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RESEARCH ARTICLES

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Literary Voice September 2019 offers a rich and varied critical response to the literary texts from British, American, Canadian, South African, Brazilian, Yemeni, Vietnamese, Dalit and Indian English literatures. Book Reviews of two recent publications--*Genius in the Making* and *A Survey of Indian English Drama*--and fresh poems by Lalit Mohan Sharma, Seema Jain, Annie John and Sushminderjit Kaur occupy legitimate space in the current issue. The British poet, Emily Dickinson and Canadian poet Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall, have been portrayed as silent singers who accepted Death as female space. Both of them felt the pangs of loneliness and inevitably sang of loneliness and succeeded in transforming female silence into songs of unique Nature. The American novelist Don DeLillo's *White Noise* mirrors up the proliferation of commercial culture in the author's fictional world. The contemporary societies have their entire system absorbed into the matrix of simulation which has given rise to mass society that has sacrificed personal sense of being of humans by ferociously and unconsciously feeding on consumption and advertising. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* has been evaluated in the light of the crucial role of language in dystopian fiction by discussing manipulative discourse. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* has been analysed in the light of Roland Barthes' concept of "writerly" text.

The South African writer Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Indian writer Pratibha Ray's *The Primal Land* explore the culture-nature dialectic that surfaces the long-lasting conflict between tradition and modernity through a distinctive tribal perspective. The notions of civilization, progress and development modelled on the dictums of western thought are also deconstructed within the framework of tribal ecological consciousness. Noor Zaheer's *My God is a Woman* focuses on the universal cause of gender discrimination and the valorous attempts at emancipation through the portrayal of female protagonist Safia's plight and her painful journey from humility towards emancipation. Githa Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* highlights the eclectic concerns pertaining to diverse and wide-ranging ideas as modern education system, pervasive power relations, teacher-taught relationship and teaching-learning experience. It aims to bring forth the themes of self-discovery, marginalisation and empowerment through psychological study of characters caught up in different sets of power relations and attempting to discover themselves.

The write up on Guru Nanak Dev, the first of the Ten Gurus of the Sikhs, founder of Sikhism, a visionary, a poet *par excellence* and a believer in one God who dwells in all His creations and constitutes the eternal Truth, seeks to highlight the importance of his idea of "*Vismad*" as inaugurating an aesthetic of wonder having the revolutionary potential for a new world order in the strife-torn world today.

Amrita Pritam's *Skeleton* (*Pinjar*) foregrounds the problems of communal hatred and historical revenge in the lives of three interconnected families at the time of Partition of India in 1947, with a focus on the inter-caste marriage of Pooro and Rashida. It also shows how the political and impersonal hatred is ironically contrasted with the emotional bonding between the families belonging to Hindus and Muslims.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Unhappiness* explores the complexity of human relationships

that not only binds man to man but also distances him from his fellow humans. Human life is not as easy as it appears and the demands of every age prompt us to make various compromises despite the fact that 'its humdrum surface conceals at its heart a yolk of egregious violence' sparked by political pundits weaving different patterns of meaning in an ever changing world order.

Literature has been a very effective medium for the writers to raise the socio-polito-cultural concerns that agitate their creative consciousness in different parts of the globe. In Yemen too, litterateurs have played an exemplary role in edifying the people and forming their collective consciousness against the political establishments for their unjust and inhuman governance. Mohammad Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers* (1971) unflinchingly focuses on the injustices and dispossession of the Yemeni people who are forced for emigrate to find avenues of hope. The study of this genre tells us the role played by national novel in edifying the people and forming their collective memory.

Vietnam literature cannot be conceived of without the deleterious effects of the Vietnam war on the psyche of Vietnamese in general. Duong Thu Huong, a Vietnamese author and political dissident who was temporarily imprisoned for her writings and outspoken criticism of corruption in the Vietnamese government, spins a poignant and convincing narrative in *A Novel Without a Name* which unfolds the meaninglessness of war. Like a skilful artist she weaves intricate socio-politico and psychological patterns and essays a probing leap into the psyche of various characters. The article analyses the novel from the perspective of incidents, situations and persons which symbolise the miseries, misfortunes and traumatic shocks that war brings in its train. The researcher draws heavily on the text in order to focus on the symbols related to futility of war, social ideology, sense of humanity, national identity, atrocity, the value of life and the state of insanity.

Contemporary Brazilian literature is, on the whole, very much focused on city life and all its aspects: loneliness, violence, political issues and media control. However, the contemporary Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho managed to break with the expectations associated with homeland-bound Brazilian authors. His books do not feature the tropical opulence characterizing Jorge Amado's renowned works, nor the urban violence found in Paulo Lins' *City of God*. Coelho's "religious explorations, ranging from mysticism to monotheism, were well received in the Western world and he became something of a literary guru for spirituality." His novel, *Brida* is analyzed to demonstrate how the female protagonist Brida undertakes an odyssey to realize her gift that she has been carrying through different incarnations, and investigates how she realizes the purpose of her being through love in her personal engagements with Lorens.

Dalit narratives voice the agonies of the community and differ from mainstream Indian English literature which is individual centric. Specially, Dalit women autobiographies deal with liberation of mind and proud reflections of Dalit culture, apart from focusing on the triple jeopardy of oppression on account of caste, class and gender. The poignant portrayal of indignities of the social order are aimed at conscietizing Dalit masses to assert, protest and mobilize against the act of monopoly on every social institution by the Indian upper castes. Likewise, Om Prakaash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, exposes the brutality inherent in the caste system as well as his own struggle for personal dignity and human rights. What literature does through the written word, cinema enacts the same

thing through its visual appeal to the masses and becomes a powerful vehicle for transforming the public opinion against various ills that bedevil social harmony and equity. Indian cinema too has been highlighting the socio-cultural dichotomies prevailing in Indian society. The Tamil film, *Pariyerum Perumal* conveys the strong message against caste discrimination through the use of animal symbolism, and also underlines the dire need to sensitize the audience to social issues.

With the current edition of *Literary Voice* we have launched a column, *From My Bookshelf* which will feature one insightful, scholarly and unbiased write up. Dr. Swaraj Raj's essay on *Butterflies on the Roof of the World* by Peter Smetacek, is the propitious beginning.

Dear Readers, we strive to take care of your varied scholarly interests but honestly look forward to being enriched with your feedback.

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Guru Nanak Dev's *Vismâd*: A Multipotential Aesthetic of Wonder

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Abstract

Guru Nanak Dev was the first of the Ten Gurus of the Sikhs and founder of Sikhism. He was a visionary, a poet par excellence and a believer in one God who dwells in all His creations and constitutes the eternal Truth. His 550th Birth Anniversary will be celebrated all over the world in November this year. The present paper is in the form of a tribute to the contemporary relevance of the Guru as it seeks to highlight the importance of his idea of "Vismad' as inaugurating an aesthetic of wonder having the revolutionary potential for a new world order in our strife-torn world today. The paper first makes an attempt to cast a glance at the world scenario and then suggests how Guru Nanak's Vismad has the potential to save us from ourselves. In trying to understand our world, the paper draws heavily from Zygmunt Bauman's ideas in trying to understand Guru Nanak's Vismad. Dr. Gurbhagat Singh's interpretation of Vismad and his translation of Guru Nanak's Bani further enriches the process of understanding.. In suggesting how Guru Nanak's Vismad is different from the western idea of the sublime, the present paper draws on some ideas in Louise Economide's book, The Ecology of Wonder in Romantic and Postmodern Literature (2016).

***Keywords**: Vismad, the sublime, liquid fear, adiaphorization, aesthetics of wonder.*

***

We are living in a world full of disquieting paradoxes. We have made immense progress in sciences, space exploration, genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence, so much so that man today is ready to play god. And yet we are living in a faction-ridden world that is almost crumbling and cracking. Despite all the progress we have made, despite not having fought a major war after the Second World War, we seem to be living in a perpetual state of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. The world is full of ethnic, racial and religious strife.

Literature may not stand in a passively reflective relationship with the historical conditions that produce it but it is certainly a manifestation of our cultural response to these conditions. One glance sat the novels on the 2018 and 2019 Booker Shortlist is enough to show preoccupation of these texts with nightmarish, apocalyptic themes, ecological destruction, technocalypse, intrusive surveillance, mass incarceration and trauma. The domain of science fiction that deals primarily with future possibilities is populated by jeremiahs than by cornucopians. This gloom is not new; it had permeated many literary

productions since the dawn of the twentieth century also. Iconic texts of modernist writers like T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are a case in point. But this gloom has deepened because of people's attitude of incredulity towards meta-narratives fuelled by postmodernism's radical decentering impulse and extreme moral relativism as well as what Zygmunt Bauman calls "adiaphorization" (37) in his dialogue with Leonidas Donskis in *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (2013)–indifference towards moral issues–that this incredulity has engendered. Postmodernism's dismantling of old, tested ways of life has left us with nothing. As Bauman avers, "The old ways do not work anymore and their efficient replacements are nowhere in sight, replacements are nowhere in sight–or too precocious, volatile and inchoate to be noticed or to be taken seriously when (and if) they are noticed" (83). The culture of speed or instantaneity, the gift to us of consumer-capitalism, does not leave any scope for any consolidation also. It is difficult to entertain belief in universal human and moral values. Hermeneutics of suspicion has made us cleverer than we were but not wiser in any which way.

The following lines from T. S. Eliot's poem "Choruses from "*The Rock*" sum up our predicament:

> Endless invention, endless experiment,
>
> Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
> Knowledge of speech, but not of silence; Knowledge
> of words, and ignorance of the Word. All our
> knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance, All our
> ignorance brings us nearer to death, But nearness to
> death no nearer to God .
>
> Where is the Life we have lost in living?
> Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
> Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

No wonder psychological counsellors and psychiatrists are much more in demand these days than they ever were.

Invoking Svetlana Boym's classic, *The Future of Nostalgia* Zygmunt Bauman, in his *Retrotopia* published posthumously in 1917, points out that our utter dissatisfaction with our present has made us lose all faith in future. In response to a world full of insecurity and violence, the utopian aspiration is projected towards a return to an ideal past more than towards the construction of a better future. Instead of looking prospectively to build a better world, we are looking nostalgically, retrospectively into the past to recover some lost utopia, retrotopia as Bauman calls it. To quote Bauman, "Retrotopias' are currently emerging: visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future, as was their twice-removed forebear . . ." (np), a reference to Thomas More's *Utopia.*

Hitler had tried to recover such a utopia with disastrous consequences. Many countries of the world are trying to emulate Hitler's Germany. In fact, the very foundations of hope for a better, equitable and just society stands eroded for diverse reasons; one of the most important among them being, as Bauman argues, rampant consumerism which has turned even human beings into

commodities, thus generating deep seated ontotological insecurity in us. This turning our backs on future is a sufficient indicator of how we have stopped dreaming. This is evident in how not only most people but even many countries are reacting to a world of violence and insecurity by closing themselves into tribes and by erecting barriers and walls. To many people, the barriers and walls being erected may appear to provide shelter and security, but as Bauman rightly suggests, "Pugnacity and astringency, together with the bleak and bitter, raw-and-rough practices of tribes, wear the mask of shielding, safeguarding 'communities.' And communities– like the security they temptingly, even if deceptively, promise–are (to use Lakoff's language) Janus-faced 'frames:' freedom from trouble bedaubed all over one–smiling–face, with the threat of demotion and exclusion on the other, sullen and dreary" (np).

The world today is not what we would like it to be. On the political front, there is a huge wave of counter-liberalism sweeping the world. Intolerance is on the rise. Democracy has not only failed to fulfil its promise to liberate us, it has rather given way to technocratic bureaucracy that places its faith in managing and fixing problems and treats human beings as mere work force, or as statistical units belonging to a majority or a minority group. As Bauman suggests in the Introduction to *Moral Blindness*, "Statistics are more important than real human life; and a country's size and its economic and political power are much more important than the value of one of its inhabitants, even if he speaks on behalf of humanity" (10). Resistance to the dehumanizing stratagems of technocratic-bureaucratic machine is either co-opted or very nearly silenced. Activism today is confined, more or less, to self-expression in social media. The technocratic society is also a panopticon that strips us of our privacy and freedom in the name of ensuring our safety and security. According to Bauman, many sociologists tend to describe this sinister propensity of the technocratic society to strip us of our privacy as "soft totalitarianism." And since soft totalitarianism is stealthily and insidiously evil unlike hard totalitarianism which was manifestly evil, it is all the more difficult to understand and resist it. It appeals to us in the name of culture, tradition, preservation of past glory, and nationalism. It advocates that there is only one way, one life and one formula for a society which is difference-ridden and heterogeneous (76).

Thus, in the absence of certainty, it is fear that stalks our liquid modern society; in fact, liquid fear as Bauman calls it, the name we may give to our uncertainty, our ignorance and unpredictability of our life. To quote Bauman once more, "The most gruesome among the added fears is the fear of being incapable of averting or escaping the condition of being afraid" (*Liquid Fear:* 94). Apart from this fear which is diffuse and unidentifiable, we can still point out three main fears whose spectre haunts our society: The fear of the stranger or the Other which stems from our inability to accept and celebrate strangeness; the fear of environmental catastrophe which seems rather imminent because of ecocidal developmental policies we have embarked upon; and the fear of non-existence and invisibility which stems from our morbid preoccupation with our self in a society that thrives on social media exhibitionism. Most of our problems today stem from these fears. And it is in this context that Guru Nanak's *Vismad* as aesthetic of wonder can show us the right path.

The literal translation of the word *Vismad* is wonder, ecstasy, rapture, bliss and awe. *Vismad*, the wonder and marvel that is ineffable and indescribable is the foundational paradigm of Guru Nanak's spiritual tradition. According to Dr. Gurbhagat Singh, *Vismad*, the Joyous Wonder of the Sikh scriptures is

"the paradigm of heterogeneity and love, celebrating the Divine" (*Vismad*: *The Sikh Alternative*: 1). The Sikh *Vismad*, "viewing the universe as a joyous wonder and beauty, linked up in Love and heterological mediation, is an alternative horizon" (5). *Vismad*, apart from being a paradigm of heterology that gives a sense of largeness, is also "a joyful experience of being wonder-struck" (6). *Vismad* is the predominant theme of the Divine Ballad of Raga Asa, *Asa Ki Var*:

> Vismad sound, Vismad the Veda.
> Vismad beings, Vismad differences
> Vismad forms, Vismad colour
> Vismad roaming naked creatures.
> Vismad air, Vismad water.
> Vismad fire that plays diverse games.
> Vismad earth, Vismad species.
> Vismad pleasures which fascinate human beings.
> Vismad union, Vismad separation.
> Vismad hunger, Vismad relish
> Vismad Praise, Vismad eulogy.
> Says Nanak, perfectly fortunate are those who realize the Marvel.
> Vismad closeness to You, Vismad distance.
> Vismad Your Beholding Presence.
> Vismad struck am I watching Your sublime play.
> Wonderful wilderness, Vismad right path
>
> (Guru Nanak Dev, *Sloka Mahla 1*, *Asa Ki Var*)

Wonder struck, the Guru himself is witnessing the "marvel" of creation. The *Vismad*, articulated here, as Dr. Gurbhagat Singh suggests, "cuts across and minimizes all kinds of unitarian and totalitive perspectives, privileging the experience of manifoldness . . . Another side of this Joyous Wonder is the "awe" of *Karta Purakh* . . ." (85), but this "awe does not cause fear-psychosis, rather as the Guru says, the awe fills the mind with "radiant affection" (86). Thus, it is different from *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that is mystery that attracts and repels, before which humanity is both fascinated and trembles, which as I believe is an essential ingredient of aesthetics of the sublime. The *Var*, while underscoring the wondrousness of a diverse universe, embraces and celebrates singularity, heterogeneity and plurality of the cosmos. In being maximally accommodative it makes definite ethical gestures towards embracing the stranger, the Other, both human and non-human. Since in *Vismad*, existence and knowing cannot be separated, the whole being celebrates the beauty and marvel of the universe; Guru Nanak's *Vismad* overcomes the binaries of mind-body dualism which plague most of the Western thought. *Vismadic* knowing awakens the mind to *Anhad Nad*, the Unstruck Melody.

The experience of *Vismad*, leads to unselfing, freedom from ego, or *haumai*. This further opens the self to the radical other. The state of '*Sehaj*' that one attains in *Vismad*, again to quote Dr. Gurbhagat Singh, is "one's actual selfless, maximum capacity to be with the wonder-inspiring multiplicity" (13). The importance of *Vismad*, thus, for ushering in a new kind of ethical politics can hardly be overemphasized.

Here I would like to bring in Louise Economides, who in her remarkable book, *The Ecology of*

Wonder in Romantic and Postmodern Literature (2016) makes a strong plea for aesthetics of wonder as an antidote to reductive, instrumental rationality of current political and economic paradigms. In the very introduction to her text, while tracing the etymology of the word 'wonder' to 'wounding' and 'wandering' she suggests that the world must be one in which nature (creation) must be wondered at and wandered through: "To wonder is to wander. To not only tolerate uncertainty in the Keatsian sense of "negative capability," but also welcome it as a gateway to new possibilities. To not stay put" (1). This is something that Guru Nanak practised all his life. The long voyages he undertook, *udasis* as they are known, are a testimony to this fact. Quoting Howard L Parsons, Economides then points out how the word wonder may have etymological affinities with the German word *Wunde* or "wound". She writes: "Parsons goes on to assert that although wonder may be associated with the shock of the new (experienced as a "wound-like" puncturing of what we took to be certain and therefore as something potentially traumatic), as wound it is also an opening up of new possibilities, prompting creativity in "a number of meaning-molding activities (art, science, etc.)" (6). The wounding is 'unselfing' that makes the wondering subject suspend received notions of what it means to live, and what it means to relate to the other. To Economides, wonder constitutes an anti-foundational aesthetic that leads to excitement and pleasurable decentring (5). The subject who experiences wonder is surprised by joy, happy to be drawn out of his/her self because the experience of wonder does not conform to habitual experiences of the world.

There is no doubt, as Economides argues in her text, that the wonder's creative potential is of great importance to the Romantic artists as it is associated with renewal of the ways in which they perceive nature and also with political dynamism. However, as Economides points out, the Romantic aesthetic of wonder is undercut by the patriarchal, hegemonic and masculinist idea of Burkean-Kantian sublime in which *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is a dominant emotion. Economides tries to make a distinction between the aesthetics of wonder and aesthetics of sublime. Unlike romantic sublime, which typically celebrates wilderness areas conceived of as 'untouched' by human occupation, wonder is an experience associated with greater diversity.

Vismad too is associated with plurality, diversity, heterogeneity and beauty. But it differs from the Romantic wonder in significant ways. The Romantic wonder carries an unmistakeable element of nostalgia. By way of an example, it is clear that the general tenor of Wordsworth's poem "Immortality Ode" is nostalgic and elegiac as he mourns, as a grown up, the loss of that sense of wonder and feelings of oceanic oneness with nature which he would experience very frequently in his childhood. He draws his creative inspiration from those 'spots of time' in his childhood when he had experienced that sense of wonder and oneness of nature that is no longer available to him after he has grown up. Moreover, the idea of defamiliarization of reality is central to the Romantic poetics. Contrariwise, for Guru Nanak, *Vismad* is unceasing wonder conducive to jouissance and 'Sehaj'. Since the entire creation is moving in a state of wonder, therefore the idea of defamiliarization of reality is alien to Baba Nanak's *Vismad*.

The idea of Vismadic consciousness makes important gestures towards ethical and dialogical relationship with the other without any fear of either subjugating one's self to the other or objectifying or thingifying the other for possessing it completely. In fact, it is Agamben's 'state of exception' that serves is an extreme example where the other is completely objectified, and today, 'states of exception' exist in almost all countries.

In *Vismad*, nature is not the other of human, hence there is no possibility of anthropocentric enframing and destruction of nature. Conservation of nature and biodiversity is not an imperative born out of the fear of annihilation of the humankind arising from mindless ecocide. Guru Nanak had no such fears when he talked about an ethical stance towards nature, whereas our concern for nature is utterly selfish.

Vismad leads to unselfing, freedom from ego. Heightened ego is the root cause of our anxieties, ontological insecurities and concomitant paranoia. In order to understand how we behave, I am tempted to bring in Arthur Koestler's idea of 'mimophant,' a hybrid of delicate mimosa crumbling at mere touch when it comes to our own sensitivities, but capable of trampling over the feelings of others with the thick robustness of a pachyderm. Most sages and scriptures warn us of how ego can harm us. Guru Nanak's corrective is Vismadic knowing and living.

The ethics inaugurated by *Vismad*, the aesthetic of wonder can tear us awake, arousing us to a state of embodied attentiveness to the presence of the other, human and non-human, a state that cultivates tolerance and is a gesture of openness. Guru Nanak's life, his teachings illumined by *Vismad* offer a model of cultural coexistence in a just world. Our best tribute to Guru Nanak would be to think of *Vismadic* alternative to a world torn apart by strife.

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The Eloquence of Female Silence in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Marjorie Pickthall

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Abstract

Emily Dickinson (American poet: 1830-1922) and Marjorie Pickthal (Canadian Poet: 1883-1922) belonged to the patriarchal culture of their respective nations. They started writing poetry at an early stage even when they were still in their teens. The present article attempts to show how the two poets accepted Death as female space. As silent singers, they wrote about the changing seasons, singing birds, love, death and immortality. Living in an oppressive culture and with an unfaithful husband, Emily Dickinson like Pickthal desired to put an end to all suffering in death, hence the undercurrent of death-wish in several of her poems. She goes a step ahead of Pickthal in welcoming death as her lover. Both the poets believed that Death was not annihilation but the gate way to immortality and eternal life. Through death a merger with nature was possible though their identities might be erased on this earth. Having lost the near and dear they felt the pinches of loneliness and inevitably sang of loneliness. In this way both the poets succeeded in transforming female silence into songs of unique Nature.

***Keywords**: Nature, love, death, female space, patriarchal, culture, loneliness.*

***

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) and Marjorie Pickthall (1883-1922) belonged to the patriarchal culture. They started writing poetry when they were still in their teens. Both the poets turned their gaze inwards to find in the landscape of the soul of all sorts of fine sunrise and moonlight effects. Sometimes they sing like lone nightingales to cheer their loneliness. They wrote their poems as they lived their lives in extreme individuality, at the same time surrounded and partly bound by conventionality. They have exhibited in their poetry a sense of wording, a sureness of feeling and a passionate grasp of life. To use a well-known cliché, Emily Dickinson was far ahead of her time. Her genius found expression in an idiom which struck her contemporaries as odd and even unpoetical. Pickthall, whose career ended abruptly at the age of 39, was hailed as genius and seer by Canadian critics of the early twentieth century. E.K.Brown wrote in 1943, "More than any other poet of this century, she was the object of a cult . . . unacademic critics boldly placed her among the few immortal names" (65). To Archibald MacMechan, Pickthall's death meant the silencing of the truest, sweetest singing voice ever heard in Canada (47).

The themes of Pickthall and Dickinson include the changing seasons, singing birds,love,

death and immortality. They were preoccupied with death and they seem to accept death as a female space; but rather than be condemned to be eternal silence which death implies, they turn silence into a female aesthetic. As daughters of inarticulate Mother Nature, both the poets struggled against the silence which was their female inheritance.

To Pickthall, death serves as an end to the struggle of life as a tranquillizing and unifying force. Her strongest and clearest voice emanates from the unquiet grave of "The Wife":

Living, I had no might
To make you hear,
Now, in the inmost night,
I am so near
No whisper, falling light,
Divide us, dear.
Living, I had no claim
On your great hours.
Now the thin candle-flame,
The closing flowers,
Wed summer with my name,

-- And these are ours. Your
shadow on the dust,
Strength, and a cry,
Delight, despair, mistrust,
-- All these am I.

Dawn and the far hills
thrust To a far sky.
Living, I had no skill
To stay your tread,
Now all that was my
will Silence has said.
We are one for good and ill
Since I am dead. (Pickthall 201)

Surely, the most silent woman in patriarchal culture is the betrayed wife. This wife fails in her attempt to make her unfaithful husband listen to her complaints while she is alive. She had no might and skill to stop him. But death has put an end to all her problems. Therefore, she has accepted death and she is dead and peaceful in her grave. Through the eloquent silence of death, she can finally exert the force of her will. The narrowness of her life, like the narrowness of her grave, is reflected in the 'narrow' shape of the poem on the page. Her repeated statements, "Living, I had no might", "Living, I had no claim," "Living, I had no skill" imply the repeated shocks and oppression she got from life for she has always been a victim. After death she is a powerful reproach. Her husband never cared for though she loved him very much. But,

now, after death and having merged with the elements of nature like dawn, the sky, the hills and seasons, the woman has absorbed the power of nature's silent speech.
Her sinister silence will forever haunt his shadow, his strength, the sound of his own voice. The penultimate line mocks their empty marriage vow, "one for good and ill" because only death and not life, has the power to make them one for good and ill. It is no coincidence that the thrice repeated statement "Living, I had . . ." is a poetic rendering of "self definition" before "self-assertion." What this poem conveys is that the poet, having found out how her self is defined, is now asserting that self. It is, of course, a poetic or fictive self but personal experience is also integrated here. She looks back to the period in her life in which she became defined by the oppressive culture in which she had existed.

Like Pickthall, Dickinson also finds solace and strength in Death and goes a step ahead of her in welcoming Death as her lover. In her poem "Because I could not Stop for Death," she prepares herself to receive death politely as befits a gentle woman receiving the attention of a gentleman caller.

> Because I could not stop for death,
> He kindly stopped for me;
> . . . . . .
> And I had put away
> My labour, and my leisure too,
> For his civility. (Oliver 332)

Like Pickthall, Dickinson accepts death as a fact. What makes death fascinating to the poet is that it is the 'hyphen' between the mortal life and the dream of immortality. Death is endowed with admirable qualities and honourable intentions; it is stripped of all its cruelty qualities and horror. Death, when it comes, can have no terror for Dickinson because she waits for it with the eagerness of a beloved waiting for her lover. The idea that it is different from a common place domestic occurrence is suggested obtrusively.

> The carriage held but just ourselves
> And immortality. (Oliver 332)

Both the female poets repond to the invitation of death willingly. Both find relief and pleasure in the kingdom of death. In this, both are helped by what their religion has taught them, namely, that death is not annihilation but the gateway of immortality and eternal life.

Pickthall's poem " Love Unfound" and Dickinson's poem "I Never Lost as Much But Twice" deal with their experience of the death of their dear ones, who have left them at a loss. Pickthall's poem is an intense search for a lost female ancestor and Dickinson's is for her beloved friends. Perhaps Pickthall is expressing the loss of her mother, Lizzy Pickthall, in the following lines:

> She was earth before earth gave
> Me a heart to miss her;
> Stars and summers were her grave,
> Any rains might kiss her;

Wild sweet ways love would not cross
Curbed in sorrels and green moss.
She's been dust a hundred springs;
Still her face comes glancing
Out of glimmering water-ringsWhere the gnats are dancing;
Loosed is she in lilac flowers,
Lost in bird-songs and still hours.
If I'd lived when kings were great, --
Greater I than any, --
I'd have sold my olden state
For a silver penny,
Just to find her, just to keep,
Just to kiss her eyes asleep. (Pickthall 126)

The poem is subtitled "A Portrait," but clearly the image of this dead female ancestor is not a painted portrait but a landscape painting. Even a hundred years after his disappearance from memory, traces of her image are still recognizable in the landscape which has absorbed her. As the last stanza suggests, even if the poet could exchange her female powerlessness for the male power to change the world, she could still not reclaim her lost matrilineal heritage. Indeed, so irrevocably lost is the identity of this ancestor that it is beyond even the highest order of male power to recover it. Dickinson describes a similar 'loss' as follows:

I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod;
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!
Angels, twice descending,
Reimbursed my store.
Burglar, banker, father ,
I am poor once more! (Oliver 309).

The loss which made Dickinson a beggar at the door of God could mean the departure of Mr. Emmons or the death of Mr. Humphrey, her close friends. But this loss was reimbursed in the form of another friendship with Rev.Charles Wadsworth, whom she called "my closest earthly friend." But that also withered away, and she is "poor once more." Hence, she is angry with God and calls him a burglar and a banker. However, the tone is one of familiarity, and tenderness, unmistakable even in the voice of righteous indignation.

Pickthall and Dickinson thought that death might result in a total loss of their identity; their identities might be erased through merger with nature. The universal fear of poets -- the fear of leaving "no word", "no following voices" and the fear of becoming a "nobody" -- are undeniably present in the poems of the two poets. In the following lines, Pickthall communicates her loss of identity as the silenced woman and the silenced poet:

She went, she left no trace to find her

No word with wind or flower
No rose, no rose let fall behind her
That lasted but an hour.
She went. She left no following voices,No sign with star or stream,
Yet still the dreaming earth rejoices
It knew her from a dream. (Pickthall 200)

This poem has a "pre-conscious" feel to it. The female figure depicted here is lost to human history. The negation made explicit through the six-fold repetition of the word "no," makes it difficult to deny that the intention is to emphasize the unequivocal silencing of this female figure. A similar awareness makes Dickinson write:

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there is a pair of us -- don't tell !
They'd banish us, you know.
How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a fog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog! (Oliver 317)

The poet longs to be "somebody" because there is every chance of she becoming a "nobody." The total loss of identity may be compensated with a new friend. Dickinson had already found fault with God for having taken away all her friends. She is at last left with no name or fame and no friends. She is not even given the choice of living with her close friends.

The images of forgotten woman and inarticulate poet are strong in Pickthall's poem "Theano":

All you who spared lost loveliness a tear,
All you who gave some grief to beauty fled,
Go your ways singing. Grief is ended where
Theano laid her head.
She was so merry. Winter did her wrong.
She was so young. Spring proved her unkind.
It loosed her like a bird without a song,
A flower upon the wind.
Here in the shadow and the heat I stray,
Spring's hand in mine, her music round me flung,
Seeking the bird that fled me yesterday
With all her songs unsung. (Pickthall 199)

Theano is one of those minor figures in classical mythology whose identity is so fragmented and scattered throughout the myth it can be said of her that she has no identity at all. She is such a shadowy figure that her life must go unsung, her death ungrieved; she is "loosed . . . like a bird without a song." The poet sums up Theano's life in four short, almost monosyllabic statements. It is all that she could do because it

seems that spring had been as unkind to her as it was to Theano; the poet strays through "the shadow and the heat" in search of her lost muse; like Theano it has disappeared "With all her songs unsung."

As the poem suggests, it is silence rather than speech which calls for interpretation. As daughters of inarticulate Mother Nature, both Pickthall and Dickinson struggled against the silence which was their female inheritance.

Pickthall complains in her poem "Exile," that even the choice of selecting the burial ground was not given to her.

> I chose the place where I would rest
> When death should come to claim me,
> With the red-rose roots to wrap my breast
> And a quiet stone to name me.
> But I am laid on a northern steep
> With the roaring tides below me,
> And only the frosts to bind my sleep.
> And only the winds to know me. (Pickthall 77)

Dickinson and Pickthall successfully managed to transform female silence into a song. They discovered that separation from Mother Nature means loss of Identity by Mother Nature. Mother Nature's womb is also a tomb, and for these two female poets, identified as they are with non-transcendence and fatality.

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Pan-Indian Dalit Women Autobiographies as Capsules of Agony

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Abstract

Dalit literature is an offshoot of a global phenomenon, rose from concepts like re-writing the canon, subversion of hegemonic discourse, voiceless objects becoming conscious subjects, going beyond middle class notions of linguistic decency and to move from the realm of abstract and aesthetic to the realm of the social and political for raising the question of identity and location. That is why it has become a part of world literature like that of Burakumin of Japan, Backjeong of Korea, Midgan of Somalia, Red Indians in Canada, Blacks in Africa, Aborigines in Australia and Maoris in New Zealand. Dalit literature has a pan-Indian existence emerging from different bhasha literatures, marked by commonalities, repeated topos, tropes and thematic concerns.

The present paper essays a probing leap into the field of Dalit autobiographies and asserts that these autobiographies are the capsules of agony, deal with liberation of mind and proud reflections of Dalit culture and at the same time embody the social and cultural history of the community. Dalit women's autobiographies deal with a triple jeopardy of oppression on account of caste, class and gender. However, the description of sufferings and pain are alone for conscietizing Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization against the act of monopoly on every social institution by the Indian upper castes. Dalit narratives voice the agonies of the community and differ from mainstream literature which is individual centric.

***Keywords**: dalit, autobiographies, cultural, castes, history, bhasha, tropes.*

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Dalit literature is an offshoot of a global phenomenon, rose from concepts like re-writing the canon, subversion of hegemonic discourse, voiceless objects becoming conscious subjects, going beyond middle class notions of linguistic decency and to move from the realm of abstract and aesthetic to the realm of the social and political for raising the question of identity and location. That is why it has become a part of world literature like that of Burakumin of Japan, Backjeong of Korea, Midgan of Somalia, Red Indians in Canada, Blacks in Africa, Aborigines in Australia and Maoris in New Zealand. Dalit literature has a pan-Indian existence emerging from different *bhasha* literatures such as Marathi, Oriya, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Malyalam, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi and Hindi. It has

commonalities, repeated topos, tropes and thematics surpassing linguistic differences. Besides there remains a symbiotic relationship among different genres of Dalit outpourings found in different bhasha literatures.

After collecting and studying Dalit autobiographies in different *bhasha* literatures translated into English, the following salient points have been observed:

(1) Description of sufferings and pain are alone for conscietizing Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization against the act of monopoly on every social institution by the Indian upper castes in the name of culture, tradition and religion. Dalit writings are invested with radical Ambedkarite consciousness of organized solidarity–educate, unite and agitate.

(2) Dalit literature deals with liberation of mind and proud reflection of Dalit culture. The heroes are Eklavyas, Jhalkari bai and Shambuk. This will become instrumental for self discovery, self-realization and reclaiming identity.

(3) The language used in these writings is blunt, simple, less ornamental and have preferred expressions like 'maggots', 'ravishment gag', 'vomiting fire', 'hole to fuck in', 'cock in your pocket', 'whore' and 'piss in the bastard gutter.'

(4) It is people speaking of themselves for themselves and others (non-dalits) rather than tolerating being spoken for and then helping in the construction of pan-Indian dalit selfhood.

(5) Dalit writer does not write as an individual but as a member of a group or community, hence dalit literature differs from mainstream literature which is individual centric. It also provides scope for self-introspection by the community as it happens in the works of Bama.

(6) Dalit literature is written from the Dalit point of view and with a Dalit vision. The Dalit view point calls for a writer to internalize the sorrows and sufferings of the Dalits. Any writer with some Dalit sensibility may have Dalit view points but not necessarily Dalit vision. A person with the Dalit view point aims at a limited transformation whereas a person with the Dalit vision demands a total revolution or transformation.

(7) Dalit aesthetics is the blend of both the trinities–indigenous and alien–the modern trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity and Indian *Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram*. The inner strength of Dalit literature is its social reality.

(8) Women dalit writers describe about the discreet patriarchy of the upper caste. Bama foregrounds the difference of Dalit women from privileged upper caste women and also celebrates their identity in their strength, labour and resilience.

(9) Dalit literature fights against the unequal social and cultural order and not against men. There are exaggerations too in graphically portraying victimization. Majority of Dalit writers target not only caste Hindus but other dalit castes which are somewhat higher in intra-dalit hierarchy.

(10) All Dalit writings mention that Dalit settlements are segregated from from main habitations. These peripheral settlements are known as '*Vas*' in *Gujarati*, '*thatthi*' in *Panjabi,* '*Tola*' or '*Basti*' in *Hindi*, '*Cheri*' in *Tamil* and are always situated in the south of the villages throughout India. The inferior location of Dalits is not only spatial, it is also normative as described in these works.

(11) Dalit narratives are an embodied text, present in body and mind. They are 'acts of history' than 'acts of memory'. Without going into the binary of Raw and Radical empiricism they can be called living histories. Dalit women narratives bring Dalit women as the producers of modernity and not as passive recipients or consumers of modernity.

