



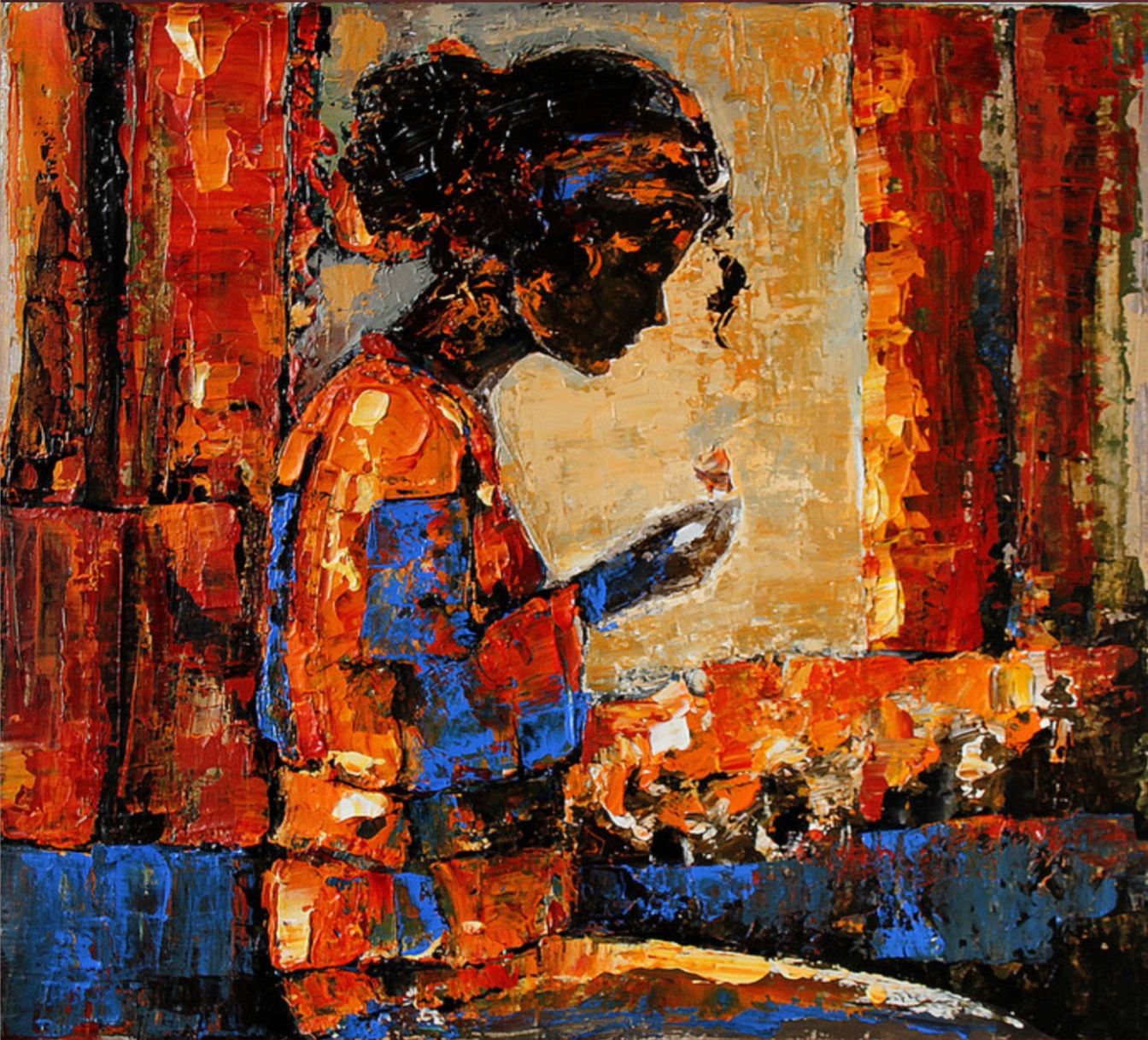
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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Literary Voice March 2019 is devoted to the emerging trends in the literature of Twenty-first Century. Literature is an ever evolving art and assumes a life of its own. The current trends in literature are not so far removed from what they used to be fifty and even a hundred years ago. In fact, what started as an important modern trend in the mid twentieth century British literature, partly due to Jean Rhys's work, is the inclusion of non-white voices, especially those from the former colonies. The trend persists in twenty-first century too in the works of Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Andrea Levy, and the Jamaican writer Marlon James who write about what it means to be "British" and live with the legacies of slavery, racism, and colonialism. This hybridity also redefines their Britishness. Likewise the emergence of Partition literature in the wake of partition of British India in 1947, continues to engage the creative consciousness of writers in the present century as well. Globalization has erased many a discriminatory categorization in literature as much of contemporary literature, apart from Western authors, includes works by literary figures from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

After the Second World War, postmodernism and deconstructionism had a significant influence on literature. A major change to come out of the former movement is a change in discourse. "The notion of the authoritative text went out the window (e.g., Jean-François Lyotard's idea of the "metanarrative"), and there was a new emphasis on hybridity, or the inclusion of two or more cultural influences on a text." Deconstruction, led by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, eliminated the notion that words have inherent meaning, an idea established by structuralism. It is not as if deconstruction/poststructuralism, postcolonialism etc. have become irrelevant in present times. It is that the focus has shifted to the rise of 'post-theory,' environmental criticism, and gender/queer theory.

With increasing globalization, intersections of cultures and more vocal discussions of women's rights and LGBT rights, identity has become a common theme in 21st century literature. Contemporary literature reflects current trends in life and culture and because these things change often, contemporary literature changes often as well as it questions facts, historical perspectives and often presents two contradictory arguments side by side. Well-defined, realistic, and highly developed characters are important in classifying a written work as contemporary, and most writing in this category feature stories that are more character driven than plot driven. Let us not forget the momentous events that marked the first twelve years of the new millennium--September 11, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, conflict in Sudan, Hurricane Katrina and a crippling world wide recession. Sporadic writings on one or all these events have appeared in the literature of varying national/ethnic denominations, though not distilled into the defining literature of the era. This can be seen in literature in a number of areas such as nonlinear plots, stream of consciousness writing, deconstructionist criticism, experimentations in a literary genre and with grammar, loss of dialogue tags, plots that do not resolve.

The research articles in *Literary Voice March 2019* showcase the new trends, thematic concerns and experimentations undertaken by the writers in various parts of the globe.

Twenty-first century African-American fiction has re-oriented the spiritual quest of the blacks into new directions of futuristic world. Neither the race nor the in/visibility of black is outmoded, yet the African American creative imagination is capable to visualize new fictional-scapes wherein their utopian and dystopian vision plays in and out. 'Frankenstein' as a metaphor for the irresponsibility of science and scientists, persists in science fiction stories of how a future world could possibly be different if humanity continues on its current path in the present, and this kind of narrative usually has a setting in either a dystopia or utopia depending on the author's point of view.

Though Nonfiction is usually not classified as literature, the present era sometimes includes works of creative nonfiction which tell a true story using literary techniques. Signs of a new trend about nonfiction as "creative art" in the Twenty-first Century, are evident in some of the autobiographies/biographies which are marked by growing creative sense, clarity and elegance, reminiscent of the masters of yore. Vishwajyoti Ghosh's graphic novel, *Delhi Calm*, initiates a new trend as well as adds to the critical mass of the discursive trend around the 1975 Emergency in India.

Contemporary trends in Indian drama being written and staged, reflect issues of gender and alternate sexuality, patriarchy, feminism and Indian history and mythology. Women autobiographies in the present century signal a new trend in debunking essentialist notions associated with the genre of autobiography, and portray woman as an agent to trigger off powerful protest against the abuse of religious systems that undermine human dignity in women and subject them to physical abuse. Likewise, an emerging trend in the neoliberal subjectivity is discernible in the protagonist-centred post-millennial Indian English fiction and Indian cinema.

Some of the persistent trends under focus in the current issue range from revisiting mythologies with a new vision and exploring the layers of meaning embedded in myths-to Environmental ethics-to Multiculturalism in national and transnational lands-to multiplicities of identities in LGBTQ literature-to transcendental vision of society grounded on the individual-to womanism-to marginalized literature as of Dalits, Tribals, diaspora, protest literature-to inspirational role of literature to inculcate patriotic zeal among the teens and draw them to the exotic life in olive green uniform which offers multiple vistas for personal and professional growth.

A Dialogue with Dr. Jernail Singh Anand, an authentic, prolific and leading voice in Indian English Poetry, is significant addition to our series of Interviews with writers. Prof. Swaraj Raj's incisive review essay on Simrita Dhir's absorbing, engaging diasporic debut novel, *The Rainbow Acres*, is a veritable treat for the scholars. Three Book Reviews of recent critical/creative works--*Mapping South Asian Diaspora: Recent Responses and Ruminations*, *The African American Journey to the Power Dome: Wright, Ellison, Baldwin* and *The Golden Servant of God (A Religious Play)*--by Prof. Himadri Lahiri, Prof. Satnam K. Raina and Dr. Raghu Venkatchalaiah--and poems by Shabnam Kaur and Nutan Garg, are the unique features of *Literary Voice March 2019*.

Dear Readers, partake of the cerebral stuff and help us to serve better with your inputs.

T. S. Anand.

Contemporary Trends in English Novel and Prose Narrative

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Abstract

Predicting literary trends at any given time is very difficult, but opening up of the literary canon, a process that started in the later part of the twentieth century and is continuing since then, has made it all the more difficult to talk of literary trends today. However, by delimiting the area of study to some specific genre(s)—as it has been done in this paper—and also by taking into account award winning texts in the main, it is possible to identify, if not the trends then at least the general drift of literary response to the changes that have and are taking place in society. This paper is an effort in this direction.

Key words: *Trend; Canon; Deconstruction; Postmodernism; Science Fiction; Utopia/Dystopia.*

Crystal gazing and trying to predict the emerging trends especially in case of literature can be extremely hazardous. One very important reason for this is the expanding canon of English literature. In the twentieth century, especially in the postcolonial period and also because of postmodernism's blurring of the distinction between the high and low art, the English literary canon came under persistent questioning for being predominantly elitist, white, male and Eurocentric. This questioning had the desired result of expanding the canon to include English writing that came from countries like India, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Africa, America and the Caribbean islands. Writings from the marginalized sections of society such as women, gays, lesbians, LGBT community and people with disabilities also started finding a place in the expanding canon. The preponderance of literary theory in the later part of the twentieth century also contributed to blurring of the boundaries between literature, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology and scientific disciplines. This opened up a space for such writings as would otherwise be kept outside the domain of core literature in the past. The impetus provided by post-structuralism and deconstruction contributed in a large measure to questioning arbitrary distinctions between history, anthropology, sociology and literature. Thus, what was earlier English literature confined to the English writing emanating from England in the main became Writing in English. Translation of texts from many other languages into English and their inclusion in the expanding canon has further added to the problem of making predictions about the emerging or future trends.

The second reason that makes it very difficult to talk about trends is the fact that the relationship of literature and history is uneven. There is no doubt that new literary genres do emerge in response to socio-economic changes; the emergence of the novel in the eighteenth century is an example of this fact. But this is also true that older forms of writing do find their way into new forms as well, thus obviating the very idea of a radical break with the past. In this sense, while assigning periods to literary movements does appear to be quite problematic, the idea of continuity with the past does aid the act of crystal gazing also.

However, the word 'trend' itself is quite problematic because of its association with the world of fashion; it makes us think as if a literary trend is a fashion, a fad dictated either by the ideological wind that blows at a given time and makes literature bend whichever way it blows, or it is determined, in a very reductive manner, by the prevailing socio-economic conditions. Apart from this, the idea of trendiness of a literary work underpins the work's commodity status, its marketability. This is actually a position reminiscent of Neo-Marxist literary theory which emphasises that a literary work is a product like any other product, a position that merits close attention especially in a capitalist economy. But in granting a high degree of autonomy to the literary work, even the Neo-Marxist theory tries to eschew economic determinism, a stance that validates the fact that literature often bucks the trend. And yet even when we study human history, we tend to rein in the chaos of history to within manageable limits by dividing history into periods; we do it by oversimplifying and in doing so, we bracket out differences, and think of trends and historical epochs in terms of linear unities. This is how we often tend to understand literary history also and make predictions on this understanding.

Establishing a trend also means positing the presence of a centre from which trends emerge as offshoots which then may diverge tangentially into different directions, but the centre remains intact like a monolith. This is how the singularity and autonomy of a literary work is violated. The positing of a centre not only means absence of difference; it also means denying the destabilizing and destructuring impulse of textuality; and it also means constructing hierarchies and binaries of centre and margin. In his *Writing and Difference* (1978) Derrida first quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "My own words take me by surprise and teach me what I think" (11). And then he adds: "It is because writing is *inaugural*, in the fresh sense of that word, that is dangerous and anguishing. It does not know where it is going" (11). Each writing being inaugural in the sense of its possibilities of the unanticipatable that happens to be the very condition of writing, each literary text ceaselessly destabilizes any context, any centre. Looked at from this Derridean point of view, there can only be rhizomatic proliferation of texts in a network of inter-textual connections. Emerging trends point to the future, the future which as Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* (1976), "can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with the constructed normality and can be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity" (4). In this sense, the very idea of literary trends is logocentric, and it is alien to Derridean thought. The fact is that each literary text, with its irrepressible recalcitrance, overruns all limits assigned to it. Tending to breach all boundaries, it asserts its uniqueness in its difference from others.

Ignoring, however, the singularity of the literary work, we do tend to subsume it under some movement or trend. So much so that in the history of literary theory, Derridean deconstructive reading itself becomes a trend, just as postmodernism, with its radical anti-

theoretical stance itself has come to be known as a theory.

These are the problems that mesmerize thinking of literature in terms of trends, both emerging and diverging. Notwithstanding these aporias, thinking about contemporary trends is a rewarding exercise as it allows us to make some sense of how our culture tends to respond to the changes around us. Thus 'cognitive mapping,' to borrow a term from Fredric Jameson, of contemporary culture is possible through literary cartographies. In order to do so, we also need to map major concerns of our times.

We are living in a world which is changing at a vertiginous pace brought about by contemporary technologies. How technology impacts both the production and reception of art was earlier pointed out by Walter Benjamin in his celebrated essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" published in English translation in *Illuminations* in 1968. For Benjamin the destruction of the sacred character—which he calls aura—of the work of art through mechanical reproduction leads to radical change in the relations between the artistic producer and the consumer. In our times, it is techno-capitalism that is redefining everything. In his essay, "Writing Excess: The Poetic Principle of Post-Literary Culture" (2006), Scott Wilson argues how 'econopoiesis,' a process in which "creative understanding and practice has been generalized throughout the economy" informs all aspects of life, "even those not commonly associated with literature" (559). Hence, literature does not operate in literature any more, but "everywhere else in the midst of 'ontological aesthetization'" (562). It is a telling comment on how "literary genius has become transformed in the twenty-first century into one of the motors of techno-capitalism" (563), as well as on the integration of arts and economy in the postmodern cultural productions, a fact that has been pointed out by Fredric Jameson also in his *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (2003). This constitutive, almost unmediated relationship of the arts with the economic system of the late capitalism earlier gave rise to postmodern art which as, Jameson suggests is depthless, anti-hermeneutical, schizophrenic, pastiche art. Since this depthlessness is also a consequence of the disappearance of the authorial subject, the postmodern novels have unreliable narrators and there is excessive word play. The postmodern novel turns self-reflexive in order to proclaim its own contingency. Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, E. L. Doctorow, W. G. Sebald, Umberto Eco and Salman Rushdie among many others are leading postmodern novelists. Postmodernism may not be a hot topic any more in literary academy in the twenty-first century, but the kind of novelistic form it gave rise to, still persists and will persist for a long time to come.

The process of erasure of the distinction of the literary and the non-literary which became synonymous with postmodernism has accelerated further. The contemporary novel is all about mixing of registers, various languages, styles and amalgamation of disciplines whose boundaries were earlier considered sacrosanct. History remains an important preoccupation of contemporary novelists. Amalgamation of the personal and the political, rememorialization and exploration of the past, especially traumatic history is a major concern in many contemporary novels. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's in her *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) draws upon her ancestral past to throw light on the Biafra conflict in Nigeria in 1967, which had left her family brutalized. W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) written originally in German and translated into English by Anthea Bell, provides a moving account of the atrocities committed by the Nazis on the Jews and their dispersal from Prague. Sebald employs a very unique narrative style that blends fact and fiction, is marked by long

sentences and absence of paragraphs. Hilary Mantel in *Wolf Hall* (2009), which won the Man Booker in 2009, re-imagines the political history of 16th century England told from Thomas Cromwell's perspective. She published *Bring up the Bodies* in 2012 which was a sequel to *Wolf Hall*. *Bring up the Bodies* also won the Man Booker in 2012. Anna Burns's Man Booker Prize winning novel, *Milkman* (2018) is about what violence--unpredictable, persistent and brutal--does to a person's mind. The narrative is set in Ireland during the Troubles in 1970s, a period when inter-community surveillance was at its peak and people did not believe each other. Distrust, paranoia, tribalism, stalking, guns and bombs, and totalitarianism are the flavour of the text. No character is given a name; they are just generic signposts such as Somebody McSomebody, the middle sister, the elder sister, the younger sister, the may-be boyfriend and so on and so forth. The eerie atmosphere the narrative evokes is rife with the devastating power of gossip and predatory violence against women. Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War* (1985 tr. 2017), for which she won the Nobel in 2017 is a polyphonic, documentary style text based on the oral testimonies of Russian women, who had experienced the Second World War on the frontline, in occupied territories and home front. This text is neither objective history nor is it a novel in a strictly conventional sense. Svetlana met thousands of women who were involved in the conduct of the War or were affected by it and recorded their interviews. *The Unwomanly Face of War* is a result of these efforts. It is history written from the perspective of women who do not find any voice in official historical records. This text is a classic example of how the marginalized are brought to the centre and how binaries of centre and margins are erased.

In fact most of the novels on the 2018 Booker Shortlist display a preoccupation with nightmarish apocalyptic themes, ecological destruction, technocalypse, mass incarceration and trauma. Most of these are gloomy narratives though this gloom had permeated many literary narratives since the advent of the twentieth century also.

One important reason for this gloom is to be found in the growing interface of the human and the technological, arousing fears of redundancy of the human in the future. The future dominated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and genetic engineering raises spectres of technology getting out of human control and becoming Frankenstein's monster. Fascination for science and technology in the earlier part of the last century had led to the celebration of the machine in the works of the Futurists and utopian science fiction writers. However, the horrors of the World War I and the World War II soon made people realize how technology had made wars much more horrible than ever before. This gave rise to dystopian science fiction. Science fiction is often set in an imaginative context such as futuristic settings, space travel, time travel, parallel universes, life of the extra-terrestrial beings, and cyborgs and machines which acquire human capabilities. Most of the science fiction these days is dystopian. Margaret Atwood's 2000 Man Booker Prize winning novel, *The Blind Assassin* and *Oryx and Crake* which won the Man Booker in 2003 are dystopic texts. In India, Samit Basu with his novels *Turbulence* (2012) and *Resistance* (2013), and Nissar Ahmed A. Naik with his *The Chicken and the Quail* (2012) have won critical acclaim. The science fiction narratives and cyberpunk that tend to blur the distinction between science, fiction, reality and literature will remain in vogue because science and technology will go on affecting us in multiple ways, inspiring feelings of wonder and fear.

Another important concern of our times is the looming danger of ecological catastrophe consequent upon human intervention in environment. Earlier, when the

domains of science and literature were considered to be separate from each other and their boundaries were assiduously policed by scientists and literary authors respectively, literature dealt with environment in a very peripheral manner. Amitav Ghosh, in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) explains in detail why the mainstream literary authors avoided writing about any disaster that can inspire terror. The experience of horror aroused by the unpredictable weather phenomena earlier fell in the domain of 'horror' or 'Gothic,' but later on such experiences were confined to the realm of science fiction which for a long time did not find any place in the established canon. Thus, the mainstream novel did not take up issues related to science as different genres were assigned to realism and for depicting events which were unbelievable—such as improbable weather phenomena: "To introduce such happenings into a novel is in fact to court eviction from the mansion in which serious fiction has long been in residence; it is to risk banishment to the humbler dwellings that surround the manor house—those generic outhouses that were once known by names such as 'the Gothic,' 'the romance,' or 'the melodrama,' and have now come to be called 'fantasy,' 'horror,' and 'science fiction'" (32). It is only after the expansion of the canon that literary authors started confronting the environmental phenomena in their literary landscapes. Ghosh's own novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) foregrounds issues of climate change, colonization, rights of the refugees which come into conflict with environmentalism inspired by the western scholars. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, also published in 2004 consists of six different stories set in 19th century and a distant future in post-apocalyptic America devastated by nuclear destruction. *The Overstory* (2018), a sprawling novel by Richard Powers which made it to the 2018 Booker Shortlist, deals with concerns that are broadly ecocritical. The novel has nine American characters who, owing to their unique experiences with trees, come together to save forests from destruction. Very unusual texts dealing with nature and ecology such as Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2015 tr. 2016) and *The Inner Life of Animals* (2017) are also making waves. We are likely to see greater proliferation of nature writing in times to come since ecocide has direct bearing on our lives.

Another major concern of literary authors today is the ethnic, racial and religious conflict in different parts of the world. The Middle-East has been on the boil for a long time now. The growing tide of right-wing nationalism in Europe and America is giving sleepless nights to people. Arab countries, Afghanistan and Africa are in a state of turmoil. Literature emerging from these areas addresses these concerns. 1918 Nobel Peace Prize winner (with Denis Mukwege) Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State* recounts her own as well as her tribe Yazidi's struggles in Kojo village in Iraq, her capture by the Islamic State during the Second Iraqi Civil War, the violence and brutalities she was subjected to and her escape. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and *Exit West* (2017), Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) are texts that speak of the countries like Pakistan, Syria and Afghanistan torn apart by ethnic and religious strife. India also has witnessed sporadic occurrences of communal riots starting with perhaps the bloodiest riots in the history of humankind during India's Partition. The violence that has scarred India finds an echo in works such as Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Jaspreet Singh's *Helium* (2014), Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) among others.

Digital technologies have led to the production of electronic literature in the form of

hypertext and the new ways of socializing using digital networks have given rise to Text-Talk novels which are constructed like blogs, email exchanges, instant messaging format narratives. The story is told almost completely in dialogues simulating social network exchanges. Graphic novels with cartoons/photos have also made a mark on the literary scene. Sarnath Banerjee's *Doab Dil* (2019), is a narrative that brings together drawings and texts and is positioned between fiction and non-fiction. The possible ways in which future technologies will impact writing in future are difficult to predict.

This brief, though inadequate, survey does point towards future writing that will be very different from what we generally consider literature. The world is changing and so is our cultural response to it. Future trends in prose narrative will depend upon how we respond to the way change affects us.

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Changing Dynamics of the Written Word: Reviewing Emerging Trends in 21st century Literature"

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Abstract

The trends of twenty first century are in continuum to the trends of 20th century, and these trends are about the global culture, our day-to-day lives and about the effect of technology and power structures on society. Historiographic meta-fiction, non-fiction, memoirs or biographical texts are powerful writings that highlight the history, politics and culture of nations. The spotlight is on power-equations as well as human rights and human values, giving a new vision, a new direction to readers of literature. New genres of study include political non-fiction, revisiting mythology, graphic novels, LGBTQ writings, Cli-Fi, folklore and unconventional techniques and methods in writings as well as presentations inclusive of theatre and across mediums.

What was considered as mass-market read is being considered as serious literature, as the present century canvas of literature is ready to embrace non-canonical writings in its folds.

Key Words: Trends, Fiction, Mythology, Meta-fiction, Literature, Nonfiction, Memoirs

"Change is the only constant in life"

--Heraclitus

Alexander Solzhenitsyn said: "Literature transmits incontrovertible condensed experience from generation to generation. In this way literature becomes the living memory of a nation." In the 21st century, world is a global village and the literature written and read in present times dismisses boundaries. World literature is no more fragmented and compartmentalized into nations, countries, cults, sects. It starts belonging to the world of readers. With much fluidity and flexibility due to technology, literature belongs to the hi-definition era--multi-hued, multi-faceted, multi-layered. Kindle and e-books are facilitators, but the space of printed books cannot be squeezed or abated.

It is true to say that books are carriers of civilization and without them history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled and thoughts and speculations are at a standstill. People of this generation are searching and in constant quest to seek and create meanings. They are carving paths out of the innumerable challenges of today and no more want to

remain entrenched and entrapped in the linear, framed, constructed set-ups of culture, values, thoughts, ideas etc. The trends of present times are about life, culture and surroundings or in other words we can say global culture defining trends. The title of the paper is suggestive of the fact that what is going around us, what is happening to us, what is going into making of society we live in, is visible in our literature-- the written word. 21st century literature has its roots in all the times gone by but it is branching and blossoming now. Hybridity and experimentation are the *dernier cri* in literature. Airport picks or roadside sales are not of popular fiction anymore, but of serious literature that people want to read.

While listing trends of 21st century literature it's pertinent not to lose sight of the kaleidoscopic trends of 20th century which is split into Pre-War; Post-War; Post 1950; Post 1980 and at the turn of the century inclusive of Cubism, Existentialism, Magical-realism, Sur-realism, Modernism, Post-Modernism, Deconstruction, Feminism, Environmentalism etc. movements, theories and criticism. Politico-history and literature are porous genres. Historiographic metafiction emerged as a significant trend, and its significance cannot be ruled out even in this century. Books like Steve Coll's *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2016* or Kenneth R. Timmerman's *ISIS Begins : A Novel of The Iraq War* or Malala Yousafzai's *I am Malala : The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* or *We are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* are not just non-fiction/ autobiographical/ Memoirs/ or biographical texts but are powerful writings that highlight the history, politics and culture of nations. The spotlight is on the power-equations, gun-debate, violence, human rights, biases and equality, justice and human values. Novels of Khaled Hosseini, Nadia Hashimi or Mohammed Hanif are the written word of unspoken lives. These books as well as similar texts deal with the big political questions, of shifting images of political processes and the decline in political engagement.

Non-fiction works of Thomas L. Friedman, author of *The World is Flat* and *Thank You for Being Late* and *Brief Answers to The Brief Questions* by Stephen Hawking and Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* stand out as they are account of our universe, Science, history, politics, culture, civilization, power structures and contradictions. These stand as reference literature for all analytical and critical interpretations. Similarly Upender Singh's *Political Violence in Ancient India* is a lengthy but comprehensive study of historical realities, debates and literature pertaining to ancient India. As he avers, "The history of ideas requires crossing not only spatial boundaries but also temporal ones. My book begins in the Twentieth century and ends in the twenty-first because many of the texts discussed here have inspired varied reactions and interpretations over the centuries, and will do so for a long time to come" (Singh : X).

Another trend is to revisit and relook at the intricacies of mythology. If in late 1990s *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were being deconstructed by scholars from varied perspectives creating new aporias, then in the present times a re-reading of these epics or grand metanarratives, scriptures and the Hindu/Greek/Roman mythologies gives a new direction, a new outlook to our understanding. It is revisiting mythology with a new vision. Some of the front runners in this genre are Amish Tripathi with his *Shiva Trilogy -The Immortals of Meluha* (2010), *The Secret of Nagas* (2011), and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013), and other books like *Ram-Scion of Ikshvaku* (2015) and *Sita-Warrior of Mithila* (2017); Ashok K

Banker who has written *Slayer of Kamsa and Prince of Ayodhya*; Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife, Menaka's Choice, Lanka's Princess and Sita's Sister*. Devdutt Pattanaik the Indian author explores the layers of meaning in our myths and legends, interpreting stories and symbols. His books include *Myth=Mithya: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (2006), *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* (2010); *Sita* (2013): *An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana*,. *Shyam* (2018): *Shiva to Shankar : Giving form to The Formless*; *Olympus* (2016). A lot of research has gone into the making of these works which are a fine blend of mythology and literature creating a new genre of study.

Interestingly, Devdutt Pattanaik has used illustrations and graphics in his work for explanation. Illustrations, graphic or visuals in heavily researched writings prove that these are no more colourful comics for children or comic strips for adolescents. This genre has taken a new dimension of reaching out to an audience who are well-read, and are deep into academics, as it touches complex situations and serious literary themes. It is alleged that writing graphic novels or illustrated works of fiction or non-fiction, is a marketing strategy, but the corollary lies in the fact that this approach appeals the readers mind. Graphic designing, contemporary art and literary texts collaborate to create and innovate new methodologies. This is the power of technology. *Cult of Chaos* by Shweta Taneja or the very popular *Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney fall in this category. Graphics in no way intends to limit the mind of the reader, rather it expands the horizons of imagination. Web comics on internet or on kindle or as e-book are the trends. Till now all this was not considered serious literature and was termed as popular literature or mass-market genre fiction.

21st century will have to give place to this kind of non-canonical, non-mainstream literature, as this is the century of acceptance and tolerance. The murky boundaries diffuse. It was believed that serious literature meant plots with conflict and formal artistry, whereas popular literature was meant for masses who were unable to decipher the complexities of human mind and emotions. But the present century literature has to envelop and embrace these baby trends, the identity seeking trends, the innovative trends. Another culture defining and a trend trying to find visibility on the huge canvas of literature is the LGBTQ literature. These are works which deal with the problems of sexuality. At one time it was a taboo to talk about Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals or Transgenders. The changing culture and material dimensions of sex and sexuality enables the much or rather less talked about queer theory and the range of identity-conscious sexual practices to not let it remain a marginalized subject. One cannot ignore the writings of Laxminarayan Tripathi--*Me Hijra, Me Laxmi; Red Lipstick* or A. Revathi's *A Truth About Me : A Hijra Story* or Vivek Shraya's *She of the Mountains; Babyji Abha Dawesar ; Boy Erased* by Garrard Conley, to list a few. "Central to many of the debates in lesbian, gay and queer criticism over the last thirty years are concerns linked to these issues of visibility, representation, transgression and dissidence" (Waugh, 435). Sexuality is not just in terms of sexual acts but is viewed as principal truth of culture and human life and needs to be read and discussed with a more open mind and sensitivity. It is the literature of resistance, protest and visibility. Texts by and about sex workers and domestic workers too need to be read as literature as literature is a mirror of society and its time, race and milieu.

Cli-fi or climate fiction is a blend of Eco-fiction and Science-fiction as these are writings that deal with calamities of climate change, human induced global warming and man-made ecological disasters which are gradually leading human race and planet earth

towards its catastrophe. Apocalyptic climate changes are a matter of concern and these cli-fi novels, map and envision a futuristic world inclusive of death of the planet. There are intuitive words on human race; words that enable us to reconfirm our faith in human sensibility and sensitivity. This is a genre to be explored, analyzed and to be incorporated in our curriculum to sensitize the readers towards environmental responsibilities, to the challenges of life styles and concerns about human well-being. Though a baby genre of 21st century, yet it has a long list of books to its credit. To list a few--*The Road* by Cormac McCarthy; *The Bone Clock* and *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell; *The Carbon Diaries; 2015* by Saci Lloyd; *Flight Behavior* by Barbara Kingslover; *We Are All completely Beside Ourselves* by Karen Joy Fowler; *The Great Derangement* by Amitab Ghosh; *The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi; and *Odds Against Tomorrow* by Nathaniel Rich. Thus cli-fi is no more restricted and bound to the realm of futuristic or imagined territories but is the literature of concern.

At the turn of the century, writers like Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing and Ray Bradbury made an indelible imprint on the minds of readers. Effect of technology and use of power structures morph our world too fast and this finds place in science-fiction writings of 21st century. Some of the novels that seek attention while referring to sci-fi are *Ink* by Salerina Vourvoulis; *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel; *Rainbows End* by Vernor Vinge; *The Humans* by Matt Haig; *Moxyland* by Lauren Benkes; *Super Sad True Love Story* by Gary Shteyngart; and *Generation -14* by Priya Sarukkai Chabria. Sci-fi is a genre that is rich in posing questions about social concerns and issues; the unequal political and personal power of men and women; speculation of changing social and ethical scenario; and allegorical representations of different race and society. Hardcore science fiction is based on real theories from various branches of science like Physics, Chemistry, Genetics etc. and an example is Stephen Hawking's books.

Another kindergarten trend in this century is writing about Spaces--The Public Sphere and the Personal Sphere--the realm of social life and the area of private individual freedom. Writings under this frame include works by exiled/refugee writers/ displaced communities inclusive of Tibetans or Rohingyas who portray the trauma loss of homeland, rootlessness and belongingness. These are not just diasporic writings but are categorized as a separate category of writings. The world of the Web and e-literature are the new trend of this century. Literature across mediums is visible in public sphere in the world of global net, the virtual reality in a TV oriented culture based on sensory stimulation, disjointed weaving of ideas through integrated technology.

The world of theatre in an unconventional way is being accepted and appreciated all over. For example, *The Legend of Ila* by Barefoot and Eastwind is a musical retelling of mythological character Ila. It is a story in song. *Nidravatwam* by Adishakti group of Pondicherry is a dramatic presentation of characters from *Ramayana*. Memoirs are the personal sphere for public consumption, and a whole lot of personal stories are available to read, analyze, interpret, reinterpret and at times even to discard. Spaces also refers to living spaces--urban/semi urban/ and rural and how these affect the mind set of people.

Folklore and its presentation in written form, its interpretation and presentation in dramatic or narrative form is another trend that not only holds attention but also is a pointer for future research by young scholars. To archive the folklore, to translate and to write explanatory notes about it is a trendsetter genre. Literature together with language preserves and protects the culture of any society or nation.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to mention that these trends are eye-openers or in other word windows for scholars in a fluid and flexible age. There are many more trends, swings and approaches that have not been touched upon due to varied limitations. This also includes the ongoing trends of 20th century like womanism, marginalized literature as of Dalits, Tribals, diaspora, protest literature, resistance literature etc. At the same time let us not forget that 21st century is far ahead of previous times where any movement or idea does not stay on for too long. Present times are fast changing and at times it is difficult to keep abreast of all.

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From In/visibility to En/visioning: Postmodernist Play in the 21st Century African American Fiction

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Abstract

African-American fiction navigates the whole range of black experience spanning from 19th century autobiographical account of slave life to the modern sensibilities of alienation and isolation. The present paper throws light on the shifting traditions in African-American writing and showcases the new thematic concerns and experimentation undertaken by various African-American authors. It brings out the major modernist tropes created by black novelists, and how they later paved the way to playful postmodernist practices. The paper showcases that the 21st century African-American fiction has re-oriented the spiritual quest of the blacks into new directions of futuristic world. Neither the race nor the in/visibility of black is outmoded, yet the African-American creative imagination is capable to visualize new fictional-scapes wherein their utopian and dystopian vision plays in and out. Their fictional configurations accommodate the multicultural reality of America indicating what different forms it may assume. Moreover, contemporary African American novelists revisit the traditional stylistics to reinvent new literary modes of writing.

Key words: *Modernity, postmodernism, science fiction, race, politics, multiculturalism*

African American fiction is a rich repository of blacks' experiences in the promised land of America. It portrays the African-American journey from dark corners of plantation in deep American South to the buoyant rays of American dream chased by many blacks who migrated to the American north for better prospects of education and employment. It presents a wide spectrum of what it means to be a black in America exploring various nuances of American life. Being an art form, the said genre reconstructs the black American experience in its aesthetic contours but, at the same time, having deeply rooted in the socio-political reality; it brings out numerous concrete facts of African American experience. In fact, it corresponds to the shifting moods and responses of collective black consciousness throbbing at the core of literary sensibilities of African American authors.

Certainly, African-American fiction has evolved over the years. It might have begun as an amateur attempt in the form of slave narratives but later culminated in a diverse range of rich literary output of unmatched dexterity. African-American authors identify

with the real life challenges of black populace and attempt to pen down their predicament. As a part of larger American literary tradition, they employ as well as expand the same by contributing to the corpus of American writing. However, the unique savor of black fiction remains intact and the distinct literary sensibility of African American artists shape the peculiar mold of their novels to present an authentic account of Black American ordeal. Black fiction navigates the whole range of African-American experience spanning from 19th century autobiographical account of slave life to the modern sensibilities of alienation and isolation.

