

# LITERARY VOICE

A Bi-Annual Peer-Reviewed Journal

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Volume I

Number I

April 2012

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Gabriel Marcia Marquez

Ngugi wa Thiong

Mahashweta Devi

Anita Desai

Khushwant Singh

Amrita Pritam

Shashi Deshpande

Girish Karnad

Shiv K. Kumar

K. A. Abbas

Hanif Kureishi

Basavaraj Naikar

Editor

**T. S. Anand**

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T. S. Anand

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## **Editorial Note**

*Literary Voice* has had, since its inception in 1975, spasmodic existence for various professional and pecuniary reasons. However, during this period special numbers of the journal on various facets and genres of literature have been brought out which were enriched by contributions of the contemporary scholar fraternity in India and abroad. Throughout these years it has been our endeavour to focus not only on the internationally eminent writers but the ones too who, though not whole time writers, have ventured into the creative arena in different parts of the globe. The previous issues of the journal vouch for our modest attempts in this direction.

The present number of *Literary Voice* assumes added significance in view of its Regd. No. and ISSN, and credible editorial and advisory boards which comprise eminent scholars from various regions of India whose scholarly write-ups on various facets of literature have appeared in *Literary Voice* in the past. I have no doubt their active association with the journal augurs well for the new beginning we are making with a solemn pledge that the quality, variety and content will not be compromised with.

*Literary Voice 2012* comprises insightful essays on Gabriel Marcia Marquez, Ngugi wa Thiong, Mahashweta Devi, Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam, Shashi Deshpande, K.A. Abbas, Hanif Kureishi, Girish Karnad, Shiv K. Kumar and Basavaraj Naikar which reflect the single-minded devotion and sustained involvement of the scholars in research pursuits.

The next issue of LV will exclusively be devoted to **Contemporary Indian English Literature** as it manifests in various genres, with varied focus on themes/ issues/ trends/ concerns, besides the enrichment of Indian English Literature by writers of Indian diaspora.

**T. S. Anand**  
Editor

## **Dedicated to**

**Prof. Mohal Lal Sharma**  
for his pioneering services  
to Literary studies

## **Frustration in Love in Shiv K. Kumar's *The Bone's Prayer***

**Dr. Basavaraj Naikar**  
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Love is the central theme of Shiv K. Kumar's first novel *The Bone's Prayer*. The narrator's friend Mr. Suresh, a native of Chandigarh University and a Professor of Philosophy, has been in love with a girl called Sheila and even wants to marry her as she is very beautiful and seductive. As a young man of twenty-five, it is but natural for him to fall in love with a beautiful girl. But unfortunately he has no practical knowledge of the world or human nature. His philosophy seems to be rather simplistic and he thinks that all that is white is milk. He is easily taken in by the superficial aspect of things and beings and cannot suspect any contradictions in them. His rather simplistic view of life could be seen in his love for Sheila. He is content with the illusion that his beloved loves him whole-heartedly simply because he himself does so and sees his own image in others. He, therefore, thinks that she is devoted to him in mind, body and spirit. But his smugness and pseudo-emotional security is destroyed by the narrator, who, being a man of the world, knows aspects of Sheila's life. He brings to Suresh's notice how Sheila has been moving around with Bhojraj, but Suresh is not at all able to believe in it. When he takes Suresh to the hotel at Dehra Dun and shows him the entry, 'Bhoj & Wife' in the register and other evidences including the golden brooch, Suresh is more than convinced about Sheila's philandering. He, therefore, hardens himself at least temporarily and behaves as if he is not affected by it. Sunil, the narrator, is quite happy about having convinced Suresh of Sheila's infidelity and hypocrisy. Sunil perhaps thinks that this disillusionment might help Suresh to forget about Sheila and make him think of a better girl. But the expectations of Sunil are nullified by Suresh, who has not been able to take it in the right spirit and improve his matrimonial prospects. Suresh, who not only lacks practical wisdom, but is also rather over-serious about his

love for the girl, cannot accept the idea of a girl being unfaithful to him. Nor does he possess the courage to defy and forget the unfaithful girl (Sheila) and search for a better one. As a final solution he resorts to suicide, which is really a cowardly act on his part. Being a Professor of Philosophy he should have a comprehensive knowledge of life and the ability to bear any suffering or pain with a sense of resignation. He should have derived the existentialist courage from his knowledge of philosophy to face the contingencies of life. But the fact that he attempts suicide by swallowing the sleeping tablets, testifies to the truth that he has not really assimilated the spirit of philosophy in his blood.

When Suresh is saved by Sunil's desperate efforts, he does not like the idea of being alive. Yet he continues his routine life simply because he cannot help it. In the second phase of his life when he goes to Jameson College of Elmira (in America) on a teaching assignment, he is again caught in the web of *maya*. He falls in love with a student of his, namely Carol, who is a divorcee and whose mother has a great love for India. Both of them exchange visits to each other's home. Suresh develops a deep love for her, who has been so much impressed by his seminars that she has decided to seduce him and succeeded in her amorous venture amply. Suresh in his typical manner mistakes her casual sexual adventures for deep or real love and thinks of having a lasting emotional relationship with her. But his dream is shattered when he goes with her and Sunil to Crawford's country-home for a party and notices that she is attracted by the guitar player, Mr. Rossini. She instantly forgets Suresh and begins to admire Rossini. She goes with him to the upper storey, where she hugs and kisses him. Suresh is annoyed and shocked so much by her instant infatuation for the guitar player that he is stunned into silence. Sunil tries in vain to console him. Finally they return from the party in a sulking silence. Again when Suresh goes to her home the next evening he is further shocked to find Carol dallying with Rossini in bed. Unable to stand the sight anymore, he returns home, describes the scene to Sunil on phone and commits suicide by switching on the gas oven in the room with all the windows closed. Sunil is shocked to see his friend repeat the crime and has to arrange for the transportation of his dead body to his father at New Delhi by air.

Suresh's pathetic end has been caused by his own cowardice and lack of practical approach to life. Both in the case of Sheila and that of

Carol he fails to understand the nature of man-woman relationship. Both Sheila and Carol believe in free sex and do not attach very serious importance to it. The only difference between the two is the cultural one. Whereas Sheila belongs to the Hindu culture, which is a hiding culture, Carol belongs to the Western Christian culture, which is an open culture. That explains the reason why Sheila indulges in free sex secretly and hypocritically whereas Carol does so openly and shamelessly. They have a very casual approach to sex and indulge in it by way of purely temporary pleasure or entertainment. They would not mind changing their bedmates. But Suresh does not have the practical sense to understand their approach. He is unable to see through Sheila's cunning or to ignore Carol's freelance philandering. Because of his amorous idealism he refuses to have sex with a callgirl at the Dun hotel. His attempt at suicide after his disillusionment with each of the girls is evidence of his cowardice. It is true that he believes in the justifiability of suicide as the only means of escape from the troubles of life. But such a life-negating philosophy, which should, ideally speaking, give us the right knowledge of life thereby enabling us to make our life beautiful and meaningful, helps Suresh to end his precious life. Suicide is certainly not the means of escape from frustration in love, though it may be so in other aspects of life. First of all, Suresh's philosophy of life is not a healthy one but one of life-negation. It is indeed very strange that a Hindu worth his name will never lose his faith in life. Any frustration in life is likely to turn him ascetic or harden him to face the contingencies. It may even be said that every person believes in a philosophy that agrees with his congenital nature or aptitude. Suresh's belief in the Nietzschean philosophy justifying suicide is a very unfortunate contradiction and it discounts his own Hinduism to a very great extent.

The narrator Mr. Sunil, who is a close friend of Suresh, plays a very significant role in the novel. Being a well wisher of Suresh, he wants to bring Sheila's infidelity and hypocrisy to the notice of his friend. He, therefore, plays the role of a detective and keeps a close watch over Sheila's movements and reports them to Suresh, not knowing that the latter is such an impractical fool. He desperately tries to save the life of Suresh from the jaws of death. Later he uses all his personal influence to get a teaching assignment for him at an American college. He, who wanted Suresh to see through Sheila's hypocrisy, wishes that he should

fall in love with some American girl like Carol and settle down in life. But paradoxically enough, both the attempts to help Suresh have miserably failed to produce the expected result. It is really very unfortunate that all his friendly attempts turn out to be a waste. What Bertrand Russell said humorously about philosophers as persons who are "constitutionally timid and are afraid of the unexpected" may be applied to Suresh quite seriously.

*The Bone's Prayer* shows the metaphysical polarity in the creation of two characters of contradictory natures: one is an impractical idealist, who seems to be deeply in love with death, whereas the other is a practical man with a lot of gusto for life. Suresh and Sunil provide the polarity within the novel. One may also say that the novel shows the extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of finding true love in the world. It also shows the yawning gap between idealism and opportunism and between eastern and western cultures.

The theme of frustration in love has been depicted by Shiv K. Kumar in a very beautiful manner. The evocation of the local atmosphere of Chandigarh, Dehra Dun and of American cities has been done according to the needs of the theme. The language employed by the novelist has the academic seriousness about it. *The Bone's Prayer* may easily be compared with similar novels of India.

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## Mahashweta Devi's Bitter Soil: A Voice of Resistance

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**“I must linger on  
Trapped in immortality  
My only freedom being  
The freedom to decompose”  
-Kamala Das**

These lines of Kamala Das speak of the survival as trap and of the only freedom of creative writer as the freedom to 'decompose'. What a writer like Mahashweta Devi has been doing is not distant from such claims of freedom to decompose the instituted order of rigid systems in society, government, law and the typical unyielding built of sophisticated psyche. Indian society has ever been discriminating the issues in terms of castes, religions, regional and cultural variations, that contribute in the power relations forming canvass for women's concerns. The act of writing in itself is the offspring of an impulse to express one's responses and reactions, both intellectual and emotional, including anger, defiance and resistance. Resistance to the order, complacency and discrimination is the chief cause behind women's anger in their writing in the post-feminist world of the literary scenario. Women like Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Taslima Nasreen and Mahashweta Devi have been above the narrow categorization as feminist writers since they have sublimated their thematic concerns to humanist canvas more than the feminist one.

Mahashweta Devi's undaunted commitment to the cause of denotified tribes in the ignored areas of the nation has made her an activist writer authentically documenting the stirring experiences of tribal lives. Devoting over a quarter of a century to the *Kheria-Shabar* tribes in *Purulia*, West Bengal, she is passionately concerned with the rehabilitation of

denotified tribes. The landless tribal who live half-clad in their dilapidated huts seem to be a slapping reality in the face of humanitarian and proudly democratic nation. Providing the fundamental human rights like drinking water, walk-able roads, livable houses, health and literacy to these wandering tribes is the first urgency to be felt and heeded by the government. People like *Baba Amte*, *Medha Patkar* and *Mahashweta Devi* fight for such a cause but how far one initiating leader can strive and how long the urban-centric nation is going to evade such responsibilities?

Instead of showing sympathy and understanding to these tribes, the government has been capturing their lands for urbanizing projects like a dam or a bridge and so on. It seems that these tribes are forced into the nomadic masses of migrant Indians in search of livelihood. When we the middle-class masters of ethical talks about order and ideals of '*Republics*', enjoy education, employment and economic freedom, why these tribes should be left helpless at the mercy of alienating forces of nature as well as society.? Does our talk of the universal brotherhood, compassion and equality as democratic values is to remain words in speeches applauded or lines in literature quoted? Do we not find our supreme concept of ***Vasudhaivam Kutumbakam*** misplaced in a narrow focus of elite masses of community, caste, class or regional preference?

The humanist vision of Mahashweta Devi's noble mission is transparently revealed in her four stories in the collection 'Bitter Soil' translated into English by Ipsita Chanda and published by Seagull, Calcutta in 2002. Poverty and plight of the tribes to Devi, is what this sophisticated and cultured society seems to impose on them. She knows she is venturing to uncover the horrifying reality and that is what she aims at. "After reading my work, the reader should face the truth of the facts, and feel duly ashamed of the true face of India." She further clarifies that the place Palamau is not one tiny tribal location but it is "a mirror of India". She digs into the roots of caste-class exploitation reaching the faulty land-system of India and agricultural economy.

"In Andhra Pradesh, land belongs to different raja or Zamindar agencies; Everything is for the upper class. I saw with my own eyes the brutalities of the existing land-system. so the sole purpose of my writing is to expose many faces of exploiting agencies; the feudal

minded land-owner, his henchmen, the so-called religious head of the administrative system, all of whom, as a combined force are out for lower-caste blood.”

Devi bases her works on truth rather than fiction, substantiating be the events like harijan-killings and caste-wars in Bihar, UP, MP and other places. Outraged by her own witnessing of the burning situations and exploiting machinery as a part of the so-called urban system, Devi grows ruthlessly unforgiving towards the agencies of such a 'disorder'. She believes in anger and justified violence and so wishes strongly to “peel the mask of the face of India” a kind of “hydra-headed monster” that deserves exposure in peoples' court. She is straightforward in declaring that her stories do not please readers.

She has a missionary target to achieve that is, her continuous fight with the suppression and silenced plight of the tribes. Her stories are a voice of resistance and a retort coming back to the society, law and the government like a stone that was hurled by them. “So where is the time for sleep? The situation demands immediate response and action”. The title *Bitter Soil* declares the soil as bitter for constituting the bitterness of disillusionment to human mind. These four narratives stuffed with worries and fears, blind faith and blind law, pathos and irony in compulsive strategies for survival, unfulfilled desires and inhuman conditioning of human beings. The narratives at prime plane bring out four major issues hunger, lust, poverty and struggle for survival. The stories as they are to be called are not in fact easy stories to brief or describe in a kind of summery. They are a series of vexing questions implicitly looming from the garb of narratives to shake the whole set of ideas representing a paralyzed culture and mythical sophistication.

*Little Ones* is the first story and the most shocking of the four, for its intolerable revelation that unsettles and haunts the sensitive reader, through its cruel mixture of irony, black humor and pathetically piercing narration. It begins with the entry of a relief officer, Mr. Singh, who is informed, entertained and warned by the BDO and the the driver, leading him to “a damned terrible place” called “*Lohri*”, “where the inhabitants have no *honest way* of living.” Devi's articulation of 'honest way' in italics indicates a tone of subtle ridicule of the honesty as defined in the socially accepted terms. Away from the urbanized society this is the 'bizarre land'

where “the vultures devour even living bodies”.

The relief officer is fearlessly marching in his duties through his audition of the myth of the sun-god and *Jwallamukhi*, the horrifying fables of little children-like ghosts stealing the stuff of the relief and the historically frightening tales of those 'jungle' folk from Kubha, who disappeared once for all after the drastic rebellion and blasts. The story progressively builds a sense of mystery, terror and suspense till it comes to a sudden climax at the end only to break the expectations of the reader in extremely cruel turn. It concludes not simply at the height of irony and pathos, brutality and horror but at the utmost degree of unimagined guilt, shame, confrontation and confession blasting out of the illusory nobility of the educated, civilized and sophisticated representative relief officer. The relief officer had seen adivasi men and women singing and dancing in Hindi films with flowers in their heads and leaves on their hips but now it is a frustrating sight for him to find them half-naked, worm-ridden and swollen bellied with songs “like the lonely wailing of an old witch”.

These 'unsettling' songs of the unsettled tribes are 'to scare away the ghosts' and equally unsettling is the series of questions raised by the wide eyed staring damned people who sell the land off to the Mahajan instead of farming it; the questions that prompt rage and helplessness among the generous people of the society:

Where is the water? Where are the seeds? Plough..?  
Bullocks..? How can we farm? And further escape-root  
justification by the reporters, “even if you give them all  
this, they still sell it to the Mahajan, saying, what we  
were to eat until the harvest? So we borrowed money.  
Now we've sold that land to repay the debt.”

The relief officer stands for every member of the cultured society whose urbanized sensibility is shot dead by Devi's revelation of the pigmy-tribal creatures that are only normal human beings abnormally shrunk into dwarfs due to the undernourishment. In the last scene of the story the relief officer encounters these *Little Ones* who are not small children but adult human beings, who have been shrinking physically for the want of food. “Chronic malnutrition has the result of stunting human and animal bodies.....starvation over generations can reduce ordinary

sized human beings into pygmies.” Such an exposure of injustice lashes the mind not only of the officer but of the reader and the officer’s normalcy is converted into maddening guilt and shame. Men and women nakedly ridiculing the relief officer for all culture that he has in him, is not so much a physical assault on him as retaliation on so-called sophistication and culture. In fact it is a crude attack on the self-centered channels of history of civilization by the dark and unseen corners of brutality left behind by the ever-marching progressive society. The shrunken bodies of *Kubha tribals* actually present the impotent policies of human progress in the name of development and civilization. The relief officer’s sensibility is shattered into insanity as madness seems to be the only refuge for the outburst normalcy at a point of breaking disillusionment. *Little Ones* is an intolerable slap into the face of relief schemes of the government that seem to be an ongoing farce and nothing more than that. The blindness of tribal beliefs and the helplessness of the aged members of the tribe rather appear to be more natural than the rationally developed order of society as such. The idealizing policies for so-named ‘relief’ offered to those who can expose the truth that is unrelieving for all of us.

‘Seeds’ is the second saga of the collection with a heart-cutting horror of brutality as survival strategy. The landless agricultural laborers of the region provoked to resist particular kinds of tyranny imposed by land-owners with the backing of police and governmental authority. Set in the deeper forest areas of northern and western Bengal, it is at once a tale of muted injustice, suffering life-time suffocation and of natural justice flaming the fire of revenge to bring a breeze of peace at the end. Land in this narrative is a powerful metaphor like ‘seeds’. The land is northern part of Kuruda is described as “uneven, arid, sun-baked.....scorched wasteland.....around half a bigha with ‘occasional raised serpent hoods of cactus plants, a few neem trees.” This initial description of the land prepares the reader to confront the barrenness as reality of life wherein the human values of honesty, love and humanity are going to be buried like ‘seeds’. The human efforts to generate new life in Nature by sowing “seeds” do not sustain long for it is not certain whether the seeds will grow into plants and yield sweeter fruits in the *Bitter Soil*.

There are some aloe plants which “even buffaloes don’t eat, and are used to make extremely strong ropes in some countries but here in India, ‘are dismissed as wild bushes’. The story begins with Dulan, the old

bony tribal with his gnarled skin, mechanically guarding his barren piece of land, sitting on the *machaan* every night.

Devi describes him as ‘**Lord of a thorny wasteland**’ whose wife knows how to fool the government into giving them ‘seeds’ every year for that unproductive land. The couple is thus busy in their survival strategies, plotting and planning what is ‘beyond the ordinary measure of a human being.’ Poisoning the buffaloes of the powerful *Rajput Mahajan* Lachman Singh the owner of ten rifles, Dulan has gained respect in the villagers for his dark and incomprehensible character. His wife supports and advises him in brewing such mischief through her endless stamina, stubborn courage and anger. “Sanichari says, your father and mother are both mad, your father of course is totally crazy, why else would he guard that land without ever farming it?” The irony of poverty versus property is so profoundly observed through the further remark of Sanichari, representing the normalcy standards of illiterate tribal minds. She comments on the *Sarvodaya Activists*,

“These are the madmen of the babu caste. They will make the landlords remorseful. The landlords will spontaneously say tch tch tch! We have so much land and they have none at all? And they will give away the land. The day they do this, I’ll sit on a chouki, eat butter and cream, and cook rice twice a day.”

So the piece of barren land comes to Dulan Ganju who refused to take it initially but Lachman Singh threatened him into accepting that. Sanichari informs the couple about the Sarkar-schemes bearing the expenses of farming by offering seeds, money for everything and “the drive for survival prompts him to exploit situations by using his natural guile rather than force.” He appeases Lachman Singh, gets a letter from vakil, and convinces the BDO into giving him seeds and fertilizers and money for bullocks and plough by displaying those every time from *Pahaan* and saying later on “the bullock died hujoor.” Such a lie is a part of strategy for Dulan to survive in the given barrenness, but his plight does not end with the small tricks. He brings the paddy seeds home to be eaten after boiling and grinding them. His normalcy is maintained enough to know that the land can be measured but not “**our hunger. Can hunger**



**be measured? The land of one's stomach keeps increasing.”** And he knows they can survive eating seeds better than eating rats during famine.

Finally the strife of Dulan comes to a point where he is silenced in suffocating secrets of murders by Lachman Singh till his own son gets entangled in the feud and becomes one of the killed victims. It is the sense of revenge as natural justice that prevails in his quiet suffering and mute contemplation leading him to work as the only refuge away from the intolerable burden of truth. He farms the land and produces paddy as a gesture of defiance to the so far obeyed orders of the zamindar. He rebels and ventures to protest Lachman Singh directly and fearlessly.

“What was our agreement malik? That I should not farm. Why not? You will sow corpses and I'll guard them. Why? Otherwise you will burn down the village, kill my family? Very good...if I die, so be it. Everyone dies sometime. Did dhatua die before his death?” Seeds in the end of the story seem to be the conversion of dead life into the living source again. Dulan smashes the head of Lachman Singh with a stone and buries his dead body in the same place where he earlier had buried others killed by the same 'hujoor' of his land. He performs the revenge and gains his freedom, peace of mind and sense of poetic justice and the nobility to give away his entire crop to the fellow beings. The strong sense of justice ultimately prevails in the long strife of virtue against power. Dulan is pacified at the end with a thought of his son's presence in that bitter soil and asked by the villagers did he use any fertilizer to make this barren land productive he answers that he has used a very precious fertilizer. Seeds thus are the seeds of karma sown and reaped in the bitter soil of hunger versus power and poverty versus property. What Devi seems to seek is the victory of labor over lust for power or money and the success of honesty at the cost of betrayal of order or law.

*The Witch* is the most horrifying revelation of a thrilling chain of mishaps and emotional miscarriages pathetically sourcing from the blind belief, ignorance and credulous communal responses of tribes in three small villages in neighborhood, Kuruda, Murhai and Hesadi. The spine-chilling description of the daini-hunt, the imagined effects of the presence of daini and the daini-terror piercing all relations within and without the domestic set up, destroys the peace and the normalcy of the villagers' lives. Every son has a doubt on his mother, husbands spy wives and everyone has to alert himself about finding a daini, remembering all her

symptoms and rules to drive her away without killing. “all husbands-fathers-brothers-sons were compelled to keep watch upon the women....”and the only belief unquestioned was if the witch or the daini could possibly be other than a woman. Daitar's old mother had to run to escape the stoning disbelievers and falling down when she hit the ground by head and died, it was inferred that the jackals that greedily devoured her body, were not animals but the daini herself. Devi's authorial voice commenting from then corner of the scene like the omniscient visionary is one of her narrative strategies. She comments:

The human nervous system revolts against the unremitting tension of fear.....they realize that, in anticipation of some calamity, a current of terror is flowing from village to village. They know something is changing in the mental make-up of these people.

The haunting terror and the daini-hunt spread in these villages bring about one after another a series of mishaps like stoning of pariah dogs to drive them out of village, stoning and horrifying a wealthy middle-aged lady who actually wanted to bring relief to the villagers, the killing of black cow by Bushra Dushad and his own consequential suicide with the obsession of guilt, the irrational search and suspicion of the credulous about their own shadow and the additional cautions alertly observed on the instructions of Hanuman Mishra and the pahaan of the village. Devi minutely portrays the intricate complexities of the caste-communalized structure of the tribal set up.

“Like the famous line from *The Arabian Nights*, Puriya ke andar puriya, puriya ke andar puriya, - in the matter of caste and community too, there are stories within stories. Dig for an earthworm and unwittingly, you will unearth a dinosaur...that Hanuman Mishra will not allow Bhola Ganju near his well is an attitude Bhola both understands and accepts the fairness of.”

Each area has its own special characteristic popularly accepted among the villagers. These are the villages that suffer from endemic

hunger and starvation, famine and drought, bonded labor and mahajan-oppression etc. when these misfortunes plague them a little less, they immediately fall to squabbling over caste differences, which they settle to keep life eventful. The women of Hesadi are bad-tempered, the Oraons of Kuruda lazy, the men of Burudi quarrelsome. And every ten fifteen years, some old man or woman of Murhai becomes a daini. In this long cherished threat of daini, the offerings of ritualistic sacred puja by Mishra, the inhibitions caused by stringent caste laws, pathetic and heart-wrenching accounts of famine history, widows falling in illicit affairs, the police oppression during the Naxal upheavals, lack of rain and glimpses of daini eating raw flesh of birds are all the events that collaborate to forward the witch-hunting episodes in the story towards a shocking end. The daini is seen and stoned from village to village, pushed ahead like the research of Peter Bharati the Australian hunter of Indian culture, and finally after Sanichari's death in the same terror, it is discovered that the so-chased daini was in fact a dumb daughter of the pahaan of Tura.

“Where is the daini? Go ask in Tahar. They got their son to rape the dumb, slow-witted girl and threw her out. They they spread the daini alarm, saying don't kill her, just stone her.” The men broke up. Each to return to his village... Peace, a wonderful peace.....they do not look back, they still have a long way to walk.”

*Salt* is the shortest of the narratives with another event of a mysterious death of three tribal youth who venture to inculcate a sense of revolt and independence among their fellow beings. It typically mystifies the killing of innocent human beings as victimization of the have-nots by the haves in capitalist feudal order of a community. “**Nimak se Marega**” and “I'll kill them by salt” is the pet threat of Uttamchand Bania who is the only money-lender mahajan in the Adivasi village Jhujhar, in the lap of Palamau. This belt of land at the bank of Koel River is full of captive labour in the shackles of *betbigari*. For past few generations they have been in Tahar as wageless labour of Uttamsingh who even votes on their behalf. It is the monopoly of the capitalist Uttamsingh in the supply of salt that becomes his weapon against the adivasi labor who refused to serve under his betbigari as provoked by Purti Munda the youth leading them.