Dalit Autobiographies:

Dalit autobiographies are the capsules of agony and have become the social and cultural history of the community. The self becomes the representative of all dalits who were crushed down and suppressed because of their Dalit identity. G.N. Devy calls Dalit autobiographies as 'social epiphanies.' Really these autobiographies fashion a self in the articulation as much as they situate this self within a larger social and cultural context. Guy Poitevin says, “Dalit autobiographies are literary forms of social protest practices.” Whether these autobiographies are life narratives or testimonio, one thing is clear, the subject/narrator moves back and forth between the individual 'I' and the collective 'we.' Dalit writers exploit this mode of autobiography as what Michael Foucault calls 'counter memory of Hinduism' and the caste system under which they suffered and heroically suffered. Dalit autobiography in general is an honest attempt at remembering and penning from the vantage of settled life, the past life with detachment and seeing as far the sight goes. They discover the past along with the present and penetrate into the future. Dalit women's autobiographies deal with a triple jeopardy of oppression by double patriarchies–(a) discreet patriarchy of their own caste and (b) the overlapping patriarchy of the upper caste and poverty.

Thus, Dalit autobiographies portray the various conditions that thwarted their lives brutally and, with simmering discontent, hoped to reconstruct a new culture wherein equality, brotherhood and freedom would prevail befitting human dignity and spirit.

Dalit Women's Autobiographies

Unlike Dalit men, only a few Dalit women have written their autobiographies and these too in regional languages. The situation has led some upper caste literary critics to comment that the position of Dalit women writers is as marginalized in Dalit literature as they are in their community. Such charges are, however, fit to be rejected lock, stock and barrel. The big reason behind it is their lack of education, necessitated due to poverty. But as there are examples, these women, given a chance, can narrate their joys as well as sorrows to some one who can help document their narrative voices. Sumitra Bhave's *Pan on Fire* (originally collected in *Marathi* in 1988) is a volume that contains the accounts of eight illiterate Dalit women telling their life-stories. In recent years a collaborative autobiographical narrative called *Viramma : Life of an Untouchable* (1997) is another addition to Dalit woman's personal narratives. Here Bama's autobiography *Karukku*, Kumud Pawde's *Antasphot* (Marathi : 1981), the English translations of which are

included in Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Breed* (1992), Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2009), *Jina Amucha,* Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2008)- *Aaydan* and *Urmila Pawar and the Making of History* (1998) have been analysed threadbare to bring back their veiled history into the mainstream observations. Dalit women narratives challenge and nullify the traditional 'Top down' approach and have created an alternate method of 'Bottom up' approach. These narratives analyse Dalit women's oppression as a triple jeopardy of oppression by double patriarchies–'discreet' patriarchy of their own caste and an 'overlapping' patriarchy of the upper caste as well as poverty. Thus, they are alienated at three levels–due to their caste, class and gender portions.

Marathi Women Autobiographies :

Dalit women's autobiographies are mainly confined to *Marathi* literature with Dr. Ambedkar's call to the downtrodden to 'educate, unite and agitate,' the Dalit women brought forth their agony of being doubly oppressed as a Dalit and female. The Dalit women as reflected in the writings of Babytai, Janabai Girahe, Kumud Pawde, Shantabai Dani, is the hardworking, solitary, oppressed being who has to survive in the high-caste society as well as in her poverty-ridden, filthy and superstitious social environs.

These women autobiographies on the one hand reveal her 'self' but on the other hand it also give a vivid portrayal of the evils of untouchability and sexist bias of society, insult and humiliation born of that, the pain of hunger, poverty, illiteracy and superstitions. The woman we encounter is a lovely being whose destiny is to work like a beast. She cannot be the beloved of any man but an object of desire alone.That is why she is sexually exploited and discarded. And yet, though illiterate, helpless
and feeble, she is repository of inner strength, will power and social pride. The researcher has analysed following Marathi women's personal narratives which are available in English translation.

Sumitra Bhave's *Pan on Fire* :

Here life acounts of eight Dalit women namely Sangeeta, Chhaya, Rakhma, Rukmini, Mangla, Ashoka, Savitri and Leela were collected by a research team headed by Sumitra Bhave under the auspices of Ishvari Kendra, Pune. They came from diverse family backgrounds and were different from each other in age, education, religion, look, taste, choice, profession, etc. However, what is common about them is that all of them lived in various slums of Mumbai. Frances Maria Yasas in the preface to the book mentions that a lot can be learnt from these narrated autobiographies which are not in chronological order :

> Thousands of term papers and books may be written on the Dalit women but the writer of the most scholarly of papers may be far from understanding what the life and problem of a Dalit woman are to her. The best way of knowing what the life of a Dalit women is to experience it, to be a Dalit woman; second best, is to step into her chappals, or her bare feet, through her oral history, in which she expresses herself in such a way that we can feel and identify with her and vicariously live through her experiences. The appeal here is not only to the mind but also to the heart"(xiv).

In narrated life accounts, each woman makes an attempt to construct a self, traumatized by poor economic and physical conditions. Rukmini observes "I tell you, men never know how to behave. They don't understand that you got to know a person a bit before you can go to bed with them. They won't even glance at you throughout the day, nor say one word, and then jump on you at night!" (84).

While narrating their life stories a majority of women confess that they had to go back to resume their usual work within four weeks of their children's birth. Savitri comments that a woman's life is like living in exile. Ashoka summarises the basic narration of these women when she says, "It must be generally understood and accepted in an ideal community that a woman is not a subordinate or a toy or a sex object, or a useful machine; she too has a body that tires, a heart, a mind, her own desires. There must be an awareness of her as person" (150).

Thus, it is found that there exists a dichotomy between the upper caste women's perception of freedom vis-a-vis the existential conditions of the lower caste women because of the different socio-cultural environments. Dalit women also suffer from social disabilities emanating from the practice of Dalit patriarchy.

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* :

It is a translation of her Marathi autobiography *Jina Amucha* which was serialized in Stree, a Marathi magazine, in 1984. The autobiography tends to interrogate the evil practices of Dalit community besides offering us an insight into the possibility of understanding the tension between tradition and modernity. It is interesting to note from her testimony that the traditional *Mahars* treat Western Christianity as a source of ritual pollution. The result of this ideological externalization led the *Mahars* to treat a body of the upper caste with timeless sacredness. The internalization of this ideology of purity-pollution compels a Mahar to keep his body folded, fearful of touching the upper caste and thus polluting the sacred body. Kamble's story mentions that Ambedkar's attempt to culturally delink dalits from Hinduism through conversion was an attempt to consolidate the hold of modernity and reason over the Mahars. It is also described in this autobiography that the architecture of upper caste houses in Phaltan was designed in such a way that it would help in keeping the polluting Mahars at a safe distance. The upper caste homes were designed with raised platforms for the purpose of providing secluded interior to confine their women and an exterior to keep the dalits outside. The following description of a dalit women who goes to purchase some provision at the shop owned by a higher caste person, amply illustrates the internalization of caste practices in dalit women.

> Standing in the courtyard, keeping a distance from the shopkeeper, she would pull her pallav over her face and then using the most reverential and polite terms of address, she would beg him with utmost humility to sell her the things she wanted. "Appasab, could you please give this despicable Mahar woman some shikakai for one paisa and half a shell of dry coconut with black skin?" The shopkeeper's children would be trickling out into the courtyard for their morning ablutions. He would give the innocent children lessons in social behaviour. 'Chabu, hey you, can't you see the dirty *Mahar* woman standing there? Now don't you touch her. Keep your distance. Immediately our *Mahar*

> woman, gathering her rags around her tightly so as not to pollute the child, would say, "Take care little master! Please give a distance. Don't come too close. You might touch me and get polluted." The shopkeeper would come out and, from a distance throw the things into her pallav, which she had spread out in order to receive them (14).

Here Baby Kamble decries the attitude of self- effacement in dalits. The subordination of Dalits may have been initially attained by force but their ultimate surrender was secured with their ideological conditioning. Dalit women are more prone to accept ideology of acquiescence due to the limited possibility of observation and inculcation of different cultural mores.

The autobiography is replete with rituals and ceremonies observed by *Mahars*. Viewing from a post-conversion position, Baby Kamble calls these rituals as essentially Hindu ones and an instrument to enslave the body and soul of dalits:

> Hindu philosophy had discarded us as dirt and thrown us into their garbage pits, on the outskirts of the village. We lived in the filthiest conditions possible. Yet Hindu rites and rituals were dearest to our hearts. For our poor, helpless women, the haldi-kumkum in their tiny boxes was more important than over a mine full of jewels (18).

Apart from all this, there are obvious hints of male ill-treatment and violence to females when the writer talks about her father, or alternatively her husband in the interview. She graphically depicts the pitiable conditions of daughters-in-law under dominating 'sasus' or mothers-in-law. The inhuman conditions in which women are left to exist in the masculine society is presented by the writer in a tone full of condemnation for such beastliness :

> Husbands, flogging their wives as if they were beasts, would do so until the sticks broke with the effort. The heads of these women would break open, their backbones would be crushed and some would collapse unconscious. But there was nobody to care for them. They had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies; their hair would remain uncombed and tangled, dry from lack of oil. Woman led the most miserable existence (98).

When the cup of suffering of these women became full, they ran away stealthily to their parental home. But even there, they did not escape from the tangles of barbarity into which fate had cast them away. She had to bear beatings from her brother and father as a consequence.

Baby Kamble traces the cause of domestic violence in dalits to the male ego, along with the humiliations they have to bear day in and day out on the hands of upper castes. Since the men folk were constantly oppressed by powerful people around them, their suppressed anger and frustrations were revealed in their assertion of their malehood on their women :

> Their male ego gave them some sense of identity. 'I am a man, I am superior to women. I am somebody. If the whole village tortures us, we will torture our women.' (156-57)

But her feminism is not passive. Fuelled by the revolutionary zeal of Ambedkar, she does not take insults lying down. Her quarrels with upper caste girls in her school reveal her struggle for more humane treatment. She appears to be suggesting that women's movements and dalit movements should combine together to fight against the oppressive theorizing of Brahmanism in the arenas of caste and gender for the establishment of egalitarian social structure, Dalit critic Kancha Illaiah also supports this view point when he says :

> In a casteized patriarchal system Dalit Bahujan movements and women's movements should extend helping hands to each other. Such coordination becomes possible only when 'upper' caste women overcome the influence of Brhamanism, which restrict their world view. (*Why I am not a Hindu* 78)

Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (*Aaydan*) 2003:

This memoir describes the writer's long journey from the Konkan to Mumbai and thus brings to fruition the struggle of three generations for a dalit modernity, about which readers have hitherto heard so little.

She writes frankly of the 'private' and 'public' aspects of her life of falling in love with Harish Chandra as a young teenager and marrying him in the teeth of family opposition, of the young couple and their children moving to Mumbai, of her many sustaining friendships with women and her work. Her talking openly about familial and marital conflicts, of the grievous shocks that life dealt her, outraged even some of her admirers. A long term member of the dalit and women's movements Urmila offers a cogent critique of feminist and dalit politics.

This autography also portrays the patterns of victimization inflicted on Dalits like other dalit autobiographies but it is a complex narrative of a gendered individual who looks at the world initially from her location within the caste but also goes on to transcend the caste identity from a feminist perspective. It captures effectively the transition of the *Mahar* community, rooted geographically in the agrarian and rural areas of the *Konkan* region, into a people relocated in urbanized spaces like Mumbai, with a more 'modern' sensibility. The journey demonstrates how the lineages of suffering in the past branch out in myriad different ways in the present as a result of the logic of 'development, modernity and progress' followed in the post-Nehruvian era in India, taking into account the exploitative and hegemonic ideologies of caste, patriarchy, class and gender. This journey takes the readers towards a possiblilty of a future where separate caste identities are morphed into a larger 'human' identity.

Urmila Pawar also mentions that it is women who are responsible for their homes and for taking care of children and old people. They had to face the double bind of exploitation as workers and housewives. Urmila describes the tough lives of these women both in her husband's house as well as in her childhood where :

> The day began very early for women at four O' clock n the morning . . . (they) had to fetch water from the well for everybody in the house to bathe in, drink . . . then they cleaned the pots' and plates for the whole house. They breakfasted with the men folk and went with them to work in the fields. They planted paddy till their backs broke . . . they returned home just half an hour earlier than their men. They lit the stove under an earthen pot which they had filled up in the morning to keep the hot bath ready for their men . . . they began preparations for the evening meals . . . the men arrived, bathed and sat smoking leisurely in the verandah, some of them drinking liquor. Women would again go to the well to fetch water, wash the muddled clothes . . . light the lamps and serve food to the men first . . . . After the children went to sleep, they sat down and massaged the heads and feet of their husbands with oil. By the time they lay down in bed, their backs would be bent like a bow . . . This was not an isolated picture . . . In addition, the woman had to behave as if she were a deaf and dumb creature (246-47).

Sharmila Rege has rightly highlighted the significance of this testimonio in her afterword to *The Weave of My Life* when she says, "It has the potential to interrogate elite Brahmnical institutions and foster new insights and theories for its introduction in the class room as a historical narrative of experience to build a complex relational understanding of social location, experience and history" (328). Thus this work allows us to see the tensions and contestations which framed the transition from a language of obligations and contestations which framed the transition from a language of obligations to a language of rights in the schools, government offices, housing societies and sphere of social activism. Altogether this work becomes a powerful medium to protest against adversaries within and without.

Autobiographical extracts of Shantabai Kamble and Kumud Pawde :

The first autobiographical extract is titled as "Naja goes to school and Doesn't." This is a part of Shantabai Kamble's autobiography *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha*. Here Shantabai describes how caste, class and gender discriminations are perpetual both in the upper caste and Dalit families. Naturally she, being a Dalit girl, was deprived of several opportunities including getting an education. She gives an instance of how she was ill-treated by the mother of her classmate, Shaku, a brahman girl. One day Shaku did not come to school. The headmaster sent Shantabai to her house to fetch her. When Shantabai reached their house she saw there were rangolis outside the door. Seeing Shantabai at the door, Shaku's Ai shouted, "You daughter of a Mahar, stay there. You will trample the rangolis" (*Poisoned Bread* 92). This was a caste-insult directed at the Mahar community as a whole. Such was the humiliation that Shantabai was scared of when visiting an upper caste house for the rest of her life. Thus, this autobiographical extract tells us about the difficulties faced by a Dalit girl in growing up in the Indian Caste society.

Kumud Pawde's autobiographical extract has been named 'The Story of My Sanskrit.' This is a chapter from her autobiography titled *Antasphot*. She was denied the learning of Sanskrit during her school and college. But a determined Kumud fought against all odds and learnt Sanskrit. She, thus, broke the monopoly of the upper caste hegemony and proved that given an opportunity Dalits could do better in Sanskrit language and literature. Today, Kumud Pawde is a distinguished professor of Sanskrit, a rare position attained by a Dalit woman.

Tamil Woman Autobiography :

The spate of autobiographies in Marathi did not find much headway in Tamil Dalit writing. It was only after two decades that the first Dalit autobiography *Karukku* written by Bama arrived on the

literary firmament. Gautaman has rightly traced the specific trajectory of the growth of Tamil Dalit writings :

During the past sixty years the force of Periyar's nationalist thought, the spread of Dravidian Movement's idea and the introduction of Marxist political and economic philosophy have provided a much more opportune context in Tamil Nadu. Here the Dalit uprising is not confined only to expression of Dalit literature. On the contrary, Dalit literature came about as part and parcel of anti-caste struggles, agitation for reserved places in the interest of social justice and political protest for economic quality (96).

Bama's *Karukku* (1992) discusses oppression borne by Dalit especially the Paraiyar caste at the hands of upper caste and at the church. She highlights how Dalit women are suppressed further by Dalit men at home. Karukku means Palmyra leaf and Bama finds many congruities between her strife filled life and saw edge Karukku. Bama herself describes the preface of the book :

The driving forces that shaped this book are very cutting me like Karukku and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away and destroy these bonds and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split then; all these taken together (xxiii *Karukku*).

The autobiography is a bold and poignant tale of life outside mainstream India. Revolving around the main theme of caste oppression within the Catholic church, it portrays the tension between the self and the community, and presents Bama's, life as a process of self-reflection and recovery from social and institutional betrayal. *Karukku* is an autobiographical statement of what it is to be a Dalit and a woman. A Dalit woman is a Dalit amongst the Dalits. She is thus thrice oppressed due to class, caste and gender. In Bama's case her position is further jeopardized by her existence as a Dalit Christian. Hence *Karukku* focuses on three essential forces that cuts across and sears Bama's life namely : caste, gender and religion. This book is about the writer's inner quest for self discovery and the resultant courage, which forces her to move away from the life of a nun to live the life of a Dalit woman.

This work avoids the established conventions of writing an autobiography. It eschews the confessional mode and avoids a linear narrative. Here Bama constructs a subjectivity for herself by addressing others (Dalits and other readers). The narrator becomes aware of the demeaning presence of untouchability among dalits through the spectacle of an elder Paraya carrying a bundle of 'Vadai' by its string and presenting it to a Naiker. Her ruminations show her deep concern at the inhuman practice :

How could they believe that it was disgusting if a *Paraya* held that package in his hands even though the *Vadai* had been wrapped first in a banana leaf, and then parceled in paper? I felt so provoked and angry that I wanted to go and touch those wretched *Vadais* myself, straightway (13).

The practice of handing over leftovers without touching them gives the writer further glimpse into this callous practice.

Education is seen by Bama as a principal aid for attaining self respect which is required in overcoming caste disabilities. The narrator is advised by her brother to study hard if she wants to overcome the indignities heaped by caste system on dalits. “Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any humour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that but if we study and make progress we can throw away these indignities” (15).

The clamour of upper class, upper caste feminists regarding the shared experiences of all women cutting across boundaries of caste, colour or creed do not find much favour with Bama in

Karukku in which upper caste women are as much exploitative and prejudiced against dalit women as their male counterparts. The warden sister of the hostel where the narrator completes her school education, had the habit of blaming dalit children for eating too much and thus becoming fattish when they are in the hostel : "These people get nothing to eat at home; they come here and they grow fat" (17). While travelling in bus, the upper caste woman on learning about the caste of dalit women either vacate the seat or ask them to move.

The decision to enter into Convent by the narrator leads her into a new awareness about the caste prejudices prevalent in Church and in its allied institutions. The narrator finds it revolting that dalits were made to do menial jobs for nuns. The exploitative and unjust power structure within the convent is just an imitation of the caste system in outer society where the nuns play the roles of upper caste people.

Dalit women possess self-reliance and courage aplenty in *Karukku*. They have to work tirelessly to earn a living and bring up their children. The narrator presents a poignant picture of their lives through the example of his patti who works from the morning till late in the night. This work does not focus on domestic violence which was highlighted in her novel *Sangati*. Yet the writer touches upon this theme when she mentions Uudan, the flute player who used to daily 'drag his wife by the hair to the community hall and beat her up as if she were an animal, with his bat' (52). But on the other hand, she speaks highly of the greater freedom accorded to dalit girls as compared to upper class girls and considers it the distinguishing characteristic of dalit society.

The writer also becomes aware of the painful reality while remaining in the convent that while followers of Christianity in India are overwhelmingly from dalit castes, the position of power is occupied by the upper caste Christians who "assume power and control over the dispossessed and the poor by thrusting a blind belief and devotion upon them and turning them into slaves in the name of God while they themselves live in comfort" (93-94).

Thus, the narrator highlights this fact that the gender, caste and class reinforce one another to subjugate dalit women and try to ensure her continual oppression. She calls upon all Dalits to wake up, unite and fight against casteist forces of the country. She dreams of a just and humane society where she believes everyone will be equal. She thus writes :

> We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings, we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all those institutions that use caste to bully us into submission and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal (28).

Punjabi Dalit Autobiographies

Punjabi Dalit autobiographies authenticate the real world of exclusionary orders and practices; of social ostracism, caste discriminations, economic and sexual exploitation and political subordination of wants, miseries, insults, humiliations but also the world of dalit dreams, aspirations, struggles, sacrifices and rise. These dalit autobiographies appeared late on the Punjabi literary horizon. The first such work happens to be Pandit Bakshi Ram's ***Mera Jeevan Sangharsh*** (My Life Struggle), hardly known and referred to as it was not published by any established publishers but by Punjab Pradesh Balmik Sabha Jalandhar, a caste-based organization in 1983. Lal Singh Dil's ***Dastan*** is a heart-rending account almost poetic of his life as a dalit on the margins of every facet of life. He goes into those issues of everyday life where he felt humiliated, neglected, ignored, despised, dismissed and tortured as he also records those who befriended, encouraged, stood by, helped and consoled. Balbir Madhopuri's

Chhangia Rukh (*The Lopped Tree*) appeared in 2003 and stirred the Punjabi literary world by baring the real rural social life the way it was not done before. It is a powerful portrayal of dalit life-world. Equally important is the 2007 autobiography by another dalit writer Gurnam Aqida called ***Kakh Kande : Nij Ton Haqiqat Val*** (*Blades of Grass and Thistles : From Self towards Reality*). It is a touching account of rural-urban continuum as far as the dalits' position is concerned. He describes that as a journalist he had to face caste prejudice and oppression at the hands of his corrupt superiors and jealous colleagues and they considered him a *Kanda* (Hindi **kanta**-thistle). The autobiography of Attarjit adds another dimension to the dalit life-world of Punjab where dalits match the dominant jatt community on the question of self-respect even engaging them in fights including murders.

On the whole there are remarkable differences in the autobiographies written by Dalit men and women. While Dalit men hardly talk about Dalit patriarchy in their autobiographies, Dalit women never hesitate to write about the nature of exploitation they generally face both within their communities and outside. The personal narratives of Bama, Kumud Pawde, Babytai Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Shantabai Kale, Viramma and several others are examples of how Dalit women have to defy several traditions to assert their individual identities. The subjects Dalit men commonly deal within their narratives are different forms of caste and class exploitation and the various kinds of deprivations they have to face because they happen to come from the so-called lower caste communities. Their protests against such discrimination in their writings are loud and clear. They have also advocated the restoration of the dignity and self respect of Dalits who have been denied such human rights for so long. Thus, Dalit Women autobiographies have becomes capsules of agony both within household and outside as they face triple discrimination on account of caste, class and gender. The effort is to break age-old wall of oppression imposed on them.

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Writing Community through Self: Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*

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Abstract

The present paper focuses upon highlighting the non-linear, fragmented autobiographical description of Valmiki's life in his book Joothan: A Dalit's Life. It also focusses upon the representation of an entire community by an author while talking about himself. The dalit community in India-even after obtaining safeguards and guarantees enshrined in the Constitution of India-has been facing extreme form of discrimination at every level of life. Their oppression and exploitation is still prevalent in most parts of the country. As a part of their struggle to seek justice and equality, many Dalit writers have given voice to the sufferings of their people and Om Prakash Valmiki is one of those writers who represent the angst of the entire community. His autobiography, Joothan: A Dalit's Life, exposes the brutality inherent in the caste system as well as his own struggle for personal dignity and human rights.

The paper has been divided into three parts. The first part focusses on Autobiography-writing the self-as a literary genre-primarily in the West-and its evolution through the ages. The second part traces the history of the caste hierarchy in the Hindu societal order and the origin of the term 'dalit' which would provide the larger socio-politico-cultural context for the reading of the text. Part III presents a critical reading of one of the most powerful autobiographies, namely, Joothan: A Dalit's Life, written in Hindi by Om Prakash Valmiki, a prominent writer who is a dalit .Its English translation by Arun Prabha Mukherjee has been used.

Keywords: *community, caste-system, dalit, Valmiki, self, autobiography, exploitation, hierarchy, politics, Joothan, education.*

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The word 'self' in the title of this paper refers to someone writing and talking about himself/herself and encompasses an individual's complete identity--class, caste, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, region etc. so, writing self is not only to talk about oneself but to represent a range of community. It is as if one is carrying a gunnysack, full of emotional, physical, psychological and social experiences on one's back all the time. When we talk about 'Writing Self,' it is to talk about

writing one's own name, life, experiences, expectations, adjustments and many other facets. Thus, 'self-writing' or autobiography is not as easy a task as it appears to be- apparently.

The tradition of writing the self-Autobiography, as it is known today, can be traced back to the Greeks-as early as Plato-and then to Romans. But, those were not systematic full length accounts of a writer's life. Rather, they presented accounts of only certain aspects of their lives, like wars and victories therein or achievements of emperors. Then came the Confessions by the early Christians that were detailed accounts of a writer's personal and spiritual experiences. St. Augustine's *Confessions* (A.D. 397-98) is considered to be among the first such autobiographies written in the West.

It took almost a thousand years for the genre of autobiography to transform itself into its literary *avatar*. This was in the form of written records of one's own life, including travel adventures in the form of diaries, memoirs, journals etc. Later, in the post renaissance Europe it became a fashion to make such personal experiences public. Although such descriptions of personal life accounts secularized the tradition and laid the foundation of the tradition of writing autobiography, yet many of those continued to be known as 'Confessions.' Rosseau's autobiography, for instance, was called *Confessions* (1789), though its content was very much different from St. Augustine's *Confessions*. It is more philosophical and ideological in its focus than spiritual. Soon arrived another phase of autobiography writing- this time these were titled as 'Autobiography.' Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1808) and J. S. Mill's *Autobiography* (1873) appeared under this title. In 1809, Robert Southey defined the term 'Autobiography' as writings by persons about their personal lives and experiences. However, this definition has since then undergone many radical changes. For instance, French critic Phillipe Lejeune defined autobiography as, "Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." The phrase 'by a real person' was included in the definition because a number of writers designed their novels as Autobiography to give them a semblance of real life stories.

Autobiography, in its modern form, is essentially a western literary genre originating in 18th century. It was the time when narration of facts was considered aesthetically superior to imaginative writing and many novelists passed their works as nonfiction, adding Prefaces written by supposedly real characters, claiming that the work belongs to the genre of autobiography. The emergence of autobiography also coincides with the rise of bourgeoisie and the social philosophy of individualism. It also coincided with the concept of writing history-historiography-focusing on a unilinear narrative based on cause and effect. Thus writing self is close to a realistic mode of narration.

While examining autobiography as a literary genre, we find that it came to India quite late. Under the influence of British writers, some Indians from the elite, urban and educated classes started writing their autobiographies. However, prior to this trend of writing autobiographies, there existed in some of the Indian languages, an indigenous tradition of writing one's life story. Some of the most prominent autobiographies by the Indians include *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by Mahatma Gandhi and *An Autobiography* by Jawaharlal Nehru. Interestingly, both received their education in England and must have been well aware of the autobiography-a literary genre.

Autobiographies-apart from providing their readers with a voyeuristic pleasure of peeping into even the psychic self of the writer-also create a rapport between the reader and the writer on the basis of a shared experience. Autobiography is a consciously pursued literary genre dealing with the

varied dimensions of its personality of the subject. It enables the author to recreate his lived experiences and offer the readers a walk through his memory lane. While writing an autobiography, the author combines the biographical facts and experiences from his own point of view and remains true-at least expectedly-to facts of life as well. Similarly, the major focus of the dalit literary movement was to present the lived experiences of the dalit from a dalit point-of- view with a focus upon the dalit in the subject position. Thus, they found autobiography an appropriate genre to represent the dalit consciousness. Their selection of the genre was well thought and deliberate.

II

Before discussing the tradition of dalit autobiographies, let us discuss briefly the term dalit. This term is the latest of all the expressions used for a specific group of people in the Hindu Social order. According to *Manusmriti* the Hindus were divided into four different *Varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras*. These Varnas had a pre-designed set of rules which included mainly their occupations. The Brahmins were given the highest position in the hierarchy while the Shudras were given the most menial jobs-the so called dirty work. Interestingly, the speaker of the Indian Parliament (Lower House) Shri Om Birla, in a recent observation, reiterated the preeminent position of people was due to their being Brahmins. The duty of the *shudras*, however, was to serve the other sections of the society. In return they got nothing; also they were denied all the rights and were treated by the other three castes in any manner they liked. The division placed the *Shudras* at the lowest rung because they originated, mythologically, from the feet of Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe. Thus, they belong to the lowest wrung of the society. Not only this, it was said that these Shudras bore the burden of their sins from the previous life. So, they should bear all the torments uncomplainingly. The *Shudras* were considered '*Achhoot*'--unholy, untouchables--and were denied even the basic rights of survival. They were forced to do those works which were despised by the upper caste people like cleaning the toilets, skinning the dead animals, scavenging the streets, collecting garbage etc. They were compelled to live in slums outside the towns or villages so that the air being breathed by other castes may not get polluted by their breath and body odours. These *Shudras* were denied education lest they should pollute the sacred texts of Hindus by being able to read them. Also, their entry into the religious places was restricted. Furthermore, they were denied access to clean water and basic food even. Being *Shudra* or lower caste people they had to live on the leftover food of the upper castes.

This is how the British found them when they colonized India. Instead of uplifting this community, they too followed the same trend. They followed this social order since the division helped them rule the country. Moreover, they found the Hindu religion and its various concepts like rebirth etc. fantastic. However, the British drafted a new provision for these downtrodden people and categorized them as Scheduled Castes and granted them some privileges and rights. Thus, in official records, the term '*Achhoot*' was replaced with the term Scheduled Castes.

However, the ground realities are always different from the official realities. These rights of the Scheduled Castes could not end their exploitation. They continued to be treated as *Achhoots*. But, some of the prominent persons among the scheduled castes realized the need to fight for their rights and started questioning the wrong-doings of the upper caste Hindus. It was by the end of the 19th

century that Jotiba Phule raised his voice against the subjugation of the *Shudras* nee *Achhoots* nee Scheduled Castes. He gave them a new name: *Dalits*. The literal meaning of the term is "Oppressed." Thus by calling themselves as dalits, these lower caste people turned a disparaging term with a negative implication into a badge of honour.

Writing about their suppression became a form of protest. The dalits started writing literary pieces in the form of poems, stories and even plays etc. Jotiba Phule, himself had composed some poems. But dalit writings found their voice only in the mid-fiftees of the last century when they moved towards writing their own life-stories. The *Dalits* in Maharashtra were the first to find a voice in this form of literature. A number of writers like Daya Pawar, Lakshman Mane, Lakshman Gaikwad, Kishor Shantabai Kale, Sharan Kumar Limbale wrote in Marathi. They all published their autobiographies. It may be interesting to observe here that while writers belonging to other castes and communities chose to write autobiographies much later in their literary careers after they had established themselves, dalits chose this literary genre as their preferred mode of expression because they wanted the people to know their personal experiences of extreme hardships at the hands of upper caste Hindus. Some, in fact, made their entry to the world of creativity with an autobiography. They aimed at raising the consciousness of the entire Indian society as well as of their own community to fight this scourge of humanity.

But, while writing their autobiographies, the Dalits changed their pattern of presenting the events. They rejected the linear and chronological order of narration. They chose certain events and phases of their lives deliberately and presented them to criticize the Hindu social order. The Dalit autobiographies deviate significantly-if not disrupting them altogether-the western mode of narration of the self. While they too based their autobiographies on realistic mode of narration, the dalit writers of personal narratives use this realistic mode as a potent weapon, challenging the hierarchical social structures under Hindu caste system. The dalit literature is full of such discourses. Since the individual stories of the dalits were intertwined with the stories of their communities-after all, the prejudice against an individual was not personal but communal- giving voice to their community became the first aim of dalit writers and they have very much succeeded in doing so.

While dalit literature is an expression of their subjugated selves, it does not represent the trauma of a single individual or a family but of the entire community. It gives voice to a large mass of suppressed people in India This is a voice of rebellion as well as liberation. These narratives of the self also challenge a notion of the individual as unfragmentary, stable self who is a free agent in his/her development. The self in dalit autobiography is constituted by multiple social forces like caste, class, gender and environment acting simultaneously. This makes the narrative non-linear and the individual described is unstable. dalit self narratives seek a change in social order through a certain point of view proclaimed by the author in the autobiography. These writers invoke a new aesthetics by selecting certain events out of a chaos of events that mark their lives and lending them signification and making them symbolic. The signification and symbolic representation makes such personal narratives to be read simultaneously as narratives of the community at the next level and national narratives at yet another. For doing this, a dalit writer chooses a certain tone and sense of emphasis consistent with his or her point of view.

This choice of select amnesia-to remember to include certain events while forgetting others-and the choice of language and diction as also the original stance-message-is exercised by the writer with the use of his imagination. A dalit autobiography, therefore, is an aesthetic manifestation of the lived reality of an individual as well as of the community.

III

Joothan by Om Prakash Valmiki is one such autobiography where the writer records certain events of his life in a non-linear fashion. It begins with the description of the village space where the people of his community lived. The *Chuhras*, people of Valmiki's own community, lived across the pond, which acted as a natural barrier between the upper caste quarters and the untouchables. It demarcates not just the physical space occupied by the upper and the lower castes but the two different worlds of existence. The lower caste people are compelled to live among filth and deprivation. There is an all pervading stink and one could see pigs, dogs and children roaming around in the narrow streets of this *basti*. Obviously as a consequence of the caste system, the *Chuhras* lived in a physical and social space devoid of human dignity. As Valmiki says, "The stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering the narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights, this was the environment of my childhood" (1). Thus, Valmiki's early childhood is marked by the utter deficiency and lack of dignity. The description given by Valmiki gives an exact sense of extreme deprivation and the subhuman conditions faced by the untouchable community. "The children of the Tyagis would tease me by calling me '*Chuhre ka*'. Sometimes they would beat me without any reason" (3).

This social and psychological deprivation is further accelerated by the economic deprivation. Every member of Valmiki's family worked and yet it was difficult for them to mange two decent meals a day. The economic backwardness was a consequence of the caste order, the *Chuhras* do all types of works for the Tagas-the upper caste people-and in return they were either paid poorly or not given anything. Due to the caste system, they dare not raise their voice against this slavery, thus they bore the inhuman behavior stoically. These lower caste people were considered polluted and even less than animals. Ironically one could touch animals but not *Chuhras*.

The next level of this inhuman behavior takes the untouchables towards their struggle for education. Although the government schools were officially open for everyone irrespective of their caste, class, color, gender or religion yet Valmiki was refused admission on the basis of his caste. After a prolonged period of begging and cajoling, Master Har Phool Singh allowed Valmiki into the school. It is important to remember that all this was happening eight years after the independence of India. The practice of untouchability was very much a feature of this school. There were two more untouchables in Valmiki's class and all the three were made to sit away from others. Despite all the ill treatment at the hands of fellow students as well as teachers, the three of them persisted and continued in the school.

The treatment at the school got worse with the arrival of the new headmaster, Kaliram. Valmiki highlights the use of swear words by the Brahmin teachers on a regular basis. This observation is a kind of reply to those who frown upon the use of abusive language in the *Dalit* literature. Valmiki explicitly highlights that when such words could be used in real life by the upper

caste exploiters then how could it be considered wrong to portray a true picture of the real life. The horrifying experiences at school left a haunting image of the *Guru* (teacher) on the young mind of Valmiki. He could never recall his teachers as saviors or enlighteners. Rather, he would remember his teacher as a man who would swear about his mother and sister and would abuse young boys sexually, " . . . After a few minutes the headmaster's loud thundering was heard: 'Abey Chuhre ke, motherfucker, where are you hiding . . . your mother . . . " (5). Moreover, the frail boy was ordered by the headmaster to sweep the entire school for three days and on the fourth day Valmiki's father discovered him with a broom in his hand, sweeping the floor. This humiliating experience proved to be the turning point of Valmiki's life. Instead of quietly letting the boy suffer this indignity, his father confronted the headmaster and promised him that Valmiki would study in the same school and ensured that many more untouchables would follow Valmiki to the school. Later on, with the help of the village *pradhan*, he managed to send him back to the same school. Valmiki presents his father as a champion fighter for the community who does not hesitate not only to gaze 'without' but also 'within.' He takes a vow to 'eliminate caste through education' and to do away with self- humiliating practices like 'salaam.'

Valmiki also describes certain social practices of the lower caste people such as collecting *Joothan* from festivities. Narration of an episode relating to collection of *Joothan* is followed by Valmiki with his comments, revealing his world view. We may call this the politics of a dalit autobiography. By bringing in an episode involving a woman being raped by two men-one of them was his teacher-and he witnessing it as a school child, Valmiki links up the oppression of Dalits with that of women. The dalit women are doubly oppressed and marginalized. This is what Jyotiba Phule and Pandita Ramabai had visualized--a joint front between those oppressed on the basis of caste and gender to confront the exploiting Hindu social order.

Through his critiquing of the system of education, social customs, practices of 'begaar'-forced free labour-and oppression of myriad other kinds, Valmiki exposes the stinking social organization of Hindu society under caste system. He describes the impact of events, hostilities or atrocities upon himself as well as upon the community's psyche. The argument that Valmiki is building up is that such atrocities scarred his psyche forever. The artistic fabrication of the autobiography comes through not the veracity of the events but through his choice to include some in his narration while leaving out others. Also in writing the self he is writing the community and writing the nation at the same time, like a pebble thrown in a quiet pond producing concentric circles, each independent and yet connected with the other. The brutalities done upon one dalit affected the entire community thereby connecting them with one another. While writing the self, he writes the community and the nation and thus deviates from the classical form of autobiography. The scars, he spoke about earlier, made Valmiki a non-stable personality and the narrative a non-linear. The caste, class, gender, physical environment have all acted simultaneously on his evolution and have made it fragmentary. The use of language which is earthy, full of abuses at times and the diction also refers to an aesthetics different from the classical one.