Shifting Traditions

It is observed that while ushering into the era of modernity, African-American fiction manifested an experimental zeal better expressed by the phrase “make it new”, a phrase given by Ezra Pound. Following the modernist mode of writing, African American avant-garde tried to address the more complex aspects of human behavior and psychology in terms of black experience. These authors displaced the earlier narrative conventions and overwrought thematic concerns of 19th century novelists. As opined by Baldick, “Modernist literature is characterized chiefly by a rejection of 19th-century traditions and of their consensus between author and reader, conventions of realism ... or traditional meter.” (Baldick 162) In his statement Baldick hints to the overall literary scenario of early 20th century wherein literary writers opted to forgo the old practices in favor of inventing new methods that can best suit to represent new challenges of emerging modern world. Since the advancement of science, increasing urbanization and industrialization gave birth to a new life style, literary sensibilities also underwent a change to articulate the plight of the modern man. However, the implications of the modernity were not identically same for all across diverse literary traditions. It was a wide spectrum of *modernisms* re-invigorating multiple trends in different literary traditions opening a vista which, perhaps, “was never really one thing, never really unified.” (Dettmar 4)

Indeed, the ongoing cultural transition caught the black fiction too in its sweeping upsurge. As a result, 19th century slave narratives were replaced by the stories set in new urban locations and black protagonists imbued with the Harlem spirit of modern man became the true representative of black sentiments. Many African-American authors such as William Wells Brown, Frank J. Webb, Charles W. Chesnutt, Sutton E. Griggs, James Weldon Johnson, Frances E. W. Harper, and Edward A. Johnson transformed traditional representations of blackness and highlighted the tragic mulatto motif. Writers like Dubois brought forth 'double consciousness' of the black whereas Wright, Ellison and Baldwin foregrounded the theme of African-American 'invisibility' in the white world in their literary classics. As the narrator hero of Ellison's *Invisible Man* proclaims, “...I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible ... simply because people refuse to see me.” (Ellison 3) He articulates his quest for identity in the words, “And I love light. Perhaps you'll think it strange that an invisible man should need light, desire light, love light. But maybe it is exactly because I *am* invisible. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form.” (Ellison 6) Interestingly, when Ellison's narrator hero, while on his way to substantiate his existence by validating his true identity, meets an accident in the factory named 'Liberty paints', a place that symbolizes modern capitalistic America, he finds himself incarcerated in a glass case like machine. He is pinned

down like a guinea pig to treat for his 'black' malady. In his gradually losing sense of being, he realizes:

The machine droned, and I knew definitely that they were discussing me and steeled myself for the shocks, but was blasted nevertheless. The pulse came swift and staccato, increasing gradually until I fairly danced between the nodes. My teeth chattered. I closed my eyes and bit my lips to smother my screams. Warm blood filled my mouth. (237)

As manifested in Ellison's case, the generic modernist fervor gets remolded in distinct African-American mode of modernism wherein a black man's alienation and quest for identity turns him into a vagabond and the author juxtaposes the genre of bildungsroman and 19th century realism with the modernistic stream of consciousness and interior monologue. African American fiction presents a litany of such experiments to illustrate how African American novels nurture the literary art through novelty of experimentations.

Modernist Concerns, Postmodernist Drifts

As the 20th century modern sensibility oriented the black fiction into new thematic concerns and experimentation, the 21st century led them into novel directions of disillusion and deliberations. Their fiction draws upon new developments like the increasing network communication, virtual experience and multicultural societies. The 21st century African American fiction envisages an experience of breaking boundaries and emergence of fused global identities. It is interesting to note how the African-American authors respond to the changing cultural realities of the time and integrate their fiction into larger American literary tradition despite adhering to the black consciousness. With the advent of 21st century, African-American fiction enters into a new realm of postmodernist play. Contemporary African American writers visualize a number of possibilities through speculative fiction that juxtaposes myth with science, space with time, themes with stylistics and so on for creating an imagined world that is no more confined to racial, gender, or national borders. These authors dig deep in the past traditions to find the future ways of expression and expectations. They transcend the geographical boundaries to set an interstellar space. They blur the color lines to bring out grey areas. Moreover, they experiment with the literary forms to create new genres for showing the interconnectivities of multiple threads of an artistic configuration, whether literary or otherwise. While interpreting a scene in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Dana A. Williams presents a beautiful poetic metaphor to understand the development of African American literary tradition. She states:

What began in 1853 with William Wells Brown's *Clotel* has evolved in this new millennium into the contemporary African American novel, which actively and effectively alters the discourse of American literature and culture. Like *Sula* and *Nel*, the writer strokes blades of grass (the imagination) to find her twig (the genre or the medium). She tears away the twig's layer (its excessive conventions) until it is smooth enough to use. She clears a path of her own and begins to trace patterns (the "tradition"). More prone toward innovation than replication, she uses her twig to dig deeper and wider. But, alas, the inflexible twig—the genre itself—breaks. So it must be modified if the "grass play" is to continue. If the genre is going to

be useful, the limitations must be abandoned. Small defiling things, unusable traditions and conventions, must be put in a hole and covered. In the end, the "grass play," in its attempt to sustain itself, literally changes that which was and creates a thing anew. (Williams 99-100)

The above metaphor astutely pictures literary transition. It is significant to note what are those traditions which African American authors break or follow? Do these writers take them in their customary form or invent new literary devices out of them? How do they mold the established literary practices? What do they pick up and how do they play with fictional mode to actualize what Dana calls, "genre modification as discourse-altering act" (Williams 100). In the words of Henry L. Gates Jr., it is a process of "repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference" (Gates xxix). Interestingly, many works by contemporary African American novelists redirect than revise the literary practices at the level of both content and style. 21st century African American writers may take race for theory but are capable to transcend it for defining new black subjectivity. Their black heroes are not bent just to learn from ancestral wisdom but are also capable to visualize a new world created in a/historic context at remote time and place. For example, what Delany envisions in the interplanetary ahistoric setting of his diptych novel *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984) shifts to the historical genre of *Phallos* (2004) that takes shape of a modern online essay and digs deep into the history of a nonexistent novel titled *Phallos*. African-American modernist concerns pave way to an interesting postmodernist play with creative imagination. Their fictional world subverts the dialectics of multiple discourses which have been built up over the centuries on the ground of various constructed binaries such as nature/nurture, black/white, past/present, man/woman, ancient/modern and so on.

Visualization of New Worlds: Re-orienting African American Quest through Science Fiction

Black 'invisibility', what emerged as the leitmotif in the 20th century African American fiction, gradually thaws out in a sense of inevitable black presence that a white world cannot afford to evade. The black does no more remain 'invisible' in the 21st century African-American fiction. African American authors have made his/her existence visible enabling their black protagonists to assume an identity despite all odds. They portray black characters as heroes, who resist as well as rebel for their dignity. At the same time these protagonists also emerge as modern wo/men living amidst the fragmentary reality of attenuating traditional beliefs. They also witness breaking down of a number of longstanding socio-political institutions. Contemporary black fiction accomplishes an actualization of the African-American 'self' through its fertile literary agency. Moreover, they also embrace urbanity, alienation, disorientation as a part of modern reality posing new challenges. In the due course of time, modernity refurbishes for postmodernist rejoinder to the changing cultural condition. Hence, subsequently, while stepping into new century, African American literary journey proliferates rather than converges with the forceful assertion of black sentiments.

21st African-American writing has re-oriented the African-American spiritual quest into new directions of futuristic world. They visualize new spaces that can accommodate diverse identities irrespective of class, gender, race, nationality and ethnicity.

Contemporary black writers prefer to ponder over human flaws, which are not necessarily race specific. They endeavor to analyze the glitches of contemporary culture over a broad spectrum rather than just looking at them through color glass. Moreover, their fictional configuration visualizes corrective measures and their search for ideal society is not confined to one group or section. 21st century African-American fiction, along with drawing attention to the persistent issue of race, attempts to speak for humanity. It not only embraces what exists as factual realities in a given socio-political setup but also engages in an imaginative play to find out what could be done to change it. Writers like Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Walter Mosley, Nora K. Jemisin, Victor LaValle employ fantasy to envision the possibilities of the future. Their writings recount the distressing choices what humankind is presently faced with and how to find a way out of human *faux pas*. Like Butler's works "Amnesty" (2003) and "The Book of Martha" (2003) explore the possibilities to fix the damage done by the destructive ways of all species including both humans and non-humans. Similarly, her novel *Fledgling* (2005) narrates the story of a hybrid human-vampire woman who attempts to learn how to authenticate her new inter-species identity of 'Ina'.

Walter Mosley's *Futureland* showcases a post cyberpunk dystopian world crowded by devastated humans. The common populace is subjected to oppressive agencies incarnated in rich technocrats. The fictional landscape of the novel indicates what Mark Fisher calls 'SF capital', elaborated by Kodwo Eshun in the words, "Power now deploys a mode... *SF* (science fiction) *capital*. *SF* capital is the synergy, the positive feedback between future-oriented media and capital. The alliance between cybernetic futurism and "New Economy" theories argues that information is a direct generator of economic value. Information about the future therefore circulates as an increasingly important commodity." (Eshun 290) Astonishingly, what the novel presages is that technological advancement does not open a very promising prospect for common populace. On the contrary, it creates a place, wherein technology and capitalistic forces writ large, portends uncertainty, suspicion and aberrations. Mosley's fiction seems to warn humanity of its dangerous modern ways of advancement amidst the postmodernist milieu of resistance, skepticism, and pluralism. The question that looms large in the backdrop is what will human progress lead to-- a better world or an unpredictable break down as indicated in the nervous panic attacks of Neil Hawthorne in *En Masse*? The author brings out irony of 'development' in a very subtle way.

The Politics of Race: Past, Present, Future

Besides visualization of utopian/dystopian landscapes, 21st century African-American fiction also allows the dark fantasies to play along for a better understanding of contemporaneity. These authors question how far the politics of race is still a part of American cultural discourse. In fact, they play it out in novel ways and stage them in the form of virtual drama more than actually existent reality. In the present postmodernist culture discourse takes place at a more advanced platform such as electronic media and internet. The fictional representation of these discourses showcases its subtle implications on the collective imagination of the people involved. Race could never be ousted from American imagination. Despite all claims of a post-racial world, it is present as a figment of haunting past. What now matters is to understand the role of 'race' in the present context. A widely acclaimed cosmopolitan society, identified by distinct imagery ranging from 'melting pot' to the 'salad bowl,' needs to investigate its own ambivalent propositions. The

shifting attitude of dis/integration itself highlights the irony of the whole phenomenon. Race which is now perceived as a fragment of past has actually ended with the past? Or it still hangs out in the present in new form and may eventually affect the future.

There are a number of African American writers who delineate the complex phenomenon of racial dis/integration in their fictional configurations. For example, Ishmael Reed addresses the vital issue of multi-ethnicity and the complexity corroborated to it. His novel *Conjuring Hindi* (2018) re-stages the pro and anti-slavery debate which is deliberately arranged by the capitalistic agencies to cash on the collective mob sentiments of both conservatives and liberals. Reed exposes the forces working behind it and the farce which it creates by ensnaring the gullible individuals as an easy target. The plot of the novel evolves around Peter Bowman, nicknamed Boa who is offered to confront Shashi Paramara, an Indian American. Both of them are invited to participate in a television debate on slavery. Boa finds the entire plan a fallacy, not only ethically wrong, but also demeaning and compromising as a true intellectual. Yet the agent Jack Sharkey justifies the offer to Boa on two-fold ground including the handsome compensation associated with it. Both of them discuss the issue:

'Be reasonable. Yes, you'd be making money but at the same time you will remind the world so that such a human catastrophe will never happen again.'

"I don't know. It doesn't seem right. Why didn't you get Chuck Skippie to do it? Something like this is right up his alley. He could argue both pro and con if the price is right."

"We couldn't meet his price. Besides, he's rolling in dough from that *Trace Your Steps* show he moderates. You know the one where he tells stars about their ancestry" (42).

The author evinces how the 19th century political debate is re-played by the 21st century media. He presents the entire drama in a satirical garb. The pro-slavery arguments echo the writings of many 19th and early 20th century authors like William Gilmore Simms, John P. Kennedy and also Thomas Dixon who published *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and its sequels; *The Clan's Man* (1905) and *The Traitor* (1907). Reed does not intend just to evoke the racial past but he emphasizes what it actually entails today. The 21st century post-racial present in which slavery is a political and capitalistic card to be used for its bestowed advantages constitutes one of the novel's dialectics. And, interestingly it does not end with the staged television debate but extends to Boa's basement, where ironically Shashi Parmara has to hide for his protection. The dark underground cell symbolically represents the subconscious terrain of American imagination. The author exposes the hypocrisy of post-racial multi-ethnicity, wherein diverse ethnic groups are staged against each other for the political cum capitalistic benefit of the selected few. Shashi, who initially emerged as a champion of cultural assimilation, also called an "assimilated Anglicized Indian" by Boa, later turns into "Indian nigger" (Reed 37) being hated by larger American society. He is hunted for his ethnic association after an American passenger plane is shot down by India. Presenting the irony, the author seems to ask how far the conception of 'race' is revised in the post-racial society. Does it not matter anymore? Or it has always been present in one or the other form and resurges when and how the situation demands. In the words of Ishmael Reed, "I think slavery is contemporary; the same institutions that existed in the plantation situation of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South (,) exist now" (Dick &

Singh, 120). The novel puts the promising vision of multiethnic America under intellectual surveillance to examine its real dynamics. In the same vein, another author LaValle also invokes the Jazz age America of 1920s in his novella *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016) to navigate the dark terrain of collective American consciousness. Lavalle re-works H. P. Lovecraft's story "The Horror at Red Hook" (1927) to narrate the theme of xenophobia from the perspective of a black man. The author evokes images of secret clubs, occult practices, black magic, and street gangs to reverse the racial underlining of Lovecraft's story. What Lavalle establishes is the upsetting apposition wherein the institutional racism is presented as more horrific than the mystic occultism practiced in the underworld of strange immigrants.

New Modes of Writing: 'Blueprint' Revisited

African-American fiction has a well-defined trajectory of development as an art form. It has a long legacy drawn upon the mainstream American literary tradition, oral narrative traditions of plantation, folk wisdom, peculiar Negro dialect and a number of ingenious stylistic experimentations. There has been a blueprint of fictional craft that gradually evolved with the contributions made by many African American stalwarts. These representative authors suggested what could and what should be the African American fictional art. Like Wright defines the role of a black writer in his "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937) in the words:

For the Negro writer to depict this new reality requires a greater discipline and consciousness than was necessary for the so-called Harlem school of expression. Not only is the subject matter dealt with far more meaningful and complex, but the new role of the writer is qualitatively different. The Negro writer's new position demands a sharper definition of the status of his craft, and a sharper emphasis upon its functional autonomy. (89)

What was theorized by Wright in the 20th century is later practiced by many African American authors in the coming age. However, the African American literary art was never bound to any given guideline. It has never been predictable and always looked for the novel ways to articulate strangulated thoughts and deep human sentiments. As in one her interviews Olympia Vernon announces:

I've got words stocked from the womb and I am about 30 years late in executing them. With all these years of waiting, all this buildup of words, I don't need to imitate. The words have been there and belong only to the characters in my mind. They are late coming, but they are emerging and they carry no blue print to push them along. (Stewart n.p.)

African-American writers' tryst with postmodernism has resulted in prolific literary output. Their works are not only credited for a new artistic overture but are also placed parallel to other seminal writings celebrated for canon formation. Like Ishmael Reed, who is considered as one of the major African-American postmodernist writers, is often compared with Thomas Pynchon and Donald Barthelme for his presentation of the postmodernist worldview. Reed's fiction exhibits disruption of form and style that shocks a reader out of his/her intellectual latency. Moreover, in his hand 'Neo-HooDooism' becomes a permanent form of resistance. In fact, contemporary African-American fiction reverses many a trend of the 20th century African American literary art. Shifting from the

early 20th century trends of protest novel and other prevalent realistic and existentialist modes of expression, 21st century African American authors allow a speculative fictional configuration using postmodernist devices. Their fictional creations foretell the inherent flaws and anticipated failures of coming of age world. The documentary details of socio-political reality are replaced by new postmodernist practices of irony, playfulness, intertextuality, anachronism and juxtaposition as manifested in Reed's tragic delineation of satirical comedy, Delany's efficient use of fantasy in building a transnational perception and Butler's and Nora K. Jemisin's dicey utopian/dystopian vision within the genre of science fiction. These authors attempt to create multicultural poetics, which not only enables to talk back to 'racial' past but also uses African American literary sensibility for imaginative re-construction of American culture and literature.

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Monstrous Trajectories: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and 21st Century Science Fiction

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Abstract

The paper is a study of Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein on its bicentennial year. The novel is acknowledged as the first true science fiction because it extrapolates the science of the day to create life. Victor Frankenstein assembles cadaver parts to form a being and animates it. He abandons the creature because it is hideous. All men ill-treat and hate it. In revenge the monster kills Victor's near and dear, after he is denied a female mate. Victor pursues it and in the attempt dies. The remorseful monster also goes away to die. The novel and its monster are metaphors for the irresponsibility of science and scientists. The 200 year old novel still influences the SF imagination in various forms like films. All SF ideas can be traced to this novel, even in the 21st century.

Key Words: *Mary Shelley. Frankenstein. Monster. Science Fiction. Films. Feminism. Technology derived from SF ideas. Robots. What Next? Cli-fi.*

"I think I do science fiction because I feel like if you're going to write realism about our time, science fiction is simply the best genre to do it in because we're living in a big science fiction novel now that we all co-write together."

-Kim Stanley Robinson

The 'big science fiction novel' of today, of the 21st Century, began 200 years ago. It started in the summer of 1816, by eighteen year old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin in Geneva as a challenge set by Lord Byron, to write a ghost story. She was with Percy Shelley, Dr. Pollidori and Claire Clairmont. She completed the novel and published it on 1st January 1818 as *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*. (No wonder that science fiction (SF) was categorized as fiction by "teens" for teens!).

Frankenstein, the eponymous and flawed protagonist of the novel, is a passionate experimenter. His unswerving ambition is to create new life. He gathers cadaver parts from graves and mortuaries, assembles them and finally animates the 'creature.' After he succeeds in his labors, Frankenstein is repulsed by the sight of the "monster," whom he describes as hideous. This rejection of the monster leads to a 'cascade of tragic calamities'. Actually, at first the creature is no monster, but rather, is kind and gentle. Tragically, the creature soon learns to fear humans, who, terrified by his appearance, drive him away with stones.

In conceiving her story, Mary Shelley was influenced by the nascent science of the day and particularly by early experiments in electricity and chemistry. Mary Shelley's was

the first novel to extrapolate and exploit such current developments in science as a means to create life. *Frankenstein* is also the first creation story to use scientific experimentation as its method and hence is regarded as the first major work in the science fiction genre. It also creatively examines the moral and ethical consequences of scientific experiments and of scientists. Science is, by its very nature, an exploration of new frontiers, a means to discover and test new ideas, and an impetus for paradigm shifts. This is also the essence of SF and in addition it imagines the effects / impact of science and technology on Man and his world.

The subtitle of the book, *The Modern Prometheus*, primes the reader for the theme of the dire consequences of "playing God." The title connects *Frankenstein* with the mythical figure of Prometheus, who defied the Gods, stole fire and gave it to the humans, and was eternally punished for it. For many contemporaries Prometheus was regarded as the great protagonist of humanity. The creature, not Frankenstein, can be seen as a Promethean figure: "being bound to the rock of deformity which offers no hope for anything but hostility and fear from human beings" (147). The monster is forever to be tortured, as Prometheus, although he has not himself committed the act of defiance. Mary splits the Prometheus myth, as it were, with Victor crossing boundaries natural to man, and the creature suffering for it. However, Victor is condemned by the creature, and they both share the punishment. The creature did not ask to be made, but yet he has to suffer the consequences of his creator's actions. He is treated unfairly by all he encounters, due to his hideous appearance. He saves a girl from drowning, and her friend shoots him: "My sufferings were augmented by the oppressive sense of the injustice and ingratitude of their infliction" (154).

Victor fails to parent the child he has created and abandons him in a world which treats him cruelly. One could say that Frankenstein denies the creature access to the human community by abandoning him. While valiant in his struggles to create life, he immediately becomes the coward, assuming his creation to be a menace and running from it in terror. When the creature kills little William and frames Justine, Victor does nothing to save her from her unjust execution: "a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman and would not have exculpated her who suffered through me" (76).

The creature has self learnt all the human skills like language and culture from his observations of the De Lacey family. This is his virtual 'school' that shows the creature how anomalous his own position is without family, parents, friends, and relations. The creature longs for a family or at least for acceptance. Mary has imbued the creature with human features, desires and needs; the desire to be loved and to love, but still he does not fit into human society and is beaten and humiliated. He declares; "should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared ever-lasting war against the species, and more than all, against him who had formed me and sent me forth to this insupportable misery" (131).

Victor never fully acknowledges his creature's existence. He treats him as an abomination and an object, a 'flesh-construct.' The monster's misery comes from his desire to be recognized by his creator; to have an identity. The monster tells Victor Frankenstein:

Yet, you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble, by the annihilation of one of us. You propose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. (95)

If Frankenstein would have honored his duty towards his creation and parented it, the story

would have been quite different.

As a solution to his alienation, the creature pleads that a female, a mate be made for him. He assures that they will go as far away as possible and cause no harm to any humans. Victor begins to construct a female creature and at the final stage he destroys it fearing the prospect of the two procreating. He fears that together they may form “a race of devils ... upon the earth, which might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (131). Victor fears that a female might become “ten thousand times more malignant than her mate” (131). The monster confronts Victor after he destroys the female and declares:

Slave. I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you, you are my creator, but I am your master – obey! (133)

This is the breaking point for the creature and the end of Elizabeth on her wedding night. It is the last straw for Victor, who begins the unsuccessful pursuit of the monster until his own death. The monster laments before the dead Victor calling him his final victim. Declares that he will also die on a pyre and allow his ashes to be scattered on the Northern ice fields. Thus ends the tale of Victor Frankenstein and his creature.

Frankenstein is a precautionary tale. Obsessed with the impulse to conquer and transform nature, humans risk extending beyond their proper reach. Victor Frankenstein comes to rue the ambition to become “greater than his nature will allow” and creates a monster to satisfy his hubris. The etymology of monster suggests the complex roles that monsters play within society. 'Monster' derives from the Latin, *monstrare*, meaning 'to demonstrate', and *monere*, 'to warn'. Monsters, in essence, are 'demonstrative' 'portents' 'warning' of dire consequences for playing God. Victor and his creature seem to warn that 'Hubris' after all will be the death of all due to the monsterisation of, not Victor or his creature, but of the people.

One perception is that the real villain in Shelley's novel is neither Victor Frankenstein nor his creation – it is the intolerant, torch-wielding villagers. Only after experiencing their cruelty does the creature become a monster, exacting revenge on those who refused to give him a chance. The creature decides to retaliate with violence: “I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?” (140) He simply responds in the same way as the humans have acted towards it, with violence. It is such devastating experiences that ultimately turns him into a murderer and therefore christened as a monster. This 'monsterisation' is a truly tragic consequence with a cathartic significance, which is further signified by the sub title “Modern Prometheus”. Prometheus is cast into eternal punishment by his 'people,' the Olympian gods. So is the monster who is punished by the society he is 'delivered' into. An identification, a brilliant device added on by Mary, that enhances the cathartic process.

The problem of the monster had always overshadowed a more profound contribution of Mary Shelley. In fact, *Frankenstein* inaugurated the feminist tradition in SF. There are many critical studies of the novel that are feminist discussions. The creation of the creature without a woman's contribution is a starting point. Frankenstein's failure to mother his creation is another aspect of the feminist perspective. Mary being the daughter of one of the earliest feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, is another motivating context. Sandra

M Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979) is one of the first serious feminist studies of *Frankenstein*. The feminist perspective has also opened up the SF genre to women writers and critics. Science fiction allows an extra elbow room to explore the woman question. New worlds can be created as models of an egalitarian society; famous feminist works like Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Joanna Russ's *Female Man* (1975), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis series and many more. The contemporary situation boasts of very accomplished writers and, in turn, have generated critical appreciations of merit. While, Mary Shelley had to publish her work anonymously, the SF writers of today are sought after by publishers and readers.

However much Mary Shelley's original tale is distorted or retold or reimagined, the myth of Frankenstein will always have a place in the popular imagination and consciousness. And the underlying theme of the novel— the dilemma of scientific inquiry—our desire for progress and our fear of what it may bring—is a timeless and universal theme, with so much emphasis nowadays on responsible innovation, this message finds wide resonance even after two hundred years.

Shelley's novel remained relegated to a position of a minor Gothic fiction, for almost hundred years. Then came the movies at the beginning of the 20th century. Starting with the 1902 film *Le Voyage dans La Lune (A Trip to the Moon)*. SF films began to flourish. In 1910 came the first *Frankenstein* silent film by Edison Studios. James Whale as director with Boris Karloff as the monster came *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). Other films were: *Son of Frankenstein* (1939); *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943); *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). The *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) with Terence Fisher as director was the First in the Hammer series with Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. Then came *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973) by director Jack Smight and screen play by Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy. In 1974 came two films: *Young Frankenstein* by Mel Brooks and Andy Warhol's *Frankenstein*. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) directed by Kenneth Branagh was an important film; the 2015 *Victor Frankenstein* was the latest. These films spanning a century by themselves attest to the interest and popularity of the Frankenstein novel. There were plays and TV serials too.

The development in special effects, animation and other digital media have encouraged the production of science fictional films. In reality, it is the proliferation of SF films that has made SF a familiar name even to the lay man. The SF films underscore the dominance of the visual media in the current context. The film *Avatar* (2009) grossed more than, \$2 billion, perhaps the highest box office collection of 21st century. The print medium has largely suffered, therefore. But reading by itself has not lost its attraction; there are digital/ eBooks. The same way as science and technology being benefitted by SF ideas, the films are being republished as SF stories. Many novels available now are from film scripts adopted for readership. The arrival of the ecommerce giants like Amazon has made available SF books, print or digital.

Along with the films, literary and scientific interest on Frankenstein too has become more prolific. The Frankenstein or Mary Shelley studies gained greater attention as the readership of the novel and its criticism grew manifold. The bicentennial year of *Frankenstein* added an impetus of its own. For instance, an essay by Lisa Vargo traces developments in Mary Shelley studies, which arose in the late 1960s after a period of critical

neglect. A proliferation of work on Shelley has been influenced by the much more recent appearance of scholarly and paperback editions of her writings. The paper surveys critical trends of her fictions, biographical writings, travel literature, and editing.

In fact there are more than 250 papers that study the science behind the novel or even, in an interesting reverse twist draw inspiration from it, according to Jon Cohen (2018) in the *Science* magazine. Over time, the influence ran from the novel back to science. For example, David J. Rhees (2009) discusses how 8-year-old Earl Bakken in 1932 saw the famous *Frankenstein* movie starring Boris Karloff which kindled his interest in combining electricity and medicine. Bakken later established Medtronic, which developed the first transistorized cardiac pacemaker. In fact there are glossaries for the use and understanding of "Franken-words" like 'Frankenfood' and 'Frankencells.' J. Craig Venter, a pioneer in genomics based in San Diego, California, has been called a Frankenstein for his effort to create artificial bacteria with the smallest possible genomes. He's an ardent fan of Shelley's tale. "I think she's had more influence with that one book than most authors in history," says Venter (Belt 137). To the charge of playing God, James Watson once famously declared: "If scientists don't play God, who else is going to?" (Belt 137).

Scientific studies apart, the creative writers are also rooted in the Shelleyian mode. The influence of the *Frankenstein* novel is continuing ever since it was acknowledged as the first science fiction novel. Brain Aldiss in his significant 1973 book of SF history, *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction*, claimed that *Frankenstein* was the first true science fiction novel because it exploited the science of its time through extrapolation to act as a means of giving life. Victor Frankenstein assembles body parts to create a being by using electrical and life sciences. There is no supernatural interventions in animating the creature. Aldiss asserts: "The Faustian theme is brought dramatically up-to-date, with science replacing supernatural machinery" (1973:26). He reiterates that Mary "makes it plain that her central marvel shares the essential quality of scientific experiment, rather than the hit-and-miss of legerdemain. She has Frankenstein create a life a second time" (1986:41). In addition, Mary creates a framework for the moral and ethical standards to be followed by scientists. Thus, Frankenstein has become the well spring of all SF related imaginations and creative endeavors.

It is, therefore, generally proposed that the 20th Century's defining literary genre was SF. This reflects the science fictional predominance in literary projects, popularized by the pulp magazines and later by the novel and film sub genres. The SF of these formative years came to be associated with the concept of "What if?" Alternate histories, space explorations, machines and doomsdays were the staple themes and forms. The early explorative imaginations were replaced by the New Wave SF. Then came the postmodern SF and its Cyberpunk subgenre, followed by the recent 'post human' and 'trans human' subgenres. These trends began to take on new forms that began to explore the "What Next?" question, a new orientation. The twenty-first century, thus, is undeniably the century science fiction built, through the previous century. Into the second decade of the 21st century, we are witness to the world transforming powers of science extrapolated in contemporary SF.

"What next?" is a question that is answered in myriad ways, in a variety of forms and styles. To illustrate: The year 2000 was marked by special 2000 word SF stories published by leading journals like *Nature*. One story by Joan Slonczewski "Tuberculosis

bacteria join UN" (Year's Best SF 6) is a wonderful satire on what are possible. It continues the Frankenstein motif through creating cybernetically enhanced bacteria. These 'cyberbacteria' were inducted in to the UN. "It's probably true that bacteria invented mass homicide but then, second-millennial humans perfected the art. If Stalin joined the UN, why not TB?" Like the Frankenstein monster and many other artificial creations like robots, the cyberbacteria develop self-awareness and profess "true brotherly love of their human hosts". A Swiss 'spokesbeing' "denies rumors that the cybermicrobes' example will finally convince Switzerland to join the UN." Joan Slonczewski is a prolific, popular, SF writer and also a US professor of biology, specializing in genetics.

The positive attitude of the 'conscious' cyber bacteria is the recent expression of negating the famous early 20th century SF notion, 'Frankenstein Complex.' One major fall out of the Frankenstein novel is the creation of the monster through a scientific process. The product of that science turns out to be a destructive monster, therefore, by extension, science and its products are also potentially dangerous. The fear of science and the scientists who create such products / devices are inevitable. It was Isaac Asimov who first found a way to reject the 'Frankenstein Complex' through his programmed robots. Starting from 1939, his 'positronic' robot stories, programmed with the famous 'Three Laws of Robotics,' prevented them from harming humans. The fear of the machines supplanting humankind is replaced with a positive partnership between man and machine in order to evolve and survive. In the same vein, Slonczewski and other SF authors are projecting science and its products as necessary and useful for the survival of humanity.

The Frankenstein story is also social in its focus. The monster becomes aggrieved by its inability to integrate in to the society. Its ugliness and huge proportion alienates it. The monster gains our sympathy for its exclusion from all social relationships. The fault is not the monster's but of its maker's. This motif continues to haunt the SF imagination even in the present century. In one of the millennial short stories by Nancy Kress, "To Cuddle Amy" (Year's Best SF 6) children aged 14 and above in this society are abandoned or driven out of their homes by their own parents. Like Victor Frankenstein, parenting is a neglected activity. Hence the children turn recalcitrant, violent, and disobedient and so on. All this because of reproductive technology that has enabled the storage of embryos in the fertility clinics for subsequent usage. Mr. and Mrs. Campbell decide to send their daughter Amy out and order for one of the embryos from the clinic. As long as the baby/child remains a mute toy, they are happy to cuddle. Once it grows up, becomes a thinking person it becomes a 'monster' to be discarded. As soon as the creature / child / machine attains self-awareness, the conflict with its creator gets problematized.

The contemporary SF scenario reveals a robust growth of science fiction. One particular work of 2008 links the Frankenstein story to the *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen: *Pride and Prometheus* by John Kessel. Frankenstein meets Mary Bennet in London, after having escaped from the monster without making a mate for him. They get attracted to each other and Frankenstein tells her his story. Meanwhile, Mary encounters the monster and becomes friendly enough to learn his side of the story. The conversation between them is full of gender equations and human relationships.

SF of the present continues the traditions that had been established in the previous century. At the same time, fresh themes have come to the fore. Climate science fiction or 'cli-fi' is one such: *New York 2140* (2017) by Kim Stanley Robinson, Margaret Atwood's

Maddaddam (2013) are some of the award winning novels. The New Space Opera is still popular, set in space, exciting, fast-paced, but it's also usually more scientifically rigorous. These novels are more literary, with emphasis on character development, and addresses social issues of race, gender, and class and also postcolonial in perspective. Steampunk is another sub-genre that has returned with a bang in novels like Mark Hodder's, *The Strange Affair of Spring Heeled Jack* (2010). It is a vibrant work full of Steampunk motifs: weird machinery, Victorian cultural attitudes, class hierarchy, the supernatural, famous historical figures, surrealism and absurdity, with mystery, suspense, and time-travel. There are also familiar SF verities like satirical and hard SF.

There is a first ever Indian presence in various SF anthologies. One is a debut collection *Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories* (2018) by upcoming writer Vandana Singh and another is Indrapramit Das's *The Moon is Not a Battlefield* (2017). SF writing in India too is getting to be more visible and viable, especially in the various Indian languages and their English translations. The Indian SF film has reached dizzying proportions. The 2018 multilingual, Rajinikanth starring robot story *2.0* has impressed technology wise and story wise. It is another morph of the Frankenstein myth reversed: the monster is the ecology conscious man who takes vengeance on the insensitive people. The original movie *Robot* (2010) had projected the human intervention in transforming a 'good' robot into a monster and in punishment had to be dismantled. It is this robot that is reassembled to save society from the monster in *2.0*. Incidentally, *2.0* grossed ₹ 860 crores, highest in 2018, in India.

Although the basic theme of Frankenstein's myth has remained the same, they are being constantly reshaped and relocated in order to reflect the ideals and anxieties of the time. We, the humans, get primed to tackle the inevitable 'Future Shock,' failing which there will be neither humans nor their world. Interestingly, Mary Shelley's futuristic novel *Last Man* (1826) is located in the 21st century. An uncontrolled 'plague' decimates all humanity leaving behind just one man. This 'last man' motif too has become a much exploited cliché in SF. The human condition is not to be dismissed so easily. One defining quality of Man is his ingenuity, cleverness and problem solving capabilities. From Asimovian robots to virus attacks on aliens in films like *Independence Day*, humans are capable of surviving catastrophes defeating the new apocalyptic horsemen. The SF writers are continuing to imagine wonderful tales of human endeavors and endurance to survive as humans or otherwise. Mary Shelley's ghost story-turned-gothic novel-turned science fiction trajectory, thus, creates a template for animating new 'monsters' with potential for transforming them into Modern Promethean figures.

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Trends in Contemporary Indian Drama

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian drama is ground-breaking and innovative. It has assimilated elements from native traditions while at the same time absorbing global influences. On the one hand, it has used history, myth, folklore and philosophies (such as existentialism and absurdism); on the other hand, it has employed shifting temporal settings, dream sequences, masks and voice-overs. The present paper traces a history of the Indian drama from its humble beginnings and goes on to detail some of the major Indian dramatists. It also discusses some contemporary trends in drama being written and staged in the 21st century.

Key words: *Contemporary Indian drama, trends in drama, innovation in drama, historical background of Indian drama, Modern drama, Women dramatists.*

Contemporary Indian drama is experimental and evolutionary in terms of both themes and techniques. On the one hand, it has used history, myth, folklore and philosophies (such as existentialism and absurdism); on the other hand, it has employed shifting temporal settings, dream sequences, masks and voice-overs. It has not only assimilated the elements of Indian theatre tradition but also borrowed from the modern western dramatists such as Bertolt Brecht, Jean Paul Sartre, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, John Arden, Edward Bond, Tom Stoppard and Arnold Wesker. Thus, it has emerged as an innovative phenomenon. It has also attracted considerable critical attention and as a result, a good deal of critical scholarship has been generated.

Drama in India: Historical Background

Drama in India has a splendid history. The dramatic tradition may be said to have matured here even before Greek drama came to the Indians' knowledge. Taking recitation from *Rig Veda*, imitation from *Yajur Veda*, melody from *Sama Veda*, and aesthetic flavor from *Atharva Veda*, as a legend would have it, Indian drama is said to have come into being as a subtle means of communicating significant experiences.

Bharata's *Natyashastra* is considered the foundation of the discipline of dramatics in India. Scholars equate it to Aristotle's *Poetics* as a treatise in the field of drama. *Natyashastra* elaborately discusses the poetics and stagecraft of drama. Various aspects of drama, including plot construction, characterization, stage setting and music have been dealt with in this treatise. The norms prescribed in *Natyashastra* were generally followed by Sanskrit dramatists such as Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha and Bhavabhuti, whose works are imbued with technical excellence. The golden age of Sanskrit drama produced world-

famous playwrights, among whom Kalidasa (370-450 CE) is definitely the best known. His masterpiece *Abhijnanashakuntalam* is a tragi-comedy of exquisite workmanship. Kalidasa is usually celebrated for his beautiful poetry, vast range of characters and spiritual vision.

Sanskrit drama flourished in India until the 12th century, but with the decline of the Sanskrit language the stage productions ceased and the plays were only read as literature. After the hey-day of Sanskrit drama, the theatre of the people flourished for many centuries in India. The *Jatras* in Bengal, *Yakshagana* in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, *Kathakali* in Kerala, *Bhavai* in Gujarat and *Ram Lila* in North India are some of the examples. These varied forms kept alive the spirit of drama in India. Contemporary drama continues to get inspiration from these forms and several devices of these are forms are still in use.

