considered as one of the great pioneers of Nonsense verse in Bengali literature. The term 'Nonsense', as a literary genre, though difficult to define, is used to mean lighthearted humorous or whimsical verse containing absurd characters and actions.

Sukumar's "selection of 'transcreated' poems by Satyajit Ray was published by Writers' Workshop, and the collection of 'translated' poems by Sukanta Chaudhuri was published by Oxford University Press … unanimously label Sukumar Ray's poems to be a collection of 'Nonsense' verse and thereby, bring in a linear identification with Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll" (Bhar, Anasuya. (7) ss Apart from his creative genius in Nonsense verse, he excels in using a rather different type of dramatic art that helps him in comically dramatizing high and lofty theme in a parodic way. His two plays "Jhalapala (Cacophony) and Lakshmaner Shaktishel (The Wonder Weapon)" contain comic themes and are replete with fun and humour, tinged with a satiric spirit.

Sukumar Ray's "Lakshner Shaktishel (The Wonder Weapon)" is taken from an episode of the Indian epic, the Ramayana. It tells the tale of Lakshman's mortal injury leading to his fatal unconsciousness caused by the Wonder weapon hurled at him by Meghnada, son of Ravana, and his subsequent revival after the application of herbal medicine brought by Hanuman. The theme is epical and the characters are originally heroic, having the status of Avatar. But in Sukumar's dramatization of the epical narrative, these Avatar's and their associates and opponents appear with ordinary human traits, with human frailties. Sukumar endows them with such characteristics as to make them funny and unheroic and fully inconsistent with an epic theme, on the surface level. But underneath this appearance lies a deeper significance which may pose a challenge to the critical thinkers of Sukumar's Nonsense Literatures. The playwright depreciates the epic characters in order to ridicule the frailties of ordinary humans like greed, unfairness, dereliction of

duty, cowardice. Apparently, the purpose is not to moralize or to teach but to delight. The play is replete with fun and humour and is a parody of the epic episode. It is written in an ambience of fun and frolic. The relationship between the plot construction and characterization speaks of Sukumar's

wonderful power of character portrayal transmuted into pure gold of dramatic art that deserves great appreciation. It has already been stated that Sukumar's "Lakshner Shaktishel" may be categorized as a Nonsense play with a lofty theme, depreciated characters and funny, humorous situations that delight the readers. The objectives of the study are to analyze the theme of the play, to discuss the narratival mode and presentation of characters which are provocative of fun and humour.

The theme of "Lakshmaner Shaktishel" is mythological and based on and derived from the "Ramayana" and the mythological characters have been portrayed as depreciated human beings. The theme thrives on Lakshman's deadly loss of consciousness as he was hit by the supernatural weapon hurled at him by Meghnad, the son of the Demon King of Lanka. However, his consciousness was regained by virtue of Hanumana's unflinching loyalty, deep respect and supreme effort to fetch herbal medicine named 'Bishalyakarani Mritasanjibani', prescribed by Shusen. The playlet ends with the resuscitation of Lakshmana. Sukumar Ray has deviated from the myth demythologizing this particular incident by replacing Meghnad, by Ravana. In other words, the wonder weapon was hurled by Ravana and not by Meghnad, in Sukumar's playlet. He has done it with the intention to ridicule Ravana who is shown as picking the pocket of Lakshman, after his loss of consciousness in the battle field, in the third Scence of the playlet. Fun and frolic, jocosity, jocundity run riot as the audience observes Ravana stealing Lakhsmana's pocket. But there can hardly be an iota of doubt that underneath this apparently farcical situation, lurks a very serious, rude, unpleasant reality that Sukumar exposes obliquely- a contemporary, realistic incident that is frequently found and reported in the Newspapers

The play consists of four scenes. The first scene shows the camp of the army of Rama and serves the purpose of 'exposition', to a certain extent, of the playlet, and focuses on the moments just before the preparation for the battle against Ravana. The characters which are symbolic of courage, valour, loyalty and bravery in the original myth of the Ramayana have been comically portrayed with words used to demean in the following speech of Rama:

Rama: I had an excellent dream last night. What I dreamt was that Ravana was climbing a palm tree and slipped and fell down from the tall palmyra (palm tree) with a crashing sound while climbing it up. (Sukumar Ray 156) (Translation mine).

What a fantastic play of imagination of Sukumar's idea of Rama climbing a palm tree and falling from the crest, and that Rama's dream occurs at such a crucial situation when Rama and all his associates are in such a dire trouble as Sita has been kidnapped. Undoubtedly, the farcical, ludicrous situation is provocative of laughter, but this apparent banter, is reminiscent of a very serious episode of the Ramayana:

Ravana, after defeating Kuvera was flying with the Pushpak Rath. But he could not cross the

mountain, Kailash which was the abode of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Ravana met Shiva's demi-god, bull attendant Nandi, at the place, and asked the reason behind his chariot's inability to pass over the place. Nandi informed Ravana that Shiva and Parvati resided on the mountain, and that no one was allowed to pass. Ravana mocked Shiva and Nandi. Enraged by the insult to his master, Nandi cursed Ravana that monkeys would destroy him. In turn, Ravana decided to uproot Kailash, infuriated by Nandi' curse, and his inability to proceed further, he put all his twenty arms under Kailash, and started lifting it. As Kailash began to shake, a terrified Parvati embraced Shiva. However, the omniscient Shiva already knew that Ravana was behind the menace, and pressed the mountain with his big toe, trapping Ravana beneath it. Ravana gave a loud cry in pain.