Since most of the readers may not share his caste and the kind of life he has led, Valmiki through his autobiography, challenges them constantly to re-examine their faith in the Hindu social

order. Finally, a brief comment about the title 'Joothan,' it is a misnomer to translate *joothan* as left over food. Joothan, actually, refers to a much more complex phenomenon wherein the recipient, a lower caste person, is expected to receive the leftover food- either left uneaten in a used plate or otherwise-with a sense of gratitude to giver, generally an upper caste person. Expressing gratitude and blessing the giver of the Joothan is an essential part of the sociology of *Joothan*. *Joothan* is used by 'Valmiki' as a metaphor for all Dalits and lower castes who have to be grateful to the Indian Hindu Social order for the treatment meted out to them.

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Communing with Nature: Restoring the Bond with Land in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Pratibha Ray's *The Primal Land*

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes the role of nature in the lives of the tribals while exploring their indigenous eco-customs and traditions that have helped in sustaining their eco-centric approach to life. It also explores the culture-nature dialectic that surfaces the long-lasting conflict between tradition and modernity through a distinctive tribal perspective. The notions of civilization, progress and development modelled on the dictums of western thought are also deconstructed within the framework of tribal ecological consciousness. Ecocritcism attempts to transcend the duality of art and life, human and the natural, and explore the interconnections between them. In this respect, ecocriticism takes into account varied literary, ecological and philosophical perspectives.

The paper analyzes The Heart of Redness (2001) by Zakes Mda, a South African writer, and The Primal Land (1993) by Pratibha Ray, an Indian English novelist, from an ecocritical perspective while comparing their representation of tribal eco-sensibilities and analyzing their eco-ethical imports. The narratives along with sending a lucid message for the survival of ecology, urge the human race to re-kindle its communion with nature.

***Keywords**: Nature, ecocriticism, tribal, eco-ethical, tradition, modernity, communion.*

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Ecocriticism investigates the human conception of ecology and traces its interaction with

nature throughout history. It attempts to work with the principles of ethics to celebrate both the aesthetic and ethical value of the natural world. In this regard, Serpil Oppermann believes that "ecocriticism ought to focus on the textual strategies of literary texts in constructing an ecologically informed discourse about the ways in which humans interact with other life forms" (5). Simon C. Estok states that "ecocriticism has distinguished itself, … firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections" (220). Furthermore, through literature, ecocriticism also suggests a political interaction with nature as a tool towards a sustainable life. In a similar tone, Grandón states that "This approach[ecocriticism] explores the view of nature in works that express a concern to denounce or ethically see the relationship of man with his natural environment, his place, his oiko" (3). Ecocritical approach, then, attempts to transcend the duality of art and life, human and the natural, and explore the interconnections between them. In this respect, ecocriticism takes into account varied literary, ecological and philosophical perspectives.

Informed by these fundamentals of ecocriticism and ecoethics laid down by theorists like Greg Garrad, Ursula Heise, Serpil Oppermann and philosophers like Patrick Curry, John Baird Callicot, Ramachandra Guha and many more, this paper analyzes the role of nature in the lives of the tribals while exploring their indigenous eco-customs and traditions that have helped in sustaining their eco-centric approach to life. It also explores the culture-nature dialectic that surfaces the long-lasting conflict between tradition and modernity through a distinctive tribal perspective. The notions of civilization, progress and development modelled on the dictums of western thought are also deconstructed within the framework of tribal ecological consciousness. The paper analyzes *The Heart of Redness* (2001) by Zakes Mda, a South African writer, and *The Primal Land* (1993) by Pratibha Ray, an Indian English novelist, from an ecocritical perspective while comparing their representation of tribal eco-sensibilities and analyzing their eco-ethical imports.

The Heart of Redness traces the journey of the male protagonist Camagu from a sceptic of traditional ecological wisdom to a firm believer of indigenous eco-identity. It places the needs of indigenous people in conflict to the western models of development and progress. While doing so, the novel also foregrounds the failure of such developmental models due to a lack of knowledge about native culture and ecosystem. While questioning the western homogenization of ethnic cultures as alternative modes of development, the novelist also attempts to dissolve the borders of past and present, 'Believers' and 'Unbelievers', tradition and progress, colonial and neo-colonial, and nature and culture. The narrative positions the old South Africa against the contemporary South Africa, and while drawing similarities and differences it questions the formation of the new on the grave of the old.

On the other hand, Pratibha Ray, in her novel, *The Primal Land* intends to evoke sensibilities towards the displacement of nature in our humanistic paradigm. The novel is a translation of *Aadibhoomi* which is her novel written in Oriya. It presents the plight of an embattled Bonda tribe that

inhabits the mountains and forests of Malkangiri region of Koraput, Orissa. This fictionalized reconstruction of a lesser-known Bonda tribe helps in surfacing their indigenous eco-traditions. The narrative unravels the image of Bonda as "naked like the mountain and the river, the sky and the earth, like the beasts of the forest" (3). For the people of the plains, he is brute and barbaric, as nature is also wild and uncivilized. Since the Bondas do not conform to the rules of civilization, they are considered wild too. For the Bonda, the cycle of life and death coincides with the cycle of growth and decay as in nature. As a "primitive, aboriginal society" (2), the Bondas have been in constant interaction with nature with their "back turned to civilization" (2). They choose to call themselves "Remo" (Man), so that the people of the plains do not mistake them for an animal. In this context L. K Mohapatra and R.P Mohanty, renowned tribal critics, state that "neither they want to leave their original place, nor like to settle with the outsiders ... Here, the question of dominance by plains people ... was at the back of their mind" (38). The Bondas have been saved and nurtured by nature throughout ages. In a mythical story present in the narrative of the Bondas, the salap trees have a "soul; it shared the pain of the human beings" (12). The origin of Bondas is credited to the salap tree which, "served the ocean with great devotion until it was pleased and gave the tree a little of its bounty of water. The water spread through the roots, the trunk and branches of the tree and dripped into the mouth of the crying babies" (12).

In a similar strain, *The Heart of Redness* reconstitutes the history of the indigenous through a celebration of its interdependence on nonhuman species, along with its strong case for maintaining authenticity and uniqueness. Zakes Mda's male protagonist, Camagu, ordained with the doctoral degree in Communications and Economics from the United States returns to South Africa harbouring dreams of contributing purposefully to the building of the new nation but is soon disenchanted by the rampant nepotism and lop-sided political and economic policies. He decides to return to the USA, but is enchanted by the mysterious call of NomoRussia, a call from the past governed by the mysticism and spiritualism of his native tradition. He decides to follow her and ends up in a place called Qolorho-by-sea, a lagoon in confrontational dialogue with the wheels of development. Here, he undertakes a journey into the heart of his existence, his redness, his traditions and his lineage unmarked by the burden of original sin. Zakes Mda uses the locale of Qolorho-by-sea to raise doubts about the global eco-tourism projects that aim at destroying the spiritual connections between the humans and the ancestral spirits, the land and the inhabitant, the sea and the valley and the native flora and fauna.

Similarly, *The Primal Land* lists numerous mythical tales that show the life-long association of Bondas with nature and set a base for understanding the cultural epistemology of the tribe. Their beliefs, traditions and ideologies not only bind them with nature for sustenance but also help them develop a familial bond with nature that goes far beyond any instrumental comprehension. The juice of the Salap tree, sapung is an intoxicant for the civilized people, but for a Bonda it is "the salve that soothes his pain, makes life possible among these fearful mountains" (23). The identity of the Bondas is strongly woven in their interaction with nature. They wear a small piece of cloth, survive on natural

produce and are content with their life. Their Edenic existence allows them to be a part of the ecological existence. The flora, the fauna and the air are their strongest ally and they worship them with utmost devotion. These traditions have helped them survive for numerous decades.

For the Bondas, the land is not a piece of paper to be owned, but a living spirit, a family to be celebrated. “Wherever the eye can travel is sky, but not divided into fragments, 'thine' and 'mine'. In the sky there are no fences separating village from village, caste from caste” (2). They owe it a responsibility towards the land, as the Mother Earth “offered her soft lap, the valleys and settlements where the Bondas rested his head” (3). To appease the spirits, rituals are invariably performed. These rituals are normally associated with different components of the ecology. Before building a new hut, a ritual worship of the Earth is done; “the soil that gave birth to him was more dear to him than his offspring” (61). Before drinking the sapung, a ritual is performed to celebrate the first yield from the salap tree; a biru is performed to ensure the health of trees. According to Bonda belief that “When a person dies the jili (soul) is carried by Goi Gigo, God of death back to Mahapuru, but the shadow of the dead remains behind as a sairem or duma, to haunt the village, the fields and forests, where the person had lived. If jili is rejected by the Mahapuru, it returns to join the duma, to create terror among the kinsman of the dead and extract birus and sacrifices from them” (210).

Just like the dense forests of Orissa allow the Bondas to be a part the ecosystem, Zakes Mda's presentation of the Nongqawuse valley as a site for the narrative fulfils the spiritual aspirations of the Xhosa tribe. Talking about the spiritual connection between biotic communities, Greg Garrad, a noted ecocritic avers, “The metaphysical argument for biocentricism is meant to sustain moral claims about the intrinsic value of the natural world which will in turn affect our attitudes and behaviour towards nature” (202). The people of Qolorha share a symbiotic relationship with nature. For them, the birds, the trees and the lagoon are a means to communicate with their ancestors. Zim, 'the Believer', finds solace in a fig tree in front of his house, as he believes that the fig tree is frequently visited by the spirit of his ancestors. Even Camagu who had long left the land, shows his disdain for the “screeching saxophones” (27). He is brought back by the mystic voices of NomoRussia who is invoking her ancestors through the oral tradition of split-tone music. Throughout the novel, there are explicit references of natives embodying ecological consciousness in their daily lives. The conservation laws charted by King Sarhili, and the decision of the 'Believers' to not cut any indigenous trees ensure that the task of preservation of nature is taken seriously by the natives of Qolorha. The only trees that are allowed to be cut are the mimosa because they grow organically and are in much abundance. While strolling in the Nongqawuse's valley, Camagu finds Qukezwa, the female protagonist and a member of the “Believer' group, cutting down beautiful plants with purple flowers. When he objects, she replies: “Nice plants, eh? Nice for you, maybe. But not nice for indigenous plants. This is the inkberry. It comes from across the Kei River. It kills other plants”(90). Moreover, these foreign trees need a lot of water, drawing in excess from the indigenous crops. Here she contests the idea of the 'Unbelievers'

who openly exhort: "It is foolish to talk of conserving indigenous trees. After all, we can always plant civilized trees. Trees that come from across the seas" (146).

The ecological conditions of the amaXhosa people find a reflection in the environmental debates prevalent in the land of the Bondas. In the garb of civilizing the Bondas, the proprietors of progress take away their beliefs, faiths, traditions, customs and even attire. Since the Bondas are illiterate, they cannot understand the real meaning of progress and blindly follow the gulang babus (government officials) in the hope of "better life". Ironically, they are unaware of the meaning of the phrase "better life", and chase a dream that finally turns out to be a nightmare for their tribe.

With the passage of time, the Bondas get divided into two prominent groups, the Upper Bondas and the Lower Bondas. The latter are more prone to the changes envisaged by the onslaught of materialism and capitalism while the Upper Bondas are still fierce in their pursuance of archaic knowledge and protection of authentic culture. For the Upper Bondas, "the soil which gave him birth was more dear to him than his offspring" (61). The language of the Lower Bondas also changes due to the influence of other cultures. They no longer wear traditional beads and prefer to be fully dressed as the plains people. The Upper Bondas despise them for abandoning their land and patronizing the foreign influences. Due to the increasing pressures of civilization, "the numbers of the Lower Bonda were increasing while the Upper Bonda killed each other" (63).

The real threat to their way of life arises with the fast-developing world making entry into their tribal world. Time to time people from various religions come to the region, with an agenda to civilize them. Perplexed at the different faces of gods, the Bondas compare them with Mahapuru, their stone-god living under the Banyan tree. They leave the photos of the new gods near the banyan tree and decide to pray to the one who maintains their ground till morning. Notwithstanding the forces of wind, the photos are lost in the eternity of time. Hence, the Mahapuru turns victorious and Bondas solidify their faith in the pagan gods. Since they do not enter the folds of any conformed religion, they are able to devise rules for themselves that are both eco-centred and eco-sustainable.

Gradually, the government starts to intervene with the lure of incentives and subsidies. The sarkar (government) carpets and re-carpets roads, opens schools with no buildings, appoints teachers with no requirement of attendance, and builds housing complexes named Indira Awas that never stand the test of time. These yardsticks of development are never implemented keeping in mind the cultural idiom of the Bondas. In fact, they are specifically aimed to cater to the western models of development and to fill the pockets of the government officials. It is feared that the success of these welfare programmes would make them redundant as "there would be no more people in need of help. What would happen to the vast resources which they had amassed? They would be used to "undevelop" those who were developed … . Charity must end, if not begin, at home" (191). This un-planned development causes a serious threat to the ecosystem of the land. The new leader of the Bonda Development Project, Bijoy Bal, orders the felling of valuable teak trees "to make chairs, sofas,

dining tables and desks" (263) for his office. He also imports exotic flowers from nurseries in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar, sets in power lines to install an electric bulb in his residence, shuts the tailoring workshop and starts the carpet weaving centre that does not use indigenous material but imports raw material from far-away cities. This disturbs the equilibrium of the place and cuts-in on the employment opportunities of the local Bondas. Under his reign, the horticulture produce of the Bonda Mountain is awarded the first prize. However, in reality, "Did anyone ever get to see those prize-winning fruits and vegetables when they were growing here? The rebellious dhangras muttered. On which trees did they grow?" (267). The aim of the Bonda Development Project is to civilize Bondas, educate them and to include them into the mainstream populace. However, this is reduced to: "If the Bonda had learnt the value of money it had to be admitted that the project was a success" (202). A divide is imitated in the Bondas based on the wealth amassed by each. When the time comes to allot the Indira Awas houses to the Bondas, the government representatives ask the Bondas, " Who among you is poor? …Who is the poorest?" (248). The plan is to allot the houses only to the poorest Bondas, so that at the time of inspection, the higher officials are impressed by the scale of development. Conversely, the Bondas respond, "There is no poor among us Bondas. What is 'poor'? To which caste does he belong? We don't need your gulang houses! Go away and leave us in peace, you Khangars!" (248). To succeed their plan, the sarkar babus finally start to offer money to the Bondas for settling in the new houses. This offer is accepted by the ones who are under tremendous debt and do not have much to survive on. Hence, the "Bondas are divided into the rich and the poor. Those who lived under thatches and those who lived under tin roofs" (249).

Unlike Pratibha Ray who chooses to present a cultural biography of the Bondas, Zakes Mda adeptly utilizes the tool of magic realism to commence a conversation concerning the western anthropocentric perspectives of the position of nature in human life. With the use of diachronic time perspective, he is able to emphasize an interplay between the past and the present and also productively present the continuities across the human and the nonhuman worlds that exist in the Xhosa traditions. In *The Heart of Redness*, the initiation of the man-nature communication is done at the behest of the cattle-killing episode (1850s) etched in the history of South Africa. During the colonial times, when the Xhosa people were being subjugated in the garb of colonialisation, the prophesy of a young girl Nongquawuse that a mass sacrifice of the cattle and destruction of crop would save them from British invasion, resulted in the spread of famine and an inevitable surrender of local people to the forces of colonization. The episode while affecting the ecology had also divided the people into two groups- 'Believers' and 'Unbelievers'. In contemporary times, the 'Believers', who are headed by Zim and his robust daughter Qukzewa, having learnt from their past mistakes are against the construction of a gaming resort on their land. They believe that the gaming project will serve a lesser economic interest and will harm the ecology of the place severely. On the behest of the creation of new jobs, it will eventually subdue the indigenous population and affect its connect with

the land. The 'Unbelievers', championed by Bhonco and his western-educated daughter Xoliswa Ximiya, stand for progress and development. They believe that the new gaming project will empower the youth with new jobs, and the tools of modernization will bring them on par with the civilized majority of the cities.

From an ecological point of view, the debate between the 'Believers' and the 'Unbelievers' cautions against a totalitarian acceptance of any ideology and suggests a mediated route as propagated by the educated elite (Camagu) and the white trader (Dalton). They envision a workable solution that satisfies most of the community members. Being well-versed with the western models of development and equally informed about the needs of the indigenous land, Camagu proposes a developmental model that is not only progressive but is also ecologically sustainable. His project of eco-tourism gets a good boost as the government agrees to declare the place as a national heritage site and rejects any proposals of the casino and the tourist resort. He organizes a cooperative of local women who harvest and sell their sea produce and make and sell their traditional Xhosa clothing and jewellery. However, he refuses to lure tourists on the fascination of an exotic community as suggested by his partner John Dalton, a native with a British capitalistic mindset. Camagu is in favour of using Xhosa tradition to sell the ecological attraction of the place provided the integrity and biodiversity of the place are maintained. He asserts, "…the culture of Xhosa as they live it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa people-he claims- are not a museum piece. Like all cultures their culture is dynamic" (248). Through the final act of Camagu and the rejection of Dalton's capitalistic idea, Zakes Mda tries to achieve an amalgamation of culture and nature, the postcolonial and the ecocritical. When the protagonist, at the end of the novel, offers Dalton to work together for a progressive future he says, "This rivalry of ours is bad. Our feud has lasted for too many years" (277). Zakes Mda hints at such new landscapes of partnership where the educated mindset recognizes his roots and traditions, and while developing a close communion with nature works for the progress of South Africa.

Maintaining a similar tone, Pratibha Ray by evaluating the cause of the tribals in the world that believes in the western notions of development highlights the fact that when their bond with nature is questioned in order to provide the clothing of civilization, the Bondas are left helpless and disappointed. Adibari, the first woman to leave traditional Bonda clothing to wear a sari and keep long hair is ultimately left by the proprietors of "better life" to survive on the mercy of a sexual pervert who exploits her on the pretext of giving her a roof. She is made to abandon her new-born in the woods, something never heard of in the Bonda community. She lives with the hope that upon her death, "… spirit will return to the mountain… I cannot go back into the sacred land to pollute it with my presence" (199). On the other hand, Sombari Toki, the second woman to wear a sari, returns to her tradition disgruntled by the false promises of development: "Which babu from the city would have come to marry me? Can any city babu be trusted? That was the mistake Adibar Toki made. My place is here, with my people. You can do nothing for us" (205). The third Bonduni to accept sari, Mangli "remained unmarried, clinging to both her sari and the mountain where she had been born" (209).

The eco-ethical import of the novel takes its due course with the representation of environmental devastations that accompany the golden dreams of development. The Bondas had earlier believed that "…when a tree is felled[sic] the earth begins to sulk, for the earth is the forest's

mother, the yong. A clearing made in the jungle provides food for three years at best, though the meager harvest seldom justifies the labour" (64). When the Bondas were nomads, they cleared a patch of land by burning a few trees, settled in the place temporarily and then moved on. This allowed the regeneration of soil and with "the mountains teemed with salap trees, birds and beasts, worms and insects: no Bonda went hungry" (65). However, the allurement of progress makes them settle at one place and clear more patches of land with the result that "… now the naked jungle bared its teeth at the Bonda to taunt him" (65). With time, "The clouds floated away to lands unknown, taunting the parched, withering trees and fields" (224). While the Bondas are going through a state of crisis, the "gulang babus could cut down the choicest timber for their furniture, which was carried away to the cities in trucks. Each Babu arrived with a single suitcase but left with truckloads of belongings" (230). The Bondas are soon to be elevated to the status of a city where "the water is sold…Air too? (269).

This want and desire to dominate nature and to serve the selfish human interests, directly coincide with ecological interests and aims to destabilize the harmony between man and nature. In this context, Teresa Brennan remarks, "To say that we need to go back, slow down will be portrayed as antiprogress. But progress lies in straining human imagination to its limits of cleaning up the mess-while retaining the information that mess has yielded" (*Ecological Ethics* xiv). *The Heart of Redness* and *The Primal Land* evaluate this problem of environmental destruction through fiction. While initiating a journey into the heart of indigenous land, these texts evaluate the potency of traditional customs and rituals in protecting and preserving the natural capital and in slowing the process of environmental destruction. They challenge the unjustness of the ecologically impaired vision of the developmental models and echo the eco-holistic ethical framework propounded by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman, prominent environmental philosophers quote Leopold as "it makes sense for people to rely on sentiments and intuitions as well as known facts and reason. It makes sense for them to act humbly and draw lessons from the behaviors of species that have thrived far longer than has *Homo sapiens*" (23).

The male protagonists of both the novels present the dilemmas and the problems that the traditional eco-customs face in the modern world. The purpose of both the narratives is to highlight the need for developing models of progress that are sustainable for both nature and community. Though the narratives are fictional accounts, they are symbolic of the vast scale environmental destruction being carried out in the aboriginal lands of South Africa and India. While Zakes Mda in the South African context writes: "People are dying. Thousands of them … . Corpses and skeletons are a common sight" (253), Pratibha Ray in the Indian context pens: "The jungle lay flattened in defeat" (224). The sordid pictures of environment degradation presented in both the novels make the reader evaluate the scale and pace at which the wheels of progress should be moving in these indigenous lands.

The narrative of *The Heart of Redness* that unfolds as a debate between the 'Believers' and the 'Unbelievers' of traditional customs soon becomes a directive that envisions a future course for maintaining the ecological health of South Africa. Similarly, the tale of *The Primal Land* is a discursive account of the Bonda tribe who are being exploited for following their traditional customs and ecological associations. The Upper Bondas are reluctant to break their bond with nature and hold on to a bleak hope of survival. The Lower Bondas leave the traditional attire and adopt the customary sari, but are still waiting for their life to become better. Though in both the narratives there is a just

evaluation of the role of nature in the lives of the indigenous, it is only in *The Heart of Redness* that it finds a future direction. Pratibha Ray criticizes the scale of development and the repercussions it carries for the ecology of the place. However, she does not empower a single character with the knowledge to counter it. The reason for this can be the inherent primitiveness of the Bondas, their illiteracy and their strong mistrust towards the people of the plains. While Zakes Mda transports an educated and USA-returned protagonist into the narrative to give it the right direction, Pratibha Ray makes no such attempts. The story is told by an100-year old man who lives bemused and bewildered at the fast-changing world around him. While a character like Soma Sirsa who after attaining half-baked education from the government schools does raise a voice of dissent at the deteriorating conditions of the Bondas and the ecology, his voice is snubbed by the government officials. The difference between the two narratives arises due to the difference in the two cultures. While the indigenous people of Zakes Mda's storyline are modern and educated, Pratibha Ray's Bondas are a nomadic tribe who are yet to get acquainted with the ways of the world.

The difference in the narratives further deepens due to the distinctive writing styles of the authors. Zakes Mda extensively uses the tools of magic realism and stream of consciousness to make the reader travel through the past, present and future of South Africa. The anecdotes from the past are symbolically embedded in the present to lend a fluidity that makes the narrative non-linear, interesting and somewhat magical. There is extensive use of colloquial terms which may be because of a lack of a just translation or an attempt to induce a flavour of the indigenous into the narrative. On the other hand, Pratibha Ray remains more focused on narrating the plight of Bondas. Her narrative is linear with flashes from the past. At many times the voice of the author supersedes the voice of the protagonist which maybe because of the claimed illiteracy of the Bondas to communicate in the language of the intellectuals. Though there are certain words like “yong”, “tomka” which are jargons of the tribe, there is a sparing use of words like “bhut” (vote) that seem to be a translation of the English word.

In spite of these differences, both the texts focus on the pertinent issue of environmental degradation, defeat of the traditional customs and loss of the indigenous identity. They question the pace of development and re-define the meaning of progress for the indigenous. Both the narratives also raise the issue of allowing progress at the cost of ecological health and the commodification of indigenous identity. The “ochre” that lends a unique identity to the aboriginals of South Africa is described as “the curse of redness” (160) by the civilized people and the loin-cloth of the Bondas is considered as a symbol of primitiveness by the government officials. Numerous attempts are made to subdue the identity of the locals where there are plans to showcase them as inhabitants of a cultural village modelled on the pictures of the past or traded to exhibitions in Bhubaneswar as tribal artifacts.

In this regard, Ramachandra Guha, a renowned Indian historian and philosopher observes that “the major lacuna in existing scholarship is an inadequate apprehension of the ecological infrastructure of human society…” (*The Fissured Land* 12-13). Though both the writers provide images of dying ecology, they find it difficult to let go off their anthropocentric leanings. Zakes Mda, however, does attempt this at some places when he hints at foreign 'civilized' plants threatening the survival of the indigenous plants, but for Pratibha Ray the health of the Bondas is more important than that of the ecology. However, she does not deny the fact that this could only be possible if the health of the ecology is maintained first

To suffice, *The Heart of Redness* and *The Primal Land* illustrate the hazardous effects of the western model of development on the indigenous ecology. The narratives along with sending a lucid message for the survival of ecology, urge the human race to re-kindle its communion with nature.

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Commercialization and the Virtual in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1984)

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Abstract

The present paper attempts a reading of DeLillo's White Noise focussing on the proliferation of commercial culture in the author's fictional world. The fictional characters perpetually defy tangible objects for intangible signs. As advanced by Jean Baudrillard in Simulacra and Simulations that while modern societies are arranged around the production and consumption of commodities, postmodern societies, in addition to this, are also surrounded by simulacra and play of signs and images. The contemporary societies, as projected in the fictional world of the novel, have their entire system absorbed into the matrix of simulation. This matrix has given rise to mass society that has sacrificed personal sense of being of humans by ferociously and unconsciously feeding on consumption and advertising.

***Keywords**: commercial culture, simulacra, signs, postmodern, mass society.*

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DeLillo's novel, *White Noise (1984) is his eighth one which* won him the National Book Award, and catapulted him in limelight of the wide reading public from the literary circles and projected him as a serious critic of the contemporary American society. He wrote *White Noise* in the vein of a cultural critic, explaining at length the effects of media, technology and popular culture on the daily lives of contemporary American population. The novel aims to offer a critique on the contemporary American society which is preoccupied with the rise of technological and scientific advancements, man's slavish reliance on machines and media and the power of images. The novel narrates the life of the protagonist, Jack Gladney and his family. Jack Gladney, a university professor and H.O.D of Hitler Studies, is married four times and is happily staying with Babette, his fourth and current wife.

The concept of commercialization is central in *White Noise*, and DeLillo opens the novel by offering a glimpse of a consumer society. The novel opens on a day of September noon, when the students of the College-on-the Hill are seen arriving in the station wagons. The students of the college belong to the middle and upper middle class families carrying a plethora of commodities that accompany them which apparently make them feel secure and united in the society driven by rampant consumerism. The narrator describes the scene as thus:

> As cars slowed to a crawl and stopped, students sprang out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside; the stereo sets, radios, personal computers; small refrigerators and table ranges; the cartons of phonograph records and cassettes; the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets, soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows; the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags—onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut creme patties, Waffelos and Kabooms, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints. . . . The parents sun-dazed near their automobiles, seeing images of themselves in every direction. . . . Their husbands content to measure out the time, distant but ungrudging, accomplished in parenthood, something about them suggesting massive insurance coverage. The assembly of station wagons, as much as anything they might do in the course of the year, more than formal liturgies or laws, tells the parents they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation (3-4).

The writer depicts how mass advertising and consumption have become part of the lives of ordinary people and the homogenizing role they play in the formation of identity by foregrounding the phenomenon known as the consumer society or the culture of mass consumption. Parents send their children to boarding schools as they get busy in their professional lives. The lives of their children are further controlled and driven by consumer culture. Consumer culture, therefore, has colonized the consciousness of the people and created a homogenous environment. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, consumerism and commercialization had consumed the whole of America. It was an era of exceptional consumerism, where previously unseen creativity in package design and advertising, enthralled America. Many Americans welcomed a new conservatism in social, economic, and political life during the 1980s characterized by the policies of Ronald Reagan. Since he was a Hollywood actor, his style seemed charismatic and optimistic to many Americans. The era of Reagan was also reflected by the popular culture of the decade. Commenting on the condition of American society Nathaniel Rich in "How DeLillo Nailed Us in *White Noise*" comments:

> Exhausted by the paranoia of Watergate era, and the panic of the oil embargo and the Iran hostage crisis, the nation sought the comforts of old-fashioned Hollywood movies, delivered by an old-fashioned Hollywood actor. *White Noise* was published two months after Ronald Reagan's second inauguration, which followed the most effective marketing campaign in American political history, sounding visceral notes of hope (It's morning again in America") and terror ("There is a bear in the woods"). In **"Supermarket"** the narrator asks Americans to judge the state of the country by the contents of their local supermarket—a tactic, incidentally, followed by DeLillo, who

> ends *White Noise* with a nightmarish scene inside of one. Walter Mondale, who had tried to make the election about the budget deficit and interest rates, soon realized his mistake, releasing ads with horror-movie music and images of nuclear warheads, but it was too late. (web)

The novel reproduces collective anxieties, hope, and optimism of Americans generated by the innovative ways of campaigning by Reagan through advertisements. It is one of the reasons consumerism and popular culture thrived in this decade. This condition has become dominant in the contemporary society where advertisement, the media, mass communication, and information rule the society and the previous exchange value of commodities, as described by Marx, has been replaced by codes, spectacles, simulations, and hyperreality as noted by Baudrillard. As mentioned earlier, the exchange value has been replaced by what Baudrillard terms as sign value. In his two seminal books, *The System of Objects* (1996) and *Consumer Society* (1998), Baudrillard explores the possibility that production has been replaced by consumption. In other words, commodities are sold and bought irrespective of their utility. This is the age of simulacrum where there are only copies of copies, with no reality to refer to. Advertising assigns signs to the products, so that when a customer buys any product he/she looks beyond its utility and buys the sign instead. The novel abounds with instances which show how commodities signify social status and power. Murray Siskind, Gladney's colleague elaborates on this postmodern condition as:

> In a town there are houses, plants in bay windows. People notice dying better. The dead have faces, automobiles. If you don't know a name, you know a street name, a dog's name. 'He drove an orange Mazda.' You know a couple of useless things about a person that become major facts of identification and cosmic placement when he dies suddenly, after a short illness, in his own bed, with a comforter and matching pillows, on a rainy Wednesday afternoon, feverish, a little congested in the sinuses and chest, thinking about his dry cleaning. (45-46)

Consumers are manipulated through advertisements and led to believe that they are in dire need of the products that are being manufactured exclusively for them. Since, DeLillo had worked in an advertising agency before becoming a writer, he knows how advertising manipulates a person's unconscious and creates desires in them to possess everything that the market has to offer. So while corporations generate needs, advertisements create desire in the people. Emilse B. Hidalgo in "The Iconic and the Symbolic: The Consumer Society in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and Andy Warhol's *Serigraphies*" argues that commodification has entered every sphere and has been restructuring reality on market model. He further notes:

> It has to do with the construction of a mega market where everything is for sale according to the customer's needs, and with the construction of the identity of the consumer, who may assume a passive role as the mindless or unconscious "target" of advertising or, who may assume an active role as a discerning consumer aware of his "needs" (21).

Furthermore, with the impingement of simulacra and technological determinism in the

contemporary society the distinction between the real and the unreal has been imploded. This gives rise to the world of hyperreality. Baudrillard defined hyperreality as "sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences" (2). In such a condition the real is produced like theme-parks, and supermarkets. This condition gets depicted in the novel when the Gladneys are made to abandon their home in the wake of Airborne Toxic Event with the help of a team of technicians known as SIMUVAC, a shortened form of 'Simulated Evacuation'. One of the technicians informs Gladney that the team has taken the Airborne Toxic Event as an opportunity to rehearse the simulation. The real event and evacuation becomes a kind of demonstration, a mock event to practice so that it becomes easier to tackle the future disasters of similar nature. The technician says "The more we rehearse disaster, the faster will be from the real thing (236). They fail to perceive the depth and threat in the reality of the Airborne Toxic Event. Later in the novel, after the Airborne Toxic Event, when Gladney is going to the mall, he happens to see his eleven year old daughter, Steffie as a SIMUVAC volunteer for a simulated evacuation program in the neighborhood. This evacuation program is organized by a private counseling firm called Advanced Disaster Management. Gladney hears the technician say:

> The more we rehearse disaster, the safer we'll be from the real thing. Life seems to work that way, doesn't it? You take your umbrella to the office seventeen straight days, not a drop of rain. The first day you leave it home, record break downpour. Never fails, doesn't it? This is mechanism we hope to employ, among others (237).

Through this example, the author presents the fact that the distinction between the real and imagined, fiction and reality, depth and depthlessness has disappeared.

The impact of the power of image on human mind has been aptly illustrated by DeLillo in this novel through the episode of "The Most Photographic Barn of America." It also reflects how tourism industry works in tandem with the media. The barn is just like any other regular barn yet the place is seen crowded with all sorts of photographers, tourists as well as locals. DeLillo focuses the attention of the readers on the fact that more than the barn itself, the image of the barn seems important to its visitors. Before reaching the barn, Gladney and Murray spot five sign boards flashing "THE MOST IMPORTANT BARN" and forty cars with a tour bus parked in the parking area. There is also reference of a man who sells post cards and slides of the barn in a booth. Ronald Barthes in the book *S/Z* (1974) advocates that postmodernism is the age of copying; but, unfortunately, what gets imitated is not the real but a copy of what is already a copy. Hence, according to Barthes, the modern photography is identified with the lack of originality, where the status of original art has been reduced to that of an imitation. Likewise, in the novel, people apparently come to the barn to see the real barn but instead get involved in capturing the substitute of the real without even realizing it. Murray, in the novel, observes:

> "No one sees the barn," he said finally. . . .
>
> "We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies.". . . .

> "They are taking pictures of taking pictures," he said.
>
> He did not speak for a while. We listened to the incessant clicking of shutter release buttons, the rustling crank of levers that advanced the film.
> "What was the barn like before it was photographed?" he said. "What did it look like, how was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can't answer these questions because we've read the signs, seen the people snapping the pictures. We can't get outside the aura. We're part of the aura. We're here, we're now" (14-15).

The photographs sold and clicked acquire the status of the sign or the refereed and the real, but the existing barn becomes its referent. The signs (the photographs) dominate and even displace the referent (the actual barn) and thus everyone loses the capacity to see the real barn. The power of image on the contemporary psyche has transformed an ordinary barn into an object of desire to be seen by everyone. The author depicts that the image has a deeper impact on human mind than the reality.

In brief, in the fictional world of the novel brimming with simulacra and commercial culture, the boundary between the real and unreal has completely faded. This dystopian novel speaks volumes about the world outside the fictional realm. The novel has been quite successful in altering the worldview into a more aware and conscious living from the slumber of mechanized and robotic life.

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The Role of Language in Dystopian Narrative: Manipulative Discourse in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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Abstract

Language plays a pivotal role in dystopian narrative, which gained enormous significance in the twentieth century through a boom in literary dystopias and other texts of speculative fiction. Language as an instrumental tool of social engineering becomes a functional means either manipulatively to suppress the fictional characters or to resist against the repressive power in the alternative world projections of literary dystopias. It is what shapes the formation of a certain ideological mindset granting or denying the character the opportunity to speak his/her mind. In this context, the aim of this article is to discuss the crucial role of language in dystopian fiction by analyzing manipulative discourse in George Orwell's Animal Farm.

Keywords: *language, dystopian narrative, Orwell, discourse, social engineering*

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Introduction

Dystopian narrative flourished in the twentieth century under the influence of historical and socio-political events, incidents and practices. When the promised utopian politics failed and the promised ideals could not be realized, the utopian ambiance gave its place to dystopia, which is "supposed to be an inverted, mirror, negative version of utopia" (Claeys 14). Therefore, the writers of the century began to produce literary texts, which represented the drastic transition from the utopian propensity to the dystopian tendency in their fictional alternative social orders. These developments led to a gradual increase in the number of literary dystopias: "*A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, [and] debt ... provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination" (Moylan xi).* Writers came up with nightmarish, comparatively more pessimistic world visions in order to caution against the potential future threats, extant in the current society or probably to occur unless certain measures are taken.