The interface with the British, their language and their literature gave a fresh stimulus to the Indian arts, including drama. English education brought, over the course of years, the study of western drama. Foreign troupes visited and performed in India. The exposure to new forms of literature and drama strengthened the dormant impulse of Indian drama. Translations and adaptations from Sanskrit and English followed. By the end of the 19th century, modern Indian drama written originally in vernacular languages and sometimes translated into English had come into being. This new form of drama employed the western tradition on the one hand and experimented with the Indian tradition on the other. In this context, Jasbir Jain remarks, "Probably it was during the colonial period that drama in English surfaced primarily as a medium of reaching across or framing Indian culture for the benefit of the British" (27).

In the pre-independence era, playwrights like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya significantly contributed to the growth of Indian English drama. Tagore (1861-1941) was probably the first major playwright who invested Indian English drama with lyrical excellence, symbolism and allegorical significance. His best-known plays are *Sacrifice*, *Chitra*, *The Post Office* and *Red Oleanders*. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) wrote originally in English on the model of Elizabethan poetic drama. His well-known plays are *Perseus*, *Vasavadutta* and *Rodogune*. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1907-1988) wrote with a revolutionary zeal and socialist leanings. He wrote a few devotional plays also, like *Raidas*, *Chokha Mela* and *Tuka Ram*. But in spite of such impressive record, Indian drama in English could not flourish as much as the drama in vernacular did.

Modern Indian Drama

While drama in English struggled to sustain itself, drama in other Indian languages kept on experimenting, growing and absorbing folk forms. Dharmavir Bharati, Badal Sircar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad are widely considered to be among the finest dramatists writing in Indian languages. They have made use of remarkable innovations and experiments in technique and theme. Dharmavir Bharati (1926-1997) uses epic material from *Mahabharata* in *Andha Yug*, linking it to the contemporary political scenario. The play was translated into English by Paul Jacob as *The Blind Age* in 1972. Mohan Rakesh (1925-1972) uses historical characters to present the breakdown of communication in modern life in *Aashadh Ka Ek Din*. His other famous plays are *Adhe Adhoore* and *Lehron Ke Rajhans*. Badal Sircar (1925-2011) employs contemporary situations to project an existential attitude to modern life. Sircar has created a genuine people's theatre known as the Third Theatre, a theatre supported and created by people and not merely performed by them. Transcending

the limits and limitations of the traditional and folk theatres, the Third Theatre is a four-way flow of influences – actor to actor, audience to actor, actor to audience and audience to audience. *Procession*, *Bhoma* and *Stale News* are the plays based on this conception of theatre. Vijay Tendulkar (1931-2008) with his Marathi plays has significantly changed the form and pattern of Indian drama. He deals with the suffering of persons trapped in isolation and hostile surroundings. His plays like *Sakharam Binder*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Silence! The Court is in Session* raise disturbing questions about love, sex, marriage and moral values, and highlight the hollowness of middle-class morality. Girish Karnad (b. 1938) addresses the problematic of this subjectivity by employing the devices of myth, folklore and history. *Tughlaq*, *Dreams of Tipu Sultan*, *Hayavadana*, and *Nagamandala* make use of history, myth and folklore to explore the gendered psychosexual construction of subjectivity.

Satish Alekar, author of Marathi plays like *Mahanirvan* (1974), *Micky ani Memsahib* (1973), *Mahapoor* (The deluge-1975), *Doosra Samana* (1989) and *Begum Barve* (1979) is one of the founder members of theatre group Theatre Academy, Pune that he managed from 1973 to 1992. With his plays like *Mahanirvan* (1974) and *Begum Barve* (1979), he created new idiom in Marathi theatre by his distinctive use of black humor, language and absurdity to convey the implicit sense of reality. Alekar mostly deals with the lives of lower middle-class urban people coming to terms with their ethnic history when faced with contemporary reality. Mahesh Elkunchwar and Alekar, although contemporaries, are driven by widely different concerns. Elkunchwar's major concerns are originality, life, desolation and death. His characters appear to be the expressions of these ideas rather than real people. His language ranges from being persistent, unrelenting and stubborn to a well-knit, cadenced dialogue full of pauses and nuanced expressions. His famous plays are *Holi* (1969), *Raktapushpa* (1971), *Party* (1972), *Virasat* (1982), and *Atankatha* (1987).

In recent decades, there is a renewed interest in the vernacular drama because of the translations of several significant vernacular plays undertaken by various national literary bodies like the Sahitya Akademi. Some of these plays have been translated by the vernacular authors themselves. This has resulted in attracting a lot of critical interest in Indian drama, available to international audiences in translation.

Indian English Drama

However, in recent years Indian English drama has found new life in the work of Mahesh Dattani (b. 1958) who writes on relatively unconventional subjects. Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian playwright writing in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award for his contribution to drama. He formed his theatre group *Playpen* in 1984 and directed several plays, ranging from classical Greek to contemporary works. He wrote his first full-length play *Where There is a Will* in 1986 for the Deccan Herald Play Festival. He went on to write many famous plays like *Dance Like a Man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought the Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1993), *Do the Needful* (1997), *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Seven Steps Around the Fire* (radio play for the BBC, 1998), and *Thirty days in September* (2001).

On the one hand, he started writing in English when drama in English was not exactly flourishing; on the other, he often selects unusual themes for his dramas. As Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri points out, "The preoccupation with 'fringe' issues forms an important element in Dattani's work – issues that remain latent and suppressed, or are pushed to the

periphery, come to occupy centre stage" (47). In *A Muggy Night in Mumbai*, for instance, Dattani chooses to dwell on same-sex relationships crumbling under the powerful influence of social demands. The play lifts the veil of secrecy that hangs over marginalised sexualities and lifestyles. The play is the first modern Indian effort to openly handle queer themes, raising serious issues that generally remain unaddressed. In *Do the Needful*, Dattani focuses on the twin issues of gender and alternate sexuality. Originally, a radio play, it deals with the shared spaces between women and queer men under the pressure of social norms to conform and live in ways alien to their nature. The same hypocrisy and sham that Dattani rejects in *A Muggy Night in Mumbai* are presented as probably the only answer to maintain peace with social conventions, without taking the risk of upsetting them.

Gurcharan Das is another eminent playwright writing in English. He is the author of *Larins Sahib*, a prize winning play set in colonial India, *Mira*, which won critical attention from critics, and *9 Jakhoo Hill*. His plays chiefly deal with the disillusionment and desperation of the contemporary times caused by the failure of socio-political systems, relationships and cultural traditions.

Presently, several playwrights write as well direct their own plays. Among them Gautam Raja, Anil Abraham, Anosh Irani, Ramu Ramanathan and Vikram Kapadia are some well-known names. These playwrights write mostly for the urban, elite audiences and deal with the issues of modern Indian democracy. Gautam Raja started writing in 1994. His first one-act play was *Admission*. He went on to write plays like *Restless*, *Pecking Orders*, *Wood* and *Pub Crawl*. Anosh Irani (born 1974) is an Indo-Canadian novelist and playwright. His first full-length play, *The Matka King*, premiered in October 2003. He has written plays like *Bombay Black*, *My Granny the Goldfish* and *The Men in White*. Ramakrishnan Ramanathan popularly known as Ramu Ramanathan is an Indian playwright-director with acclaimed plays to his credit. He has written plays like *Cotton 56*, *Polyester 84*; *Jazz*; *Comrade Kumbhakarna* and *Postcards from Bardoli*. His book *Sakina Manzil And Other Plays* is a collection of eight plays. Vikram Kapadia is one of the few contemporary playwrights writing in English. His *Black with Equal* (2002), a two-act black comedy is one of his best known plays.

Contemporary Indian Women Dramatists

The chief concern of the women playwrights is the revelation of certain unseen phases of the past, examination of the past for considering a current understanding, reinterpretation of legends, history, and myth, and establishment of strong images of women. Indian women playwrights from the twentieth century, namely Varsha Adalja, Tripurari Sharma, Kusum Kumar, Malatibai Bedekar and Muktabai Dikshit, Manjula Padmanabhan, Dina Mehta, and Polie Sengupta are the most prominent figure of Indian Feminist Theatre.

Manjula Padmanabhan has written significant plays like *Harvest*, *Lights Out*, *Hidden Fires*, *The Artist's Model*, and *Sextet*. Alienation and exclusion are the central themes in her works. The chief emphasis of her works is the detailed problems faced by mainly urban and present upper middle-class section of Indian society. Her award-winning play *Harvest* is a revolutionary play with a widespread image to 2010 that represents the confinement of an middle-class family of the third world to the attractive but forbidden global economy of the first world. *Lights Out* deals with the issue of public neglect of the atrocities heaped on women. She is one of those few Indian women playwrights who have bravely walked out of

notions that explain morality in order to voice the problems of gender, female, her body and its performance, its manipulation in a family and social setting.

Poile Sengupta is one of the foremost Indian writers in English, especially well known as a playwright and writer for children. Her first full-length play, *Mangalam*, won the award for the most socially relevant theme in The Hindu-Madras Players Playscripts Competition in 1993. She has written a series of plays including *Inner Laws* (1994), *A Pretty Business* (1995), *Keats Was A Tuber* (1996), and *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha*. Dina Mehta addresses various issues like female foeticide, infanticide, rape, and gender discrimination in her play *Getting away with Murder*. She writes to spread awareness about all kinds of marginalisation and discrimination through her drama. Varsha Mahendra Adalja is a Gujarati feminist novelist and playwright. *Mandodari* (1998) is collection of one-act plays written by her. *Aa Chhe Karagar* (1986), *Tirad, Shaheed* (2003), *Vasanti Koyal* (2006) are her full-length plays. Tripurari Sharma is a playwright and director. She has written plays like *Bahu, Birsa Munda, Aks Paheli, Banjh Ghati Sazaa, Kath ki Gadi, Lal Lal Hathi*, and *Hello to Myself*.

Trends in Contemporary Indian Drama

One feature that unites the contemporary playwrights is their disillusionment with the systems of existence, their loss of faith and existential crisis. These playwrights are writing in a postcolonial and global world, which affects their consciousness and their perception of the world. On the one hand, they are influenced by the world drama with all its innovations and accomplishments and on the other hand, they are pulled back by their native dramatic traditions.

Several contemporary playwrights have delved into the world of Indian mythology and Indian history for inspiration. They contemporise mythical and historical characters and themes to generate insights into the world around them, dealing with political, social and cultural dilemmas. Girish Karnad, Satish Alekar, Ninaz Khodaiji, Anosh Irani and Ramu Ramanathan are grappling with myth, folklore and history in their plays.

Another distinguishing feature of modern Indian drama is its tryst with issues of caste and class discrimination. Indian drama like other genres of literature is not untouched by the socio-political reality and is deeply located in the system that produces it. B.S. Shinde, Datta Bhagat, Dr Gangadha Pantavane, Ramnath Chavan, Prakash Tribhuvan, Baburao Gaekwad, Premanand Gajvi, Sampat Jadhav are some of the playwrights that extensive deal with Dalit consciousness in contemporary times. Indian drama is also offering cultural resistance against all kinds of authoritarianism in the society. Theatre movements and associations like People's Theatre Front, Indian People's Theatre Association have mobilised the Indian theatre towards active social change. Playwrights like Badal Sircar, Safdar Hashmi, Gursharan Singh, Vikram Kapadia, Manjula Padmanabhan are some of the playwrights have engaged with the subaltern themes in Indian drama.

Patriarchy and Feminism are two other concerns that imbue modern Indian drama. The feminist theatre in India originated as a result of the effect of the women's movements of the 1970s. This theatre was thought mainly as the main vehicle for the distinctive self-portrayal of women and their concerns. Indian drama is a powerful tool to represent the hypocrisy of the male-centered and controlled patriarchal set-up and the struggles of women. Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Deena Mehta, Polie

Sengupta and Manjula Padmanabhan create powerful images of women in their plays, thereby, giving immensity to the feminist Indian drama.

Besides this, contemporary Indian drama grapples unusual themes and issues. In *A Muggy Night in Mumbai*, for instance, Dattani chooses to dwell on same-sex relationships crumbling under the powerful influence of social demands. The play lifts the veil of secrecy that hangs over marginalised sexualities and lifestyles. The play is the first modern Indian effort to openly handle queer themes, raising serious issues that generally remain unaddressed. Playwrights like Mahesh Elkunchwar and Satish Alekar have taken up themes of incest and obsession in their plays generating fresh insights and new connotations.

Some critics have condemned modern Indian drama for being frivolous and elitist. Pearl Padamsee, eminent theatre personality, compares modern Indian drama with Greek drama. She says:

The Greek theatre has tackled vexed issues. Our Indian English theatre has not. There can be number of reasons. A lot of theatre that we see today is frivolous. But the moot point is, how many of us want it not to be so. Would we like to be provoked into thinking? Would we, at all, like to face the truth? But these are lessons no one wants to hear.

However, a survey of contemporary Indian drama shows that the works of contemporary playwrights represent a powerful and resurgent Indian drama. These playwrights have, with their innovative and experimental work of contemporary relevance, given new directions to Indian drama. One of the things that profoundly unites them is their mutually complementary treatment of the problematic of contemporary Indian subjectivity on the various axes of gender, sexuality, history, politics, tradition, class and socio-cultural change.

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Nonfiction as “Creative Art”: Twenty-first Century and the Tradition Behind

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Abstract

Since the early 1980s, with the symptoms of mass society developing in every part of India, there has been a steady growth in nonfictional prose writing till this day, not just in journalism but also in the academic sectors, resulting in a vast output of nonfiction in print media and academic journals. While there has been a phenomenal mass appeal of fiction over these years, nonfiction has never received the attention as “creative art,” which had risen to the pinnacle of glory in the hands of writers like Emerson, Bertrand Russell and Sri Aurobindo. With the introduction of a separate paper on nonfiction in the syllabus of Visva-Bharati, the question has cropped up again: Is nonfiction “creative art”? The present paper seeks to throw light on the issue with reference to the twenty first century scene placed against the great writers of nonfiction of the yester years.

Key words: *Nonfiction, Art, Creativity, Tradition, Experiential prose.*

Among the connoisseurs of literature, nonfiction has rarely been referred to as “art.” An essay has been praised quite often in the literary circles, but not as “art.” It has been appreciated as an example of the writer's intelligence or scholarship, or his socio-political views or his critical acumen. In our academic circuit, the dignity and status of a paper depend on references intext and the citations at the end of the paper. The longer the notes and the citation list at the end the greater the dignity of the paper. It is simply for this reason that we academicians do not appreciate an experiential article from a journalist. An academic paper may be excellently experiential, with chiselled sentences of supreme clarity and depth. It may be free from the vices of jargon and that forced and unnatural application of a theory on the paper. A. C. Bradley and G. Wilson Knight were supremely creative with their strong intuitive sense and living sentences. Even in India, we had scholars in our previous generations, who were creative in their critical prose. Such were V.K. Gokak, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sisirkumar Ghose, Bhabatosh Chatterjee, P. Lal and many others. In the twenty first century print media, the demarcating line between literature and journalism

has been difficult to define, as more and more journalists are seen generating "life" into their sentences.

As the materials of fiction and nonfiction are not different, the columnists, sports writers, film critics and personal essayists have been captivating us with their masterful prose during the first two decades of the new millennium. The articles today are often born either through a keen external observation of spectacles or through a deep life-sense characteristic of a novelist. Thoreau once said: "The forcible writer stands bodily behind his writings with his experience. He does not make books out of books, but he has been there in person" (326). It appears strikingly true with reference to a large number of writings in the print media today. It appears more true if we give a look at the nonfictional prose of the stalwarts like V.S. Naipaul, M.J. Akbar and Ruskin Bond, whose full length biography came out in 2017 under the title *Lone Fox Dancing*. Naipaul's *The Masque of Africa* came out in 2010, which time and again expresses the presence of the sensitive writer behind his words.

The land is full of cruelty which is hard for the visitor to bear. From the desert countries to the north long-horned cattle are sent for slaughter here in big ramshackle trucks, cargoes of misery, that bump along the patched and at times defective autoroute to Abidjan, to the extensive abattoir area near the docks. And there in trampled and vile black earth these noble creatures, still with dignity, await their destiny in the smell of death, with sometimes a calf, all alone, without a mother, finding comfort of a sort in sleep, a little brown circle on the dirty ground, together with the beautiful goats and sheep assembled for killing. The ground round the abattoir goes on and on. When sights like this meet the eyes of simple people every day there can be no idea of humanity, no idea of grandeur (212-13).

The sentences are bubbling over with life, as the spectacle has pricked the sensitive skin of the writer as artist. He makes it gently moving and pathetic with the climax coming at the middle of the unit with reference to "a calf, all alone, without a mother." The same sensitivity is to be found in Bond's final autobiography in a differently composed self-mirroring mode: "No life is more, or less, important or interesting than another – much of it, after all, is lived inside our heads" (*Lone Fox 2*). Bond's fiction and nonfiction are made out of the same stuff with that poignant sensitivity always making the sentences penetrate through the sensitive flesh of the reader into his soul.

When you are old and grey and full of sleep, it is good to have someone to lean on from time to time, and in that respect this agnostic has been blessed by the gods. I still value my solitude, but it is also nice to have someone tucking me into bed at night.

It is this sense of life infused into the sentences that makes nonfictional prose a living vibration of the spirit of the writer and Bond retains this power even to this day making us look back to what John Ruskin had said as if like a theoretical preview of the art of his namesake.

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion, all in one.¹

¹Words of John Ruskin, 6 Feb. 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/60950>.

Sidelined either as a popular author or a children's author by the "intellectual" critics, Ruskin Bond is a seer of life and Nature, a conscientious artist lingering his power even in the twenty first century keeping his love for the planet intact. We are instantly reminded of these words of John Ruskin when we approach the fiction and nonfiction of Bond. The most relevant words are: "To see clearly is poetry, prophecy and religion, all in one." In a fast moving technology-burdened society of the millennium, Bond has survived with his old but eternal sensibilities. How? One might well ask. Let us listen to his own words from *Lone Fox Dancing*:

Hope, love and pig-headedness. Without these, I would not have survived into my eighties and remained in working order. I have also been lucky by temperament: the things I wanted were not out of reach; I only needed to persevere and remain optimistic. When the weather got rough, I pulled my coat tighter around me, turned up the frayed collar, and waited for the storm to pass. Then the cloud dispersed; splashes of sunshine drenched my writing table, and good, clean words flowered on the pages on my notebook...It has never taken a lot to make me happy. And now here I am an old man, an old writer, without regrets...But I must correct that. I decided to stop trying to grow up; and writers are only as old or as young as their readers. So here I am, a young boy, an old writer, without regrets (*Lone Fox 2*).

As Tagore and Hemingway are the two favourites of Bond, one may sense here the fusion of the mellow Bengali sensibility and the tough insides and understated glory of Hemingway creeping in secretly as traditions. Creativity is the consciousness projected through words; it is discovery of a sentence, a paragraph, a longer unit through inspired argument or analysis or revelation of a thing seen or felt. The creative writer generates life into his/her sentences. Controversies and personal life apart, M.J. Akbar has that touch of class, that touch of experience and perception in his words. Let us have a look at his prose artistry in the following passage from *Kashmir Behind the Vale*, which came out in 2002:

History lives in song, in generational memory, in the tale told by a mother plaiting the hair of her young, questioning daughter in the soft afternoon sunlight drifting through speckled apple trees, in the music of a marriage when in the early hours of a grey morning, the singers of the night cluster over a rejuvenated *kangri*, heads bowed towards the glowing embers and spirits abandoned to invisible swirl of floating sound, the energy and rhythm of the last strain even more vigorous, more in harmony with the ideal than the first. The history of a people is so often reduced to the limitations of a page: knowledge is far more than the decaying fragment of a Sanskrit or a Persian Chronicle in the library of a Nawab or a Raja himself reduced to an illusion; or in the vaults of a Government building imprisoned by an intellectual bureaucracy. History is more real than footnotes in small type which too often sound like an in-house conversation between willing conspirators (3).

The language is naturally built with the perception of history supported by telling images. It reaches the climax of the unit with the final irony directed to the scholastic writings with footnotes, for which the creative historian has little sympathy. The truth behind the words

makes it a forceful observation in general instead of a lifeless catalogue of statements. By and large this was the mode created by the great prose writers of the nineteenth century, which rose to a rare class in the hands of Ruskin and Emerson, as also in the great Prefaces to *Leaves of Grass*, culminating in the supremely inspired expositions of Sri Aurobindo, who could fuse poetry and argument with an absolute ease and mastery. The expository technique of twenty first century nonfiction, which we frequently see in the print media of India and abroad, has a distinct memory of the Victorian prose masters, although, the sentences are shorter and non-periodic. The suspended syntax is strictly avoided today, whereas the balance-antithesis scheme of the past has been retained to give strength to the logical structure of the essays written in recent times. Even film criticism uses the balance anti-thesis schema with great effect. Apart from the paradoxes and antitheses, writers in the millennium can use the cool apophthegm with marvelous effect. "Times Life", the *Times of India's* Sunday magazine, has been coming out from all the cities of India with the same features. On February 3, 2019, on the eve of World Cancer Day, Nupur Amarnath wrote prose like an artist in "Times Life":

Ever read someone's story and thought: This is what I need to hear today. This is a story of courage. A story of hope. A story of heroes. And thanks to social media, we now find heroes with a finger tap. They have a name, face and positive outlook that is helping shape the journey for many who are battling the big C – and this time with a big smile ("Times Life" 3.2.19).

The broken sentences may be journalistic, but they serve to highlight "hope" and 'heroes', followed by the masterful last sentence with the climax at the start of that, "They have a name, face". The point is: many writers in the print media know today that an empty flamboyance leads to nothing. Many receive training in literature before coming to journalism.

The Victorians were the first to write masterful expositions in English, the prose of a balanced orotundity with an up throw of aphorism here and there, but their syntax has been totally rejected in the new age except for the occasional parenthesis or dash in the style of punctuation. However, much of the intensity and intuitive sage-sayers of Emerson, Wilde and Whitman have crept in the nonfictional prose of the twenty first century. It is difficult to say how, but, most probably, despite the decline of taste in general, there is a natural intuitive sense in the recent prose writers working in the media. Here are two passages from the nineteenth century, one from Emerson, and the other from Whitman serving as a tradition behind twenty first century nonfiction:

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world of value is the active soul, — the soul, and free, sovereign, active. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past

utterance of genius. This is good, say they, — let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius always looks forward (Joel Porte 355).

Built on the Senecan mode, perception and clarity are the two assets in this prose, which are also the remarkable features of modern day expository prose. The mastery of Emerson lies in the fact that his aphorisms are also serving the purpose of exposition. By and large this is the tradition behind today's creative nonfiction. Hailed as one of the greatest of poets, Whitman's nonfictional prose has been overlooked or shadowed behind the stature of the mighty image of the poet. It has that same perception and clarity characteristic of today's prose along with an invading sensibility generated by the personality of the writer. Let us have a look before we pass on to the twenty first century examples:

The greatest poet has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me (Norton 624).

The nonfiction of the twenty first century has this clarity and elegance and more of the varieties of experience fused into the texture of the prose. The following is an excerpt from the 2016 book of Raju Korti and Dharendra Jain entitled *Mohammed Rafi: God's Own Voice*, where nonfictional prose becomes creative art with a mellow feeling of adoration for the great singer:

His voice, of course, was God-gifted. Flexible like clay, it could be moulded into any shape the composer wanted. It was this quality that enabled him to glide effortlessly through many a composer's songs—from the wild 'yahos' to the fondly romantic ones; from the soulful Bhajans to the spirited patriotic songs; from the peppy quwalis and intense *nazms*... to the touching ghazals. His oeuvre was wide, range mountainous and singing exceptionally brilliant. Neither was any song's emotion out of his purview nor was there any note that was not negotiable. His voice had the power and gusto to rise from the lowest octave to the highest and back without in any way compromising with the song's *laya* (rhythm) and *sur* (note) (17).

This prose is characterized by a true perception of the genius of a singer, who is held by many as the voice of a century. It is exactly expressive of the things the writer wishes to highlight, especially the incredible variety of a multi-dimensional singer. The emotion is kept under control to place the proper details, which the interpreter wishes us to see. Even in the field of academic writing this precision, though not too frequent, contributes to the creativity of today's nonfiction. Academicians are becoming more and more conscious about writing prose that would not go bad. The following passage is taken from the editorial of Smita Agarwal from her book *Marginalized: Indian Poetry in English*:

Poetry, on the other hand, for the middle-class reader, is associated with

difficulty, is as feared as mathematics. Its layers of meaning demand a far greater level of engagement, ask uncomfortable, unanswerable questions and so is best, shunned. Yet, as a classical art form, poetry refuses to die. Age upon age, it somehow barely survives despite failure or a decrease in demand (2-3).

What I wish to mean, finally, is the deliberate artistry found in the nonfiction of the Twenty First Century, artistry mostly contributed by the passion, among the intelligentsia, to write well and partly due to the growing creative sense among the journalists. There was a time when the academicians abhorred the lightness and the frivolity of a columnist. Gone are those days of snobbery. The gap between the journalistic writing and the literary writing has been narrowing since the beginning of the millennium. More and more we are witnessing experiential prose full of the fine subtleties of true perception born through the fire of life.

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Changing Trends in Women Autobiographies: A Study of Select Women Autobiographies

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Abstract

*The research paper aims to study the emerging trends in the field of women autobiographies written in 21st century. The genre of women autobiographies gained attention after the feminist movements of 1970s. The genre was meant to provide some space to women writers to express themselves and to write their own stories to avoid their misrepresentation in literature. However, the genre itself got tied up with certain givens and presuppositions about women's self, identity and pattern of writing. This paper seeks to highlight and debunk such essentialist notions connected with the genre of women autobiographies. The three autobiographies that are taken up for study in this research paper are Betty Friedan's *Life So Far* (2000), Michele Roberts' *Paper Houses* (2007) and Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* (2013).*

Key words: *Women, Autobiographies, Self, Identity, Feminism, Women Writings..*

Autobiography as a genre is a distinct mode of literary expression that is a way of self-revelation. Literature is a reflection of society and reflects the growth and change taking place in the society over the years. The place and status of women in society has been undergoing rapid change in the contemporary times. Since the male-oriented society makes women define themselves according to the social norms that are male-centred, women have used literature as a medium to voice their thoughts and portray the hurdles they face as women. Self-writing, that is autobiography, acts as a platform for women to voice their innermost feelings, trace their growth and journey and to connect with other women as a group. Kamala Das, a noted Indian poet, states in her autobiography, "Often, I toyed with the idea of drawing myself to get aid of my loneliness which is not unique in any way is natural to all. I wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvement" (17).

The present research paper aims to study the emerging trends in the field of women autobiographies written in 21st century. All the three writers selected for study in this paper are famous names in the field of literature. Thus, their autobiographies can be seen as representative texts for the times in which they were written. However, it must be stated that the inferences drawn from the selected texts can be limited. The three autobiographies that are taken up for study in this research paper are Betty Friedan's *Life So Far* (2000), Michele Roberts' *Paper Houses* (2007) and Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* (2013).

Carolyn Heilbrun, a noted feminist critic says in *Writing a Woman's Life* that a woman can portray her life in four ways:

The woman herself may tell it, in what she choose to call an autobiography, she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction. A biographer, woman or man may write a biography or the women may write her own life in advance of living it, feminist unconsciously and without realising or naming the process (13).

Women autobiographies as a genre have usually been studied to trace the difference between the writing patterns of male and female writers. Women have been missing from canonical literature for very long. The invisibility of women as the subjects of writing does not signify the absence of women as individuals. Rather, it signifies that women were for very long not accepted as the 'subject' of writing. Even when women were made the 'object' of writing, a very stereotypical, biased and unrealistic picture of them was presented. In the post-colonial and post-modern times, feminists pressed the need to recognise women's autobiographies as a separate genre. It was believed that literature has been essentially male dominated and women have been excluded from history and literature. It was contested that women's writings were too personal and trivial to be made a part of canonical literature.

In 1970s, with the evolution of feminism, an interest in women's autobiographical writing was generated. Critics such as Deborah Rosenfelt, Annette Kolodny, Lillian Robinson and Elaine Showalter worked to theorise feminist criticism. They emphasised on the need to re-read women's writings to generate new readings and to re-create a realistic picture of women from women's point of view. They yearned to de-throne the mainstream male canon by focusing on "history, style, themes, genres and structure of writing by women . . . the psychodynamics of female creativity the trajectory of the individual or collective female career" ("Feminist Poetics" 128-29).

The women writers wanted to establish a women-centred canon which Showalter calls 'gynocriticism,' an alternate canon which presents women from the view point of women and stresses on women characters and women's representation in literature. For this, it was needed that women take the lead and write about themselves to avoid their misrepresentation by male writers.

As Leigh Gilmore states in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation*, autobiographies are a mode of revolution through which women write more from the place of object into the subjectivity of self representational agency (12). However, when women started documenting their lives, the genre of women autobiographies too got categorised and marked by certain parameters. It is believed that men's autobiographies document the stories about their political success and depict the social, cultural happenings of their times. The focus is on the man's participation in professional and public life. Most of the male autobiographies trace their journey from rags to riches, making it a source of self glorification.

On the other hand, conventionally women's autobiographies are believed to be emotional, confessional and revolving around their family life and their struggles as women. It is also believed that women usually write in solidarity with 'women' at large. They see their issues and struggle as a part of what women face worldwide. Thus, their writings tend to be more general and universal.

It is believed that women autobiographies are more general whereas men autobiographies are more individualistic. It is also presumed that women's writing is

fragmented because women are afraid to tell the entire truth as they are silenced by the social norms. Isodara Duncan, a female writer stated back in 1920s in an interview with Jelinek, "No woman has been ever told the whole truth in her life. The autobiographies of famous women are a series of accounts of the outward existence, of petty details and anecdotes which give no realisation of their real life for the great moments of joy or agony, they remain strongly silent" (n.p.).

Men and women autobiographies have also been distinguished on the basis of their writing pattern. Men's writings are supposed to be linear whereas women's writings are believed to be non-linear and marked by gaps and silences. Such distinction between men and women's writings again goes back to the essentialist division of gender. Division of sense on generalisation adds to the essentialist view of gender.

Betty Friedan in her autobiography, *Life So Far* does talk about her family life and the experiences that influenced and shaped her but at the same time, she traces a lot of socio-political happenings of her times, of which she was an integral part. Unlike the usual belief that women talk less about the social, political or historical times in which they write, Friedan's autobiography gives us a vivid description of 1960s and 70s. In fact, she herself was among the leaders of women's revolution during her times and she shaped the major happenings of the era. Also, her struggle and eventual evolution as a successful leader form a major part of her life-story. Thus, her autobiography does not conform to the postulate that it is male writers who talk about power, success and politics in their autobiographies.

Friedan emerges as a powerful influence in her times- the leader of NOW, NAACP and a major figure in second wave of feminism. Nowhere does her autobiography seem to be an emotional saga of despair and victimisation. However, she does talk about women at large as she was working as the leader of feminist movement of 1960s. Her voice is more the voice of women at large. Thus, "I" in her autobiography is more general than individualistic.

Michele Roberts in her autobiography *Paper Houses* talks about her life in retrospection. She describes in detail her past experience, her struggle with Catholicism, her parents' excessive control over her. Roberts also takes into account the reason for her breaking her ties with her home and parents. She unabashedly portrays what she had to undergo as a woman in 1970s--her struggle with social norms, body issues, her struggle with homosexuality and her search for 'home,' a place where she could feel at peace. Though Roberts depicts her struggles and troubles in detail yet she does not take an emotional approach to them. Her 'I' is stronger and more individualistic than that of Friedan.

Roberts talks about things women had to face at all times and ages like body issues, yearning to have the freedom to roam around without being controlled by 'male gaze,' freedom to make her own 'choices' and so on. But, she adopts a more subjective tone while talking about them. She is very assertive and firm about her opinions and observations. Her 'I' is not strictly universal.

In *Paper Houses* as well, there is a vivid picture of socio-political happenings of the times in which she was living. Roberts talks about youngster's obsession with bohemian lifestyle, women's marches and protests for equality, women's inclination towards lesbianism as a more liberal way of life etc. Robert's account is a very linear and unapologetic one.

In her autobiography *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg talks about power struggle, dearth

of women leaders, women's internal and external struggle preventing them from taking up powerful positions, ambition gap, struggle between household and workplace duties and other issues faced by working of twenty first century.

Sandberg talks about the reason behind this leadership gap by tracing the hurdles that prevent women from making it to the top. Nowhere in the text does Sandberg adopt an emotional narrative tone. Also, there are no gaps, omissions or pseudonyms in the text. She quotes statements and opinions of famous personalities to defend or courier their views on women and their issues. She uses concrete data and analysis from research and surveys to authenticate her arguments.

One does not get any hint of inhibition or fear in the text. Rather, Sandberg also arranged a digital setup named Lean In.org to provide a platform to other women also to speak about their issues publicly and look to revolution on a global scale. Sandberg emphasises on the need for women to voice their concern and problems. She does not advocate playing the victim card. She suggests contemporary working women to take charge, make authentic choices and to opt for challenging roles so as to realise their potential to the maximum.

The 'I' in the text is universal but bold, logical and very assertive in tone. Sandberg takes into account the history of the way women have made it to the times when they have access to education and jobs. Though the earlier feminists had to struggle to gain this privilege, this has led to another set of issues and hurdles that the working women of 21st century are facing like wage discrimination, gender bias, choice between marriage and career, lack of equal partnership in marriage etc.

Thus, the representative texts that have been taken up for study in this research paper show a break from the earlier beliefs and thoughts about women's way of writing about self. These texts do not totally conform to what has conventionally been stated about women autobiographies. There has been a marked development in the genre of women autobiographies. Women writers too present the social, economic and political developments of their times. None of the women writers taken for study seem to be silent or hesitant about their life. Thus, women's writing is not essentially defined by omissions, gaps and silences. Rather, two of the women writers taken up for study here--Betty Friedan and Sheryl Sandberg--are iconic feminists who not only voiced their concerns but urged other women too to articulate their beliefs and issues.

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Self-Writing and Self-Identification: An Analysis of Sister Jesme's *Amen: The Autobiography of a Nun*

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Abstract

*The question of how an autobiography is written is primarily a question of how the self is constructed. The creation of the self involves self-recognition and subsequent power to overthrow the dominant structures. Writing about the self is considered important for women as it gives them a chance to tell their stories and expose the challenges and manifestations of oppression. The present paper will discuss *Amen: The Autobiography of a Nun* (2009) by Sister Jesme from the point of view of the emergence of a woman as an agency against a religious system which is accused of sexual abuse of women and other corrupt practices. Sister Jesme's account of the happenings in and around the nunnery and the church reveals her vehement rage against religious authority; the most established and dreaded system in society. Her courage and conviction has encouraged many nuns to expose the hypocritical religious system.*

Key Words: *Narration, Self-identification, Self-representation, Autobiography, Discourse, Resistance, Religion, Empowerment.*

Writing about the self involves a deep insight into how one has lived one's life. Memoirs, diaries, personal letters and self-portraits come under the purview of autobiography. Autobiographical writings are said to have begun in the West with Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (A.D. 398-400). In antiquity, the purpose of such works was regarded as self-justification rather than self-portrayal. With time, autobiographical writings became a means of narration and assertion of the self.

The word "autobiography" was first used depreciatingly by William Taylor in 1797 in the English periodical *The Monthly Review* (Autobiography). Other famous autobiographies are John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1947), Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996) and many others. Gradually, the trend of writing autobiographies travelled to other parts of the world. Georges Gursdorf in his book, *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* made it clear that "autobiographical writings were not just the domain of the westerners" (Gursdorf 28). People in other parts of the world had started narrating their lives as well. Innumerable autobiographies have been written since then, but autobiographical writings came to be considered as a literary genre only in the twentieth century. As a part of literary criticism, it has a very recent origin.

Specifically, in the Indian context, though autobiographical elements were present

in the poetry, drama and prose of the early Indian authors, autobiography came to be recognized as a distinct genre in the nineteenth century only. As M.P.Sinha states, "The literary renaissance that began with India's contact with England made a remarkable contribution as it excited and stimulated the autobiographical impulse in Indians" (Sinha 97).

Writing about the self is considered important for women as it "offers an ideal scope for satisfying human urge and quest and curiosity about human nature" (Naik 10). Indian women throughout history have tried to voice their resistance towards oppression through their autobiographical writings. Initially, it was women belonging to either the royal class or the educated class who took up courage to narrate their lives. Some Indian women (belonging to the elite class) whose autobiographies have been acknowledged are Gayatri Devi (*The Princess Remembers*, 1975), Kamala Das (*My Story*, 1976) Amrita Pritam (*The Revenue Stamp*, 1976), Vijayaraje Scindia (*Princess: The Autobiography of the Dowager Maharani of Gwalior*, 1977), Dilip Kaur Tiwana (*A Journey on Bare Feet*, 1990).