Thus, the very first dialogue of the playlet is indicative of a serious bearing in the play. It is obvious that Ravana's ambition to uplift the mountain Kailash and the consequence of his ambition has been very shrewdly, obliquely presented, and that too in a mood of jocundity. What is interesting in this context is that Sukumar did exactly the reverse of what Alexander Pope did in The Rape of the Lock. While Pope made little great, Ray belittled the great. The purpose of both the poets, however remains the same- to expose and explode human follies, foibles, avarice, ambition. That the obvious result of ambition- a burning folly of the mortals since the creation of the Earth- is fall from the peak, has been beautifully revealed by Sukumar Ray.

The details of the war Messenger's report are discussed in presence of all the faithful warriors of Rama. Hanuman enters with the report of Ravana marching towards them with full battle preparation. The scene ends with Sugrib's proposal to Lakshmana to challenge Ravana to which everybody in the Rama's camp agreed:

Sugrib: O Lakshman, let us encounter and fight with (Ravana). (Ray 158)

All stand up with battle determination and leave the camp. The second scene focuses on the fatal fainting of Lakshman in the battle with Ravana. The violent battling mood and gesture of Ravana created extreme fear and panic among the commanders and the monkey soldiers.

Jambuban is highly panicked to find Ravana marching towards them with a violent warring mood and called upon everyone to flee from the battle ground to save their lives.

Bibhishan and Sugrib heard it and expressed their panic also:

(Song)

If Ravana's blow touches your body – Then you'll die – you'll die surely Flee away, flee away, I tell you

Or You'll be killed--

The blow of the cudgel will lead to your death. (159)

Sugrib challenges him and Ravana threatens him with a dire consequence. Sugrib becomes afraid and flees away without least resistance. Ravana condemns his cowardice and finding no one in the place picks the pocket of Lakshman.

The third scene is full of sarcastic remarks directed towards Jambuban and Hanuman. Lakshman is carried to the camp fatally unconscious. Hanuman is blamed by both Sugrib and Jambuban for his failure to protect Lakshman against the attack with Ravana's supernatural weapon. Everybody laments for Lakshman's condition because of Ravana's hit with his weapon. Jambuban (Sushen Baidya in the epic) prescribes medicine for Lakshman, that Hanuman is to fetch from the Gandhamadan hill near the Kailash. Hanuman first hesitates and agrees to fetch it from the hill. Bibhishan is selected Commander-in-chief for the night. Bibhishan finally agrees against his will.

The fourth scene opens with a verbal battle between Bibhishan and Jambuban over the former's

dozing off which is indicative of negligence of duty- again a satirical exposure of a typical characteristic of the mortals of contemporary life. However, Bibhishan who is selected Commander- in-Chief for the night, is detected snoring with deep sleep by Jambuban. There is an unmistakable, contemporary and erstwhile social relevance of the fun- packed incident which can be easily traced in daily Newspapers. Bibhishan denies the charge and is much annoyed with him. The dramatist here mocks Bibhishan's sense of duty and responsibility. The scene then focuses on the arrival of Death Messengers to take Lakshman to necropolis but they are prevented by Bibhishan from doing it. The conversation between the two Messengers of Death is not only amusing but also sarcastic. Then Bibhishan encounters with Jama, King of Death who threatens Bibhishan with His identity and activities:

Jama: I'm the god of death, I'm named, I'm all-ravager, I kill all.
I'm always equal to all'

I roam everywhere in the three worlds.

I meet one in the end in the guise of God – I'm introduced to one in the end of life. When the journey of

worldly life come to an end –
I, God of death, bestow relief on the tired soul. (169) (translation mine)

The moment Jama ends his speech, Hanuman enters with the hill voicing "Victory to Rama". Hanuman catches the Messengers by the throat and Jama is pressed under the hill, again an oblique reference to

Ravana under the mountain Kailash. The herbal medicine that Hanuman brought was instantly applied to Lakshman who comes back to his full consciousness. Jama who is pressed under the hill is set free. The Messengers also leave the spot. The entire scene, like the other scenes is full of farcical situations which amuse children and bewilder, if not deceive, the adults.

Sukumar Ray wrote Lakshmer Shaktishel, indeed with a purpose- the purpose of depreciating the lofty and heroic mythological characters in order to attain the comic and parodic effect of the play and endowing them with human traits criticises human being not only of his own time but also of the subsequent ages. His sense of humour is delicate, by virtue of his delicate sense of humour, the playwright "compels these legendary, heroic figures to descend from the epic heights to a world of spoof and horseplay" (Chattopadhyay, Debasish 247). The theme of the play and the characters are epical indeed, but their action- if The Rape of the Lock's adjectival sub- title, heroic-comical, is allowed to be transferred- is extremely unheroic. The obvious result is what has been being stated from the very beginning.

Sukumar Ray has portrayed their characters as ordinary, weak human beings. When Lakshman regains his full consciousness and hears Bibhishan, Sugrib and Jambubam staking their respective claims for credit for his revival, he does not kill time to claim for himself for the scope and opportunity for them to parade their knowledge and learning. Lakshman utters: "And if I had not fainted because of being hit with the supernatural weapon, nothing would have happened and you could have not had the avenue to parade your knowledge and earning" (Ray 171). Sukumar belittles the mythical, heroic characters by endowing them with the traits of ordinary human beings. Chattopadhyay brilliantly observes in this context:

It will, therefore be naïve to assume that Sukumar's Lakhshmaner Shaktishel does not have a sense or meaning. Quoting Trilling, "When it (Nonsense) succeeds, it makes more than Sense" (Ttrilling, Lionel iv) it may rather be asserted that Sukumar has succeeded in making his Nonsense a perfect one at least in so far as Lakshmaner Shaktishel is concerned.

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La Panorama is an international anthology of critical essays on myriad topics pertaining to Literatures in English and on Media Culture: Postcolonialism, Religion, Mythology, Gender, Film Studies, Romanticism, Ecocriticism etc.

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