The formation of such a dystopian social order can be realized through numerous means of social engineering such as control of religion, family, sexuality, education, rigid social stratification and social division and language. The aim of this study is thus to discuss the crucial role of language in

dystopian narrative to reveal how the use of language creates and shapes thoughts, ideas, feelings, an ideology and a discourse. In this discussion, Michel Foucault's views on discourse and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis are used in order to expose the vital function of language in dystopian fiction. The argument of the study will then be exemplified with a critical analysis of George Orwell's allegorical novella, *Animal Farm* (1945), which is highly relevant today considering the socio-political conjuncture in different parts of the world, to illustrate regulation, contamination, and distortion through manipulative language.

Language lies at the heart of dystopian narrative since its efficient use plays an instrumental role in establishing and regulating a dystopian system. Writers may create a new language, which may have its own grammar, jargon, and terminology, introduce neologisms and/or distort the real meaning of some words, phrases and concepts. Language emerges either as a functional means of control, repression, or intransigence. David Sisk remarks that some novels "overtly explore language concerns as such, often through artificially constructed languages, while other dystopias embed these questions within narrative structures" (12). The way a writer engages himself/herself with language can be also closely linked with ideology, which "tells a story, one that justifies or legitimates the existence and beliefs of the group and, in doing so, gives an identity to the group" (Sargent 123). Legitimation of the ideological discourse through the projected language accordingly becomes influential in the organization and maintenance of the extant order. Language in this regard can be manipulatively used to construct fake news, to distort facts, to contaminate the minds, and to create an aura of ambivalence as to the nature of what is true and what is false, thereby serving a political purpose. Sisk voices that an analysis which ignores the role of language in a literary dystopia will fail to comprehend the power relation and the dystopian mechanism: "[I]ssues of language are so closely intertwined with questions of power and freedom in dystopian literature that any criticism ignoring these concerns will inevitably produce less-than-comprehensive readings of the texts" (11-12).

Furthermore, in a similar vein, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan draw attention to the influential position of language: "Language is a key weapon for the reigning dystopian power structure. Therefore, the dystopian protagonist's resistance often begins with a verbal confrontation and the re-appropriation of language, since s/he is generally prohibited from using language" (6). In this study, I am trying to expose how language becomes a powerful means of manipulation, control, and abusive power in dystopian narrative by canvassing various aspects of the use of language in *Animal Farm*. Therefore, it is useful to briefly refer to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and Foucault's views on discourse in order to better comprehend the instrumental role of language for a dystopian setting and to discuss the novella accordingly.

Edward Sapir and his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf, who are known for the theory of linguistic relativity, generally known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, point to the role of language in shaping reality. Sapir argues that humans are "at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an allusion to imagine that one just adjust to reality essentially without the use of language" (209). In relation to the connection between language and reality, Whorf expresses: "We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way---an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our

language." (qtd. in Hall 143). If we take language as "a code that all members of a specific language group learn and share, and through which a significant amount of what is known about the world is learned," it influences enormously how the members of society accept, adopt and internalize or judge the reality and/or truth presented to them (van Troyer 165). In dystopian fiction, language can function on numerous layers in order to attain and implement authority, restriction and to create a certain ideological discourse.

The use of language can play an instrumental role in producing and shaping a discourse. The specific manner through which language is applied becomes influential in creating a specific type of discourse and highlighting it as the reality. The dystopian aura of the dominant power starts to permeate throughout the society under the influence of the novel discourse, which restricts citizens to an ideology enforced by the fictional state. In this light, Foucault's concept of discourse contributes to comprehending the significance of discourse in how the state inaugurates a new policy of encroachment on individual liberties and suppression. Foucault forms a close connection between discourse, power and knowledge since discourse produces and shapes knowledge.

Discourse is enormously influenced by power relations and impinges on the formation of an ideology and/or a culture specific to a group. Foucault interprets discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49). Weedon regards Foucault's notion of discourse as:

> Discourses, in Foucault's work are, ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the "nature" of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional basis.(108).

Discourse in a Foucauldian sense creates a specific episteme and inflicts it on the target group. The language used and the mainstream discourse of the ruling power in literary dystopias shape and regulate the society projected in accordance with the parameters of the despotic state. The rest of the study will exemplify and discuss how language and discourse transform the initial utopian propensity to the dystopian tendency and then create a dystopian ideology and social order in Orwell's text with a special focus on the two characters Squealer and Napoleon.

Language and Discourse Shape and Distort Memory and Reality: Manipulative Discourse in *Animal Farm*

Animal Farm, which has been popular since its publication along with its various screen adaptations, is a novella recounted from the perspectives of animals. Each animal is given an idiosyncratic characteristic reflecting different properties of humans. Orwell depicts an animal farm, invaded or conquered by the animals, in which the animals come up with a seemingly utopian

ideology called Animalism, which the animals find "welcome due to the horrible treatment they endured" (Senn 152). Animalism, launched by the Old Major and developed by the main characters, Snowball and Napoleon, starts off as an ideal project promising equality, freedom, nonviolence and solidarity. However, upon the Old Major's death, there emerges a gradual shift in the practice of Animalism towards a more dystopian tendency. This occurs in the aftermath of the drastic change in discourse on the initial Animalism, which plays a significant role in persuading the animals to do their duty via convincing language. The transformation of discourse takes place under the leadership of the animal, Napoleon, but Squealer, Napoleon's propaganda minister plays an efficient role with his gift of manipulation, eloquence, and persuasion, which lead to the loss of memory and distortion of the reality. It is this function of language and discourse that I aim to focus on in order to reveal how Napoleon's totalitarian social order is built and reinforced with Squealer's help in manipulating other animals.

It is useful to give brief information about the book prior to the critical discussion. Orwell presents a critique of Stalinism, Soviet communism, power abuse and exploitation through his engagement with power relations among animals: "It is complex enough to evoke the rivalry between Stalin and Trotsky and the conflict between 'socialism in one country' and worldwide revolution" (Dickstein 135). Although the text illustrates animals and their struggle to form a social order free from the touch of humans, which they fail as a result of the pigs' dominance and their ensuing dystopia, animals have their echoes in real life. There are numerous animals in the book representative of different groups such as pigs, dogs, sheep, hens, donkeys, horses, raven, pigeons, cows, goat and rats. Among these animals, the pigs assume the role of leadership in the new order to be established. The elder pig, Old Major, twelve years old, stands for Karl Marx, Snowball represents Leon Trotsky, Napoleon stands for Joseph Stalin, and Squealer represents the propaganda section.

The animals capture and confiscate Mr. Jones's farm, the Manor Farm at the beginning of the book. Then, Napoleon's despotic and tyrannical rule starts taking shape transforming the original seven principles of Animalism. The initial utopian commandments of Animalism are met with elation, unanimity and complete agreement since they hint at the formation and maintenance of a more ideal world order for the animals, which have been used and abused by the humans. However, Napoleon and Squealer, who get rid of Snowball by labelling him as a traitor and distorting all the reality about him implanting a distorted image of Snowball into the mind of the animals, manage to transform these principles into their new dystopian form. The novel ends in a pessimistic light suggesting no room for flexibility or hope since pigs start looking like men: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" (Orwell 148). In this study, my main concern is how Squealer skillfully uses and abuses language and discourse in order to manipulate the other animals into blind adherence and utter conformity to the new shape of Napoleon's Animalism.

Manipulative politics is initiated in an attempt to build the social order Napoleon desires. Squealer becomes the key figure in this process throughout the book as his cunning use of language contributes to the new discourse, which gradually topples the former seemingly utopian discourse of the Old Major and Snowball. He is described as: "He was a brilliant talker, and when he was arguing some difficult point he had a way of skipping from side to side and whisking his tail which was

somehow very persuasive … he could turn black into white" (Orwell 20). He manages to persuade all the other animals whenever a new policy is introduced, which leads the animals to doubt about their memory and to believe in the distorted version of the reality imposed on them. His elaborate, articulate discourse re-shapes the reality about the principles of Animalism, Snowball, Napoleon, Mr. Frederick, Mr. Pilkington, the windmill, and Boxer. Squealer's manipulative discourse exemplifies how individual memory is erased serving the interests of Napoleon's version of Animalism, which desires to have "power to understand the processes of farming and of government, power to control the fates of other species" (Fowler 174).

Squealer's language acts like a strategic weapon pointing at the relativity of truth. It becomes possible to misconstrue the extant reality from another perspective, which results in the animals' naive satisfaction and/or consent, resulting from their complete dissatisfaction with Mr. Jones's rule. He constantly uses and abuses the possibility of Mr. Jones's return, which he articulates when it is found out that the pigs have drunk milk and eaten apples: "'Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! Yes, Jones would come back! Surely, comrades,' cried Squealer almost pleadingly … whisking his tail" (Orwell 40). This threat about the Jones turns out to be quite efficient as the animals forget about their actual condition and consent to the Napoleon's rule because it is not a human who owns and governs the farm, but an animal, which implies the so-called equality.

The new social order promised equality and fair treatment of all the animals; however, the pigs undertake the responsibility of leadership, which Squealer explains as challenging, exhausting. This turning point sparks his constant struggle to attribute any developments and successes to Napoleon and any failures to Snowball, who becomes the scapegoat for any failures and/or calamities: "Do not imagine, comrades, that leadership is a pleasure! … No one believes more firmly than Comrade Napoleon that all animals are equal" (Orwell 62). He starts changing the historical truth about the Battle of Cowshed in terms of Snowball's bravery in the battle, highlighting Napoleon's alleged grandeur. His strategic use of language gives rise to Boxer's one of the two mottos: "Napoleon is always right" (Orwell 63).

The new discourse denies the factuality of historical memory about Napoleon's opposition to the windmill and puts the blame on the scapegoat, Snowball, who actually introduced and supported the idea of the windmill. Squealer cunningly explains Napoleon's initial seeming opposition to the windmill as a strategy to reveal Snowball's treachery and his ill intentions. Here, he draws on words, about which the other animals are not informed, yet the way he articulates these words convinces them: "'Tactics, comrades, tactics!' skipping around and whisking his tail with a merry laugh" (Orwell 65).

Napoleon's new decision to engage in trade with humans is met with disapproval and rejection in the beginning, but Squealer's scheming discourse refutes the claimed ban on such a trade: "It was pure imagination, probably traceable in the beginning to lies, circulated by Snowball … Have you any record of such a resolution? Is it written down anywhere?" (Orwell 71). His discourse causes the animals to believe in the fallibility of their own memory. Although it was forbidden to move into the farmhouse in the beginning, the pigs move into the farmhouse, which is, according to Squealer, necessary for the brains of the farm and the dignity of their leader, Napoleon. The pigs start sleeping in beds, and the

minister of propaganda makes a slight change adding that sheet, which is a sign of humans, is actually forbidden: "You did not suppose, surely, that there was ever a ruling against beds?" (Orwell 74). As the new rule takes more shape and becomes more powerful, the pigs start to lead a hedonistic lifestyle.

Squealer articulates laudatory remarks for the animals' service and labor, and maintains his main position as Napoleon's speaker, expressing Napoleon's orders. Napoleon and Squealer do not hesitate to forge sham documents justifying Snowball's alleged collaboration with the Jones and his position of the secret agent of the Jones. Snowball's bravery in the Battle of the Cowshed is impugned and refuted: "[I]t is all written down in the secret documents that we have found—that in reality he was trying to lure us to our doom" (Orwell 86). Squealer talks with numbers, figures, and elaborates on the battle graphically, which persuades the animals.

Meanwhile, Napoleon's regime continues to be reinforced under the propaganda policy of Squealer as Napoleon awards himself medals, namely "Animal Hero, First Class" and "Animal Hero, Second Class." The new regime demonstrates its violence by executing the animals that have *confessed* to their crimes, which is shown as a cause to the murdering of animals. Therefore, four pigs, three hens, one goose, and three sheep are killed. The song, "Beast of England," which is the song of the rebellion, is replaced with the new song, "Comrade Napoleon." A new way of addressing Napoleon is invented. He is now referred to as the "[f]ather of all animals, Terror of Mankind, Protector of the Sheep-fold, Ducklings' Friend, and the like" (Orwell 98). Squealer's discourse persuades the animals to believe in Napoleon's wisdom, affection for the other animals, and his mercy. In addition, all the domains of social life begin to be ascribed to Napoleon: "Under the guidance of our Leader, Comrade Napoleon, I have laid five eggs in six days" (Orwell 98).

Animals' grip of the reality disappears gradually and they become dependent on the constructed lies. The way words are articulated and projected impinges on the animals' comprehension of Napoleon's system even though the animals are now subject to mistreatment, poos nourishment, constant fear and Napoleon's society of surveillance. Squealer manages to find a pretext for any new policies and/or precautions such as reduction of the rations. The animals are given numbers, figures and told how their society has improved as compared with the Jones' time. The actual experienced situation is not reflected in its true form: "Claims and plain truth, signifiers and concrete reality, are widely disparate … Numbers have almost magical powers; they dissolve any doubt" (Elbarbary 33).

When one of the most loyal members of the farm, Boxer becomes too weak and ill, he is taken to the knacker to be killed, meaning he has been sold. However, according to Squealer's version, Napoleon has made all the arrangements for Boxer to be treated at the hospital in Willingdon. The van on which it is written "Horse Slaughterer" used to belong to the knacker and now belongs to the veterinary surgeon. Squealer comes up with a false story about Boxer's death and his sentences before dying: "'Forward in the name of the Rebellion. Long live Animal Farm! Long live Comrade Napoleon! Napoleon is always right.' Those were his very last words, comrades" (Orwell 130).

When looked at the overall general aura of Napoleon's social order, it is full of injustice, malpractice, infringement, oppression and violation. It bestows privileges on the pigs and holds other

animals in disrespect, disparaging them. A scapegoat is found and any failure is attributed to this scapegoat. Fake documents are constructed and rendered as truth. Violence is practiced on the other animals and any deviation from the mainstream ideology, Napoleon's Animalism is strictly punished. The initial utopian principles of Animalism are violated and breached. The cult of leadership is formed and blind conformity to Napoleon is expected.

The pigs become more like humans in the end, walking on their hind legs, almost impossible to differentiate humans from pigs and from pigs to humans. Orwell's novella ends on a very pessimistic, maybe realistic tone as Napoleon's dystopian regime becomes successful in suppressing the other animals and consolidating its omnipotent position. Language and discourse lie at the heart of the process of establishing the pillars of the new despotic regime, Napoleonism or Animalism since it is through Squealer's discourse that the animals' mindset is formed. It is through his cunning manipulative language that they are motivated to have complete conformity to the new system.

Conclusion

Language plays a central role in dystopian narrative in that it is used either as a strategic means of control, authority suppression or as a powerful tool of resistance, struggle and rebellion. The way language is used has a substantial influence over the formation of a discourse, which in return produces and shapes knowledge to a great extent. In this regard, there arises an interrelationship between language, discourse, knowledge, power and ideology in a Foucauldian sense, which affects the regulation and operation of the parameters of the projected dominating power. In this study, I have demonstrated the functional role of language and discourse in forming a certain ideological mindset and establishing a dystopian social order in dystopian narrative in the light of Orwell's novella, *Animal Farm* with a special focus upon the characters, Squealer and Napoleon. These characters transform the society and transition into a new social order, which turns out to be suppressive, silencing and stifling. Manipulative discourse, cunning elaboration and articulation, and misrepresentation of the reality prove influential in manipulating the citizens and creating an ideology with a dystopian tendency, which attests to the instrumental role language enjoys in dystopian narrative.

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Political Hatred and Emotional Bondage in Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton*

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Abstract

The article discusses Amrita Pritam's famous novel Skeleton (Pinjar) as a partition novel in which the writer has foregrounded the problems of communal hatred and historical revenge in the lives of three interconnected families, with a focus on the inter-caste marriage of abduction between Pooro and Rashida. It also shows how the political and impersonal hatred and revenge is ironically contrasted with the emotional bonding between the families belonging to Hindus and Muslims respectively.

***Keywords**: Communal hatred, partition, abduction, refugees, displacement, relocation*.

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Amrita Pritam (1919–2005) was a Punjabi writer and poet, considered the first prominent woman Punjabi poet, novelist, and essayist, and the leading 20th century poet of the Punjabi language, who is equally loved on both the sides of the India-Pakistan border. With a career spanning over six decades, she produced over 100 books, of poetry, fiction, biographies, essays, a collection of Punjabi folk songs and an autobiography that were translated into several Indian and foreign languages. In her career spanning over six decades, she penned 28 novels, 18 anthologies of prose, five short stories and 16 miscellaneous prose volumes.

When the former British India was partitioned into the independent states of India and Pakistan in 1947, she migrated from Lahore, to India, though she remained equally popular in Pakistan throughout her life, as compared to her contemporaries like Mohan Singh and Shiv Kumar Batalvi. Known as the most important voice for the women in Punjabi Literature, in 1956, she became the first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for her *magnum opus*, a long poem, *Sunehe* (Messages), later she received the Bharatiya *Jnanapith,* one of India's highest literary awards, in 1982 for *Kagaz Te Canvas* (*The Paper and the Canvas*). The *Padma Shri* came her way in 1969 and finally, *Padma Vibhushan,* India's second highest civilian award, in 2004, and in the same year she was honoured with India's highest literary award, given by the Sahitya Akademi (India's Academy of Letters), the Sahitya Akademi fellowship given to *the "immortals of literature"* for lifetime achievement. Besides, she received International recognition as a person of letters from Bulgaria, France and U.S.S.R.

Though she began her journey as romantic poet, soon she shifted gears, and became part of the Progressive Writers' Movement and its effect was seen in her collection, *Lok Peed* (*People's Anguish*) (1944), which openly criticized the war-torn economy, after the Bengal Famine of 1943. Her novels and novellas are known for her beautiful style which is at once realistic and lyrical or poetic. She creates the local colour of Punjab by poetically depicting the landscape, the flora and fauna and the cultural ethos including the local idiom and humour. The beauty, tragedy and irony of human relationship – especially the man-woman relationship – has been depicted by her with deep insight and sympathy.

The Skeleton translated from the original Punjabi novel entitled *Pinjar* by Khushwant Singh, is a slender novel (better to call it a novella) against the backdrop of communal hatred aggravated by political hatred between Hindus (India) and Muslims (Pakistan). The partition of India in 1947 was one of the most traumatic experiences undergone by the Indians of the border areas as it involved the multiple tragedy of loss of lives, relatives, movable and immovable properties, abduction, rape, murder, displacement, migration, and rehabilitation. Amrita Pritam's *The Skeleton* delineates the life of three families in three villages of Punjab deeply disturbed by the politically motivated communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims, with a focus on the tragedy undergone by young and old women as being a woman writer she can have a better picture of feminine hearts than me writers can.

Pooro, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to a family of money-lenders of Chatto village. The family had fallen on bad days, though they were still called *sahukars*. They mortgaged their ancestral house and kitchen utensils and went to Thiland to make their living. Later they returned to Chatto village and recovered their ancestral property. Pooro was just fourteen year old then. She had a younger brother and four younger sisters.

As soon as the family returns to Chatto, the first thing they do is to find a suitable bridegroom for their daughter, Pooro. Ram Chand, the son of a well-to-do family in the neighbouring village, Rattoval happens to be their choice for Pooro. That is because marriage of girls in the family is the most important responsibility of parents in India. It helps the family to lighten the burden and to give a sense of permanent emotional security to the daughter. Accordingly the wedding is fixed on a particular date. But before the day of the wedding, Pooro's mother asks her to go to the nearby field and bring some okra beans. The Hindu family cannot live in peace in the border area because of the latent historical communal hatred between Hindus and Muslims waiting to erupt suddenly. As per this socio-political atmosphere, when Pooro goes to the field she is kidnapped by the Muslim young man, Rashida, who has an eye on her from the beginning. He captures her quickly and hauls her on the back of his horse and takes her to his village Sakkar.

> *Pooro did not know from where the horse had come, nor who was the man riding it; she did not know how far she had been carried. She had lost her consciousness, and when she came to her senses, she found herself on a charpoy in a room with the door shut. She banged her forehead against the walls and hammered the door with her bare hands till she fell exhausted. She felt someone rub hot ghee on her scalp. For a moment she believed it was her mother beside her pillow. An agonized cry escaped her lips: Amma! (6).*

The Muslim youth's abduction of a Hindu girl has two main reasons: one, biological/emotional attraction and two, taking revenge upon Hindus by spoiling their caste purity and by settling scores with their family for ruining the latter's family in the money-lending transaction in the past.

The abduction of Pooro, naturally creates great frustration in her family. When she recovers her consciousness, she finds herself in her kidnapper's house. The kidnapping of the Hindu girl happens to be the justification for the historical event and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. The *sahukars* of the Hindu family had lent Rs. 500 to the *Shaikh* as loan and charged compound interest and attached their house when they had failed to clear the loan. Consequently the *Shaikhs* were rendered homeless.

> "Tell me, in the name of your Allah, why did you do this to me?" she asked
>
> "May be we were men and wife in a previous life," he replied naively. "But why do you bother your head with such things? What was to happen has happened. I promise that no harm will come to you for the rest of your life." He continued, after a pause, "Did you know that our families, the *Shaikhs* and the *Sahukars*, have been at loggerheads for many generations? Your grandfather had advanced us Rs. 500 on compound interest and taken our house as mortgage. WE could not redeem the mortgage. He attacked our house and had the entire *Shaikh* family ejected. We were rendered homeless. That was not all. His agents used foul language towards our women folk, and your uncle kept my father's sister in his house for three nights – with the knowledge of your grandfather! The *Shaikhs* were then like a bundle of sugarcane from which all the juice had been squeezed out. They wept bitter tears of blood and bided their time. My grandfather made my uncles swear that they would avenge these insults. When we heard of the plans of your wedding, there was talk of settling old scores. They picked on me; they made me take an oath on the Koran that I would abduct the *Sahukar's* daughter before she was wed" (7-8).

Thus, the social and biological insult done to the Hindu family by the Muslim family is the result of economic exploitation of the Muslims by the Hindus.

Now Rashida tells Pooro, the abducted girl, how they have bribed the police to give a false report that the girl Pooro is missing. He wants to marry her, but she is not willing to marry him and therefore escapes from there and returns to her parents. But the parents refuse to accept her because of her ill-luck. That is because of the cultural contamination of Hindus by the Muslims.

> *Pooro rattled the chain. The door opened from the other side and she fell on the courtyard. She had used up all her strength; as soon as she reached the winning-post she had collapsed. She lay on the mud floor moaning like a wounded animal. She found her parents standing above her with oil lamps in their hands; she saw tears streaming from her mother's eyes. She felt her mother take her in her arms and clasp her to her bosom, as a cry of anguish broke from her heart.*
> "The neighbours will hear. There will be a crowd," warned her father.

Pooro's mother stuffed her mouth with the hem of her shirt.
"Daughter, this fate was ordained for you; we are helpless." Pooro heard her father's voice.
She clung to her mother. "The *Shaikhs* will descend on us and destroy everything we have."
"Take me to Thailand with you! cried Pooro.
"Who will marry you now? You have lost your religion and your birthright. If we dare to help you, we will be wiped out without a trace of blood left behind to tell of our fate."
"Then destroy me with your own hands."
"Daughter, it would have been better if you had died at birth! If the *Shaikhs* find you here they will kill your father and your brothers. They will kill all of us," said the mother, hardening her heart.
Pooro remembered Rashida's words: "You have no place in that home now" (9-10).

There is something deterministic about the idea of caste-pollution believed in and practiced by the Hindus. Rashida takes the full advantage of the Hindu belief. Thus by marrying Pooro, he has achieved double success (i) in wreaking economic (historical) vengeance against the Hindu family and (2) satisfied his emotional hunger (along with his sexual urge) for the Hindu girl who is delicate and good looking.

As for Pooro, she is trapped by Rashida due to the contingencies of her life. She is converted into Islam by the *moulvis* and formally married to him. Consequently she is re-named as Hamida and assumes a new, Muslim identity. Now that Rashida's Islamic ego is satisfied and Hamida is inescapably trapped into (inter-religious) marriage, the couple starts having their regular marital sex. As per the great irony of life, biology always triumphs over religion, race and region. Thus being habituated to regular marital sex and emotional protection by her husband, Hamida gradually tends to forget the acerbity of her abduction by him. Consequently her initial hatred of him is gradually transformed into tolerance, acceptance and dutiful love. She thus compromises with her forced marriage and strange fate. In course of time she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby-boy, who is named as Javed. The birth of the baby-boy brings about a complete change in Hamida's psychology, which makes her forget her past and look to her future and to her baby, She, naturally develops deep attachment to her baby. Thus the internal conflict between hate and love for her husband is finally resolved. She is reconciled to her lot. She settles down in Sakkar village.

The Hindu-Muslim divide is deeply rooted in the psychology of Indians in the border area. The Hindus happen to be more puritanical than the Muslims, whereas the Muslims happen to be more aggressive than the Hindus. Such a background of communal separation, hatred, distrust and phobia come in the way of achieving easy social mobility.

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The marriage of Pooro and Rashida is an example of a sort of inter-communal love-marriage (or vindictive marriage?) and the story of arranged marriages among the Muslims provides another extremity of social life. For example, Taro, who is the neighbor of Hamida, is married to Rahima and happens to be his second wife. She tells Hamida about her plight, her helpless parents –especially father – and her indifferent husband and how she is forced to become a prostitute for earning a pittance

of livelihood. Her miserable life holds mirror to the patriarchal society of Muslims:

"Taro, I am your friend. Why don't you tell me?"

"What can I tell you? When a girl is given away in marriage, God deprives her of her tongue, so that she may not complain."

"You are absolutely right," agreed Hamida. "My parents have no use for me; parents never have for a married daughter. And my husband has no use for me, because another woman is mistress of both his heart and house."

"Taro, do you mean to tell me that your husband was already married?" asked Hamida, surprised. "Why did your parents give you to him?" "They did not know. Besides, at the time he was only keeping her."

"Surely, his parents must have known."

"They certainly knew. She was a low-caste woman. His parents wished to get a daughter-in-law of their own caste."

"Did they have no thought for the girl they proposed to get as their daughter-in-law?"

"Sister, who bothers about other people's sorrows! Besides they say, 'We feed and clothe the girl. Give her money to spend. What has she to grumble about?"

"As if food and clothing were all a woman wanted?"

"For two years I have had to sell my body for a mess of pottage and a few rags. I am like a whore… like a common prostitute…" Taro clenched her fists; her eyes turned up in their sockets showing only the whites; her body stiffened like a plank of wood (18-19).

Whereas Hindu-Muslim hatred is one kind of social evil, destitution (especially of women) is another, but worse kind of evil, which may be described as cosmic. The novelist presents this evil also as part of the realistic depiction of Indian society. For example Hamida happens to see a mad woman wandering about in and around the village and laughing without rhyme or reason and careless about her clothes, almost in a semi naked manner. The destitute woman has been impregnated by some scoundrel. The elders of the *panchayat* take her in the dark and leave her near Sakkar village so that the other people may take care of her. The presence of the destitute holds mirror to the Indian society wherein there is no institutional provision to take care of them. The Indians, especially Hindus generally believe in the idea of fate or karma and hence are not bothered about helping others. Hence destitute are entirely at the mercy of people who may have some humanitarian sympathy for them.

When Hamida happens to meet the mad woman in the nearby field, she discovers that the mad woman is dead after being delivered of a baby-boy. Hamida takes pity on the dying mad woman, cuts the umbilical cord, takes the baby to her house, bathes it and begins to nurse it on humanitarian grounds. Rashida also does not object to her performance of humanitarian act. The elders of Sakkar village bury the mad woman's corpse. Hamida starts nourishing the foundling (baby of the mad woman) as her second baby by lavishing equal affection on him. Hamida satisfied her instinct of motherhood by accepting the alien child also as her won. But her humanitarian act creates problems for her as well as for her husband. The real and deep reason for this trouble-making is the communal psychology of Hindu-Muslim divide. The people of the village think retrospectively about the baby's

mother, i.e. the mad woman, who was the daughter of a rich merchant of Lala-Musa and who was poisoned by her husband's second wife. They confirm the fact that the mad woman was a Hindu as the holy word 'Om' was tattooed on her hand. So the Hindus elders problematize the communal issue and opine that a Hindu baby (by a Hindu mother – the identity of the father is not known or knowable in the present situation) should not be nourished in a Muslim family. But the irony of the situation is that nobody could ascertain the exact religion or caste of the man who had raped the mad woman and fathered the child on her. The Hindu elders send one of their men to Rashida's house and ask him to part with the foundling baby. Although Rashida and Hamida are unwilling to part with the baby, they are forced by the circumstances to do so. The elders take the baby and order the water-carrier's woman to look after the child. They want to re-convert the baby into Hinduism. Hamida is deeply disappointed by this event and suffers from frustration of her feelings of motherhood.

But the child does not take easily to the new care taker and begins to vomit every drop of milk fed to it and therefore is on the brink of death. Hence the Hindu elders inevitably return the child to Hamida and ask her to take care of it and possess it permanently if he survives.

> The foundling was the only topic of conversation among the Hindu women. The fourth day passed. And the fifth. The next morning three men burst into
>
> Rashida's courtyard.
>
> "Take him! We leave his life in your custody! If you can save him, he is yours!" They deposited a yellow, waxen doll wrapped in white linen in Rashida's lap. The child was in a state of coma.

Anger surged up in Rashida's face. He had a strong desire to thrash the men; he wanted to shout: "Weren't you the fellows who offered me those silver coins to compensate me for my six months of service? Now that the child has one foot in the grave you want me to give him back to me! Take him wherever you wish to and get out of here!" But he saw the sad expression on Hamida's face and decided to swallow his pride.

> A week later the villagers saw the foundling gurgling and playing merrily in Hamida's courtyard" (28).

Meanwhile Hamida accompanies Rahima's Mother to Rattoval village to meet the Holy One for getting her eyesight cured. Hamida remembers her (would-have-been) husband, Ram Chand and goes to the nearby field and meets him a couple of times and confirms about his identity. Ram Chand recognizes her as Pooro.

The communal hatred and vindictiveness between Hindus and Muslims is ever live and active in the border area. For example, one day Rashida comes home and tells Hamida that her brother had set fire to the wheat stacks belonging to Rashida, by way of wreaking vengeance on Rashida for abducting his sister. But Hamida cannot believe it.

As days go by the Hindu-Muslim conflict intensifies in the area and both of them begin to

sharpen their weapons and dream of having separate nations by way of political partition. It results in mass hysteria and perpetuation of communal atrocities. The Hindus vacate the Muslims areas out of fear. The Muslim rowdies take full advantage of this situation. For example they parade a naked Hindu woman publicly. In the refugee camps some rowdies forcibly take the refugee women overnight for sexual enjoyment and leave them back in the morning.

Hamida meets Ram Chand in the Refugee Camp, offers him a pot of ghee and Ram Chand tells her how he married Hamida's sister and his sister married Hamida's brother; that Hamida's parents have gone to Thailand; that his sister Lajo (wife of Hamida's brother) was kidnapped by somebody. The Refugee Camp is moving to India shortly.

Abduction is a common practice by Muslims in the communal tension in the border area. Hamida, who is sad about her brother's wife (Lajo) being abducted by somebody, requests her husband Rashida to find out about Lajo. A few other girls also were abducted by Muslims. Hamida herself does some spying by going to an old Muslim woman's house on the pretext of selling some *khes* and buttermilk and detects Lajo there. Next time she goes to Lajo's house in the absence of the old woman, sympathizes with and encourages Lajo to escape from her house at midnight and go near the well outside the village so that she may be transported to a safe place.

Accordingly Lajo escapes from the house of her abductor at after serving him with sufficient liquor and food and having sex with him, i.e. Alla Ditta. She goes to the well at midnight by mustering up her courage and is picked up by Rashida who takes her on horseback to a safe place. Lajo joins her family and feels happy:

> Lajo hated touching the bottle of liquor and had always grumbled when the man ordered her to fetch it for him. That evening she got it without waiting to be asked. And she picked up his favourite double distilled brandy, flavoured with cardamom, which he kept apart from the other bottles.
>
> The old woman and her son were pleasantly surprised; she had fetched the liquor on her own and the lentils and rice were delicious. Perhaps she was coming round at last; perhaps she would share his bed that night.
>
> The old woman began to nod with sleep.
>
> "It's become chilly in the courtyard; I have put your *charpoy* indoors. Go. . . if you are tired." Lajo spoke like the mistress of the house. The old woman's eyes were opened wide for a moment. Obviously, the girl wanted to be left alone with her son! She went indoors to sleep.
>
> The night advanced. The man was soon drunk. He grabbed Lajo's arm and drew her to his *charpoy*. Lajo did not resist.
>
> Thus passed the first quarter of the night. Then liquor and sex took their toll. The man fell into a deep sleep and began to snore lustily.

> Lajo came out of the village…
>
> "Ya Allah!" muttered Rashida, as he helped Lajo on to the back of the mare. He mounted the saddle and dug his heels into the animal's flanks. It broke into a fast gallop….He remembered that when he had abducted Pooro, his conscience had weighed like a stone, which had become heavier and heavier. It had weighed on his mind for long. That night as the mare sped through the starlit countryside the weight seemed to lift and he felt as light as a flower speeding in the fragrant breeze (45).

Lajo and Hamida exchange their memories heartily and sadly by remembering theirmother. Lajo suffers from a sense of despair, but Hamida tries to cheer her up by promising that her husband (Hamida's brother) would come and pick her up. After a short while Rashida comes and tells them that Ram Chand has come back to take back Lajo and that her husband would come from Amritsar to meet her.

Next day Hamida prepares some sweet and sews some silk outfit for Lajo. On the third day they leave the village and catch the train for Lahore where there is a family reunion followed by permanent separation. Hamida requests her brother to receive his wife Lajo without casting aspersion on her. Now Lajo and her husband and Ram Chand return to India in the government bus under police supervision, but Hamida decides to remain in Pakistan with her husband, Rashida. Thus finally after the pain of displacement and separation is over the two families are able to achieve the joy of relocation and permanent settlement. Thus, Hamida is permanently displaced and forced by her marriage by abduction to remain in Pakistan, whereas her sister and Ram Chand and Ram Chand's sister are permanently displaced and relocated in India.

What is admirable in the novel is that although Hindus and Muslims distrust, hate, trouble, rape and abduct each other on impersonal and political grounds, Rashida never practices the communal hatred for Hindus in his personal relation with the kinsmen of his Hindu wife. Once after satisfying his vindictiveness on the Hindu family due to economic reasons and stigmatizing the caste-purity of Hindus by abducting a Hindu girl (Pooro), he begins to love her and her relatives like Ram Chand, Ram Chand's sister, Lajo and Lajo's husband by helping them in the Refugee Camp and by helping Lajo to move from the house of her abductor and to reunite with her husband and brother.

Amrita Pritam has presented an authentic picture of the horrors of partition of the country between India and Paikistan and the traumatic experience of Hindus in the Muslim-dominated villages on the border area of India. That is because Amrita Pritam herself had stayed in a Refugee Camp at her twenty eighth year of age and knew the problems of people first hand. Being a woman writer she has depicted the feminine psychology of the protagonist of the novel, Pooro-turned-Hamida microscopically and lyrically. Although the novelist has concentrated her attention on the depiction of the life of three closely interconnected families, the micro-picture offered by her easily symbolizes the macro-picture of the political and communal hatred of Hindus and Muslims and the attendant horrors and some exceptional emotional bondage. It may therefore be described as a minor classic of partition theme. The metaphor of skeleton occupies the central place in the novel.

Amrita Pritam offers a concentrated picture of the horrors of partition by foregrounding the

family life of the Punjabi men and women. As compared with Bhisham Shahni's *Tamas* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Amrita Pritam's novel *Skeleton* (*Pinjar*) appears to be limited in its scope, but it is equal to those and similar other novels in its intensity of vision and quality of presentation. But within the limited scope of her novel she exhibits her talent as a woman writer by offering an insightful picture of the feminine heart.

The translation of the original Punjabi novel, *Pinjar*, by Sardar Khushwant Singh is excellent and highly readable, as he hails from the same Punjabi background and has created a realistic as well as a lyrical picture of the land and the socio-political problems prevalent there. One feels that one is reading a novel originally written in English, which is the highest ideal of a translation.

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Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness:* Exploring Human Relationships through Changing Socio-Cultural Lens

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy, a much sought- after Indian English writer keeps her readers glued to her works not because of the fulminations but also because of her capability to capture the complexity of human relationships in the flux of time. Like other contemporary novelists she too calls her works fiction but they transcend what humans face every day though they pass unnoticed. Roy's keen sense of observation and her grasp over psychological underpinnings and her incisive eye arrests the undercurrents camouflaged under the quotidian human life that remains oblivious to numerous crushed desires trampled under the heavy feet of globalization responding to time and space making all the difference.