Autobiographical writings reflect a person's 'self' as is seen and understood by him/her in particular social conditions. Phillippe Lejeune and James Cox have recognized that autobiography is "the claiming and discovery of self, and that it is also about subjectivity, responsibility, freedom, and autonomy" (Babbit). The willingness to identify the self plays an important role in the creation of an autobiography. Specifically for women, writing about the self requires a lot of courage; to encounter and accept the truth which is now past, and which may bear consequences not appreciable in a patriarchal society. The most important concern while studying an autobiographical narrative is "the subjective truth, the truth of self- definition and self- understanding" (Gordon 106). When an autobiographer narrates his/ her story, he/ she does not simply undertake the task of telling a story, rather he/she addresses the question of self-representation for the reader.

The number of autobiographies and biographies of nuns in the world is not so staggering yet these engage the readers' concern about the evils which have afflicted religious orders in various parts of the globe. *Throwaway Nun* (2016) by Rosemary Scirocco-Corsale rekindled the debate on myriad forms of abuses nuns are subjected to under the façade of congregations and convents. In 2009 the publication of *Amen: The Autobiography of a Nun* by Sister Jesme, an ex-nun of the Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC), created a sort of storm. The present paper deals with the construction of subjectivity of a woman who has undergone oppression in the institution of religion: a place which is rather considered to be a savior of humanity. It will analyze Sister Jesme's autobiography.

Sister Jesme (real name Meamy Raphael) was born in 1956 in Thrissur, Kerala. She belonged to a lower middle class family. Her parents did not have enough money to support her education but every year she was funded for admission by the local priests. At the tender age of eighteen years in 1974, Meamy decided to join the convent. It was then that she chose the name Jesme for herself which she formed by combining a part of the name of Jesus, "Jes" and "me (herself)". After completing Masters in English, she did M.Phil. and Ph.D., from Calicut University on a scholarship awarded by the Government of India.

During her stay within the Congregation, she realized that purity, celibacy and honesty held no meaning for a major chunk of priests and nuns. She suffered inescapable lesbianism, forced sex and corruption by the way of collecting and misusing money in the form of donations from students belonging to rich families who sought admission in

various educational institutions of the Congregation. She also witnessed partiality with regard to assigning tasks to nuns on the basis of their social and economic background.

After serving as a nun in various convents for over thirty three years, in 2008, Sister Jesme left the Congregation alleging physical and mental harassment by the Church seniors. 'Sister' still forms a part of her name in spite of her having given up her robes because that had become an inevitable part of her identity. Moreover, it was never religion that she gave up, it was only the pretensions, corruption, and exploitation in the name of religion that she said goodbye to. "It is not the person, it's the system. I am looking forward to renewal of the Church" (Anand). In the 'Author's Note' to her autobiography, she defines her decision to leave the church as an escape from a "Formidable Fortress to His Safe Anchorage" (Jesme xi). Jesme claims that she has seen a deterioration of the church over the years. She defines it in terms of the game of power. In an interview to Akrita Reyar, she said, "they were all after wealth, then they wanted power, then social power, then they wanted political power" (Reyar). In August, 2008, before leaving the Congregation, she resigned from the post of the Principal of St. Mary's College, Thrissur, Kerala.

In various interviews as well as in her autobiography, Jesme talks about the urgency of narrating her story. The church authorities were bent on proving her insane and were trying to intoxicate her through some medication. In order to prove her sanity and her potential for thought and reason, she organized her life in the form of a narrative. Her empowerment through a realization of her 'self' has been her greatest strength. In a recent interview with Divya J. Shekhar of *Economic Times*, she remarked, "Empowerment has been my biggest learning. With courage, a woman can carve out her own life even when the odds are stacked against her" (Shekhar).

Jesme may be considered as the first nun in the history of the Church in Kerala to have exposed the hypocritical and exploitative system inside the church. The cases of Sister Abhaya and Sister Anupa Mary were brought to the fore but only after their deaths. Sister Jesme may also be considered to be one of the first women victims inside the Church to have been a part of the #MeToo movement which originated in 2006 in America but was popularized in 2017 all over the world. Recently, many nuns have tried to break the silence and voice their grievances against sexual abuse by senior priests. The latest incident of the alleged sexual abuse of a Keralite nun by Bishop Franco Mulakkal, a priest of the Diocese of Jalandhar, in Punjab (India) reported by many sources of media including *Economic Times* shows that many nuns have started voicing their sexual exploitation openly in the convents but the nuns who spoke out in support of the victimized nun have been threatened and suppressed (Rape accused). Sister Jesme also came out in support of this victimized nun. In a discussion on a TV show on *NDTV*, she recently remarked, "I was waiting for ten years for at least a few nuns to come out and speak what is going on within but even those nuns are being punished but not the real accused, the culprit" (Why are nuns). The recent case clearly reminds of the bold steps taken by Jesme ten years ago. Jesme could not protest against the Church authorities ten years back wearing a habit. Inside the convent, she could just observe and do nothing as she was aware that no one would pay any heed to her complaints. She states about her early days in the convent, "I come to know of certain violation of rules, but ... I can only be a mute witness" (Jesme 56). Also, the fear of the power of the church authorities did not let her speak. Even after having witnessed all the social and cultural discrimination, and having encountered fallacious characters like Sister Vimy, Sister

Tressila and a few others, she could not speak out. "There are occasions when my conscience pricks me, but out of fear I remain silent" (Jesme 57). However, she carried the spark of rebellion. She went out of the way to help her students survive the irrational behavior of the seniors, attempted to fight against the lower grades given to her students out of contempt in spite of repeated warnings and threats. They tried to ostracize her and even prove her insane when she finally decided to stand out against the Congregation. She understood why they tried to do so:

May be they never appreciated my desire for freedom My frankness and straightforwardness may lead to many of their secrets being revealed, they feared. My questioning of many of their decisions and practices may have reaped for me displeasure of the authorities. Perhaps that is why they want to curb me, to break me and silence me (Jesme 69-70).

Jesme had a sense of freedom which she felt missing being in the Convent. She had to quit the convent in order to speak up.

In her autobiography, Sister Jesme has deconstructed the very idea of nunhood. She asserts that religion can be practised without a rosary. One can be in direct union with God (Jesus here). She discouraged the practice of confession even while she was still in the nunnery. She challenged the very notion of Church and the priests being mediators between man and God. She questions the hypocrisy of the church which teaches celibacy. The same priests who pretend to be celibates, harass the young girls sexually who enter convents as nuns.

Jesme, who had imagined a different world in the Church where she could be in union with Jesus without any malice, was shocked to witness such disharmony and malicious practices that went on within the church. In *Amen*, she has reported an incident in which a senior priest stripped himself off in front of her and asked her to do the same and also forced her to look at and touch him. When she confessed this to another priest with the motive of unveiling the character of the accused priest, she was silenced by saying that the case need not be reported to higher authorities since she had not lost her virginity.

A close reading of *Amen* suggests that once you enter the church as a nun, all the doors to the outside world stand closed. In Christianity, when a woman becomes a nun, it is said that she is married to Lord Jesus. Any problem faced by a nun can be reported only to the higher authorities within the church. Jesme has made it very clear that some of the priests and nuns in senior positions inside the church could go to any extent of exploiting the young girls even if they are accused, they go scot-free.

Power structures inherently play a major role in defining the position and status of different subjects in all spheres of life. Religion as an important institution cannot be excluded from the domain of power relations. History has made it evident that concentration of power in the hands of a few in the name of religion has corrupted the institution. Women being the most vulnerable category have been exploited in the name of religion--sometimes openly as in the Devadasi system in many parts of India in the past and at other times in the name of "holy kisses" in the nunneries. Some of the issues that she has raised in her autobiography include sexual enforcement on nuns by senior priests, forced lesbian relations which she herself suffered, and corruption by way of donations at the time of admissions to various educational institutions of the Congregation. She has also broken her silence about the issue of gender inequality within the church. The examples include the

freedom of choice of dressing up to the priests while the nuns have to strictly adhere to the dress code including the habit, and while a Father is free to marry if he likes, a nun can never marry. She writes, "The priests travel and go for movies in lay dress, officiate or attend weddings, and even consume liquor. Their financial status is sound. But nuns cannot dream of all these things" (Jesme 111). No doubt, the cases of sexual exploitation of nuns in the convents and child abuse in churches have been reported but not by priests.

Jesme questions the politics of religious institutions which allowed certain liberties to women for its convenience but prohibited women from other privileges. She fought hard to replace the age-old concept of "blind obedience" with "responsible obedience" (Jesme 110). Through her narrative, she has tried to highlight the feminist aspect of Christianity and has alluded to the Bible to prove her point by giving examples of "the Woman of Samaria," the first missionary of Jesus Christ, and of Mary Magdalene, the first woman to meet Jesus after his resurrection, and other women followers of Jesus Christ (Jesme 110). She has even blamed the westernization of Christianity which has led to a deterioration in the position of women in the Church. She writes, "Christ's way, later called Christianity is Eastern in its origin. Jesus gave women due status in His lifetime . . . But as Christianity travelled to what we now call the 'Western' world, the West's ideas, customs and perspectives coloured the religion" (Jesme 111). She has referred to beliefs of Christian religion discriminating against women as "anti-woman" (Jesme 111).

A strong and valid construction of 'self' can undoubtedly be linked to writing. Autobiographical writings give the subjects a chance to re-imagine experience and build an identity. According to Paul John Eakin, "the right to write our life stories is a natural extension of the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Eakin 113). Throughout her autobiography, there is a sense of alienation that prevails. She felt alienated from her family. She had a feeling of being the chosen one and wanted to join the Congregation. Inside the convent, she felt that she was the one who could bring a change in the otherwise corrupt and hypocritical system. In response to Sister Jesme's autobiography, many protests demanding reforms in church have gained momentum. The number of nuns reporting cases of sexual abuse has also increased manifold over the last ten years.

The class distinction prevalent in the society outside the church held its effect inside the institution of the Church as well. The nuns who came from the lower strata of the society or who were less educated and less- privileged were discriminated against the ones who belonged to more- privileged families. The former had to do menial jobs. This distinction was made as "Fair Ethelamma" and "Dark Ethelamma" based on disparity in complexion, education and wealth (Jesme 47). In her autobiography, she repeatedly talks about the need to pay attention to "the marginalized and the underprivileged" (Jesme 89).

Sister Jesme boldly speaks about the practice of lesbianism which was referred to as "special love" between the sisters inside the church. She describes one of the earliest experiences when a senior nun, Sr. Vimy exploited her sexually. Her traumatic experience is ignored by the senior priest who calls it a natural phenomenon. No one could understand her guilt and her conflict. "When all are asleep at night, she creeps into my bed and does indecent things to me which I hate but cannot combat" (Jesme 51). This was what she felt initially but with her autobiographical account she has been able to fight against all such injustices. In her autobiography, she also mentions the plight of nuns in old age. They lead a strict life all their youth, and in old age when they lose control over their selves, most of them

tend to go insane. She writes, "All their suppressed emotions explode in their old age as they lose their self-control" (Jesme 79).

Structurally, the narrative opens when Jesme has just left the convent and is looking for some refuge, as her life seems to be in danger. After briefly describing her situation and her plan for rescue, in a sort of flashback she begins with the autobiographical details. The narrative has a coherent structure as she puts forth the issues related to the purpose of writing her autobiography. A large part of the narrative sequentially describes the incidents that shape Jesme's life. They are effective in shaping her identity and ultimately making her realize that she is more powerful than she actually believes she is. In the narrative, incident after incident, we see that she is snubbed and longs to overthrow the corrupt political structure of the convent. But each time, she questions whatever she feels is wrong. This capability to interrogate leads her to the identification of her 'self'. In the 'Afterword' to her autobiography, she poses a series of questions. She asks, "If I am a "harlot", how come my partner in "sin" remains inside the monastery... Is the victim to be penalized, but the perpetrator to be applauded?" (Jesme 177). Neeta Avatar Khurana in her article, "A Gynocritical Reading of Nalini Jameela's *An Autobiography of a Sex-Worker* and *Amen: The Autobiography of a Nun* by Sister Jesme" calls the narrative under study a truly gynocritical work as it "brings to the fore the injustice and hypocrisy inherent in society and meted out to those who hover on the margins of the marginalized within the subculture" (Khurana 142). Khurana describes Jesme's autobiography as a journey from "a life of enclosure to a life of exposure" (Khurana 145).

Before she wrote her autobiography, Sister Jesme was invited to the book release function of Nalini Jameela's *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. She accepted the invitation for which she was condemned by the priests. She defended herself by asserting the hypocritical male patriarchal attitude hidden behind making a woman a prostitute. She writes, "I would like to ask, who wants a woman to remain a sex-worker? Is it the need of a male-chauvinistic section of the society?" (Jesme 118).

Thus, *Amen: The Autobiography of a Nun* brings to the fore the political aspects related to the personal lives of such women as choose to sacrifice their freedom and desires for the sake of religion. The narrative reveals Jesme's awakening to a realization of the 'self' and bridges the gap between endurance and rebellion. She refuses to endure being called a harlot when she was the one who was being sexually exploited. She also resists to be called insane and proves it through her writing which exhibits a knowledgeable and sane personality. She finally decides to cross the threshold of the church and identifies her 'self' by doing away with the veil of alienation that she had been wearing for thirty three years.

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The Question of Neoliberal Subjectivity: An Emerging Trend in the Protagonist-centred Post Millennial Indian English Fiction

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Abstract

With the neo-liberal economic reforms of 1991, and the consequent structural adjustment of the economy, the Indian state made a transition from the state-led, bureaucratic, welfare-oriented economic paradigm to a free market driven, entrepreneurial, neoliberal state, whereby ideologies of empowerment and self-governance came to displace discursive formations of the welfare state. With austerity programmes and privatisation, empowerment has come to be a preferred tool to construct self-governing, self-caring, consuming entrepreneurial subjects in the broader rubric of the neoliberal Indian de-welfarised state that in recent years has shown an overtly urban, consumerist and middle class bias. And in this particular context, India is largely being represented in the global interface as 'new' India, with a pronounced primacy on the rise of the Indian middle class, which has come to dominate the configuration of the new Indian in terms of its urbanised Westernised outlook, entrepreneurial energy, technology-suaveness and conviction in its own consumerist prowess. As such, a marked strain of protagonist-centrism can be noted in the post-millennial Indian English fiction that aspire to narrate the new India and attempt to negotiate with the new Indians trying to come to terms with the renewed notions of neoliberal subjectivity. In this context, this paper would seek to address the intriguing question of politics of neoliberal subjectivity in post-liberalised India vis-à-vis the protagonist-centred post-millennial Indian English fiction, across diverse genre, especially with respect to the three dominant discursive subject formations, namely – the feminist/postfeminist subject, the marginal subject and the representative new Indian middle class youth propelling the popular new Indian commercial fiction.

Key Words: Neoliberalism, Neoliberal subjectivity, Postfeminism, Marginal subject, New Indian middle class, Entrepreneurship.

With the neo-liberal economic reforms of 1991, and the consequent structural adjustment of the economy, the Indian state made a transition from the state-led, bureaucratic, welfare-oriented economic paradigm to a free market driven, entrepreneurial, neoliberal state, whereby ideologies of empowerment and self-governance came to displace discursive formations of the welfare state. With this neo-liberalisation, India is largely being represented in the global interface as 'new' India, with a pronounced primacy on the rise of the Indian middle class, who has come to dominate the configuration of the new Indian in

terms of its urbanised Westernised outlook, entrepreneurial energy, technology-suaveness and conviction in its own consumerist prowess. As such, a marked strain of protagonist-centrism can be noted in the post-millennial Indian English fiction that aspire to narrate the new India and attempt to negotiate with the new Indians trying to come to terms with the renewed notions of neoliberal subjectivity. In this context, this paper would seek to address the question of politics of neoliberal subjectivity in post-liberalised India vis-à-vis the protagonist-centred post-millennial Indian English fiction.

Now, to engage in a critical analysis of texts emerging in post-liberalised India, it is important to understand that new India itself is now a new literary canon. Not only are the traditional postcolonial literary tropes of colonialism, diaspora, and nationalism insufficient to understand many of the new fictions like the stories of entrepreneurial acclaim and rise from the indignities of servitude as in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) or Vikas Swarup's *Q and A* (2005) or the troubled dual lives of call centre employees in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ The Call Centre* (2005), the crisis of the individuals in these novels hardly arise from their split postcolonial psyches or from the conflicts of their cultural identity. The issues that they face, and the world that they live in, have been vigorously restructured by new social and economic changes post liberalisation that determine and shape their existence. This is significantly being made a point of import in E. Dawson Varughese's *Reading New India: Post Millennial Indian Fiction in English*, where she embarks the publication of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* in 1997 as a turning point, not simply in Indian fiction in English but also in India as a country, its contemporary culture and society, finding itself on the brink of New India. She recognises in Roy's work the seeds of a canon of work soon to emerge in the Indian literary scene, one that epitomises new India and is unrecognisable to the Indian English literature preceding it.

Under the aegis of neoliberal governmentality, citizenship is reframed and the focus is on the configuration of a "depoliticized existence and disciplined, consuming, individuated civic actors" (Sharma xx). Neoliberal discourses of rationality, consumerism, autonomy, responsibility, entrepreneurship, positivity and self-confidence constitute the neoliberal subject in ways consonant with neoliberal governmentality. Neoliberal subjects perceive the self as a project with the emphasis on self-responsibility, agency, enterprising business acumen and initiative; problems are construed as ones with market solutions; the focus is on profit and productivity (Mcguigan). The neoliberal self is connected to a generational structure of feeling; a selfhood counter-posed to the old social-democratic self, involved in intense brand-conscious commodity fetishism, pivoted to self-care and money-generation and comfortable with debt. Future-oriented, they are selfishly resourceful, competitive, calculating and bent on becoming human capital. The new Indian middle class premises its subjectivity on the hegemonic ideals of neoliberalism; in fact, the intensification of consumption, following the work of Bourdieu and Featherstone (2000) is related to the emergence of the new middle classes

Undertaking a neoliberal reading of the post-millennial Indian English fiction, across such diverse genre, we see that such fiction consciously participates in the representation and political construction of the new Indian as a social class that works as a proponent of economic liberalisation; it also engages in the new trend of artistic production in neoliberal India that implies the trope of the enterprising ethic to inform, shape and build characters. In portraying the constructed-ness of this new Indian middle class, who

according to Leela Fernandes, encompass English-speaking urban white-collar segments of the middle class who are benefitting from new employment opportunities (Fernandes xviii), these new fiction address the paradigmatic shift in their roles, attitudes, lifestyles and consumption practices in collusion with the state and corporate media generated mainstream national political discourses that posit urban middle class as the representative citizens of liberalising India. As Nandini Gooptu attests, in her book, *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media*, protagonist-centred fiction is now a product of India's liberalisation. Characterised by themes of ambition, personal initiative, an embrace of the new and a rejection of an old corrupt political system, these fiction in the backdrop of the coming-of-age neo-liberalised nation, gyrate around characters that are autonomous, enterprising, in control of their destiny and unfettered by social structures or sentimental ties to family and community. These fictions trace the journey of the protagonists as they secure personal development through "active accumulation of knowledge, the refusal to be a victim and the rejection of fate." (Gooptu 197) And in the stories of their hopes, dreams, struggles, success and crises is written the story of an India, so divided post liberalisation that it fails to stand on its own. In this paper, we would address the intriguing question of politics of neoliberal subjectivity in post-liberalised India vis-à-vis the protagonist-centred post-millennial Indian English fiction, especially with respect to the three dominant discursive subject formations, namely—the feminist/ postfeminist subject, the marginal subject and the representative new Indian middle class youth propelling the popular new Indian commercial fiction.

Recent feminist scholarship (Gill and Scharff 2011; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008) shows that the links between youth, femininity, consumption, self-transformation and notions of choice suggest that young women have been hailed as neoliberal subjects, who according to Christina Scharff, can lead responsabilised and self-managed lives through self-application and self-transformation (Scharff). Accordingly, through a detailed reading of Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India* (2010), we see how it has to negotiate with the renewed notions of Indianness and reinvigorated hegemonic tenets of neoliberal subjectivity. In keeping with the larger shifts in the global economy, we also observe how neoliberalism percolates to and alters the lives of Indian women like Anjali from remote backwater towns like Gauripur; how the neoliberal ideology reaches her and becomes her philosophy to live life. The novel shows how the altered worldview makes Anjali alien to her local context and meaning is restored once she inhabits the neoliberal city, Bangalore. She learns to consume guiltlessly and in assuming the image of the idealised, depoliticised and privatised subject, she takes up the practices and discourses of consumerism to negotiate with citizenship. Thus, in imbibing the entrepreneurial prerogative of the desirable, enterprising neoliberal subject, she becomes the new Indian citizen, who becomes, in her construction of herself, integral to the larger effort of the state and the corporate media, to narrate a new liberalised nation.

Interestingly, it is relevant to quote in this context, what Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff observe in their ground-breaking volume, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* (2011) that "the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-inventing subject of postfeminism" (Gill & Scharff 7). To a greater extent than men, it is now a mandate on women "to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their

conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (Gill & Scharff 7). Thus the critics put forth this question that could it be that neoliberalism is always already gendered, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects? Shelley Budgeon too explores the contradictions inherent in the recent construction of successful femininity, arguing that Third Wave feminism is at risk of becoming entombed in discourses of choice, freedom, active consumption and empowerment that comply rather than critique the usurping intersection of postfeminism and neoliberalism. Thus, we can see that neoliberalism has garnered a feminist subject, whom we see reflected in Mukherjee's Anjali and many such leading protagonists of the chick lit fiction, now in trend. These idealised neoliberal feminist subjects, rather than working cohesively on their problems that might require feminist solidarity, most uncritically accept full responsibility for their own well-being and self-care and such action is found to be increasingly predicated on devising a befitting work-family balance premised on cost effectiveness.

Now, shifting the focus from the neoliberal feminist subject to the marginal subject, we need to divert our attention to the rise in the post-liberalised social realism fiction that, besides capturing the loud contrast between the old, stagnant India of Licence-Raj decay and the new hopeful India, after the opening up of the economy post 1991, reflect on contemporary India, through the perspective of their wronged marginal characters, drawing attention to social injustice and disparity in the wake of economic prosperity. At a time when India is increasingly becoming a country characterised by its English-speaking, urban, middle class, Westernised elite, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and Vikas Swarup's *Q and A* (2005) in their respective choice of making Balram and Ram Mohammad Thomas, the protagonists and Tarun J. Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins* (2010) in trying to explore the outstanding lives of the labelled antagonists, beg to differ. These novels attempt to bring to focus on the rift between the glorified neoliberal hope of inclusion and the actual social exclusion and marginalization that the poor Indian has to suffer. Though the stories of material success of both Balram of Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Ram Mohammad Thomas of Vikas Swarup's *Q and A* are apparently testimonies of the success of neoliberal globalisation, the novels do not portray Balram and Ram's success as a natural consequence of economic liberalisation; rather both the protagonists embody crucial values of ideal neoliberal subjectivity that propel their success. The protagonists thus make it to the top precisely because they play according to the rules of neoliberal capitalism, and act as the model citizens of the new economy. In contrast, the crucial question that *The Story of My Assassins* poses is – how does neoliberalism fare for those who do not submit to its required criteria of subjectivity and citizenship? Does neoliberal society have any place for the marginal, the deviant, the non-consumerist, and the poor?

Balram is the true prototype of the downtrodden underclass in the India of darkness and *The White Tiger* shows that the entrepreneur as the neoliberal role model of social subjectivity has not only been established as an objective fact, but it has been disseminated across different social sectors, so much so that this hegemonic neoliberal discourse reaches even Balram, so young, at such a remote village. And neoliberals, according to Tomas Martilla, have a quasi-heroic attitude to the entrepreneur and to engagement in the market. The idea that everyone should be an entrepreneur is distinctly neoliberal. There is therefore no distinction between a market economy and a market society in neoliberalism. With such attitudes and ethics, there is only market: market society,

market culture, market values and market persons marketing themselves to other market persons. And Balram Halwai has always been one with the entrepreneurial spunk. Thus, Balram succeeds to be part of the new India and the tenets of neoliberal entrepreneurship and the opportunities of the free market allow him to do so. However, the question remains how far this social up-gradation from a subaltern to an upper middle class businessman is a feasible option for an underprivileged marginal subject of the old feudal India, when the means taken to make such a move is a murder.

Through the neoliberal analysis of Vikas Swarup's *Q and A*, we see that Ram Mohammad Thomas gets to surpass his inherited socio-economic marginality through the process of the spread of global capitalism in the form of the globalisation of the entertainment media owing to his eagerness to learn, flexibility, ability to speak English fluently, ability to critically read facts and confidence for entrepreneurial intervention to address lacuna, critical reading and re-reading of past experiences, exceptionally sharp memory and the entrepreneurial wisdom to use the reservoir of his past experience as resource to both critically assess the present as also build the scope for future. It is these renewed attitudes to life, fostered by the hegemony of the ideals of neoliberalism that catches Ram young and prepares him for the material success of his life. As Manfred Steger points out, the central ideological tenet of neoliberalism – “presented to the public as a central, leaderless juggernaut that will ultimately produce benefits for everyone” its “promises of material well-being and social mobility” are well-publicized (79). According to Swaralipi Nandi, *Q&A* projects a neoliberal premise of social mobility by banking on one of the most revolutionary aspects of reality TV, that is, its focus on the 'ordinary' man. Marking a major shift from the scripted sitcom narratives and professional actors, reality TV had turned the spotlight to the common man (115). As Bourdieu points out: “the power of neoliberal hegemony is based on a new form of social Darwinism: In the words of Harvard ‘the best and the most remarkable win the race’” (51); the ideal subject of neoliberalism is therefore someone with exemplary survival skills, like Ram. It is only by his survival skills that Ram becomes materially successful, hence visible; his story brings to light the significant amount of violence that is exercised over this precarious class of society – the street/ slum children – subjected as they are to economic and political exclusion. Unfortunately, the street child is also excluded from the national cultural representation complicit with dominant elite modernity.

Looking into the representative politics of the marginal subject in Tarun J Tejpal's *The Story of My Assassins*, we see that the novel explores the interface between the elite narrator and the pathetic five men, who are supposed to be his assassins. The difficult lives of these men from the underclass continue, parallel to the astronomic progress of India, post globalisation. With the lure of social climbing and trying to inhabit the social space of the middle class, these men seek to move from being invisible in the darker recesses of India to visible enlightened zones. But they lack the requisite factors. They even lack the rare cunning and unique entrepreneurial spunk of the exemplary Balram Halwai of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. They are not white tigers. They are not resourceful. They are men, highly unfit for the neoliberal society that the neo-liberalised globalisation has dawned India into. They are disposable poor men, made into pawns of conspiracy of the state and the stories of their lives attest so.

Through the analysis of these social realism fiction in the wake of post-liberalised

India, with their focus on the marginal characters and their anxious attempts at assumption of neoliberal subjectivity, we can conclude that to be able to be part of the new India, one has to partake in the drive for consumerism and the neoliberal policies of abolishing state regulations and control in favour of a deregulated economy further pushes to the margins those people, whose interests are now irrelevant to the global neoliberal logic, as poignantly pointed out by Kanishka Chowdhury.

Now, to sum up, we can say that this emergence of the new Indian novel, in its diverse interests and bents, works as a metonymy for the emerging new India itself, as noted with much clarity by Swaralipi Nandi. However, increasing consolidation of capitalist markets of commodity production and consumption has unleashed not only economic growth and social change, it has also led to the emergence of a new sect of readers who have become an increasingly emboldened social class, owing to their increased income and enhanced power to spend. They are the “new generation” in the words of Ritty A. Lukose (6), who admire capitalism and are goaded by the ambition to get rich. Having grown up in the era of food surpluses, they prefer jobs in the private corporate sector. To fit into the neoliberal social order, they consume without guilt and propel the policy of consumerism that largely characterise the changed economic status of India post liberalisation. Therefore, they subscribe to the state and the corporate-media endorsed construction of the consumer-subject. However, it is only in the commercial fiction of mass market writers like Chetan Bhagat, Ravinder Singh, Priti Shenoy and Durjoy Dutta that they find celebratory representation. Their consumerist, amoral attitude is not judged, nor their lack of emotional exuberance mocked. And this corresponds to their congratulatory presence in the mass media.

Thus, coming to the third category of neoliberal discursive subject formation, we see that the politics of the rise of the now popular mainstream Indian commercial fiction, with its stated shift from the grandiloquent historical reservoir to concentrate on the anxieties of the present is mired in its localised thrust to address the politics of visibility of the new Indian middle class, ambivalences towards the cultural effects of consumerism, moral anxieties over shifting gender roles and changes in youth culture. The new Indian commercial fiction, owing to its representational dynamics, its drive to become self-consciously less literary in its simple, pragmatic approach to the English language to be more relevant to the new young readers as also to survive in competition alongside print, television and online media, also attempts to aid and participate in the discursive hegemonic construction of a particular segment of the consumerist middle class – one that represents the promise of the liberalising Indian nation – as the new middle class, signifying the promise of the new materialist Indian dream.

To theorise on the rise of commercial fiction in response to demand created for consumption in the neo-liberalised market society of new India, it must be noted that the commercial fiction of Chetan Bhagat, Durjoy Datta and the rest promises honourable representation for the newly emergent dominant class of the aspiring middle-class Indian youth, post two decades of neo liberalised globalisation. This is in line with Ulka Anjaria's observation that in the new commercial fiction projecting the new Indian experience, the norms of social pressure and expectation have shifted finding themselves more intricately bound to pressures of globalisation, economies and the very tangible possibility of personal choice. The neo liberalised individual, be it average or below so, as per contemporary

societal standards, can rise to any material height as he chooses to. Therefore, neo liberalisation champions stories of average people ending up in achieving extraordinary feats, like Shyam's in Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center* and that of the average protagonists of these popular fictions, with a clear commercial focus.

As Smith et al. point out in *The Handbook of Social Geography*, if neo-liberalisation is assumed to work through the naturalisation of market rationalities and the normalization of individualistic egoism, then the critical task becomes one of exposing the various dimensions of neo-liberalisation as social constructs (Smith et al 1). Therefore, on that note, we can conclude that the question of neoliberal subjectivity thus becomes such a crucial proposition to be taken into account, now, in analysing the characters featuring in the largely protagonist-centred post millennial Indian English fiction.

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Foregrounding an Indigenous Environmental Ethic: A Study of Pratibha Ray's *Primal Land* (2001) and Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* (2011)

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Abstract

Understanding the value of each aspect of our ecosystem requires a deep awareness of the complexity of ethics. So to treat the natural world ethically means respecting and revering it for its own sake and not just for ours. There is a dire need to question how one should live and act best. Environmental ethics is caught between the moral dilemma of ascertaining the value of a thing based on its instrumental value or intrinsic/inherent value. Consequentialist ethical theories believe that the rightness of an action is determined by the consequences it holds. The anthropocentric view proposes the supremacy of human race on the claim of it being the only rational animal in the natural world. The philosophy behind this line of thought can not only be found in the writings of Augustine and Aquinas but also of Descartes and Kant. There has been a subsequent array of variations on the theme of environmental ethics. Albert Schweitzer (1959) included the idea of "an ethical world" in his discussion of "reverence for life." Rachel Carson (1962) argued that it is insufficient to concern ourselves with the relation of humans to one another. Instead, she stressed the relation of humans to all life. Later, in the 1970s, a drift began toward bioethical concepts in which mankind is not taken to be the central orientation of nature but instead is considered to be only a member of the planet's natural community of life.

*The present paper aims to foreground the cartographies of eco-ethic in the postcolonial literary texts, *The Primal Land* and *Gift in Green*. These novels have been skilfully translated from regional languages into the linguistic fabric of English. Within the Postcolonial contours, translation is being seen as a medium of empowerment, as enrichment and as cultural learning. In order to understand the basis of environmental ethic flowing in the veins of the Indian fabric, it is important to read indigenous texts that verbalize native cultures and weave stories of regional import.*

Key Words: *Eco-ethic, Environmentalism, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Bioethic*

Advancing an environmental ethic means to articulate a world view that reassigns meanings to good and bad; is suitably focused on the health of the blue planet; an ethic that is directed for the environment, of the environment and by the environment. An environmental ethic must also specify the scientific, social, political and economic nature of

our association with environment. It should also provide a clear direction for action and agency deducible from the environment and charted for the better health of the environment. The debate regarding the application of ethics in the field of ecology has been initiated with the choice of the value assigned to Mother Earth. Around 35 years ago, James Lovelock along with contributions from Lynn Margulis developed a theory eulogising Mother Earth-the *Gaia hypothesis*. 'Gaia' is the name of an ancient Greek goddess of the Earth, which Lovelock chose on the suggestion of author William Lovelock. The hypothesis developed in the book *Gaia: A New Look on Life on the Earth* (1979) revolves around the basic idea that Earth is more like a living organism than an inanimate machine, and which is made of highly complex inter-dependent ecosystems, self-renewing, self-sustaining and maintaining relative stability in the face of changing atmosphere and temperature. Patrick Curry defines three strands of ecological ethics: "light green or environmentalism; mid-green, mainly concerned with (other) animals; and dark or deep green or ecocentric. The last, which includes but exceeds the other two, is fully ecological" (*Ecological Ethics*, 2).

The present paper aims to foreground the cartographies of eco-ethic in the postcolonial literary texts, *The Primal Land* and *Gift in Green*. These novels have been skilfully translated from regional languages into the linguistic fabric of English. Within the Postcolonial contours, translation is being seen as a medium of empowerment, as enrichment and as cultural learning. In the recent years, several writers in Indian languages have been brought to the global platform including Prakash (Hindi), Geet Chaturvedi (Hindi), Vyomesh Shukla (Hindi), and Vivek Shanbhag (Kannada). To understand the basis of environmental ethic flowing in the veins of the Indian fabric, it is important to read indigenous texts that verbalize native cultures and weave stories of regional import. These texts present an India that is true, real and naked. From the lagoons of Kerala, to the rocky soils of Madhya Pradesh to the hilly terrains of Utrakhnad, these texts take the reader to the interior of the country untamed and uncivilized by the techno-gigantic denominations of neo-colonialism.

The need for a region specific environmental ethic arises due the vast difference in worldview enwrapping the colonial and non-colonial minds. The 2009 Copenhagen world summit on environment reinforced this opinion, when no consensus was formed on a common environmental policy. It can be duly inferred that a common environmental ethic cannot solve the problems of every nook and corner of the world. However, an environmental ethic that emerges from the ethical pattern of a specific region along with a determined direction for action can provide a suitable solution to the environmental health problems of the world. While the environmental ethic in the West has focused on the instrumental value of ecological entities, Indian environmental ethic is guided by the principle of inter-connectedness of non-human and human to maintain the inner order or unity of the vast universe.

The notion of ecocentricism has proceeded from and fed back into, related belief systems derived from Eastern religions, such as Taoism and Buddhism and from modern interpretations of primal religions. It stands in direct conflict to the Kantian philosophy of being sensitive towards non-human beings due to their instrumental value only. In the context of Indian environmental ethic, Purushottama Bilimoria in "Environmental Ethics of Indian Religious Traditions" (1998) analyses the environmental ethical traditions in Indian religions and cultures. She explores the philosophy of *prakriti* and *rta* in Hinduism, *jiva* in

Jainism and *sramana* traditions of Buddhism. K.K. Sunitha in "Environmental jurisprudence in India: philosophy and practice" (2008) explores the possibility of incorporating Indian philosophy in environmental laws to find philosophical and practical solutions for present-day environmental degradation. During the Independence struggle Mahatma Gandhi led the salt march, which was representative of the claim of natural resources by the parent nation. The framework of Gandhi's social philosophy is contained in a slim tract, *Hind Sawaraj* (1909); where with his negation of the western materialistic philosophy he calls for the revival of the indigenous modes of survival of the pre-colonial and pre-industrial past. To tackle this environmental debate a 'post-materialistic' perspective in which nature is not a mere means of production but is an integral unit in the enhancement of life on the planet needs to be considered. The fundamental of the culture-the traditions, folklore and religion need to be re-interpreted in the wake of recent natural catastrophes.

The literature of the region has been textually and opinionatedly grafted to address these concerns. Although not many, there are a few novels in the history of Indian English literature which can be read through the lens of ecocriticism. It is true that a serious concern with ecology seems to be lacking in the earlier works, yet nature has been used as an important backdrop against which the story develops. One of the prominent writers of Indian English novels, Raja Rao's, depiction of the South Indian village culture and environmental setting is a true depiction of relationship between man and nature. In his novel *Kanthapura* he has shown how rivers and mountains play an important role in people's lives. R. K. Narayan wrote in the same decade and has given life to a place, Malgudi, or it can be said that he has developed a place as a character which can be seen in almost all his prose fictions bearing the same features. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* depicts the true picture of Bengal famine of 1943 in which at least 3,000,000 Indians died of starvation. The other writer whose work bears a reference to the Bengal famine is Kamala Markandya in her novel *Nectar in Sieve*. The natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Missouri almost invariably form the setting of Ruskin Bond's works and reflect his ardent faith in the healing powers of nature. He shows his worry for the unthoughtful actions of man towards nature. Dominance of nature images which act as important part of theme is evident in the works of Anita Desai. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* straddles across continents, mapping the contours of the ethno-racial and historical relationship between people from different cultures and backgrounds. Desai crosses international boundaries (India and USA) and shows her character from cross-cultural ecocritical perspective.