Uttamchand not only vowed to avenge the “*Nimak Harami*” people and stopped selling salt.

After an impatient series of bad deals for salt, bartering away the crop and the money all the villagers are trapped in the scarcity of salt so obsessively that they feel breathless eating their ghato without salt and necessity mothering the invention of salt by Purti creates an option for them. Purti and his friends steal the black lumpy salt from the *ekoa's* salt grounds meant for the elephants eating from salt-licks. The forest department alerts the villagers about *ekoa's* man-killing madness in anger but nobody could for a long time guess where the salt disappeared. Purti and his friends were cleverly and carefully treading the *ekoa's* salt earth but finally attacked and trampled by the herbivorous rational animal commanding natural justice by its own power, die for nothing but salt. The incomprehensible act of stealing a thing as cheap as salt remains a mystery to the villagers and it is declared that the youth were probably drunk. The *ekoa* is declared a 'rogue' and because he is a loner, a commissioned hunter shot him dead. Uttamsingh got back to his own business of supplying goods including salt once again and the villagers know that the “babus will never understand how salt can become something to risk one's life for, that this business will always remain unreal to them.

*Seeds* and *Salt* are the two stories with parallel thematic strife of existential strategies but with opposite results of poetic versus natural justice. In *Seeds*, the revenge sums up the narrative with a sense of justice through human urge and convictions while in *Salt*, the loss of good at the hands of the evil creates the sense of blind justice in nature. Devi raises a brilliant structure of arguments about what is good, bad, right and wrong without explicitly wording her objections but knitting them into a subtle questionnaire of events, mishaps, illusions and wrong-doings in the subaltern set up of tribal lives. She produces her own draft translations exploiting at the same time the social use of English words brilliantly observed in the middle class half-urban Bengali milieu. Italics reserved for Indian words extend often to communicate a strong sense of Irony in the context of Once-colonized nation.

Gayatri Spivak in her foreword to another book of Devi describes the author's language as “a prose that is a collage of literary Bengali, street Bengali, bureaucratic Bengali, tribal Bengali and the language of the tribal.” One is not really surprised to find a lot of words

representing Mahashweta Devi's own inventiveness rather than the actual speech of the people. The words like *commis* for *communist*, *socalis* for *socialist*, *gorment* for *government* and *thikadar* for *contractor*, *fillum* for *movie* are and many such are flavored with the strong taste of Desi chutnification of English as well as Hindi to connect with the half-urbanised unique sensibility of Devi's readers all from the middle class.

Many other words as *babu*, *hujoor*, *sarkari system*, *ashram sevak*, *sevika*, *premkatha*, *sipahi*, are used only to typify the Indian sensibility groomed in peculiar ways in the domestic and social lingua-cultural set up. "I believe in documentation...", "for I believe in anger, in justified violence...", and "my experience keeps me perpetually angry..." are the statements that confirm the voice of resistance in her writing. She outrageously exposes the complacent hypocrisy of the upper class, and follows the track of resistance to the Western canon in her gendered vision as well as linguistic diversions to cultural and native Indian words and phrases in her style. The stories in *Bitter Soil* are woven around the polarities of tribal versus urban, progress versus survival and native versus foreign elements in society. She successfully pierces the fruit of democracy and independence in the nation as socio-political determinism. In doing so Devi brings the '**Unable-to-speak**' **Subaltern** into the light of humanitarian faith and democratic stage.

Devi refuses to integrate into the mainstream Indian society for the grudge she articulates about its exclusive ways towards the tribes. "What is there so beautiful in the mainstream Indian society that they should get integrated and lose their tribal entity?" she asks. It is her blunt charge upon the mainstream that remains totally oblivious of the tribal situation furthering her anger into a kind of writing that is more a voice of resistance than a piece of writing. Living safely in a house, enjoying the bliss of electricity and availing medical services from hospitals and health centers, choosing a line of career, trade or job is what we all normally do with a prerogative of being the citizens of a democratic nation. Education and literacy, water and food, security and respect in the society are minimum human rights and we do not find it wrong to deny these to some of human beings as they happen to be the tribes?

Note: All the quotes are taken from the text, *Bitter Soil*, Mahashweta Devi, translated by Ipsita Chanda, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2002.

## Articulating Protest Against Mass Hysteria and Senseless Violence in Khushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan* and K.A. Abbas' *A Debt To Pay*

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Literature being a mirror to society depicts man's hopes and aspirations, sorrows and pains, frustrations and disappointments of the time when it is written. Similarly Indian English Fiction at the time of independence and after independence is vitally concerned with the socio political realities of India like the partition, the emergency, the communal clashes and controversy over geographical boundaries etc. We therefore, find distinctive writers expressing shifting paradoxes and myriad sensibilities at different times. For example Anita Desai seems to focus more on psychological make-up of its characters, Ruth Praver Jhabvala on East-West syndrome, Mulk Raj Anand on social stratification, Bharti Mukherjee and Salman Rushdie on expatriate sensibility, while Amrita Pritam, K.A.Abbas and Khushwant Singh mainly concentrate on sweeping communal disturbances and senseless killings prevalent at the time of partition. The immediate repercussions of partition were: massacre, displacement of millions of people, inhuman atrocities on women and children and extensive loss of property. Innumerable Hindus and Muslims were killed and left homeless in the communal riots of Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab prior to partition since a dreadful massacre ensued. That is why a wide range of topics and problems pertaining to partition and its aftermath have been covered by contemporary poets, novelists and writers. Focusing on this intriguing aspect of our national reality, the present paper attempts to explore the predominant theme running through the contemporary literature i.e. the restoration of humanism and propagation of communal harmony between the two communities as limned and portrayed by Khushwant Singh in his award winning bestseller *Train to Pakistan* published in 1955, and K.A.Abbas's *A Debt to Pay*, a Urdu

story translated by Khushwant Singh.

The longing for peace is part of our deepest human yearnings. Both the works; *Train to Pakistan* and *A Debt to Pay* writings deplore the communal narrowness and religious fanaticism. There is a stark and vivid description of evil consequences coming out of religious madness and intolerance. It has been depicted that the individuals of both the communities preserve the human values during this period. And in fact, these very values are the first in the causality list, when it comes to the interest of both the communities. Besides this intrinsic; *terra-firma*, these works also bring out the agony of the associated miseries like the communal distrust, hostility, hatred and menace of violence, rape, massacre coupled with religious animosity and rioting.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a tragic story of Punjab happenings when people are seized by communal madness and frenzy at the declaration of independence and partition of the two countries, India and Pakistan. The anguish of the wounded soul of the novelist and the personal urgency are poignantly articulated and reflected through out the story. It speaks of the mob insanity and also warns of the terrifying consequences of communal clashes and riots, that a society faces. The setting of the novel is in Mano Majra, a village in the Punjab, half a mile away from the river, Sutlej. Before Independence the novelist projects Mano Majra as a perfect example of communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims. The story depicts the life of Muslim Mullah, a tall and lean, grave bearded man, who despite his sixty years of age walks erect and is called 'Chachha Imam', out of affection which he wins from his fellow villagers in Mano Majra. Besides Muslims Mullah, there is Bhai Meet Singh who is short, fat, hairy, often untidy; his long hair are tied in a knot held by a wooden comb; the sweepers 'whose religion is uncertain'. There are other characters like the lonely station master and his only assistant who himself was the occasional passenger that gets on or off the train, the women sitting after their midday meal rubbing fresh clarified butter into each other's hair, and discussing birth, marriages and deaths. It is worth noticing that these seemingly unimportant description also provide very subtle significant details, which come out with effortless ease from the writer's hand.

Besides all Mano Majrans adore and worship the three foot slab of sandstone that stand upright under a keeker tree beside the pond. It is

the local diety, the deo to which all the villagers Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims or pseudo-Christians-repair secretly whenever they are in special need of blessing (*Train to Pakistan* 17). The novelist here is trying to suggest the underlying ones of the people of the village, which mocks the folly of the communal barriers. It brings to life the binding faith of these communities in the village. Before day-break, as the mail train which does not stop at Mano Majra rushes through on its way to Lahore and as approaches the bridge it blows two long blasts of whistles. With the sound of whistles penetrating the heart of silence the Mullah at the Mosque knows it is time for prayer. The priest in the sikh temple who lies in bed till the Mullah has called his God, gets up, draws a bucket of water from the well in the temple court-yard, pours it over himself, and intones a prayer. Perhaps the novelist insinuates the sense of belongings interdependence they share with each other.

In other words these simple details propose the idea that Sikh priest cannot do without the Mullah offering his prayers. Further he informs the readers that the Gurdwara is invariably the place for Muslims and Sikhs to meet and discuss the common problems of the village. Also the peepul tree in front of the temple gives shelter to the people of Mano Majra without distinction; Sikhs or Muslims. This unity is a living actuality in the way the Sikhs make their Chacha's sorrows their own. When the Muslim weaver's wife and the only son died and Chacha's eyesight becomes bad to worse and when he is unable to work on his loom, he is reduced to beggary with a baby girl, 'Nooran', the village people have brought him small offerings of vegetables, food and other essentialities of life. They have done this out of love and respect for him and Chacha Imam also cares for them, he writes verses from Koran to wear as Charms. He also entertained them with his inexhaustible treasure of anecdotes, jokes and proverbs. One doubts whether anyone has ever heard of Jinnah; but some of them know Gandhi. Chacha Imam says once:

All the world respects a religious man. Look At Gandhi!  
I hear he reads the Koran Shariff and Hnjeel along with  
his Vedas and Shartras (27).

Gandhi as a man of God impresses quite a few people but freedom has little or no meaning for them. We read that the lambardar of

the village tells Iqbal that freedom must be a good thing but what will they get out of it. He could understand only this much that educated people like Iqbal will get a job but has a doubt whether they will get any more lands or buffaloes. Muslim Mullah confirms lambardar's statement and says:

Freedom is for educated...We were slaves of the English and now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis (33).

This analysis startles the readers as well as the educated youth like Iqbal. Hence we can extract one fact from these incidents that the novelist perhaps considers this village as a symbol of hope of human sanity and survival.

But the scene changes when the dreadful news of the arrival of a train-load dead bodies of Sikhs and Hindus at Mano Majra railway station slowly trickles in, despite the Deputy Magistrate Hukam Chand's efforts to suppress it. The Sikhs and Muslims meet in the Gurudwara in utter shock and disbelief. They have little to say but they certainly invoke the blessings of Allah and the Guru. Khushwant Singh remarkably portrays their farthest helplessness and the way they resort to seeking the help of Guru and Allah to somehow dispel the darkness which is gradually enveloping them.

But young Sikhs and Hindus get agitated and start retaliating after this incident. For discussing the repercussion of this train-loaded dead bodies dissidents, who desire to go berserk Juggat Singh, another important character, has been introduced in the novel. He is arrested as a suspect of killing of Ramlal but gets released on the guarantee of good conduct. Actually we come to know that at the time of murder, he is in amorous mood with Nooran, his muslim sweet-heart. This proves that he is not a party to the murder. In fact on his return to the village he finds Ramlal dead. However, since he belongs to Malli and his gang and due to his inability to explain away his absence from the house, lands him in police lock-up. While Jugga happens to talk his heart out to Malli in the following words:

...it is our fate. It is written on our foreheads and on the lines of our hands. I am always wanting to do

something. When there is ploughing to be gathered, then I am busy. When there is no work, my hands still itch to do something, so I do something, and it is always wrong (76).

Here the novelist has gone into the psyche of a criminal. Thus in contrast to moral characters like Iqbal and the Hukum Chand, Jugga is curious combination of both the good and the evil. Obviously the writer does not intend to delineate him as a hard core criminal or a savage who is keen to see others bleed. He in fact, shows him as a victim of violence who otherwise is capable of displaying his goodness and virtue. His ultimate charity and sacrifice is strongly highlighted as Jugga ends up laying his life in order to save hundreds of Muslims from massacre, when the police authorities find themselves helpless in controlling the agitated furious mob. They release Jugga who is a friend of both Mano Majra Muslims and Hindus, and Iqbal, a non-political communal worker so that they could save Muslims from being tortured. The sub-inspector purposely informs them that all the Mano Majra Muslims are to be sent to Pakistan at night by train and adds:

There are lots of outsiders going about with guns killing Muslims, Malli and his men have joined them. If the Muslims had not left Mano Majra, Malli would have finished them off by now (186).

Now Jugga's immediate concern is the fate of Nooran who is carrying Jugga's child in her womb. After coming back to village he comes to know that the train carrying his beloved, Nooran and other Muslims of Mano Majra, would be the target of some hot-blooded Sikhs. They have stretched a rope across the first span of the bridge, a foot above the funnel of the engine, in order to sweep-off the Muslims sitting on the roof of the train. He rushes to Gurudwara to invoke Guru's words. As the infuriated Sikhs start their operation, Jugga climbed the steel span of the bridge, whips out a small kripa and starts slashing the rope. In the process the conspirators, his own people shoot him. However he, gets succeeded in his task before he falls down dead as the train goes "over him", and goes "on to Pakistan" (207), carrying his beloved Nooran and his child safe in

her womb. The storyline of the novel reveals Khushwant Singh is intensely moved by the senseless violence prevailing all over the country at that time and through the character of Jugga he perhaps tries to voice his inner feeling and desire of establishing harmony between the two communities. Jugga is in fact a harbinger of peace and humanity.

On the other hand, Hukum Chand, the Magistrate and Deputy Commissioner of the district who has to maintain law and order in this awful situation, lets out his inner feelings thus:

Let them (Muslims) get out; but be careful they do not take too much with them. Hindus from Pakistan were stripped off all their belongings before they were allowed to leave (32).

We observe the prevailing carnage and utter disorder has adversely affected the educated beings and the law enforcing agencies. As the situation worsens with the arrival of trainload of dead, Hukum Chand lapses into inactivity and maintains a pretence of responsibility. On the other hand, Imam Baksh, the Muslim priest of Mano Majra when asked to leave the village is moved to tears:

What have we to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers (147).

On hearing this, many people start crying. Meet Singh, the Sikh priest, clasps Imam in his arms and begins to sob. It is not easy for them to part away from the familiar faces and go to the distant unknown ones. In spite of their oneness at heart and mind their lives are being governed by certain socio-political forces beyond their control. We do agree with M. Tarinayya's comment on the story:

The novelist seems to suggest that somewhere, deep in their psyche, the people of the village felt the human folly of communal barriers (M. Tarinayya 238).

The novelist however, focusses on the ironical aspect of the

tragedy as even the cognizant and concerned individuals fail to alter the rock-solid deterrent that confronts and deserts them in the shape of insensible communal hatred.

A similar psychological barrier which gives rise to communal hatred has been dealt with by K.A. Abbas in his celebrated story "A Debt to Pay." This story locating the cause of mutual animosity in the very mental shape of an individual, attempts to explore the psychic disorder that emits such repulsions and hatred. Thus the story *A Debt to Pay* written originally by K.A. Abbas, a famous Urdu short story writer, and translated by Khushwant Singh probes the problem psychologically as does the novel written by the latter on the similar issue. In this wonderful mind capturing story Shaikh Burhanuddin, the protagonist talks about his hatred towards Sikh community, which he develops since his childhood. In fact to a certain extent he is scared of them because of their distinctive appearance. He says:

I could not have been more than six years old when I saw a Sikh sitting out in the sun combing his long hair. "Look!" I yelled with revulsion, "a woman with a long beard!" As I got older this dislike developed into hatred for the entire race (K.A. Abbas 96).

This disliking of the protagonist also gets a little more stultified because it was a custom in the then Muslim society that the old women of the household would heap all affections on their enemies like British & Sikhs. Obsessed with this idea, Shaikh can never understand why Sikhs imitate women and grow their hair long. The surprising fact is that even the protagonist does not like his hair cut too short. Despite this awareness he continues with his whim. He also does not like their beard. He compares the beard grown by his community people with beard of Sikh people. He says:

There was my father's beard, neatly trimmed in the French style; or my uncle's which went into a sharp point under his chin. But what could you do with a beard to which no scissor was ever applied and which was allowed to grow like a wild bush-fed with a



compost of oil, Cura & goodness knows what/and, after it had grown a few fact, combed like hair on a woman's head (97).

Thus, his repugnance against Sikh community is of a peculiar kind. It is somehow related with external appearance of Sikhs. He also feels Sikhs have undue superiority about themselves. For him, they are crude races who do not know how to converse, how to behave at table or to deport themselves in the polite company. He also thinks they know how to drink large tumblers of buttermilk but they are totally unaware of delicacies of vermicelli with essence of kewra sprinkled on it. He always finds their languages harsh, rude & unsophisticated to the extreme. It sounds as if they were quarrelling.

After leaving college Shaikh becomes a clerk and a head clerk and comes to live in New Delhi. He gets married and has children. By stroke of luck the quarter next to him is occupied by a Sikh who has been displaced from Ravalpindi. The protagonist is told and feels too that the Sikhs boast of their bravery and they flaunt their long kripans. But he is happy to know that Sikhs could not withstand the brave muslims in Ravalpindi. Muslims have virtually wiped them out. We observe that by now his disliking towards Sikhs is more firm and deep rooted. we find him admitting:

In the beginning he tried to draw me into his net by professions of friendship whenever I passed him he insisted on the talking to me I donot remember what kind of Sikh festival it was, he sent me some sweet butter. My wife promptly gave it away to the sweepress. I did my best to have as little to do with him as a child (100)

If fact, Shaikh snubs him whenever he can. He thinks if he speaks a few words to him, it would be difficult to shake him off. He never tries to use civil talk with him as it seems to him that it would rather encourage him to become friendly which Shaikh himself never wants. He is so very scared of this Sikh that he tells:

I was concerned about the safety of my children. One could never trust a Sikh. And this man had fled from Rawalpindi. He was sure to have a grudge against Muslims and to be on look. Out for an opportunity to avenge himself. I had told my wife never to allow the children to go near the Sikh's quarters (101).

Actually after the thrashing in Rawalpindi Sikhs and Hindus abscond to East Punjab where they find Muslims to be weak and unprepared. When Sikhs, fleeing from Western Punjab, come in large numbers to Delhi, it is evident that there would be trouble in the capital. This is the reason Shaikh sends away his wife and children by air with his elder brother and he entrusts his own fate to God. In fact, he wants to finalize the provident fund business. As readers we find Shaikh is proud of living in Delhi because he considers it as the center of Islamic Culture. He says:

My cup of sorrow was full to the brim when I realized that Delhi, which was once the footstool of the Muslim empire, the center of Islamic culture and civil salien had been snatched out of our hands. Instead we were to have the desert wastes of Western Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan inhabited by an uncouth and uncultured people (102).

One can easily read the pain soaring in the heart of Shaikh like Imam Baksh, the muslim priest and others in *Train to Pakistan*. He feels he is forced to go to a land where people are completely strangers to him. In the story readers are informed that on one morning the news spreads of a general massacre in old Delhi and Homes of Muslim are burnt in Karol Bagh. Muslim shops in Chandani Chowk are looted and pillaged. The protagonist has only got as far as Gole Market when he runs into a Hindu colleague in the office. He advises him to go back immediately and not to come out of his house as the rioters are killing Muslims in Cannought Place. He barely gets a quarters when he runs into his Sikh neighbour. The old Sikh assures him not to worry as long as he is alive he would protect him. But because of long rooted hatredness Shaikh tells himself:

How much fraud is hidden behind this man's beard! He is obviously pleased that the Muslims are being massacred, but expresses sympathy to win my confidence; or is he trying to taunt me? (103)

The true fact is that Shaikh does not want old man's kindness or sympathy. Because of his inner deeper resentment Shaikh is rather prepared to die but after, killing at least ten or twenty men before the rioters could get him. When the yelling crowd come closer and closer, these rioters appear to him the bearer of his death warrant. In no time old Sikh comes and asks him to come into his quarters and Shaikh follows him without a second thought. At the same time rioters arrive and start raiding his house. They carry all his furniture, boxes, pictures, books, carpets etc. into the truck in front of his eyes. To his utter surprise, even the old Sikh with his children is pleading with the rioters. He is infuriated and is thinking, "You bloody Sikh! If God grants me life I will settle my score with you: (104). But he is dumbfounded when old Sikh and his children put all the stuff they have pretended to loot in front of him and his old wife expresses her utter grief, "Son I a'm sorry we were not able to save more" (105). On the other side when gangsters call Shaikh, the cowardly son of a filthy Muslim., little Mohini protests at this answers back "Shakhji is not a coward. He has not run off to Pakistan". And when gangsters want to know his whereabouts, she tells that he was in. By the time she could realize her mistake it is too late. Rioters proceed and Sikh locks Shaikh in the inside room and goes out. He does not allow them to enter inside the house. He protests against their assault fully but they shot the old man. After this rioters leave and Shaikh is taken out. By then Shaikh does not know what has happened outside between rioters and the old man. Therefore, he is in utter shock when he finds the old man lay torn his body covered with blood. He does not know what to do or what to say but the world of detestation in which he had lived all those years, lay in ruins about him. He asks the old man, "Why did you do this?" The old man replied:

"Son, I had a debt to pay." What kind of a debt? In Rawalpindi there was a muslim like you who sacrificed his life to save mine and the honour of my family.

The old man breathes his last. Like Jugga, the old Sikh sacrifices his own life to save human beings and consequently humanity. The whole story reflects how the society and the environment are responsible for building an atmosphere of revulsion, violence and betrayal. But individuals keep striving to establish harmony and, a cordial relationship. The most important thing is the self-realization of the sufferer and the consequent revolt, which ultimately gets curbed and subdued under the pressure of circumstances. Both Khushwant Singh and K.A.Abbas show a strong streak of communal violence and hatred prevailing in the society and its different reactions serve as the most efficacious correlative of articulating their own consciousness and its concomitant repressed psychology. They voice a loud protest and express their seething anger against the senseless cataclysm, vehemence and hat redness. Through Jugga Khushwant Singh unfolds his own inner feelings for love, affection and harmony whereas K.A.Abbas vocalized first how the orthodox society inculcates a sense of sharp antagonism in the minds of the innocent children and how it grows with them and then becomes a severe cause of refusing to have social intercourse. This is truly reflected in the character of Shaikh Sahib. Both writers somehow seem to depict the futility of institutionalized religion because that ultimately becomes a tyrannical agent of devastating the peace of mind of innocent people. It further narrows down the thinking and attitude of people. Here the Hindu and Muslim relationship is viewed from the psychological point of view. Tarlochan Singh Anand rightly remarks:

People were unaware that their fates were sealed like the frontiers between the two newly formed countries, did not know their lives were governed by certain socio-political forces beyond their Ken and Control (93).

Thus, both the works reveal how the socio-political impact of the partition works havoc in the lives of common people and sows seeds of suspicion among people; blurs the perceptions of even the educated beings like Hukam Chand and Shaikh Sahib; makes coward of progressive minded people like Iqbal and also victimizes the peace loving Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs like Jugga and Nooran, the old Sardarji and his family,



Chacha Immam and others. In this way though the exterior of both these works spin a yarn based on the incidents of the partition time, what captures the attention of the readers is a pathetic depiction of human reality that is painful, ironical and incomprehensible.

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## From Roots to Routes: Story of Indo-Mauritius Diaspora

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*An empty line of twenty-four rooms:*

*Eight feet by twelve feet.*

*Once it housed native workers*

*Eight died: others fled*

*Who would live among the dead?*

*Homeless I had come in search of paradise*

*This house of hell was now all mine.*

**-Satendra Nandan**

*("Lines Across Black Waters")*

This is the story of Indian indentured labour since 1834. 19th c. overseas migration to King Sugar Colonies was an offshoot of colonialism. Colonial governments and planters did not promote the recruitment of indigenous people and after the prohibition of African slavery, India became the main alternate source of labour. Migration from India to Mauritius, South Africa, Trinidad and Fiji at the time of European colonialism was due to certain social and economic push factors, of which the primary ones remained poverty, low level industrial opportunities, lack of basic amenities in far flung remote villages, drought and famine stricken areas (genuine or created), and the fear to exercise right on one's own land. Population from these areas were allured by the comforts of a life in sparsely populated far off places. The only qualification required was physical fitness and experience of agricultural work. Families never migrated. Usually individuals and that too in the initial years only the males shifted, later females too started migrating. Life in colonies was hard and isolated and indenture was a long exile where working hours were extensive and wages remained unchanged for years. Any contact with outside world was through the plantation manager, magistrate, police and immigration department. Let us recall that indenture was a contrast by

which the emigrants agreed to work for a given employer for a period of 5 years for a specified wage. The other name for Indenture Agreement was the '*girmit*', which placed the workers under complete control of their employers. At the end of 5 years, the emigrant could either reindenture or work elsewhere. [The Contract was governed by an Immigration Ordinance.] Sometimes the emigrants moved into villages and towns for living, dependent on subsistence farming with wage labour. From India most of the unskilled labourers migrated from UP, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, whereas Bombay, Sind and Gujrat were the feeding areas for small scale entrepreneurs.