The present paper endeavours to explore the complexity of human relationships that not only binds man to man but also distances him from his fellow humans. Human life is not as easy as it appears and the demands of every age prompts us to make various compromises despite the fact that 'its humdrum surface conceals at its heart a yolk of egregious violence' sparked by political pundits weaving different patterns of meaning in an ever changing world order. We are reminded of what Shakespeare says, "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues."

Keywords: *human relationships, globalization, fulminations, complexity*

***

Arundhati Roy's latest novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017)* is intricately woven into a web of various characters, who strive and suffer because of their individual choices differentiating them into two groups. The first group of characters belongs to hermaphrodite and creates their own world through their passion for music and live life their own ways. Another group of characters though not suffering from sexual anomaly also finds themselves misfit in the real world because of myriad problems. Roy's array of multiple characters in this novel doesn't reflect her ideological differences against the so-called idea of oneness, which according to her, is the enemy of this novel. In defence of her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, she says:

> It is a story that emerges out of an ocean of languages, in which a teeming ecosystem of living creatures---- official –language fish, unofficial –dialect mollusks, and flashing shoals of word fish—swim around, some friendly with each other, some
> openly hostile, and some outright carnivorous. But they are all nourished by what the ocean provides. And all of them, like the people in the Ministry, have no choice but to co-exist, to survive, and to try to understand each other.

Roy's rebellious views may prompt over enthusiastic readers and critics to put her works into ideological straitjacket exploding anti-establishment views. But such a notion belittles the stature of Roy's realism. The depiction of caste that distances the true merit of individuals merely on the basis of colour and class consciousness in her debut novel *The God of Small Things* itself contradicts as she vehemently opposes the Communist government in the said work. Roy is not a slave to any ideology despite vestiges of various transgressions in her work. While Velutha, the transgresses the boundary much as other characters, his party men too transgress the limits of propriety and pooh-pooh the established norms and party ideology while destroying the *paravan*. Neither the policemen nor comrade Pillai relent while Velutha is smashed and his jaws and bones are broken beyond repair. Roy seems best at portraying the social change that prompts the marginalized (both Velutha and Ammu) to break the love laws and face the consequences. Aijaj Ahmed, despite finding several flaws in Roy's first novel, is yet full of admiration for her realism as he rightly says:

> A key strength of Arundhati Roy is that she has written a novel that has learned all that there is to be learned from modernism, magic realism, cinematic cutting and montage and other such developments of narrative technique in the 20th century, but a novel that nevertheless remains Realism in all its essential features (Tickell 113).

The novel under discussion got published after two decades and the veteran writer continued her craft of writing grounded in problems and issues affecting ordinary human lives. We have come a long way and several significant developments have emerged worldwide. But Roy's question remains the same. She carves stories out of several issues that appear less literary. Her response on the craft of writing compelling non-fiction is not only an eye-opener but also thought-provoking. She says,

> "For each essay, I searched for a form, for language, for structure and narrative. Could I write as compellingly about irrigation as I could about love and loss and childhood? About the salinisation of soil? About drainage? Dams? Crops? About structural adjustment and privatisation? About the per unit cost of electricity? About things that affect ordinary peoples' lives? Not as reportage, but as a form of storytelling? Was it possible to turn these topics into literature? Literature for everybody — including for people who couldn't read and write, but who had taught me how to think, and could be read to?" (The *Wire*, 18 May 2019).

Aijaz Ahmad's observations of Roy's masterpiece *The God of Small* Things as her 'sentimentally over written prose'(Tickel 110) may find a remedy in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* where the narrative flows quite lucidly as every day and commonplace language. The novel in question, if compared with the first novel appears to disappoint ardent readers of Roy. But as a writer of exemplary mettle, she succeeds in weaving the fragmented yarns comprising fact and fiction with equanimity. Serious

readers of literature not only enjoy the poeticity but also extract its essence in the after-effects of globalization in the various forms of social change paving its way silently. *The Ministry* reminds readers not only of the fulminations of another contemporary Indian novelist Aravind Adiga but also takes us back to one-time champion of the deprived, Mulk Raj Anand. It's not unfair to record that both Adiga and Arundhati are the extended selves of Anand. These writers seem not to sell their soul to Mephistopheles but create fiction out of their crusade with the oddities of society with changing times. It is this aspect of realism that surfaces repeatedly in Arundhati Roy's literary forte.

Since every writer depicts the age he/she lives in, Arundhati Roy too, is not an exception. But in doing so, she does not sacrifice her *dharma* of a writer's vision. She is aware of the socio-cultural changes taking place from time to time. Her reactions and rebellious views remind us of a celebrated English poet and critic Matthew Arnold who in his famous essay on "Culture and Anarchy" had described the present state as 'an upper class materialized, middles class vulgarized and lower class brutalized'(Arnold). Arnold had advocated that culture should conceive of true human perfection as a harmonious perfection which could develop all sides of our humanity as well as all sides of our society. Roy, like Arnold reiterates that the excessive materiality and emergence of individuality could not civilize society. Roy's dig on Capitalism, apart from other things can also be heard in Aravind Adiga, who in *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in the Tower* fictionalizes his protest against the capitalistic forces that alienate humans from each other. Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger* resorts to violence and later establishes his entrepreneurial venture just to avenge his master's cruelties. Likewise, Yogesh Murthy in *Last Man in Tower* wages a war to claim his space and right in a capitalistic and consumerist world though he is eliminated by the builders. The act of both the heroes appear rebellious but are not devoid of their growing epistemic strength.

Roy's *The Ministry* depicts various threads of protests manifested through a web of characters. The story begins with the travails of Anjum alias Aftab, the son of Jahanara and Mulaqat Ali, who fail to hide their son's unusual characteristics. Aftab's mother persuades him to undergo a surgery but the son rebels and insists on living amid *Hizras* 'with painted nails and a wrist full of bangles' (Roy 19) and longs to lift his salwar just a little 'to show off his silver anklets' (19). As luck would have it, Aftab becomes Anjum--- a famous Hizra, and a disciple of Ustad Kulsoom Bi of the Delhi Gharana and later participates in different political activities that upset the entire nation from time to time. Having spent several years with fellow Hizras, Anjum feels disillusioned with the state of affairs at *Khwabgah*. She yearns to live life like an ordinary person who could send her child off to school with her books and tiffin box. A new ray of hope suddenly emerged one day at Jama Masjid where she found an unclaimed and abandoned child whom she decided to adopt and explore some joys in rearing the three-year-old infant. Anjum named her Zainab and proffered all her love on her. The child also responded to the affection of Anjum and started calling the former her mummy and other inmates as auntie. The novelist describes this new fond bond in the following lines: "The mouse absorbed love like sand absorbs the sea. Very quickly she metamorphosed into a cheeky young lady with rowdy, distinctly bandicoot like tendencies (that could only barely be managed)" (31).

Besides Anjum other members of the Khwabgah also yearned for viable relationships to carve their identities. In this regard Zainab provided floodgates of filial emotion in Anjum and bred jealousy in Saeeda who also wanted to possess the growing child. Having smelt of Saeeda's longings, Anjum got

cautious and blamed the former for any untoward incident, if any, in case of Zainab. Calling her illness a result of Saeeda's black magic, she undertook a pilgrimage to Ajmer Sharif to avert all evils befalling Zainab. Anjum's absence provided Saeeda enough opportunities to snuggle with Zainab and substitute Anjum's motherly care and concern to the extent that the child started calling Saeeda her mummy.

Roy as a keen observer of human nature delineates the fact that happiness is completely a feeling of internal realization. While the inmates of the *Khwabgah* pretended to be happy, they faked happiness. This feigned happiness seemed to offer a sort of retreat to the dreariness and debauchery present in the real world. The novelist makes *Khwabgah* a mouthpiece to express her angst about the horrendous realities of the real world. The ordinary people albeit are surrounded by external problems, the inmates of the Khwabgah face the same internally. Roy not only refers to the unalterable truths and machinations of the mundane realities governed by rules and regulations but also scoffs at them whole-heartedly:

> 'No one's happy here. It's not possible. Are Yaar, think about it, what are the things you normal people get unhappy about? I don't mean you, but grown –ups like you – what makes them unhappy? Price-rise, children, school-admissions, husbands beatings, wives cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war- outside things that settle down eventually. But for us the price –rise and school –admissions and beating-husbands and cheating-wives are all inside us. The riot is inside us. The war is inside us. Indo-Pak is inside us. It will never settle down, it can't' (23).

The problems of hermaphrodite outnumber the problems of the common people as they undergo the conflicts externally while the former suffers the battles of all kinds internally. *Khwabgah* represents the microcosm of the civilized and normal human world which to the novelist is the macrocosm. Roy, like a neutral observer, expresses the anguish of inmates' identity and also unveils its connections with royal pride. Ustad Kulsoom Bi seems to safeguard the decline of the decreasing regal pride that provided many ancient rulers the safe passage to their tangled relationships. What Kulsoom Bi says is not an exaggeration but a harsh reality associated with the secrets of people in power:

> 'We are the Hizras of Shahjahanabad. Our rulers trusted us enough to put their wives and mothers in our care. Once we roamed freely in their private quarters, the zenana, of the Red Fort. They are all gone now, those mighty emperors and their queens. But we are still here. Think about that and ask yourselves why that should be' (49).

Kulsoom Bi vouched for the historical significance of the Khwabgah though she cautioned her people against the crumbling of its tradition. She reiterates that such a system still existed and it was not to be written off. The novelist rightly mentions: "What mattered was that it existed. To be present in history even as nothing more than a chuckle, was a universe away from being absent from it, from being written out of it altogether. A chuckle, after all, would become a foothold in the sheer wall of the future" (51).

Human relationships in the novel gain new meanings shrouded in many mysteries not only of the inmates of *Khwabgah* but also of four university days' friends who in search of their vocation finally

separate and rejuvenate at intervals but in different avatars. Their relationships formulate during the rehearsal of a drama but take different shapes because of the volatile political conditions. These relationships are founded on love-hate syndrome spread by handful of people bent upon creating splits in society just for some political advantage. Names act as referents to certain faiths and animals become the symbols to ignite racial discrimination. Many characters in the novel change their names just to protect themselves from the relentless mobocracy, which seems to have lost all rationale. Roy, a realist, very subtly delineates the merciless murders of innocents in mob frenzy based on baseless allegations. Anjum, a Muslim by caste is shuddered to hear the miserable plight of Dayachand alias Saddam Hussain who had adopted this name simply because of his so-called bravery or butchery against a throng of his avengers. Dayachand had closely watched the brutal murder of his father in the name of cow-slaughter simply because he couldn't bribe the policeman, Sehrawat. It is quite paradoxical that both Dayachand and Sehrawat belong to the same Hindu community which reveres the cow as mother. Roy as a creative writer wants to awaken the sleeping and misguided mankind from the slumber that has sealed their conscience. Her metaphoric ire against the deep-rooted malaise keeps surfacing in the novel to show her authorial intent.

Roy creates stories within story rooted in a sort of disenchantment with the prevailing order that destabilizes the harmony of fellow beings. What makes the novel exemplary is the novelist's technique of weaving and connecting all other stories into a united structure. The novel apart from depicting the tangled web of human relationships also hints at the split between two communities. This is much in contrast with the inmates of *Khwabgah* which albeit comprises mostly Muslims yet it welcomes people of other communities having different faiths. References to the conflicts between two communities also get mentioned from time to time. The external forces, too, are found taking disadvantage of the splits between two faiths: “The poet-prime minister of the country and several of his senior ministers were members of an old organization that believed India was essentially a Hindu nation and that, just as Pakistan had declared itself an Islamic Republic, India should declare itself a Hindu one” (41). The lines in context are a dig at Indian maxim of *Vasudhaib Kutumbakam*, i.e the entire world is one family. This gets shaken because of the divisive politics of our so-called representatives who perturb the peace of millions of people just to gain access to the corridors of power.

Roy does not side with any political party so far as her idea about politics is concerned. The change of governments too fails to alter the fate of the commoners. The novelist makes a beautiful contrast between the poet-prime minister's lisping with the trapped rabbit's timidity. The new prime minister's timidity is described in the following lines:

> He spoke like a marionette. Only his lower jaw moved. Nothing else did. His bushy white eyebrows looked as though they were attached to his spectacles and not his face. His expression never changed. At the end of his speech he raised his hand in a limp salute and signed off with a high, reedy Jai Hind (82).

It's quite ironical to note that despite the change of guards at the centre nothing changes as such. One community or the other becomes a victim of the years of rebellion simmering in the minds of people. The killing of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the riot in Gujarat, The Kashmir problem are some such issues that

require due attention. But the craze for power keeps majority of political parties agog with dilly-dallying, sometimes deviating the common masses in the glitter-glatter of globalization and yet at other times soothing their bruises in the name of sympathy. This prompts many idealists to undertake fast unto death, protesting against parochialism on the one hand and red tapism, on the other. The real issues most often are relegated to the margins. The novelist graphically records:

> The summer of the city's resurrection had also been the summer of scams—coal scams, iron-ore scams, housing scams, stamp paper scams, phone scams, land-scams, dam scams, irrigation scams, arms and ammunition scams, petrol –pump scams, polio-vaccine scams, electricity bills scams, school –book scams, god-men scams, drought-relief scams, car-number-plate scams, voter-list scams, identity –card scams—in which politicians, businessmen, businessmen-politicians and politician-businessmen had made off with unimaginable quantities of public money (102-03).

The novelist is not oblivious to the fact of various relationships which fade because of the political instability. The government policies seem to favor the elite masses and show disregard to the common masses. People in power most often get shielded at the cost of the cold blooded murder of innocents merely because of the fault of a handful of people or their faith. Craze for a consumerist culture pushes the nativity ode into oblivion and the sprawling cities give everyone the illusion of a shining country where pedestrians find little space either to relax or to revive their lost energies. In such a situation people like Dr. Azad Bhartiya, a triple M.A in Hindi, Urdu, and History undertakes a strike for eleven years. But ironically, this person is kept under surveillance mostly. He has become a crusader and is ostracized by everyone yet what he says has ample substance: "Capitalism is like poisoned honey. People swarm to it like bees. I don't go to it. For this reason, I have been put under twenty-four hours' surveillance. I am under twenty-four hours' remote control electronic surveillance by the American government" (129). It would be pertinent to quote the words of Natasha Walter, who in her review of Roy's novel, writes: "By including so many voices Roy may be pressing the point that everyone is as worthy of empathy as everyone else, but at times the effect, strangely, becomes the opposite."

Much in contrast against fast unto death of Azad Bhartiya is the politicization of the death of a former Prime Minister in 1984, which shook the entire nation. The fault of a body- guard brought nemesis to the entire Sikh community. Biplab Das alias Garson Hobart, an important character of the novel, describes the blind fury and violence in the following lines:

> I was disgusted by the stupidity, the futility of it all, but somehow, I was not shocked. It could be that that my familiarity with the gory history of the city I had grown up in had something to do with it. It was as though the Apparition whose presence we in India are all constantly and acutely aware of had suddenly surfaced, snarling, from the deep, and had behaved exactly as we expected it to (Roy 150).

The Kashmir issue raised in the novel also speaks volumes about the gimmick people in power are engrossed with. The valley has become a hot bed of politics because of the sponsored *Azadi* syndrome, leaving the common mass segregated and seething in anger, affecting their means of livelihood. The confrontation between the armed forces and the recalcitrant Kashmiris has affected the peace and

harmony among people. The writer seems to sympathize with the local people and says: "So far in this more than quarter-century –long conflict in Kashmir, it has paid off. Kashmiris mourned, wept, shouted their slogans, but in the end they always went back home. Gradually, over the years, as it grew into a habit, a predictable, acceptable cycle, they began to distrust and disrespect themselves, their sudden fervours and their easy capitulations" (Roy 182).

The atmosphere of distrust misguides the immature and innocent youngsters trapped in the name of saving and freeing Kashmir. The tug of war between the militants and the armed forces enables the latter to make money in the name of fake encounters. A young misguided youth, Aijaj's narration about his kidnappers' reveals the truth as he says: "They tortured me, they gave me electric shocks and made me sign a blank sheet. This is what they do here with everybody. I don't know what they wrote on it alter. I don't know what they have made me say in it. The truth is that I have not denounced anybody. The truth is that I honour those who trained me in jihad more than I honour my own parents" (Roy 227). Aijaj later reveals that the armed forces sold bullets to the jihadis and they never wanted the militancy to end.

The novel also unfolds the tangled web of Tilo's life which is full of mystery. A foster child of a Christian mother, Tilottama, one of Delhi University's Architecture students gets attracted towards Musa though they take to their professions and get separated. This provides Biplab the chance to try his luck. Attracted initially by Tilo's charm, he is at war with himself thinking what disarmed him towards Tilo and says: "It's hard for me to describe someone who has been imprinted on me, on my soul, like a stamp or a seal of some sort for so many years. I see her as I see a limb of mine –a hand, or a foot' (153). But Tilo negates the question of marriage with anybody and hence this charm comes to an end. Biplab, alias Garson, gets disappointed and his infatuation for Tilo also comes to an end.

Tilo, on the other hand, kept herself tied constantly to Musa and later married him. Musa's yearning for Kashmir's freedom takes him to the disturbed valley where he stealthily starts a family but loses his wife and daughter in police firing. He goes into hiding yet continues to be associated with Tilo. Soon, people come to know about his death. It is later revealed that Musa had a dubious identity and he created the fake news of his death. The insurgency in Kashmir affects and distances them yet they maintain a secret bond. Tilo is trapped in Kashmir but because of Naga she is rescued to Delhi where she marries him.

Roy as a novelist is not confined merely to literary creativity. As discussed earlier, her first novel *The God of Small Things* also is not devoid of her political activism. This is amply justified in her later writings grounded more in her poetics of protest than of sheer literary leanings. It is pertinent to quote an observation of Geoffrey Ken, who in his article "Tuning (In or Out) the Big Voice of Arundhati Roy Following *The God of Small Things*," remarks:

> Roy's persistent general focus has been and remains the exercise of power; within this domain, her attention has passed through several phases from conflict between state or national government agency and local within India to Indian development of nuclear weapons and Indo-Pak conflicts to the United States' response to 9/11, and most recently to

> the War on Terror what she regards as the militaristic Establishment of the American Empire. (Ken)

Tilo's marriage with Naga, the son of Ambassador Hariharan and their luxurious life loses its sheen shortly. Out of exhaustion, Tilo leaves Naga as the former wanted 'an insular independence' (Roy 216). She was tired of 'living a life that wasn't really hers at an address she oughtn't to be at' (Roy 231). While Naga wanted to shine as a 'celebrity', Tilo wanted to sink into oblivion. When Naga was packing Tilo's things to be put into a carton, he was wonderstruck by Mariam Ipe's medical reports that disclosed the mother-daughter relationship. He later comes to discover that Tilo's individuality and her unusual quirkiness was the result of her mother's influence on her. He failed to notice that distance from her mother had an adverse effect on Tilo but Naga's realization was too late. The lack of companionship not only forced her to live in a rented house but also to kidnap an unclaimed child at Jantar Mantar. But this also didn't last long as the police started searching for the kidnapper and the suspicion lay on Tilo. The mother of the unclaimed child had reported in the police who suspected Tilo's whereabouts. Tilo was forced to seek shelter in *Jannat* Guest House established by Anjum and others.

What tangles human relations further in the novel is the mystery behind the kidnapped child later named Miss Jebeen, the second. The real mother of the child, Revathy sends a letter to Dr. Azad stating her miserable plight and the loathing relationship with the child. She admits with disdain that the child was illegally begotten because the latter was conceived after her rape by police forces. Revathy had joined Communist party just to avenge her father's atrocities on her mother. But because of her rebellious ways, she was arrested by several policemen who had raped her one after another. She got conceived and gave birth to the accursed child in the forest. She detested the child and named her Udaya, who according to her, had river as mother and forest as father. The desertion of the child at Jantar Mantar was the result both of Revathy's hatred of her and also of the hope that some good soul would take care of the child. What Revathy discloses in her letter reveals the brutal face of armed forces and the generous nature of recalcitrant people like Dr. Azad Bhartiya and others:

> I saw many good people in Jantar Mantar so I had the idea to leave Udaya there. I cannot be like you and them. I cannot go on hunger-strike and make requests. In the forest every day police is burning killing and raping poor people. Outside there is you people to fight and take up issues. But inside there is us only. So I am returned to Dandakaranya to live and die by my gun. (Roy 426-27)

Friendship and love as the foundations of every human relationship seem to fritter away because of everyone's professional exigency. In this regard Tilo of the Delhi University friends' group keeps all of them tied to one another because of her mysterious charm in mysterious ways. She initially attracts Garson alias Biplab and Naga but these male members though not truly friends, maintain a sort of adversarial relationship. The competing forces of friendship and love distance them both personally and professionally making them rivals to each other. Musa's untimely exit from Tilo's life allows Naga to show advances to her and later their marriage brings some fresh showers though short lived. While Garson seethes in his lost longings for Tilo, his marriage with Chitra also suffers a breakdown even after so many years. His desertion by his wife and daughters allows some room for his unfulfilled romantic leanings towards Tilo. Years after he derives a faint satisfaction in renting out his apartment

to Tilo, the woman who in his 'weak, wavering way', he 'will never stop loving.'

Tilo finally seeks refuge in *Jannat* Guest House where she finds peace in the company of Anjum, Saddam, Zainab, and Saeeda who are also living borrowed lives. Musa comes out of his hiding in search of Tilo who had preserved his recoveries safely. He finally unites with Tilo and also makes peace with Biplab alias Garson. Biplab also realizes the futility of all his years working in Bureau as an intelligence officer bent upon toeing the right course of action though in the wrong manner just for a little patch of land. His disillusionment with the state of affairs in Kashmir gives an eye opener to what man has made of man. The novelist describes:

> Kids on the streets with stones in their hands are facing down soldiers with guns; villagers armed with sticks and shovels are sweeping down mountainsides and overwhelming army camps. If the soldiers fire at them and kill a few, the protests just swell some more. The paramilitary are using pellet guns that end up blinding people--- which is better than killing them…the world is inured to the sight of piled-up corpses (Roy 429-30).

The aforesaid discussion substantiates that Roy is not a slave to any ideology. Her participation in several social welfare programme and her outbursts against the politics of ideology have earned her both brickbats and bouquets. Her humanistic concerns disseminated through several protests, articles and pamphlets speak of her candour and courage required of an all-time humanitarian approach. Continuing her tirade against the populist measures in any form that play divisive politics and segregate one community from another lends her an edge over other contemporary writers. In her latest novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,* she disapproves of the governments in power whether it be the Congress or the BJP. Her barb is against the power politics that marginalizes various mellifluous relationships either marred or mirrored simply in the name of taboos.

The natural urge of humans to transgress the sacrosanct boundaries charted out in past hangs like an Albatross around our necks though we may boast of living in a globalized world. It goes without saying that Indian masses too have demystified the inter-racial marriages, live-in-relationships, and other issues of sexuality once considered illicit. The depiction of such themes and their deliberations in academia are no more considered profane. Hence, it is the guts, grit and gumption of Arundhati Roy, who as a writer of realist fiction, doesn't dodge her responsibility but instead reiterates her vision and imagination of tomorrow.

Thus, Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* weaves a story that depicts the gaps and ruptures but finally untangles the web of human relationships by re-uniting the characters, who despite various grievances against one another make peace. There are some characters who change their names and identities but finally re-surface and reassess themselves for bringing harmony. In this regard while Anjum is overjoyed to see her adopted daughter Zainab tying the knot with Saddam who gets blessed to pay the last rites to his father murdered in cold blood. Musa gets united with Tilo while Biplab mends his fences with Musa. Biplab's idea of starting a music channel with Naga emerges out of his will to harmonize everyone lost on the sands of time. The shattered story of the novel gets dovetailed with the unifying forces of love.

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Eclectic Concerns in Githa Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*

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Abstract

The present research paper aims to bring forth the themes of self-discovery, marginalisation and empowerment in Githa Hariharan's novel, The Ghosts of Vasu Master. The narrative highlights the eclectic concerns pertaining to diverse and wide-ranging ideas as modern education system, pervasive power relations, teacher-taught relationship and teaching-learning experience. It is a psychological study of characters caught up in different sets of power relations and attempting to discover themselves. The novel attempts to analyse the suffocating emptiness in the life of Vasu Master after superannuation. The Ghosts of Vasu Master explorea from different perspectives the dynamics of Teaching methodologies, human psychology and self-discovery. It is a reassessment of the shallowness of the contemporary system of education where students confine themselves to a few prescribed texts. Throughout the narrative challenges the authoritative texts of western education and medicine. Besides, The Ghosts of Vasu Master traverses India's progress as an independent nation and also deals with psychological and physical maladies and the process of healing.

Keywords: *self-discovery, marginalisation, empowerment, power relations.*

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Githa Hariharan's novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* highlights the themes of self-discovery, marginalisation and empowerment. It offers an interesting psychological study of characters caught up in different sets of power relations and attempting to discover themselves. The eclectic concerns pertaining to diverse and wide-ranging ideas like modern education system, pervasive power relations, teacher-taught relationship and teaching-learning experience, engage the reader's attention. As is prevalent in most societies, different groups interact with and control other groups and the resultant 'power relations' are sometimes clearly visible and sometimes ambiguous. These power relations tend to create a divide among people as a result of which the weaker group gets marginalised. At the same time, there is a streak of resistance ever present in these relations which make the weaker person/group strive for empowerment. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* portrays the interaction between intellectually developed vis-à-vis the underdeveloped individual.

The novel is narrated on three parallel tracks. The first one comprises the fables told by Vasu

Master to teach his mentally challenged student Mani. The second one is constituted of Vasu Master's encounters with the ghosts in his memories. The third track consists of the stories narrated by other characters of the novel in which Vasu Master becomes a listener. The chapters of the novel are organised independently as tales along with digressing asides. Personal myths, fables and allegories are narrated through Vasu Master, leading to his analysis of himself and observations about their effect on Mani's mind. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, as is clear from the title itself, is not a woman-centric text. The novel attempts to analyse the suffocating emptiness in the life of Vasu Master after superannuation and also addresses some other issues. Vasu Master, in the novel, has generally been simple and linear as a school teacher, and he is shaken out of his complacence by his retirement after which he embarks upon a journey of self-analysis and discovery. He undertakes the difficult task of teaching Mani, a twelve-year old mentally retarded boy who cannot speak. As the epigraphs to the novel suggest, power relations prevail in every sphere of life including that of knowledge. The first by Charaka states: "*The entire world is teacher to the intelligent and foe to the unintelligent*." The second one by Shakespeare articulates: "*We cannot all be masters, nor all masters cannot be truly followed.*" It has been extracted from Act I, Scene i of Shakespearean play *Othello*. The last one is a quotation from Gandhi "*I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills*"(ix). All three reflect upon the theme of knowledge and education in the novel. They also refer to the power relations between the intellectually developed individual and the underdeveloped individual. Vasu's courageous endeavour to educate a sub-normal child gradually turns into his quest to know and understand his own life and discover himself. The three epigraphs clearly emphasize that there is no need to create knowledge as it already exists in the world, it is for the seeker to find it. This becomes the base for the story of Vasu Master and Mani. The epigraphs also represent the process of self discovery through Vasu's final encounter with the teaching profession.

Vasu Master's contemplation on the role of a teacher reminds of the methods of teaching which prevailed in ancient India. The *Gurukulam* method which existed in the past is revived by Vasu because it generates a direct teacher-student relationship. The teacher focuses on the welfare of the pupil who in turn devotes himself completely to his tutor. As Hariharan writes, "The pupil belonged to the teacher, not to an institution of stone and mud. Learning was a lifelong task, not a brief sojourn in an exotic, artificial place" (199). *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* thus questions the existing education system. It is a reassessment of the shallowness of the contemporary system of education where students confine themselves to a few prescribed texts. Throughout the narrative challenges the authoritative texts of western education and medicine. Hariharan propagates a system through Vasu that goes beyond the textual and traditional method of teaching. Living alone in a remote village of Elipettai, Vasu Master who is often haunted by feelings of loneliness, decides to teach Mani to fill the emptiness and void in his life. It is at the belated juncture in his life that he accepts the challenge posed by Mani and begins to interrogate existing methods of teaching. He describes this challenge in the following words:

> But Mani was a puzzle; the kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was a puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand Mani, even in part; if I was to know what I was to him and he to me; and if I were to find myself before it was too late (99).

f and moving forward on the path of self discovery. His own physical and psychological problems are being solved. As long as Vasu remains under the invisible influence of the power of societal forces, he is unable to discover his own potential. After his retirement, he is freed from the obligation of being an employee of the PG School and following its rules. Thus, he discovers his own self and adopts new methods to arouse Mani's interest. As Urvashi Butalia avers:

> Desperate to get reaction, Vasu tells Mani stories, and begins to supplement them with drawings, and gradually, Mani and his teacher (one might say a failed pupil – for Mani's parents hand him over toVasu's as just that – and a failed teacher, failed only because he is assailed by a sense of his own inadequacy (*Peopled* 30).

As Mani starts understanding the various themes presented through the stories, fables, narratives and anecdotes, Vasu asks him to draw pictures of the stories narrated to him. Vasu Master is full of enthusiasm as he motivates Mani and says, "Come, Mani, let's create a new world. A better one"(262). Vasu Master, through his efforts, succeeds in improving Mani's condition, though partially. He also succeeds in creating a better world for himself by freeing himself from the constraints of societal barriers and emerging as a free individual.

The novel undertakes to reflect upon human psychology, nature and character. The structure and technique is also similar to the psychological literary texts in which episodes and situations are strung together through a single consciousness.. Vasu Master's thoughts reveal him to be a man who has been forced to repress his instincts almost throughout his life. Consequently his creative and fertile mind has never surfaces through his actions. As his character evolves, his inherent intuitive capabilities become evident. This reflects the truth of the assertion that instincts are the motivating factors of behavioural patterns; by consummating them one can attain satisfaction, and also that denied instincts do not die but get relegated to the unconscious mind. The ideas and desires keep shuttling between the conscious and unconscious mind and enable the individual to liberate his mind. As Dr. Joseph Murphy opines:

> I have seen the power of the subconscious lift people up out of crippled states, making them whole, vital, and strong once more. Their minds made them free to go out into the world to experience happiness, health, and joyous expression. There is a miraculous curative force in your subconscious that can heal the troubled mind and the broken heart (*Power* 3).

This happens in the case of Vasu. Initially he was not an independent-minded teacher but one who was influenced by the system and he played his role accordingly. Hariharan seems to suggest through Vasu that by rejecting our heritage of the *gurukula*, quality education has been diluted and distorted too. The novel thus highlights the psychological conflicts and begins to contemplate upon the nature of teaching, the methods of teaching and evolves a new technique which proves his power to teach a child who is considered sub-normal. The biggest challenge for Vasu as a teacher is to restore Mani's self confidence and emotional balance and in this attempt he embarks on a process of self exploration

and recognition.

Hariharan's richly textured text explores various levels of Vasu's active consciousness are explored even though he is now at an age when activity should normally end. Vasu is reminded of his father very often when he begins to teach Mani. His father was a well educated man, with considerable knowledge of Ayurveda. The influence of his father is brought out at various points in the narrative in which his quotations from Shakespeare and other texts are remembered by Vasu. He finds a concord in the liberal humanism of Shakespeare and the traditionalism of *slokas* and *rasayanams* as they are both universally significant. Vasu tries to trace the wisdom of India by adopting a change in the stereotypical method of education and delving deep into the indigenous texts his father used to refer to. The novel portrays a vivid description of the intellectually strong individual's power over the underdeveloped consciousness through the characters of Vasu and Mani. The kind of power relations presented in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* reminds one of the ambiguity of their presence in the society.

The Ghosts of Vasu Master is a text in which Hariharan portrays the situation of women through a male consciousness. As the author acknowledges, she was dealing with the issue of women deliberately in a more indirect manner than in her other novels. As the title also suggests, the central character and consciousness is that of Vasu but various significant issues of identity and self are resolved through his thoughts. From being an obscure and insignificant school teacher, he emerges as an effective individual. His intuitive and insightful journeys into his past enable him to overcome some shortcomings in his own nature. Thus, the narrative becomes a complex rendering of the issues in the lives of both men and women. The novel ultimately culminates with the chapter "Terminal Examination" which highlights what Hariharan says in "Acknowledgements" given at the end of the novel:

> Some of the ideas Vasu grapples with reflect my own rather eclectic course of reading over the last six years for this novel. The list included readings on education, alternative methods of teaching, ancient Indian education, Indian healing systems and healing in general (275).

It is this last chapter that in some ways clarifies the writer's intentions in writing this novel. Hariharan talks about the universality of healing approaches which are "in reality bound by their relativity" (266). They are "springboards" to be used by individuals to find answers to the enigmas of life. It concludes that only trial teaches the proper lessons in this world. The last question paper set by Vasu is unique because it intends not to uncover deficiencies and losses but to light up one or more of the manifold paths that confront the examinee. The individual needs to confront the truth and the very ambiguity of existence. The examinee is placed at many of the crossroads and his/her response would reflect how he perceives this world. This is also a new method of educating the individual and empowering him/her to make choices and take decisions on his own. Hariharan has also posited in an interview with Joel Kuorrti that this examination raises questions that should inspire others to contemplate and dwell upon them. She says,

> I think at the end of *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* I also say that the story is not quite over. It seems to be over, but it will continue. There is always this quality of the retold tale that is never quite finished. It is as if you are saying, I've done this and i've put here and somebody can come along and pick up and continue (22).

The open-ended conclusion leaves behind some unanswered questions because it is a story which will be carried on. A story telling has no end and thus it will lead to telling of many other stories that will have new beginnings. Thus, it may be concluded that Hariharan's novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* has been explored from different perspectives. Teaching methodologies, human psychology and self-discovery are some major concerns of this text. Besides, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* traverses India's progress as an independent nation and also deals with psychological and physical maladies and the process of healing. Though indirectly, it gives a fresh look at the postcolonial issues including education system. Apart from the socio-cultura changes engineered by the globalisation and other technological advances, the novel highlights the issues of identity crisis, questions the education system and the human condition through the loneliness of Vasu and his grappling with the existing value system and return to a preference for the old value systems.

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Servility and Emancipation: A Study of Noor Zaheer's *My God is a Woman*

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Abstract

Noor Zaheer, the Third World Indian Woman Writer in English, is a versatile genius as well as a social reformer who has not left any nook and corner on gender issues. The present paper is based upon her woman centric debut novel in English, My God is a Woman in which she has narrated the plight of a Muslim woman Safia, the protagonist, and her journey from humility towards emancipation. She becomes the target of tormentation and exploitation not only at the hands of her own community but also at the hands of personal law that restricts her privilege as a human being. She also suffers because of the liberal approach of her husband who gives her freedom to seek education and lead an independent life irrespective of the bondage of caste and creed. Thus, the paper delineates the universal cause of gender discrimination and the valorous attempt at emancipation.

Keywords: *Third World, Social Reformer, Gender Issues,Humility, Emancipation,Freedom, Bondage, Caste, Creed.*

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The term 'subaltern' has been borrowed from Gramsci which means an unpresent, unwanted, discarded and inferior group of people in society. India is a multicultural nation in terms of name, caste, creed, language, religion, culture and gender. In a multicultural country the issue of cultural identity and subalternity is very much prominent. This multiculturalism results in discrimination, assimilation and many other social and economical changes that pave way for cultural identity and subalternity. This affects each individual who finds it difficult to define his/her identity. Thus, identity crisis becomes a primary concern specifically from gender perspective. Even in the field of writing the role of gender is persistent. Both men and women as writers have explored the role of gender through their writings. Their narrative is very diverse while narrating their male as well as female characters. A woman writer has moved very much far away from timidity and marginality to self expression and redefinitions. Still the position of woman, whether as a writer or a human-being, is quite challenging even as the third world woman. Being completely emancipated and independent, she has been considered as 'the other.' Simone de Beauvoir asserts her own views on cultural othering as, “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental,

the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (*The Second Sex*: 16). Though a woman has her own recognition and individuality yet she is considered as subaltern or marginalized because of the supremacy of the patriarchal set-up in society. And it is very difficult to describe her in a straightforward manner. The subaltern status of a woman rests on how she has been beholden in society on the grounds of culture, politics, economy and fiction as well. Homi Bhabha delineates this differentiation as:

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, people. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural differences, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalization' of modernity (*The Location of Culture*: 171).