Translated from an Oriya novel, *Aadibhoomi*, Pratibha Ray's *The Primal Land* muses upon the theme of exploitation and the tribal struggle for existence within the pristine corridors of nature; while the forces of civilization work to quicken their noose around them. With a world that had till now remained untouched by the deadly chains of civilization, they are persuaded to accept this system through as Guha states, "three kinds of devices: by permitting a trickle of handouts to reach them; by ensuring that they remain asset less and uneducated; ad, finally, by more active coercion" (35). The British initiated and the Indian state continues the assumption of draconian power in the acquisition of Land for ostensibly public purposes. The powers invested in the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, have been administered to violate their bond with the land. The novel which talks of the plight of tribals of Bonda tribe that inhabits the mountains and forests of Malkangiri region of Koraput, Orissa; forces the readers to re-asses the role of nature in our lives. Here, nature

is not only presented as an integral part of the ecosystem, the man himself is presented as a small speck in the schema of nature. The Shahukars allow easy rate of interests, thereby, enticing them for heavier loans, the government agencies distribute free saris in a move to distance them from their culture. The edifice of the nature-culture paradigm is further attacked by forging a conspiracy to gain the ownership of salap trees that produce an intoxicating drink, one that is considered an elixir by the tribal people. The existence of salap tree is closely related to the genealogy of Bondas. It is believed that Bonda tribe was founded by twelve brothers who built their huts in twelve villages which made up the Bonda country called lower Bondas and those at the hills are known as upper Bondas. The salap tree is a witness to the ebb and flow of Bonda blood; its juice sapung is an crucial part of Bonda life, its use nurtures them at the same time confuses them, thus becoming a "cause of murder, rioting incarceration and hanging" (11). "The Bonda's relationship to the salap tree is that of the flower to the stalk" (11). It is an eternal link that binds them to the Mother nature. "A Bonda will kill or be killed in protection of his salap tree ... Sapung is not just an intoxicant to the Bonda, it is the salve that soothes his pain, makes life possible among these fearful mountains" (23). The importance of this wonder tree is eternal, always a part of Bonda life; to the Bonda child, Bonda adult (Dhangra) and Bonda old (Dokra) It often is a bone of contention between two Bondas. The Bonda woman feed their infants with the sago palm juice, while a pregnant woman drinks it to supplement the milk intake. Often at funerals, the distraction of family feuds, the worries of an official visit, and during other troublesome periods, the sago palm serves as an effective anesthesia (Mohanty, R. P 2).

For the Bondas their land is a spiritual place, sacred and part of their identity. At the Pansatti (Assembly of five elders) the Bondas observe an oath, "No remo will give up his country, except to go to jail. No remo will work for any foreigner" (90). This aspect of Bonda character is unique in the sense that they maintain their identity and love their pristine culture. If a child is born in the forest he or she is considered an incarnation of their ancestors. The child thus grows fast as he is fed on Sapung and also drinks lendha and pendum brewed from millets. Festivals are religiously celebrated in Bondaland; Pusa festival intoxicates and drives one mad. According to Bonda belief, "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. 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). As Dandekar (1979) puts it, "The vast universe was not strewn about in random chaos, but had an inner order, a unity with an inexorable law and purpose (*Rta*) that governs the working of both the macrocosm and microcosm" (158). In ecological terms, the Vedic hymns written in *Rigveda* speak of the uncanny unity of creation and, more significantly, the mysterious interconnectedness or co-dependence of everything to everything else. The *Sramana* (lone-some ascetic pursuits of yogis) traditions of Buddhist and Jaina religious philosophies also tend to endorse the principle of non-injury and respect to all *jivas* (life-forms).

To safeguard their own way of life and identity, the Bondas have taken refuge in the inhospitable terrain, this terrain has enabled the Bondas to lead a secure and undisturbed life. However, the real threat to their way of life arises with the fast developing world making entry into their tribal world. Through the voices of Soma Mudali, Lachhma Toki, Adibari Toki, Bagha Bindhu who represent native, and Gulang babus who represent the

colonizer and propaganda in the tribal world, Ray presents a microcosm of a modern-day society that is floating in a liminal space between the real and the perceived. The pressure and interference of the outside world, including the government, start increasing gradually. With numerous forces acting against the freedom of the Bondas, they are robbed of their pots of Sapung, their salap trees, their cattle is slaughtered and their bond with nature questioned. The systematic displacement of the tribals through the periodic establishment of various industrial units and macro development projects establishes the fact that the process of impoverishment of the tribals is inbuilt in the development plans of the state. Thus, the colonial process of marginalization of the tribals gets reinforced under the tutelage of new paradigm of development (Mohanty, Bbbhuti Bhushan 9).

Similar to the conceptual lines of *The Primal Land*, Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* (2011) analyses the eco-ethical lines transversing the philosophical, historical and organic significance of water in the Universe. The novel is set in Aathi, a fictitious lagoon that snugly lies in the womb of "an enchanting world", a "mangrove forest that the people of Aathi affectionately called the Green Bangle" (25). Located in a secluded serene environ, the place is bereft of all noise, pollution and traffic of the outside world. It presents a perfect model of an ecosystem, self-sustaining and immune to the cacophonous voices of development. The enchanted place carries a mystical aura around it with glow worms dancing and mussels singling the glory of universe. The land is blissfully administered to the care of a deity Thampuran. The place has no leanings of modernity, with people sleeping on mats, every household cultivating rice and each family unit including a cow, a buffalo, hens and ducks. The entire text revolves around one common source -water. The significance of water is depicted in every aspect of the novel. The people of Aathi depend on it for their livelihood, their spirituality and for their inner peace. Joseph writes: "There had been a covenant between them and the water. The fish, the frogs, the crabs, the oysters, the birds, the butterflies, the reptiles, the grass, the bushes and the mangrove forest were all signatories to that water covenant. You will give us water and livelihood. We shall work with you and take care of you" (201). There is deep bond between the people of Aathi and the waters of Aathi. In fact, the moment there is disturbance in the people of Aathi, water comes to their rescue. The water provides them with fish, mussels and prawns which was sufficient to meet their needs.

The novel reassesses this bond with water in the light of modern-day so-called technological advances. In the Indian cultural idiom, the Rigvedic hymns refer to water as a great cleanser and stands second in significance to Agni. It is written in Rigveda: "Waters have healing powers, they drive diseases away; they have a balm for all, let them make medicines" (RV.X;137;6,7). The life of Aathi displaces when this bond with water is ought to be broken. A landfill is envisioned and a grand temple for the deity Thampuran is planned. A lagoon where; "No one had ever dared to take advantage of ... Other than birds, squirrels, snakes, garden lizards, chameleons and crickets - familiar denizens of the forest - as well as amphibious creatures like turtles and frogs, no one had ever laid claim..." (4); the forces of modernization, urbanization and commercialization come in the form of character Kumaran. He, an earlier resident of Aathi, had left the land of Aathi in search of better prospects and luxuries of life. With the money in his pockets and the power of corporate agencies and business tycoons besides him; Kumaran starts weaving the web of better prospects for the innocent and naive people of Aathi. Sarah Joseph shows how Kumaran

achieves this at first by mastering the strong woman of Aathi, named Kunjimathu. Through capitalist ideology and hegemonic mindset, Kumaran tries to devastate the biodiversity of Aathi. The novel, thus, tries to protest against all power constructs involved in the process of conquest and exploitation. The idea of progress contained in *shruti* literature is holistic because it centers on the idea of 'mangala' or universal well-being. The ancient principles of 'mangala-kaushala' are aimed at ensuring universal peace and harmony. The Indian epistemology of development does not perceive nature as an economic resource. Here, development is considered an all-encompassing holistic renewal of the system to bring forth growth and synergy.

Gift in Green also brings forth the anthropocentric treatment of nature which allows mankind to govern the entire ecosystem. It embodies the age-old Indian concept of "vasudaivakudumbakam" i.e. the entire world is one family. The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* present a unified vision of nature, man and culture. As M. Vannucci remarks, "Everything is sacred by virtue of its own nature because energy pervades everything, ...".(113) The concept of Rta, cosmic order or equipoise, one that calls for individual, social and cosmological union of the ecosystem forms an integral aspect of the Indian world-view. There are no binaries or dualities while dealing with nature in our everyday lives, it is tightly interwoven in the integrated microcosm of community. Sarah Joseph alludes to this cosmic unity by depicting a lagoon that is both self-sustaining and self-regulating. She presents the water- life in Aathi as an example for this integral and primordial vision. It is the symbol of fertility, sustainability and vitality. Through the biblical reference, water is presented as the source of life in Aathi: "Hagar could understand the thirst of a people, the infinite value of water and the secret of life scripted into it But you must know that water is life itself"(14). As the narrative progresses, the novel shows how the covenant between water and the people of Aathi gets broken in the course of time. Water in Aathi gets contaminated. The unsustainable developmental projects and the interference of people like Kumaran disrupts the ecological balance. The novel shows how the pristine purity of water in Aathi is "pitted against the ever-thirsty behemoth that can, in one sweeping slurp, suck dry the waters of Aathi"(274).

Unlike many other novelist of dystopian fiction, Sarah Joseph does not end her story at a melancholic note. The contaminated and polluted water gets transformed into a shamanic force capable of refreshing and purifying through the baptismal quality and the pristine purity thereby giving a redemptive hope. The novel raises the question of ecotourism as an emerging face of neocolonialism. It questions the wheels of development, and the finalities of progress. Joseph finally asserts that till the time nature is no longer perceived as a market commodity, providing an implicit rationalization for the control and management of natural resources by the global urban-industrial system; sustainable development cannot be achieved. If man cannot re-analyze his role in the ecosystem then, surely, nature will take its own course to claim what is its own.

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Blending Mythologies in New Age Fantasy Literature

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Abstract

*Twentieth Century Literature is characterised by several new fascinating literary phenomena, chief among them has been the Fantasy novels. These novels have been greatly influential in resurrecting the otherwise dead habit of reading especially among the children, heralding a new era where readers have a greater say on what writers would write. Combining classical mythology and new age magic, several writers have weaved fantasy into their writings. Among the most popular books in this genre are Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, CS Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. This article looks at how in recent times, mythologies have been blended to create the aura of fantasy with specific reference to the *Harry Potter* series. Taking up just the etymology of the names of characters and spells, it is possible to see how the author has evolved the characterization/nature of spells with just the combination of terms from mythologies around the world. A brief survey of retelling mythologies in Indian Writing, Twentieth and early Twenty first Century English literatures are also included in the article.*

Key Words: *Fantasy, Gothic, Mythology, Roman, Greek, British, History, Harry Potter.*

Introduction

Fantasy Literature has always captivated readers, though they have been in and out of fashion throughout literary history. Most of the fantasy Literature of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was essentially horror stories, presented in the Gothic style. The twentieth century saw the return of the Mythical age, when a plethora of novels retelling mythologies were produced. However, it is in the twenty first century, that the influence of mythology in recreating them as new age fantasy story telling not only became popular but the most sought after genre of writing. The Twenty first century trend has been significantly successful, as publishers were willing to bet on new fantasy writers and readers, willing to patronise the world of magic. In Josh Jackson's words, "Many readers have worked their way back from movies like the *Lord of the Rings* franchise or TV series like *Game of Thrones* to their fantasy novel origins, seeking out new authors after devouring J.R.R. Tolkien and G.R.R. Martin's books".

Mythology and Indian Writing

Indian writing has always been replete with a range of mythological inclusions. From simple allusions to recreating and repackaging mythological stories, a whole range of

literary narratives have been produced. Indian mythology or ancient history, as the Sanskrit term 'Iti hasa' means, has survived many millennia mainly through the oral tradition. It is believed that there have been many different versions of the same story. "A story, told and retold over generations, develops its own sub-plots, introduces new characters and relatable events and changes perspectives according to the storyteller" (Parthasarathy). It is this aspect that has greatly inspired the writers across generations to retell the stories to suit their context. Ramayana for example, have many versions. Tulsidas Ramayana is different from Kambar's and so on. Besides, mythology has always been part of the socio-cultural fabric in India. Unlike British Literateurs, the Indian writers use mythological names, characters, stories and allusions at ease, as there is every possibility of the readers relating to them. This explains the popularity of the modern mythological storytellers. Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale Of The Vanquished*, Amish Tripathy's *The Shiva Trilogy*, Rajiv Menon's *Thundergod: The Ascendance of Indra*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions*. Gurcharan Das's *The Difficulty of Being Good* and so on. From creating a world that contradicts popular beliefs and perceptions, to presenting the tales from different perspectives and interpreting them to understand the present socio-political context, these novels and many others retain the acceptability and the believability of their plots. Another interesting aspect is the modelling of these novels on present-day India that makes them relevant to contemporary times. In Amish Tripathy's *The Shiva Trilogy*, as Anusha Parthasarathy puts it, "Not only is Shiva shown as a human but the language and setting too are more or less contemporary".

Mythology in British Literature

The English Literary scene produces a whole new world of mythological retelling. The giants of English literature—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Wilde, Joyce, Eliot had introduced the names of the heroes and demi-gods of Roman and Greek mythology at will, since they assumed that their readers were familiar with them (Glyn Iliffe). That situation soon disappeared with the advent of Industrialization and the two Wars which altered the perspectives of the writers. With the onset of the postmodern angst, ridden with pessimism, novelists explored newer forms like stream of consciousness and interior monologue that helped express their thoughts better. This kept the common reader blissfully oblivious of classical literature. Recalling mythology therefore became more of a necessity than a mere avenue for delightful entertainment.

Among the many novels written in the twentieth century, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* stand out as one of the most inspiring fantasy fiction for a whole generation of readers.

The Chronicles of Narnia is a series of novels by C. S. Lewis. Though written in the 1950s the novels were adapted into films in the early 2000. Set during the Second World War, the plot revolves around the adventures of Pevensie children in the world of Narnia. The fascinating point is that they are guided by a wise and powerful lion named Aslan, that can speak. He is considered as the true king of Narnia. The children fight against the witch who abducts and chains Edmund, the eldest son of the Pevensie family. With the help of Aslan, Edmund's siblings Lucy, Susan and Peter save the Kingdom of Narnia from the clutches of the evil witch.

The transition from the human world to the fantasy world of Narnia is extremely smooth. The children move in and out of the two worlds through the space inside a wardrobe. Another interesting point in the story is the time difference between the two worlds. Having

spent days on end in the Narnia world the children return within a few seconds to the human world from the time they left it. The narration is gripping right through the story, thereby capturing the imagination of the readers, both young and old.

The Lord of the Rings, an epic high fantasy novel written by English author and scholar J. R. R. Tolkien in the 1950s, but adapted into movies in the early 2000. It is a three volume narration, mistakenly known as a trilogy. The central idea of the novel is to show how even the smallest of heroes could accomplish the greatest of deeds. The plot unravels the War of the Ring in the fantasy world of 'Middle-earth'. It is a sequel to the earlier novel by the Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, where the magical Ring was discovered by Bilbo Baggins. He retires and hands over the ring to his nephew Frodo Baggins. The discovery of true nature of the ring, and Sauron's forging it to take control over the Middle earth, where the free peoples such as Men, Elves, Dwarves, and Hobbits, overpower the dark forces of Sauron by destroying the ring and save the Middle Earth, form the crux of this fantastic novel.

A significant factor about *The Lord of the Rings* is that it has inspired, and continues to inspire, not just literature but development of technology supported video games, board games, artwork, and television, music, films and many more.

One of the most characteristic features of these novels is that they are brimming with magic and violence that transcend to high fantasy epics, chronicling wars with a dramatic effect. In order to sustain the effect, the writers have used classical mythology to produce the right mixture of realism and fantasy that set the trend afoot in the twenty first century.

A select list of Twenty first century popular books in this genre is briefly discussed here. In 2002, Rick Riordan began inventing stories for his son Haley Riordan, when he ran out of ideas for his bedtime stories. He created new stories that combined mythological characters with modern ones. Thus was born the fictional character of Percy Jackson and the story of his pursuits of Zeus's lightning-bolt across the United States. Many more stories involving the great wars of the Greek Gods with the Titans followed, this gave rise to many new age mythology based fantasies. "The *Inkheart* series by Cornelia Funke in 2003, has a twelve year old girl as the protagonist. The books chronicle the adventures of this little girl who realises that she and her father have the powers to bring fictional characters into the real world when reading aloud. *The Magicians* by Lev Grossman 2009 the first book of a trilogy, captures the lead character's travels to a magic land with his friends.

Harry Potter is a mesmerizing series of seven novels by J. K. Rowling. Chronicling the adventures of the protagonist Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, the fantasy world is captured through their adolescent eyes. As students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry their exploits are widely touted as the best fantasy literature since C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, to enchant young minds. The plot revolves around Harry's predicament in the fight against the evil wizard Lord Voldemort, who apparently left the young boy orphaned at the age of just one, thus quenching his thirst to overpower the wizarding world and dominate the non-magical people called Muggles.

It is quite fascinating to note that one entire generation of children grew up with this book. One of the prominent upshots of the book is the development of reading habit. The Harry Potter generation as it is popularly referred to, saw some voracious readers. If we go by the number of copies of the books that have been sold, then there seems to have emerged an entire world of readers out of the blue. This is perhaps the most befitting response to criticism of the book / series particularly from the more hard line religious people.

Many writers have also been deeply influenced by Rowling and others in capturing the imagination of the young readers. It is worth noting that a whole generation of readers grew up with Harry Potter whose every year at Hogwarts coincided with their school life. Little surprising that many new writers have taken to this genre, as fish to water. An average young reader's favourite fantasy books in the genre includes a wide range from high fantasy worlds with well-defined systems of magic to humble fables fantastical in nature to urban / aristocratic fantasies filled with real life-like characters to convince the reader of their possible existence.

The Harry Potter Generation

This new generation of readers is equally proficient in writing as well. The website <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/> has over 67 thousand stories on the trio (Harry Potter, Ron Weaseley and Hermione Granger alone) while another website http://www.fanfiction.net/book/Harry_Potter/ has about 50 thousand stories about other characters like Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and their teenage years. James and Lilly Potter series is yet another one to have similar mindboggling stories. All weaved out of the reader's imagination! Beside these, each of these stories receives reviews and criticism by another set of readers adding to both the readership and the writers. This is to suggest that this series has produced many amateur authors as well. Therefore neither is writing a lost habit. Another whole series of fiction based on the stories from the novels have been adapted into films like *The Fantastic Beasts* series.

Even an unsuspecting glance at the bookshops on the eve of the book release, would have pointed to yet another astounding data. It was not just the children whose imaginations are annexed. In fact age is not a criterion, for invasion into the fantasy minds of the old happened equally. The queue comprised of all age groups jostling for space to access the first copy of the book no sooner it was released. A sight so very perplexing and inexplicable by any standards!

The defence for the huge popularity of the book could be summarized as follows:

- The plot in the books are a product of a fertile imagination, which the author has conceived in her own head aiming at mere story telling.
- The books endorse diligence in learning and obedience to the rules. Goodness, truthfulness and moral uprightness overcome dishonesty and deceit.
- The story line in the series is the time tested 'good triumphing over evil'.
- These books primarily targeted children approximately in the age group of 10 and upwards.
- The names of characters, spells, charms and even the subjects of study evoke a highly classical feel among the readers adding to the enchantment.

We shall now look at the last point mentioned above, in detail:

The Mythological Etymology and Semantics of the names of characters and Spells

The names have been drawn heavily from different mythology and folklore of the world. In a 1999 interview J.K.Rowling had this to say:

"I do a certain amount of research. And folklore is quite important in books. So where I'm mentioning a creature, or a spell that people used to believe genuinely worked- of course, it didn't... then, I will find out exactly what the words were, and I will find out exactly what the characteristics of that creature or ghost were supposed to be."

This explains the classical origins of these names. Besides, the names are not drawn from just one or two languages. They are in fact an amalgam of two or more, with their combined

meaning explicated through their actions. For instance, Professor Minerva McGonagall, has the following semantic combination:

Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war; her pet was an owl, like Athene, her equivalent in Greek mythology. The name Minerva means wise.

The Scottish name McGonagall (or McGonigle, McGonegal) is of Celtic origin - Conegal, meaning 'the bravest,' plus Mc, or 'son/ daughter of.'

Befittingly, she is the head of the Griffindor house which has students who show remarkable courage and wisdom in the face of adversity, (This is also the house to which the trio of Harry, Ron and Hermione belong).

The entire novel stuns the reader when read with such deep semantic understanding of the names which are drawn from numerous sources across the world. This article looks only at the names of characters and spells. A whole new study is required to look at the several episodes that directly suggest references to mythological, historical and religious texts from all parts of the world. The entire series looks like a compendium of world literatures repackaged as fantasy literature.

We shall look at select names of characters and spells which are tabulated below.

S.No.	Name	Etymology	Semantics	Characteristics
1. HOGWARTS STAFF Headmaster	Albus Dumbledore	Latin <i>Albus</i> - Old English <i>Dumbledore</i> -	White Bumblebee - busy as a bee	Honorable , hard-working. His actions and planning have been flawless.
2.	Argus Filch	Greek mythology <i>Argus</i> - <i>Filch</i> - (Informal word)	All-Seeing man with 100 eyes on his body - great watchman Secret stealing	Filch sees all - the watchman in Hogwarts - steals the marauder's map
3.	Rubeus Hagrid	Latin <i>Rubins</i> - Greek <i>Hagrid</i>	red Kind Giant of the Jewels Framed for murder but allowed to take care of animals	Generous man - Expelled from Hogwarts - allowed as a Game keeper
4.	Gilderoy Lockhart	English - <i>Gilded</i> Scottish <i>Lockhart</i> - Australia	gold coating 'I open locked hearts' Town near Wagga Wagga	a gilded, golden- haired man whose big smile and friendly ways unlocks hearts. He claims that he had vanquished the Wagga Wagga werewolf.

5.	Severus Snape	Latin <i>Severus</i> - English <i>Snape</i> -	Roman emperors, strict, severe Town in England, A piece of wood, or cut it at a sloping angle - can be inclined	A very strict man, severe towards Potter, Snape slopes towards Voldermort though he remains loyal to Dumbledore
6. OTHER WIZARDS	Godric Gryffindor	Old English <i>Godric</i> - <i>Griffin</i> -	Power of God fierce legendary beast- body of a lion and head and wings of the eagle	Hogwarts House named after him - Lion is its symbol
7.	Helga Hufflepuff	Old Norse <i>Heliger</i> - Celtic Myhtology <i>Badger</i> - Hufflepuff - a <i>huff and a puff</i>	Prosperous and brave symbol - badger guide, determined commonly used to indicate hard work	Hogwarts House named after her - known for loyalty and hard work
8.	Rowena Ravenclaw	Latin - Germanic <i>Rowena</i> - English Raven <i>claw</i> -	Fame and joy The claws of a large crow	Hogwarts House named after her - wise and quick learners - symbol - eagle
9.	Salazar Slytherin	Spanish/ Basque Salazar- English <i>Slytherin</i> -	palace variation of slithering serpent	Hogwarts House named after him. Symbol - snake - descendents of dark / evil magic
10.	Sirius Black	Egyptian and later Greek <i>Sirius</i> - English Black-	Dog Star -among the brightest in the Sirius constellation dark wizard	Black dog form for hisanimagus transformation His ancestors were Slytherins

11.	Potter	English <i>Harry</i> - Lily (mother)- <i>James</i> (father)-	Henry, ruler of the home. flower of purity. supplanter - one who takes the place of someone else, especially by force.	Harry saves the wizarding world from the dark forces. Lily's pure love saves Harry. James marries Lily, seizing the place of Snape who loved her deeply.
12.	Ron Weasley	Scandinavian <i>Ron</i> - English <i>Weasley</i> -	"advice ruler," a leader who gives advice Sneaky, cowardly, running away from a situation	He is seen to advise Harry every now and then Ron though intelligent shows fear and would want to run away from many challenging situations like meeting the Aragog etc.
13.	Hermione Granger	Greek <i>Hermione</i> - Helen's only child American English <i>Granger</i> -	Earthly, Hermes, God of orators, wit, literature, invention, weights measurements, and thieves. Farmer	She did steal a few items from Snape for the polyjuice potion. Her practical intelligence and wit are well known characteristics in the series. The only one to have studied arithmancy and runes

14.	Voldemort Tom Marvolo Ridde	French English Tom- <i>Marvolo- Riddle</i> -(also)	Flight of death twin, marvelous, to pierce with many holes	It is the fear of death that makes him actually want power
15.	Draco Malfoy	Latin <i>Draco</i> - French <i>Malfoy</i> -	Dragon Bad faith	He is as dangerous as a dragon and is always on the side of the evil.
16. MUGGLES	Dursley Vernon Petunia	French Latin English	alder tree delicate, bell- shaped flower from the meadow	The family has plant - oriented names.
17. Spells & Charms	Dudley	West African (dialect)	friendly to thieves (opens that which is locked)	Hermione uses to open a room to escape Filch and Peeves (Philosopher's Stone)
18.	Alohomora Locomotor Mortis (Leg Locking curse)	Latin <i>Loco</i> - motor - <i>Mortis</i> -	to place move death	Hermione to Neville (Philosopher's Stone)
19.	Petrificus Totalus (body binding curse)	(Latinised) English <i>petrify- total</i> -	to turn to stone complete	Hermione to Neville (Philosopher's Stone)
20.	Wingardium Leviosa (levitates objects)	English <i>Wing</i> - Latin <i>Ardus</i> - <i>Diem</i> - <i>Levis</i> -	used to fly tall, high heavenly, sky light	Ron performs the spell on the club of a mountain troll (Philosopher's Stone)
21.	Expelliarmus (disarming spell)	Latin <i>expellere</i> - <i>arma</i> -	to expel, to thrust away weapons of war	Snape uses against Lockhart, expelling the wand from his hand and disarming him

22.	Lumos (a wizard's torch)	Latin <i>Lumin-</i>	Light	causes the tip of the wand to illuminate,
23.	Obliviate (wipe the memories from its victim)	Latin <i>Oblivio - Obliterate -</i>	forgetful erase	Professor Lockhart (Chamber of Secrets)
24.	Rictumsempra (tickling charm)	Latin <i>Semper - Rictus-</i>	always open mouth	Harry on Malfoy (Chamber of Secrets)
25.	Tarantallegra (makes the victim dance uncontrollably)	Italian <i>Tarantella - allegoris-</i>	a type of dance, joyful	Draco Malfoy uses this curse on Harry (Chamber of Secrets)
26. The Unforgivable Curses	Imperio (forces the victim to do as commanded)	Latin <i>Imperare -</i>	Command	Mad Eye Moody shows on Harry who resists it. (The Goblet of Fire)
27.	Crucio (immense pain to the victim)	Latin <i>Excruciate -</i>	Tormented	it caused Neville's parents to go insane
28.	Avada Kedavra (the killing curse)	Aramaic <i>abracadabra -</i> Latin <i>Cadaver -</i>	let the thing be destroyed corpse	Harry's parents die while Harry survives this curse
29.	Accio (summoning Charm)	Latin <i>accio-</i>	I call	Harry summons his Firebolt (The Goblet of Fire)
30.	Confundo (confuses the victim)	Latin <i>Confundere -</i>	to mingle together	Severus Snape believes that Harry and Hermione had been Confunded to believe Sirius Black's claim to innocence

31.	Engorgio (Engorgement Charm)	French <i>engorgier</i> -	feed to excess	Many Hogwarts students think Hagrid must have been hit with an Engorgement Charm
32.	Impedimenta (tripping, freezing, target's progress towards the caster)	Latin <i>impedimentum</i> -	a hindrance or an impediment	Madam Hooch to shortly stop Harry from fighting with Draco

Summation

The twenty first century literature has certainly reinvented many new themes and genres. The reintroduction of mythology and foregrounding stories from mythology have greatly inspired the digital native generation. It is essentially technology that has enabled the realization of magic and fantastic phenomena, which may have otherwise remained as wild imagination or what Coleridge called as "Willing suspension of disbelief". However, authors like Rowling have scaled several notches ahead of many other writers by recreating mythology by blending them in ways unimaginable. It is this unique ability to blend characters and their actions with appropriate names and retaining the flavour of their mythological significance right through the series without losing sight of the plot, that has made the Harry Potter series stand out among the fantasy novels in the twenty first century Literature. That it has inspired and influenced a whole generation of readers and writers is perhaps its biggest contribution to contemporary literature.

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Shifting Images of Women in Contemporary Indian English Feminist Fiction and Indian Hindi Cinema

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Abstract

*Indian English Feminist Fiction and Indian Hindi films have been consistently projecting myriad shades of woman's journey for self-empowerment. Both the mediums enjoy immense popularity among the masses. The present paper focuses on a woman's psychological need to be nurtured and cared for, though ceaseless torments force her to retaliate as she finds it difficult to tolerate the prejudiced behavior. Hence, in her struggle to fulfill her roles and responsibilities as a mother, daughter, wife and a professional she emerges as a woman of substance in spite of all the contraries that assail her life. Manju Kapur's novel, *Difficult Daughters* and Madhur Bhandarkar's film *Satta* are the subject of scrutiny in charting out the various points of progression in a woman's life.*

Key words: Cinema, Fiction, Feministic, Patriarchy, Gynocriticism, Tradition, Modernity

Indian English Literature before the Partition of India revolved round the nationalistic aspirations of the people though with the dawn of independence, the writerly concerns broadened as the focus shifted to socio-political and psychological issues that agitated the minds of the people. Specially, feministic concerns of the writers got primacy in the narratives. Woman as a subject has been skillfully investigated in the writings of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Nair, Manju Kapur etc. These women writers "have taken up the ordeals faced by women in the patriarchal society" (Raman and Rathore 132). Several strong female characters as Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Savitribai and Madhu Saptarishi in *Small Remedies*, Sita and Maya in Anita Desai's *Village by the Sea* and *Cry, the Peacock* represent different shades of women in Indian English Feminist fiction.

The present paper attempts to explore the portrayal of two strong, breathing and convincing women characters in the novel *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur and to analyze their portrayal correspondingly in the film *Satta* by Madhur Bhandarkar. The delineation of weak as well as a powerful character in the novel and also drawing a parallel in the projection of women of substance in the film *Satta* by Madhur Bhandarkar, pertinently illustrates how both the mediums—Literature and Cinema in India—have skillfully projected the multidimensional and independent image of women in recent times.

Inequality has been present in the Indian society and this idea has been projected

many times through the literary works as well as through cinema. Though outwardly this fact is highlighted that she is equivalent to her male counterpart in every respect but the reality is different. The same idea has been propounded and validated by eminent feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf, Helene Cixous, Elaine Showalter, etc. Elaine Showalter has contributed to the literary field with her revolutionary works, *The New Feminist Criticism* and *Speaking of Gender*. In these works, she has proposed specifically a female framework for the analysis of women's literature. She has advocated for 'gynocriticism,' a completely new model based on women's experience and rejected the blind dependence on male theories and male models. In her opinion, gynocriticism looks at the genres, themes, history and structures of writing by women and also the progress and rules of female literary tradition. Elaine Showalter has highlighted through her work the ways by which the female writers have been kept out of the literary group during the nineteenth century period. At that time, the writings by the women have been termed as trivial and limited in scope. As a result, she has identified three critical phases in the progression of female literary writings:

Feminine phase as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonyms in the 1840's to the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the Female phase as 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960 (1999: 13).

Helene Cixous, another important literary critic, through her essays such as *The Laugh of the Medusa*, *Sorties*, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays* and *The Newly Born Woman* attempts to determine a writing style that is fluid, transgressive and beyond binary system of logic. After the study of all the western discourses, she has reached the conclusion that this binary opposition is prevalent everywhere. In addition, this binary hierarchy is always linked to violence in which the feminine term always gets eradicated. In her own words, "Intention: desire, authority-examine them and you are led right back...to the father. It is not possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for women in the calculations" (qtd in Nayar 2002: 102).

Different norms have been set for both men and women, though they live in the same world yet different rules guide their lives. It can be highlighted if we closely examine the character of Virmati in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* and Anuradha (Raveena Tandon), the protagonist of Hindi film *Satta*. On comparing Virmati and Anuradha, a complete shift can be seen in the character of Anuradha who is initially weak like Virmati but later on emerges as a strong individual having all the characteristics of Swarnalatha, an independent character in the novel *Difficult Daughters*.

In the initial phase, Anuradha, the lead character in the film, *Satta* is shown as a middle class woman who lives in a world different from politics and does not like even the mention of rigid institutions as marriage. Daughter of a divorcee mother and having faced the agony of failed marriage of her parents, she believes in living a life without any impositions. On the contrary, she falls in love with the son of a renowned politician and their love culminates in marriage. Unaware of her husband's drunkard nature and loose character, she realizes her mistake. The expectation of her in-laws and husband to be merely confined to the house, and excessive denial to participate in the work related matters force her to retaliate. She feels tormented as she has led a life without any rigidities, hence the unbearable treatment comes as a jolt to her. Instead of buckling under its impact, Anuradha bounces back into action solely relying on her intrinsic strength of character.

As the narrative unfolds, her husband kills a bartender in a fit of rage as she refuses to offer him drink. On hearing the news of her husband being behind the bars, she immediately goes to meet him but feels shocked not to see any vestige of guilt on his face. On seeking clarification, he behaves as if he has done nothing wrong. An election being near, a quick replacement is sought by the party and Anuradha seems to be the only alternative. Her father-in-law introduces her to Yashwant (Atul Kulkarni) who becomes her political guru and confidant.

Although her entry in politics is forced, she tries to learn the ways of politics. In the preliminary stages, she does not feel comfortable. Confusion engulfs her as she finds herself in an arena of politics which she has hated the most. Quite innocent in her approach of dealing with the clash of ideologies involved in politics, her adjustment becomes a bit difficult as she feels uncomfortable while meeting people and nervous while delivering her first speech. Lack of knowledge about political affairs brings her closer to Yashwant who guides her and encourages her to do something substantial for her country. At this juncture, a complete change in her character gets highlighted where she transforms into a completely controlled woman, no more ignorant and weak but a dominant individual who is self-confident and has the ability to take decisions on her own. Another noteworthy aspect comes to the fore where her character seems quite identical to Swarnalatha, an extremely bold character in the novel *Difficult Daughters*; a woman that doesn't need support but as her name suggests, like a golden creeper provides support to others.¹ Unlike Virmati who is weak both mentally and physically, she is quite firm in her approach and intolerant about unfair things, thus displaying a resistance to imposed societal pressures.

Swarnalatha studies with Virmati in Lahore and is completely in control of her life. Her direct and straightforward nature of handling things comes to limelight. On being asked by Virmati that why her mother does not send her anything to eat, she says very directly, "She is annoyed with me" (107). The dialogue between the two concerning studies is quite revelatory:

Swarnalatha: Then what? I love Lahore. All my friends are here, all my activities. I had to stay here, and so I decided to do an M.A. I wrote and told my parents. There was not a moment to lose . . .

Virmati: Didn't they try and stop you?

Swarnalatha: They had no choice. (Swarna arched her brows, totally in control of her life). "I was very clear that I would like to do something besides getting married. I told my parents that if they would support me for two years. I would be grateful. Otherwise I would be forced to offer *Satyagraha* along with other congress workers against the British and . . ." (107).

Virmati is shocked to know that her parents agreed to her demands due to her rebellious nature. Unlike

Virmati, who blindly follows the Professor and accepts whatever he says and behaves like a puppet in his hands, Anuradha acts like a free-willed Swarnalatha, defeats everybody and emerges as a strong woman, thus showcasing enough courage to defy the orders of her father-in-law and even Yashwant. In the initial stages, she blindly follows Yashwant. For instance when a secretary of her father-in-law comes for her signature, she seeks Yashwant's opinion and signs after his approval. She also agrees with him when he suggests that in politics three unjustified deeds should be supplemented with one justified action

and quickly cancels the transfer of an honest policeman.

Swarnalatha, a woman of strong morals and clear principles, does not believe in keeping hidden agendas, hence very clearly expresses her resentment at the vulgarity being displayed at a function. Despite being an intrinsic part of the system, she is not corrupted by it and is absolutely sure of her moral obligation of her position and the demands of her profession. Her intimate relationship with Yashwant at the same time doesn't in anyway encourage her to disregard her acquired skill of dealing with people. The same political acumen is highlighted in the novel, *Small Remedies* (2000) by Shashi Deshpande through the character of Leela, "Her desire to do something on her own prompts her to join politics . . . Her boldness and sense of judgment is displayed when she silences the males in her party with her reasoning ability and never allows them to overpower her" (qtd. in Shekhawat:132).

When she comes to know from one of her party members that Yashwant is behind her husband's murder, she does not show her spontaneous outburst of anger but maintains her composure. By following a strategic approach hitherto associated with politicians, she takes the rein in her control and kills Yashwant.