... starting from 1835 to 1920, moving in successive waves of indentured labourers 1.5 million, poured into the plantation colonies of Mauritius (453,063), Reunion, Trinidad (143,943), Guyana (238,979), South Africa, Kenya, Surinam and Fiji (60,000). The result is that Indians formed majority only in Mauritius .... The labour diaspora was generally followed by free immigrants, mainly Sindhi and Gujrati traders and jewellers. (Mulloo: 17)

Interaction between indentured immigrants living in barracks evolved a bond of brotherhood, relocated cultural kinship and redefined the boundaries of native homeland. Displaced from roots - homeland/ native place, and replanted and resettled in a new land was the story of all demographically dislocated people. The shift from parent nation to expatriate home carried the history of struggles and challenges, problems and solutions, desperation and hope. The 'routes' i.e. the journeys on ships augmented the concept of '*jahazi-bhai*'. With the start of lengthy sea voyages began the remaking of cultural and ethnic identities. Thus the ship became first cultural site where social relations were negotiated. On the routes travelled culture. This diasporic community who moved from 'roots' to 'routes', witnessed a beginning of a new chapter in the history of Mauritius on 12th March 1968- the magic date on which Mauritius gained independence. The day brought hopes for the people and the date divided the times in colonial and neocolonial for which post-colonial is only a euphemism.

Since independence in 1968, Mauritius has been ruled by PIO Prime Ministers, including Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the Father of the Nation (1968-82), Sir Anerood Jugnauth (1982-95, 2000-2003), Dr Navin Ramgoolam (1995-2000). (Mulloo: 98)

The past progresses into the present; unequal power-equations worsen the sense of freedom; from dictatorship to democracy, the neo-colonial set up retards growth because the practices are those of erstwhile colonizers. Progress is clogged. To put in Foucault's words it is 'the shift from a criminality of blood to a criminality of fraud.' The change of attitude is a whole complex mechanism- as it is the mechanism of power that frames the everyday lives of individuals. Thus, the paper is about Indo-Mauritius diaspora. The first part of the paper deals with the tales of indentured labour, history of the *girmityas* and the adaptation of the Indian culture for survival. The second part of the paper deals with the stories that highlight the plethora of day-to-day problems in the lives of common people. The package of problems and challenges is similar to any country of the Third World Order.

The stories are narratives of emancipation, integration and enlightenment. The stories taken up for peruse are from Kamal Kishore Goenka's selected and edited book *Mauritius ki Hindi Kahaniyan* published in 2000 by Sahitya Akademi. It is one of the first compilations where writings of diasporic writers writing in Hindi, belonging to Indo-Mauritius community figure collectively. Ngugi wa Thiong'o said: "The call for rediscovery and resumption of our language is a call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues . . ." How true! Indentured labour community remained alive in adverse circumstances through their culture, their identity markers like language, religion, literature, rituals and customs and myths, which gave them the strength to cope up with the inhuman treatment meted out and the will to live in uncongenial atmosphere.

The racist white planters, ex-slave owners, exploited the labour of the Indians as if they were slaves . . . . They imposed starving wages which remained fixed over a century, harsh laws which restricted the liberty

and movement of the Indians who were subjected to fines, arrests, imprisonment against which they had no appeal so that Indians were maintained in a state of poverty, illiteracy, humiliation and terrorism . . . .

In such moments of despondency, they were saved by their very Indianness which instilled in them a bundle of moral values, thrift, courage, resilience, hard work, attachment to their family values and the will to succeed. (Mulloo: 107-08)

The core values helped them to stick together through thick and thin, and provided them strong ethnic identity, mutual co-operation and ability to share ideas, information and values. Their cultural baggage was their survival kit. The migrants developed a diaspora consciousness and they wanted to retain links with homeland so that they were rooted in their culture.

Mauritius offers the spectacle of a harmonious multicultural society. Indians have preserved their cultural heritage, their languages, including the teaching of Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Urdu in the schools, thanks to its nearness to India. (Mulloo: 96)

Mauritius is dominated by Hindi speaking diasporic community and therefore Hindi and Bhojpuri are the languages of communication between people. Linguistic homogeneity became a unifying factor. Hindi speaking gave impetus to Hindi literature and the growth of Hindi stories started way back in 1926. Present time literature also known as the Modern Period began in 1960. Prior to this, most of the writers used pen names to raise their voice. Either the stories were not published as they were narrations of true incidents or if published the writers were harassed for drawing attention of the masses to the issues of concern.

*“Bharat mata ki jai* [Hail India]

*Hindu dharm ki jai* [Hail Hindu religion]

*Hindu sanskriti ki jai* [Hail Hindu culture]

*Hindi bhasha ki jai”* [Hail Hindi language]

are lines from Deepchand Beeharry's story “Gurujī”, which

reveals the importance of Hindi language and Indian/ Hindu culture for these diasporic communities who collectively identify with each other as Indians/Hindus irrespective of region or religion. Beeharry explicitly writes about the 100 year old saga of girmitya labour who were displaced from their country to work on sugar cane plantations; who were told that under each stone was gold and they left no stone unturned just to their story of exploitation written by sugar barons.

Girmit was slavery by another name, nothing more, nothing less. The indentured labourers themselves were gullible simpletons from impoverished rural backgrounds, hoodwinked into migrating by unscrupulous recruiters (*arkatis*), and brutalized by the unrelenting pace of work on the plantations, their sufferings ignored, their women molested by the overseers and *sirdars* (Indian foremen), their families separated, their dignity in tatters. (Brij V.Lal: 4)

White industrialists and their brown stooges forced the released indentured labour to stay back. The rulers never let the traditions and customs of these labourers to flower and the people had to undergo many struggles to keep intact their language and culture. Dhirender the central character of the story- *Gurujī*- sermonizes that “far away from India they have only one thing to be proud of and that is their being Indians, their language. The Whites, the colonizers might be owners of the land, but not their Hindu culture/Hindi language.” For him language is like a woman and any kind of attack on the language was like molestation of a woman.

Brij Lal Ramdin's story “*Navjagran*” also brings to limelight the pitiable conditions of the labour class who would sleep on gunny sacks, work even when health was deteriorating and bear the blows of the masters silently. Suffering and pain was an integral part of the daily whip-and-chain living. But commendable is their bonding, where they are ready to fight and struggle for their Indian brothers. The story reflects as to how the emancipation movement gained momentum by integration, not only against the injustice and exploitation but also against cultural colonization. The diasporic community in Mauritius (Fiji/Trinidad/Surinam) has given a befitting reply to cultural imperialists. They realized that their survival was

dependent on survival of their culture. People were inspired by the lectures of Gandhiji who had visited the country on 29th Oct 1901. [Goolam Mohamed Issac, the pioneer and cloth merchant at Corderie Street, Port Louis, played host to MK Gandhi in 1901. (Mulloo: 155)].

Formalized religion through *bhajans and kirtans* flourished as it was a means to organize and orient their lives. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* acquired a new significance in the immigrants socio-cultural religious life. The scriptures gave them spiritual sustenance and social bonding.

Dimalala Mohit's story "*Privaet ki Lakdi*" is another story that narrates as to how the Indian labourers travelled to Mauritius to live a comfortable life but became slaves, were mercilessly beaten up by canes made out of a wood called *Privaet*. Ironically, a part of this indentured labour community was involved in the cutting and felling of logs of the trees from which these thin fine canes were made. The logs were brought to the plantation sites from the forests, where they were cut and sculpted to beat the rest of fellow brothers, who would at times die to continuous beating. The story ends on a positive note where the woman Mrs Niranjana suggests that pieces of similar wood be taken home from the forest to be burnt in the holy fire while performing *yajna* so that the departed souls are at peace.

Abhimanyu Unnuth, a landmark writer is the Prem Chand of Mauritius. His story "*Woh Beech ka Aadmi*" is the story of struggle of a small farmer, Ramcharitar. He wants to save his ancestral land from going into the hands of the neocolonial government. In the story we witness as to how in independent Mauritius powerless, poor people are exploited by their own people. About fifty years ago, Ramcharitar's ancestors had emptied all their savings in buying a plot of land, and therefore the land is not just a place where he has a house, but it's his identity, it's a memorial for him who worked as labourers. With great difficulty they had been able to carve a niche for themselves in the new land which was not new any more. "It had been the dream of every Indian immigrant to buy a plot of land and to build a house of their own to rear their family so that they could live in comparative freedom according to their customs and traditions. This dream had been made possible thanks to the system of morcellement which had started in 1865, triggered by the process of centralization of sugar estates leading to the selling of the remote and

inaccessible lands, mainly on hills and mountains, to labourers" (Mulloo: 177). Ramcharitar a literate, influenced by Prem Chand's *Godan* feels that produce and returns, benefits and profits were the due of the labour as well and they should have an equal right over them. He identifies himself with Hori. Though Ramcharitar has learnt to compromise with the woes of life that a small, insignificant peasant has to undergo - be it food, work load, wages etc, yet he's unable to compromise on the issue of the ancestral land to which he relates his identity. It's not easy for him to compromise with the new rulers; to part with the ancestral land for the upcoming airport (development), to see the "Iron- Demon" ("*Lohe ke Daitay*") bulldoze the memorial within minutes. Here is a person who was once displaced from native land, and is displaced another time in the settled land as well. In this story the predicament of people in colonial and neocolonial times are well juxtaposed.

In almost all the stories we read the fear psychology in girmityas and their progeny and the consequences of internalization of exploitation. Simultaneously, the rebellion, the urge to retaliate is well portrayed. Abhimanyu Unnuth's another story "*Tuuta Pahiya*" (Broken Wheel) highlights the plight of the older generation and their value system in a new, liberated Mauritius. The opening sentence of the story is "it was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of country's independence". The story delineates the history of the country in simple, curt sentences. Yusuf, the protagonist is the last man to have a horse cart in the area. He had earned his living by being a cart man. He had even declined an old age pension being given by the government. Gradually he had left reading the newspaper because journalism was all petty politics same people, same speeches, repeated advertisements and scoops. There was sensational news, nothing new. It was a mundane affair. Streets appeared monotonous posters with half clad women, strikes, discotheques and youngsters, loud blaring music, porn literature, unisex apparels, etc. This was the new neocolonial land. Yusuf's full name was Yusuf Ramjit. He is symbolic of the Hindu and Muslim fraternity. Hindus and Muslims had travelled together on the same ships they were '*jahazi bhais*'; they lived together in the same barracks, were beaten up equally, faced the same hardships and therefore their religion was of bonding, humanity and brotherhood.

Abhimanyu's story "*Asvikaar*" also highlights a neocolonial Mauritius where freedom of press is curbed, tourism industry is booming,

hotels are mushrooming, inflation is increasing, unemployment is on rise, queues for basic necessities, fraud and corruption. It's a statement on the system which is ruining the country. He rightly says: "*Apne Desh mein Ajnabi*" (stranger in one's own country).

People had sacrificed their ancestors, who had suffered, whose families had a painful living, had never imagined that an entirely new, different nation was breeding round the corner. Before 12<sup>th</sup> March 1968, the people of Mauritius had dreams of a free, democratic, liberated country which would suffice their basic necessities and make other amenities within their reach and not a country where their children would either suffer or lose their basic values.

A story that brings forth the clear picture of neocolonial times is "*Dishayen*" (Directions) by Ramdev Dhurender. The writer has an unnamed girl protagonist whose date-of-birth is 12<sup>th</sup> March 1968. This school going girl is a victim of neocolonial Mauritius. For the first time when the narrator sights the girl, in the garden where he works, feels contented that innocent school children, untouched by the big bad material world, were there to enjoy the freedom of life and nature. But gradually as the story unfolds, the narrator and the reader observe that the picture of new generation portrayed by this girl and the two boys accompanying her is beyond imagination. The picture of impact of modern times on these gullible children who are experimenting their hands on smoking, touching each other, cheating, telling lies is dismal. The girl reveals that her parents are separated and would soon be divorced. She lived with both of them, as it was convenient for her according to the situation and time; but her love for them was like a pendulum which shifted with the amount of money they doled out. And if she did not find comfort at either of the places then she escaped to her grandmother's house. Thus, the picture is of disintegrating relationships.

Two more stories which highlight the disintegrating relationships are "*Girmitya Mazdoor*" by Bhanumati Nagdaan and "*Mamta ka Saaya*" by Mohanlal Brij Mohan. The first story is about a sixty-eight year old woman, grandmother of two children who exists a life worse than the *girmityas* of pre-colonial times. The story opens with the abuses of people being hurled at her: "Are you blind? Do you want to die? Can't you stay at home?" and ends with her collapse on the road. She is a woman who'd silently look after the house of her children cleaning, cooking, washing,

rearing grandchildren and the usual household chores, and at the same time listen to the constant nagging of her daughter-in-law. She had often asked her son to leave her back home, but he too was selfish. If the mother left, who would perform the duties of the maid; who would look after the house and children. She lived a life of misery. The pension she received was taken away to pay water and electricity bills. The couple wanted to be millionaire overnight. Stung by the adder of consumerism their only hobby was shopping. Despite money and materialistic goods, they were unable to enjoy the pleasures of a comfortable life. They were victims of a race where the whole social-system country, society, family, home, and values like love, sacrifice, sharing and emotions all suffered.

Similarly in the story "*Mamta ka Saaya*", the gap between modern city culture and traditional rural system is effectively presented through Ritesh and Raakhi. Raakhi simply abhors adjusting to village life where she stays with her mother-in-law for her comfort i.e. to save house rent and her compulsion to usurp and own the piece of land. The hope for the plot made the new era couple think of the mother after eight years. By the time the story concludes, the mother leaves her own house to go to an old age home *ashram*. The sorry state of affairs in families is due to high standards of living, unlimited desires, and meager income. This becomes a perpetual reason for unhappiness, division in families and disintegrating value system.

Jaidoot Jeet's story "*Girvi Rakhi Aatma*", Munishwarlal Chintamani's "*Maut ka Saudagar*" and Biwi Saheba Farzal's "*Bebasi*" are stories which pinpoint vital issues of unemployment, corruption, drugs and prostitution respectively. These vices are the fruits of neocolonial order. Colonialism depletes resources and erodes the basic amenities-jobs, health facilities, housing giving way to a new order of "greasing palms", compromise and soul mortgage, etc. Women are worse sufferers. Poor girls are hired as maids, later drugged, raped and forced into prostitution. Women from Mauritius are sent to Gulf countries to work in night clubs as is evident in Farzal's story.

Women exploitation is apparent in Dharmanand Bhantu's "*Sahib ki Patni*" where the woman narrates her somber tale of being stigmatized as an unwedded mother. These women remain outside the folds of respectability and security for no fault of theirs.

The question of identity is well portrayed in Anita Ojaib's story

“*Main Kaun Hoon*”. The children of these exploited women are confused as an identity crisis builds up within them regarding their name, religion, language, culture, etc. Mixing of castes and people does not mean hybridity alone, but it also questions the whole notion of diasporic cultural identity. Remaking of cultural and ethnic identities continues to permeate all aspects. To put it in Said's words: “Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale.”

The creativity of these writers is rooted in social commitment. They are ambassadors of their country's history, culture and writings. Through literature and that too in Hindi they highlight the importance of language both as individuals and as a community. The long history of Indo-Mauritius diaspora which started with girmityas grows with the fact that they carry their baggage of rituals, customs, traditions and values. Uprooted from homeland, settled in new lands, bearing a double consciousness, yet successful in building a new home (even ruling the nation) is the story of common people.

These writings may not be aesthetic, propounding the '*la art pour la art*' but they definitely reflect the political and ideological stance of the masses. The stories are intensely politically charged narrations. The personal is political. The anti-imperialistic stance of the people, their concerns for and sympathies with the deprived, oppressed and exploited section of society are well written in these short stories.

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## Girish Karnad's *Wedding Album*: The Mythical Discourse of Culture

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*Wedding Album* traces the culmination of the artistic genius of Girish Karnad where he explores a traditional Indian wedding with a view to exposing the strained relationships which come to the fore on the occasion of a wedding. In *Wedding Album*, Karnad moves from myth, folklore and history to cultural stereotypes and modernity. There is no direct allusion to either myth or history in it, yet the cultural stereotypes it showcases, are almost of mythical stature. In addition to this, Karnad uses the occasion to explore several contemporary issues related to relationships and society.

Vidula, the female protagonist, is about to get married to Ashwin whom she has known only through a few e-mails, video-conferencing and photo-sharing. Incidentally, the marriage of Vidula and Ashwin appears as an arranged marriage in the contemporary India which is changing rapidly under the impact of several global forces. One can notice a co-optation of postmodern technologies by a conservative social institution.

Vidula is an educated modern girl; hence, why she agrees to such an arrangement is incomprehensible. Perhaps the occasion offers her an opportunity to be someone she cannot be otherwise, as is apparent from her internet-café conversation with her unknown friend. She steps into the shoes of another girl, as the concubine of an older man who keeps her like a slave. The girl is sold off when the master dies. She reveals this and several other facts about herself to the unknown friend at the other end, but which are only a figment of Vidula's imagination. But the internet-conversation offers her a veil of anonymity behind which she can be whatever she feels like. This multiple performance on the part of Vidula can be better understood in the light of Judith Butler's concept of performativity. Butler suggests that identity is performative. People may



become totally different persons when placed in different circumstances or in the company of different persons. Thus, if identities are performative, it means the self of a person is also unstable and constructed. In fact, the very notion of performativity lays stress on the function of discourses in our lives. Discourses, according to Foucault, shape our actions and speech and make us do what is consistent with them (*Power/Knowledge* 119). By identifying the repetitive processes of inscription of social norms and the resistance offered to those norms, Butler emphasizes the discontinuous nature of identity (*Gender Trouble* 25).

Vidula steps into a newly constructed 'self' in the internet café, and also when she is with Ashwin, her groom-to-be. It appears that Vidula herself is hardly aware of the possibilities within her. She appears to be ignorant of how exotic, exceptional and glamorous she can be at times. Vidula even stands up to the self-styled guardians of Hindu culture for her rights and transforms into a bold, aggressive and aware woman in the face of a fanatically charged patriarchal attack on her individuality.

Mahesh Dattani feels that Karnad does not take any moral stand regarding any of the sexual issues depicted in the play, but rather paints them with an amoral brush:

We feel privileged in having had an insight into a way of life that goes beyond social decorum and upper class demureness. This play is a winner because we do not find her surreptitiousness in any way immoral (6).

In fact, Karnad does not even begin to judge the matter as moral or immoral. It appears that in Karnad's plays morality is assumed to be relative. It is difficult to pinpoint what we should call moral or immoral as it depends upon the situation, state of mind or the discourses of the time.

Karnad's stand on morality can be seen in the light of Nietzsche's views who considers morality as a weapon of the weak to get even with the strong. The weak label the strong as "evil" and in turn themselves as "good" and they uphold their tendencies as virtues and condemn those of their opponents as vices, creating an arbitrary system of morality to protect their interests (*On the Genealogy of Morals* 46). Nietzsche does not see any divine basis of morality but, of course, morality forms an

important discourse in the ideological processes to suppress certain tendencies supposed to be dangerous to the state and society just as the moral police in the play uses the discourse of Hinduism and its values and morals for certain political aims.

Ashwin's proclamations about preservation and propagation of Hinduism and Indian culture too appear to be a professional tactic to win people and impress upon them the imagined greatness of his culture, while, on the contrary, he also tells Vidula how he himself has seen, experienced and enjoyed every aspect of American culture:

I have drunk life in the US to the lees. Girl friends, affairs, mistresses, one-night stands and on the public stage, glamour, success, social connections. I have been through them all. And I have come to the conclusion that that whole culture is empty of values now, bereft of any living meaning. It is shallow, you see what I mean, glittering and shallow . . . Unlike the US, India has an ancient civilization. A culture which is full of wisdom and insight. India should have the capacity to lead the world (80-81).

It is again a case of patriarchy using the discourses of religion and culture to exploit and suppress people by stereotyping genders, persons and places. He expects Vidula to be a submissive housewife who should perform her duties within the circle of the household without expecting any gratitude or without thinking of her own life, career or economic independence. Ashwin tactically yet spontaneously uses the patriarchal discourse of woman as Devi. Such discourses construct certain subject positions which stereotype a woman, creating impracticable ideals for her to follow.

On the other hand, it is Ma, Vidula's mother, who seems to have emerged unscathed from the influence of patriarchy. She used to get severe beatings from her husband. But now it is she who takes the decisions. Father grumbles about having lost his commanding position in the family, but he praises Ma for her sacrifice and her skill at management. But this again reinforces the idea that a woman can only win applause in a patriarchal system if she makes sacrifices, reaffirming the woman as Devi.

Through Rohit, the play gives us a glimpse of how the lure of money and fame could make a person opportunistic. Rohit loves Isabel, but the influential and rich Sirur family wants him to marry their daughter Tapasya. Rohit at first refuses but gradually the lustre of wealth tempts him and he gives in, dumping Isabel to suffer. The promise of prosperity and material well-being makes him suppress his emotions for Isabel. It is thus the conflict between wealth and prosperity on the one hand and love and emotion on the other which defines Rohit as a subject.

Radhabai, the cook, too makes a similar move, when it comes to choosing between the love of a daughter and a job. Radhabai's daughter was a kept woman. She used to send money to her, with which Radha is able to come to the city and find a cook's job in a household. But she does not tell anyone about her daughter because it might cost her the job if the employer came to know that her daughter is a concubine. Incidentally, her daughter's master dies and his people turn her out. With no shelter or money and heaps of insults from people, she goes mad and starts running on streets in search of her mother. But her mother refuses to recognize her when she finally finds her house. The incident, however, leaves Radha guilty and repentant, causing her to weigh and ponder her decision time and again, throwing her into fits of temper. The play ends with Radhabai contemplating the decisions she made, reliving the crucial moments and justifying to herself what she did and why she could not do otherwise. It appears that she repeats the incident to herself time and again in order to consider and reconsider her options:

You can't keep a grown up daughter at home, can you?  
... I was paralyzed. Why is she here? What if my mistress  
sees her? What'll happen to me? (92-93)

The social discourse of morality commands her to make her choices. Dattani compares her to Firs in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, but thinks that Radha is a far more tragic figure than Firs. According to him:

Keeping Radhabai in the periphery for so long shows  
Karnad's preoccupation with the Brahmin's point of  
view, but at the same time his compassion clearly rests

on the other side. Although Karnad is closer home, he doesn't take us into the kitchen where his saddest story is set (6).

Although Radhabai's story is somewhat marginalized in the play, yet it certainly catches the eye of Pratibha and Rohit when they are planning the next episodes of their TV serial. Pratibha, his boss, finds it more realistic and melodramatic than the Vidula episode. They discuss how they can mould the ending a little to make it even more tear-jerking. Pratibha congratulates Rohit for having thought of such a great idea, "Your great advantage is that you know the lower middle class inside out" [59]. The fabrication and maneuvering of real life tales to suit the requirements of a tele-serial suggests how far sensibilities can be shaped by the contemporary capitalist spectacle-machine. Human grief, too, becomes a commodity in a kind of emotional cannibalism.

Although *Wedding Album* appears to be a comparatively modern play, yet the subjectivity it explores emerges out of ancient mythical and cultural discourses. The play explores the tension between forces of tradition and modernity, both vying with each other for a space in subjectivity, leaving a hole in the subject. It also depicts how the discourses of culture, morality and tradition are associated with a sense of guilt and remorse, as is apparent in the case of Radhabai and Rohit.

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## **Gender-bias or gender-blender?: Hanif Kureishi's perception of gender in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album***

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Imaging implies projection, reflection, imitation, and the act of symbolising. It is an imposition and has an element of control. It confers a certain degree of passivity on the subject which is cast in an image, the active role being bestowed upon the image-caster (Jain 11).

Hanif Kureishi, the second generation Pakistani-British diasporic writer of mixed race incorporates the complexity of his own hyphenated identity in the characters of his fiction. His protagonists in most of his novels are diasporic individuals fighting their lot in the new setting. The characters in Kureishi's novels show generational conflict, through which the novelist establishes the changing notions of British identity and identification of the new Britishers, exploring the newer contexts of Britishness in a changed scenario. Kureishi elaborates the generational difference and keenly observes the distinctively different attitudes. Similarly several other conflicts, based on a support for and against essentialism and such other instances arise in the novels. However in his novels another important issue that makes itself visible is the issue of gender.

This paper highlights the relationship between the genders whereby the male and female stand at conflict in their emancipation of the new setting. The women in the diasporic scenario prove more powerful than the men. As in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* or Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, the male fail to adjust to the new land. The women have a firmer control and a better understanding of her self and her situation. Hence the women have a better share in the acquisition of the new land.

Nazneen, the protagonist in *Brick Lane* though begins as a naive woman, unable to adjust to the new life, she gradually gets over her initial fit. Though she is introduced as an "unspoilt girl. From the village" (Ali 16), by her husband, she becomes one with the land, begins adjusting to the codes of the new land and ultimately prefers to stay back in England with her daughters while her husband having failed to adjust, decides to return.

The women characters in Ali's *Brick Lane* or Meera Syal's novels have powerful voices and the fiction centre on the life and experiences of these diasporic women in the hostland. Apart from South Asian British Diasporic women writers as Syal or Ali, even writers like Romesh Gunsekera, the British diasporic writer of Sri Lankan origin; and Nadeem Aslam of Pakistani background, give emphasis on the experience of the women. They project women's experience as starkly different from the men, the former having a far more balanced and firm hold on the hostland. The characters in the novels of Gunsekera project a train of powerful women characters and though in *Reef*, Miss Nili's frail shadow lurks throughout the text while the men champion in getting the upper hand in commenting, in his *The Sandglass* and *The Match*, the women function as key agents in emphasizing the point of assimilation in the new land. While the men find it difficult to adjust, the women flourish for they seem to carry their world along in their adherence to their family and in their adaptability. Pearl in *Sandglass*, narrates her life in Sri Lanka to Chip and it is in this narration that an encounter with a land and a history is revealed. While she stands an emblem of the man and his milieu in *Sandglass*, in *Match* Clara is bold enough to dwell on the hyphen and names her child, born of unwedded parents, "Hyphenated" (Gunsekera 160).