Winner of Foundation of SAARC Literature Award 2011, *My God is a Woman* is the narration of a turbulent journey of a Muslim girl Safia who achieves her emancipated self, fighting for the cause and liberation of Muslim women. Noor Zaheer's debut *My God is a Woman* is a thought provoking novel and an admiring and courageous attempt from her side. The novel is based on socio-historical issue of Shah Bano. The case brought the country into political, social and religious turmoil. The author has very well narrated each strand and has tried to evolve each moment to make understand the intensity of emotions and the author's own point of view. She makes use of simple plot structure to narrate the struggle and suffering of Safia Jafri. The novel is set in pre – independent India and it was written after twenty two years of the introduction of the bill for the protection of the rights of Muslim women. The novel begins with a preface in which the author claims, "I had held three long discussions with Danial Latifi, Shah Bano lawyer...these discussions have formed the Background for this book." (*MGW*: *Preface*). The novel has been divided into thirty three chapters along with many unequal sub-parts telling different tales including an interlude in which the novelist has narrated her own points of view as well as 'Shah Bano case and quotes'. The title itself shows the feminist approach of the writer where she considers woman as her god. In all religions god is particularly a male. On the other hand, it is the woman who produces life by giving birth to a baby, thus she is very much responsible for existence. But when it comes to her own existence and individuality, she remains on the back foot. The existence and freedom of women has been questioned with the beautiful poetic lines from Safia's Journal in the 'Interlude' as:

> *How am I to write immortal works when I am not free?*
> *How am I to answer when I am not asked?*
> *Why should I waste time in writing verses?*
> *If time itself loses those verses.*

I write in a durable kind of language.
It should be long until they are implemented.
To achieve the fundamentals, great changes are needed.
Little changes are the enemies of great changes.
My thoughts have enemies, therefore, I must be free. (*MGW*: 268)

Safia, the leading lady in the novel dominates the entire domain of the novel from its very beginning to the end. She is the representative character in the novel who represents any other woman who is the victim of suffering in patriarchal set-up of society. At the beginning of the novel, she has been introduced as a seventeen years old innocent girl who has been married to a rich Nawab hailing from a reputed family of Lucknow headed by Justice Jafri. Her husband Abbas Jafri, an active member of the Communist party has been thrown out of the party by the members because of his publication of *Fireworks* in which he supports the cause of Muslim women for equality and liberation. Being a liberal member of society, he denies his wife to wear purdah which is not at all accepted by his mother Zeenat Begum. The result is the never ending war like atmosphere between the son and the mother. Safia, on the other hand has been permitted to complete her education at Allahabad University. During her studies she comes in contact with Dr. Zahida and Gayatri who become an indispensable part of her life as they make her realize about her fundamental rights. Her husband has been murdered due to unrest in society of Muslim fundamentalists. After his murder Safia shifts to Delhi with her infant daughter Sitara in order to fulfil the dreams of equality seen by her husband. She, being an emancipated woman, gives complete freedom and liberation to her daughter Sitara. Sitara after completing her post graduation pursues for The Doctorate and also marries the man of her choice and shifts to Geneva. Disappointed for not having a child from his barren wife Wasim becomes a victim of child kidnapping and prostitution. Their comeback to India creates a great void in their relationship which results in their separation. Safia also saves her friend Amrita from the subjugation and suppression of her husband Govind Ram. Amrita has been married at a very tender age with the son of a rich man which later comes to an end just because she does not want to lead the life of subjugation and suppression. She gives birth to an insane daughter Geetika who becomes the pleasure of her desperate life. But this happiness does not persist long as she has been killed accidently by her father. This incidence results in denouement of the tormentation and a new journey towards emancipation. The novel concludes with Safia's last journey towards fulfilling her husband's dream to liberate Muslim women in the name of religion. As Noor Zaheer shows her detest towards those who restrict the implementation of some particular rules under Muslim religion that are responsible for duality against women in the following lines:

> The *Shariat* says that a woman has to be kept happy, so happy that she would not desire anything beyond the boundaries of the Zenana and gold is said to make a woman happy. The *Shariat* did not say so but the man knew it. To make up for the weakness of the female body and its incapacity to wear more than a certain amount of gold jewellery, mirror frames, make-up cases, tables chairs, beds, bath tubes and even commodes of gold were ordered for the Zenana. No one asked the dying princess why she had risked her life for freedom. No one asked the women in the Zenana if they were happy shitting in gold lavatories. Nobody tried to find out if she would have preferred a harp

> or a book. Music is banned by the Qur'an and books... well, the best book is the Holy Qur'an isn't it? When the most superior book is available to her, why need she read inferior ones? (*MGW*: 271)

In her literary works Noor Zaheer has brought into light many misconceptions created in patriarchal society that is responsible for the suppression of women. In the novel the writer has picked up the socio-historical threads of a Muslim woman Shah Bano who fought for the cause of her right as a woman. She picks up the threads of the scattered identity of a woman which was left behind by Safia because of her death. As Noor Zaheer herself asserts in the preface:

> More than two decades on, we still await an initiative from a democratic set-up, which professes equality for all its citizens, towards giving a section of women the right to live with dignity. Had it been taken, this book would have become unnecessary. As the noose of the fundamentalists tightens, the target remains constant – the woman. It is time to shake off lethargy and complacency. It is time to fight back. It is time to speak and call a spade a spade because that is what it is. (*MGW*: Preface).

Women Emancipation

The term 'emancipation' has been defined as the process of giving people social or political freedom. Woman is nuclear of society and complementary to man. This is unfortunate at her part that her individuality has been tried to efface from the social, religious and cultural milieu and has been shifted to marginal position or as inferior to man. She has been considered emancipated on legal grounds as far as her rights are concerned. But do these rights really emancipate her as far as the patriarchal ground is concerned? No doubt cultural disintegration is also responsible for this and the result is confusion and compromise specifically at the part of women. They have to face discrimination in all fields of life. In the novel the author tries to explain the hypocrisy that people use to exploit in the name of religion specifically when it is the matter of woman. The description of the cultural dominance has been presented in a prominent sense. Noor Zaheer's characters, men and women both are strong examples of women emancipation, their freedom and liberation. Her novel revolves around this basic concept of emancipation.

Noor Zaheer has very decently narrated the cultural background to assimilate her characters more efficiently in it. Cultural discrimination plays an integral part in differentiating one's own identity and individuality. And if it has been evaluated from gender perspective, it is the woman who faces twofold oppression: first, as an individual and second as a subaltern part of society. In this binary opposition the role of society, based on cultural disintegration matters a lot. In Muslim culture women attain the position of subjugation at every step whether it is the matter of marriage or any other personal as well as private occasion. Safia has been married in a rich family which boasts of 'two Knights, five Khan Bahadurs and nine barristers' (*MGW*: 1). It seems a contract more than a marriage where meher has already been decided even before the marriage happens. The author describes the boastful grand marriage of the Nawab's where demonstration counts a lot. Wearing eleven seers of brocade and jewellery makes Safia more uncomfortable. Her father Syed Murtuze Mehdi arranges her

marriage with the opinion of his friend and confidante Mirza Ashfaque Barni. Marriage is supposed to be a personal state of affair where the consent of both the girl and the boy is necessary. Thus, in the matter of marriage, a woman has no right to take a decision of choosing her life partner. She has always been forced to accept the decision taken by the patriarchal set up in society and she has no other option but to accept the most important decision of her life, meekly and submissively. Thus, the role of a woman is usually determined by her male counterpart.

The subjugated and subaltern state of Safia has been presented when she becomes an embellished object in the hands of her elders who represent the male hegemony and hypocrisy in society. She is directed to interim for her father's direction to serve the guests with a loaded tray as a Muslim woman has no right to serve a man outside her family. Safia listen to her father's conversation about her marriage from behind the curtains. It is all a girl is expected i.e. to stay hidden behind the curtains when the men take decision for their women. She has been introduced as a 'mature and sensible' (*MGW*: 2) girl whose 'knowledge and understanding of the Holy Scriptures is perfect' (*MGW*: 2). The author presents the mental state of those staunch Muslims and their misconceptions about their holy book. If anybody shows his feeling of contempt towards its rules and regulations, it is considered that his soul is given to a Satan and a holy person who is a true believer in Muslim religion can be able to bring that person back to Islam. These misconceptions are applicable to both men and women, although it is the woman who becomes the target of exploitation and discrimination.

Safia's perplexed and feminist state of mind has been shown when she says, "Liberty. Gone so suddenly, so definitely, like the window closed...Would ever a day come when the Shariat shall be rewritten to give voice to the women? When shall god decide that he no longer wanted to be used by men? When shall any religion have a female prophet?" (*MGW*: 148). She does not give in easily as she has to continue the fight started by her husband for the welfare and betterment of women irrespective of their religion. She decides to move to Delhi because it is a 'bigger city' and 'national capital'. Thus, Safia's journey to Delhi is a metaphorical journey towards her emancipated self as well as for the rights of the other subaltern women. Being emancipated does not mean to support their own cause and freedom. Instead it tends to fight for the cause of the minority and realising them of their true identity. In Delhi she comes in contact with Amrita who is a subaltern and changes the way of her life by bringing her to her senses as a human-being. Safia joins her art institution for earning livelihood for her daughter and herself. Being educated means being independent. Safia gets a job soon because of her education. She ignites Amrita of her miseries and lost identity. At last Amrita wins the fight of her life with the help of Safia. She also helps her own daughter Sitara to get herself free from the clutches of patriarchy that creates hindrance in her way towards emancipation. She also decides to help Shah Bano in her fight for her fundamental rights. In her journey towards liberation of women, she continuous to move on her way with her husband's advice which was in the form of a song written by Rabindranath Tagore as, "*Jodi tor daak sune keu na aashe, tobe ekla chalo re*" (*MGW*: 251). Her final journey from Delhi to Indore proves to be her last journey towards her goal that remains incomplete and it taken further by her daughter Sitara. As the author narrates, "you did not want her to die but you

did not give her chance to live. She would have lived if she had support for her cause, support in the shape of a single female individual. She would have lived, not physically maybe, but as the only educated, well-placed Muslim woman who had the guts to call a wrong a wrong" (*MGW*: 266). Thus, the journey towards emancipated-self continues.

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Socio-Political Realities in Yemeni Novel: A Critique of Mohammad Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers*

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Abstract

Little has been written about Yemeni novel besides a small number of articles in journals and some investigations in local magazines and newspapers. The first part of the article focuses on the history and the development of Yemeni novel -- a genre that has enriched Yemeni literature and contributed in forming the course of modern Yemeni literature; and the second part has a special focus on Mohammad Abdul-Wali's They Die Strangers (1971) as this Yemeni novel deserves attention for its unflinching focus on the injustices and dispossession of people who are forced for emigration to find avenue of hope. The study of this genre alludes to the role played by national novel in edifying the people and forming their collective memory. Recently, many factors such as democracy, freedom and justice have influenced modern Yemeni novel and enabled female writers to represent the nation and address questions of national identity. Investigating the history of Yemeni novel will initiate a much-needed area of investigation on the development of modern Yemeni novel and will help scholars and students to familiarize themselves with the national novel and the factors that have contributed to its development.

***Keywords**: Yemeni novel, Imams (political leaders), social injustice, emigration.*

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Introduction

Yemen is an Arab country with a rich cultural heritage; Islam is its main religion and Arabic is the official language**.** Known in Greek and Persian geographers' books of classical times as *Arabia Felix*, a Roman cognomen meaning 'lucky' or 'prosperous' in Latin, Yemen had been at the centre of Arab civilization. At a personal level I realized this when in 2008, I had the pleasure to meet Arabs from different walks of life who belonged to different Arab countries, such as Mrs Fatima, mother of the UAE military attaché in London; Miss Aida, Tunisian delegate to the Conference of Non-Aligned nations in Delhi and many Arab researchers in different countries. These people said that their ancestors came over from Yemen and described the country as 'the motherland of all Arabs.' Haykel (2018), Professor of Near East Studies at Princeton University, describes the country as the "richest and most interesting country in Arabia" where "culture flourished, as did the arts" (2). In an interview with Sophie Roell on the best books on Yemen, Haykel says: "Yemen is, historically, an extremely

literary country. It has a remarkable scholarly culture . . . It's stunningly beautiful . . . The Yemeni people are highly distinctive too"(2). Yemen has produced unique oral and written literatures. The present article attempt delves deep into the history of the Yemeni novel and the factors that gave momentum to Yemeni literature.

The Formative Stage: 1920-1960

Before the rise of novel in the Arab peninsula in the 1950s, narratives had been part of indigenous literature of Yemen in both oral and written forms. Novel in Yemeni literature was shaped by the the historic and social circumstances under the Imamate regime, a tough regime belonging to a minority ethnic group that controlled Yemen between 897-1962: "North Yemen was almost closed to the rest of the world . . . In sum, north Yemen and the modern world had little economic need for or interest in each other, and traditional Yemen remained intact partly for this reason" (Burrowes 29). In the earliest Yemeni novels, narrators and major characters represent a microcosm of their society and fight for freedom against the despotic ruler. These novels have overarching themes of "political, social corruption and the decline of moral values in the royal establishment of that time" (Noman 22). Events in those novels are based on real history and characters are given real names of Imams and influential figures who had infinite power. Further, readership reflects an avid willingness of the audience in advocating national novel in order to take it to an honoured place among world literary genres and introduce external readers to the plight of the dictator's victims. In the midst of the turmoil and the struggle to gain freedom in Yemen, "novelists are the first among those trying to document these changes, and to further agitate and enlighten. They have put forward proposals to modernize society and overcome the obstacles impeding movement toward that goal" (Albakry). The coming together of such events and themes gave national novel the social and cultural strength it needed to find a public because readers, too, wanted to end the social isolation imposed by the political regime.

Written novel struggled to gain a foothold within the dominant oral narratives and folk tales because oral representations of history were culturally privileged and remained in an unchallenged position of supremacy for centuries, specially in the nomadic and tribal parts of the country. Before novel got its written form, oral fiction had been used to deliver messages in different forms such as tales, myths, novellas and short fiction.. These narrative forms offered the writers motivation for writing and helped them express the aspirations of their society in the new form. Oral forms, according to the founders of oral studies, have long been "the learning of the people" (Ben-Amos 6); "the wisdom of the people, the people's knowledge" (Sokolov 3) or more clearly, "the lore, erudition, knowledge or teaching of a folk" (Boggs 55). In the Yemeni context, the written form can be seen as an 'old wine in new bottles' or a 'new wine in old bottle' because of the three types of relations: "possession, representation, and creation or re-creation" between oral and written narratives (Ben-Amos 5). This type of relationship established the identity of the written novel and inspired writers like Hamad Khalifah, Hashem Abdullah, Mashreqi Aziz and Hussein Ba-Sedeeq who wrote novels in form of articles and published them in newspapers and magazines:

> The period 1920s is the formative stage in the life of the written narrative which can better be called the stage of story article where the story was at the stage of creation and birth. It was below the artistry level. In the absence of an integrated

concept of the art which was dominated by the folk narratives, written narrative was the means for expressing thoughts, calls for reform and introductions for good governance (Abu-Taleb).

Newspapers, magazines and journals were the main platform for publishing the creative works of writers who articulated the national desire to bring social and economic reforms through writings. Shafiqa Zawqari's *The Martyr's Widow* (1968) is a telling instance of a novel published in the first issue of *Almajalah* newspaper in 1968. Nabihah Abdulhameed's *Mother* (1963) in *Alrai Ala'am* and Samiah Mahmoud's *Tomorrow Things Will Be Known* (1967) in *Alayam* are also novels written by female writers and published in newspapers. Narratives in the press were recognized as representative of Yemeni writing until the 1970s when written fiction registered the emergence of important literary figures like Ahmed Alsaqaf, Mohammed Muthanna and Mohammed Loqman: "Ahmed Alsaqaf is the founder of Yemeni novel who made Yemen a pioneer in the field of written narrative not only on the level of the Arab Peninsula but the Middle East through his contributions to the genre" (Sagheer 115). In the two parts of Yemen, the southern part lying under the British colonial rule and the northern part under the oldest and longest dictatorship in the region, the writers were on the similar wavelength in terms of socio-political concerns.

The Stage of Maturity

Critics refer to the 1970s as the second stage in history of Yemeni novel; an era that marks the establishment of universities and the departure of students to study abroad, mainly in Egypt and Syria. At this stage, novel got its identity and "had a new style and content. It contained some new artistic tools of a novel . . . novel fulfilled the artistic criteria" (Al-Mutawakel 84). Between 1970-1980, more than fifteen novels were written most of which focused on the social and political life at that time, for instance Hussein Ba-Sadeeq's *The Way of Fogs*, Mohammed Alzubairi's *Waq Alwaq*, Mohammed Haniber's *The Village of the Batool* and Hussein Saleh Messibli's *The Orphan*. It coincides with the publications of two great authors: Mohammed Abdul-wali and Zayd Mutea Dammaj. The artistic ripeness was clearly reflected in Abdul-wali's engagements with nostalgia, exile and issues related to emigration, and Zayd Mutea Dammaj's with socio-political realities. This period also marks the entry of formidable females into literary canon like Ramziya Aliryani whose *Victim of Greed* (1970) deals with issues related to women's subjugation and forced marriage and *Qat is A Poison* (1971) with the social problem in Yemen i.e. wasting time in chewing Qat leaves. Shafiqa Zawqari's *The Martyr's Widow* (1968) and Lamia Aliryan's *A Woman…but* (1978) are novels written by pioneer women writers who represent the powerless female and highlight many critical issues of forced marriage, female's right of education and male guardianship. The increasing participation of women, apart from impacting the development, added a unique flavour to the genre: "Women's contribution in this field will add a new tone that would lessen the world of sadness, and aggressiveness, and anger" (Ibrahim 116). By following a realistic approach as a technique of narration, Yemeni women writers succeeded in representing the plight of women in the patriarchal society and highlighting the major concerns of common woman.

After charting out the evolution of Yemeni novel, I turn to Mohammaad Abdul-Wali who is considered one of the forerunners of the modern Yemenite literary movement. He published three

collections of short stories as well as two novellas. Mohammad Abdul-Wali (1940-1973), a Yemeni writer of Ethiopian descent, joined the University of Cairo in 1955 but was expelled from Egypt for his leanings in Marxism. Later, he moved to Russia, studied literature and literary theory at the Gorky Institute which is reflected in his portrayal of the bitterness of longing for home, labour emigration and sympathy with disenfranchised people. In 1962 he came back to Yemen; a country that just had won its independence, joined Ministry of Foreign Affairs and served in diplomatic missions in Moscow and later in Berlin. Abdul-Wali's *oeuvre* is marked by literary and artistic flavour. Regarded as Abdul-Wali's *magnum opus, They Die Strangers* dealt with the common experiences of Yemenis who were caught between cultures by the displacements caused by civil war or labor migration. The novel under scrutiny was published in 1976 and translated in English by Deborah Akers, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Ohio State University and Abubaker Bagader, Professor of Sociology, King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.. *They Die Strangers* is the story of a shopkeeper, Abdo Saeed, who leaves his wife, son and parents and spends twelve years in Addis Ababa seeking fortune because "all who go to sea return wealthy" (Abdulwali 27). He is filled with a desire to return home: “now, twelve years later, he knew very little about home, except for what was revealed in the letters he received two or three times a year . . . In his heart, he lived not in Sodset Kilo, but in faraway village in Yemen” (27). In addition to the main character, Abdo Saeed, there are several typical characters as Taito who prostitutes herself and pretends to be a noble woman; Amin, the Yemeni Imam and the representative of Yemeni community; Abdullateef, and Abdullateef's secretary who is half-Ethiopian and given no name. Abdullateef's secretary, though a minor character, does not agree with his master's notion that Yemenis in Ethiopia are contributing in the liberation of their country: “liberating your country requires first that you liberate yourselves, that you not cower, that you fight your enemy face to face” (57). Though he is a young boy who has never been to Yemen, he seems to be self-assured and mature enough to represent a nation: "No, sir, you didn't come to liberate your country. You escaped . . . I tell you frankly, you'll never be the ones to liberate your country. If it is liberated, it will be by those who stayed there" (57-58). He tries to provoke the Yemenis to put an end to the despotic regime that caused many displacements and rendered many fugitives or emigrants. However, the boy's sincere desire to unite the divided and desperate Yemenis fail because their psyche and identity are seriously affected by the long exile. The world of *They Die Strangers*, according to Wahb Romeyah is a collapsing human world:

> Its people are sick--they carry the seeds of destruction within themselves, and they move toward their demise with determination. Their lives, relationships, and dreams are strong, but emigration kills their souls as they get used to it and submit to it…And from the heart of this split world which is about to break apart and fall come the half-breeds torn apart by the duality of their allegiance to home or the absence of any allegiance at all (51).

They Die Strangers is an epical effort for carving out an identity; it has less to do with political realities. Abdo Saeed says “yes, us! We're searching for a homeland, a nation, a hope. You don't know what it's like to feel like a stranger" (58). When Abdullateef discusses political instability at home with him, he answers "I don't care about the political situation. I will return to my village, plough my land, and remain with my wife and son" (72). His grand dream becomes personal, revolving around saving good money for his wife and having a fancy house after he returns home. He

never thinks of supporting the on-going revolution at home or attending any community council abroad. Going back home seems to him impossible and homeland becomes an album of images:

> As a boy, he had been a shepherd. He used to drink only goat's milk... Perhaps he ate some fruit that grew on village trees or dates that grew in the valley or bananas that he stole from a garden near the valley. Abdou treasured memories were of that valley, the trees ripe with fruit, goats lowing. These were things he remembered (25).

Abdul-Wali's *magnum opus* is a highly artistic text and a pioneering postcolonial novel in Yemeni literature. Identity crisis, alienation of male emigrants, woman's suffering at home and man's betrayal are the focus areas of the text. Identity crisis is a hot button issue of literature in 1970s and a major concern of diasporic Yemenis who were in limbo and did not know where they belonged. Though young, the secretary has a better knowledge of lost identities of mixed-blood people who live around him. He does not find a serious identity issue for his master; rather he finds him a man who is not ready to sacrifice: "He wasn't a stranger, despite being an expatriate. He had a country to go home to one day" (56). The novel gives an obvious voice to the boy who criticizes the uncertainty the Yemenis living in: “you dream of a myth, but we live a reality! . . . from here you will never do anything but shout at the top of your lungs (57). Their loose connection with the social and cultural norms of their homeland makes them impotent victims who are lost in “drinking alcohol and chasing women” (62). Abdo Saeed is an example of a man who allows himself sexual pleasures with women in Addis Ababa and doesn't turn to them again: "They said he even made love to a fifty-year-old woman" (90). Similarly, Abdullateef refuses to take the responsibility of the kids resulting from his illegal affairs: "What concerns the hajji is that leaving the boy with the Christians would mean a Muslim soul might be led to godlessness. As Muslims, we can't let these Muslim children go to hell, can we?" (92). This life astonishes the boy who condemns the inhumane circumstances of the emigrants including Abdo Saeed whose death represents the fate of the Yemeni emigrants in general:

> Graves are the right place for individualistic emigration . . . A wife deserted for years . . . and a son who doesn't know him. And a land to which he gives no drop of his blood. He died a stranger like hundreds of Yemenis all around the earth. They live and die strangers without knowing solid ground to stand on. As for this grave, it is not his . . . It is the grave of another people. The graves we [Yemenis] occupy are Ethiopian. Isn't it enough that we take our living from their mouths, much less take their graves? My god, what strangers we are, what strangers we are!! (95-96)

In a short creative span Mohammad Abdul-Wali succeeded in presenting the enigmatic social and political realities that obtained in Yemeni society, thus ensuring a durable future for the genre. However, Al-Maqalih (1987), an eminent Yemeni poet and critic, notes that novel of this period is still weak and has not yet achieved creativity and mastery of the genre because writers fail to create a "balance between the action and artistic structure" (12). He opines that the Yemeni novel in the late 1970s was still a "stumbling effort" of writers who "are unable to express themselves well through the novel" (11). *They Die Strangers* introduces two compelling issues; social injustices and

emigration, in a critical era in the history of the country despite its intrusive fictional world. Given the circumstances Abdul-Wali's creative endeavors should be taken seriously as historical and political record of the country. Through his creative works he has laid a strong foundation and paved and smoothened the way for the futuristic Yemeni writers. *They Die Strangers* introduces the torturous experience of the people living in cultural isolation under the crushing iron heel of political dispensations and serious socio-economic difficulties. It focuses on the expatriation of the Yemeni men whose emigration does not solve their socio-economic problems; rather, they pay dearly for leaving their homeland, wives and children. The text is the best example of modern Arabic novel in all the Arab peninsula in terms of characterization and artistic treatment of socio-political issues without sacrificing the architectonic of the genre.

Conclusion

In Yemen and many Arab countries in general, novel as a genre has evolved as a result of the writers' contact with the Egyptian and European novelists. Though the first full-fledged Yemeni novel was produced in 1971 and published in 1976, the progress in novel writing was comparatively slow. The tardy progression of novel as a literary genre is ascribed to the national awareness, specifically to saving the traditional heritage in a period that is considered the most stable in the history of the country: *They Die Strangers* documents the history of humanity in fiction. It is about the blurred atmosphere that created disrupted identities and social depression. The novel is unique in its artistic approach toward the social and political issues, and very subtly attempts to reform the society at social and personal levels. Contemporary novel is a reflection of the war, confusion and lack of order that is evident since 2010. In a new style and contemporaneous themes, modern novel uses the realistic approach of characterization, sarcasm and tragic irony as fictional techniques to raise the readers' anxiety; a creative way for dealing with real sensitive issues.

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Duong Thu Huong's *A Novel Without a Name*-A Critique of War

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Abstract

The Vietnam War was a long, costly and divisive conflict that pitted the communist government of North Vietnam against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The conflict was intensified by the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. More than 3 million people were killed in the Vietnam War, and more than half of the dead were Vietnamese civilians. Duong Thu Huong, a Vietnamese author and political dissident who was temporarily imprisoned for her writings and outspoken criticism of corruption in the Vietnamese government, spins a poignant and convincing narrative in A Novel Without a Name which unfolds the meaninglessness of war. Like a skilful artist she weaves intricate socio-politico and psychological patterns and essays a probing leap into the psyche of various characters. The present paper analyses the novel from the perspective of incidents, situations and personas which symbolise the miseries, misfortunes and traumatic shocks that war brings in its train. I propose to draw heavily from the text in order to focus on the symbols related to futility of war, social ideology, sense of humanity, national identity, atrocity, the value of life and the state of insanity.

Keywords: *Vietnamese Literature, war, ideology, insanity, atrocity, meaninglessness.*

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The Vietnam War presents no hopeful or cheerful ending. It's merely a structure of terrible decision after terrible decision, an improvident whirlpool that did devour lives of people for nothing. Much has been written to condemn the nefarious Vietnam War from the viewpoint of sociology, politics and humanism. Duong Thu Huong uses several symbols in monumental work, *A Novel Without a Name* (1991), to strongly demonstrate the meaninglessness of war. In fact, using symbols in a literary text is a common way to convey an idea indirectly: “Symbols are a means of complex communication that

often can have multiple levels of meaning" (Womack 102). The use of symbols in order to indicate an idea indirectly "became prevalent in modem literature with Romantic poetry and was tied to the visual image" (Olds 156). Duong in *A Novel Without a Name* elaborately shows that even though the war was led by political authorities, the civilian people got caught in the vicious trap of futile war engineered by the prevalent socialist ideology and vague sense of nationalism and humanity. The harrowing experiences of warfare in jungles, daily loss of human lives and deep psychological impairment began to affect the mind of the soldiers during and after the war.

The Futility of War

The futility of war is hinted in the beginning of the novel as "the soldiers found the mutilated bodies of the women and they found that they kept the yarn to tie their hair and the betel nuts to clean their teeth" (Duong 3). The women had believed that "they would see their men again" (3), thus clinging to the futile dreams that they kept at the time of war in Vietnam. Unfortunately, the war destroyed many people's lives and dreams of hope. The anxiety tree, which bears "mushy yellow fruits which make people faint and sink into bizarre dreams" also represents the meaninglessness of war. After eating the fruit of the anxiety tree one experiences a strange yearning for death, likening the tree to the war which drives people into misery as they yearn for death in order to escape the atrocities. Like the act of eating the fruit of the anxiety tree, war is meaningless. Another instance from the novel refers to Luy who accidently shoots Phien: "The survivor had closed his eyes, waiting for a bullet, while the dead man stared wide-eyed into space" (22), thus implying that those living amidst the war, fear death whereas the dead seem to have found freedom.

Another poignant image that attests to the meaninglessness of war is when Quan finds the skeleton of a young man in the forest and he reflects that "they had both loved the only female image in their lives, their mother and that they had remained children" (57). The soldiers fighting for the war have never had the chance to fall in love or experience their youth and growing up. Their lives have been devastated by war. When Quan meets "Bien at his asylum cell, Bien sings a song of lamentation" (89) and this too shows that the war only leads to unhappiness. Bien's suffering as he feigns insanity also shows the negative effect of war which leads the soldiers to resort to extremes in order to survive. There are also songs that remind the soldiers "of their peaceful countryside, the home that they might not return to" (52). The author also mentions that "a cock will fight to death over a single crowing" (108), thus symbolising how Quan and Bien are compared to each other and alludes to the competitiveness that springs from war.

Nothing good comes out of war; rather it brings to surface the worst in man. Duong portrays Quan quite realistically. He has an aggressive inclinations and is called "Quan the impassive" and his potent rage at his father is discernible as "he knew his father was responsible for his brother's entry as a soldier and death" and felt his "whole body ready to snap, to pounce, to commit some irreparable crime" (121). His indignation at his brother Quan's death is taken lightly, "just as the lightness of the envelope that was sent to inform his death" (122). The war makes death as a usual phenomenon, where none is taken seriously or given much attention.

The Sense of Humanity

The narrative is replete with instances of Quan's deep sense of humanity. As a protagonist Quan is a loving soldier who loves his mother and brother dearly. He remembers "the birth of his brother as one of his happy memories with his mother and brother" (15). Quan's love for his mother comes to the fore as he finds "the word 'Mother' in the dead man's diary, the same memory came to him" (57) and promises that he would "visit the mother of the man's tomb and read his diary for her" (58), thus implying that he is a concerned soldier, and a warm human being despite being a soldier. There was a similarity between the dead man and Quan as they both suffered through the war and had only one female image, their mother and this demonstrates "the gentle and fragile hearts of the soldiers who are trapped within the ideology of socialism" (57). Quan also remembers and takes into consideration that there are people concerned about their families. It is obvious when he offers Dao Tien "to send letters and things to his family" (105). The fragility in Quan is also symbolised when he "hugs Bien and cries as he did for his mother's death" (106). As Quan highly looks up to his mother for being very dedicated and loving, he despises "the image of his father who is envious and cruel due to war" (115). He despises the fact that he and his brother Quang "resemble their father in image and is envious of any child who looks like their mother" (115). The little girl who rescued and nursed Quan back to health symbolises Quan's step (second) mother, illustrates the loving family of the little girl. The little girl and her grandfather take care "of Quan as their own family despite their poverty" (64). Her grandfather said that she "did the right thing by nursing Quan back to health" and this shows that she was "brought up well (65), which is a contrast against the backdrop of war. Dao Tien, a commander, also "refuses to eat the exotic food that has to be utilised during war" (86). Unlike his sister, Dao Tien is horrified of fried grasshoppers and he dreams of "becoming a mandarin someday and getting the best place at the village banquet" (86). He dreams of being someone big one day and reveals a side to his humanity by not resorting to eat unusual food during times of war. Moreover, Mr. and Madame Buu signify people unlike the stereotype brought by the ideology; unlike other people, "they are openly affectionate in public and this surprised all those around them" (96). Mr. Buu also respects his wife and gives her a high standing in the household as she could "sit down and drink with her husband" (130). This contradicts with the social standing of the women in their community where their place is in the kitchen. Bien, their son, also imagines and dreams beyond what others dream and this represents a way of thinking that "surpass the confined thinking of a soldier" (100).

Vague Nationalism

Despite the war, the Vietnamese can be seen collecting fragments of things that come from America. The parachute, for example, constantly appears in the novel and symbolises America, specifically in the women whose mutilated bodies were found by the soldiers in the beginning of the novel who were recognised to have come from the north from their scarves "which were made out of parachute cloths" (2). In addition, Phien, a soldier who is accidentally shot by Luy collects "parachutes to trade for real fabric after the war ends" (25). When Quan was rescued by the old man and his granddaughter, they are shown to live in a shelter where "the floors were covered with parachutes and tarpaulins" (66). Moreover, Dao Tien sends "a comb made out of aircraft metal for his daughter, a scarf made from parachute netting for his wife and an American ballpoint pen for his son" (105). These contradictions in responses of the people otherwise hostile to anything American,

points to their vague and blurred sense of nationalism.

Atrocities of War

Atrocity in war is "an act of violence condemned by contemporaries as a breach of morality or the laws and customs of war; the victims are usually defenceless persons" (Kramer 188). The narrative offers numerous instances of atrocities of war. When Quan finds "the skeleton of a dead soldier and ponders upon his horrible death" (53). The soldier died of hunger, "feeling his blood thicken like glue, fading from red to grey and his breath going chill" (53). Also in the part where Quan found the soldier's skeleton and his possessions, among which he found the soldier's picture, a young man whose "face sparkles with optimism and Quan remembers that he too has a similar picture taken on the day of his enlistment" (55). The optimistic photos symbolise the hope the Vietnamese had before the war, which clashes with the grim reality of brutal war. Both Quan and the dead soldier, together with other soldiers come to realise that the hope is futile as they know the harsh realities of war and its atrocities after spending almost all their lives in the war. Furthermore, Quan, beside the dead soldier, realises that they had remained children "as they both worshipped the only female image in their lives which is their mother" (57). The phrase "We had remained children" symbolises how war has stopped them in their normal lives and never had the chance to have a married life.

Another atrocity of war is related to the fleas that Quan spots in the shelter where he was "rescued by the old man and his granddaughter" (69). The fleas symbolise the poverty, which entails the war where they rejoice during it with unlimited amount of "blood and the people could not be too concerned with the fleas as their time is taken by war" (69). They experience living their lives in poverty without comfort because of war. Besides, Quan watches Bien "eat hungrily, he felt something like regret" (109) which exposes that the War has changed Bien from being "the rosy-cheeked boy who could carry a hundred baskets of paddy rice on his back and dreamt" (109). Quan's regret for Bien symbolises "their youth being taken away by war" (109). Additionally, the native soil represents what most soldiers adored and cherished, but for Quan whose mother had long been dead and father "who was always a stranger to him, did not share the same adoration on the native soil" (110). This signifies the loss of the sense to fight for the country, yet Quan could not escape his fate. Quan's father also symbolises the negative effects of war on men. Quan remembers the time his father came back and tortured his mother mentally; though, she tried to explain why she had her cousin accompany her "to get food one day and his father bangs the table and silences her" (112). His father is remembered as "a brute, and a cruel, hateful presence" (113). Furthermore, Quan's father is completely engulfed in state of disinterest rooted in the masculine belief, which "has seeped into his mind, making him wary of his own wife" (114). He does not have "neither the strength nor motivation to do much with his life" (117); however, what his neighbours are doing is "what is keeping him alive" (117). Quan's father's perseverance is like that of a water buffalo that represents those who "follow the ideology blindly without question or contemplation" (117). Moreover, the train, by which Quan rode, also symbolises the atrocity, "poverty and misery brought about by war" (154). People shoved and scrambled to get "on the train and the train is filthy and old" (154). This represents the harsh reality that people only fight for survival at wars. The old man who Quan met on the train also symbolises the poverty, the man who hungrily ate the piece of stale bread and is happy with the simple

gestures such as Quan's help to find "a place for his sack of bowls" (155).