Though in the initial stages both Virmati and Anuradha are similar in their weakness, indecisiveness, and tendency to get easily flattered yet with the passage of time, a marked progression in Anuradha is discernible though Virmati's personality does not register any substantive change. No doubt, she revolts against the forced traditions of her family and strongly expresses her desire to study but she lacks the requisite wherewithal to pursue education. Unfortunately, instead she starts an illegal affair with the Professor and deviates from her purpose.

Virmati belongs to an Arya Samajist family that is very much concerned about the traditions and morals. Initially being an obedient child of her parents, she adheres to her family likings and respects their wishes but expresses her desire to study after getting inspiration from her cousin Shakuntala. Her grandfather is a staunch supporter of women education so he allows her to study in Lahore. Her family decides for her marriage and consequently she is engaged to Inderjit but her life takes a dramatic turn after entering college when she falls in love with a married Professor and never acquires the courage to reveal this fact to her parents. Reluctance to share her amorous alliance with her family, hence becomes a dangling person between her family responsibilities as an eldest daughter and her own love.

Eldest and a girl, she was finely tuned to neediness; it called to her blood and bones. Days passed, and Virmati's confusion grew. She would sometimes wish that ... but what could she wish? Early marriage and no education? No professors and no love? Her soul revolted and her sufferings increased (50).

Like Virmati, Anuradha, the female protagonist of film, *Satta*, falls madly in love with Vivek, absolutely unaware of his background. As the truth about her husband dawns upon her, Anuradha realises she has made a mistake when she finds she is expected to play the part of an efficient doormat. She has other plans and promptly puts her arrogant husband in place. Like an enlightened woman, Anuradha refuses to be intimidated by anyone and raises voice against her abusive husband and in-laws. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* also realizes her meaningless search for love in a person who is not worth her love but only towards the end, hence tries to impose the same restrictions on her daughter.

Reena Kothari endorses the same, “*Difficult Daughters* is the story of three generation of daughters, each one a difficult one for its generation. In their relationships, all the daughters either face difficulties from others or pose difficulties to others” (2002: 105).

The gradual and complete transformation can be seen in Anuradha's character wherein she transforms into Swarnalatha, a very strong character in the novel *Difficult Daughters*. Anuradha is very hesitant initially but when she senses the political murkiness all around her, rather than showing escapist tendencies, she decides to face it by becoming an integral part of it. She not only learns the dynamics of politics but also becomes proficient in its usage as and when required. Hence, transformation from Virmati to Swarnalatha to Anuradha is not possible overnight but through a gradual process of empowerment.

Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* dramatizes the conflict between the demands of modernity and tradition. Virmati's conflict is between her duty to her family, her desire for education, independence and her love for a married man. Having seen the deadening child-bearing existence of her frail mother, Virmati wants a life of her own, educated, independent and beyond marriage. Through the powerful tool of education the female protagonist attains enlightenment about her self and society around her. The new awareness of empowerment enables her to chart out the course of her life punctuated with new realms of awareness of the existential dilemmas. On the other hand, Madhur Bhandarkar's film, *Satta* advocates the woman empowerment through the story of Anuradha. At no point does she depend on a man for her survival, she conducts all her relationships with the men in her life on her own terms. Bhandarkar's heroine doesn't lose her inherent values in the corrupt milieu she inhabits. Anuradha gradually finds her own identity and starts getting a hang of the game of power. The trend of portraying a living, breathing and convincing woman protagonist that started with the advent of women writings in the 1970s, persists in the twenty first century literature and cinema as well.

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Tagged and Untagged: Body Speak in *The Gypsy Goddess* by Meena Kandasamy

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Abstract

Meena Kandasamy's The Gypsy Goddess is a polyphonous fictional text with a multiplicitous overlay of the historical fact of the Kilvenmani massacre of dalit farm labourers. The author uses the device of tagging and untagging characters and events to guide the reader through the maze of the postmodern text. The amalgamated selves and individual bodies found in the novel are tagged and presented for scrutiny one after another by the narrator-novelist, who presents the body as a central metaphor in the novel. Further, The Gypsy Goddess blends together elements of class and caste conflict, gender equations, feudalistic structures, economic, political and social systems, and individual and collective memory to posit a transformative change in society. It lends itself successively to tagging with each of these categories but simultaneously also disowns and disclaims them, refusing to be defined or constrained by any such tag. Thus, it successfully expands and redefines the ambit of what is known as dalit literature.

Key Words: *Kilvenmani, caste, class, memory, body, tag*

The seeds of Dalit literature, as the literature of the oppressed, othered and marginalised on the basis of untouchability in Indian society, have been traced back to the early Buddhist oral literature and the Bhakti movement. Dalit literature as a genre entered the lexicon of Indian literature in 1958 at the first seminal conference of the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh in Mumbai under the leadership of Annabhau Sathe. This Dalit Sahitya Sammelan answered the need expressed by B. R. Ambedkar of a literature for the dalit movement. Dalit literature gave expression to the alienation and slavery, degradation and abject poverty, angst and aspiration of the former outcastes. Though the word dalit has been contested by both the dalit and non-dalit communities in the debate on identity and subaltern speak, as also on its points of departure from the Buddhist ideology and the various caste-based movements; in literature, the term gathered strength steadily and today we have a cogent and substantial corpus of dalit literature in several Indian languages. This literature encompasses testimonios and autobiographical accounts, poetry, performance, drama, prose, fiction, journalistic writings, blogs, et al. By the turn of the century these writings from the margins, which engaged with the centre on its own terms and in its own idiom and metaphor with the clear purpose of registering dalit lived experiences, also leant strength to the increasing fervour of translations among Indian languages and English. Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread*, comprising English translations of more than eighty writings

by Dalits in several genres, heralded a new phase in Dalit literature. As noted by Prakash Bal Joshi, "*Poisoned Bread* played a significant role in creating an ideological bond and recognising the writers who had so long been expressing themselves in a sporadic fashion. The book received an overwhelming response, got translated into Indian as well as foreign languages, creating a vibrant literary movement." Dalit literature in the subsequent decades saw an outpouring of writings that not only voiced but also transcended the problematics of the political movement, which remained immersed in the duality of victimhood-assertion, usurpation-authenticity and identity-assimilation. Waman Nimbalkar offers the view that Dalit literature is ultimately human literature for it completes the hitherto partial narration of human life from the vantage point of privilege.

Dalit writings by women, which gained ground in the eighties and the nineties of the twentieth century, is the feminist voice in dalit literature. Muktabai, Savitribai Phule's student, is often credited with being the first voice of dalit women's literary expression in the 1850s. This young girl described and analysed the dominant institutions of caste, religion and patriarchy and asserted a personhood apart from them. This perspicacity became keener in the writings by Bama, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Kumud Pawade, Hira Bansode, Shivakami, Gogu Shyamala and others. Most dalit women writings are uncompromising on exposing patriarchy within dalit society and while criticising the nexus between poverty and deprivation and the caste system. The unequivocal demand for right to equality, equity, dignity and opportunity is the binding vine of dalit women's writings. Meena Kandasamy is a powerful emerging voice in Indian English writing. Known for her polemics and self-assurance, she refuses to be circumscribed by the label of Tamil dalit writer and adds the postmodern question of self-representation and diversity to dalit writing. Her poetry and fiction are complex blends of class struggle, caste conflict, feudalistic exploitation, and external and internal patriarchy, in which the women are located as agents of sanity, strength, change and humanity.

Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* is a narrative that intersects collective memory with the personal re-memorising of the questioning, questing narrator as she roots into the historical Kilvenmani massacre that took place on Christmas Day in 1968. The novel, presents a multiplicity of voices that speak from shifting points-of-view. The amalgamated selves and individuated bodies found in the text are tagged together carefully by the narrator-novelist who presents the body in various forms as a central metaphor in the polyphonically structured novel: for instance, the bodies charged in the carnage, the dismembered body of the landlord who lead the charge, the composite body of the eponymous goddess, the body of the storyteller(s), the bodies of the victim-survivors, and the body politic. Kandasamy pans into the region, state and village to meticulously place an assemblage of all these bodies by deftly presenting their antecedents and their traditional, cultural and historical bearings. The epigraph taken from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, provides the universal context and also introduces the motif of isolated body parts harnessed to metonymic intention: "Slaughter and terror did not stop them. How can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children?" It thus tags the body of the starved person as the site of material conflict and ethical definition in the novel. The prologue that follows provides the counterpoint to the 'cramped stomach' and 'wretched bellies' of the poor farmers by inscribing the 'heavy heart' and 'paralysed life' of Gopalakrishna Naidu, the President of the

Paddy Producers' Association as he beseeches the Chief Minister to intervene in the conflict between the striking peasants and the land owners "in order to prevent violence and bloodshed" (8).

The novel is divided into a prologue, the body--in four parts--and an epilogue. The four parts have interesting and telling names: "Background," "Breeding Ground," "Battleground," and "Burial Ground." "Background" is replete with self-reflexivity aided by a prolificacy of metaphors, similes, ironies, parody and pastiche. The first chapter, "Notes on Storytelling" begins with the words: "It is difficult to write a novel living in a land where despotic bards ensured that for more than a thousand years, literature existed only in the form of poetry – alliteration under the armpit, algebra around the rhyming feet" (11). Minstrelsy and making of the legend are thus subversively interrogated at the very outset by placing them in often overlooked or disregarded body parts. Kandasamy goes on to describe the coming of age of Tamil prose literature in expressions of the human body, "the first signs of a moustache and breasts began to show, hair sprouted in downward spirals, and prose attained puberty without much fanfare" (11). Her own novel, which one might be tempted to call a tour de force, she herself describes in mild gustatory terms, "Tamil in taste, English on the tongue . . . dished out in dandy prose" (11). In the centre of this framing she places the storyteller, "*Once upon a time, in one tiny village, there lived an old woman*" (13). The authorial voice plays with 'self-sabotage' by mentioning the possibility of this character underwhelming the narrative and then instantaneously subverts the idea by showing the vacuity of tagging the gratuitous intertextuality of 'another' woman or village by alluding to a failed surgical procedure: "This transplantation falls flat on its face, the fatal forehead first" (13). This texturing of subverting form, mining memory, and defining humanity with the device of tagging or untagging of the body is evident throughout the novel. It is clearly visible in the title, tag, of the novel itself "A title does not have to be about the book. Trust me, they are generous enough to co-exist with each other" (39). Having untagged the novel, the narrator-novelist then proceeds to divulge that it is named after Kurathi Amman, the gypsy goddess, who is an amalgamation of seven gypsy women, and their children, who were murdered by their own clan for 'moral' transgression. The irony is compounded when the goddess is portrayed as a product of a foreign 'epic' novelist's desire to control and colonise the village (42). The tag of 'Illusion and Mystery' attributed to the man is thus added to the multi-person goddess. Further, Kandasamy mirrors the killing of forty-four persons – sixteen women, twenty-three children, three old men and two other men – from the dalit farm labourer community, through the verbal iconography of the body of Kurathi Amman. The complexity of these multiple strands of 'one story' is held together by the narrator who tags the readers to her story and asks them 'to stay' invested with her in the bourgeois activity of reading a book: "This is a joint venture. We collaborate . . ." and then, yet again, she undercuts this ironic use of capitalistic words by continuing gravely, "on the critical condition that we do not abandon each other" (32).

Eventually, the narrator-novelist asks the reader to forget the aesthetic and stylistic postmodern pretensions of "The Background" and instead to "remember this: nobody lived happily. No-body outlived the ever-after" (37). She concludes this section with the note that poetry and politics are all we have to "numb and dissolve our pain" (46). In the next part of her story, "Breeding Ground," the narrator begins to unravel the pain. Gopalakrishna Naidu, the leader of the landlords and the one who looks after their combined vested

interests makes his first corporeal appearance to the readers as he embarks on his campaign trail. His 'gold-ringed right hand' is the first to be spotted as he alights from his car. This is the hand that had written the memorandum asking for the government's interference to quell the labour unrest which had arisen because the Communists had "put dangerous ideas" into their heads (62). It is the same hand that rapaciously seizes women in five villages and mercilessly beats men at will. It is also the hand that will engineer the defining bloodshed in the village. The rest of him, which emerges after the repressive hand, is the body that will be dismembered into forty-four pieces in a distant time of retribution. Meanwhile, "he looks around the room, at the nodding heads" (56) of his fellow landowners and believes himself sovereign and invincible.

The landlords engage in a long-fought duel over wages and rights with the labourers – both men and women. "When women take to protest, there is no holding back" (75) says the narrator and asks "How not to expect militancy" (77) from men and women battling hunger and subhuman existence. The time is apparently ripe for the Communists to enter the fray, quoting Gramsci on class differences with unconscious prescience: "As a collective they don't faint when the still-breathing corpse of a murdered child is thrown at their feet" (84). They totally disregard caste, which renders them partially blind to the situation. As Cosimo Zene explains: "If, on the one hand, the choice of those who do not share a caste ideology seems commendable, on the other, given that they disregard this ideology, it represents a blind choice from the point of view of "integral history", given that castes do not disappear simply by being ignored, and that the subjugation of Dalits and others still persists" (14). The Communists obfuscate the point that "caste consciousness is anchored on status deprivation but dalit consciousness is complex and compound consciousness which encapsulates deprivation stemming from inhuman conditions of material existence, powerlessness and ideological hegemony" (Oommen 256). Kandasamy's villagers, of course, do not understand fully this intersectionality of caste consciousness with class conflict, although they live it in everyday life. Dialectical materialism and revolution mean nothing to them. They join the Communist Party simply because the communists promise to get them better wages and working conditions at a time when famine, food scarcity and high prices lead to the poor labourers, especially women and children, oftentimes eating mud and many a time dying of starvation, in spite of the fact that they spend their lives toiling in the fields and producing the best quality rice. The peasant body wastes away in a thousand different ways and the narrator adopts a careful objective voice while cataloguing the pain. The absence of medical help, basic education and minimum opportunity make up the body politic of these labourers. The women's bodies are further dehumanised by sexual and proxy violence aimed at them. Yet, they break into songs, "don't be blind, open your eyes . . . we shall see a world of smiling faces and satisfied lives!" and there are stories, which are both cathartic and strengthening.

The massacre in the "Battleground" silences the songs. The story (and stories) continues to live on in the body and mind of the Old Woman and her people, who are tagged in by the narrator in the subsequent section. "Battleground" begins with a deconstructed list of the documented post-mortems of forty-two corpses. It is revealed later that "The remains of two babies [Sankar and a baby girl were] muddled into a mess, so they were not on the list of the dead" (187). The two babies are thus untagged in the picture of the massacre constructed at the time, thus, rendering them invisible. Kandasamy takes pains to bring

them into focus by tagging them and adding the small details available about them with care. The sanitised list soon surrenders to the insanity of the massacre in “Mischief by Fire.” Kandasamy describes the attack on the villagers by the goons of the landlords in graphic detail. On the night of the incident most of the men were not in the village to avoid being arrested by the police. A few were hiding in the coconut groves armed with stones and bricks. When the mob approached from all the four directions, their stones were no match for the guns. Many were injured in the firing and they fled for safety into the jungle. There were only women, children and old infirm men in the village when “the mob soon arrives on its rampaging feet” (163). Nine-months-pregnant Paappa, Ramayya's wife, cradles her stomach and comes out of her home to call in people into the safety of her large hut (163). Her image stands out as the mother-nurturer-sustainer against the murdering vicious inhumanity of the mob. Kandasamy tags this image as an abiding one. The mob tries but fails to break in and in fury sets the hut on fire. The ghastliest description of body parts and bodies follows: “in desperation a mother throws her one-year-old son out of the burning hut but the boy is caught by the leering mobsters and chopped into pieces and thrown back in”; “their vocal cords have scorched and closed and suddenly inhalation itself is injury”; they are “bathed in blisters making touch their greatest trauma” (164) and continues: “their blood begins to ooze out of every pore sometimes tearing skin to force its way out”; “and facial features disappear and flesh now starts splitting” and so “they burn all night fuelled by their own fat” (165).

The graphic discussion of the massacre numbs the mind and the narrator turns to poetry and metaphor to make it possible for the readers to fight through to the end of the incident:

at some point seeing becomes impossible because life has elapsed and so they no longer scare each other and instead they mourn in silence inside the torched hut as their muscles lose mass and begin to flex of their own free will arching joints into pyramids and the dying dance after their death as they are formed and deformed and their tongue-lolling soot-coated smiles only mean that pain is always followed by paralysis. (165)

The Communists showed interest only in wresting the charred corpses from the administration, “the bodies belong to us” (186) they claim. However, they are thwarted in this attempt to tag the victims as theirs as “it was easier to pluck hair off a hen's egg than to find matching pairs of legs, arms, a torso and a head” (186) they gave up and soon after disappeared from the village. The narrator makes special mention of the comrades exchanging pleasantries with the police chief who says to them, “They might be dead meat, but we cannot ration them” (186). In a supreme irony, the burnt bodies “refuse to burn” in the cremation ground and extra firewood and kerosene have to be requisitioned to make them “disappear into ashes” (189). Singed by this gruesome incident, the stupefied labourers who survived the attack then onwards live a dystopic life, shorn of the will to live. Could it have mattered then that eventually the poor low caste labourers were themselves held responsible for the grisly murder of their own kin. Or that Annadurai, the then chief minister of Tamil Nadu, compounded the absurdity by asking them to “forget this as they forget a feverish nightmare or a flash of lightning” (216).

After the carnage, the Old Woman of the “Background” surfaces in the narrative to tell the story as her story and to retell it as history time after time in the “Burial Ground”. She

is Maayi the widow of Sannasi, the revered witch-doctor and soothsayer. He was renowned for taming the demons but now Maayi was tasked to deal with the demons haunting her community. Her embodied generosity and heroism are highlighted against the morbid gloom of the living past as she cares for the injured and the maddened. She takes food for Letchumi who has not eaten in days. Letchumi places Maayi's hand on her forehead, eyes and throat to feel her dead mother and friends living inside her as their hearts beat in her breast. She was not the only one who tagged and "carried the ghosts of their dead" (199). Maayi tends to her daughter-in-law, patiently waiting for her to recover from her ordeal: "She would not allow a stitch of cloth to cover her body. She lay naked on the mat, through the day and through the night. She threw away all her clothes. When Maayi forced her to cover her shame with an inskirt, she tore it off. She was coherent when she talked about the Communist Party, but she refused to talk about her hatred for clothes" (207). Packiam had been: "Caught by the hair, pushed to the ground, stripped naked, beaten up. Scars on her left cheek, a sickle split on the right side of her hip, red welts on her palm from fighting the men" (207). Maayi comforts and cares for the villagers but she also wishes that pain and anger continue in the village to give people a reason to live. She thus does not want their pain and rage to turn inwards to devour them. Maayi is partnered by Thangamma in her efforts. Their story is the story of all the strong women in the novel. Thangamma conceals her anguish stoically and displays high spirits to keep her people alive and resilient. She looks after her husband and whenever the curiosity of a journalist brings them into Kilvenmani, she joins the others and speaks about what happened "She told them how she saved her mother-in-law, Araayi, that night. She described how she led her little children, Shenbagavalli and Mani, to safety by herding them to the nearby school. She spoke of Kerosene Govinda pulling at her clothes and how she fought back fiercely" (204). Altogether, the women exhibit love, bravery and the indomitable will to keep history alive. It is largely because of the Old Woman and women such as her that "*The Gypsy Goddess* participates in the process of creating collective memory and initiating remembrance among wider audiences through the creation of a literary historiography" (Yadav 115).

Maayi and Thangamma well understand the patterns of pain and protest and the devising of ways to live with these. They know, for instance, that an abhorrence of coverings is not merely insanity or an anguished expression of a broken spirit, but that it is also an act of defying that pain. According to Vijaya Ramaswamy, nakedness is sometimes regarded as a socially 'subversive behaviour' and sometimes as an open revolt (22-24). The perversity of gendered sexual violence is defied by Kunjammal who abjures sex "as if to punish herself" (209). Muniyan's wife's wandering legs in the night as she walks manically through the night compensate for the silence of her tongue during the day. Keeping the memory of the massacre alive for the sake of the community and posterity is integral to the commitment of the older women and they perform the role of memory- and conscience-keepers with great seriousness and sincerity. As does Kandasamy, the novelist-narrator and "the long-lost daughter of the village" (281). She lends her own voice to the story as the voice of continuity and disjuncture, of belonging and alienation, of forgetting and remembering. Her voice of re-memory incorporates the later event of the murder and dismemberment of Gopalakrishna Naidu, twelve years after the massacre on 14th December 1980. The story continues as the corpse is chopped into exactly forty-four pieces, wrapped in palm fronds and delivered to tagged households in the village (272).

The women of the village engage in collective mobilisation and sisterhood to effect healing, commemoration, and hope. *The Gypsy Goddess* incorporates class struggle, caste conflict, feudalistic exploitation, changing economic, political and social systems, patriarchy and memory to raise a collective voice of protest for systemic, structural and transformative changes in society. It lends itself to tagging with each of these categories but also rises to transcend every such tag by disowning and disclaiming them, refusing to be defined or constrained by any such tag. Thus, it successfully expands and redefines the ambit of what we know as dalit literature. *The Gypsy Goddess* is a novel which simmers volatily under the surface of playfulness, humour and self-reflexivity. Meena Kandasamy states her purpose quite clearly in an interview with Ujjwal Jana published in 2008 when she asserts, "I write because, if I were to be silent today, I will be condemned for my silence tomorrow" ("The Struggle to" 2). In the epilogue, Maayi takes on the tag of the narrator-character as the reliable eyewitness of the event. She diligently relates the incident and her experiences to every visitor who comes asking about the massacre to the village. She illustrates how the people still await justice and for that reason they receive each person who enquires into the (hi)story of their village. The story teller is ubiquitously marked as an important medium to keep memory fresh and Maayi is thus crucial in the villagers' quest to secure justice for their dead. Maayi thus takes on the mantle of an ancestral sage or community mother who is the repository of the collective memory. The narrative technique of tagging and untagging the characters and images by the narrator-novelist helps the reader to excavate and reveal meaning from within the skilful maze of abundant literary devices to help us to see and hear the story and, perhaps, to understand it more keenly.

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Revisiting the Emergency: Vishwajyoti Ghosh's *Delhi Calm*

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Abstract

The turn of the present century marks the emergence of quite a few cultural/literary narratives of the Indian Emergency of 1975-77. These narratives appear after a considerable time lapse of about twenty-five to thirty years. The purpose of this paper is to read these narrative re-visitations of the Emergency as testimonies to its continuing life, to explore the question of why the Emergency never seems to get over, and why it inevitably keeps re-inscribing itself within the ongoing narratives of nation. The text to be read here is Vishwajyoti Ghosh's celebrated graphic novel Delhi Calm (2010).

The inherently disruptive memory of the Emergency, and hence the often disrupted trajectory of the Emergency narrative forms a crucial question for most of its readers. The early 2000s mark some kind of 25th anniversary commemoration of the event. There are memoirs, reminiscences, tracts in the public domain informing and steering the discourse around it. The public invocation of the memory of the greatest conceivable wrong to the nation is somehow supposed to discount every other kind of wrong.

This paper aims to address the spike in the narratives about the national Emergency of 1975-77 in India: a moment in contemporary history which gets referenced with surprising regularity in our public discourse: in terms of Vishwajyoti Ghosh's graphic novel Delhi Calm which as a novel-gone-visual marks both the initiation of a new trend as well as adds to the critical mass of the discursive trend around the Emergency.

Key Words: *Emergency, creative narratives, public discourse, graphic fiction, contemporary history, historiography..*

This paper aims to address the spike in the narratives about the national Emergency of 1975-77 in India: a moment in contemporary history which gets referenced with surprising regularity in our public discourse: in terms of Vishwajyoti Ghosh's graphic novel *Delhi Calm*¹ (2010) which as a novel-gone-visual marks both the initiation of a new trend as well as adds to the critical mass of the discursive trend around the Emergency.

Throughout the current decade, there is a spate of Emergency writing which informs and steers the upsurge around the Emergency in current public discourse. The retelling of the Emergency is a highly public and publicized affair this time. Notable books to appear during the recent years are: Coomi Kapoor's *The Emergency: A Personal History* (2015), Kuldip Nayar's *Emergency Retold* (2013), Nayantara Sahgal *Indira Gandhi: Tryst with*

Power (2012), Vinod Mehta *The Sanjay Story* (2012), Pranab Mukherjee *The Dramatic Decade: The Indira Gandhi Years* (2014), M G Debasahayam *Jaiprakash ki Akhiri Jail: Emergency ka Kuchakra* (2012).

Interestingly, if arbitrary censorship may be regarded as a measure of Emergency-like 'exception,' the current nation state also supplies considerable evidence of it. Demands to ban films, books and book-burning rituals and vandalism spectacles, all too many, are met with a steady stoic acquiescence. Ramachandra Guha in his article "Ban the Ban..." rues the "depressing regularity" with which bans are executed in this country. It might be pertinent to consider censorship and bans in the context of the ongoing Emergency narrative. Notable among the bans sought in this context were on Pupul Jayakar's *Indira Gandhi* (2000); Katherine Frank's *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* in 2007; and in a strangely arbitrary continuity, Javier Moro's fictionalized biography of Sonia Gandhi *The Red Sari* was allowed to release in India only in 2015. There was also the case of the clamour for a ban on Deepa Mehta's 2012 film based on Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* for presenting Indira Gandhi in poor light. A State Minister took exception to the very screening of the film saying that it ought not to have been allowed since "Indira Gandhi is a passion for many" (IANS) in the country. While Sudhir Misra's film managed to release as a feature film, Prakash Jha's documentary *Loknayak Jaiprakash* commissioned by the Ministry of Culture in the former N.D.A. regime was almost shelved by Prasar Bharti under the first UPA regime.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nothing like this ever happened. If it did, it doesn't matter anymore, for it was of no interest or relevance even while it was happening. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental. This is a work of fiction. Self-censored.^{iv}

Thus, reads the prefatory note to *Delhi Calm* in the fashion of a mischievous statutory disclaimer. The irony of the disclaimer is obvious: in its articulation, it demolishes the very idea of the indifferent acquittal of the moment of the Emergency it seems to suggest.

Vishwajyoti Ghosh's graphic novel *Delhi Calm* (2010) is a recent creative re-visitation of the moment of the Emergency. For a slim 240 page illustrated text, it is surprisingly packed. From the powerpolis and its dynasts and functionaries, to the revolution and its votaries, to the migrant urban poor of all sorts of shades, to mofussil aspirations, to forays in the rural hinterland, meeting peasants, red revolutionaries, political criminals and goons, it is quite a novel about everything about the Emergency. The format of the text allows for multiple almost rhizomatic personal narratives, juxtaposed with imaginatively fictionalized genealogies on the one hand; and snippets of information, news pieces and snapshots and other kinds of reportage lifted from the discursive space on the other. Throughout, the text engages in this interplay between fact and fiction, constantly qualifying one against the other, relentlessly teasing the boundaries and interfaces of engagement between what it seeks to enact versus a sense of what "really" happened.

The title *Delhi Calm* is lifted from a little newspaper piece, on June 26, duly displayed as a cutting, reporting the impact of the Emergency in the city titled 'Delhi Calm'(10), describing the day as a historic day on which calm prevailed in the capital city. Of course, there are several ways this 'calm' can be read in. Is it calm as in calm, or is it calm as in shocked into passivity, or is it calm as in 'tense but under control' in the usual official parlance? At any rate the 'calm' is not quite there, or it would not require such reiteration. Later in the text the calm motif gets played out again when the Emergency is lifted: this 'calm' is not to be trusted anymore. What gets established here is the inevitable sense of

uncertainty that accompanies it. Calm is in any case no longer something the state guarantees, it is what it seeks to exact out of its citizens by muffling whispers of dissent.

The text pitches two distinct plot lines simultaneously: the grand narrative of the Emergency and its principle figures on the one hand, and on the other, the everyday existence of a set of ordinary denizens as they live through the Emergency and beyond. Quite literally, the Delhi of “white ambassadors, leather briefcases, English speaking convent schools and stable salaries” vis-a vis the city of “pot-bellied enterprises and petty cash, fueled by insecurity... [as it] runs on a nagging post partition fear shift from eight in the morning to eight in the evening” (10).

The text opens with Vibhuti Prasad, alias VP's narrative. On the morning of 26th June, VP wakes up to a concoction of Karl Marx and Mohammad Rafi reflecting on the idea of the importance of writing in general and his own writing in particular. However, what seems like just another day in the life of this struggling writer, soon takes a bizarre twist. Disrupting the Vividh Bharti broadcast, the Prime Minister, Mother Moon announces the imposition of a national Emergency. VP is a first-generation migrant in the powerpolis, who lives in a rented room in Lajpat Nagar, works as junior writer and tea-maker for a local newspaper. The imposition of the Emergency raises concerns: of shocked disbelief and incredulity indeed, since the reasons of internal security threat and conspiracy to overthrow the government seem completely untenable. However, the perceived crisis of the Emergency quickly evaporates before the more pressing crisis of the threatened salary (cf. the date 26th June) and the everyday self that depends on it for survival. The crisis turns real: the newspaper office is locked, the proprietor is underground and the salary is completely out of the picture. As he wanders the familiar streets, he notices the strained silence that surrounds him, in those who look away diffidently, as well as those who stare at him, and even in the assurance of the 'Smiling Saviours.' By and by he stumbles upon some of his old associates and friends, together with whom he lives through the Emergency, trying to make sense of it.

The powerpolis is quite another matter, and one layer of the narrative traverses just that. The text stages the entire exposition to Mother Moon's (modeled on Indira Gandhi) spectacular rise to power: achieved almost accidentally on the basis of pedigree, as well as due to the miscalculations of the powerpolis' powermongers, who gravely misjudge their “no talk doll,” thus unwittingly inaugurating the dynasty rule. Moon's journey from Moon to Mother Moon involves her initiation into politics as the innocuous minister for “propaganda and pacifist assignments,” in the course of which she meets the masses as the earnest and dutiful daughter. She begins to consolidate her position acting with startling quickness and stealth. Strategically, she plays up the dutiful daughter the doting mother and the ruthless leader one after the other, before people around her can even begin to make sense of her. Within “her father's party” the Indian National Syndicate, she cultivates her coterie of yes-men, the Indian National Caucus. As she gets cast into a symbol of authority, all kinds of things begin to be attributed to her, for instance the victory against the Green neighbour as well as the success vis-à-vis the Little Delta (the references being obviously to Pakistan and Bangladesh). Political acumen quickly gets displaced by rhetorical slogans masquerading as seriously planned programmes. For instance, there are various 5/10/20 point programmes plastered on walls, pulled up on hoardings, painted on buses, stickered on autorickshaws; just about everywhere; suggesting abolition of dowry, creation of casteless society, redistribution of land, population control, etc.

Another development here is the inordinate rise of Prince Charming and his boys' club within the Caucasus. Prince has his particular fondness for population control and city beautification programmes and indeed his little car project. For both Mother Moon and Prince, things would be perfect if only they could have everything their way.

A peaceful dynastic reign, however, is not to be, since then there are all kinds of people protesting, and there is of course 'The Prophet': the utterly 'inconvenient' idealist; the almost mystical Gandhian: "In his presence the Naxals fell silent, in him the hill tribes found a voice and a restless Kashmir embraced him. Only to him would the dreaded dacoits surrender, in him the working class saw hope" (68).

The Prophet leads the 'movement' for what he calls the 'total revolution'. An important vantage point in the text is indeed the trajectory of the movement and the shine tutorial tutors, a bunch of almost accidental votaries for it, as has already been mentioned. The movement finds legitimacy in its idealism and its policy of inclusion, which also are its problems: the text points out how the movement carries within its fold the Left, the Right and even the Wrong! In some ways then, it is a motley assortment of ideas and idealogues: posited more as an alternative to perceived problems vis-à-vis the dynasts, rather than as a clear, consistent ideological position. It is not left enough for the Left, and therefore it is deemed confused, compromised, closet right wing and in some extreme mythmaking, a C.I.A. funded American operation to destabilize the Indian government, with practically all the supporters on Uncle Sam's payrolls.

While that may be a little extreme, there are things quite not in place in a movement that seeks to claim inherent respectability because of the Prophet's credentials. The free for all inclusivist policy brings along mercenary goons who join up for their own ends bringing nothing but disrepute to the movement. There is the case of one Jogi, for instance, a small time village goon who seeks allegiance to the movement, only to further his vested interests of terrorizing and bullying local villagers. Of course he goes on to become "the leader of the Bright Saffrons" later (244), enacting his agenda on the national scale; and the impetus he receives from the movement is the precise problem the text seeks to address. While the 'wrong' elements are clearly isolated and marked out, that the Prophet too is not marked out for any kind of sanctimonious reverence. The prophet is seen as a self-styled messiah - as much as he is seen sanctioned as such through common consensus; in the footsteps of the Mahatma and similarly strategizing as a holier than thou messianic figure, whose very presence is supposed to be self-legitimizing, or perhaps not.

The text manages to poke some good-natured fun at the dear Prophet's expense. For one, diabetic and on dialysis, he seems a seriously belated candidate for his total revolution as it runs haywire around him. Two, there is no clarity as to how this revolution is to be achieved at all, let alone in the stipulated one year he sets aside for it. At some level then, his ideals too collapse into empty rhetoric. Mother Moon clearly has no viable agenda, but perhaps neither does the Prophet.

Anyhow, before the crisis can come to head, Mother Moon declares an internal Emergency, arresting leaders across party loyalties overnight, gagging the press and instructing the general public to fall in line, or else . . . Rationales for the Emergency appear printed and plastered all over the city overnight. "Talk less, work more", "The Nation needs your Hard Work, Sincerity, Discipline", "Do not Talk Politics" "Do Not Think; Do Not Guess", and then there is indeed an entire murder of crow-like smiling saviours, of the boys' club of Prince, who smilingly parachute down among people, gently leading them on to

vasectomy centers or newly built homes far away from their original habitat. Not doing their bidding is not an option, and the unsmiling staff-wielding, gun-toting, eager policemen promptly take the unwilling ones away.

Statutory disclaimers, the kind first encountered in the preface itself, recur with these various pieces of reportage that build counter narratives of the Emergency as opposed to its official versions. Because totalitarianism can never be quite so total: somehow dissent trickles in as it must, at an exacting price, undoubtedly, but trickle in it does. There is this playing upon how and who publishes the 'real' stories. There is the self-proclaimed *Independent News Division*, which does little more than telecast Mother Moon's performances. Similarly, the *New India News* runs dedicated programmes on the little Prince and his little car. The *Popular Indian Journal*, the *Hush Hush Gazette*, the *Underground Pamphlets* on the other hand come up with 'real' news about people, politics, prisoners et al, albeit with the standard statutory disclaimer that the publication is not responsible for the views expressed in its columns. The official jargon is mimicked more to throw light on the total abdication of responsibility by the official press and media, than to suggest any via media in case of any action against the publishers. Just as the publishers of news are different, so are the gatherers: Tea stall owners, paanwallahs, beggars, tiffin providers, all function as part time news gatherers, since certified reporters either can't or won't.

The Emergency's relationship with the media is indeed a twisted one, and so is its peculiar relationship with the institutions of culture. The world's second largest democracy, predictably has the second largest entertainment industry, which the totalitarian state seeks to reign in, just as it seeks to reign in the rest of the unwieldy media.

Ambiguities and contradictions of all sorts characterize the relationship between the newly declared totalitarian state and its entertainment industry. Wary though the state may be of it, it does need to mobilize popular cultural resources to achieve a sense of normalization of the Emergency. The state cajoles and then coerces: consent must be manufactured somehow. The totalitarian regime and cultural institutions thus find themselves condemned to each other and indeed condemned vis-à-vis each other, as they try to absolve themselves.

One kind of reading is of totalitarianism stifling popular entertainment: there is the instance of both movies as well as moviegoers being under surveillance. The punishment for those watching 'immoral' films is vasectomy, for theatres showing them, it is vandalism. There is also a reference to the ban on Kishore Kumar's songs on All India Radio because of his refusal to sing jingles in praise of the Emergency. There are however, also instances of cultural figures bending backwards to please: in the text, on the very evening of the Prophet's grand rally post Emergency, film maker Raj Kapoor, who supposedly does not allow any of his films on Doordarshan, makes an exception to throw in *Bobby's* telecast as a prime-time bonanza. Not only this, special screenings are also arranged on large screens in public spaces: all with the intent purpose of wooing people away from the Prophet. Bobby fails, so does Mother Moon's Caucus.

The lifting of the Emergency is as abrupt as its imposition: a radio announcement and a TV telecast with Mother Moon informing that the ailing and suicidal nation had been nursed back to health and happiness. Democracy resumes, but the age of innocence of the assumed democratic character of the polity, even for the middle class citizenry, is over forever. The question of whether the Emergency is really over, or whether it would be imposed again is actually asked as well as answered in the text: It could easily happen again,

but another time they are likely to be “clever enough to do it within the system” (239). The stock taking of the excesses during the Emergency, is another question that comes up as soon as it is over. The powers that be, conveniently plead ignorance. Mother moon claims she had no idea of the excesses. Of course, she refuses to be blamed for them, and blames the unreformed police force instead. Party cadres are blamed, loyalists are blamed, and the Prophet is blamed.