The Pakistani British writer Nadeem Aslam's novels prioritize the man's voice, but the depth of women's experience have been plumbed; they make themselves heard. The slosh of warm blood of menstruation and such deep-rooted feeling of envy and hatred and her love-hate relationship with the man is brought to the fore with a strict discipline and keen observation. Kureishi's portrayal of the women characters in his fiction on the contrary appear biased. The number of female characters in the fiction of Kureishi is quite less compared to the male characters. Moreover the man has the voice of the protagonist and the women are less voluminous in expressing their thoughts. Apparently the men are the executors and the women the passive bearers of the

men's decisions as it happens in *Intimacy*, where Jay decides to do away with his previous relationship for a newer and a better option, as that would give him more scope for self expression and a better way of living. A similar motif is revealed in *The Buddha* where the mother, Margaret had failed in providing the sustenance that was due to the relationship and instead had led to the ruin of her husband, Haroon. He is left to decide for himself while his wife walks away with another white man. Haroon enters into a relationship with Eva Kay, and neither Margaret, his first wife, nor Eva are given their voices to comment on Haroon or their relationship with the same.

Under such a condition it becomes apparent that the women are left unrepresented to a great extent. Hanif Kureishi's women characters are both Asian and white and they share a minor forum wherefrom to comment. However when we go deep into the intricacies of the text we realize that the apparent delineation of the women characters in an unfavourable light or giving them a short compass does not prevent the women from attaining considerable reckon. The women, though have a minor role to play in the execution of the human drama, are powerful women fighting their lot in the new country and though the men fail to adjust, the Asian women have no doubts about their emancipation of the land. They strive against the racial hatred prevalent in the land and confront atrocities at home coming from the Asian men who are in most of the cases their nearest kin. Jamila, Karim's friend in *The Buddha* claims that she had been colonized by her tutor Miss Cutmore, and though Karim feels that she had been unjustified in her approach to the settler country, Jamila nonetheless sticks to her stance. While Karim lacks a positive strength and suffers from an identity crisis being pitted in this land which is his place of birth and bringing up, yet not his roots; his home and no-home at once; Jamila does not suffer from such angst.

Jamila's father, Anwar sticks to an essentialism and considers it necessary to get his daughter wedded to a man from Pakistan or India, who would be groomed in lessons of Eastern spirituality. Though Jamila is intent on not entering into such a marriage proposal which appears absurd to her, she is forced to bend before her father's whims as Anwar resorts to the Gandhian strategy of fasting. As her father's health deteriorates, she has to surrender her will but though she gets married to Changez, she outrightly denies him. That the marriage proves fatal to

both the sides becomes apparent in no time. Anwar too is ultimately disillusioned after he comes face to face with Changez's unholy liaison with the Japanese prostitute. Jamila's mother Ajita too defies her husband and leaves him to sulk upstairs while she looks to the family shop in Britain.

Though Kureishi's characters do not acquire the foreground like Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* or Meera Syal's *Life*, the women are nonetheless self-dependent, confident, clear in their thoughts and feelings towards the new land, and have no problem in understanding their identity as Asian British. They are bold enough to understand the complexity of dwelling on the hyphen and are happy enough to explore its duality. The men on the contrary resort to a bohemianism and an irresponsibility which emerge out of their failure to connect, neither with the land of their stay and not with the land of their origin. Kureishi born of mixed parentage, and his identity being second generation British Asian, it becomes even more problematic for him to consider his identity as one. The protagonists in Kureishi's novels, especially in his first two fiction, like the author do not have any concrete notion of the previous land. As in the case of Kureishi it would even be unjustified to name Pakistan as his homeland, and the tag, land of origin would prove inappropriate for the purpose. In this regard it must be said that the problem faced by the protagonists in the first two novels are hardly visible in the latter novels, but in such novels as *Intimacy* and *The Body*, the mid-life crisis or the case-study of the languishing mind in an ailing body becomes conspicuous.

Kureishi's novels mark two genders openly in the fathers and the mothers. Kureishi's women are mostly of the two categories, those who frequent the home and remain confined in their homeland setting, and those characters who move out to the world beyond the home. While to the first group belongs characters as Margaret, the mother and Aunt Ajita in *Buddha*, Susan in *Intimacy*; to the second group belongs characters as Eva Kay, Haroon's girlfriend in the *Buddha*; Karim's friend, Jamila in the same novel; and Deedee Osgood, Shahid's teacher and partner in *The Black Album*. These two groups stand parallel to each other and at times confront the other group. However these characters form yet another pattern whereby the women can be grouped as white British and the Asian women. Another categorization could be on the basis of education Deedee and Jamila being educated are more expressive and self-assertive compared to the other women as Mom or Susan. Gabriel's mother in the

*The Gabriel's Gift* however merges the domestic and the public world as she cares for her son and family but at the same time comes home drunk and in an unconscious state from work. However in any case whatsoever, it cannot be denied that the women characters are portrayed in an unfavourable light. Whether sprawling the domestic sphere or taking part in the outer world the train of Kureishi's women act as repressive agents for the men. Kureishi's men are destroyed and emasculated by these women, and not only so, they are even deprived of their identity.

However when we look into the depths of texts we realize that Hanif Kureishi's attempts at revealing a gender discrimination on the surface of the texts is not all that Kureishi tries to bring out through his texts. As he unknots the fudge, which arises out of the controversy and conflict over the two genders, the knot gets more entangled as Kureishi brings out his elucidation of the genders. Kureishi's characters though mostly male, fail in representing themselves as true patriarchs. Though in some cases they try to dominate their female counterparts, they fail to manage their women, the whites, or the Asian women, and are often bossed over by the female characters. Deedee Osgood becomes Shahid's icon figure, whom Shahid follows. Though the Islamic fundamentalists influence his life with their thoughts on essentialism, Shahid weighs both the ways of Deedee's liberalism and the former's essentialism and decides to go with Deedee. While Shahid's friends who uphold Islamic fundamentalism are many and Deedee stands all alone, Deedee has the final say in spite of Riaz or Chad's fervent attitude towards life. Deedee's motto, "All limitations are prisons" (25), affects Shahid and he decides to follow her until "it stops being fun" (276).

Riaz, Chad, et al fail to urge Shahid on to accepting the ideals of fundamentalism. As Shahid in *The Black* questions, "How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world" (*Black* 274). It is this mutation of selves and the merging of a self with others or its extension beyond itself, is what plays the most crucial role in its comment on genders. He aspires for a pop culture that would level the stratification of race, class, hierarchy or gender discrimination. Shahid and Deedee's fascination with the black artist, the American musical genius, Prince, brings home the point "He's half black and half white, half man, half

woman, half size, feminine but macho too" (*Black* 25). As Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* asserts, "In glam rock, at least among those artists placed, like Bowie and Roxy Music, at the more sophisticated end of the glitter spectrum, the subversive emphasis was shifted away from class and youth onto sexuality and gender typing" (61). For Karim Amir sexual preferences was not a matter of biology but of taste: choosing between girls and boys is like having to decide between the Rolling Stones and The Beatles (*Buddha* 55).

In *Gabriel's Gift* Gabriel acquires the sense of cross dressing from the pop-star Lester Jones and dresses up in his mother's dresses and jewellery. He listens to Lester Jones as Jones' spirit works upon him and he "painted his toenails in some dainty shade and was wearing his mother's rings, necklaces and shoes" (Gabriel 17). Deedee makes Shahid dress as a woman and he is forced to kow-tow before her and the sexual acts turn to that of exploitation. As Karim is exploited by Marlene and Pyke and as he is nicknamed "Creamy" or even "Creamy Jeans" by Jamila, that which strikes the libido and an element of hunger at once is repeated in the sexual interaction between Shahid and Deedee-

She had said she liked him naked while she dressed... she sat up and licked her lips. He shrank back. "You're looking at me as if I were a piece of cake. What are you thinking?" "I deserve you. I'm going to like eating you. Here. Here, I said." On his knees he went to her' (*Black* 127).

Deedee even makes Shahid dress up like a woman. Though painful and a bit uneasy at first Shahid gradually reconciles to Deedee's wish, thereby acquiring a new notion of identification, far from his initial fear that he was getting disoriented "It troubled him; he felt as if he were losing himself" (*Black* 127). He grows passive and a sense of tranquillity sets into him "he let her take over; it was a relief...he liked the feel of his new female face. He could be demure, flirtatious, teasing, a star... a certain responsibility had been removed" (127). Moreover Deedee makes Shahid walk like a model which he accepts in good spirit, swinging his hips and arms, pouting, kicking, etc. Jollity takes over him as he shifts from the strict code of identity to an *other* sense of identification. But as Deedee

enters into identification whereby she attaches a stereotypical male identity to her self, Shahid on the contrary enters into the emancipation of the stereotyped female. In either case stereotyping goes on but still, they are blended and acquiesced in by the opposite sex. The play with genders gets into a politicizing an even intercourse becomes a site of clash of power which can be altered by altering gender roles, becomes apparent as Shahid squeals in sexual excitement to Deedee, "I want you to fuck me." "Don't worry" she panted, "Leave it to me" (122).

The women are not the marginalized race, nor are they the deprived lot languishing beneath the sway of all-powerful men. The men are not the patriarchs that they had been in their homelands, but in this new world the men are the third world men. As Edward Said observes in his *Orientalism*, the third world men are seen as women, the marginalised sex revealed in the men perceived as other. However in Kureishi's perception, it is not only the male who become a politicized site, and an agent in representation, but the relationship between the man and the woman too takes a part. These men are marginalized at both ends, by the whites on the one hand and the Asian women on the other.

The Asian women in this new land have found a new world of their own. They have a hearth and home all to themselves and can assert their own identity. They are expressive and enjoy their freedom in the domination of their male counterparts. Though Ajita, Anwar's wife in *Buddha* is the sole woman in the realm of Kureishi's fiction who face torture in the hands of men, she too revolts by looking to her family business. She is much confident of herself and looks to her daughter's happiness, as against her husband who acts as an instrument of torture. But however much Anwar tries to assert himself, that he had failed and had fallen from his upraised status becomes conspicuous as his daughter takes to her own ways. Moreover Changez, the man he had sponsored and had privileged over every white man, too defies him and kicks him, to which insult he succumbs.

Kureishi's expression makes it quite apparent that while the women have gained in this new arena, the men have degenerated in this changed setting. In a way the women having treaded over the male domination are in a new ground where the male members of their family are themselves dominated by a dominant culture which is conceptually accepted as superior to them. The travails of the women and their

exploitation have been taken over by the men and the women enjoy greater freedom than their male counterparts. What Kureishi brings to the fore is an amalgamation of the characteristics of both male and female in the third world subject. The genders coalesce in their acceptance of their feeling of loss and subordination in the hands of a superior force. The power structure in the new land far from resting on the man-woman binary, redefines itself on the neo-colonial plane. As Gilbert Moore rightly observes in his seminal work on Hanif Kureishi:

... As Sadiq complains: 'Our voices suppressed by Osgood types with the colonial mentality. To her we coolies not cool' (*Black* 181). As such responses suggest, as much as other kinds of western radicalism, metropolitan feminism's desire to help give voice to or liberate the oppressed may reinscribe power relations which preserve the authority of the ethnic centre (140-3)

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## Magic Realism and Postcolonialism: A Study of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*<sup>1</sup>

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In her book, *Magical Realism and The Fantastic*<sup>2</sup>, Amaryll Chanady explains that magic realism is characterized by two conflicting but autonomously coherent perspectives, one based on an "enlightened" and rational view of reality and the other based on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of the everyday world.<sup>3</sup> Although the term "magic realism" has been in use for over 60 years, there appears to be little critical consensus concerning its definition. While "realism" itself is a chronically unstable term, realist writing is usually understood to be that which draws on a set of narrative conventions designed to create the illusion that the story on the page is "real"<sup>4</sup> or "true" and corresponds in some direct way to the ordinary world of day-to-day life. The term "magic" is equally contentious, arousing on the one hand, notions of harmless trickery and good-luck charms, and on the other, images of the supernatural and the fantastic. The oxymoron "magic realism" thus represents a complex and problematical critical concept.

The term "magic realism" first appeared in the context of art, being coined by the German art critic Franz Roh to describe the work of post-Expressionist artists in the mid-1920s. Roh claimed that these artists were painting ordinary objects through "wonderstruck eyes" seeing in such objects a "magical" re-creation of the world.<sup>5</sup> These magic realist painters looked at everyday objects and life around them and attempted "to portray the strange, the uncanny, the eerie . . . aspects of everyday reality."<sup>6</sup> While their aim was to shake habitual perceptions of their surroundings, they did this not by introducing elements of the fantastic into their work, but rather by showing that there were different ways of perceiving everyday objects.

Since the 1950s and 1960s the concept of magic realism has

increasingly been associated with Latin American fiction. It is important, however, to distinguish between magic realism in art and magic realism in literature. While Roh coined the term in the context of the art world, to describe a specific way of portraying the mystery inherent in everyday reality without raising questions about that reality, magic realism in literature is "writing that works both within and against the aesthetics of realism."<sup>7</sup> Where normal, plausible, everyday events co-exist on the same level as supernatural, extraordinary and even fantastic events whose authenticity is never questioned.

Thus, the central concept of magic realism in literature is its insistence on the co-existence of the magic and the real. While a narrator of the fantastic dispenses with the laws of logic and the physical world and recounts an action which may be absurd or supernatural, a narrator of magic realism accepts most or all of the realistic conventions of fiction but introduces "something else," something which is not realistic, into the text. These elements are not highlighted for shock value, but are woven in seamlessly. Magic realism, therefore, belongs neither entirely to the realm of fantasy nor to that of empirical reality. Despite the presence of fantastic events, however, it is always linked with the "real" world, grounded in recognizable reality through social, historical and political references.

The purpose of my essay is to place magic realism in the domain of postcolonial studies, thus providing it a new garb. The term "postcolonial" is as problematic as "magic realism," but broadly speaking, postcolonial writing encompasses a wide range of discursive practices which resist colonialism and colonial ideologies. Undoubtedly notions of identity, history and perspective are important to postcolonial writers, but perhaps the most dramatic effect of the colonization process is that the colonized are forced to occupy two conflicting worlds or spaces, referred to by Linda Hutcheon as a duality of "post-colonial doubled identity and history."<sup>8</sup> Colonization effectively created a duality of worlds for the indigenous population. The "reason" and "logic" of European intellectual tradition collided with the "mysterious" and "mythic" perspective of the locals. The settler colonists too were faced with the imposition of an imported world-view onto a new, and in many ways, alien physical space. In both instances the two worlds may be incompatible in many ways, but the colonized cannot avoid defining their identity in terms of the dual worlds or spaces they are forced to inhabit.

Canadian critic Robert Wilson's ideas about the spatial effects of magic realism might be particularly useful in the context of postcolonial writing. Magic realism, he points out, creates a "space in which the spatial effects of canonical realism and those of axiomatic fantasy are interwoven . . . in magic realism, space is hybrid (opposite and conflicting properties are copresent)."<sup>9</sup> Wilson calls this phenomenon "dual spatiality." Indeed, Wilson suggests, "it is as if there are two worlds, (wholly distinct, following dissimilar laws) which interact, interpenetrate, and interwind, unpredictably but in a fully natural manner." (W, 205) The opening up of hybrid space in magic realism makes it difficult to conceive of the "real" as a single world with a single set of rules or laws.

Postcolonial writing then uses magic realism to exhibit the inherent problems created by the imposition of a bizarre and UN-real European world-view onto the local reality of the colonized. A conventional western world-view is carefully detailed while at the same time the narrator introduces another level of reality, that of suspicion and myth, which is inexplicable according to the logic and reason of Western thought. To borrow Wilson's words, the two worlds "interact, interpenetrate and interwind" (W, 205) so that spirits, demons and sorcery figures mingle with "real" people of different races in overlapping periods of time.

Stephen Slemon is one critic who has drawn attention to the proliferation of binarisms and dualities operating within settler cultures, binarisms such as Europe and its other, colonizer and colonized, and the West and the rest, for example. Slemon also suggests that magic realist narrative recapitulates a dialectical struggle inherent within the postcolonial culture.<sup>10</sup> he binary oppositions, he continues, undergo a process of dialectical interplay which undermines the fixity of borders between them, foregrounding the gaps, absences and silences produced by the colonial encounter. Binarisms of white and non-white, civilized and barbaric, colonizer and colonized, vocal and silent, centre and periphery.

As I mentioned earlier, magic realism has been described as "writing that works both within and against the aesthetics of realism," and postcolonial writing, I would suggest, is writing that works both within and against the effects of colonialism. The hybridity of both modes of writing indicates strong possibilities for an interweaving of their agendas. Magic realism contests the restrictions of colonial space by opening up a

"dual spatiality," thus making problematic any notion of a single unified world-view or reality. As Chanady notes, the enabling of new and multiple perspectives on events "allows us to see dimensions of reality of which we are not normally aware."(C, 27) Magic realism, with its "eruptions of spatial folding" raises questions about the nature of the worlds we inhabit. Stephen Slemon claims that magic realism's strength is that it encodes "a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems," and further, that the deployment of magic realism in literature can "signify resistance to central assimilation by more stable generic systems."(SS, 10)

It is in this viewpoint, I would like to present forth the magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The latter writes in "The Handsomest Drowned Man"<sup>11</sup> "They were wandering through the maze of fantasy"<sup>16</sup> (232). By choosing the word wandering Marquez attaches tangibility to fantasy. He characterizes the people as active wanderers through the maze. "Magical realism expands the categorizes of the real so as to encompass myth, magic and other extraordinary phenomena in Nature or experience which European realism excluded"<sup>17</sup>

Gabriel Garcia Marquez uses the technique of magical realism in his novels as well as his short stories. Marquez uses magical realism to blend reality and fantasy so that the distinction between the two erases. In the novel he successfully demonstrates the technique of magic realism through a skillful integration of fantasy and reality, and the peculiar description of the events and characters. This feat requires analysis of his resources, especially the most important one: his narrative tone. The author has intuitively grasped the vital relationship that exists between space and tone when he noticed that tone could serve as the main unifying force in the novel. Tone belongs by all rights to the narrator's voice: someone who would report all the incidents calm and untouched, without comments or moral judgments on what has happened. Garcia Marquez chose to employ this serious tone to make unbelievable ideas seems real, because it allows him to dispense with explanations and justifications. With his authentic presentation of events - the tone, there is no need to justify all the implausible phenomena in the story. His sole duty is to simply recount the tale in the most natural fashion, so that the intangible can be associated with the tangible with the greatest of ease. As Garcia Marquez has once asserted himself, "the key to writing *One*



*Hundred Years of Solitude* was the idea of saying incredible things with a completely unperturbed face."<sup>18</sup> In order to fuse the fantastic or improbable perfectly into realistic occurrences, the only effective way is to deliver them as if they were the implacable truth.

Examples for this remarkable narrative tone are palpable in the novel: "Just a moment, now we shall witness an undeniable proof of the infinite power of God."(M, 85) This statement was said by the priest who levitates by means of chocolate. By depicting this absurd occasion as an unquestionable truth, the author has merged the grotesque into his fictional world so naturally that no one suspect their existence. Consequently, his practice of magic realism in an "unperturbed expression" renders a satiric style throughout the novel. The stabilized and "normalized" atmosphere in the novel assimilates marvelous things with village and household events, and converts them into acceptable phenomena which the reader can easily admit. This atmosphere is originated from the familiar domestic activities of Ursula, which creates a centre where decisive events happen and others slowly germinate. "Ursula's function is to impregnate the fictional space with everyday realities so that the marvelous may enter it smoothly."<sup>15</sup> It is through the presence of Ursula that the transition from the imaginary to the real can occur naturally without any remarkable notices or astonishment. Thus, narrative authenticity becomes more readily perceptible when what is related oscillates between impossible and everyday occurrences.

Numerous episodes in the novel also illustrate the author's adroit manipulation of language and narrative focus for the purpose of fusing the real and fantastic elements of his fictional world. A striking case in point is his treatment of the mysterious death of Jose Arcadio: After his hunting trip with his wife, Jose Arcadio goes into the bedroom to change his clothes. Moments later the sound of a pistol shot signals his death and its strange aftermath:

"A trickle of blood came out under the door, crossed the living room, went out into the street, continued on in a straight line across the uneven terraces, went down steps and climbed over curbs, passed along the Street of the Turks, turned a corner to the right and another to the left, made a right angle at the Buendia house, went

in under the closed door, crossed through the parlor, hugging the walls so as not to stain the rugs, went on to the other living room, made a wide curve to avoid the dining-room table, went along the porch with the begonias, and passed without being seen under Amaranta's chair, and went through the pantry and came out in the kitchen, where Ursula was getting ready to crack thirty-six eggs to make bread."(M, 135)

Jose Arcadio's death and its aftermath is utterly ridiculous, but it is made almost believable by the meticulous stylistic precision, and numerous everyday details surrounding the occurrence. This episode perfectly illustrates the author's method of making the fantastic seem real, thus eliminating the barrier between objective and imaginary realities and creating a total fictional universe.

Garcia Marquez has erased the distinctive boundary between reality and fantasy by immersing proven and fabulous events indiscriminately with the application of his steady, unchanging tone. When the author narrates the story, he "never allows it to become evident, by interjection or amazement, that there may be a substantial difference between the extraordinary and the commonplace."(G, 130) For him, there is really no difference between what is plausible or what is not. He does not doubt or question incredible happenings or facts throughout the story. As a result, under the operation of his imagination and narrative tone, prodigious events and miracles can naturally coexist with the ordinary. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, this fusion of fantasy and reality is patent in different aspects. As a diverting illustration, "this time, along with many other artifices, they brought a flying carpet. But they did not offer it as a fundamental contribution to the development of transport, rather as an object of recreation."(M, 31) For many years, the town of Macondo accepts the fantastic as an integral part of life without showing any signs of disbelief or amazement at such remarkable phenomenon. This is a circumstance that the author purposely invents to achieve his ultimate purpose. Although this existence of a flying carpet is obviously a fictional element of the novel, Garcia Marquez does not make it appear unreal. Rather he places it side by side with the familiar realities as equally true events, so that they are connected with one another inseparably. The

author provides a peculiar, exaggerated description of characters and events in order to give each occurrence a sense of reality. In describing Melquiades, Garcia Marquez says,

He was a fugitive from all the plagues and catastrophes that had ever lashed mankind. He had survived pellagra in Persia, scurvy in the Malayan archipelago, leprosy in Alexandria, beriberi in Japan, bubonic plague in Madagascar, an earthquake in Sicily, and a disastrous shipwreck in the strait of Magellan.(M, 6)

Apparently, this statement is inconceivable. Events and personal characteristics are spectacularly exaggerated, made quite absurdly larger than life, yet in a style that takes the hyperbole for granted, as though it were a meticulous fact. Hence, this hyperbole serves as an important device to intermingle the strange and exotic with reality. Many of the fantasies of the novel are indeed absurd but logical exaggerations of real situations. Throughout the book Garcia Marquez exaggerates events to gain fantasy. For example, "it rained for four years, eleven months, and two days."(M, 320) This hyperbole is employed to emphasize the severity of the rainstorm that destroyed the town. Although such long period of raining is very unlikely to occur, however, in another perspective, its specific numerical values give the incident a considerable sense of reality. Once again, the overstated description has converted the fantastic element in the situation into an undeniable fact.

Magic realism as a technique of transforming the fabulous into true existence is represented by Garcia Marquez perfectly. He shows his taste for this narrative device - the blend of fantasy and hyperbole exhibited in a context of reality throughout the novel. By telling the story in a serious and natural narrative tone, Garcia Marquez is able to produce a magical realm where everything is possible and believable. This is the main reason why the novel attracts, convinces and seduces the reader. With his manipulation to blur the distinction between the real and surreal, no one would doubt that this masterpiece is a remarkable breakthrough in the literary world of fiction. Consequently, it can be asserted that by bringing fantasy into the realm of reality Marquez has provided the colonized with a space unthought-of before. He has while using the

medium of magic realism filled the gaps often felt in the novels belonging to the postcolonial genre.

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## Grains of Rebellion

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A *rebel* “is not only a person who fights against government of their country” (Oxford Dictionary) but rather can be the one who resists or refuses allegiance to authority; or even an awakening of conscience and the formation of an affirmative 'no' to bring about a new change. As defined by Albert Camus a rebel is “A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion” (10). This resistance can be further seen as “an act, or a set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of its oppressors, and it so thoroughly infuses the experience of living under oppression that it becomes an almost autonomous aesthetic principle” (as qtd. by Slemon 107). The rebel is a counter product of decolonization, which is a “process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling” (Tiffin 95). Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) “examines the meaning of individual and collective commitment to cultural/political revolution; however, it simultaneously explores the psychology of the disenfranchised, whose personal struggles to serve, like Mugo's, can become destructive forces which undermine the endeavours of the freedom movement” (Kessler 82). Peterson argues, “by stressing the difficulties rather than the successes of gaining a political revolutionary consciousness, Ngugi has indicated the enormity of the task undertaken” (ibid.). But at the same time the novel ostensibly celebrates *Uhuru* of Kenya's independence in 1963 through the rebellious female figures of Ngeri, Wambui and Mumbi. As quoted by Williams:

In *A Grain of Wheat* the story is told of the woman Wangu Makeri, who ruled over a large area in Muruanga until she broke one of the tribal taboos by

dancing naked in public. She is labelled by Ngugi as the last of the great Gikuyu women, yet in women like Muthoni, Mumbi and Nyambua, Ngugi has given us glimpses of the kind of charm, beauty and power once wielded by the female rulers of old (65).