Weakness of Social Ideology

The author introduced Quan as a 28-year-old soldier who has spent the last decade in the North Vietnamese Army. Quan left his village when he was 18, filled with bright, shining hopes and lots of idealistic fervor. The war against foreign aggression was for a resurrection of Vietnam which would become humanity's paradise. But the years of tramping through the jungle and burying his dead compatriots, however, have seriously tarnished Quan's expectations, in much the same way, it seems, that Ms. **Huong**'s own experiences in wartime and post war Vietnam led to her own disillusionment with the Government and her own youthful ideals. No longer does Quan dream of glory and heroics; rather, the war has become for him a daily matter of survival for finding enough food to stave off malnutrition, of dodging bullets and bombs. There are instances in the novel uncovering the weakness of the ideology in Vietnam war. "Despite the appearance of uniformity among those protesting the war, all activists didn't share the same anti-war ideology, and all activists didn't practice the same tactics" (Shmoop Editorial Team 11). The novel is the portrayal of the idea that the Vietnam War is fought between the nationalism and socialism, which have all their believers follow the ideologies like "herds of dreamy, militant sheep" (62). In a way, this phrase symbolises how the people follow the ideologies thoughtlessly. The novel also portrays the
weakness through the false news in the Party newspaper, which Quan came to realise after becoming a soldier. During the war at the B3 front during the Tet offensive, Quan had buried "countless numbers of his companions and the Communist Party daily had celebrated the victories of that incident" (83). Quan then does not believe in the news brought by the Party and had "ripped the newspaper into shreds and throwing them into a stream" (83). Therefore, the Party newspaper symbolises the blindness and ignorance against "the realities gave most of those who still believe in the ideology energy to fight" (84). Another example is Quan's words in the jungle "in his journey to Zone K to find Bien, and bask in a moment of thinking" (Duong 36). He, having survived the war "and known its calamities, says that words are slippery as eels" (36). This symbolises the promises of the socialist ideology that sometimes may be deceptive. Quan sees it to be true from his life of ten years in the jungle, fighting the war.

Duong Thu Huong channels the weaknesses of the ideology through the character of Mr. Buu. Mr. Buu symbolises someone who does not believe in the ideology, specifically, when he says that "in the earlier times there are few honest and civilised leaders and now, all are ignorant of the basic morals" (Duong 133). Furthermore, when Quan tells Mr. Buu about what really happened to Bien, and when Quan realises that "there is a part of him that continued on living while another part of him waited, watched, dazed and agonised from the war" (136), unearths the reality he told Mr. Buu of the truth about the war. Another example divulging the weakness of the ideology is during "the conversation of the two idealists" (158). The ideology somehow influences the people to be wary of their wives and this can be seen when one of the men says that "the wife is the husband's unofficial enemy" (158). The conversation of these two men reveal that the ideology is only a lie where "the people under the Party are not exactly comrades like had been promised" (159), and they are merely servants, tricked by the Party. Their conversation also reveals how many people "have abandoned everything for an

ideal, the promises of Communism in Vietnam" (160). The idealists also tricked the people into doing what they want, "building the civilisation without lifting a finger themselves" (162). They also used or rather, altered the ideology to replace religion in the hearts of the people and "doing this is easier than trying to civilise them" (162). They also called the ideology as an opiate religion where the idealists "would need the opiate more than anyone else" (163). The religion of the people in Vietnam is replaced by Marxism where the people would hang pictures of Marx "instilling divinity to the masses" (163). Here it can be seen that there is an absence of religion among the people of Vietnam. Furthermore, there is a revelation that "Karl Marx himself was not a noble man" (164). The two men say that Marx hung out in "brothels and had a few children out of wedlock" (164). Therefore, their conversation symbolises the hypocrisy of the Communist ideology in Vietnam.

Value of Life

Another classification of symbolism that can be found in *A Novel Without a Name* is the loss of lives due to the Vietnam War. "Some 365,000 Vietnamese civilians are estimated by one source to have died as a result of the war during the period of American involvement" (Mead 219). The death of the young soldier whose skeleton was found by Quan symbolises a terrible death. Quan realises his similarity with the dead soldier "as they both love their mother" (58). After promising to the dead soldier that he will visit the man's mother's grave, Quan says that his mother could rejoice from her son's bravery and that "the war did not give them a chance to make their mothers proud" (58). Quan has somehow accepted his fate in war and the almost certain death that comes with it. Moreover, when Quan reminisces on his mother's funeral, the word cemeteries and gravestones symbolise a foreshadowing of death. During his mother's funeral, the cemetery is littered with tombstones, brambles infested with "the macabre kind of grasshopper that haunts cemeteries" (106). The loss of lives in times of war also represents the break of family institutions in Vietnam as family members suffer directly and indirectly from it. Quan's mother's death has made the family part; this causes Quan's sadness from his brother's death that symbolises "the loss of life from the war" (124). He feels angry and sad regretting the fact that "his brother obeyed their father's commands to enter the army" (124). Quan had loved his brother and mother dearly and he feels regret that his letter to his brother had not reached him and his efforts "to avoid his brother joining the army was futile" (124), thus symbolising break down of the family. When Quan says that his "father had won" (125), his father signifies the socialist ideology that had won over the people and caused all to suffer. Furthermore, Quan and his comrades have to "sleep in coffins" (180), which foreshadows the death that the soldiers have to face, either their comrades or their own. Quan was surprised when Bien instructed him to sleep in a coffin, although Bien explains that "it is to protect them from tigers" (181). He then says that the smell of the coffin's wood and sweat are becoming familiar to him that symbolises how death has become a part of his life after he entered the war. Still another foreshadowing of death is when Quan and his men "were faced with a lynx" (227). Thai says that lynxes never prowl near fields, rice paddies or villages and that when they are seen, "it is always a sign of disaster" (228). This reflects the superstition of the Vietnamese in the novel. The disaster or loss of lives are realised when "an entire platoon was stricken with malaria" (232).

Insanity

The final type of symbolism that can be found in the novel is the insanity that creeps in the minds of the soldiers. Hochgesang in a study on post-war Vietnam states that "To belong, you had to be willing to kill other human beings and the only way out of this club was to die or go insane" ("Psychological Effects"). The sense of insanity appears when Quan describes the horror of eating the orangutan soup, which his men enjoy. The soldiers' hunger forced them to eat "anything they could find, even orang-utans" (8). Quan says that "the orangutans resemble humans and could express happiness, hate or pain through their eyes" (8). The soldiers' willingness to eat anything due to hunger symbolises the inhumanity of war and loss of sanity. However, Quan's refusal to eat the 'uncommon' food shows that he is still trying to keep his sanity intact in spite of the war.

Besides, the red colocasias appearing in several parts of the novel symbolise the loss of direction and anxiety among the soldiers, another negative effect of war. Quan was lost when he walked in circles for two days in a valley covered with red colocasias. Straying in the forest, he finds himself "in a forest of giant colocasias almost two yards high" (51). He experiences the lost direction multiple times, which symbolises his loss of direction in life as he enters the war. The colocasias' destructive nature also signifies the state when they are "to absorb the death of the soldier as nourishing for their growth" (53). The constant fear and weariness seem to have driven one of Quan's best friends completely mad. Once a big, hearty soldier, Bien is now an emaciated wreck who hurls himself at barbed wire and concrete walls, and sings sad nonsense songs to himself. In fact, Bien represents the unstable psychology of the soldiers after going through war. His condition in his cell shows the terrible situation of the asylums at times of war. The song Bien sang as soon as he saw Quan, shows "the sadness and the longing to go home" (89).

In brief, the analysis of various situations, incidents and characters in *A Novel Without a Name* symbolises the erosion of human values, failure of political ideology, psychological maladies, fickle sense of nationalism, atrocities and futility of war. Through the narration of the soldiers eating orangutan, Huong wants to show that the hunger situation has gotten so desperate that the men succumb to eating orangutan, an animal which shares 97% of the same DNA as humans. It is almost a form of cannibalism. In ancient societies, the winner would sacrifice and sometimes eat the enemy people. The Vietnam War lasted about twenty years and claimed around two million Vietnamese civilians. Thus, Huong criticizes the futility of war, its inhumanity and the attendant evil that come in its train.

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Self-Actualization Through Love: A Study of Paulo Coelho's *Brida*

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Abstract

Paulo Coelho de Souza is a Brazilian lyricist and novelist whose songs were critical of his country's military rule in the 1980s, he was imprisoned and tortured. With the publication of Hell Archives in 1982 Paulo Coelho launched his writing career, and is known for his novels of spiritual significance, with which he has become one of the successful authors worldwide. To date, he has written 30 books, including By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept, The Fifth Mountain, Veronika Decides to Die, The Devil and Miss Prym, The Valkyries, The Witch of Portobello, and Brida. The present paper attempts to highlight how Brida undertakes an odyssey to realize her gift which she has been carrying through different incarnations, and investigates how she realizes the purpose of her being through love in her personal engagements with Lorens.

Keywords: *Self, self-actualization, spirituality, soulmate. Self. odyssey, enlightenment*.

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One of nature's greatest gifts and also a source of pleasure is man's addiction to the question of the meaning of life. Man never ceases in asking himself why and how he should live, and what is the point of all his hard work and sufferings. While tracing the question of importance of existence Paulo Coelho says that every one of us has one classical, common question i.e. What am I doing here? Answers to it may be varied. His narratives reflect the vision of life i.e. giving importance to the basic human values such as love, faith, religion, spirituality and forgiveness. He expresses his simple philosophy and concept of spirituality as 'generation of basic human values and nurturing them in behaviour' to develop an awareness of the self and seek transcendence. In his narratives he has

revealed the simplified ways towards spiritual enlightenment and suggests that understanding life itself is an answer to all the questions. He has also developed his own sphere of 'religion,' which is based on the principles of Christianity and he has named it as the 'Tradition.' It is a coalesce of spiritual enchantment and devotion.

Brida is about the spiritual journey of a young woman in pursuit of fulfillment of her destiny and in search of her soulmate, but along the way; it touches various other spiritual premises as witchcraft, mysticism, supernaturalism and the search for self. The most central and imperative theme is the idea of soulmate. Brida's journey towards a new, simpler and contented life is not without struggles and contradictions. Her spiritual odyssey is in the form of personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life; about meaning and about relationships. She puts in lot of efforts during her odyssey to gain wisdom and power while moving towards the discovery of 'Self.' She desires to learn the infallible truth existing within mankind. Through her the narrative develops and exhibits the shades of love, passion, and mystery. She is forced by her inborn capabilities to gain recognition as a witch. She puts her efforts in learning magic and mysticism form Wicca and Magus along with it she expects to find out the secrets of life and existence.

"The spirit within us is our real self! And yet when asked this question "What is 'spirit'?" hardly anyone will answer: "It is me, myself, my true being" (Duraisamy). It is the spirit within us that is our real self and correct interpretation of it will help to answer all the questions. Duraisamy says that to know the spirit as one's own real innermost self is the first step of spiritual enlightenment. Initially, Brida, during her odyssey to learn magic, meets her real soulmate, Magus, a guide and teacher, who makes her aware of the obstacles in the path she has chosen. He knows the importance of knowing own strengths and limitations, so he makes her aware of requirement of the first step of the spiritual odyssey: the knowledge of the self. Magus, who is always foresighted, nonjudgmental and trustworthy, guides her on the right path during her odyssey in search of wisdom. Initially he makes it clear to her thus:

> When you find your path, you must not be afraid. You need to have sufficient courage to make mistakes. Disappointment, defeat, and despair are the tools God uses to show us the way (*Brida* 17).

Magus also teaches her how to overcome her fears and to trust in the goodness of the world through the 'Tradition of the Sun.' In order to test her capabilities to be a pupil on the path of magic, he asks her to spend a whole night in the forest. The fearful memories of childhood and imaginations about the snakes and ghosts make her panic but then she overcomes her fear and understands the difference between fear and danger. She understands the meaning of 'Faith' when she imagines the presence of her Guardian Angel during the helpless, fearful, and panic situation in the forest. This experience also makes her aware that the greatest security of life is faith and when you have faith you get whatever you need. Her words next morning affirm her learning:

> I learned that the search for God is a Dark Night, that Faith is a Dark Night. And that's hardly a surprise really, because for us each day is a dark night. None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, and yet still we go forwards.

Because we trust. Because we have Faith. (*Brida* 25)

Metacognitive aspect of the self explores how an individual thinks about his own thinking. This helps in realizing the truths about self and helps in planning and directing one's own thinking, actions, and behaviour. Awareness about the strengths and weaknesses helps an individual to take decisions and choose the right path towards the attainment of the goal. Brida at many instances introspects or revives her thoughts and actions, which helps her to choose the right path to move toward her destination. It is seen that she finds her inabilities or limitations to go with the 'Tradition of Sun,' with Magus and so chooses to take up the path of learning through books that specialize in occult studies and the 'Tradition of Moon' with Wicca. Through these experiences she finds that life is complicated like a dark night and it is unavoidable.

Brida's next teacher, Wicca, is like a 'good mother' for her, who teaches her how to dance to the hidden music of the world and how to pray to the moon. Wicca also intimates her that only if she understands her soulmate she would be able to understand how knowledge is transmitted to the next generations. This would also help to find a path to understand the purpose of her present incarnation. Brida's odyssey which starts as a quest for knowledge, wisdom, and to learn magic slowly and gradually turns out to be search for her love and soulmate. This makes her confuse and she struggles to find her right path towards destination. Regarding soulmate Brida asks Wicca, “But how will I know who my Soulmate is?” (*Brida* 38). This would be the most imperative question she had ever asked in her life and Wicca has very simple answer i.e. 'by taking risks.' Here, for Wicca risk means risking her failure, disappointments and disillusionments. However, she also instructs to never let her search cease while searching for love. Because Wicca believes that as long as we keep searching for it, we will triumph in the end.

Wicca knows that Brida needs to know about her past incarnation to move on her spiritual odyssey. In this case through a ritual Wicca helps her know that she was a 'Witch' in her past incarnation. Wicca tells Brida about the soulmate and further also informs her about the sign to recognize the soulmate, i.e. light in eyes, and Magus tells the second sign i.e. the point of light above the left shoulder. Wicca explains that our soul gets divided into two and it is always divided as a male part and a female part. In next incarnation finding our other part is considered as finding ourselves and this is the process of love. Wicca further explains thus:

> In each life, we feel a mysterious obligation to find at least one of those Soulmates. The Greater Love that separated them feels pleased with the Love that brings them together again (*Brida* 38).

Wicca makes Brida aware of the fact that love is a part of spiritual path. Then Brida gets excited to find her soulmate as she has understood the significance of love in her odyssey. Wicca instructs her to take risks but never cease searching for love. According to Wicca love is the only essence of creation and it has the power to bring all human beings together. Wicca feels that the whole existence of human beings can be summed in the search of soulmate and meeting with the soulmate helps to commune with the God. Wicca instructs her to find her gift and herself which in turn would help her understand the world better and find her soulmate. Wicca instructs her,

> Go in search of your Gift. I can't go with you today, but don't be afraid. The more you understand yourself, the more you will understand the world. And the closer you will be to your Soulmate (*Brida* 64).

Brida continues to practice the rituals in the 'Tradition of the Moon' but is not successful to awaken the gift and the voice that would guide her. Now she gets in confusion and dwells in belief and disbelief. But at an instance while talking to Wicca on phone she hears the voice saying, *"What is outside is harder to change than what is inside"* (*Brida* 135). Here she gets confirmation of her path being right and learns very important lesson: if your quest demands surrender, you must surrender whole heartedly. Surrender is like an assumption; then turns out to be reality and eventually it becomes truth leaving no space for duality. And even when she visits a church and prays before God; there she realizes that God has played his role and has shown the world that, if everyone plays their role no one else will have to suffer because he has already suffered for all those who had the courage to fight for their dreams. Thus, she understands that she has to play her role and continue her odyssey even if she comes across confusions and hurdles on the way. She trusts that time will surely provide the solutions to her confusions and problems.

Wicca wants Brida to be initiated into tradition as a 'witch' at the time of Equinox, a day when day and night are of equal length. But before that Brida must experience the greatest feminine force through sex. According to Wicca it has transformational powers and knowledge without transformation is not wisdom. On the part of Brida even though she has not yet found her soulmate, has a boyfriend, Lorens, who has been compassionate, supporting, and lovable to her. She has not yet seen any sign even in Lorens that he is her soulmate, but still his behavior coveys the true meaning of love. The sexual experience with him, on a rocky land, awakens Brida's all five senses which in turn helps her discover the bridge that connects the visible world to invisible one. And after touching upon the power of five senses she finds that Lorens is her soulmate. But to add to her confusion, while being with Magus, she also finds the same light in Magus's eyes, which indicates him being her soulmate too. She feels herself nothing but as an ordinary fickle woman and feels ashamed and thinks what is she doing with Magus if she has already seen light in the eyes of Lorens. Here, she has to accept the fact that a person may meet more than one soulemate in an incarnation. She now begins to feel the miracle of being alive.

After practicing number of rituals under the guidance of Wicca, Brida learns that witchcraft merely keeps her close to Supreme Wisdom, and finds that whatever you do has the power to lead you there, as long as you work with love in your heart. Finally, the time comes when Brida is to be initiated into the tradition with a joyful party accompanied by clapping, dancing, and singing. After the fire is lit everyone starts dancing around the fire. Later on only the women who are to be initiated in tradition are dancing around the fire and Wicca sings two simple verses from witches' mantra. Here dance becomes the manifestation of God in the visible world, she puts off all her cloths; dances with rhythm of the world, clapping, and singing. She is now far away to care about the superficial world. The rhythm aroused in her reminds her of being the teacher of the wisdom of time. This ceremony is a kind of reencounter with herself and with the tradition that she has been part of. With this she feels profound respect for herself. She is also proud of her body which has fought for millions of years to

survive in a hostile world and has helped her to feel her present incarnation. After the rituals are over, the gift of everyone present there becomes apparent. They have walked long and torturous path where the world has tested them in all possible ways before they come to their destination. This arduous odyssey makes them aware of the fact that each one possesses a gift. According to Paulo Coelho God places gift in the hands of every one of us. It is the instrument through which God reveals himself to the world and helps humanity. After the ritual Wicca expresses her gratitude to God for allowing and enabling her to carry out the same job throughout different incarnations. She is proud of her pupils who are capable and willing to sacrifice worldly comforts and take up the challenge of discovering a new world.

The spiritual aspects of the narrative *Brida* are most reflective and along with this Brida, Lorens, and Magus put in great efforts with the more assertive and instinctive challenges of the heart. The struggle is manifested by the two Forces: Magus and Lorens, the people Brida finds as her soulmates. Magus is her teacher, guide, and mentor and on the other hand, Lorens, is her pleasure, delight, and lover. This struggle of choice within Brida signifies the author's endeavor to illustrate the slightly understated battle between the id, pleasure-seeking principle, and the superego, the quest for perfection and discovery of self. This battle subsists side by side within each person. Here, Brida's quest for perfection is uncomplicated as she intermittently practices the expertise of her trade and therefore achieves the goal of becoming a witch. Eventually, Brida realizes that love brings both contentment and twinge in equal measure. At the end, her mother's experience helps her choose Lorens, but she will always remember her correlation with Magus. On the other hand, Magus feels that his mission with his soulmate, Brida, is over in this incarnation. But, at the same time, he is also aware of the fact that somewhere in time, they were part of same body; felt the same pain; and were made happy by the same pleasure. At the end Magus willingly decides to go away from Brida's life as he knows that he cannot possess her in this incarnation.

Paulo Coelho says that love is to follow our dreams and such love liberates us from all entanglements of our life. The self lives in the universe and is realized through love, which liberates from all types of entanglements. Douglas Bloch remarks that our false voice pushes us towards 'who we think we should be,' however, our inner voice supports 'what our essential nature and who we are.' The study of Brida's odyssey to actualize herself as a 'witch' through love reiterates what Paulo Coelho has emphasized in *The Alchemist*, “And, when you want something, the entire universe conspires in helping you to achieve it (21).

The novelist positions Brida in a situation where she eagerly desires to learn magic which is actually inherent in her throughout her past incarnations; then makes her undertake an odyssey to learn the magic; provides potential guidance and observation from Magus and Wicca, to enable her to discover her soulmate and learn that love is the most divinely liberating force to be recognized and valued on the path of true wisdom and knowledge. It; makes her suffer, experience, generate new perception of things, struggle to get meaning out of meaninglessness, transcend towards spiritual awakening and emerge as evolved 'Self.' She possesses the attributes of love, faith and enlightenment which make her essentially a spiritually enlightened individual. Her odyssey explores the essence of meaningful human existence i.e. quest in search of something.

Paulo Coelho, through poetic, realistic and philosophical style matched by simple and symbolic language, attempts to shape his reader's views, attitude and thoughts through the actions of Brida. Her odyssey reflects readers' search for self-knowledge. The novel caters to readers' quest for new horizons. By empathizing with Brida every reader would find him/herself as a warrior in life as everyone possesses values as discipline, friendship and love to listen to one's heart and go in for personal growth and understanding the essence of life.

Brida manifests that without any purpose and aim to achieve, life is boredom and it requires a lot of courage and strength on the part of the character to pursue his/her dream in the face of odds and temptations. The narrative offers a prelude to the importance of listening to one's heart; the significance of reading the omens and learning through doing; taking decision and remaining accountable for it; solving problems with fortitude; and most importantly, realizing the enormous power of love. The fruit of an odyssey lies not in its destination but in the learning through experiences during an odyssey itself. An individual must have the spark and spirit that can boost his/her instinct to realize the clues that life offers to solve the existential dilemmas. Brida's odyssey is nothing but transformation from immaturity towards maturity, and aided by the power of true love she discovers her 'Self.'

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Popular Culture and Animal Symbolism: An Insight into Caste-Based Films with Special Reference to *Pariyerum Perumal*

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Abstract

Caste is one of the persistent problems in India. Like a canker, it eats away the very fabric of the social framework. However, the 'devoiced' have begun to speak up through Dalit literature and this transition can also be perceived in contemporary cinema. The present paper indulges with one significant method opted by both, writers as well as film makers, to convey the strong message against caste discrimination. With the abundant use of certain specific animals, they draw the parallel between the lower species in the animal and human world. The Tamil film, Pariyerum Perumal foregrounds animal symbolism as one of the potent technique in discussing the caste issues. Such films boldly declare the need to overhaul Indian cinema, and also to sensitize the audience towards social issues.

Keywords: *Animal symbolism, Speciesism, Popular culture, Dalit literature*

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In recent times, many movements have emerged to deconstruct the notion of anthropocentrism and to popularize animal welfare. Despite such initiatives, very few studies on the relationship between animals and human beings are being done. Though history, religion and human civilisation share a good bond with animals, the plight of animals seems unchanged. While earlier, animals were offered as sacrifice to appease gods, today, human beings are 'sacrificing' them in the laboratories. This concern for animals has stemmed up with the realization that animals can

experience suffering in a way similar to that of human beings. Literature and other media exploit symbolism to foreground this connection between the two species. In line with the same thought, this paper attempts to extend the parallel between animals and human beings to discuss the caste discrimination in India *vis-a-vis* their representation in popular culture. Taking the Tamil film *Pariyerum Perumal* as reference, the study establishes the abundant use of animal symbolism in films.

Symbolism allows creative writers to add layered meanings to a particular story. It also appeals to the readers' cognitive mind to understand beyond what is said. Animal symbolism in particular has a long history in India and the best manifestation of it can be seen in the allegorical and didactic stories of *Panchatantra.* In Indian culture, stories of animals were used to unveil the mysteries of life and the universe. In addition to this, animals also figured in the religious text such as in the Old and New Testaments. Charles Darwin propounded that human beings are not created separately from animals but have instead evolved from animals. Extending the hierarchy among human species to animal kingdom takes us to the term 'speciesism'. It was coined by Richard D. Ryder in 1970 and was popularised in 1975 by the philosopher Peter Singer. Speciesism is a form of discrimination based on species membership which involves treating members of one species as morally more important than members of other species. Primarily, it came up to argue and grant equal rights to both, animals and human without any prejudice. However, the paper studies the domain of caste within speciesism and hence the concept of casteist speciesism. According to this, a semblance can be found in the representation of lower caste people with certain animals.

Symbols such as 'tree', 'wolf', 'swine', etc. are explicitly employed in Dalit literature to project the enslavement and oppression of dalits in India. Anthropomorphism, i.e, assigning human traits to animals, has been one of the active part of most of the literature at one particular period of time. Such symbols can be seen in Adiga's *A White Tiger* where he uses animals such as Stork, Bear, Mongoose etc. to represent Balram's masters and the village landlords. In Hindu religious texts, gods become incarnate as animals and have animal vehicles, and cats and herons are used as symbols of ascetic hypocrisy. Texts about the lower castes are sometimes masked by narratives about dogs that stand for Dalits and this has also been reflected to the treatment of stray dogs in the contemporary society. Manusmriti also instructs as to how *Chandalas* and *Shvapakas* shall only have servile animals like dogs and donkeys as possession. J. P. Sanakya, the Tamil short story writer, speaks about human problems with non-human beings like animal body. Though the story “Ethirolippathu Ungal Kuralthaan” may appear to be the story of castrated dogs, he addresses all the issues which cannot be directly spoken about male body.

Postcolonialism has vested power to the oppressed to speak out their predicaments. The new genre, Subaltern Studies, essentially works to record 'history from below'. In Indian context, Dalit writers have captured the cancerous nature of caste and record the agony and pain of their community in their writings. With technological advancements, films have emerged to be the lens of society marking a shift from literatures. Being the most popular among the new media, films become the apt medium to address and represent society. But sadly, films portraying social issues often take a

backseat and get reduced to be the so called 'award films' whereas other 'commercial' films featuring stunts and item songs become box office hit. The film maker Joshi opined, "Caste based films produced on the subject of Dalits and their struggle have given the downtrodden community visibility. However, contemporary films are avoiding frontal confrontation of Dalit issues in lieu of entertainment values." Joshi's comment can be validated with respect to the mainstream films where the directors and producers focus only on 'mass' films and their commercial value. Jeya Rani writes, "mainstream media has carved its kingdom out of loyalty to the powers, to the bureaucracy and to kingdom." Though there have been films like *Achhut Kanya*, *Ankur*, *Aakrosh*, *Sujata* etc, the unconvincing treatment of dalits and *adivasis* failed to nail the message. The contemporary Indian cinema is more daring and one cannot ignore the popularity of films such as *Masaan*, *Sairat* and *Pariyerum Perumal*. Can these, dealing with caste issue, be marginalised? Nagraj Manjule, the director of *Sairat* and Pa Ranjith, the producer of *Pariyerum Perumal* are amongst those people who reflect their lived realities and ideology as a Dalit man. Thus, Indian cinema is coming of age by its bold portrayals and has successfully initiated deliberations and sensitization on the otherwise neglected issues.

Tamil film industry has come up with some anti-caste films such as *Pariyerum Perumal, Kabali, Madras* and *Attakathi.* The film *Pariyerum Perumal* has its main protagonist as Karuppi, the female hunter dog and the companion of Pariyan. However, Karuppi gets killed in the initial scene itself as she is tied onto the railway tracks before the arrival of the train. Directed by Mari Selvaraj in the year 2018, it has the story set in the year 2005 in the locales of Tamil Nadu. The story revolves around the two youths, Pariyerum Perumal (Pariyan) and Jyothi Mahalakshmi (Jo) who are classmates in the Law College. Jo helps Pariyan in learning English and they start to share a good bond. Jo is an innocent girl and is blind to all caste differences. But, she is a girl from an upper caste family and this causes problems in the life of Pariyan. Unaware to Jo, Pariyan is beaten up multiple times by her family. The film also depicts the attitude of upper caste towards lower caste, the practise of honour killing, the cultural art form *karakattam* etc. The film ends on a hopeful yet doubtful note with Jo's father and Pariyan talking.

Selvaraj exploits animal symbolism and makes Karuppi the representative of the lower caste, especially Pariyan. Karuppi ('karupp' meaning black and 'karuppi' meaning black girl) is skinny and black, the colour of the oppressed. Despite being a hunter dog, her vitality is masked behind the physical appearance of being weak. This is the semblance one can find between people caught up in the clutches of poverty where their oppressive identities hide the truth of who they are. In a similar fashion, though Pariyan is weakened and humiliated for his caste, he has good determination and loyalty. He is loyal to those who are loyal to him. He never lets Jo know about her family's attacks on him. But he bursts his agony out on her father as he says,

> Hey, remember, how your daughter smiled at you today! How fondly she called you "dad". That affection is the pittance I doles out to you. You think you are the protectors of your pride, honour and shit like that! I have protected it! Had I told your daughter all this, she would have spat on your face and hung herself. That's why I put up with everything. (*Pariyerum Perumal*)

Moreover, Pariyan is darker in shade as compared to Jo who is fair. Karuppi being a black dog makes this association strong. This colour dichotomy is visible even in their names. 'Pariah' being a caste name of lower caste in Tamil Nadu is contrasted with Jyothi Mahalakshmi meaning 'light of wealth and happiness'. But there is a stark contrast in the title of the film *Pariyerum Perumal* meaning 'God on a Horse'. Horse being a privileged animal, used only by people of royal blood, becomes the name of the film. This is in contrast with the plight of the character, Pariyan who is a lower caste and hails from a small village in Tamil Nadu. His close company with the dog Karuppi also heightens the irony of the title.

One can find two aspects in the naming of Jyothi; first, as how she was a light in the life of Pariyan by helping him in class to learn English and thus even valourising the elitedom of English as a language; secondly, from the point of view of caste, being an upper caste girl, she is privileged with light and glory in life contrary to that of the state of Pariyan. His state of ignorance with regard to English language and his fluency and zeal in speaking Tamil can be set against with the dog, Karuppi. She can only bark with vigour and thus by learning English, Pariyan takes a step away from his instincts to a more revolutionary need.

Karuppi being a hunter dog is juxtaposed with Pariyan who has a good physique, lacking only in colour and caste in the hegemonic set up. Pariyan questions Jo's father regarding his state of servility as, “What's your problem? How am I inferior to you? My hands held the plough but also wielded sword.” Karuppi is juxtaposed to Pariyan in different frames of the film which becomes the crux of analysis. It is Karuppi who appears in the first frame of the film. The camera is placed low and captures Karuppi walking through the bushes with the sound of the train in the background, foreshadowing the events that follow. The low gaze of the dog observing the surrounding has also been shot by the director with minute attention. However, this changes after Karuppi's death where she is shown to come alive with a much stronger gaze as the camera zooms onto her face. This has been juxtaposed with the strong gaze of Pariyan and other dalits being shown by the director in the song 'Naan Yaar' (Who am I?). The camera is zoomed into the eyes of the characters to depict the deep emotions. Pariyan's eyes reflect retaliation whereas Jo's eyes are shown with tears flowing down. Though Karuppi gets killed in the beginning of the film itself, she gets implicitly represented all through the scenes even after her death. Moreover, the study of the film has brought in another dimension of the dog, Karuppi. The dog being a female, be identified with Dalit woman who is doubly marginalised, first for being a woman and secondly, being a dalit, thus intensifying her plight.

The successive second frame is shot with Pariyan as if he is following the trail of Karuppi. The camera doesn't reveal the face of the character at first, but focuses on the T-shirt which has the name Pariyan written on it, he being a Kabadi player in his village. Thus both Pariyan and Karuppi contrast the Dalit body image, Pariyan being a player has a good physique and Karuppi is agile, being a hunter dog.

The cinematographer G. Shridhar shoots the aerial geographical location of the place and reveals the discrepancies in the division between a village settlement and that occupied by the upper castes. Such separate settlement provisions can be seen in other places across India too. The autobiographical work *Changiya Rukh* by Balabir Madhopuri writes of this separate settlement

provisions for two castes;

> The settlements of the untouchables are always in the lower ends- the western part- of the village …because this class of people, in accordance with the Hindu social system, are not a part of the caste system and do not belong within the four varnas…The second factor was that the dirty water of the village flows towards the west,… and it is believed that not only should they not pollute clean water but also that these people should live in dirt, mire and slime. (Madhopuri, 9-10)

This differentiation between the outcaste village and the main village is broken as Pariyan gets admitted in the Law College. Once again, education is emphasized to be the panacea for all ills in the society. But the director has attempted to show the existing *varna* system through the depiction of desks and benches. In the initial part of the film, Pariyan is shown occupying the last row whereas other upper caste students occupy the front rows. But, later when Pariyan attempts to come forward and occupy the second row, where Jo's relative used to sit, he was demanded by Jo's cousin to move from his place and a duel followed with Jo's cousin reminding Pariyan of the wedding night happenings with him.

Selvaraj reiterates casteist speciesm by juxtaposing the plight of Karuppi and Pariyan. When Pariyan is brutally beaten up by the upper caste men, his wounds on the forehead, neck and face are shown on the face of Karuppi also; her skin worns off, showing the red fleshy part on the neck, near its eyes and on the stomach. When Pariyan is locked up in a room, he is shown tied by a rope on to the chair and Karuppi also appears in that frame, wounded badly. Further, the song 'Naan Yaar' has a tunnel shown where Karuppi appears, soon after which Pariyan is also shown with blue colour on his face and arms. This is followed by Karuppi running smeared in blue, followed by Pariyan, running in the similar fashion. As Pariyan breaks free of the ropes with which he was tied to the chair, Karuppi also disappears, which can be symbolised as the breaking free of Pariyan as a human being from the servile status. The rope which had tied Pariyan might be used to symbolise the rope of caste that chains people like him. His legs are also tied, alongside which a snake moves which symbolises Jo's father. As Pariyan breaks the chair and the things around in anger, the other poisonous animals around him run away which might have been an attempt of the director to symbolise the upper caste. Snake, cockroach, scorpion and cat are the animals shown running away as soon as Pariyan regains his strength to break free himself from the fetters. There is also a close juxtaposition in the frame on the railway track where Karuppi was tied to and killed. In a similar fashion, the director presents Pariyan on the railway track, the only difference being that Pariyan was able to save himself and could retaliate whereas Karuppi becomes the symbol of the oppressed and is shown smeared in blue colour. This narrow line between the dog Karuppi and Pariyan dissolves as the latter echoes his voice in the first song 'Karuppi'. The lines goes like this, “In the wilderness without you, how will I find my way? Your paw scrapes are my trail. You're not just a dog, aren't you me?”

It is the 'dogness' in Pariyan which the upper caste exploits and this is well understood by him. It is this realization which moves him to action. In the final conversation between Jo's father and Pariyan, the former feels sorry for Pariyan. He realizes that while Pariyan had to die many times to talk freely, Jo is always privileged to speak frankly about anything. However, the consolation of Jo's

father that 'who knows that things can change for better, tomorrow' is answered by Pariyan as he knows about 'tomorrow'. He says, “I know Sir! As long as you are the way you are and expect me to be the dog you want me to be, nothing will change! Everything will stay the same!” (*Pariyerum Perumal*)

Yet another aspect to which the animal symbolism can be related to is Pariyan's sudden connection with the dog when he is in despair. Even after the dog was killed and Jo gets angry at him and leaves him for some time, he retains his normalcy and sense of humanness by his connection with the dog. It is Karuppi which gives him strength to get up and move on. This can be the psychic connection of the lower castes with certain animals. The lower castes being called dog, *kuthi* etc. finds relation or a share of pain with animals rather than human beings.

Conclusion

Films, thus have marked the coming of age of Dalit movement with varied themes touching the society. The makers certainly deserve much applause for their commendable contribution to sensitize the masses. Such realistic portrayals also ensure the enlarging of the scope of subjects. The cinematography, music, camera angles and the silences provoke the audience to think and to act compared to other literatures. Films such as *Chauranga* and *Manjhi: The Mountain Man* have also employed animal symbolism to establish the nexus between animals and human beings. Film being a new media can also attract and grab the youth to the societal problems and hence becomes the appropriate medium for addressing them and evoking them to actions.

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Baffling the Reader: John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as a 'Writerly' Text

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Abstract

The present paper draws on Roland Barthes' concept of the 'writerly' text to examine John Fowles' acclaimed novel, The French Lieutenant's Woman, first published in 1969 and considered as a pioneer work in postmodern fiction. It explores how the reader has come to occupy a central place in the meaning-making process in contemporary theory and the way the novel exploits various narrative strategies to disrupt the notions of a fixed perspective, linear movement towards a climax and its resolution, and a univocal truth existing independently of the act of deciphering it. Arguing that The French Lieutenant's Woman is a text that baffles the unwary reader, it concludes that the journey of an alert reader is fruitful as there are a number of insights to be gained by the reader from her manipulation by the narrator.

Keywords: *textuality, narrative, writerly, bafflement, reader-response, alternative endings*

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The problem of the meaning of the literary text has ever been at the centre of literary criticism and the turn towards theory in the second half of the last century has only brought it into a sharper focus. The theoretical turn has radically questioned traditional notions of the text such as the place of the author as the originator of, and the final authority over its meaning, and the reader as a passive consumer of an already existing meaning. Literary criticism had for long viewed the reader as

someone deciphering a text whose meaning existed independently of the reader and the act of reading. Contrary to this, recent advances in theory have placed the reader on a centre stage as can be seen in critical schools as varied as philosophical hermeneutics, especially the Heideggerian-Gadamerian school, structuralist and poststructuralist theories of Culler, Barthes, Derrida and Kristeva, and reader-response theories of Fish, Jauss, Iser and many others.