The Prophet has influence now, and his supporters this once, don't go trucking the countryside, but fly high in a hot air balloon, across the country, readying for his rally. His People's Party ousts Mother Moon in the next elections, but petty ambitions ruin any hope of serious redressals. The Prophet, we are told, dies a sad man, witnessing the failure of his dream within his lifetime.

While the text remains in principle, a testimony of those who lived through and survived the Emergency, it by no means suggests any erroneous bypassing of it completely. It claims its token prisoner, even if for just about a day, the day the prisoner in question VP decides to erase from his memory. VP is rounded up while he is trying to pass a note to a foreign delegate and duly taken to the police lock up, where he is thrashed, tortured and brutalized. The thing most unrealistic about his capture is of course the tenure for which he is imprisoned: usually political prisoners were arrested for interminable periods, not just a single day they could put behind, and certainly not when they were caught not on suspicion, but with the evidence of treason literally in their hands. But then, this is just a story, and a story of those who live to tell it, and live through it reasonably unharmed.

Finally, perhaps one may consider the innocuous note on Delhi in the post Emergency scenario:

Delhi has never been so unsure of its breath as in the recent past. Mind your breath, mind your step, mind your words, mind your mind. Slowly, let the silence in the buses convert to whispers, careful but free. Let democracy appear democratic. (228)

Ironically, what in retrospect seems to turn out to be the only achievement of this officially announced, all-inclusive Emergency is its reality check, in that it tests the very boundaries of normative democracy that are so taken for granted. It forces the cognition of the utter provisionality/ uncertainty of all collective truths, systems and indeed lives: the cognition that in the intensely increasing biopolitical technologies of our states, populations en masse and bodies individually, are equally dispensable. The state clearly is about itself: it does not care whether people live or die, as long as their living or dying is in its own interest.

For those who wish to wish the cynicism away, suggesting that it all happened once upon a time and may never happen again, the text towards the end has a telling sign board, welcoming people to Delhi:

Welcome to New Delhi

Do not talk about:

Emergency

'84 Delhi Riots

Babri Demolition

'02 Gujrat Riots

Naxal Corridor

Have a Pleasant Stay (246).

The rest of the board is obliterated, but the blank before the 'have-a-pleasant-stay' greeting indicates the unreadable and the unknowable. The Emergency is dead. Long live the

Emergency.

End Notes:

- i) Annie Behler in "Getting Started With Graphic Novels" quotes Will Eisner's working definition of a graphic novel, the acknowledged first graphic novelist: "The manner of [comics] creation has evolved from a work written and drawn by a single individual to a wedding between writer and artist. This has established a creative process that employs the skills of an accomplished writer and an artist of great sophistication" (17). Behler points that the graphic novel form is barely three decades old, with its roots in comic strips of the 70s, but as comic strips grew in length and the quality of their content, the readership also grew from children to young adults and adults. Eddie Campbell in "What is a Graphic Novel" identifies the more complex kind of 'graphic novels' as those comic book narratives which are not only "equal in form and dimensions to a prose novel", but "a form that is more than a comic book in the scope of its ambition"; it is a "new medium altogether" (13).
- ii) Vishwajyoti Ghosh, *Delhi Calm* Harper Collins, New Delhi 2010. All subsequent references are from this edition.
- iii) Prasar Bharti under the aegis of the UPA government reportedly took exception to the "imbalanced" and "negative" portrayal of the Emergency in the film and demanded several omissions in it. The film was released months later after considerable public criticism.
- iv) Excerpt lifted from the unnumbered preface.

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Annie Dillard's *The Maytrees*: A Contemporary Investigation of Transcendental Thought

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Abstract

Annie Dillard (1945-) is one of the chief American environmentalist writers who revived the premises of American Transcendentalism of the nineteenth century. Dillard started her career as a poet, and she wrote prose as well as two novels. She published her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* in 1974, a nonfiction narrative about the natural world which won the 1975 Pulitzer Prize. The present article investigates the transcendental thought in Dillard's novel *The Maytrees* which she published in 2007. The deep analysis of this novel shows that this work reflects much of Dillard's transcendental philosophy and perspectives. Dillard presents a transcendental vision of society grounded on the individual but not related to a specific society; it is a universal vision.

Key Words: *Transcendental, Vision, Society, Self-reliance, Spiritual*

Annie Dillard was considerably influenced by nineteenth-century American Transcendentalism. Dillard, indeed, is a true inheritor of the leading figures of transcendental movement--Ralph Waldo Emerson and H.D. Thoreau. A representative example of this tendency in Dillard is her masterpiece *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) which is seemingly written in Thoreau's style in *Walden*. Like Thoreau, she has an everlasting passion for Nature which she describes amazingly in details. Dillard follows the successions of seasons and records the evolution of the writer's consciousness through reflection on life in Roanoke Valley. She was known, like Thoreau, as a lonely trampler in the outdoors. Dillard's observation can be read as a metaphor for the universal self and its relation to Nature and God, and in this respect, Dillard displays similarities to Emerson.

Annie Dillard does not involve the social concerns of her age in her major writings. One can hardly find a direct reference to society which is something Dillard seems to have done intentionally. Only in her two novels, *The Living* (1992) and her latest novel *The Maytrees* (2007), may the reader find Dillard openly touching on social issues. Those two novels marked a change in Dillard's focus from the solitary narrator and self-absorption in her previous works to dealing with many characters that belong to different types of people. However, it is her second novel *The Maytrees* that reflects, as it seems to me, much of her transcendental philosophy. In her immersion in the natural world and avoidance of the current social issues of her age, Dillard reminds me of her ancestor Emily Dickinson. Yet, Dillard seems to deal with society on a larger scale that goes beyond specific reforms or

social policies. It is a transcendental vision of society grounded on the individual but not related to a specific society; it is a universal vision. Human understanding of his position in the world and his relation with the natural world are Dillard's main preoccupations. In this article, I will deal with Dillard's novel *The Maytrees*. My reading of the novel will be a social one. I will explore the social implications of this work which will significantly serve to illuminate Dillard's transcendental vision.

Annie Dillard lived in an age when people have been devastated by a sense of alienation and despair. Unlike Eliot and many other contemporary writers who describe the wasteland of the modern age in their writing, Dillard looks for the transcendental values of the nineteenth century to reconsider modern misery and to seek a way out of despair. Dillard's second novel *The Maytrees*, published in 2007, is set in bohemian Provincetown, Massachusetts in the decades that followed the Second World War. The novel, which is a short one (nearly 200 pages), is an elevation of the human condition. Dillard exposes the potential of the human condition to adopt a self-reliant and ascetic life while displaying an intimate relationship with nature and the universe. Self-reliance and nonconformity do not necessarily mean isolation from society. As Lawrence Buell says: "Emerson clearly believes individual acts of principled repudiation of conformity by individuals will have ripple effects. The chief focus of his interest, however, always remains mental emancipation at the individual level" (67).

Dillard thinks that fiction may delve into the depths of human experience. The plot of her novel is uncomplicated. The story which begins after the Second World War tells of enduring love between Toby Maytree, a carpenter and "a poet of the forties and fifties and sixties[who] wrote four book-long poems and three books of lyrics" (2) and his wife Lou Maytree a surprisingly intelligent and beautiful woman. The couple meet after the Second World War and gets married. They have one son named Pete and live peacefully on the banks of Cape Cod in Massachusetts: "Twice a day behind their house the tide boarded the sand. Four times a year the seasons flopped over. Clams live like this, but without so much reading" (2). The novel consists of three parts. The first part concentrates on the breakup of Toby and Lou's relationship for Toby Maytree falls in love with Deary Hightoe. Part two focuses on Lou who lives alone while Toby lives with his second wife and part three shows Toby and Lou's reunion. Dillard keeps avoiding any direct reference to the social scene of her novel as Daniel Smith points out: "Dillard offers just enough fact that the reader can grasp the basics of the narrative. We get nearly nothing in the way of social detail; there are no set pieces; there is only one dramatic confrontation, at the gruelling moment when the Maytrees split, and it is rendered quickly as if to get the moment out of the way" ("No Strictly Platonic"). Dillard's human condition, explored through Lou, is one that transcends the boundaries of the physical world. Dillard's transcendental philosophy is shown in the character of Lou. Dillard claims, "The Maytrees are a woman and a man both simplified and enlarged" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 309). Therefore, Lou could be, to use Emerson's phrase, the "transparent eyeball" in every woman. At the outset of the novel, Dillard introduces Lou as a transcendental figure, "Over her open eyes showed two widths of blue lids whose size and hue she would never see. Her faces skin was transparent, lighted and clear like sky" (8). The metaphor of a transparent eyeball suggests a reference to the transcendentalism movement in the novel. *The Maytrees* is a contemporary investigation of transcendental thought in which Dillard places Emerson and Thoreau's values on Lou.

Toby, who is interested in poetry, unexpectedly falls in love with Deary Hightoe and leaves Lou. Lou is left alone with her child, so she has to find a way to go on. Toby himself cannot understand love and his actions, so he immerses himself in poetry. During the twenty years that Toby and Lou spend apart, Lou carries out her own search for consciousness in an effort to find meaning. Lou starts her transformation in her lonely life by adopting an Emersonian self-reliance. Lou accepts her status as a woman betrayed by her husband, creates a new existence and challenges social expectations of bitterness and melancholy. Her loneliness becomes an opportunity to practice self-reliance, "LOU HOPED SCANDALOUSLY to live her own life. A subnormal calling, since civilization means cities and cities mean social norms. She wanted only to hear herself think" (*The Maytrees* 131). Lou's self-reliance becomes more noticeable especially in a small community like Provincetown. As she gets older, her commitment to herself persists: "Most years she shook her wide, white head and refused aid – She's impossible, they said, fond and sacred" (*The Maytrees* 80).

In her self-reliance, Lou moves towards a more ascetic life. She shares Thoreau's rejection of redundancy and exhibition of material wealth, choosing purposeful life instead. Trappings of society no longer worry her:

Lou had long since cut out fashion and all radio but the Red Sox. In the past few years, she had let go her ties to people she did not like, to ironing, to dining out in town, and to buying things not necessary and that themselves needed care. She ignored whatever did not interest her. (*The Maytrees* 131)

Lou fears that humans will lose in the end as a result of their material preoccupations. When Lou devotes herself to a purposeful life apart from obligations to others, Lou has more freedom and time to think, "With those blows, she opened her days like a piñata. A hundred freedoms fell on her. She hitched free years to her lifespan like a kite tail. Everyone envied her the time she had, not noticing that they had equal time" (*The Maytrees* 131-132). Lou sets out her rebirth with her own personal pilgrimage where she uses self-reliance to cause self-improvement. With all the time she acquires through her ascetic lifestyle, she finds herself committed to letting go of Toby and meditates about letting everything go:

She could climb the monument every day and work on herself as a task she had. She had nothing else to do. Within a month she figured that if she ceded that the world did not center on her, there was no injustice or betrayal. If she believed she was free and out of the tar pit, would she not thereby free herself from the tar pit? (*The Maytrees* 91)

Committed to herself, immersing herself in Nature provides her with more freedom and reveals a life with many more possibilities.

Lou's pilgrimage aims to achieve illumination. Lou's literal and metaphorical climb of a monument displays her ability to attain new viewpoints about the earth and universe. Lou looks to the sky as she climbs the monument and recognizes that both her quest for knowledge and the universe were boundless. This seems to echo Emerson who claims that the lack of limits connects us with God. By taking herself to the highest point in town where her sight does not limit her awareness of the universe, her ego vanishes and Lou becomes identified with God.

Even though Lou reunites with Toby Maytree at the end of the novel, she keeps

close to her spiritual connections as her sensual aspects of their relationship are gone. Toby is more at peace since the material, and physical aspects of his life are eliminated. Dillard closes her novel by reminding us of the transience of life and its cyclic nature. Transcendentalist philosophy focuses not on the end and beginning of life, but on the idea of living to the fullest while alive. As Toby experiences his final moments, Lou contemplates what will happen to all of the knowledge he has learned throughout his life while watching seagulls outside. She then considers her own memory, "the little she retained; all she had yet to think through in her time left. Replaceable gulls. For all she knew she had seen the same gulls over and over. . . . Would he remember, at least at first, to watch for its own blue seas' palming the earth?" (*The Maytrees* 216). Dillard does not answer the question but creates a strong and permanent impression about the proper way to live where even if we lose someone very dear, we can survive, find renewal and learn from the universe with its boundless possibilities.

Dillard then, as I pointed out before, does not directly write about society on political or cultural levels but deals more with the individual as the core of community. By adopting the transcendental premises of self-reliance and ascetic life, Lou Maytree is able to get out of her despair and frustration, remaining optimistic about her life. Through the character of Lou, Dillard seems to elucidate her transcendental philosophy and the importance of reviving its principles for creating a healthy society. According to Dillard, Emerson and Thoreau's self-reliance and ascetic life which Lou Maytree adopts should be restored and revived. Maytree could survive and live her life to the fullest. She demonstrates a transcendental model to be followed by women and men in order to achieve Dillard's transcendental vision of American and global community:

Dillard creates a vision which reminds us of Thoreau and Emerson, the leading figures of American transcendentalism of the nineteenth century. It is a vision which asserts hope in the modern world and restores the spiritual and religious dimensions of our existence that have seriously damaged in the modern age. (Al Jumaili 46)

Annie Dillard's treatment of society is not explicit in most of her works. Her vision of society is based on the individual and not related to a specific community. Dillard presents the transcendental ideal of self-reliance and ascetic life to transcend despair and sustain hope as seen in the heroine. The heroine represents a transcendental model to be imitated by both women and men in order to achieve Dillard's transcendental vision of society, local and universal.

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Multicultural Dilemmas in National and Transnational Lands: A Study of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance Of Loss*

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Abstract

*Migration across geographical space has been an integral part of history. The present era is marked by an increase in migration flow, and cultural diversity. Multiculturalism has become an indispensable part of culturally diverse societies. The term 'multiculturalism' denoting a society in which several cultures co-exist, some times jostling for recognition within national and global boundaries, sometimes in relative harmony with each other, sometimes in conflict, thus giving rise to conflicts among minorities and majority, rising ethnic consciousness, attitudes and expectations of immigrants as well as of host population. These occurrences have put a serious challenge to the notion of multiculturalism. The writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee, Zadie Smith, Randa Abdel-Fattah and many others have portrayed divergent concerns related to multiculturalism in contemporary scenario by fictionalizing different factual situations in their narratives. In the present day scenario along with cultural diversity, multiculturalism has incorporated many other issues such as politics of recognition, identity, diaspora, globalization, fundamentalism, dichotomies of 'us' and 'them' and a few others. The present paper aims to study Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* and to explore multiple issues related to multiculturalism both in national and transnational lands.*

Key Words: *Diaspora, Multiculturalism, Identity, Cultural diversity, Globalization.*

Migration across geographical space has been an integral part of history. People move from one geographical location to another for a variety of reasons like social, political, economic etc. The present era is marked by an increase in migration flow and cultural diversity and multiculturalism has become an indispensable part of culturally diverse societies. C.W. Watson considers multiculturalism a 'political phenomenon' and opines that multiculturalism draws our attention "to the deeper philosophical and political implications of the co-existence of different orientations to engagement with the world, and the way in which those differences jostle for recognition within national and global boundaries, sometimes in relative harmony with each other, sometimes in real conflict" (Watson 230). The 21st century has also witnessed a number of bizarre happenings and conflicts among minorities and majority, rising ethnic consciousness, attitudes and

expectations of immigrants as well as of host population, disillusionment, humiliation and disappointment among the immigrants and minority communities in national and transnational lands due to cross-cultural conflicts, violence, terrorism, national and international upheavals. These occurrences have put a serious challenge to the notion of multiculturalism. Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee, Zadie Smith and many others have portrayed divergent concerns related to multiculturalism in contemporary scenario by fictionalizing different factual situations in their narratives. The present paper aims to study Kiran Desai's novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and explore multiple issues related to multiculturalism both in national and transnational lands.

Kiran Desai, born in India, shifted to England at the age of 14 and later settled in the United States, observes everything through the "lens of being an Indian" (Wikipedia). She wrote her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* in 1996 and her much acclaimed second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* published in 2006 won her Booker Prize. The text sprawls over two continents in Kalimpong, a small town in India at the foothills of Mount Kanchenjunga in the northeastern Himalayas which is shown passing through a political turmoil in mid 1980s in the wake of the Liberation Movement launched by the Indian-Nepalese under the banner of GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front), demanding Gorkhaland for the Gorkhas and in New York city of America which is full of legal and illegal immigrants from many third world countries.

Multiculturalism in India is not an official policy. Instead of the term multiculturalism, other terms such as 'secularism' and 'unity in diversity' are used in Indian Constitution to give equal space, recognition and opportunities to different cultural and ethnic minorities residing in different parts of the country. In spite of this, the country has witnessed many ethnic conflicts in post-independence era e.g. Jharkhand movement, Kashmiris' fight for 'Azadi,' Sikhs' demand for Khalistan, Gorkhas' demands for an independent state and the very recent is Telangana movement. Desai has set her novel in the backdrop of insurgency rising in the north-east in the mid of 1980 which posed a big threat to law and order. The movement was launched by the Indian-Nepalese under the banner of GNLF, Gorkha National liberation Front, demanding Gorkhaland for the Gorkhas, who felt cheated by the political leaders in 1947. They were "fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs" (Desai 09).

According to Will Kymlicka the recognition of minority rights is a major concern for the practitioners of multiculturalism (Kymlicka 49). In the case of GNLF, how far are the demands of Gorkhas justified? Different communities which had been living together since a long time suddenly adopted a hostile attitude towards one other. The Nepalese who earlier used to feel alienated on the land of their ancestors suddenly rose to the subject position and other communities from different parts of the country started feeling marginalized. Kiran Desai here seems to raise a few questions for the readers: How and why do these ethnic movements arise? What are the reasons behind these? Is it due to socio-cultural differences or due to a sense of discrimination? How far are their claims substantiated? Joseph Carens, who endorses special rights for minority communities, while discussing the claims of minorities reflects that it is "necessary to consider at least the history of the group asserting the claim, the precise nature of its demands and the character of the

state in which these demands are made." (Carens quoted by Mahajan 115)

Multiculturalism is confined not only to the conflicts between the minorities and the majorities or the natives and the immigrants. Multi-ethnicities and ethnic clashes are a reality among different communities residing in their native land. Desai has presented diversity of characters from different parts of the country. The judge in this novel is a Gujrati, the cook is from Uttar Pradesh, Mrs. Sen, Noni and Lola are Bengalis. All these characters in one form or other consider Nepalese in an undermining position. The cook's surprise to know that Sai's tutor is a Nepalese clearly indicates his belief that Nepalese can't be good in education. The conversations of the two sisters Lola and Noni and of Mrs Sen reveal that Nepalese are not trustworthy hence should not be employed at home. When Sai comes to stay with her grandfather Jhemubai Patel, he does not send her to a government school because of his belief that she won't be taught well there. All these ethnic communities consider themselves in a higher position than the Nepalese.

Feeling side-tracked, underestimated and marginalized on the land of their ancestors, the Nepalese start a protest for their rights. They blame that the ethnic communities, who have come from other states, are leading a luxurious life at their cost. The violence breaks out and the non-Nepalese are plundered, looted and killed. Even the administration does not take any action. It becomes corrupt and takes the side of violent activators. The cook and Lola and Noni ponder over their decision to make a home at a place where they have become non-existent today. Desai seems to raise a question here, who is actually responsible for these multi-ethnic conflicts? The Nepalese, who have never got a respectable position in their own land, or the ethnic communities, from other states, who are a part of this nation and have made their home there with a feeling that in one's own country one is free to move and settle in its any geographical location. Lola, Noni, Mrs Sen and Jhemubai Patel who have never considered the Nepalese as their equal, do they have any right now to blame them for starting liberation movement for their equal rights? While demanding their rights, is it right for agitating people to turn to violent activities towards their own fellow human beings? No doubt, the attitude of the ethnic communities towards the Nepalese is wrong, but more than this, the violent activities of GNLF towards non-Nepalese are also utterly negated.

The contemporary multicultural societies are gripped by the fear of ethnic tensions, conflicts and violence. With increasing levels of development, the ethnic problems are becoming more and more alarming. While portraying multi-ethnic conflicts in homeland, Desai also focuses on the experiences of multi-ethnic communities in transnational lands. In America the process of multiculturalism started in mid 1960s but multiculturalism was not opted as an official policy. Rather American Government insisted on the policy of 'melting pot' and stressed on assimilation and integration. 1980s was the period when America had been in the process of becoming super-power in economic sector. People from different parts of the world migrated here, legally or illegally, to fulfill their American dream. While portraying the experiences of immigrants in transnational lands Desai seems to question how far the policies of multiculturalism and globalization have been able to bring down socio-economic disparities and to create socio-cultural harmony and mutual tolerance among different ethnic communities? The immigrant experience is discussed through the characters of Biju, Saeed, Harish-Hary, Mr Kakkar, Achooltan and a few others. The immigrants who migrate to the States are judged by the country of their origin. The

migrations from the 'white world' are accepted but the immigrants from third world are being discriminated because of their belonging to the developing and under-developed countries. Desai gives description of the restaurants where Biju works.

Biju at the Baby Bistro

Above, the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And, when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian and Pakistani.

Biju at Le Colonial for the authentic colonial experience.

On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native.

Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian.

On to the Stars and Stripes Diner. All American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below. Plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived (Desai 21).

Far worse is the condition of blacks or Negroes who not only get humiliated by the host nation but also by different ethnic communities residing in the USA. Desai shows how multi-ethnic conflicts are found both in the native land and foreign land. While taking memories of their homeland in their hearts and other objects in their suitcases, immigrants also carry the hateful attitude towards the people of other communities and countries along with them. Biju hates Pakis and is reluctant to be friendly with them. "This habit of hate had accompanied Biju . . ." (Desai 77). He is even warned by someone that he should be careful of the Negroes. But with Saeed who is from Zanzibar he is comfortable because the latter is not a Paki and if he eats cow then that is not an Indian cow, so it cannot be considered an unholy act. Saeed has encountered the same dilemmas regarding Biju. "From other kitchens, he was learning what the world thought of Indians" (Desai 77). Harish-Hary, a successful businessman, exploits the illegal immigrants, pays them less and makes them work day and night. When this exploitation becomes unbearable for Biju and the futility of American dream dawns on him, he cries out:

What business would you have? This is how you make money, paying us nothing because you know we can't do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal why don't you sponsor us for Green Card? (Desai 189).

"Ethnic minorities have to meet at least two challenges: the external pressure of assimilation to the traditions of the cultural majority and internal tensions between different generations within the diaspora itself" (Sommer 177). Bhikhu Parekh and Gurpreet Mahajan, the two theorists of multiculturalism, also talk about the conflict of the first generation to hold on the tradition of the country of origin and that of assimilation by the second generation (Parekh 65-67, Mahajan 31). The second-generation immigrants born and brought up in a foreign land try to assimilate into mainstream culture and eventually become more and more alienated from their own communities and families. They feel awkward associating publically with their families as they do not consider them suitable for the mainstream culture. Harish-Hari runs a food shop named Gandhi Café where he tries to uphold the Indianness whereas his daughter is totally Americanized. This leads to inter-generational clashes between Harish and his daughter.

Will Kymlicka is of the opinion that immigrants adopt host country just for material gains and do not cultivate any sense of loyalty towards it. Their loyalty is directed towards

the country of their origin (Kymlicka 149). Achootan, a fellow dishwasher to Biju in a kitchen, wants to have green card out of revenge. He openly shows his hatred towards the host nation. "Your father came to *my* country and took *my* bread and now I have come to *your* country to get *my* bread back" (Desai 135). Saeed outwardly adapts himself to the American system but inwardly nourishes a feeling of hatred and revenge towards the host country. "*First* I am Muslim, then I am Zanzibari, *then* I will *BE* American" (Desai 136). Harish-Hary, who is a successful businessman and owner of an Indian restaurant, even after getting all the benefits, carries the same feeling of hatred, disgust and revenge towards the land of adoption. "Every time one enters my shop I smile Hi how ya doing? But all I want to do is break their necks. I can't but maybe my son will and that is my great hope" (Desai 149).

Biju, Saeed and a few other illegal immigrants do not reveal the truth of their pitiable conditions to their families. So the people at home remain ignorant of social, economic and political inequalities experienced by immigrants in the first world. Desai foregrounds the idea here that the outer world is not always bright and full of opportunities as Lola, Noni, Mrs. Sen and the cook think of. Globalization and multiculturalism are the policies which are suitable for only a blessed few. How the west still holds its power on the third world is shown through Mr Kakkar's conversation with Biju where he suggests that even if he goes to his own country he cannot escape the hegemonic power of America as it is in a process of buying the whole world.

In spite of the development and advancement policies of the modern world or however positive the socio-cultural policies of a society are, there are many ethnic groups that continue to live in a marginalized position in every country. They are the ones who have to make adjustments in every walk of life, so that they may live comfortably and be accepted by the dominant group of a particular society. Santana Halder writes in this context:

Kiran Desai highlights that the process of globalization has its loopholes that the cartographical binaries have collapsed only for a blessed few. The poor people of the third world countries who dream of a better future and are lured by the affluence of American society have no place in the world of their dream. They are compelled to suffer in their homeland and the exile they opt for only increases their suffering (Halder 87).

Multicultural theorists advocate the importance of identity and recognition in the context of multiculturalism. Charles Taylor observes rightly, "Non-recognition or mis-recognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being" (Taylor 25). Desai has presented a diversity of characters who in one form or the other are going through the problem of identity crisis. Gyan's attempt to join the violent separatists agitating for an independent state is an extreme measure of asserting his identity. Being very conscious of his ethnic identity he believes that one's own tradition and culture shape one's personality. Sai, who is born out of two different cultures, a Zoroastrian father and a Hindu mother, is in search of her identity. Jhemubhai Patel, the retired judge, begins his quest for identity from a position of the 'other' to become a member of the mainstream. Unable to become a part of either side he acquires an 'in-between' position and confines himself to his own world of solitude. Indian-Nepalese after becoming aware of their subordinate position try to assert their identity through violent means. A conscious awareness of their own rights makes them demand recognition

of their identity. Biju, another character in the novel, attracted by the western multicultural world moves there as an illegal immigrant. He is representative of all those people who after feeling marginalized in transnational land and their native land oscillate between 'here' and 'there'. He is thrice dis-placed as he does not have a single place of his own to fix his identity. Through the dilemmas of a few other characters like Lola, Noni, the cook, Father Booty and Mrs. Sen, Desai has highlighted how people's identity gets affected by changing situations and "constant wanderings negate a chance of fixed identity" (Varghese 51).

Gupreet Mahajan avers that the dichotomies between 'us' and 'them' that informed the colonial discourse persist even in multiculturalism. Although not representing the 'other' as barbaric or uncivilized, multiculturalism continues to treat the 'other' as unequal in many respects. Desai has presented the dichotomies of 'us' and 'them and 'here' and there' through multiple angles and has shown that in some critical situations even these dichotomies get interchanged. The Gorkhas feel bad as being treated like 'other' in their own land.

We are soldiers, loyal, brave. India or England, they never had cause to doubt our loyalty. In the wars with Pakistan we fought our former comrades on the other side of the border. How our spirit cried. But we are Gorkhas. We are soldiers. Our character has never been in doubt. And have we been rewarded? Have we been given compensation?? Are we given respect?? No they spit on us (Desai 158).

After the insurgency all these Indian-Nepalese who were earlier feeling marginalized suddenly rise to subject position. The people from different states, regions and communities from India residing in Kalimpong take the position of 'other' in their homeland. The novel also highlights that first world culture influences even the third world and preferences are given to those people who belong to rich countries. Desai expresses her anguish that binaries exist within the boundaries of home culture also, providing more facilities to foreigners than to Indians. At Kolkata airport Biju observes that NRIs and foreigners are given preference:

We are paying as much as the other fellow. Foreigners get more and Indians get less. Treating people from a rich country well and people from poor country badly. It's disgrace. Why this lopsided policy against your own people?? "It IS Air France policy, madam," he repeated. As if throwing out the words Paris or Europe would immediately intimidate, assure non-corruption, and silence opposition (Desai 298).

In order to present the divergent multicultural issues, Desai has used different literary techniques. By using stream of consciousness and flashback technique she has tried to explore the minds of her characters. Jhemubai Patel's past is revealed through this technique only. There is juxtaposition of place and time and past is often contrasted with present. Her use of language is both American and Indian. She prefers American English and tries to make it Indianized. She has used Indian vocabulary, metaphors and images. She begins every chapter in the novel with an italicized line, thereafter she elaborates the topic. In order to emphasize her expression she uses rhetorical questions and italics. "Better leave sooner than later . . . India is a sinking ship. Don't want to be pushy, darling, sweetie, thinking of your happiness only, but *the doors won't stay open for ever . . .*" (Desai 47).

Desai manifests her reactions to multiculturalism through the experiences of her

characters and the depiction of social, cultural and political milieu in national and transnational lands. America has focused on the policy of melting pot and feels that multiculturalism is against the American ideal of national identity. She presents a skeptical look towards this and seems to bring forth the idea that in spite of America's policy of 'melting pot,' assimilation and integration are only partially successful. The novel also highlights that multiculturalism is not only confined to western world but multicultural conflicts and violence are prevalent even in India. Although Indian constitution provides liberty and equality as fundamental rights and promotes secular and democratic ideas in the country but the post independence period has witnessed a variety of ethnic conflicts in different parts of the country. Moreover, a few characters in the novel Jhemubhai patel, the cook, Mrs Sen, two sisters, Lola and Noni are inclined to the western world and see more positivities there, but through the predicament of immigrants like Biju and Saeed, Desai foregrounds the idea that the outer world is only a mirage and the actual reality is bitter and harsh and suggests that economic prosperity, globalization and capitalism of western world cannot become a route to success for the downtrodden.

To sum up, it can be said that by portraying the complex experiences of her characters across the nation and within the nation, Desai has raised multiple issues related to multiculturalism, e.g., violence, ethno-conflicts, immigration, inter-generational conflicts and dichotomies of 'us' and 'them.' She does not provide solutions to the problems resulting from multi-ethnicity, but allows different voices to be heard and different opinions to be expressed. By leaving the gaps and silences open, she leaves them to be filled by the readers.

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Taboo, Alternative Sexualities and Choices: The Depiction of Trans Identity in Duncan Tuckers's *Transamerica*

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Abstract

The notion of sexuality has frequently been used in the study of literary works to create stereotypes related to the representation of both male and female sexualities. Actually, sexuality can neither be totally expressed nor fully apprehended through sexual performances, presentations or narratives because it is too complex, involving not only concepts and norms that are culturally determined but also having individual, subjective contours. Today queer culture is centered on social difference and the multiplicity of identities. The present paper focuses on the film, Transamerica which openly documents Bree's past as a male and lays emphasis on the need to accept her past in order to be able to continue her new life as a surgically constructed female, and argues that cinema can be considered as a reflection of social values, ideas, morals and changes – the reflections of which can be transported through the filmic narrative arguably resulting in processes of contestation and change in not only the minds of the spectators in the auditorium, but in the mind of society as a whole. The challenging of foundations and breaking of boundaries, stereotypes and engrained ideals pertaining to patriarchal, phallogocentric society has been crucial to this analysis of representations of gender as reflected in the chosen film. The recognition of the fluidity and plurality of sexuality and gender, transcending the restrictive and discriminatory codes still operating in the society has been the primary issue tackled by the chosen film maker.

Key words: *Gender/Queer/Sexuality Studies, Film Studies, Discourse Analysis, Identity.*

There is probably no area of social life today that is more volatile than sexuality and sexual identity. Every day seems to churn out debates centering on questions about sexual behavior which is not normative, projected perversion and choices, about the meaning and place of sexuality in shaping human lives. Studies about sexuality emphasise the fact that it is a social construction, which similar to the term gender, presupposes a set of behaviors and characteristics considered culturally and socially accepted and another set that consists of what is unacceptable; to the former relates to heterosexuality, while the latter, for example, has traditionally been related to homosexuality or bisexuality. The regime of compulsory sexuality privileges heterosexuality and condemns alternative sexual practices and

identities, that is, those that deviate from the socially privileged function of biological reproduction. The individual's assumption of a position in terms of his or her sexuality relates to the idea of sexual identity, which Maggie Humm defines as "a sense of one's own sexuality...culturally rather than biologically determined: the public presentation of sexual aims and objectives as integrated into the personality", which can lead one to conclude that sexuality does not necessarily correspond to sexual practice. The very fact that public presentation and practice may reveal incoherent aspects of one's sexualities confirms the complexity of the individual's position.

Nancy Chodorow argues that psychoanalytic works based on the biological assumption that heterosexuality is innate or natural lead to problems, the most worrisome being the obvious denial of the fact that so-called normal heterosexuality is as specified in its object of desire as homosexuality is said to be. She goes on to say that "the fairy tales, myths, tales of love and loss and betrayal, movies, and books that members of a culture grow up with and thus share with others" (Chodorow 771) influence an individual's choice of an object of sexual desire. Sexual fantasies, thus, reflect the individual's appropriations of the language of these culturally created narratives, which also inform the notions of sexual attraction and attractiveness that are culturally privileged.

Michel Foucault emphasises the notion of sexuality as a social apparatus for control of individuals, describing its development throughout history. He claims that the term 'sexuality' (emphasis is mine) only appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that the constitution of this notion follows the norms originated from the development of sciences and from social institutions, as well as from the "subjectivisation" (*History of Sexuality II* 4) of these norms by individuals. In other words, sexuality is determined and controlled through discourses that intend to examine and explain the human sexualised body. Differently from Foucault, Judith Butler argues that gender differences not only are constructs of social oppression but also impact the individual's subjectivity. In other words, recognising gender as a social construction is one thing and assuming that this fact hinders the incorporation of this notion into a person's subjectivity as if it were a natural predisposition, is another. This incorporation attests the efficiency of the imposition of the notion of gender as a way of social control upon individuals, but the recognition of this efficiency does not mean complacency with such imposition. This fact is what Foucault assumes in relation to sexuality but refuses to consider in relation to gender.

The notion of sexuality has frequently been used in the study of literary works to create stereotypes related to the representation of both male and female sexualities. Actually, sexuality can neither be totally expressed nor fully apprehended through sexual performances, presentations or narratives because it is too complex, involving not only concepts and norms that are culturally determined but also having individual, subjective contours. With many writers taking up queer/LGBTQ themes for their work, a 'same-sex plot' is no longer a taboo. For many years, as gay rights activists are fighting for equal rights, gay and lesbian writers are providing a richer understanding of trials and tribulations of their lives. A few prominent works of this genre include: James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) narrating the story of a man who discovers his sexual identity in Paris, Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) which is a memoir of her closeted gay father, E.M. Forster's *Maurice* (1971) which was written when homosexuality was illegal in England and was published posthumously and a well-known novel *Orlando*:

A Biography (1928) by Virginia Woolf, which describes the adventures of a poet who changes sex and meets important historical figures, to name a few. Earlier, novels on same-sex desire/relationships were rare in Indian writing in English but this scenario has undergone a change in the recent years. R Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* (2003) is among the first gay novels written in English in India. Rahul Mehta's *Quarantine* (2010) is a collection of short stories dealing with queer identity and Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's novel *The Exiles* (2011) is about a homosexual man's extra-marital relationship. A prominent work, *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (2000) by Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai details the history of same sex desire and homoerotic love in not just Indian writing traditions but also in poetry and architecture.

Today queer culture is centered on social difference and the multiplicity of identities. In poststructuralist terms, appealing to one's sexual, gender, or ethnic identity as the grounds for community-building is particularly problematic because of the instabilities and exclusions related to those categories. While gay liberation framed homosexuality as an issue of sexual politics, poststructuralists frame the hetero/homo dichotomy in Western culture as political itself. The anti-foundationalist, essentialism-questioning stance of queer theory is well-placed to make a valuable contribution to a re-reading of the understanding of mainstream media 'invisibility' and 'partial visibility' (emphasis is mine) of non-heterosexual sexualities that emerged from within Lesbian and Gay Studies.

In *Transgender on Screen*, John Phillips presents an eclectic investigation of gender through representations of (and ambivalent responses to) cross-dressing, transgenderism and transsexuality in mainstream film. Shohini Ghosh in one of her essays has talked about the emergent sexualities in popular cinema and their relationship to the larger public discourse at the cusp of the 20th and 21st Century. She maintains that two new currents become evident as queer sexuality becomes impossible to elide or overlook. The first is the emergence of an ambivalent discourse that invokes non-normative desires through a simultaneous invocation of the erotic and the phobic. The second is the emergence of a new cinema that displaces conventional cinematic codes of gender and the inevitability of heterosexuality. *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* by Michele Aaron defines 'new queer cinema,' (emphasis is mine) by assessing its filmmakers, examining geographic and national differences, and theorizing spectatorship.