The paper focuses on the unleashing power of these Gikuyu women being the part of rebellion and resistance against the White authority to bring about a change, where the role of Kenyan men in it is almost explicit. In Ngugi's novel, the men are active in Mau Mau rebellion and women have just aesthetic purpose to solve, but still through their national consciousness, resistance and boldness they form a necessary part of the rebellion. The resistance and rebellion of women in the novel are neither necessarily nor even often revolutionary, yet in its offing both contribute to a revolution, for the love of their soil through a shared space. It is not necessary that the protest has to be violent and volcanic, seething with anger but sometimes it is non violent, fellow supportive and not conforming to any authority. Even Richard J. Lane in his essay “National Consciousness Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*” contends “...none of the characters within the novel should be considered entirely in isolation; they are implicated in, and contribute to, the independence of their nation, and, as such, are deeply interrelated” (47) and testifies it by quoting from the text “after one of the community leaders, Warui has spoken, there is a silence: 'Each person seemed engrossed in himself as if turning over the words in his mind. The woman cleared her throat, an indication that she was about to take up the thread from Warui'” (ibid). This paper breaks ground on how women characters in the novel take over the thread of rebellion.

No doubt the female character's main aim is domestic bliss and matrimonial harmony but at the same time they realize that domestic freedom can only be complete if there is social and political harmony. The title of the novel *A Grain of Wheat* sets a biblical pattern of burial and regeneration epitomizing self sacrifice through resistance and rebellion which leads to a new birth, a new change. Sacrifice is remarkably explained by Kihika, who finds in Bible the ways and means to freedom:

In Kenya we want deaths which will change things, that

is to say, we want true sacrifice. But first we have to be ready to carry the cross. I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another... Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ (Agow 95).

Ngugi's idea of freedom is not simply political freedom of being adequately represented in parliaments, but one in which the idea of the African personality is realized and does not merely remain a glorious myth. So here the Ngugian rebel is not the one who undertakes an endeavour aiming at resolution but one who embodies hope in African culture. In the novel, Mumbi Kihika's sister represents the rebellion figure who believes in sacrifice and suffering before the attainment of bliss, an elysium in Africa:

Her dark eyes had a dreamy look that longed for something the village could not give. She lay in the sun and ardently yearned for a life in which love and heroism, suffering, and martyrdom were possible. She was young. She had fed on stories in which Gikuyu women braved the terrors of the forest to save people, of beautiful girls given to the gods as sacrifice before the rains (Agow 76).

The suffering and sacrifice through a show of defiance forms the part of rebellion against the Whiteman to change the polity of Kenya. The concepts of martyrdom, suffering, heroism and freedom are not empty slogans for Mumbi but form an integral part of her life, as her pulse; as she tells Mugo:

When my brother talked. My heart travelled with his words. I dreamt of sacrifice to save so many people. And although sometimes I feared, I wanted those days to come. Even when I got married, the dream did not die. I longed to make my husband happy, yes, but I also prepared myself to stand by him when the time came. I could carry his sheath and as fast as he shot into the

enemy, I would feed him with arrows. If danger came and he fell, he would fall into my arms and I would bring him home safely to myself (Agow 136-137).

Mumbi sees domestic bliss and social freedom as an integral part of each other. She is very much concerned about her surroundings and the grave situation. She wants freedom for the Black people, without which she knows her domestic freedom would be incomplete. In the words of Bu-Buakei Jabbi:

Mumbi does not...go into the forest when the Mau Mau warfare breaks out. But her intuitions of self-sacrifice and of rescue are sufficiently realized in other aspects of her life and conduct, as in her matrimonial devotion despite suffering or her selfless efforts to save the necks of Karanja and Mugo, who had respectively jeopardized both her marriage and her brother's life (as qtd. by Lane 57).

Mumbi sees nothing great or heroic in brutal murder and meaningless violence. She was always,

moved by her brother's words into visions of a heroic past in other lands marked by; acts of sacrificial martyrdom; a ritual mist surrounded those far-away lands and years... She could not visualize anything heroic in men and women being run over by trains. The thought of such murky scenes revolted her. Her idea of glory was something nearer the agony of Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane (Agow 88).

For Mumbi violence for the sake of violence has no meaning. Her abhorrence of violence being committed in the name of justice is also suggested when she sends a warning letter to Karanja.

The repulsion towards the White power gets impregnated through Mumbi's loyalty to Gikonyo. According to Lahiri Dutt, authentic resistance must "negate rather than accept the basis of domination" (as

qtd. by Selbin 10). With the Whiteman's power invested in him, Karanja despised and feared people:

Men cowered before him...Women offered their naked bodies to him...Mumbi, would never yield, and he could never bring himself to force her (Agow 209).

Mumbi never submits to Karanja the black man with a white mask, but is eventually raped by him. Her momentary submission to Karanja comes, as he himself admits, "...when he stood on the brink of defeat" (ibid.). And his feeling of triumph was only momentary which "...seconds later...melted into utter isolation and humiliation" (Agow 210). Though this resistance might seem material and everyday and also passive but still this "refusal...to cooperate actively with...authority figures...is an activity, an 'action'" (Selbin 11) and which might plant seeds that germinate in the right conditions. Resistance might seem elusive but it is powerful. Selbin also asserts that "In most cases, resistance reflects the actor's conception of their actions as part of some long process of struggle that most societies hold in their collective memory" (ibid.). Here the whole novel meanders through Mumbi's struggle and guilt and her resistance has its objective correlative in the community and country at large.

The minor character of Njeri might be construed by some as a victim, but for Judith Cochrane she "reveals the great strength and determination of Gikuyu women in her impassioned vow to devote herself to Kihika" (as qtd. by Williams 64). Njeri's sacrifice can be seen as passion for a secret dream. Nobody knew about her obsession for Kihika until:

...she ran away to the forest to fight at Kihika's side. She was shot dead in a battle, soon after Kihika's death (Agow 138).

In Njeri one can see the secret passion and in Wambuku, Kihika's wife is the agony of a widow. After hearing about Kihika's death "she only destroyed herself with soldiers and homeguards, any man. But she refused, so it is said, the advances of this particular homeguard, who got

his chance for revenge during the trench" (Agow 137).

The power of the women also makes its mark through the character of Wambui, a woman full of fighting spirit. She believed in the power of women to influence events, especially when African men were unable to turn tables on the Whiteman. At the worker's strike in 1950 to make it more difficult for the Whiteman to govern; where some men grumbled and did not come out on strike, there:

...Wambui...led a group of women to the platform. She grabbed the microphone from the speakers. Was there any circumcised man who felt water in the stomach at the sight of a whiteman?... Let therefore such men, she jeered, come forward, wear the women's skirts and aprons and give up their trousers to the women. Men sat rigidly in their seats and tried to laugh with the crowd to hide the inner discomfort. The next day all men stayed away from work (Agow 180).

The novel also highlights through Wambui, women's vital roles as Mau Mau arms couriers- as a figure of resistance to colonial authority and as a rebellion supporter:

Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the Emergency, she carried secrets from villages to the forest and back to the villages and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Njoro, Elburgon and other places in and outside the Rift Valley. The story is told how she once carried a pistol to her thighs near the groin. She was dressed in long, wide and heavy clothes, the picture of decrepitude and senile decay. She was taking the gun to Naivasha (Agow 19).

Not to talk about the explicit rebellion or protest, but dissent can also be subtly noticed through the carrying forward of African tradition in the wake of colonialism. The old woman in the novel symbolizes the African spirit:

She had a small face grooved with wrinkles. Her eyes were small but occasionally flashed with life. Otherwise they looked dead. She wore beads around her elbows, several copper chains around her neck, and cowrie-like tins around the ankles (Agow5).

This clinging to African culture can also be viewed through the women dressed for Uhuru celebrations:

...women, dressed in Miengu and Mithuru, with beads around their necks; women in flower patterned calicos...singing traditional and Uhuru songs (Agow 216).

Uhuru celebrations in the novel, marks the start of *revolution* in Kenya which is “ultimately about passionate commitment and great willingness to sacrifice” (Selbin 16) though the celebration stands incomplete with the betrayal by some Kenyan men.

Mumbi's Africanization is even implied when after independence, she is the one who takes up the task of building traditional African hut while men are busy building concrete cement buildings. In his article “Daughters of Moombi: Ngugi's Heroines And Traditional Gikuyu Aesthetics,” Charles Nama paraphrases Ngugi's view that “the unequivocal liberation of Africans lies not in Westernization but in the resuscitation of traditional cultural values that have been an intrinsic part of the people's lives from ancient times” (as qtd. by Kessler 79). Mumbi represents a nurturing force, who even in her idealized dreams, is capable of bringing together elements of culture that represent a potential source of strength and offer a vision of continuity in a dislocated world.

The revolt, resistance and rebellion is actively shown in the novel through the heroism of anti-imperialist male characters, members of the Party, forest fighters like Waiyaki, Harry Thuku, Jomo Kenyatta and Kihika being the part of Mau Mau rebellion. But being off field, the women characters of the novel especially Mumbi, take the spot-light area through their aesthetic participation in the rebellion against the colonial White forces. The novel remarkably shows that though the matriarchal rule in Kenya was reversed, still apart from domestic chores and child bearing

the Gikuyu women left no stone unturned; for their country's independence. The struggle leading to a new creation is depicted at the end of the novel through Gikonyo's work as a carpenter, particularly in his imagining of a stool for Mumbi as a wedding gift; in the form of a man, a pregnant woman and a child. This thematic concern is also evident in Gikonyo's estrangement and ultimate reconciliation with Mumbi and his association of Mumbi with “the birth of a new Kenya” (Agow 105). Even Gikandi evinces the fact by casting Mumbi as “the symbolic mother of the nation” (as qtd. by Lane 54).

Ngugi has very subtly represented his women characters far away from stereotypes as brave, resilient, resourceful and determined though embedded with human weaknesses. In a way he has successfully created positive sexual images through his implied progressive stance. To sum up, on an anti-bourgeois note, as aptly remarked by Porter, Ngugi's work show that “the problems of Africans (or, indeed, of mankind) do not necessarily have their roots in either the sex or the colour of people” and tacitly suggest that “rather than fight for “feminine” liberation (which wrongly implies that all men are free), women, together with their male counterparts, should fight for the freedom of all” (73).

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## **Redefining Feminism in Indian context: A Study of Anita Desai's Novels**

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The odyssey of Indian literature in English from its spasmodic state to the present glory and splendour has been quite fascinating. The earlier attempts in creativity were poor imitations of English romances. Beginning with the trio of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, the ever expanding horizons of the Indian English literature have compellingly drawn the attention of the critics and creative writers of the world, and they see it firmly ensconced in the slot of post colonial literature. Apart from the male writers who have enriched it over years, a sizeable number of Indian women writers have been critically evaluated, read and acclaimed all over the world as their works offer penetrative insights into dynamics of complexities of life. The fictional concerns of the fraternity of women writers are skillfully reflected in their understanding of Indian women as a victim of male hegemony, cultural and patriarchal social forces which have emasculated women who as part of the burgeoning women's movement have recreated their own features and moved from a point of invisibility and facelessness to empowerment.

Among the galaxy of Indian women writers, Anita Desai has occupied a pivotal place by virtue of her portrayal of the existential dilemmas, terrors and tribulations of a woman's life in an authentic manner. Her sensitive portrayal of and understanding of intrinsic human nature make her writing conspicuous, enduring and captivating, Desai's father was Bengali and her mother was a German, both had cultural dislocations. Consequently, Anita felt that there had always a sense of being on the edge of things. May be this feeling might have originated in the feeling of alienation and retreat to the world of books very early in her life. She has read the classic at very young age. Her tryst with her own and her parents dilemmas provided her a better understanding of the

psychological make up of her characters, and her mellow and deft handling of the protagonists' existential dilemmas deepened and widened the scope of novel writing in English. Like a true psychologist, may be in the mould of Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai has explored the inner world of her characters, their varying moods, whims, fancies, ruptured desires, suppressed selves, oddities and idiosyncrasies which make them human.

The sensitive representation of female protagonists in women writing is a befitting corroboration of their sombre realization of subjugation to male hierarchy. This concern for woman's welfare is discussed under the umbrella term of Feminism. Irrefutably, Feminism is a call of equality for women. It demands a congenial atmosphere irrespective of congenital differences. The definitions of feminism change according to one's perception of the word woman. But culture remains a dominant factor. This paper discusses the female characters in Desai's novels and how these characters validate feminist concerns of Desai against the backdrop of Indian society.

Anita Desai delves deep into the inner life of her female protagonists. Her forte lies in presenting before the readers, the true picture of middle class Indian woman, her marginalized role as a daughter, as a wife, and as a mother. She explores the connection between the outer constraints of the society and the inner conflict of her female protagonists. Her heroines are sensitive ones who fail to understand the harsh reality of all relationships. They live in their own world of imagination and their contact with the callous outer world is unbearable for them. Desai herself has declared her interest in psychological make-up of her characters. In an interview with Jasbir Jain she says, "It is depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character or scene rather than going round about it" (Jain 61).

Her interest in the psychological life of her characters widened the scope of novel writing in English. The other peculiar feature of her novels is Indian-ness of the characters and society. She has seen India as an outsider from her mother's point of view that was a German and felt about it as a native like her father. Her characters are indulged in never ending strife of survival. They point towards the general futility of life and mad clarity of all relationships. K.R.S. Iyengar aptly remarks, "In her novels the inner climate of sensibility that lours, clears or rambles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer

weather, the physical geography or the visible action.” (Iyengar 464)

It is her victory in exploring the deep recesses of human psyche which has set her comparisons with Virginia Woolf. Her female characters deal with confinement and lack of expression, the farcical nature of marital bonds, and the illusory quality of all human relationship. Their sensitivity earns them the name of being insane or abnormal. Callous nature of her male counterpart, the societal pressures shrink her capacity for co-operation and communication. In her interview with Atma Ram, Anita Desai said: “I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into despair and so turned against the general current. It is very easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, and it costs no efforts. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out the great 'No', who fight the current and struggle against it, may know what demands are and what it costs to meet them” (Ram 21-22).

A writer who is writing about the inner world of her characters, their moods, aims, desires, their suppressed self, needs passionate language. This is another beauty of Desai's fiction. She writes poetic prose and her use of liquid words enhances and enriches the pleasure of reading her fiction. Her images convey the inner conflict of her characters. In her first novel, *Cry the Peacock*; she uses animal and insect imagery to portray clearly the inner world of her protagonist, Maya. Dr. Kunj Bala Goel aptly observes: “Animal and insect imagery used with reference to human beings prepares the background for characters' withdrawal and puts forth its causes by suggesting the meaninglessness of human life, its monotony, insensitivity and lack of individuality” (Goel 82).

The protagonists of her novels associate their emotions and feelings with the natural surroundings. There is one such beautiful example in her novel, *Clear Light of Day*: “The Koels began to call before daylight. Their voices rang out from the dark trees like arrangement of bells, calling and echoing each other's calls, mocking at enticing each other into over higher and shriller calls . . . Tara ran down the steps, bowing her head to the morning sun that came slicing down like a blade to steel into the back of her neck, and crossed the dry crackling grass of the lawn to join her sister who stood watching, smiling” (Desai 1-3).

The beginning of the novel is in the beautiful surroundings of nature and images of the insects have a direct relationship with the

psychological make-up of her protagonist. Snail image is repeated often in her novel. Desai has associated it with slow, dull movement of life and with Tara's timidity. It also represents survival, steadiness of life. The “bees' episode” in the novel makes clear Tara's escapism and it also underlines Bim's basic nature of taking risks and sacrificing for others. Symbolism is an important device in Anita Desai's novels. It helps her to delineate the intensity of passion and emotions of her female protagonists. Symbols, images and poetic words become appropriate objective correlative to convey the inner turmoil of her heroines. Absence of communication between her protagonists and the society is conveyed by symbols. In her novel *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* She uses the image of an eagle to present before mind's eye, the real picture of her protagonist. The eagle is wounded and is attacked by the crows. The crows are eager to prick it to death. Eagle is a bird of prey but Desai has used it in different context. Eagle here, symbolizes Sita, heroine of the novel, who is wounded and suppressed. The crows represent the callous society around her. It also makes clear that Sita's tragedy is caused by her inability to adopt her according to the value and attitude of society. The setting of the novel is symbolic too. Sita is feeling restless and yearns to visit island of her dreams; Manori island. The novel is divided into three sections. It symbolizes the present, past and present of Sita. She turns to Manori islands to escape the dullness and callousness of the society. But she finds same suffocating and cruel attitude of nature in the island. Locale is another important aspect of her novels. Life of city in all her novels is associated with cruelty, materialistic outlook and callousness. The incompatibility with the world around alienates her protagonists and they move in silence. The role of environment is made clear in B. Ramachandra Rao's words. He feels that in her novels, environment only adds to presenting “each individual as an unsolved mystery” (Rao 61).

Symbols, images, language, interior monologue, psychological conflict, introspective nature of her character fall under the category of stream of consciousness novel. In stream of consciousness novel, the whole focus of the writer is on the mind of the protagonist, which is like a stream. Like a stream, it is ever changing and flowing. The writer depicts the fleeting emotions of the protagonist. Similarly, Desai has used this technique in her novel. Almost all of her heroines, Maya, Monisha, Sita, Raka, Tara, Bim and Uma remain busy in the exploration of their inner-



selves. Desai has been influenced by Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and Henry James in her use of stream of consciousness novel. Admitting it, she says: "In my twenties when I first began to work seriously and consciously on my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Proust that influenced me more strongly. Later, the novels of the Japanese writer, Kawabata and more, modern poetry particularly that of Rimbaud, Hopkins, and Lawrence (Srivastava 217).

This is Desai's pre-occupation with psychological realism that makes her present the relationship in a true light. She writes as life is not as it should be. She is a realist and a witness to the position of women in Indian middle class families. Her protagonists have escapist and existentialist tendencies, marital discord is the major theme of her novels and she is satisfied in painting the reality. She herself says, "Literature should deal with more enduring matters . . . with life and with death. It should be too ironical and also too mystical to accept the world at face value and regard it as the whole or the only truth" (Narasimhan 23).

Desai is not happy with the depiction of the outer world, because she regards it only a little part of reality. According to her, reality is buried deeper under the layers. One has to probe into the depths, to get real meaning. In her interview with Yashodara Dalmia she says: "One's preoccupation can only be a perpetual search-for meanings, for value for dare. I say it truth, I think of the world as an iceberg... the one tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore, writing is an effort to discover and then to underlines and finally to convey the true significance of things" (Dalmia 13).

Like Virginia Woolf, Desai also explores the unfulfilled desires of her female protagonists and their fight with haves and have-nots and their experiences result into split personalities. It also damages their domestic life, makes them physically paralyzed and becomes a reason for their psychic death. Anita Desai says: "My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world" (Desai, Replies to the Questionnaire 1-6).

Desai uses interior monologue and flashback technique to make clear the chaotic inner world of her protagonists. Desai's preference to theme and moral vision make plot only a medium to carry her message. Her protagonists reveal her vision of life. Speaking about her vision, she says: "All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things-Next to this exploration of underlying truth and discovery of a private mythology and philosophy is its style that interests me most and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting language and symbol and word and rhythm-one must find a way to unite the inner and outer rhythms, to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on chaos" (Jena 81).

Anita Desai's first four novels *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *Fire on the Mountain* focus on tensions and travails of married wives. Maya, Monisha, Sita and Nanda Kaul symbolize the psychological trauma of women in India middle class families who are torn between the conflict of duty and individuality. They suffer confinement, lack of expression and failure of communication. Their silence is stifling. Their endeavours to cope up with different situations and their protest against suppression and subjugation reflect the novelist's feminist concerns. They resent the suppression as practised in the family and community, yet they rarely reject these social institution altogether.

Marriage is an important institution in Desai's novels. Her female protagonists are not divorcees though they are married with men of incompatible temperaments. The childhood of Maya and Monisha clearly underlines the biased attitude of their parents towards them. Maya gets snubbed for her love of Urdu poetry. Monisha snubs her literary leanings after marriage. Both of these protagonists turn neurotic. Maya kills her husband Gautama in frenzy and Monisha burns herself.

Both of them realize the suffocation imposed by their unhappy married lives. Monisha thinks of servitude as the ultimate fate of all Bengali women, "Lives spent in waiting nothing, waiting on men, self-centered and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstand, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses in the old City" (Desai 120).

Barrenness is the other shared grief of Maya and Monisha. But the next novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* rejects the children as a

guarantee of happy married life. In this novel, Sita has four children and is pregnant for the fifth time. But she is unwilling to give birth to her baby. She shows some hints of advancement from the previous protagonists. She smokes and is given to outburst of anger. But she is so much involved in her own self that she appears as an alien to her children. Same alienation can be noticed in the relationship of mother and children in *Voices in the City*, in Nanda Kaul's relation with her children in *Fire on the Mountain*. Bim and Tara also depend on Mira-Masi for emotional comfort in *Clear Light of Day* and in *Fasting, Feasting* Uma and Aruna feel the same.

The alienation of the mothers in Desai's novels represents the manifestation of India myths of *pativrtadharmā*, the moral duty of a wife. They are aware of their duty towards their husbands only. Like mythical *Gandhari*, they follow them blindly. As Uma and Aruna observe in *Fasting, Feasting*, "Mamapapa. Mamapapa. It was hard to believe they ever had separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not Mamapapa in one breath" (Desai 5).

Importance of female education is another important issue raised by Desai. The unarticulated grievances of Maya and Monisha gather focus and force in Uma in *Fasting, Feasting* who expresses her inclination for convent education but her parents thrust the responsibility of Arun and reject altogether her idea of her education. Her father hated working women.

"The frown was filled with everything he thought of working women, of woman who dared presume into the world he occupied . . . Mama said, "Our daughter does not need to go out to work, as long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work" (Desai 143).

In the same novel, Anamika's life presents the most acerbic result of negligence towards female education. She was an outstanding student and had won a scholarship to Oxford University. It was natural that her parents would not allow her to go there because the Indian families and the traditional, stereotyped thinking made them use the degree as an accomplishment to search a suitable match for her.

"She could never bring herself to contradict her parents or cause them grief. The scholarship was one of the qualifications they were able to offer when they started searching for a husband for her" (Desai 69). Her married life is disastrous and she is burnt alive by her -in-law after twenty

five years of her married life. Uma becomes a servant of her parents.

Besides these important central female characters, Mira-masi emerges as an important character in *Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting, Feasting*. In both of these novels, she is a widow, homeless, serving her relatives as an unpaid and faithful servant. She encircles the temples to wash off her sins of previous birth as her widowhood is a result of bad stars in her horoscope. She trains Tara to become an ideal wife and mother in *Clear Light of Day*. The ironic tone of Desai is clear in these lines:

"Guiltily, she scrubbed and washed and cooked for them. At night she massaged her mother-in-law's legs and nursed wakeful babies and stitched trousseaux for her sister-in-law of course she aged. Not only was her hair white but also she was nearly bald. At least that saved her from being used by brother-in-law who would have put the widow to a different use had she been more appetizing" (Desai 108).

She is superstitious and fatalist in *Clear Light of Day* and in *Fasting, Feasting*, she declares that Uma's husband has left her because she was occupied by the Lord. Lord *Shiva* was her husband. Desai's skilful use of character delineation makes *Mira masi* appear so real that one can easily imagine the plight of such widows who are seen at the pilgrimages in India.

In contrast to the uneducated and silent housewives, two female protagonists: Bim (*Clear Light of Day*) and Laita (*Journey to Ithaca*) clearly carry the feminist message of Desai. Bim decided not to marry because of her duties towards her home, her responsibilities towards her mentally retarded brother, Baba. She is financially independent; her ideas on marriage are not traditional. She is rather open and liberal in her views on marriages as she rebukes Tara who thinks marriage as the ultimate goal of a woman's life and adds very firmly:

"What else? . . . Can't you think? I can think of hundred of things to do instead. I won't marry..... I shall work I shall do things, I shall earn my own living and look after *mira-masi* and Baba and be independent"(Desai 140).

In her recent novel, *Journey to Ithaca*, Desai's heroine shows deeper interest in self-realization and is raised above the margins drawn by tradition-bound society. Lila leaves her native country, ransacks India in search of *Guru*, Her quest is human quest for knowledge of the ultimate. Lila breaks the boundaries and achieves her goal. In the end, she becomes spiritual *guru* of the foreigners like Matteo and others. Lila's life



is the living example of the victory of feminine principle. She embodies the faith in feminine patience and power. She is the 'Supreme Power; the divine force, mother of humanity. She overpowers all other heroines and shines with the brightness of truth.