The most influential of the above mentioned theories is Roland Barthes' view that the death of the author signals the birth of the reader points to the growing awareness of the critics that the reader performs an active role in the creation of meaning. Barthes distinguishes between what he calls the *lisible* (readerly) and the *scriptible* (writerly) text, which further emphasizes his distinction between 'work' and 'text'. As against the *lisible* (readerly) text, the *scriptible* (writerly) text foregrounds the productive role of the reader by foregrounding its own highly fluid nature. The reader is made aware that meaning is not readily available to her. She is made to feel that meaning has to be searched for painstakingly and yet it remains elusive as ever. The reader's hunt for meaning is constitutive of the narrative itself as she is never allowed to settle into a self-assured mode. Reading is thus a kind of writing, and meaning something to be created anew in each act of reading. No doubt that an unwary reader will be baffled by the *scriptible* (writerly) text if she approaches it assuming a passive role.

To make the reader aware of the provisionality and tentativeness of all conclusions requires a technique that exploits the open-endedness of the narrative and where reading becomes a kind of game with shifting rules. Since there can be no ideologically neutral reading, the reader is made aware of reading as a meaning-creating activity in which she necessarily has to participate. This involves resistance to closure as a means to invite the reader to take up her position of a co-producer along with the author.

It was not co-incidental that the experimentation in literary writing corresponded with the emergence of the reader-centric theories. One of the pioneers of the idea of the reader as producer of meaning in fictional writing is John Fowles whose novels foreground this idea consistently. John Fowles's attempt in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), his first novel to receive universal acclaim, to weave a narrative which draws on the conventions of storytelling but puts them in a self-consciously sceptical framework, makes it an exemplary work of the 1960s. The attempt to renew the novel from within, subverting its own conventions, provides the key for an understanding of Fowles' work. This novel is a critique of the conventions of classic realism as it mostly appears in nineteenth-century fiction. The reader is invited to verify the truths of the narrative and to compare and contrast the "realistic" Victorian norms and styles of the narrative with a self-conscious, postmodernist narrative technique. The referentiality in Fowles's narrative is not suspended; it is only problematised through a juxtaposition of various and mutually irreconcilable strains of storytelling. The novel, as Roland Binns, argues:

> inverts the traditionally assumed dichotomy between the romancer and the realist writer, manipulating the romance form to effect both a sceptical examination of the romance experience and, more radically, a critique of contemporary realist fiction for its absence of moral responsibility (319).

Fowles seemingly attempts to imitate the conventions of Victorian realism until Chapter 13, where the imitation unexpectedly gives way to parody, as the omniscient narrator mischievously admits that he does not know who Sarah is and that the story he is telling "is all imagination," thus shaking to its foundations the willing suspension of disbelief of the reader:

> I do not know. This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind…I am writing in…a convention universally accepted at the time of my own story…We wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is (95).

This confession of the narrator that he does not know his characters and is creating a story from his imagination puts the reader in a quandary. What, after all, is she to make of the story told so far, and how can she continue reading the novel to the end without a willing suspension of belief? There is indeed a serious challenge to the very convention of readership here as the reader is alerted to the fact of her collusion in the making-meaning process.

The French Lieutenant's Woman has a Victorian setting with plot and structure based on the archetypal romance of meeting, separation and reunion of Charles Smithson and Sarah Woodruff. The novel recreates, in a particular distant way, the narrative movement and the solid characterization of the 19th century realistic novel. It is a novel in which the realistic and problematical elements are so dexterously interwoven that the reader finds it impossible to keep a steady perspective. It undermines the linear movement of texts by constant intrusion of the narrator into his Victorian narratives and by providing three alternate endings. Even at the first glance the novel offers a serious challenge to the reader as a certain obliquity and game-like activity on the part of the narrator becomes apparent. The narrator adopts the guise of a storyteller set to present before the reader a coherent account of events at one point, only to reveal this as an illusion at another. Approaching the past in this way, the novel undercuts the ideological basis of the realist narrative and flaunts its own 'constructed' nature.

The novel is a remarkable exemplification of the use of the writing devices that are historically germane to the Victorian period, to 1867 and its ideological and aesthetic substructure. The narrative technique provides the basis for an enquiry into the complex connections between history and writing. It exemplifies Fowles' exploitation of the space between the two world-views, that of 1867 and 1967, and becomes the foundation for an elaborate critique both of the novel as history and the novel as a work of art. The essential questions Fowles raises for us are those which focus on the aesthetics of the novel in the 19th century, and those contemporary elements of parody which allow us to enter into dialogue with those aesthetics. In fact, the problem of distinguishing between aesthetic and historical conditions governing the production of the text is always raised but never clearly solved.

The narrative uses textual juggling so that the distinct textual identity can create textual ripples in the new context. The description of places especially the Dickensian scenes set in England, the presentation of Dickensian stereotypes, like Sam and Mrs. Poulteny, the web of references to the fiction of Dickens, Hardy and Austen, and the representation of the crippling behavioural

prescriptions of a stifling society: all of these contribute to a narrative system which establishes the mosaic of a world and its cultural authenticity by various reality-effects, and by a prose style which imitates the literature of that period and elaborates its view of historical and social reality. The flamboyant intruder-narrator of the novel explores and flaunts the characteristic narrative devices and reminds the reader that the representation of reality is always necessarily a stylization and a fiction. Thus by systematically displaying and flouting the conditions of its own artifice, the novel enables probing into what Robert Alter calls "the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality" (137). Alter cogently explains that in a fully self-conscious novel like this one, "there is a consistent effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and conventions" (137).

The narrator opens the novel with background information on Lyme Regis, where the story is initially set. He then introduces Charles Smithson, a 32 year old gentleman and his fiancé Ernestina Freeman, who are taking a walk along the Cobb, made famous by Jane Austen in her novel *Persuasion*. He disrupts the narrative by directly addressing the reader, and even steps into the story himself at one stage. The narrator refuses to choose between the two competing denouements: one in which Charles and Sarah are reunited after a stormy affair, and the other in which they are kept irrevocably apart. He therefore introduces an uncertainty principle into the novel and even dallies with a third possibility of leaving Charles on the train, searching for Sarah in the capital. The strategy of multiple endings is exploited to undercut the assumptions of a linear narrative with its beginning, middle and end, and throws a challenge to the reader who assumes an already existing single culmination to the action.

The reader confronts unexpected twists and sudden shifts which again frustrate any anticipation whatsoever. Chapter 4, to cite an example, ends with a focus upon Sarah and the reader expects to see her description in the next chapter but surprisingly it opens with the description of Ernestina. Similarly, Chapter 30 shifts the linear trajectory of the narration. The reader expects Charles to enter the barn searching for Sarah, but instead of pursuing this line in the next chapter the narrator stops to unravel why Sarah was dismissed from Mrs. Poulteney's house.

Fowles' concept of godgame which he employs remarkably in his another novel *The Magus* (1978) again points to the bafflement of the reader as she becomes aware that she is being manipulated by a skilled craftsman. Like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the structure of *The Magus* is characterized by self-consciousness, intricacy, mysteriousness and fictional games. It subverts the traditional linear disposition of classic realism as it privileges the narrative openness, the baffling circular endings and the projection of interweaving texts. The novel ends quoting the refrain of the *Pervigilum Veneris*, an anonymous work of 4th century Latin poetry which has been taken as indicating the possible preferred resolution of the ending's ambiguity.

The French Lieutenant's Woman uses metafictive strategies to disrupt the epistemological assumptions of the realist narrative. Patricia Waugh argues that metafiction, "suggests not only that writing history is a fictional act… but that history itself is invested, like fiction, with interrelating plots which appear to interact independently of human design"(48-9). The novel produces a theoretical effect by transposing narrativity into narration. The objective voice of conventional

Victorian fiction is constantly subverted by the apparently inappropriate intervention from an authorial narrator. As Salami explains, "*The French Lieutenant's Woman* contains a special type of character not usually found in modern novels, a narrator-persona who addresses himself directly to the reader or rather to the reader's persona who is also inscribed in the text" (105).

Such interventions were, in fact, not unknown in the Victorian convention which allowed for an oscillation between the modes of showing and telling in the narrative voice, or the intrusion of an authorial voice into the fiction to address the reader directly. But where the Victorian intervention operated as a kind of narrative candour to enhance realism, Fowles turns this into an illusion-breaking self-reflexivity, reminding the reader that the history being presented is a species of creative writing. The narrator regularly interrupts his own recognizably Victorian tone with a narrative comment from the late 20th century, or with an explicit declaration of the artificiality of the events being narrated.

By highlighting the role of narrativity in shaping history as a story the reader is forced to contemplate not what the past was actually like but how it has been represented by other texts. As Barthes argues, intertextuality foregrounds the role of the reader, the interrelation between the reader and the text that displaces the author's monopoly of meanings. The intertexts "are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotation without inverted commas" a description that recalls the epigraphs to each chapter that are indeed incorporated without inverted commas (1977:160). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* makes this intertextual orientation abundantly clear by invoking and imitating novels and scientific texts of the period.

The narrator of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* acknowledges that the novelist has traditionally stood next to God and may still do so but "there is only one good definition of God: the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (97). As such he does not possess a freedom born of omniscience and control of his characters: rather, freedom is constituted to the extent that characters possess a degree of autonomy from the narrator. The narrator concludes his narrative by offering to free his characters from the trap of his own plot and imagination, in which they have been contained. Susana Onege makes the following perceptive observation about the ending:

> at the end of the novel, protagonist and reader are left in a strikingly similar position: turning from a Victorian into an existentialist, Charles loses his reassuring belief in a well-ordered, unitary cosmos, immediately accessible to the subject, and experiences the agonising vision of the void, as he contemplates the abysmal gap separating himself from the world. Likewise, with his/her trust in the reliability and omniscience of the narrator irreparably shattered at the end of the novel, the reader finds himself/herself sharing Charles's bafflement and alienation, as the fictional world fragments and appears unattainable by unmediated perception (142).

Charles at the end reaches a point of understanding whereby he is able to perceive, through Sarah's example, a non-determined view of behaviour. Thus action becomes for him existential, a matter of personal choice. The choices, however, are many, and the task of choosing filled with the modern anxiety. Elizabeth Rankin argues that, "without this ending—or with this ending undercut or made anti-climatic by a subsequent ending—there would be no perfect exemplar of existential freedom in the novel and hence that concept would remain hazy throughout" (205). The narrator

postulates a growing independence in his characters and it is partly an independence from the controlling hand of the novelist himself. The novelist's choice of possible endings is thus dramatized in the plot for the reader too and the lessons learned by Charles are also supposed to have been learned by the reader. Textual indeterminacy destabilizes the text's univocality as the narrator hands the reins to the reader. Salami comments thus on the ending:

> The novel's open-endedness is a form of freedom to Charles as well as to the reader, a factor that undermines authority in the narrative. This still life at the end of the novel reflects the free ending, the incompleteness of text, and the deferment of their meanings (134).

As Salami argues, the ending gives the reader freedom to connect the last two chapters and make sense of the contradictions between them. Furthermore, it permits the text to display its postmodernist rejection of Victorian closure. It also has a historical function: the juxtaposition of the Victorian family of Chapter 60 with the lone hero of Chapter 61 gives the reader the opportunity to compare the modern and Victorian eras without being given clear guidance by the narrator.

Although the reader has passed through a rigorous process, been waylaid at times and manipulated throughout, it has been a rich and fruitful journey. What she has realised is that no reader is positioned as a passive receiver and the idea of a singular, univocal and authoritative voice is an illusion to be seen through. The 'writerly' text such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* punctures the idea of the already written and the already read text by adopting a self-consciously intertextual mode. It reveals that nothing can be articulated with innocence and all artistic expressions are necessarily implicated in an intricate web of social, cultural, linguistic and political relationships.

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FROM PROF. SWARAJ RAJ'S BOOKSHELF

A Genre Blurring Memoir: *Butterflies on the Roof of the World*

Author: Peter Smetacek
Publisher: Aleph Book Company
Year of Publication: 2012
Pages: 224
Price: Rs. 495/-

The monsoon rains this year were a bit delayed thus lengthening the scorching summer months. But when the rains did arrive, it poured in torrents. This is the time of renewal when the earth seems to don a green mantle; even the red tiled roof of my house turns green and slippery with moss. Weeds, shrubs and undergrowth pullulate. With the air dank and warm, ripe with petrichor, come the ubiquitous insects; beetles of different sizes and shapes, grasshoppers, praying mantises, dragonflies, damselflies, moths and butterflies, spiders, and many other flying and creeping creatures. There could not have been a more opportune time than this to reach out to and revisit Peter Smetacek's rollicking memoir *Butterflies on the Roof of the World* lying smugly in my bookshelf with *Nabokov's Blues: A Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius* by Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates to its left and John Gray's *The Silence of Animals* to its right. There are times, when revisiting a book you had read earlier becomes a necessity, a pressing need you cannot ignore. And the time for revisiting Smetacek's memoir had arrived.

Literature and science have mostly charted different courses. It is only in science fiction, utopian as well as dystopian, that literature and science coexist. This schism has been pointed out by Amitav Ghosh too in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), though in the context of literary authors not taking up the cause of environmentalism. According to Ghosh the domains of fiction and science have rarely overlapped. Nature and environment are often considered to belong to the realm of science. The texts that blur the distinction between literary writing and scientific writing are few and far between. Peter Smetacek's *Butterflies on the Roof of the World* is one such text that breaches disciplinary boundaries and interweaves scientific knowledge with a style that is introspective, humourous, ludic, and passionate at the same time. Peter Smetacek, incidentally, is an authority on Indian butterflies and moths and has established the Butterfly Research Centre in Bhimtal, the only one of its kind in India.

A memoir, the *Butterflies* has seventeen chapters in it, apart from a prologue. “Forests run in the family” is the opening line of the first chapter “Love and War” and this sentence serves as the *leitmotif* in the entire text. The first chapter explores how the author's father, a man of German descent who was born an Austrian before the First World War and later became a Czech citizen escaped from the Nazi dragnet and sailed in a transport ship to Calcutta in 1939. He wanted to go to South America but somehow, he had to jump the ship with his cameras and a few clothes. Despite all the odds he not only survived in India but also flourished and married a Muslim lady, the paternal branch of whose family had descended from Tipu Sultan. It was a love marriage which was solemnized after many

trials and tribulations, all told by the author in a manner that makes light of the difficulties his parents must have gone through. With great relish Smetacek describes how in wooing his mother in a true Bohemian fashion and with "determination and sheer pig-headedness in equal parts," his father had unwittingly resolved to storm the "orthodox Islamic bastion" with his only qualification being "a clear conscience" that he had "brought from his middleclass background." After getting married and staying in Calcutta, Smetacek's father, who had been brought up in the midst of rolling forested hills in Sudeten Silesia, finally settled in the sylvan surroundings in Bhimtal. A certain raciness and boisterous irreverence characterizes Smetacek's prose when he describes his father's escape from the prying eyes of the Gestapo, his marriage and how he finally reached Bhimtal, making the entire description a delightful read.

From the second chapter onwards, the author delves into his lepidopteron interests and that streak of adventurism whose evidence he gives in the Prologue itself, and which is a repetition of his father's determination and adventurism. The entire book is replete with Smetacek's keen observation of nature and the narration is marked by enduring vivacity of an individual whose love for nature is abiding, just as his childlike curiosity is. At one place he writes: "Having nothing urgent to do is one of the prerequisites for observing nature," an observation that reminds one of Ezekiel's "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher." But then, should observing nature not be an urgent task that most of us have forgotten? The whole book has thick description of various animals and their interrelationships, their dependence upon each other, plants and climatic conditions. And each such description serves as a reminder of how our quotidian routines have made us utterly oblivious of the most urgent task of observing nature. The best thing about Smetacek is that neither does he ever adopt the tone of a preacher, nor does he anthropomorphize nature. His observations are starkly naturalistic and are devoid of didactic air that marks most nature writing.

The book also explores ecosystems in a language that eschews intimidating scientific jargon. While describing the eccentricities of different animals and their quirky behaviors, Smetacek is at his wittiest best. His tongue-in-cheek remarks lift the language to a different level altogether. However, underlying his light hearted manner is his through knowledge of his subject. For example, while talking about the large bodied moths with colourful hindwings that feed on overripe fruit and get drunk, Smetacek observes how their body movements become uncoordinated and their ataxic gait compares well with human tipplers. The inebriate moths scrabble over uneven fruit surface, and unable to find a secure foothold, they topple over: "There is a dull thud as it hits the ground. Looking down, one can see it lying on its back, weakly waving one arm in a universal gesture that any bartender would instantly recognize." He talks about his encounters with caterpillar mushrooms and ghost moth caterpillars both of which are known to have aphrodisiac properties, hallucinogenic bees, shrews, owls, monkeys, dragonflies, toads, dogs, and of course many naturalists from abroad who visited his Butterfly Research Centre. He gives graphic descriptions of his expeditions to Nepal and Auli in Uttarakhand on his motorcycle. He talks about his travels and travails with the detachment of a Fakir watching, as if the comic show, from the first circle. He sounds intimate and detached at the same time, a participant-observer. Very keen observations are almost always accompanied by rib-tickling wisecracks and there is hardly a page that does not bring a smile on the face of the reader.

In between, he also makes a dig at the way entomological research is conducted in India and

also exposes the fallacy of the myth that the forests can be grown by growing some selected varieties of plants. He also suggests, with empirical evidence, how the presence and absence of butterflies and moths can be a very reliable indicator and predictor of climate change. All this he can do because for him, to borrow the title of Fritz of Capra's book, our world is a "Web of Life" with no hierarchies; such awareness does not leave any scope for treating even the tiniest creature as mere object.

On the whole, it is an absorbing book and the only desirable thing missing from the book is photographs–even sketches would have done–of the butterflies and moths he talks about, especially of those which are really very rare. But then in hindsight, one can say that he had a trick up his sleeve; he reserved all the photographs for his second book *A Naturalist's Guide to the Butterflies of India* that he published in 2017.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Satish Kumar, *A Survey of Indian English Drama,*

Second & Enlarged Edition. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot. 2019. Pp.278. Rs. 320.

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Apart from K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar's pioneering *Indian Writing in English* and M.K.Naik's *A History of Indian English Literature*, there have been no separate and exclusive surveys or histories of Indian English Drama, perhaps because the genre of Indian English drama happens to be the poorest among the literary genres and suffers from many disadvantages, due to its alien medium (of English language) confined to academia and lack of an independent theatrical tradition. But in spite of all these disadvantages Indian English drama has survived because of own colonial contact with Britain and the English education introduced by the colonial rule. Though Indian English Drama cannot be seen on the stage, it has been read and studied in Indian Universities as part of their post-graduate curriculum and doctoral programme. But the information on Indian English Drama has not been abundantly available in literary histories, as it is a new subject and there is no network of academic communication and centralized documentation in India. There are many plays, which have escaped the notice of literary historians like M.K.Naik.

When viewed against this background, Satish Kumar's *A Survey of Indian English Drama* happens to be an important and welcome addition to the realm of literary history. He starts his survey from the beginning – Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo up to the latest and contemporary playwrights like Mahesh Dattani. What is appreciable in his book is his generosity to recognize the feminist playwrights like Manjula Padmanabhan and Poile Sengupta and the contemporary playwrights like Arun Kukreja, Abhisek Majumdar, Neel Chaudhri and Aditya Sudarshan and son and brings it up to Basavaraj Naikar.

There is some critical controversy about whether to treat Rabindranath Tagore and Girish Karnad as Indian English playwrights or Indian Regional Playwrights in English Translation, because both of them wrote their plays in Bangla and Kannada respectively and then translated them into English (sometimes with the help of others). Such a controversy cannot be seen in the case of Sri Aurobindo. Satish Kumar ignores this important issue. It is high time now for Indian scholars to push Tagore and Karnad into the division of Indian Regional Literature in English Translation so that the pure Indian English dramatists may be studied separately for arriving at a better perspective.

Satish Kumar combines the techniques of panorama and close-up in his survey, by listing up all the playwrights, but yet highlighting a few, providing much biographical information and media-

hyped data. This conglomeration of different methods, though not desirable on the principle of consistency, turns out to be quite useful to the students and researchers in the said field. Unfortunately he has not mentioned the latest plays of some dramatists like Partap Sarma (ex. *Begum Sumroo*) and others. His bibliography of secondary sources like critical works and anthologies on Indian English Drama is not up-to-date and exhaustive. But his chronological list of Indian English plays and author-wise plays happens to be very useful to students and researchers. As a one man's venture, Satish Kumar's *Survey* is highly admirable. There are, of course, a few spelling mistake like 'Polie' for 'Poile' and 'Pratap' for 'Partap', which could be avoided in a future edition.

On this occasion I would like to suggest to Indian English scholars and Professors to undertake the writing of separate histories of Indian English Poetry, drama, Fiction and Prose on a collaborative basis and revise and update them every five years. Another important point that I would like to make is that many of the early Indian English plays are not available in the market, but are rotting in the limbo of old libraries..(For example, the excellent plays like the *Tiger Claw*, the *Line of Mars* are not available in the Indian market.) So the adventurous Indian publishers should undertake the publication of the reprints of those plays either individually or in the form of thematically classified anthologies like Religious/Philosophical Drama, Mythological Drama, and Social Drama and so on. Otherwise there will be an imbalance in the academic studies, focus and appreciation, because some playwrights who enjoy undeservedly greater media-hype start strutting on the stage in this age of advertisement and great ones will be criminally neglected by the academia.

Akankssha Arora, *Genius in Making*

(Chennai: Notion Press, 2018), Pp. xviii+142

Dr. Neena Malhotra
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Genius in Making by Akankssha Arora is a real good treat to go through for the married women of all age groups – young or old. Akanksha- a mother of two grown up children has beautifully described the process, a journey from conceiving a child through nine months of pregnancy to achieving motherhood by delivering a child. The author has keenly perceived how a mom-to-be should prepare herself for motherhood accepting her pregnancy as a blessing as Nature has invested women with the power to create. What a beautiful romantic description of the moods of a woman, her feelings and attitude at times weird behaviour during pregnancy this book presents and yet it is so realistic. Nothing utopian. Only a woman, who has undergone the experience of achieving motherhood can give this kind of psychological and realistic description. Every line written suggests and emphasizes the fact how a woman should care for her personal self, her needs, her health, her desires and her thoughts during her pregnancy. Personally speaking, I relived the process of my own pregnancy while going through this book – my feelings, desires, momentary depressive moods and fears. The realization dawned upon me where I was wrong in not caring for my nutrition.

The author has done a lot of research and really worked hard on writing this book by highlighting all the important aspects of the process of motherhood – be it planning for conception, moods, desires, nutrition, physical exercise and the psychological state of the would-be moms. It contains very useful tips for them how to love themselves and prepare to welcome the new member whole heartedly. At the same time, it prepares them for the discomfort and fatigue on the arrival of the new being. Nothing to panic about the sacrifices would-be-mom has to make. The bliss of motherhood grants super human strength to new mom and the pleasure of creation is greater than the pains and labour involved in it.

The author has been very wise in including a chapter on would-be-father, the Cheer Leader and support system. She has very minutely emphasized the role of father during pregnancy and the support he must give to his wife throughout even after the child is born, sharing the pleasant and unpleasant conditions directly or indirectly.

This book is divided into 11 chapters with very fascinating and meaningful titles. Each chapter is so engrossing that one is reluctant to give a break. The style of writing is simple, spontaneous and absorbing. Each chapter begins and ends either with a piece of advice or a well

worded quote that makes it more interesting. Throughout the book all the important quotes, tips and sayings, the beautiful and meaningful lines in bold letters on separate pages become prominent and catchy. Another unique feature of this book is that it has three Forewords by renowned doctors of the town who are specialists in their own fields – Gynae and Clinical Psychology. This makes the book more authentic and medically approved.

I wish every woman – young or old, would-be-moms or experienced moms, mothers and mothers-in-law should read this book to guide the young married daughters and daughters-in-law about motherhood so that if not geniuses, at least normal healthy babies will be born in future. *Genius in Making* is really an amazing book of its own kind.

PORTRY COLUMN

The Hobby Horse

Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma*

I
Beyond the normal persists
the demeanour
the persona impressed
On mental walls of millions
Millions of mouths gape
eyes widen in the East
gather in the West
the football fields
yield space to public speech

Airwaves and digital frames
capture and nurture
a legend of such claims
as folklore is made of

Can use a new invention
Before light of day sees it
Can swim across the skies
beyond the reach of a radar
Can reposition men in time
into a space of his volition
He is clad down to the sneakers
in teflon garments
trendy and elegant

II
Often he speaks of himself
as if of a third person
Addressing a big crowd
he would arraign
The greats of the era gone by
Out to dump the deadwood
Turning upside down
Tearing inside out
Dispute in eloquent oration

repute of long adored icons

Never a false step
Always he seems to know
his moves like a chess Master
His knights know their role
Pawns walk straight
right or left as per the sleight
of his media-savvy skills
Many can have a wild guess
of the end he aimed at
Vehicles of his travel
secret and stealthy
His rivals get trapped often
in the trenches they dig
for hiding in defence

III
At moments getting off the hobby horse
One can pluck the specs
the broom
and the spinning wheel
Of a man we all know who
Walked bare-footed on the bloody
streets of Noakhali just when
Tryst was proclaimed
to many a million

IV
The Hobby Horse
Surely a favourite
Beyond many temporal claims
Yet always into spacial frames
Of how we speak or hear
Choose the dress we wear
Eat the food most eager
to suit our palate fine

Hobby Horse gallops on the highway
Can it subvert the wayside joints
and choose to annoint itself
When he deigns to expunge
games of civic indulgence
played for scores of years

V
Not that every act of charity
can be a racket
It is more likely
using madness as a ruse
A lot of good is done
A lot more is spoken
And lots being done
That is not spoken

Cleansing
Releasing fresh versions
of ancient sermons
Numerous human beings
swayed by mesmerising aura
Words gestures slogans
Turning out a neat package
Like a set of yoga manuals
beyond the regular display
Of antics and singsong
demeanour
Of the hobby horse
on his roadshow

.....

**Dr. Lalit Mohan Sharma, former Principal, Govt. College, Dharmshala (H.P.), has published eight books, including four anthologies of English poetry and a poetic English translation of Urdu Poetry, Three Step Journey. Dr. Sharma's creative pursuits persist in myriad ways.

Two Poems

Dr. Seema Jain*

My Precious Jewels

Every day, before moving out
For the day's routine
I make sure to safely entrust
My precious jewels to the closet:
All the fragments of the broken heart,
The aches, the lacerating wounds,
The scars, the moans and tears,
Deposited away from prying eyes.
I put on the lipstick, a light make-up
And the disarming smiles,
The expected civilities;
Fully equipped with warm greetings for all
My lunch-box neatly packed,
I am ready to face the world,
All insulated from any betrayal
By my own heart.

Europe's Weather

The weather in Europe
Reminds me of
The ups and downs, the fluctuations
Of our relationship
Now bright and scorching sunlight
Alternated by benign clouds and
Cool soothing breeziness;
One moment the heat pinches,
Comforting shadiness the next
Neither this being the sole truth nor that
But somewhere in between, the medley zone
Life too seems quite similar

To be found not in the black or the white, Or the red or the yellow clusters
But is a rainbow hue, a bouquet of many coloured flowers
And of course, with some thorns
To go with them.

---

*Dr. Seema Jain is presently Associate Professor & Head, P G Dept of English & Dean Academics at Kanya MahaVidyalaya Jalandhar (Punjab). She has published *An Apology to My Father* (English Poems), *Mom ke Pankh* and *Dhoop Chhanv* (Hindi Poems). She has edited *Women Empowerment and Higher Education* and *Cross Cultural Nuances*. She is recipient of Purvottar Hindi Academy Award for her contribution to the field of education, Literature and Creative Writing.

The Demise

Dr. Sushminderjeet Kaur*

Somewhere in the regimented
life of worldliness
sharing and caring
ingrained since ages
slips to peripheries
as slow death seeps into
pores of my conscience.

What fell to me
in legacy
dissolves unknowingly
as the moral centre goes adrift
and robs my soul
of sustenance
though physically
it floats in the deserts around.
.
My heart ceases to beat
when I miss the chance
to feed a hungry child,
Or to part with the coin
Sourly needed by him,
and my soul doesn't rebel.

The process of dying
persists
when I refuse
to pay his fee
yet wear the mask
of an educator.

Life oozes out of the soul
as my eyes fix
on the parched lips
of a child beggar,
but pass by him
without offering water.

My heart misses a beat
on seeing the migrants
being booted and beaten

as the deadened soul
passes by sans bother.

Daily the spirit dies
myriad times
only to keep it alive,
pretend to follow the path
carved by the forebears
but wilfully oblivious
of thoughtless responses
and driving it to eternal oblivion.

Without pause
sinful burden piles
as conscience dies
and gadgets besiege,
woefully we wait
for the epiphany
to connect to the soul one day.
Will the fickle Time
ever come,
as the spirit dies eternally?
.....

*Dr. Sushminderjeet Kaur is Associate Professor & Head, Postgraduate Dept. of English, G.G.N. Khalsa College, Ludhiana (India). She has edited *Immigrant Literature by the Writers of Punjabi Origin* and *Humanism in Indian English Fiction*. She is Associate Editor of *Buoyant Bliss: An Anthology of Poems*.

Three Poems

Dr. Annie John*

If Memories Had Wings . . .

If dreams had wings
I would soar to you
And spend an eternity in that paradise
From where you speak to me all night.

If wishes had wings
I would carry my petition
And placing at His holy altar
Take flight with you by my side.

If fantasies had wings
I would indulge in generously
And create our sacred domain
That none could ever have access to.

If tears had wings
I would carry errands
And let you know
How I miss you terrible.

If desires had wings
I would place on a platter for you to see
All that you desired for me
Come true and in plenitude.

If laughter had wings
I would cherish in abundance
All those giggles and titters
That amused us endless.

If thoughts had wings
Each moment of mine
Would be dedicated
To visualize your heavenly beauty.

If memories had wings

I would take flight
And collect all our sweet sad moments
Weaving them into a beautiful string.

If imagination had wings
I would let go loose of it
And re- live those five decades
That cruel fate snatched away.

If hope had wings
I would bring you back
For I pine intensely
A life time with you again.....

(For you Mom)

Strange Passion

The little bird ached with bleeding wings
Flapping violently at the bars sought escape
But when it was time to fly away
.....She had fallen in love with the Cage.

The tall prison walls, prevented him a view outside
Defeated, struggled hard to break through
But when he gained his freedom
. . . He had fallen in love with the Wall's solidarity.

The plants hated him and his scissors
He trimmed them to discipline their unrulyness
But when it was time to adorn someone's garden
.... They had fallen in love with the Gardener.

The water vapor locked up in the pregnant cloud
Suffocated, Sought release
But by the time the cloud burst
. . . Had fallen in love with the Sky.

Rejection, isolation and solitude
Killed her instinct to live
Died a million times every moment

But when proved innocent
. . . She had already fallen in love with Loneliness.

Lying on his death bed, suffering excruciating pain
Implored earnestly to the omnipotent
But when granted life
. . . He had already fallen in love with Death.

A Commitment

I will meet you again
I know not when and how
But I'm committed to meet you again.....

I may come as the raindrop
And gently fall upon your cheek
To revive you of the scorching wait.

I may come as the dew drop
And drop to cool your feet
For they have wandered miles.

I may come as the sunshine
And spread warmth in your garden
To revive you after the frosty cold.

I may come as those wondrous hues
And spread a multicolored spectrum
In your life void of colours

I may come as a song
And escalate melody
On your lips devoid of rhythm.

I may come as a melody
From the hollow of your flute
And quench you of life's monotony.

I may come as the cool breeze from the gale
In your tornado like life
And breath to you all goodness.

I may come as a rustle
In your world of silent stress
And whisper reassurance.

I may come as a promise
Where words are constantly broken
And affirm our bond forever.

I may come as the wide expanse
And meet you midway
To lead our life beyond the horizon.....

*****Dr Annie John, an Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, A. R. Burla College, Solapur (Maharashtra) is a writer, poet and editor. She has 31 books to her credit and also pens articles on values/ morals which is being published every week in Daily Sakaal Newspaper. She has supervised 8 Doctoral projects and is currently Chairperson, Board of Studies in English, Solapur University, Solapur since 2010.

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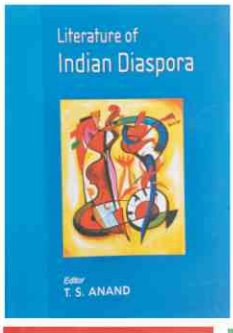

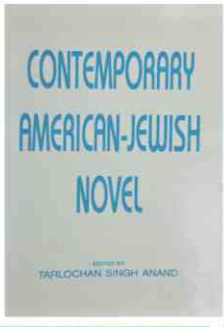

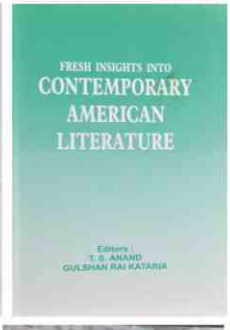

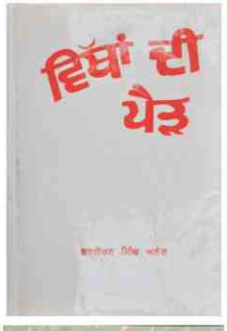

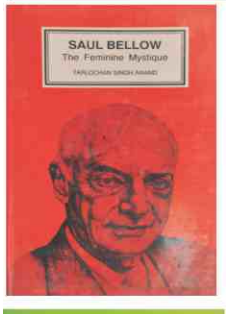

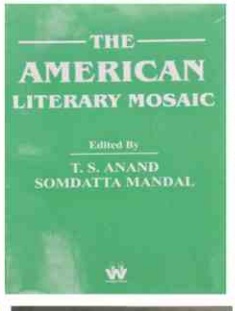

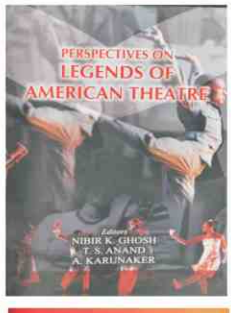

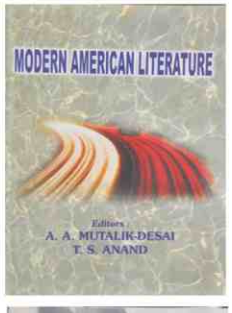

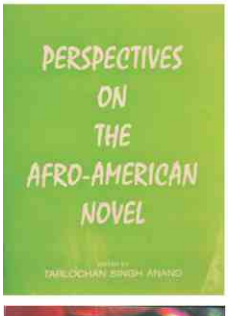

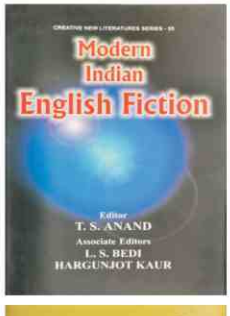

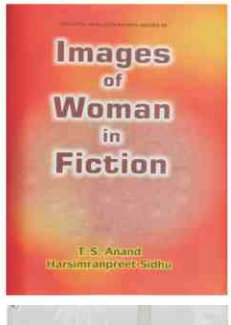

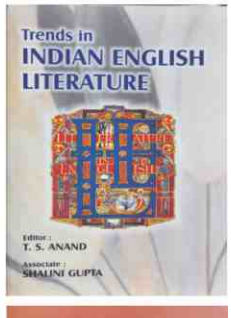

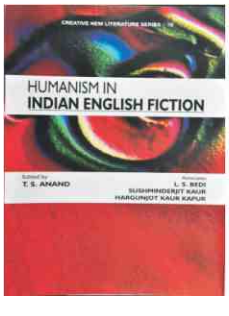

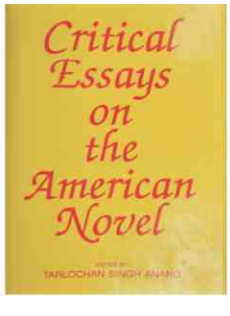

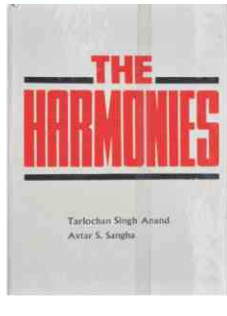

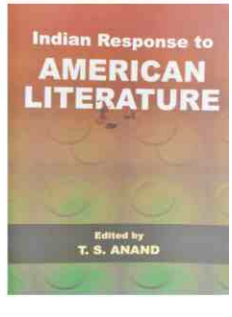

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