Desai confirms that for women nothing is impossible, they are capable of enjoying freedom if they desire. In the changing scenario women are becoming aware of their individuality and self-respect. Similar attitude for modern woman is expressed in the following poem:

"The day for moving mountains is coming.  
You don't think so?  
It is coming: for a while the mountain sleeps,  
But in other times  
Mountains all moved in fire. If you don't believe that,

Oh man, this at last believe.  
All sleeping women  
Will awake how and move." (Akiko 241)

Desai's central concern centers on the sexual bias in Indian society and the silence of her female protagonists further confirms their unquestioned subjugation. In *Clear Light of Day* and *Journey to Ithaca* Bim and Laila appear as incarnation of *Shakti*. Though feminism is not a new word yet in India it needs a clear definition. The recent article, "When daughter are unwanted," posted on August 20, 2010 shows the ugly but true plight of women in India. "The full demographic impact of the spread of this technology is likely to show up dramatically in all India census in the year 2001, India has had a lower proportion of females than of males in the overall population for at least a century. The 1901 census recorded 972 females per 1000 males in the country's population. By the 1991, the sex ratio had come down to 929 females per 1000 males, indicating a deficit of nearly 30 million females in the total population. Selective abortions of female foetuses following sex determination tests are likely to further accelerate the deficit of females." (<http://www.manushi.in/blog-context.php?blogid=35>)

Feminism is still struggling for a clear definition in post-independence era. As Madhu Kishwar, a renowned activist and editor of

*Manushi* says, "Feminism in India has no integrity. You can't trust it." (tehelka.com) She declares boldly that dowry system has not been abolished even after implication of a number of laws against it. So, the Indian situation is totally different. Self-awakening, self-assertion for individuality and identity, freedom from traditional and conventional bondage is still at the nascent stage. But whenever the opportunity for self-exploration, self-expression and self-realization exists, Indian woman feels secure and comfortable. In certain instances, she emerges stronger and her strength is dubbed or condemned as her obstinacy.

In brief, the fictional world of Anita Desai confirms the universally held belief that her female characters emerge as convincing and breathing women who experience lot of turmoils and terrors in their married life, experience the agony and wrestle with the existential dilemmas and eventually affirm in the values of life, social institutions and above all community from which they some times tear away but then return to its fold to celebrate life with all its glories, uncertainties, confusion, chaos and absurdities. Through her female protagonists, she conveys an important reality of life. Life is not a bed of roses. It offers contradictions and paradoxes at every turn. But only those survive who have capacity to compromise. In an interview, Desai says: "Of course if one is alive in this world, one cannot survive without compromise, drawing the lines means certain death." (Ram 21)

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## Reconfiguring The Gender Equation: A Postfeminist Reading of Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*

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"Everything is read from a feminist angle ... I want to be read as a writer", quotes Shashi Deshpande in the online edition of *The Hindu*. Shashi Deshpande, a most celebrated writer has been widely acclaimed as a sensitive feminist herself. However, such a comment coming from the noted writer herself goes a long way in striking home the thought that from amongst the vast panorama of Indian women writers, Deshpande has tried to distinguish herself from the hackneyed and over-hyped feminist pedagogy. The debate over women writing, that is, if there is a particular style and content that distinguishes it from the general writing has been in foray for quite some time. And Deshpande has been increasingly felt to distance herself from being called a 'feminist' as it stamps her in a particular mould.

Although it cannot be overruled that the values and attitudes that come through in her creative works have definite feminist overtones, yet a conscious effort has been made by the writer to remind the need to recognise that the society is changing and today many men are sensitive to women but are dubbed together as 'men'- a hostile entity. From a postfeminist viewpoint, men's studies' is another emerging area that is claimed to be complementary to women's studies. "Men have been studied as heroes and villains, kings and warriors, scholars and scientists, architects of destiny and achievers; but never as ordinary human beings- as men- as gendered beings" (Krishnaswamy, Varghese, and Mishra 80).

Though feminists keep emphasising that patriarchal oppression has marginalized woman, this is not a universal phenomenon. Postfeminists deconstruct, demythologise and demystify the myth of

masculinity and in doing so, they challenge hegemonic assumptions held by the second wave epistemologies that patriarchal oppression is a universal oppression. The selective denunciation of the male being the sole reason for the genesis of all of a woman's predicaments is probably a circumscribing of vision, ignoring the universal metaphysical and existential hues of human existence. In fact, the global intellectual climate has moved from modernity to postmodernity and the contemporary women writers have begun to exhibit postfeminist concerns, thereby transcending gender politics, genre boundaries and narrative discourses.

Feminism, resting by and large on binaries, has never been a homogenous discourse. As such, the postfeminist ideology is more suited to the contemporary situation, since being much more flexible and heterosexist in orientation, it widens its ambit to include men as well, who, sadly, have not been the recipient of enough positive feminist academic attention. The need to re-define feminism is basically a fall-out of this gaping lacuna in the existing paradigms as well as is a response to the changing literary and social scenario, which compels a corresponding change in perceptions. Hence, the male figure, which was ruthlessly projected in earlier texts as the unforgiving, unfair, non-feeling, prejudiced oppressor is not accepted as viable by third wave feminists. The humane side of him has been largely ignored, the pressures built by society break his defences, he is expected to conform to set standards, his perplexed and splintered self undergoes wordless agony, he is traumatised within. The second wave women writers have conveniently forgotten how utterly vulnerable the so-called formidable man could be! What sublime secrets his heart may hold! What prompts him to shun worldly entrapments or a safe family cocoon and embrace sanyasa? New age women writers have shed the cold feminist garb and realise that men, too, are essentially human. Shashi Deshpande as a postfeminist writer has a needle sharp insight and has attempted to portray the seething turmoil of complex emotions and picturises how these turbulent whirlwinds, which a man tries to cover under a veneer, threaten his very existence. Gone are the days when women wrote only about female conflicts which only a woman could identify and which a man overlooked. Shashi Deshpande has stepped out of the boundaries that ignored and sidelined men. She does not appear to be obsessed with crying hoarse over feminist issues, but expresses a profound concern for the seemingly stoic and poised man

who is expected to be strong and emotionally placid all the time.

Through the protagonist Gopal, of *A Matter of Time*, Deshpande allows her readers to peep into the psyche of a male. One is mystified at the realisation as to how, in a male-dominated set up, a man is oppressed! It is a discomforting fact that a man feels alienated and displaced in a man's world! *A Matter of Time* is the first attempt of the author wherein the male hero gets a relatively uncritical, almost sympathetic treatment to the spiritual and philosophical turmoil that wrecks him. Gopal, in fact, is the only character, who gets the maximum sympathy, well roundedness and discursive space in her novel. *A Matter of Time* has a failed marriage as its narrative crux. Gopal, a middle aged, ex-professor and father of three daughters, walks out of his twenty year old marriage to Sumitra a. k. a. Sumi ; leaving all his material possessions and starts living a spare, monastic life in a single, ramshackle room, making a meagre living out of occasional copy-editing. Gopal's inexplicable act, however, does not shatter his regal and beautiful wife, Sumi, who picks up the fragments of life and bears the responsibility of her daughters undauntingly.

What is striking though, is, that the hub of the novel is not Sumi and her heroic efforts, but the quiet, unassuming male hero- Gopal and the intricacies of his inner domain. In fact, Gopal's reasons for walking out on his marriage are mysterious, metaphysical and philosophical. Maybe, his situation could be synonymous with Betty Friedan's "the problem that has no name ... a problem that lay buried, unspoken ... as a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning ..." Indeed, the emotionally challenged male, Gopal in this case, suffers from turbulent, unidentified and unnamed emotions. As the wheel turns full circle, the woman in the narrative surfaces as a strong identity, while the so called and so imagined heroic male plunges into the depths of despair. Perhaps, it is the collective consciousness of the female psyche that instinctively guides, steels and strengthens her, whereas, the ideal male cannot fall back on any emotional reserves and hence, is confounded and lost in the wake of emotionally charged situations.

Sumi muses that Gopal had always had a unique metaphysical strain in him. Twenty years of marriage had not been enough to know him and she wonders, "What kind of a man is he?" (Deshpande *A Matter of Time* 22) Sumi remembers how Gopal had once mused on the meaning of

the word *Sa-hriday* and had remarked that in the sense of oneness, it was an impossible concept. He had added that English being a practical language had no word to fit the concept. And then pulling her close to him, Gopal had said, "Listen, can you hear? It's two hearts beating. They can never beat in such unison that there's only one sound. Hear that?" (Deshpande 24) Sumi realises belatedly that these unexpected quirks were hints, telling her that it was always there in Gopal, the potential to walk out on her and her children. "Two hearts, two sounds. Gopal is right. *Sa-hriday*- there is no such thing, there can be no such thing" (Deshpande 24). The existential angst rings loud and clear, proclaiming that each one of us is basically on our own individual journey and that we have no idea what the journey of others is all about.

Sumi reminisces yet again when Gopal had unexpectedly resigned from his university job, stating, "I could no longer stand in a position of authority before my students" (Deshpande 27). Just like Gopal to give such an impossibly metaphysical reason, who would perhaps have given a similar answer if Sumi had asked,

Why are you leaving me? ... And yet she thinks, if I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one, the question no one has thought of. What is it Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because, and I remember this so clearly, it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are a part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (Deshpande 27)

Undoubtedly, it is this cold 'why' that puts to shame the Enlightenment factor. Such metaphysical rumblings have been in the universe since the age of Prince Siddhartha, who renounced kingdoms and riches to turn to meditation and become the Enlightened One- the Buddha. Seeking a solution to the enigma of human loneliness and discontent, Gopal begins to feel so alienated in his own home, his silences increase so much so that he withdraws from them and echoes to Sumi,

"It's not easy to be the only male in a family of females. You feel so-so- you feel so shut out" (Deshpande 60). The writer has dealt with her protagonist's dislocation and alienation with such acute panache that one ponders to seek an answer as to why does the male patriarch, the ruler, the owner and the oppressor wish to find an escape route, snapping all ties! Gopal aptly reflects Murray Roston's remark that "The crisis of alienation affects all sectors of society, irrespective of class, gender, race, politics or religion." How utterly sympathetic is indeed the authorial sensibility of Shashi Deshpande, to comprehend the strange desires of a man's heart! Although she does dwell on the emptiness in Sumi's life, Deshpande draws a similar ambivalent sympathy from the wronged wife, Sumi. Hardly ever has the pen of a woman writer sketched a female character who understands and forgives her wrongdoer.

Another remarkable feature of the novel is how concerned Gopal is about Sumi. He might have walked out on her for strange reasons only his heart can fathom, yet time and again he draws on his unfairness towards Sumi. He suffers from mortifying thoughts that he had not been fair to her and may be should have given her "some hint of what was happening to me". And yet again, he is sure that "Sumi is the one person who may understand this. She will know..." (Deshpande 41) Their hearts might not be *Sa-hriday*, they might not beat in unison, their thoughts might not converge, yet he is sure that Sumi would understand his message through telepathic communication. Though Sumi claims that she does not know her man completely, Gopal is sure that Sumi will understand. The thinking reader pauses to think at this point as to where did the image of the uncaring, unforgiving male disappear!

In fact, the novel is riddled with so many 'why's. Shashi Deshpande puts to question several issues such as- Why does a seemingly content marriage fail? Why does a man walk out on his family? Why is a man to be tied to his duties forever? Why can he never be free- not even after his death? The writer further lets us have a peep into the mystical shades of Gopal's psyche to know the probable reasons behind his monumental decision to renounce his family. Gopal has suffered a lost childhood. Learning that his father had married his brother's widow and that he and his sister, Sudha did not share the same father, he had always held his father to be his mother's guilty partner. He had always been tormented by the thought that he was born out of sinful love. For a while,

Sumi had drawn him out of his troubled stupor and Gopal had lost himself in his love for Sumi and their daughters, only to realise later that he had “lost himself in that beautiful dense green foliage ... And I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being that men give up their dreams of freedom” (Deshpande 45, 223). The final blow perhaps came with the death of cancer stricken Sudha, which brought out all his hidden fears of the futility of relationships. It is a universal fact that death of a near and dear one evokes strange feelings forcing one to re-think of the gnawing loneliness within. Gopal launches into long metaphysical moorings after the demise of his sister.

Emptiness, I realised then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of waking up among total strangers, is one we can never escape. And so, it's a lie, it means nothing, it's just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day, sometime, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. Like Sudha did. And I (Deshpande 52).

Shashi Deshpande moves out of the feminist mould and deftly deals with the theme of uncertainty, unfulfillment of desire and the wandering search of something incomprehensible, also dwelling on the vagaries of destiny and time. In the shifting sands of pain and pleasure, the celebrated Indian writer, Deshpande transforms her male protagonist from a betrayer to an object of self pity, trapped in a morass of human laws and psychic distress; and her heroine is not a victim of fate, but a woman of substance. In the process, she weaves a tale of the contradictions of male ambivalence and cruelty, female stoicism and shame and human desire and desertion.

The book is also a mirror of the society in transition. The change in the society is skilfully elaborated through three generations of women- Kalyani (Sumi's mother), Sumi and Aru (Sumi's daughter), who are the axis around whom the story spins. Sumi's parents- Kalyani and Shripati share a strained relationship and have not talked to each other for over thirty-five years. Caught in the metaphor of this smouldering silence, Kalyani, the

abandoned wife cries in utter disbelief that Sumi has been abandoned by Gopal. Although, the desertion is of a quite different order, yet, for her, a woman abandoned is a woman condemned. For Kalyani, it means a social stigma. Sumi, on the other hand, is extraordinarily collected to the point of indifference.

In a culture where marriage is the be all and end all of existence for many, where responsibilities outweigh desires, the expression to be free of all binding ties is in itself strange. However, Gopal's ruminations do carry a meaning, though they may be tough to endorse. In one of his philosophical moments, Gopal remarks:

For a woman, from the moment she is pregnant, there is an overriding reason for living ... A man has to search for it ... woman and child ... together in that magic circle ... A man is always an outsider ... Marriage is not for everyone ... A life time of commitment is not possible for all of us” (Deshpande 68-69).

Undoubtedly, the most wrenching change comes for Sumi, who neither shatters, nor is bitter but discovers untapped strengths within and accepts Gopal's decision in good faith. Unable to find joy in the small moments of family, Gopal is hyper aware of the fleeting nature of happiness and turns recluse. In contrast Sumi begins life anew, knowing fully well that “Where I stand is always the centre to me” (Deshpande 98). Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* is an assertion of the fact that, “The male as representative of the patriarchal society has at last been jerked off the centre of a woman's gravitation” (Girdhari 17). The dynamics of the oppressor-oppressed have undergone a metamorphosis. While Gopal is driven to the edge of a sense of isolation and wishes to break free from the bondage of complicate and determinate relationships, Sumi remains grounded and does not fall victim to psychic tortures.

The author does not make her hero Gopal conform to the 'ideal male' rules- the provider of the family, the final authority etc. Neither does she allow Sumi to play a radical feminist or become a product of 'victim feminism'. The manner in which the mature wisdom of Sumi honours the decision of Gopal cannot and must not be misunderstood as her lying low and acceptance of her fate unquestioningly. Sumi had discovered Gopal

and realised that his life's driving force lay elsewhere- beyond the bondage of filial ties. The strength of the novel comes from its large minded vision- the upholding of the dignity of Gopal's decision and the tenacious efforts of Sumi to face and accept the changes that have suddenly become a part of her life. Deshpande deserves a salutation for her sensitive portrayal of the internal fragment life of the mind and its fluid moments through uncharted territories. Shashi Deshpande's sympathetic treatment of her male protagonist spells clearly that what matters more than the feminist fulminations is the recognition of elemental, individual differences and scaling narrow parochial gender walls. The committed writer herself writes:

I know that as a writer I am privileged to be living at a time when the women's movement has made it possible for my voice to be heard, for the things I write about to be taken seriously, looked upon issues that concern all of society, and not dismissed as 'women's stuff' (qtd. in Pant)

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## Amrita Pritam's *The Revenue Stamp*: An Assessment

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The first four decades of independence were a crucial period for the spread of ideas on nation-building and consequent decolonization in India. The women writers during these years were spirited by a desire to clarify then justify, to propose rather than demand and to understand rather than claim or blame. It is remarkable that most of the women writers tried to satisfy their urge for self-identity by writing autobiographies. Autobiography is the genre that implies self assertion and self display. Metaphorically it is journey of mind towards the inner recesses of the writer with a perceptive vision of his growth of personality from past to present. Women enter a sensitive process of assimilation and identification through their act of writing autobiography.

The study of women's autobiography can proceed to further analyze the themes like middle class or social morality, fusion of realism with romanticism in self narratives, psycho-religious or spiritual aspects of feminine sensibility or exploitation of the form for self-defence, self preservation, self-discovery or self-assertion by woman.

Amrita Pritam came from a Sikh family of Western Punjab (now Pakistan) whose father, a Sikh preacher Giani Kartar Singh Hitkari, was more inclined to spiritual pursuits but was responsive to reformist impulses. Perhaps, that made him encourages his daughter to write poetry. She started writing poetry at sixteen. Khushwant Singh tells us, "It was syrupy stuff about Sikh Gurus and Sikhism." Amrita's father gave her formal education and she passed the vidvan and Budhiman examination to attain proficiency in Panjabi. She was married before she was an adult, which gave her the name Amrita Pritam and perhaps the necessary comforts and liberty to become a poet of renown. They made an incompatible couple but the dilemma to walk out of this marriage remained with her for a long time. Amrita's greatness primarily rests on



dirge she composed on the eve of the partition of the Punjab in 1947.

Amrita Pritam's autobiography, *The Revenue Stamp*, is valuable as a study of female psyche in its interaction and co-relation with the male mind and the world. The confessional mode and personal tone authenticates it as record of gender and gender constructed traditional and non-traditional images of womanhood. This autobiography is socio-historical document showing how women have been both the victims and agents of social change focusing on contemporary situations.

In life, full of struggle and suffering, Amrita Pritam rebelled against the gender biased ideas of pseudo moral social structure. She was fully aware of her limitations as a woman in patriarchal families and male-oriented communities. It is her creative spirit that empowered her mind to survive all traumatic episodes of her life. She could overcome what Anita Desai calls "The terror of facing single-handed the ferocious assault of existence." (Anita Desai, an Interview with Yashodara Dalmia in *The Times of India* 29th April, 1979, P 13).

Amrita Pritam undertook a process of self-discovery in the enterprise of writing the life story. The major role that becomes instrumental in her self-knowledge is that of a beloved. More than wife, sister, daughter or mother, she pined for response in her role of the beloved. Her self explanation-demonstrates the dependence on some male agent in her vision of life. Amrita Pritam's autobiography moves around her father Sahir, Imroz and sagged for self evaluation.

Amrita Pritam had a troubled childhood. She missed her mother so strongly that resulted in severe psychoses for want of emotional security in her adult life. Amrita lost her mother and suffered her absence especially in her adolescent years. Amrita married according to her father's wish and realized afterwards how she became a victim due to the mismatch. Then she revolted and broke away after a long period of conflict and suffering. She wrote novels for earning but wrote poems in her early age to elude the loneliness she suffered. She suffered at the hands of male agents in society but did not despise the male. She never followed feminist principles in her life. She lived by her convictions, fighting with the mistaken notions regarding womanhood and female excellence.

Amrita Pritam's autobiography is primarily the literary document which exposes socio-cultural construction of gender. It reflects the

deconstructed feminine sensibility against the culturally produced elements of womanhood. As a woman, she is positioned at the locus of complicated, collective and individual constraints of living. Representing herself in man's world, she has been triumphant at the expense of her feminine solidarity to which her autobiography seeks to give credibility. She demonstrates her vision of life creating an order and tracing the growth of her creativity in a lucid way though her creative spirit is linked with gender-orientation and womanhood.

In her quest, Amrita longed for reformation of justice, creation of order and pattern and preservation of her self-integrity. Amrita went on searching the truth from personal and emotional aspects of life to the socio-historical, universal and spiritual ones. Amrita Pritam challenged the very taboos of community and culture by breaking her marriage of her own accord and leading an independent life. She tried to find idealistic vision of love in her relationship with father and then in her dreamy bond with Sahir. She failed in both and finally went to take refuge in compromises. She accepted Imroz and made herself happy by strengthening that relationship. Amrita could never overcome her idealism and her strong sense of decency and grace of womanhood. Her quiet way of expression was her art of writing.

Nostalgia, contemplation analytical vision of experience, thought and the world are the typically romantic features cultivated by Amrita in her writings. She writes of her dreams, she felt; were suggestive of some reality of life. She interprets those in her aesthetic way and links her own world of romantic ideas with the real one she lived in. As a poet and writer, Amrita Pritam had a lofty approach to life and the world. She sublimated language, values, even her feminine sensibility. She talks about woman as 'Shakti' and questions that supremacy of male in a philosophical way by illustrating the myth of 'Ardhanarishwar' whose body is half male and half female.

Amrita Pritam was disillusioned so disturbingly in marriage that she did not marry again although she accepted Imroz the last man in her life as her mate. Amrita Pritam believed that disappointing marriage is not worth living and it is not so significant as to waste the whole life for the sake of it. She stepped out of the domestic walls when she felt her creativity would cease within those suffocating relationships. In her quest for truth, her self-expression touches the heights of spirituality. She

laments the incompleteness of relationships and suffers the sense of loss and isolation and exposes such pretensions in life.

Amrita Pritam matured and mellowed to become a mystic and a philosopher. Amrita Pritam lived the life in a way others dreamt of living. She made her characters too tragic rebels like herself. She experienced the individual's struggle between two opposite emotions inherent in her own personality. She waged a relentless war between her private authentic self and social self. She had known by her experience that women's life is torn between private and public, familial and social, moral and mental forces. "Love was her creed, the world her home, and her quest was the only law that bound her." (Amrita Pritam, *Two Faces of Eve*).

As a sensitive individual she struggled with her fate and tried to participate in society. Her intense involvement with the creative self on her replaces her personal relations which also throb with the energy of deep passion. For her, it is vain to write anything without the concept of social morality, the sense of justice, equality and honesty of individual's share in society.

Amrita's social revolt through her pen is a part of her general revolt against the surfacial or superficial beliefs and wrong sense of values. She perceives that 'Atma-Vichara' i.e. 'self-enquiry' is the only source of fulfillment and knowledge to a creative mind. It is a type of 'Gyana-yoga', the yoga of knowledge, to think and analyze the self. Amrita felt rejected as a daughter, as a wife and as a beloved. She revealed an extraordinary sense of dignity and graceful codes of relationship in her expressions. As a mother and grandmother she has been enjoying her role and felt comforted. Amrita disbelieved in God as a child when her mother died. She rebelled against the faith of her father and refused to offer prayers. She also argued with her grandmother who kept the utensils used by Muslim visitors untouched. As a writer, she emerged above the conflicts of faith & doubt. She wrote stories and novels in which demons suffered for this broad and matured view.

She was boycotted by her community for a while for allowing a person of another religion stay with her. She patiently proved her self-preserved values. Amrita's motto 'look a bit higher' was always her inspiring principle for life. She did not confine herself to one religion or community. She belonged to the world of reality and followed human values in her conduct.

Among the contemporary Indian writers Amrita Pritam occupies a unique position. This uniqueness surfaces because of her foray into both the lovely and a harsh imaginative world wherein she could ooze-out confessional outpouring of a sensitive soul and also manifest the patriarchal social constraints. The confessional strains are very much evident when Amrita makes a candid confession of the intimate experiences of her life. Even a casual reading of her autobiography suggests that all experiences of her life since childhood have been created and lived under one shadow or the other: the shadow of death, weapons, dreams, patriarchy and shadows of authoritarian power, shadows of contemplation shadows of unrequited love.

Amrita Pritam has portrayed prodigious personal experiences into the texture of her writings. Her autobiographies are a personal testimony of the new sense of worth, she experienced as an individual whose specific life she thought was of interest and importance. The materials she gleaned from her personal reminiscences whether real or visionary have been converted into an artifact of beauty and order. Narrating the predicament of a women writer, Shobha De says: "For a woman, a book in progress is like a secret lover she has to hide from her family and so people are terrified at the thought of writing Her writings were criticized and about themselves. They find all kind of excuses. They lie. They invent. They rebut." (Selective Memory 1-2). The most conspicuous trait that is evident in Amrita's autobiographies is a woman's battle against authoritarian and male hegemonic discourse and her determination "to live the life she imagines."

Out of her several precious moments which both enlighten and consume her heart is the memory of unrequited love for Sahir. Because of the conservative family milieu and its hatred towards Muslim, there existed hatred between the two. Her grand mother would feed Muslim friend in branded utensils which she hated. She confesses, "Neither grandmother nor I knew them that the man I was to fall in love would be of the same faith as the branded utensils were meant for." (The Revenue Stamp 5). Her passionate longings for Sahir, remained a constant source both of her hopes and despair. She missed much in life, but bore the pangs of bereavement with stoical fortitude. Amrita's love for Sahir is reminiscent of a sufi poet of Punjab, Mirza, who having seen the bewitching exquisite and matchless beauty of Sahiban, exclaimed with

delight, 'Man Mirza tan Sahiban'. In similar way, when Amrita describes her love for Sahir, it seems that Sahir has made her heart his abode. Imroz accepted her with all her dreams & realities, he alone tried to bring her private self to perfection. She dedicates her book to Imroz and to each one who lights the earthen lamp by extending the flame and offers the last letter of the soul to surrender and seek the heavenly existence in the lap of God. Like Browning Amrita is too optimistic to belong to "all times".

It is an affirmation of the life she lived as a woman and as a poet. *The Revenue Stamp* shows the cognitive life vision of a woman who not only loved poetry but has lived poetry. It reflects her rebellious ideas and is an expression of a romantic mind and the sufferings of the woman in her. Her transition from self to society, from dreams to reality, from love to spirituality, from poetry to mysticism marks the voyage of Amrita as an artist. The autobiography proves to be a little window viewing the inside of the writers mind and a vehicle reaching finally into the roads of the perception of her life.

*The Revenue Stamp* is an extraordinary example of contemplative and interpretation of her life. It can be analysed through convenient division like childhood and youth, love, social ethos, marriage, private self, womanhood and above all the poetic vision. Amrita's images, perceptions of how small things and events in childhood affected her development, are so accurate that one cannot really doubt her capacity of psychological penetration. Amrita fuses her past memories with her present. She consciously polishes her expression and is too careful to mention her womanly weaknesses. She presents her self-image in her description of childhood, girlhood and youth so metamorphic ally that her autobiography becomes an appealing example in its imagist use of language and aesthetic vision.

Experience e very strongly. "I was thirsty for life", she states, I wanted living contacts with those stars I had been taught to worship from a far. What I got instead was advice and constraint which only fed my rebellion."

Amrita declares in the prologue to the autobiography that the complete texture of her book is threaded by her personal feelings. Feminine agony openly and agrees that her other books depict the same agonized experiences and feelings but with a mark, a quite, a different name of a character and so on. Amrita's self reflections in the R.S. are the

passages appropriately analyzing how a sensitive woman finds it difficult to talk about her love and life in love.

Emotions in a relationship, afraid of lessening their value in expression. It is She felt the quest for knowledge and she reveals her One cannot so easily speak out those delicacies of important to note that despite all her rebellious ideas and bold expressions Amrita was a very shy woman as a beloved. She could neither utter nor convey her love for Sahir for nearly twenty or more years. Amrita's fear for her 'self' within a sexual code, forced her to shield the image and reality of her ideal love. Like an expert ballerina, she played simultaneously with the realities of her life and her imagination. With Sahir, she had a voiceless sense of harmony where in her quest for love was just dreamt within. With Imroz, she accepted the reality of her loneliness and sharing it with a man to continue the sense of creative existence.

Amrita wrote in the complex socio-cultural ethos and had to struggle for her freedom and expression of self. She lived before and after the partition and suffered various riots of religion and division of nation. She talks about this dark period in her novels *Pinjar* and *Dr Dev* and several short stories poems. Amrita developed a habit of brooding and philosophizing at an early age. She grew up to perceive the drabness of middle class morality. Her revolt against social injustice in general and against women in particular was also the result of her thought provoking isolation. The act of writing was a way to self fulfillment.

An autobiography for Amrita becomes an instrument for bringing the suppressed private self. Woman; she did what she thought she should and not only defied codes of feminine conduct but also revolted against the age-old system of marriage. It is true that Amrita does not glorify the role of woman, especially that of beloved and mother, which is the contribution of the artist in her. In her autobiography, she never emphasizes her virtues or sufferings as a woman.

Amrita established herself by her limitless trust in the creative powers of mind and relationships. She overcame all frustration, criticism and humiliation Amrita herself never lived like a traditionally ideal on personal and social level. She has preserved her honour and individuality at the cost of social and personal comforts and pleasures. She sadly accepts that she achieved freedom but what a terrible price one has to pay for it. Amrita views the intellect and temperament of woman with a

different stance. She is neither stereotyped sympathizer nor an outraged feminist nor a slogans viewer. One needs to understand that she is a humanist rather than a feminist. She believes that her poems are the needles to prick the consciousness of man, for liberating his mind enslaved in regional, religious and intellectual powers around. In *The Revenue Stamp*, Amrita agrees that one has to change one's perceptions after a gap of time. Meanings have to be sought out. She says "Those of today may not be acceptable tomorrow." The autobiographical act is in a way a reconstitution of the meanings the writer seeks in life. Amrita has a strong urge for creation and writing on one hand while she is able to detach herself from external and public reactions on the other. Writing was both a gesture of protest and a way to self discovery. The truth that Amrita seeks in her self analysis is not the historical truth of past events and actions but the truth of her feelings, ideas and creativity. There is a mixture of poetic images and critical remarks in her style. In her 'assertiveness' there is a subtle shade of the feminine desire to submit her devotion and existence to the man she loved.

*The Revenue Stamp* is an intense experience of this search for truth. It is only in autobiography that she found the real opportunity of full satisfying her impulse for truth. Her world is created by her strong sensibility and offers no place to hatred, bitterness and harsh feelings.

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## Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence- A Reconsideration*

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Traditionally, in the Hindu marriage the position of husband and wife is clearly defined. The husband is expected to be the authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the life of the wife. The wife should regard him as her master and should serve faithfully. Thus the traditional concept of superior husband and subordinate wife had been the guideline of Hindu marriage. In an Indian marriage it is understood that the wife will merge her name, personality, life style and in fact, her entire life into that of the husband.

Marriage and sexuality as a subject of study has been left unexplored by most of the early Indo-English novelists, as it was overshadowed by the various socio-political problems that dominated the milieu. Shashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relations she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them.

*That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande's most critically acclaimed novel is about the long silence that engulfs the marriage of Jaya and Mohan. Mohan's demand of an English speaking wife makes tie the knot with Jaya, a well educated girl. Jaya in turn marries Mohan out of defiance, as her mother disapproved of him. In spite of Mohan's expectations he had a strong traditional background where he had grown up seeing his mother silently submit to every erratic demand of his father. With the roles of submissive wife and domineering husband deeply ingrained in his mind, he enters into matrimony with Jaya. Whereas Jaya, the only daughter of an unconventional family, adored by her father and brothers was brought up differently. The disparity in their background leads to a

clash of expectations.

The first conflict of ideas takes place when Jaya was pregnant and repulsed with the odour of cooking oil asks Mohan to cook. Insulted by her demand to do something unmanly, Mohan tries to laugh it off. Jaya's insistence flares up into fight in which Jaya responds in an equally bad temper, as she had always done at her father's place. Mohan shocked at her display of anger, voices his disapproval by repeating "How could you? I never thought my wife could say such thing to me. You're my wife".<sup>1</sup>

Jaya realizes that her anger had shattered him. It had broken the image of a traditional wife which Mohan had in mind—the image created by his mother, about whom he had proudly told her, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her"<sup>2</sup>. His mother had silently endured the moods of her drunkard husband and slogged to fulfill his irrational demands. This had set in Mohan's mind the qualities of endurance and sacrifice in a woman.

Jaya's realization of the depth of patriarchal traditional belief in Mohan makes her to understand the cause of distaste on his face when she shouted and his refusal to speak to her till she realized her mistake. She realized that, "to him anger made a woman unmanly". Since then Jaya like a dutiful wife learnt not to annoy him lest it should affect her marriage. For the first time she becomes aware of the role of a wife and its limitations. She blames her parents and their easy life-style, which did not train her to be a perfect wife as she saw in the women at Mohan's house.

To become an ideal wife and mother, Jaya learns to suppress her own desires and acts according to her husband's wishes. With this "Suhasini the name Mohan had given her at the time of marriage begins to give shape to Jaya's personality and becomes the antithesis of Jaya, the rebel. Jaya willingly accepts her new identity of Mohan's wife, of Suhasini, and tries to become and remain a smiling, placid, motherly woman, a woman who lovingly nurtured her family, a woman who coped"<sup>3</sup>. As Suhasini she becomes the epitome of a happy woman as traditional society perceives it self-centred and priggish.

Jaya even gives up her creative writing as Mohan disapproved of the stories she wrote. On his suggestion she takes up writing non-controversial issues. Mohan takes pride in her writings but to Jaya it was a frivolous piece which satisfied everyone except her. The importance of Vanitamani's words "husband is like a sheltering tree which is to be kept

alive and flourishing even if it meant by deceit and lies,"<sup>4</sup> sets in her mind and she adjusts her life to it. Thus begins the 'long silence' which dominates their life.

When the monotonous flow of their life is disrupted by Mohan's malpractice, they send their children for a vacation with some friends. Jaya like an obedient wife follows Mohan to their Dadar flat. She unquestioningly accompanies him for "he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails(...)"<sup>5</sup>.

For, years she had taught herself to wait in silence, to accept her husband's desire mutely. The appalling banality of such a life dawns upon her when her busy routine is replaced by idle hours. Jaya feels, "There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing. I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy"<sup>6</sup>. Living alone with Mohan in the Dadar flat Jaya reviews the sexual aspect of their marriage and the loss of desire and emotions in her. For her "sexual memories are the coldest"<sup>7</sup>. They stirred up nothing in her. For her it had become more of a routine or a mechanical process without necessary emotions. Mohan never tries to know her expectations and desires and even Jaya never speaks of them.

Mohan's upbringing which had made him insensitive to a woman's needs reminds Jaya of Kamat, a caring and understanding man, who used to live upstairs when Jaya and Mohan had first lived in this Dadar flat. Jaya's association with Kamat develops into a deep friendship based on communication. In him, Jaya finds the companion she missed in Mohan. She shares with Kamat her memories of her father and mostly her desire to become a writer. Kamat advises her and helps her discover her talent as a writer but in the process he feels attracted towards her. Kamat's gift of casual physical contact receives desire in Jaya and reminds her of her sexuality. Kamat is brought in the novel as a foil to Mohan though Jaya's intimacy with him does not lead to any physical relationship between the two. She walks out on Kamat when she finds him dead as she is aware that society does not acknowledge any relationship between a woman and a man outside marriage, however innocent it may be.

Now, back in the Dadar flat with little work on her hands Jaya's desire to write all about marriage, love and life revives. She notices the

condition of married women around her and realizes the extent of suffering a woman has to undergo in marriage. She recalls the life of Mohan's mother. Her never enduring suffering had to be endured in marriage as she had no choice. In a frustrated attempt to free herself of repeated pregnancies, she hit herself and tried to abort yet another unwanted child. In the process she met her painful death coupled with ignominy for she dared to go against tradition by aborting her unborn child.

Similarly Jaya's old maid-servant Jeeja also experiences a turbulent marriage to a drunkard only to be abandoned for another woman. Jeeja blindly accepts the traditional belief that a married woman must give birth to children. Since she has failed to do so, she accepts that she is of no importance to her husband and he has every right to abandon her. Therefore she accepts his second wife and even looks after their son after their death.

Jaya's analysis of her marriage makes her realize the limitations of the traditional wife. In retrospect, she is forced to accept the fact that, in seventeen years of marriage she had moulded herself according to Mohan's wishes. The only assertion of her self she recalls was the abortion of her third child, which she has undergone without Mohan's knowledge. Certain that Mohan will impose his will on her, Jaya has taken this bold step without informing him.

Regarding the rest of her life, she feels that she has unconsciously done what her family has advised her to do, 'to keep Mohan happy'. She realizes that she chose to do so because it was easy to conform, be guilt free and comfortable. But in the process her marital relationship has become like "Two bullocks yoked together ( ..... ) It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?"<sup>8</sup>.

When Mohan with dwindling confidence seeks Jaya's support, she fails to sympathise with him as her years of silence have made her indifferent. Feeling cheated, Mohan realizes for the first time that Jaya's silence does not mean her unstinting support. His accusation that she is indifferent to him, a fact, he notices after seventeen long years amuses Jaya. She finally breaks her traditional silence by bursting into a hysterical laughter and Mohan humiliated by her reaction walks out of the house.

However Mohan's walking out on her makes her suddenly feel

vulnerable and deserted. Jaya is overcome by the fear of being abandoned by her husband. Her awareness of Kusum, her alter ego who had gone through a similar fear and committed suicide because of it gives Jaya the courage to fight her fears. Deshpande has brought in the charted of Kusum highlight the silent acceptance of suppression by woman. Kusum's state of distress and desperation leads to mental imbalance. In order not to face the humiliation of an abandoned wife she ends her life by jumping into a well. Kusum's story helps Jaya, but in the process unable to bear so much mental strain Jaya collapses and falls seriously ill.

However, as she recovers, she realizes that Mohan cannot be solely held responsible for their troubled marriage. She begins to accept her own failure in establishing a normal reciprocal relationship with Mohan. Her contemplation of their past life unravels to her, own role in the suppression. She realizes that she agreed to Mohan's wishes because conforming to social norms was 'safe, comfortable and unassailable'. Long hours of contemplation lead to her decision to give up the role of a silent and passive partner with a resurgence of faith, Jaya now decides to erase the silence that had defined and distorted her communication with her husband. In the end Jaya feels that "Two bullocks Yoked together that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of belief in ourselves. I've always thought-there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices".<sup>9</sup> Lord Krishna's sermon in Bhagwadgita, "I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire"<sup>10</sup> gives her the courage to assert her feelings. Mohan's letter and her long hours of contemplation lead to her affirmative decision to give up her silence. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists turn out to be most realistic and balanced in their view as, Jaya after a long deafening silence and seventeen years spent with an insensitive and rigid man, decides to change her own perspective and hopes to change, that of Mohan too. With a hope to make Mohan understand her and her feelings, Jaya prepares to face life for "life has always to be made possible"<sup>11</sup>.



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## Integrating Literature and Language in EFL/ESL Classroom

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"Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become." - C.S Lewis

There has been a long and unending debate among the educationists regarding the place of literature in EFL/ESL classrooms for pedagogical purposes. The focal point of my paper is to vindicate the use of literature as an effective tool for teaching both basic language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) thus integrating literature and language. Presently the role of literature as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum rather than as an ultimate aim of English instruction has been gaining importance. Widdowson (1978:3) points out two levels of linguistic knowledge: (1) the level of usage and (2) the level of use. He defines usage as knowledge of linguistic rules, and by use, he means how to use these rules for effective communication. Now we have to see whether literature can contribute to the knowledge of these two. Literature and the teaching of language skills, benefits of literature to language teaching and the criteria for selecting a literary piece within the area of teaching English through literature teaching in TESL / TEFL programs are discussed in a threadbare manner. The issues as to how, when, where, and why literature should be incorporated in ESL / EFL curriculum will be dealt with. Vigorous discussion of how literature and ESL / EFL instruction can work together and interact for the benefit of students and teachers has led to the flourishing of interesting ideas, learning, and improved instruction for all (Hismangolu 2005:1). Why a language teacher should use literary texts in the language classroom, what sort of literature language teachers should use with language learners,

integration of literature and the teaching of language, and benefits of teaching language through literature and the place of literature as a tool in teaching English as a second or foreign language will be discussed.

Literature is nothing but language pregnant with meaning in which a variety of linguistic usage finds expression in various contexts. It is a storehouse of wisdom and time-tested knowledge contributed by the best minds of all ages and countries. It depicts human life as it is. But it is not merely a depiction of reality; it is rather a value-addition. Literary works are portrayals of the thinking patterns and social norms prevalent in society. They are a depiction of the different facets of human life. Classical literary works serve as a food for thought and a tonic for imagination and creativity. Exposing an individual to good literary works, is equivalent to providing him/her with the finest of educational opportunities. On the other hand, the lack of exposure to good literary works is equal to depriving an individual from an opportunity to grow as an individual. Ezra Pound (1968:23) observes: "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree." The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills and language areas is gaining significance with the passage of time within the field of foreign language learning and teaching. Now a days several language teachers make their students translate literary texts like drama, poetry and short stories into the mother tongue. Translation gives students the chance to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in other courses, as an application area covering four basic skills. Translation and transliteration can be applied in the classrooms in order to give the students an opportunity to try their hands at two languages.

### **Should Literary Text be used in Foreign Language classes?**

The educationists assert that in English for speakers of other languages, there is renewed interest in the use of literature in TEFL/TESL classroom. For example, Gregory Strong stresses that literature may be a part of a communicative method in three ways: (1) by providing a context in which to develop student's reading strategies and knowledge of non-fiction and literary texts; (2) by being the basis of an extensive reading program, with attendant acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical forms; and (3) by offering the opportunity to explore cross-cultural values

(Strong 1996: 291). Collie and Slater (1990:3) point out that there are four main reasons which lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom. These are: (1) valuable authentic material, (2) cultural enrichment, (3) language enrichment and (4) personal involvement. Lazar (1993: 14-15) highlights the use literature and mentions such valid reasons for the effective use of literature in the language classroom as the following: (1) It is very motivating. (2) It is authentic material. (3) It has general educational value. (4) It is found in many syllabuses. (5) It helps students to understand another culture. (6) It is a stimulus for language acquisition. (7) It develops students' interpretative abilities. (8) Students enjoy it and it is fun. (9) It is highly valued and has a high status. (10) It expands students' language awareness. (11) It encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings.

It is good to expose learners to literature in the classroom because the skills they acquire in dealing with difficult or unknown language can spontaneously be learned through this rich source of language used in the class. Literature encourages interaction. Literary texts are often rich in multiple layers of meaning, and can be effectively used for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions. Literature expands language awareness. Asking learners to examine sophisticated or non standard examples of language (which can occur in literary texts) makes them more aware of the norms of language use (Lazar 1993:19).

Literature educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom. Literature motivates and it holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Literature as a subject has as its principal aim the development of the capacity for individual response to language use.

(Widdowson 1975:76). To cap it all, literature is a use of impeccable language which provides the students with an opportunity to know the different kinds of usage. Literature is a fathomless sea of knowledge filled with various linguistic items and expressions used in various contexts.

Criteria for Selecting Suitable Literary Texts in Foreign Language Classes While selecting the literary texts to be used in language classes,

various factors like needs, motivation, interests, cultural background and language level of the students should be taken into account. It should also be ensured whether a particular work is able to reveal the kind of personal involvement by arousing the learners' interest and eliciting strong, positive reactions from them. Reading a literary text is more likely to have a long-term and valuable effect upon the learners' linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge when it is useful, relevant, meaningful and amusing. Choosing books relevant to the real-life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the learner is of great importance. Language difficulty has to be considered as well. If the language of the literary work is simple, this may facilitate the comprehensibility of the literary text but is not in itself the most crucial criterion. Interest, appeal, and relevance are also prominent. Enjoyment; a fresh insight into issues felt to be related to the heart of people's concerns; the pleasure of encountering one's own thoughts or situations exemplified clearly in a work of art; the other, equal pleasure of noticing those same thoughts, feelings, emotions, or situations presented by a completely new perspective: all these are motives helping learners to cope with the linguistic obstacles that might be considered too great in less involving material (Collie and Slater 1990:6-7). The difficulties in understanding literary text may result from the ignorance of the the language being used, of the ideas being used and of the form being used. (Burke and Brumfit 1986: 174) There are various factors regarding the text to be taken in to account- like: is the text old or new, what is the genre of the work, which dominant literary school does it allude to, is it short or long, who is the author, is it culturally significant and appropriate etc.

### **The Role Literature in the Teaching of Language Skills**

Literature being an authentic and valid material for language teaching plays an important role in teaching four basic language skills like reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, when using literature in the language classroom, skills should always be taught in an integrated way. Teachers should try to teach basic language skills as an integral part of oral and written language use, as a part of the means for creating both referential and interactional meaning, not merely as an aspect of the oral and written production of words, phrases and sentences. All the four language skills should be given the equal importance. Here the

resourcefulness and improvisation of the teacher should be used to combine and integrate all the language skills.

### **Literature and Reading**

Emphasizing the importance of reading, Francis Bacon writes: "Reading maketh a fullman; conference a readyman, and writing an exact man" Reading plays a pivotal role in learning any language as it is through reading that a large part of knowledge comes to our mind. Sandra Mackay (1986:192) writes: "An evaluation of reading proficiency rests on an understanding of what is involved in the reading process. Widdowson (1977:74) and others regard reading 'not as a reaction to a text but as interaction between writer and reader mediated through the text'. This interaction seems to me, occurs on two levels: linguistic and conceptual. In other words, reading necessitates the ability to interact with a text by decoding the language and comprehending the concepts presented." The teacher should give model reading of certain literary pieces giving stress to tone; intonation and stress. Then it should be followed by a reading of the students' one by one, if possible, all. The teacher should be much careful about the pronunciation of the students. He should adopt a dynamic, student-centered approach toward comprehension of a literary work. In reading lesson, discussion begins at the literal level with direct questions of fact regarding setting, characters, and plot which can be answered by specific reference to the text. When students master literal understanding, they move to the inferential level, where they must make speculations and interpretations concerning the characters, setting, and theme, and where they produce the author's point of view. After comprehending a literary selection at the literal and inferential levels, students are ready to do a collaborative work. That is to state that they share their evaluations of the work and their personal reactions to it - to its characters, its themes, and the author's point of view. This is also the suitable time for them to share their reactions to the work's natural cultural issues and themes. The third level, the personal / evaluative level stimulates students to think imaginatively about the work and provokes their problem-solving abilities. Discussion deriving from such questions can be the foundation for oral and written activities (Stern 1991:332).

Literature is a suitable subject matter for extensive and intensive reading. Novels, biographies, autobiographies, travelogues and dramas

are good for extensive reading purposes. The teacher can fix a limited time for the students to read a lengthy piece of literature without extensive use of dictionary. In this way, learners learn how to read a lot in a short period of time by guessing the meaning of certain words. Poetry can be one of the best literary texts for intensive reading purposes as it is good for close analysis. The students can be asked to read each line closely to find out the hidden and implied layers of meanings expressed in the text by reading between the lines. Thus, the students can be given the practice of extensive and intensive reading through literary texts. Literature also gives ample space for practicing reading sub skills like: skimming, scanning, and finding the main ideas. Reading in literature serves two purposes :( 1) enjoyment (2) information.

### **Literature and Writing**

Literature plays a vital role to motivate the students as a source for writing in ESL /EFL. Literature as a model plays a pivotal role when student writing becomes closely similar to the original work or clearly imitates its content, theme, organization, and style.

Literature serves as a subject matter when student writing exhibits original thinking like interpretation or analysis, or when it emerges from, or is creatively stimulated by, the reading. Literature provides various themes to write on in terms of guided, free, controlled and other types of writing giving the students different options for writing.

### **Literature as a Model for Writing**

When we talk of a work of literature as a model of writing, we assume that we can use it in more ways than one keeping it in mind as a touchstone of excellence. Some of the well-known and practiced ways are as follows:

#### **Controlled Writing**

This is one of the simplest and basic model in which the beginner is expected to rewrite the passage in an arbitrary way he likes. For example, the instructor can give him the instruction to write a report on the Window-Scene of 'Romeo and Juliet' which he saw secretly as a newspaper reporter. A student can be asked to write a diary entry posing herself as one of the friends of Juliet.

**Guided Writing:** This type of writing can be for a little advanced level. The instructor is expected to give a number of questions to be answered by the student. The retelling of the narration is a very common exercise in this regard. Paraphrasing the passage has been a well-known instruction which allows the learner to use the language as directed by the instructor. The teacher must have imagination and insight to enable the student to write beyond the literal level.

### **Reproducing the model**

This is a little higher level of activity and is suitable for the students who are capable of writing creatively as well as critically. For them, the sky is the limit. For example after reading the novel 'Pride and Prejudice' the students can be asked to write an independent narration from their experience based on similar type of characters as Elizabeth and Darcy. When the students read a simple poem, for example, 'A Rainbow' by Wordsworth they can be prompted to write similar verses based on their experiences of nature and its beauty.

### **Literature as the subject matter of writing**

Very often, the instructors fail to provide innovative topics for composition. Students neither get challenge nor are they inspired to write creatively. A prudent instructor can ask the students to write on the topics directly or indirectly related with literature. I do not mean that they should be asked to write on the problem of deceit in the plays of Shakespeare, though it can also be good idea. It is suggested that the students are to be guided by us seriously.

Literature develops the art of thinking. It encourages us to apply what we read in a way that affects our daily life. The role of the instructor is to guide his students to read literature as life-experiences. Once the literature is chosen as life experiences, we can then set out to provide the students the kind of assignments that connect them with the real life experience. Literature is about connecting. We learn to write by connecting with life-experiences on the one hand and the writers' experiences on the other hand.

Literature also proves to be a means of inspiration for the students to try their hands at creative writing as we say writers are born and made. The teacher can ask his students to follow the following

techniques to begin their creative writing.

**Adding to the Work:** It means adding something to the existing works of literature. For example, in Macbeth, there is one Comic-Scene in all which is followed by the murder of the king Duncan and the teacher can ask his students to add one more comic scene to the tragedy just after the death of Lady Macbeth to temporarily remove the tragic tension. This will give the students a good start and confidence to begin creative writing. **Changing the Work:** The students can be asked to change the existing literary works completely to give a different effect. For example, the students can take any of Shakespeare's comedies and give it a tragic end.

### **Literature, Speaking, and Listening**

The literary texts can be an effective tool for the development speaking and listening skills. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, pantomime, discussion, and group activities can be resorted to by the teacher to practice speaking and listening skills basing them on literary works.

### **Oral Reading**

Pronunciation is very important while giving the students a drill of speaking and listening. Language teachers can make listening, comprehension and pronunciation interesting, motivating and contextualized at the upper levels, playing a recording or video of a literary work, reading literature aloud themselves. Having students read literature aloud contributes to developing speaking as well as listening ability. Moreover, it also leads to improving pronunciation. Pronunciation may be the focus before, during, and after the reading. (Hismangolu 2005:59)

### **Dramatization**

It is not a matter of debate now that literature-based dramatic activities are valuable for ESL/EFL classroom. They play an important role by in the development of the oral skills as they motivate students to achieve clearer comprehension of a work's plot and a deeper comprehension and awareness of its characters. Though drama in the classroom can assume many forms, but the three conspicuous are these: (1) dramatization, (2) role- playing, and (3) improvisation.

Dramatization can be performed by the students in classroom as per the directions of the teacher. Students can be asked to write their own scripts for short stories, scenes of drama or sections of novels, keeping them very near to the real text. The students can also write their own dialogues on the basis of literary texts. Browning's Dramatic Monologues can be a model for the students to write poems having one or more personae and then playing the same roles themselves. Students should attentively read assigned sections of dialogues in advance and be able to answer questions about characters and plot. They should indicate vocabulary, idioms, or dialogues they don't understand and words they cannot pronounce. Students next rehearse the scene with their partners. At last, the dramatization is presented before the class. But all this arrangement needs a lot of work and resourcefulness on the part of the teacher. Both improvisation and role-playing may be developed around the characters, plot, and themes of a literary work. The success of improvisation depends on the experience and resourcefulness of the teacher as it is a dramatization without a script. In improvisation, learners are presented with a stimulus situation. The starting point for an improvisation may be a simple situation from literary work into which the students are asked to project themselves. But in role playing, students are asked to adopt a specific role from the work being read and join in a speaking activity which gives an ample scope for speaking and listening skills. For listening practice, the learners can be exposed to the audio versions of the poems, short stories, or novels. The musical elements in poetry stimulate the learners' desire for approximating their speaking patterns to the native speaker norms by adhering to the principles of rhythm, rhyme, and intonation. In addition to above given techniques, the recorded speeches of the famous literary figures can be played in the classroom through audio / video modes.

### **Group Activities**

Group activities help a lot in enhancing critical thinking and argumentative ability by stimulating total participation of the students. Through them all students are involved and the participation is multidirectional. To teach English through literature, the following group activities can be resorted to in language classroom: general class discussion, small-group work, panel discussions, and debates. All of these

group activities both develop the speaking abilities of the students and give importance to pronunciation practice. Teachers indicate pronunciation errors of the students during the act of such activities so as to correct such errors (Stern 1991:337). Thus, group activities prove helpful in developing the speaking and listening skills of the students.

The role of English literature as a tool to teach language in the English curriculum of many non-English speaking countries cannot be underestimated. By studying Literature, students can learn not only language aspects such as vocabulary items but also they can learn how to use language for specific and aesthetic purposes. Sufficient knowledge of the concepts of beat, metre and rhythm can improve their own writing as they are able to appreciate and apply these ideas. Moreover, the study of Literature can provide students with a fresh and creative angle with which they can approach their studies in particular and their lives in general. Literature provides the students with sufficient opportunities to exercise four basic language skills and language areas as it is a rich source of authentic material. The teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature. It is his duty to determine how, when, why and what sort of literature can be explored in the classroom by determining the aims and objectives of language teaching in relation to ability, needs and expectations of the taught. Then it will be easier to determine its place in EFL/ESL teaching and the aims and objectives which can be fulfilled by its use.

Literature does not only develop the linguistic efficiency of the students in the target language, but it also opens new vistas in to the culture of the target language.

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## Review Essays

## Colonial Conflict in Basavaraj Naikar's *A Dreamer of Freedom*

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Basavaraj Naikar, currently Professor Emeritus, is a bilingual writer in Kannada and English. He has published many translations and critical works. As a creative writer, Naikar has published novels, dramas and short story collections. He is the recipient of prestigious awards for his overall contribution to literature. He has published several research articles and reviews in national and international journals. He reviews Indian books for *World Literature Today*, U.S.A. regularly. I have taken up *A Dreamer of Freedom*, a historical play about 1857 Indian war of Independence for my critical assessment and evaluation.

*A Dreamer of Freedom* by Basavaraj Naikar is a historical play which depicts the interesting life and struggle of Bhaskararao Bhave of Naragund Kingdom of Peshwa dynasty for freedom. It shows the colonial conflict between Bhaskararao Bhave and the East India Company authorities during 1857 war of independence. It is an absorbing play rooted in the burning passion for self-rule and self-respect from the tyranny of British rulers. The negative policies of the East-India Company reached a climax during the day of Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor General of India. The Disarmament Bill, the Doctrine of Lapse and the general imperialistic attitude of the British in India aggravated the problems for the royal Indian princes who had to lose their power, property, self-respect and military capacities for various reasons. Against this background, Bhaskararao Bhave of Naragund kingdom fought against the Doctrine of Lapse which strictly prohibits the adoptions from among the relatives. According to this law, all the kings of the princely states who have no children of their own cannot adopt anybody without the permission of the authorities of the company Sarkar. When the British authorities refused permission to him, he rebelled against them. This really infuriated Mr. Manson who was appointed as the Political Agent of South India to look after the sixty-three princely states. He summoned meeting of the kings to familiarize himself with the kings of all the

kingdoms of south India. The arrangements for the function on the palace campus were complete. They erected four ground gates at all the four directions. After crossing them, the kings had to cross another four gates which were smaller than the outer ones. The kings thus had to duck their heads to cross still smaller gates. All these gates erected symbolized Mr. Manson's arrogance and ill-treatment towards royal Indian princes. A man of self-respect, Bhaskararao Bhave strongly reacted to action of the East India Company.

Manson Saheb, don't you remember what you have written in your letter? After joining your duty as the Political Agent of South India, you wanted to acquaint yourself with all three sixty-three kings of the princely states. That is why you asked us to come here with all our dignity, pomp and glory. Accordingly, we have all come here with dignity and style. But the gates of the conference parlor erected by you are so small that we have to get off own horseback and bend own heads to enter the gates. If we bent our heads like this, don't you think it is an insult to our status and dignity? Don't you think insult to us is tantamount to insult to you? That is why I asked my bodyguard Virabhadranayaka to break these small gates. We have maintained our dignity and status as advised by you. What's wrong with it? (Act II, Scene vii, 42-43).

The breaking of gates symbolized the acts of bravery, revolt and rebellion against the colonial rulers. The colonial conflict continued in the matter of farming when the real problem was viewed from a broader perspective. The oppression of Swadeshi rights is echoed strongly in the words of Bhaskararao Bhave:

These British people bring the cotton seeds from America and sell them to our farmers, thereby encouraging them to grow it in their fields. Then, they buy that cotton and send it to Britain for wearing. In return, they will sell the cotton cloth back to us (Act II, Scene x, 52).

The intention of East India Company was always to forestall such quarrels and conflicts among the natives. This is evidently clear in the following arguments between Manson and Bhaskararao Bhave.

**BHASKARARAO :** Manson Saheb, as far as I know, you have permitted a few kings to adopt the boys of their choice. Similarly, you have to permit us also to adopt.

**MANSON (Angrily) :** Mr. Bhaskararao, I cannot tolerate this arrogance of yours. I cannot permit you for adoption (ACT III, Scene i, 61).

When all the kings of South Indian princely states have decided to fight against the British People, Bhaskararao Bhave directed Vishnupant, the commander to install all the cannons on the fortifications of palace as well as on top of the hill. The preparations of war material were being planned with his confidants. He ordered his clerks Banyabapu and Krishnajipant to collect the maximum quantity of gunpowder and get ready to meet any eventuality. The British influenced some of his officers to their own side and his own men like Banyabapu and Krishnajipant were used as their spies to secretly pass on information. They indulged in the acts of betrayal and deceit. They deceived their own king who fed them for years. 'Divide and Rule' a British Policy, was clearly employed against Bhaskararao Bhave just when he was preparing for the war. Manson lured them with appropriate rewards and asked both Banyabapu & Krishnajipant to mix oil and millet in the gun powder and render it dysfunctional.

**MANSON:** Look, Mr. Banyabapu and Mr. Krishnajipant, your king Bhaskararao Bhave has made all the arrangements for fighting with our company govt. you must mix oil and millet in the gunpowder and render it useless. We must help those who help us. That is the policy of the East India Company (Act III: Scene ix, 82-83).

Manson assured them of half of the Kingdom of Naragund if they helped them in the right way. Meanwhile, Bhaskararao Bhave suspected that his own people might be carrying tales and prejudicing against him. Chandralal, Martanda, Raghopant Joshi, Ram, Banyabapu and

Krishnajipant became conspirators and traitors who used every trick in their disguised appearances to secretly meet Mr. Manson and passed confidential news from time to time. The colonial anger and arrogance of Manson appears in the following dialogue:

O Babasaheb, you arrogant fool! I shall teach you the lesson of your life. Do you think our company Government consists of playing children? It is like fire. You have to warm yourself from a distance. You will be burnt to ashes if you come near it. Do you think I have come here as the political agent of South India for a child's play? I shall teach you what it means to be a British officer. (Act IV, Scene viii, 105)

When the spies brought the news of a possible attack by Manson and co., Bhaskararao Bhave got it confirmed that Manson camped on the hilltop with about three to four hundred cavalymen. In fact, Bhaskararao Bhave wanted to capture Manson alive. When the soldiers of Manson's army have been killed and Manson escaped into the cover of darkness somewhere. While a few soldiers guarded for Bhaskararao Bhave, the others continued the search for Manson. Having lost his brother to the bullets of Manson, Marya, a warrior of Bhaskararao Bhave, revenged by piercing Manson's head with the point of his sword. Manson was killed. A sort of jubilation followed and Marya echoed triumphantly:

It's victory of Babasaheb! Down with Company Sarkar!  
Victory to Babasaheb! (Act IV, Scene xi 115)

Soon, Bhaskararao Bhave held a discussion with his associates. He foresaw a danger from the company Sarkar after the killing of Manson.

Look, my dear friends and well wishers, we killed Manson. But that Manson is not a mere individual, but a representative of the East Indian Company. By killing him we have wounded and angered the king Cobra called the company Sarkar (Act V. Scene ii, 119).

Sensing danger, Bhaskararao Bhave convened a meeting with people of Naragund Kingdom and asked them for greater sacrifices in their fight for freedom. His intense thirst for freedom from the British is

seen below:

All right. If all these patriots come at the right time by the grace of God, nobody can prevent me from fighting these red-faced monkeys. I shall make them eat the dust. I shall light the lamp of liberty in my country and dissipate the darkness of slavery. Jai Bharat Mata! (Act V, Scene iv, 125)

It was June 2, 1858 when Bhaskararao Bhave was sitting in his durbar rather restless and anxious. Then, commander Vishnupant rushed in to brief that all the soldiers were ready for the war. A messenger soon followed it up with the breaking news that the company Sarkar had come to the main gate and their soldiers were fighting with enemy heroically. Bhaskararao Bhave was confident that they had sufficient arms and gunpowder to attack the British. All of a sudden, Vishnupant carried the danger news that cannons were not exploding.

The gunpowder was adulterated. They failed to explode just when the situation demanded. Banyabapu and Krishnajipant had done the treacherous thing. Eventually, Bhaskararao Bhave was deceived by his own men with the *firangi* people. He lost the battle. His mother and wife left the royal palace in order to save the honor. Then Bhaskararao Bhave who fled the Kingdom of Naragund was later captured and sentenced to death. Shankara Bhatta, the cook in-charge of Bhaskararao Bhave, was worried about the king who was going to be hanged to death. To him, Bhaskararao Bhave was the real hero who fought for honour and freedom by losing his kingdom, palace, family and kith and kin. Shankara Bhatta's token of gratitude resulted in his sacrifice of life for Bhaskararao Bhave.

Bhaskararao Bhave escaped from the prison and was in disguise of a *sanyasi* in the forest. Citizens in Belgaum bemoaned the hanging of their king. Meanwhile, traitors like Banyabapu and Krishnajipant claimed for half of the share in the kingdom of Naragund as it was agreed upon during Manson's time. Malcolm hits back to say:

Gentleman, you have betrayed your king for your selfish ends. Then what guarantee is there that you won't betray the Company government? (Act VIII, Scene iii, 201)

Both Banyabapu and Krishnajipant were sentenced to life

imprisonment at Dharwad jail. Thus the play projects that those who betrayed their own king have been betrayed in the end.

In conclusion, I reckon that *A Dreamer of Freedom* is truly a colonial conflict between freedom and oppression, faith and betrayal, Indian princes and colonial rulers. It is an extraordinary play of bravery, adventurousness and self-respect. Basavaraj Naikar has touched upon the predominant theme of self-respect and self-rule from colonial conquest which in our times is really influential to invoke a sense of patriotism and honour. Further, the play also depicted a continuing saga of conspiracies and unending villainies. Indeed, the play can be termed as historical drama in the Indian Freedom Struggle.

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## Review Essay

***Poles Apart on the Same Bed\**: A Review****Dr Vinod Kumar Sinha**Professor of English  
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Alexander Raju's twenty-nine short stories encapsulated in *Poles Apart on the Same Bed* are striking for diversity of themes and the multiplicity of narrative modes and styles. The changing personas of the narrator in these stories have one thing common in them: they are all rooted in the lower middle class Indian society- a convenient vantage point from which he can tell not only the tales of his own class with inwardness but also of the lower class which is not much farther than that of the lower middle class to which most of his central characters or the narrators of his stories belong.

These are not the tales of heroes endowed with superhuman strength and exceptional fortitude and courage; these are the tales of unending pains and tribulations of the small people who have not been granted even their modest desires to live a life of dignity and honour. The anthology presents the tales of a class which very often undergoes the pains, the tortures and the exploitations with silent resignation and, shows flickers of protest very rarely. Only two of them namely "Junction" and "A Call from the Black Crow" present the characters taking resort to violent means of protest against injustice or revenge. The first one hinges on the theme of conjugal disharmony and, the husband's (the central character's) efforts to bring some kind of reconciliation. The actual reconciliation, however, takes place only after the husband, being mauled, mugged and grievously maimed by some hooligans, lands in hospital where he loses one of his hands, an eye and, also his sexual potency caused by a kick in the scrotum. Later the husband very ingeniously takes revenge on them--an act that, however, fails to bring peace and sense of fulfilment to him. A gnawing sense of uselessness on the physical level drives him towards 'the other' of the two roads "leading down to the lake, and then, down and down and down to the depth of the lake." After taking revenge the character is left with two options symbolically

presented in the story as two roads. The first one would take him to his sister's saint who will save him spiritually. Curiously he chooses the other road, the suicide. The choice for the second is simple yet extremely realistic as the sublimation of a physical inadequacy is fictionally easy to present but agonizingly difficult if not impossible to live with and live by. However, the first person narration is a bit jarring. "A Call from the Black Crow" is a story of a father who kills the person who elopes with his daughter. The elopement does not consummate in marriage. The eloper after exploiting the girl for some time for his sexual gratification eventually kicks her out and prepares to marry another one. The father, the crematorium operator, very cleverly takes revenge on the womanizer. Raju's fictional world does not seem to celebrate the revenge of this kind; a strange nemesis overtakes the avenger. He is burnt alive inside the machine presumably with his daughter. All other stories of exploitation and torture included in the anthology show the wronged characters succumb to the injustice and suffering by putting an end to their lives. A father in "Icy Decision" commits suicide with his daughter just because she has been sexually exploited and blackmailed by someone; in "Roof Frame" the father dies of shock when his daughter, sexually abused by the son of the rich man in the village, hangs herself to death; in "Through the Fog" the father of a Nepali girl driven to prostitution by abject poverty dies of unrelieved grief; "The Vendor of Tooth-powder" is an intensely poignant story that presents a scathing critique of a country that boasts of being a welfare state, and of the callousness of a society that is deaf to any lessons of cleanliness. Here, the poor vendor, unable to have a square meal a day, eats up all his tooth powder and kills himself. Within these stories of suffering there are random references and allusions to the police atrocities of various kinds, such as forcing the poor to buy tickets of star shows, implicating the victims of a crime in false crimes in order to extort more and more money from them.

In addition to the stories of social injustice, there are stories of abject moral depravity and degradation in "Before the Cock Crew Twice", where even the dead body of a young girl is not spared; the body is desecrated sexually in morgue. Such an act of necrophilia, said the writer when questioned about its veracity and impossibility on practical grounds if not moral or ethical one, is terrifying reality of our life. The sordid and gruesome tales are balanced by those of humour, which compel peals of

laughter in readers; the story of liquor tragedy and that of a simple cure for pimples are some such stories. Even these humorous stories raise issues of great social significance.

The collection comprising the stories written over thirty years is a veritable graph of the writer's story-telling skill. Although many of the stories in the collection end up with the writer's explanations, the readers can simply ignore them, if they wish, as obtrusive interference and go ahead with enjoying them. In the stories included in early section the writer obtrusively appears in the story time and again, but as we pass through the middle section to the last one, we find the gradual extinction of the writer within the fictional structure fewer authorial intrusions. There are at least two stories in the collection that deserve to be called examples of flash fiction, they are, "the Head-Loader" and "the Rebirth". The central character in "the Head-Loader" is driven by the desire of his family's safety and well-being- a desire that is common to most of the characters in his stories included.

Raju's stories blow a soothing breeze in dreary atmosphere of individualism that threatens the fabric of Indian family life, where characters invariably show commitment to their immediate family. Characters try to protect the members of their family even at the cost of their lives. Hence, Alexander's unrelenting belief seems to be that an individual derives the meaning of his life only in relation to the family. A characteristically Indian belief unalloyed by the modern western thinking that hesitates to sacrifice an individual for the family!

On the whole a joyful read!

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\* *Poles Apart on the Same Bed* by Alexander Raju. Published by CCB Publishing, British Columbia, Canada, Priced \$ 16.95.

## Review

### Khushwant Singh, *The Sunset Club*\*

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#### A Book Review

"This is going to be my last book", Khushwant was quoted by the PTI, on the release of his latest book. Whether it is a sigh or a sense of helplessness-only Khushwant knows. This statement was good enough for me to start my romance with Singh's *The Sunset Club*. But it turned out to be another novel of his cult. His swan song had nothing anomalous to arouse the inquisitiveness of the one who is new to his fictional world. Before reading *The Sunset Club*, I just ransacked Khushwant's profile, only to find national awards and honours to his credit. Although having a celebrity status, (book launched by Gursharan Kaur, wife of Dr. Manmohan Singh, PM) and being a renowned writer in India (Sahitya Akademi fellowship award by Sahitya Akademi of India,2010), his work has hardly been appreciated or recognized by the Western world. He has his own mantra of making his novels successful. But success is what he achieves, no literary appreciation. His work abounds in sexual references which startle the reader. That's fine! But the way he uses such unpalatable expressions and words, his oeuvre just turns out to be nothing but coarse humour. *The Sunset Club* turns out to be a continuation of the cocky humour that he often resorts to, where a plethora of lewd expressions, tales and vernacular obscene expletives appear, which are seemingly absurd and highly distasteful. The most faithful reader of his works may well find *The Sunset Club* to be another intriguing work, but it is an ordinary tale flooded with cheap sexual anecdotes that shadow the other commendable aspects of this work.

Before the launch of this novel, as he explains, he had doubt over the completion of this novel (writing at 95!). Sheela Reddy of Outlook magazine egged him on to give a form to the account of his experiences he had with his bosom friends who are no more. The *Sunset Club* is the

result. The book can be read as partially autobiographical in tone where there is interplay of fact and fiction. Real life situations and fabulous descriptions blend perfectly. A salacious writer, as he is, '*The Sunset Club*' is steeped with lascivious material that sometimes leave a bad taste in the mouth. The story opens with an 'Apologia' by the writer. He states: "My readers may find what I've written to be in bad taste-unacceptable in polite society." (*The Sunset Club*, ix) How true he turns out to be! Not only unacceptable, but shocking too.

The *Sunset Club* may appear as a memoir that peeps into the lives of three men, past their prime, who all assemble at the Lodhi gardens, New Delhi, almost every evening. The three old men (octogenarians) - Pandit Preetam Sharma, a Punjabi Brahmin and an Oxford graduate, Nawab Barkatullah Baig Dehlavi, a Sunni Mussalman and Sardar Boota Singh, the protagonist (noticeable similarities with the writer) discuss multifarious issues. The writer has intentionally taken up three characters from three different religions of society: a Brahmin, a Muslim and a Sikh. These three men are representatives of their class/caste/religion. The story moves in a circular fashion, completing one single revolution of the Sun, from 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009 to 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010. Within this time period, the story picks up almost every strand of the Indian way of life. The story highlights the beautiful chemistry among them and also tells how they continue to be together through lean and shiny times. All their discussions act as a perfect foil to the innumerable issues that have been dealt within this story. All three have been coming to Lodhi gardens for the last forty years, and they sit and talk about all things under the Sun, unfailingly. Together they sit on the 'Boorha Binch' (named after the three oldies who sit here and reminisce about the bygone times), which faces the 'Bara Gumbad', or 'The Big Dome'. The very description of the Gumbad gives a taste of Khushwant's style of writing. He is at ease when it comes to play the game he loves the most. 'The Big Dome' is metaphorically portrayed as, "an exact replica of a young woman's bosom including the areola and the nipples" (*TSC*, 5). Kudos to Singh's conceit, but the subtle description doesn't amuse the reader. The sprinkling of such obscene, ribald references, cut across the length and breadth of the novel and this has been done with fearless effect. All the three men come and sit in the evenings on the bench. Recalling sunny days, they talk about their suppressed fantasies and foibles of the youth times. Sharma usually avoids

all such talks by saying, 'I have better things to occupy my mind than think of a woman' (*TSC*, 191). But he also has a story to tell and a detailed explicit description of what happened. Just before his death, Sharma discloses to Boota about the lady who always wanted to marry him. Boota is at home to such tales. Every time they meet, he has a story to tell - his encounters with Indian as well as foreign ladies. The photographic detail with which he narrates his sexual experiences is very embarrassing. Such details could well have been avoided or narrated in ways implicit. The words and language he uses, embarrasses the reader more than arousing the interest. Nawab's stories are equally on the similar plane. In Sharma's absence, Nawab has a lot to hear about Boota's past sexual experiences. He also reveals his secrets, on the condition that Boota should keep all such secrets buried in his heart...! 'Now Boota Singhji, if you repeat a word of my story to anyone, I swear by the name of Allah I will kill you' (*TSC*, 133).

It is amazing to notice the vigour and the interest that the Rangeela Sardar (*TSC*, 196) still maintains in such matters, even at this age. Khushwant revels in painting such pictures. And all such matters find a voice in the experiences of the three friends. So be it the description of the dome, Boota's sexual experiences during his youth, or the wet dreams of Boota at this age...! Sex dominates the entire novel but this cannot take away some other aspects that have been taken up by the writer. Subsidiary to such discussions, that form the kernel of the talks among them, there are so many pertinent and topical issues that have also found space. Although the reader is left to gape at the various sexual references that have so minutely been discussed, the interest is sustained by the other issues which have been keenly discussed and contested. The novel compels the reader to question the mental attitudes and demeanours of old men in society as the three old men are representatives of such old men belonging to different religion and caste. Is it that the sexual fantasies of a large number of such men who are aged, germinate from love and desires of their own youth?

Though Khushwant was very reluctant in writing this novel (as he remarks in the apologia), but the style of it is appreciable and well thought out. The story opens on the Republic Day, with three of them criticizing the essence of celebrations that are carried out throughout the country, year after year. As we turn over the pages, the writer, through the mouthpiece of the three, discusses everything. The story takes us



across all the months, starting from 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2009 to 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010 in a circular fashion. So, the writer:

1) Skilfully blends the seasons of the year with The Sunset Club's discussions and their moods, and

2) Critiques the various events that take place in this one year.

The novel carries us through Delhi's weather and seasons round the year. It starts with the month of January, when Republic Day is celebrated, and when 'winter loosens its grip'(TSC, 1) and 'the time for flowers and calling of barbets is round the corner'(TSC, 1). Then it moves to Basant Panchami, the month of flowers and when the friends enjoy the beauty of the flowers on the trees. March is witness to death and rebirth and many trees bare themselves only to wear new dresses. The writer, similarly, takes us through other seasons of the year as well, and all these seasons gel well with the talk, atmosphere and the temper of the three. It is not only the beauty of the seasons that attracts the reader's attention, but it also forms the backdrop of their talks about various national and international events that take place during that time. Republic Day provides them with an opportunity to criticize India's image of being the land of Gandhi. 'The truth is, we Indians are full of contradictions: we preach peace to the world and prepare for war (display of lethal weapons on 26th Jan). The gradual move from one month to the other, gives them a chance to discuss everything-from politics to religion, infirmities of old age, from natural disasters to corruption in India, and from celebrities to a common Indian.

The past personal experiences merge with the present public issues. As such, we hear them talk about general elections announced in India (which is a metaphorical fight between Kauravas and Pandavas), Tata's announcement of launching the cheapest car on Indian roads i.e. Nano. Other topical incidences like the hurling of a shoe by a Sardar at Home Minister P.Chidambaram, demand of splitting of A.P into three parts, N.D.Tiwari being caught on camera in bed with three prostitutes, Michael Jackson referred to as 'a sodomist and a catamite and a child molester'(TSC, 190-91). The journey across the year is witness to all such events. Towards the fag end of this year, Boota loses his two friends one by one. But Boota maintains his sense of joviality and Khushwant, through him, continues to pep up the readers with his startling remarks. The story starts with the dome reference and after completing one year, ends with

Boota sitting on the 'Boorha Binch' brooding of yesteryears, and his future, and still thinking of the dome as 'fully rounded bosom of s young woman' (TSC, 216). Khushwant's swan song, 'The Sunset Club', can well be seen as a regret ,he has, of his youth days, and his ever constant urge.

*Where are the frivolities of yesteryear?*

*Where has your youth fled? (TSC, 22)*

Though 'The Sunset Club' is a typical Khushwant novel lacerating the narrow Indian outlook towards morality sexuality and sensibility, but the good part of it, is the way, the writer has carried forward the thematic concerns through an interesting style. We actually feel the moving seasons and also get an incisive criticism of all the contemporary events and situations through the discussions among three friends that took place in all these months. All said and done, Singh is, indeed, a King, in his own way.

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\* New Delhi: Penguin 2010. ISBN 9780670085194. Priced Rs.399

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