Cinema plays a major role in shaping our private thoughts and public behaviour. This ability of cinema is exploited by the filmmakers to investigate various concerns of human struggle and strife. The audio-visual culture of the present time employs cinema for learning and relating to the world. In the event of one's worldview being restricted to the boundaries of his or her language, a language whose scope transcends verbal communication (say, cinematic language) holds the potential to change the worldview for masses. Although cinema plays a paramount role in injecting particular values into public consciousness, history of cinematic movements (e.g. Italian Neorealism, French New Wave, and Third Cinema) has shown that the medium can also be a vehicle for intervention and social change. While speaking about cinema's role as public pedagogical machinery, Henry Giroux wrote:

A visual technology (cinema) that functions as a powerful teaching machine that intentionally tries to influence the production of meaning, subject positions, identities, and experience, suggests how important it has

become as a site of cultural politics. (Giroux 6)

Assuming that cinema is a form of public pedagogy, one of the greatest challenges to using cinema for social justice is accessibility to cinema that contains thought-provoking elements, which can help facilitate social transformation and become a vehicle to question essentialist and redundant cultural ideals. While technological advancement and savvy marketing strategies have enabled an easy access to the latest films and film writings round the world, these trends have also escalated scholarly and critical interest in cinema. The aim of this paper is to situate the chosen film within the context of a changing cultural and social climate in contemporary times.

Queerness being repeatedly symbolised in terms of movement/movability and an overall resistance against 'standing still' is a powerful, recognisable trope and one of the regular features of films dealing with the queer identity and it is often expressed through the recurring motif of the road - queerness is constantly 'on the go'. Eve Sedgwick, once claimed that 'queer' is movement, not only in the sense of referring to a communal, shared, or even a cinematic crusade, but because it moves in the literal sense too (Sedgwick xii). Queer is all about being fluid; it is about moving or fleeting across genders, sexualities, needs and practices. If queerness doesn't stay in sync with the spasmodic pulse of identity politics, perhaps it moves more literally across a backdrop that occasionally has trouble securing the fluctuating, unstable ground upon which queerness often travels.

This notion of the queer being 'on the move' is quite suggestive, given that in some queer films, the subjects don't inhabit any one specific place for too long- they are factually and figuratively in a state of flux. Instead, such characters keep passing through and between places, identities and things- young, untethered characters who hustle their way through life. If anything, the persistence of the road motif underscores the idea that the queer characters of these films are restless identities, unable to be moored in any one 'space'. Unlike the usual exaggerated, romanticised mode, the road in these movies doesn't assure narrative closure, but seems to lead to the unanswered and the unfound. These films engage with similar ideas involving 'movement' in the manner in which they feature protagonists whose circumstances and subjectivities are informed by the act of moving across the landscape.

To an extent, the road functions in these films as a site of escape; a means of being able to float throughout life- embarking on a journey about longing and searching. The principal characters in the films are looking for recognition, civil courtesy and love but their search for these is almost prompted after escaping from troubling situations. One of the paradoxes of the road is that on the one hand, it suggests freedom and escape because it conveys an on-going sense of self-transformation; on the other hand, the road proposes a sense of estrangement, vulnerability and hazard because it can trick the subject into a vicious cycle of change. In other words, the transgender characters' endeavour to transmute their circumstances or identity always leads them into the same perilous predicaments - they may be able to alter their circumstances, but are always brought to another similar point of extreme crisis.

During the last decade, there has been a proliferation of films with lesbian/gay themes and content emerging from the large Hollywood production companies and this is an important development in available resources that constrain and reinforce discourses of sexuality. Film and television have become important, perhaps competing, resources of

information. Generally, when a wide-distribution film with lesbian or gay characters is released—no matter how small their part—it is praised by lesbian/gay critics and newspapers as an important film, and is recommended and noted for its contribution to lesbian and gay visibility.

More significantly, these films and television programmes might often be the point of 'first contact' a spectator/viewer has with issues and sexual desires of a non-heteronormative nature; for many such media could be the only resource providing evidence of sexualities that deviate from what is still posited as the heterosexual norm. While visibility of non-heterosexual sexualities can be important in conveying a social sense of alternatives to heterosexual sexual arrangements, the concept of 'visibility' is clearly more complex than one that should unwittingly be advocated. What is being made visible? What are the characteristics of those visible lesbian and gay personages in film and television? And what do they teach about non-heterosexual sexuality?

According to Sharon Cowan, *Transamerica* which is a film following the journey both literally and metaphorically) of a pre-operative male-to-female transsexual named Bree, paradoxically reinforces and challenges the dichotomies of sex/gender politics (Cowan 104). Historically, transgender people were expected to lie about their identities and about their pasts, as Kate Bornstein discusses in "Gender Terror, Gender Rage", yet this film openly documents Bree's past as a male and lays emphasis on the need to accept her past in order to be able to continue her new life as a surgically constructed female. Bornstein goes on to inform that when dealing with transgender issues, the old medical model ordered the suppressing of patient's childhood and biological sex, favouring a denial of existence as the sex into which they were born and/or raised. In this way, the medical, psychiatric and psychological institution encouraged transsexuals to lie about their gendered histories in order to smoothly enter into agreement with the hegemonic, binary gender system and live 'stealth lives' says Joelle Ruby Ryan in *Reel Gender* (9).

The film echoes this older concept however, as at the beginning of the film, Bree's therapist tells her, "You look very authentic." Bree replies, "I try to blend in, keep a low profile. I believe the slang terminology is living stealth" (*Transamerica*). The suppressing of one's biological sex in cultural history, as opposed to the film, helped to ensure 'trans subjectivity' (emphasis is mine) as totally invisible and as a fleeting mode of being that indicated passage from one physical state to another.

However, *Transamerica*, as Cowan argues, also substantiates itself within this binary framework as its success alone demonstrates, that "the transsexual who wants to cross and pass is, more than ever, accepted by mainstream culture- Bree does not want to live as a trans person continually calling into question our safe, comfortable categories of male/female" (Cowan 107).

Bree, in her own and her therapists terms, is suffering from "gender dysphoria", historically and medically referred to as "gender identity disorder" (Bullough 311, 313) which is still listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-111-R) and still considered an illness. Therefore, it is not surprising that the central precept of the theory of gender dysphoria figures large in many trans-narratives, says Sally Hines, in "Trans Forming Gender". It would seem that the film places too much emphasis on the labelling of Bree's condition and on her desire to transition surgically, in the process neglecting an opportunity to portray trans identities as 'normal' when sitting outside the

binaries of the sex/gender classification system.

Butler argues that precisely because certain kinds of gender identities fail to conform to those “norms of cultural intelligibility”, they appear only as “developmental failures or logical impossibilities” (*Gender Trouble* 24, 24) from within that domain. Their tenacity and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to “expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility,” and hence, to open up within the very terms of that “matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder” (*Gender Trouble* 24, 24). However, the representation of trans-visibility that Bree embodies misses this point all together. Rather than explore the fluidity of gender, *Transamerica* arguably constructs what can only be described as the stereotypical story of transition. The founding representation of trans- identities as a whole in the film is to build trans bodies as normal in an effort to render trans people endurable, understandable or justifiable. For Bree, her desire for normality is paramount and not wanting “a liminal life on the frontier- on the threshold between genders” (Cowan 107) which makes her embark on a journey towards sex reassignment surgery.

There is an interesting point that David King makes while commenting on how medicine has become the “culturally major lens through which gender blending” (King 119) is observed in modern Western societies. So while the media do not simply reproduce medical knowledge, this perspective has had a major impact on the media treatment of gender blending. This is certainly true of *Transamerica*- using narrative to ensure gender conflict is given embodied expression through surgery, producing the body as story. The transsexual body inscribed through “textual violence” finally allows the representation of the contradictions and ambiguity, the “chaos of lived gendered experience,” to be intelligibly read (Nataf 21). Within *Transamerica*, the continuation of Bree's journey towards gender reassignment surgery is amplified through a universal 'individual progressive' (emphasis is mine) account, stories of origin and conclusion- from wrong bodies to right ones, sagas of professional and subjective success. Nataf calls such narratives of alteration “heroic processes of self-discovery and self-naming” (Nataf 20) - from epiphany to approval, resolution and promise to transition- the embodiment or rebirth, the early stages of new life and passing.

It is during this process that some form of gender stability is sought, along with an alleviation of the anxiety and disorder of gender dysphoria. It has been argued that the media have been partly or largely responsible for promoting the idea of trans-sexualism as a genuine condition for which sex-reassignment surgery is an appropriate response. The movies have so popularised the idea of sex-change that the patient may come to the psychiatrist already sure of his diagnosis and treatment. Of this, *Transamerica* could be said to be guilty. In “(Not) queering “white vision” in *Far from Heaven* and *Transamerica*,” Rebecca Scherr proposes that one must adhere to a very narrow concept of transsexualism to receive the requisite medical treatment. Those whose identities and desires as the opposite sex most closely suit the normative conceptions of femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality are more easily permitted through the devices of control.

Bree therefore is presented in the film as a trans-woman, sexually attracted to men (therefore reinforcing the hetero-binary) and, as made evident in a scene in which she stumbles upon a transgender party made up of trans people who appear to be at ease with their gender 'otherness', Bree is clearly at odds with the ambiguity of sex/gender (emphasis

is mine). However, in this scene, the trans people who are not interested in passing or going “stealth” are made to be seen as “freaks” (*Transamerica*). Bree prefers to be simultaneously visible (as woman) and invisible (as trans). For Cowan, this scene reflects the apprehensions and problems that many transsexual people face around hiding one's birth sex/gender and passing in one's self perceived sex/gender (Cowan 107).

In this respect, *Transamerica* highlights a true-to life depiction of one trans-issue - Bree asserts her right to exist as a good citizen in a politically liberal society that admires her commitment to 'heteronormativity' and is exactly the sort of 'good' transsexual subject that the United Kingdom's Gender Recognition Act 2004 would comprehend and reward with legal recognition” (Cowan 107). This aligns with Butler's oft-asserted proposition whereby the unity of gender is the effect of a regulatory practice that seeks to render gender identity uniform through a compulsory heterosexuality.

Transamerica concludes with the surgery Bree has waited for so long and as she 'finds' herself, is rendered complete with the past glitches clarified and surpassed; in cultural terms the categorization of gender is “vindicated as the misfit finally fits” (King 145). *Transamerica* could be argued as continually downplaying the social, cultural and political implications of trans people's lives, and focussing instead on micro-level experiences and salacious personal details. For example, issues such as sexuality, sex reassignment surgery, and non-accepting family members are overrepresented. However, issues such as discrimination, the binary gender system and civil rights initiatives, which have been a focus of the transgender movement, are rarely illustrated. On another level, the manner in which Bree's character is 'neatly' labelled into that of a 'traditional' transsexual-someone who obliges the existing sex/gender system by surgically mutating into 'either' male 'or' female, makes the film miss out on any prospect of depicting the real lives of trans people who do not undergo any medical transformations to change their physical selves in order to fit the deterministic definitions of any society.

The phenomenon of 'transgender-ism' serves to be a reversal of the dynamic in the relation between the subject and the other - the subject becomes the other. The person, structurally positioned as the subject strives to reconstruct himself as a subject, thereby abandoning the structurally fixed position for the instable experience of transformation - of becoming a movement without the finality of a stable locus. Engaging in a process of locating himself from the perspective of the person who is structurally, politically and socially located as the other (and thus, becoming a non-subject), the trans dislocates the subject position from a structurally fixed place. The personified experience of 'becoming the other' through a dramatisation of the apparatuses for constructing difference, can also be considered as a viable anti-hierarchic undertaking, meant to subvert the dominant politics of subjectivity. Paying attention to these experiences at the fringes can help us reconsider and revisit the concept of gender, its restrictions and potentialities, both politically and analytically.

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Indian Army: Rachna Bisht Rawat's Inspirational Writings

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Abstract

The units and regiments of the Indian Army have diverse histories and have participated in a number of battles and campaigns across the world, earning a large number of battle and theatre honours before and after Independence. In spite of its glorious past and laudable present, it has not generated the enthusiasm among the teenagers to be drawn to the life in Army. In fact, the number of good aspirants for induction into the army are few and dwindling as time goes by. Though Indian Army offers exciting careers to young people yet surprisingly it faces a shortage of officers. Presently it is reeling under a shortage of 21383 personnel, and over seven thousand officers. Image projection campaigns have not yielded the desired result. Rachna Bisht Rawat's motivational books – The Brave: Param Vir Chakra Stories (2014), 1965: Stories from the Second Indo-Pakistan War (2015) and Shoot, Dive, Fly: Stories of Grit and Adventure from the Indian Army (2017) serve the singular purpose of introducing the teenagers to the real super heroes of India, myriad career options in the Army and motivating them to be part of the exotic life in olive green uniform.

Key Words: Army, Battles, Motivational literature, Wars, Careers, Bravery, Teenagers.

The Indian Army was a separate organisation to the British Army, its main task being to police the Indian Empire. It came into being in 1895 when the three armies of the Presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal, unified into a single army. Besides maintaining the internal security of the British Raj, the Indian Army fought in many other theatres--Burma, Afghanistan, and in China in the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion. By the end of second world war, the Indian Army had grown to a force of about 2,500,000 men, making it the largest volunteer army ever raised. The Indian Army served with distinction in Europe, North and East Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. Indian soldiers earned thirty Victoria Crosses for their outstanding bravery. Indianisation, though, was likely to be a very slow process since British officers were only replaced by Indians when

they retired. An all-Indian officer corps would not have come about until 1967, except for the advent of the Second World War and Indian Independence (Merryn Allingham). It was and continues to be one of most glorious Armed Forces of the World. The Indian Army is the land-based branch and the largest component of Indian Armed Forces. In brief, the Indian Army originated from the armies of the East India Company, which eventually became the British Indian Army, and the armies of the princely states, which finally became the national army after independence of India in 1947. "The units and regiments of the Indian Army have diverse histories and have participated in a number of battles and campaigns across the world, earning a large number of battle and theatre honours before and after Independence" (*Battle Honours of the Indian Army 1757–1971*, 1993, 2). Numerous books written by retired Army officers in the last seventy years, have focused on the brilliance, bravery and heroic exploits of the Army. During this period it had faced five conflicts on its international borders and its history abounds in multiple instances of war time glory garnered by its cadres on the battle fronts yet the literature extant has not generated the enthusiasm among the teenagers to be drawn to the life in Army. In fact, the number of good aspirants for induction into the army are few, and dwindling as time goes by. The Indian Army is one of the most respectable and exciting careers our country offers to young people and surprisingly the Army faces a shortage of officers year after year. Presently it is reeling under a shortage of 21383 personnel (*The Economic Times*, March 21, 2018). In Army (excluding Army Medical Corps, Army Dental Corps and Military Nursing Service), as on July 1, 2015, against the authorized strength of 49631 officers, the actual strength of officers is 40525 with a shortage of 9106 (*Indian Defence Review July-September 2015 Vol. 30 [3]*). In order to bridge the gap the Army has undertaken sustained image projection campaign to create awareness among the youth on the advantages of taking up a challenging and satisfying career. Awareness campaigns, participation in career fairs and exhibitions, advertisements in print and electronic media, motivational lectures in schools, colleges are some of the measures in this direction.

Rachna Bisht Rawat's motivational books—*The Brave: Param Vir Chakra Stories* (2014), *1965: Stories from the Second Indo-Pakistan War* (2015) and *Shoot, Dive, Fly: Stories of Grit and Adventure from the Indian Army* (2017) serve the singular purpose of introducing the teenagers to the real super heroes of India, myriad career options in the Army and motivating them to be part of the exotic life in olive green uniform. As Mahendra Singh Dhoni writes in Foreword to *Shoot, Dive, Fly* that it has been possible because Army authorities allowed Rachna "access to young serving officers to share . . . the experiences of the fascinating jobs they do" (*Shoot, Dive, Fly: Stories of Grit and Adventure from the Indian Army*, 1).

The first two books record the saga of incredible courage of men in uniform on the battlefield, the men who put their lives on the line of fire for their country. *The Brave*, is a compilation of unheard valor and pride of the Indian Soldiers throughout the history of India's wars who were honoured with the Param Veer Chakras. Rachna Bisht brought on herself the task of meeting with comrades and family members of the brave men who were decorated with the highest gallantry award of the country. She has done a huge favor to the readers by putting in the book, the unadulterated narration of these people that reflects pride and pain, all at once. Her description of the setting in which she talks to the narrator is vivid and transports the reader to a place from where they can "hear" the legendary tales.

The narrative is further punctuated by details of the honorable soldier's lives and specific incidents. She also talks about regiments and companies that have fought the war along with the mention of brave soldiers, who have not received the Param Veer Chakra but still deserve a mention for their support and courage in times of war. The intricate description of incidents from war whose narration begins with inter-mixed emotions of courage, uncertainty and pride, end mostly with the loss, or rather, sacrifice of great valuable lives. The book has been divided into sections based on the wars and operations that the country has been a part of, namely, The Indo-Pak War of 1947-48, Congo-1961, The Indo-Chinese War of 1962, Second Kashmir War of 1965, The Indo-Pak War of 1971, Siachen-1987, Operation Pawan 1987-1980 and The Kargil War 1999. Before getting into the details of the lives of the steel hearted soldiers of the country, Bisht has made it a point to describe the war that they are associated with adding to the intensity of the stories. In each story, the author has mentioned the details of the location, the position of the soldiers, the instruction they issued for their men, the injuries they suffered and the courage and patriotism that kept them fighting till they sacrificed their life or the war ended. The tension, the moments of doubt, the critical decisions, the do-or-die situations, the physical and mental turmoil that persisted in the minds of the soldiers present on the warfront has been depicted in the book very well. The reader is comfortably transported into the shoes of the soldier for a moment to get a perspective of wars that have been fought and the sacrifices that have been made in order to maintain peace in the country and make India what it is today.

The book *1965*, is a spotlight on the five major wars between India and Pakistan. Rachna narrates history as if a commentator is reporting live scenes from the battlefield of Haji Pir, Barki, Asal Uttar, Dograi and Phillora. Rachna doesn't hesitate to appreciate the soldiers' ability to respect bravery of even the enemies. The acts of individual valor, the unity among the soldiers, the strategies that are developed in a matter of mere minutes under the pressure of attack from the enemy's side, are all illustrated in the book. In her blog titled, "Why Remember Wars?" she writes, "Wars need to be chronicled because they happened; because they are a part of our history. Because men – who were sons, brothers, husbands, father too –decided they were soldiers first. Because, when the call came, they unquestioningly strapped on their boots and put their lives on stake, for the country that belonged not just to them but to us too. We as nation must be grateful to ones who returned and remember and bow to the memory of the ones who never could. Because that's the least we can do. We need to do it on both sides of the border. Because, the enemy who died left behind broken families too. We have to tell these stories, to read them, because we need to learn that in wars, nobody wins" (Rawat blog).

Through the medium of *Shoot, Dive, Fly: Stories of Grit and Adventure from the Indian Army*, Rachna Bisht Rawat "aims to introduce teenagers to the armed forces and tell them about the perils, the rigours, the challenges, the perks, the thrill, and the adventure of a career in uniform. Ballroom dancing, flying fighter planes, detonating bombs, skinning and eating snakes in times of dire need, and everything else in between--there's nothing our officers can't do" (Vagabomb.com). Through twenty-one nail biting stories of daring, thrill and adventure wherein courage is a common thread, the author essays to overturn the spurious assumptions about age, gender and disability, and showcase the vast variety of jobs available in the army. Rachna overturns the false beliefs that in army one is just trained for combat duties. Instead "Army is a career that lets you do things like skydiving, rally

driving, mountaineering, flying a helicopter to work while you are on the job. You get paid to do things you'd like to pay for and often even those chances never arise" (*Shoot, Dive, Fly: Stories of Grit and Adventure from the Indian Army* 3).

In order to reach out to the intended teenagers, Rachna prefaces each story with an interesting incident of adventure. For instance, one story begins when a helicopter pilot on a rescue mission in the Siachen can't land because of the snow cover. The helicopter is low on fuel, 10 mountaineers are stranded, and the officer must give the mission his all. The story then moves on from the incident to the officer's life and goes on to speak about this as a career option. The other incredible stories include those of a "Kashmir expert who killed militants, the most highly decorated serving officer in the Indian Army who went on a suicidal mission to destroy a militant camp in the Northeast, mountaineers who scaled Everest more than once, lady officers and a cyber warrior" (Sneh Singh <https://yourstory.com> 30 November 2017). But above all, the tone and tenor, provide plentiful inspiration and multiply our respect for the olive-green uniform. *Shoot. Dive. Fly* also features a section on army institutions and information on how to join the army.

In an interview Rachna delves deep into the labour and pains that have gone into the production of *Shoot. Dive. Fly*. When specifically asked about some of the interesting stories about women in the book, the author alludes to a lady officer in the book who is a rifle shooter. She is from a small town in Haryana, and is also a mother, wife, and daughter. I asked her how she gets the time to do her job along with all her responsibilities. She said "I have some dreams that are mine." Her most prized possession is her rifle, which she keeps locked up in her cupboard. There is another girl from Rajasthan who covers her face at family functions, even though she has led an expedition to Everest. Women who numerically constitute more than the male population of India, are still under represented in the army. How to invade the areas in the armed forces which were restricted to men only, is the dilemma. Rachna admits to the presence of a lot of women in the Army, and all of them have had to fight to be where they are. Even though the Army is now opening up its doors to women in battle, there are still a lot of reservations against females in what is considered to be a male dominated space. She avers, "You have to prove that you are as good as them. Gender doesn't matter if being in the army is your dream. One of the ways we can promote the army as a viable career option to young girls is to publicise and share the stories of women who are already in the army. Girls have to see role models, they have to be able to think 'If she can do it, even I can'" (Tara Khandelwal).

Rachna, who hails from an Army background, says, "One tends to think of the Army as just fighting battles. However, the role of the army is much wider. There are cyber warriors, white hat hackers, helicopter pilots, skydivers. The army promotes adventure in a big way. And you can get paid to do things you may like, such as skydiving, instead of paying to do them." Doubtlessly, the book has its quota of infirmities but the honourable intention of presenting the world of India Army across the mindscape of the impressionable young minds and acquaint them with the exoticism and patriotism and motivate the teenagers, is worthy of note. To sum up, *Shoot. Dive. Fly* is not an ordinary career guide; it puts out inspiring stories of real-life heroes in the Indian Army. The army officers speak candidly about their perilous missions and struggle to survive, providing inspiration to the youth and those seeking career options.

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A Review Essay on *The Rainbow Acres* by Simrita Dhir

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Simrita Dhir's debut novel *The Rainbow Acres* is an absorbing, engaging and unputdownable, quintessentially diasporic text. The leitmotif of the text is journey. The story unfolds in the first decades of the 20th Century. The narrative, historic in its sweep, is woven around perilous journeys undertaken against heavy odds by two protagonists, Kishan Singh from Punjab, India and Sophia from Guadalajara in Mexico to California, the land of their dreams. Heartbroken and homeless in their own ways, they look for a new home in a distant land and finally their spirit of adventure and grit sees them through. They not only survive, they also reinvent themselves when they find new moorings, and they flourish. However, there is no evidence of ludic and facile shedding of old identities as we find in some diasporic texts; I am happy that Simrita has not fallen into the postmodernist trap of creating depthless characters who shed their identities at the drop of a hat, thus helping postmodernist authors avoid commitments. As an author Simrita's commitment to love that uplifts, essential goodness of human beings, and to celebration of life and hope, rings loud and clear in her novel.

Since the entire action in the novel takes place in the early 20th Century when the death of humanism had not yet been proclaimed as it was done later on by many postmodernist thinkers in the seventies and the eighties of the last century, the core concerns of the novel deal with humanist values. Simrita's text avoids the flippancy we associate with many diasporic narratives like Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. Simrita provides a fairly nuanced account of negotiation of migrant identities, allowing her characters to retain some of their originary identity while gleefully imbibing the ethic of survival which makes them accept new ways of living. During the course of their journeys, Kishan, Sophia and other important characters do reinvent themselves, but they still retain those values which had defined their personalities before they embarked upon their journeys. Characters of both Kishan and Sophia are fairly illustrative of this experimentation with identity formation.

To begin with, a voracious reader in his village school and a farmer at heart in his native village Noor Mahal, Kishan remains a farmer even in America. To him "Farming meant attuning one's self to the changing hues of nature, arousing the land, no matter how obstinate, to bear crops and make those crops available to men and women across the world" (193). What drives him is the desire to own farmland, lots of farmland. In his rainbow acres he wanted to grow "Vegetables and grains. Some melons perhaps. And Dreams" (163). Throughout the text, he cherishes this dream. Proud of his humble farm boy heritage, he could never make himself lay false claims to aristocracy the way Gatsby does in Fitzgerald's

The Great Gatsby. This is one reason he does not like *The Great Gatsby*. Kishan Singh's hunger for farmland does not make him give up his essential humanity.

Similarly, Sophia too, whose grandparents had earlier migrated from Spain to Acapulco, a coastal town in Mexico, undertakes multiple migrations to Guadalajara, Bahia de Kino and finally to California. Like Kishan, she too retains something of her original self despite the turmoil and tragedies which scar her. An ebullient young girl growing with her parents and grandparents in Acapulco, her intense love of chocolate defines her. Chocolate remains her song, her dream and the kind of chocolates she makes carry an imprint of her journeys. She too, like Kishan, retains her radical innocence throughout despite losing her husband Giovanni and her two sons in the Zapatista led violent revolution Mexico.

The two stories of Kishan and Sophia intersect and their intersecting trajectory is signalled by, to borrow a term from music, the dyadic contrapuntal structure of the text. This technique maintains difference of the stories and towards the end, allows these stories to criss-cross and merge into each other. This is a very clever narrative strategy adopted by the author, although greater space has been provided to Kishan Singh's story.

Going through the text is like breeze, and to extend this image further, a breeze which brings intimations of the mixed redolence of lands from Mexico, India and the Americas. The prose becomes lyrical while describing nature – images of rivers, butterflies, cuckoos, mynahs, sandpipers, flowers, sunsets and sunrises, trees, plants, contours of the land, crops, and the texture of the soil populate the text. In fact, the journey leitmotif is inlaid with frequent appearances of colourful designs featuring butterflies and birds. The following quote illustrates this point:

The sight of roosting butterflies would be forever caught and held in Sophia's mind. Little did she know then how much she would come to embody their courage and resilience. Or that her life would echo the journey of the butterflies and that she, too, would one day travel long and far in pursuit of sunnier spots (22).

A lot of research has obviously gone into this kind of imbrication of human and animal migration. In fact, the entire narrative is laced with allusions to actual historical events which provide a broader context to important happenings in the text.

Simrita is really at home while describing nature, and also when she defamiliarizes the familiar with deft imagery that covers the entire gamut of senses – olfactory, visual, gustatory, auditory and tactile. Her luminous prose is pellucid. This is evident in the way she describes a rainy day in Kishan's village in Noor Mahal when Kishan was studying in his village school:

Children bathed in the rain, floated paper boats in puddles, munched on gulgullas and grandmothers fried large woks. The air was respondent with song, dance, the beating of drums and the aroma of malpuras and kheer. Everyone was basking in monsoon fervour . . . (57).

Apart from the fact that she describes nature with lyrical vivacity, she really comes into her own while handling the love between Kishan and Roop in their native village, the love that did not reach fruition because of Kishan's poverty: And also when she describes the fairy tale love affair between Sophia and Giovanni. Whereas Kishan and Sophia were childhood playmates and their love matured by and by; Sophia had met Giovanni only once theirs was love at the first sight.

Sophia and Giovanni's attraction for each other was irresistible. Sophia was drawn towards him like a butterfly to its host plant. Such spontaneous falling in love looks a bit implausible for a while, particularly in our times when people have really forgotten how to fall in love, as Alan Badiou would say. Love, that strikes an individual like a fatal, tragic blow and changes him/her completely, is a thing of the past. We now believe in some kind of sanitized hedonism – relationship, yes, but without any strings attached, without any commitments; just like having decaffeinated coffee. But it is different for Kishan and Roop, Sophia and Giovanni, and later for Isabel and Jaspal. Being in love, especially as the author suggests, is being free. Being in love is like soaring in the sky and exiting one's comfort zone for exploring new worlds, trying to find new moorings; a process akin to metamorphosis and eclosion of a butterfly from its chrysalis. When Sophia falls in love with Giovanni, she realizes that her days in Apaculpo are numbered and she feels a little apprehensive: "Looking up, she saw a seagull attempting to soar high up in the sky only to stumble and start trying again. To fly far was to risk stumbling, but there was no grander adventure than probing new spaces. It made life worth living. Something new and exhilarating awaited her. She wanted to savour it, swim in it and steep herself in it. A million butterflies began whizzing in her mind, dispersing fear, making her want to discover herself anew. Being in love was being free" (105).

The Rainbow Acres underscores the importance of dialogue between diasporas. This is made possible by the author's faith in the essential goodness of human beings. Whereas many texts by diasporic authors tend to highlight alienation and violence of the diasporic situation, Simrita's text eschews overt instances of racism and violence against the aliens in America. There are, no doubt, references to discriminatory legislation but the kind of violent hate attacks – which are generally isolated phenomena blown up by the sensation seeking media – that we often read about are not there in this text. We meet good people who are generally supportive of strangers. Simrita herself, in an interview stresses that "it was a conscious decision on my part to focus on the benevolence of strangers. The representation of strangers in fiction has, more often than not, tended to be one of distrust. So I wanted to shift that stance and show how in their limited roles, strangers have the ability to leave a lasting impact, gradually leading the protagonists to becoming the finest versions of themselves."

In the current scenario, when trust is on a discount and racism is making itself felt conjuring up the spectre of an uncertain world sinking into barbarism, *The Rainbow Acres* comes as a gentle breeze of fresh air that brings fragrant intimations of love and freedom. Most characters in the novel have made friends with hope; the text seems to ask its readers also to make friends with hope.

 Simrita Dhir. *The Rainbow Acres*. Om Books International 2018.

A Dialogue with Dr. Jernail Singh Anand



Dr. Jernail Singh Anand [b. 1955, Punjab, India] is an internationally acclaimed poet, writer, critic, spiritualist, and philosopher. Author of more than 55 books, of English poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and spirituality, he is also the co-innovator of the critical theory of Biotext. A Professor of English by profession, Dr. Anand holds Ph.D. degree from Panjab Univ. Chandigarh, and D.Litt. from Univ. of South America. His books of spirituality, 'Bliss' and 'I Belong to You' have been translated into Persian. Dr. Anand was awarded Cross of Peace and Cross of Literature by World Union of Poets [Italy], Lord of World Peace and Literature, Lifetime Achievement Award by Art4Peace Foundation, California, and World Icon of Peace [Nigeria]. Dr. Anand served as Secretary General, World Parliament of Literature and holds the position of Director, World Institute of Peace [Nigeria], Ambassador and Senator, World Union of Poets [Italy]. He is co-founder and President, *Philosophique Poetica* [de-Anand], an international portal for poetry, art and philosophy. His recent works, 'GEET: the Unsung Song of Eternity' [a lyrical epic—a sequel to Milton's 'The Paradise Lost'] and 'Ganturbury Tales' [a near sequel to Chaucer's 'The Canterbury Tales']—for which he was awarded Trendy Tale Teller Award—are his masterpieces, coupled with his forthcoming work, 'The Satanic Empire' [an epic sequel to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*].

Professor Bina Singh, Head of the Department of English, Vasant Kanya Maha Vidyalyaya (B.H.U.) interacted with Dr. Jernail Singh Anand to have him out on his oeuvre. She has authored 6 books and several articles, poems and research papers in various national and international books and journals. Her area of interest is American literature, feminist literature, fiction, drama and poetry.

- BS: Hello Prof. Anand. It's my privilege and great pleasure that I happen to share the literary space with you as a creative person. You have written and published a good number of research papers, articles, poems and books which reflect your passionate commitment to creative art. My question to you is what inspires your creative urges?
- JSA: Who inspires you? Yes, of course. Every work has behind it some sort of inspiration. Most discernible aspect of this inspiration is the urge for self-expression. I believe it is my keen observation of the phenomenon outside that stimulates me into writing, and, then, powers my imagination. It is very rare that I

make up my mind to write on a certain issue. I react to the natural phenomenon, and then, whatever comes to my mind, takes the shape of poetry. In fact, I catch the poem while it is trickling down from the catchment area of the mind. A thousand emotions come into play, once something from outside presses your buttons. And, then, there is no stopping. Sometimes, I feel it is a divine activity, and poetry comes to me in images, figures of speech, and sometimes in sentences. I have no conscious control. I turn passive, and it flows over. Sometimes it appears like a fax message. I am conscious at the beginning and I am careful of giving a sharp ending to the poem, but in between, what comes and how it becomes a part of the flow, it is a mysterious activity.

BS: *Any particular author/s who influenced your poetic sensibilities?*

JSA: It is difficult to name one person. Yet, it is Walt Whitman whose work has really impressed me. In my research work also, I have compared mysticism in Walt Whitman's poetry with Prof. Puran Singh, a Punjabi mystical poet. Other authors who have impacted my thought process are Lala Har Dayal, Victor Hugo, and Yuval Noah Harari.

BS: *What are your views on creativity?*

JSA: Creativity lies in the electrifying blending of the real and the imaginative. If we go on reproducing what we see in our lives, it can give us a realistic portraiture of life. But literature goes far ahead of this state. Creativity lies, not only in evoking the reality, but also in presenting it in such a way that your work says something more than that reality. In fact, to reality the author adds his own vision. Poetry or fiction are only a heap of words or images if they lack a unifying transcendent vision.

BS: *Being a bilingual writer you have chosen different genres of literature at various points of creative career. Which genre of literature happens to be closest to you or favourite form of writing for you?*

JSA: Poetry comes most naturally to me, and it reminds me of Keats, who says: "If poetry comes not as naturally as leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all." While writing poetry, no time is sacrosanct. I have found myself writing even on the back of bus tickets. Ideas come without getting an appointment, and the poet has to be ready with his pen and paper, and nowadays, with his smart phone. For good or bad, I don't use paper and pen. I write straight on face book. And my favourite genre is free verse. When we look at poets of yore, we can find their mastery at rhyming and different genres like sonnets, etc. Rhyming is good in the learning stages, and very good if it comes naturally. But, I have a permanent feud with forced rhyming. If you put wine in different shapes of glasses, it looks wonderful because it does not lose its essential taste. But when we try to conveniate a poem to suit a sonnet, or an octate, I find it really a violent activity. I believe in rhythm based poetry. Simple diction and clarity of ideas. Poetry should be so simple that a man of average intelligence should be able to grasp it easily.

BS: *What is your take on Coleridge's averment that a poet is born not made?*

JSA: We can teach painting or gymnastics. But poetry is made of different stuff. I have never seen any School where poetry can be learnt, although there are hundreds of schools where poetry is being taught. Teaching poetry is entirely a different job from creating poetry. Coleridge knew that a poet is drunk with a divine vision,

and it is not possible to impart this divine vision to everyone. No doubt, poetry is an art form, still the idea that a poet can be made seems scandalous.

BS: Will you like to enlighten about your recent work, 'Geet: The Unsung Song of Eternity' a sequel to 'Paradise Lost' and the inspirational facts and factors?

JSA: Geet is a lyrical epic, and, one of the Trilogy that I have created. I have always thought that the wisdom of the past needs to be re-interpreted in the light of the situations obtaining today. I also firmly believe that the world has changed at an astonishingly rapid speed during the last twenty years with electronic revolution. And what was thought five hundred years ago, how relevant it is today, needs re-examination. John Milton's epical work, *The Paradise Lost* tries to justify the ways of God to Man, whereas *Geet* shifts the focus from God to man's doings and brings in Lord Krishana's 'Karmic' philosophy. In addition to this, with *Dr. Faustus* as its hero, this work re-writes the scene between Devil and Dr. Faustus where he signs a bond in his blood and sells his soul to the Devil. In *Dr. Faustus*, Devil had forbidden him to utter the name of Christ. In this work, the Devil tells Faustus, never to love. Rather, he must encourage marriage. The book takes a dig at the deteriorating institution of marriage and family. Man was actually born to love, but Devil distracted him from this Original Bliss, and forced him into Original Sin.

In this Trilogy, the second book is *Ganturbury Tales* which is a sequel to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. It tries to re-work his magic into a work which celebrates the Poetry Festivals at Guntur and the pilgrims are the Poets who are coming from far and wide, and assemble at various airports, where while sitting over lunch or coffee, they tell their stories. I was honoured with 'Trendy Tale Teller Award' for this book by Indian Poetic Confluence at Hyderabad.

The third work is *The Satanic Empire*, again an epical work, which weaves back the high imagination of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and re-examines the beliefs that made it such a great passion with the masses. *The Satanic Empire* is under publication. It brings up Dante from his grave, and then, their tour in the world marks the story part of the book. It is a timeless work, with its vast spatial shifts and characters like Narad Muni etc.

BS: According to T. S. Eliot, literary tradition enriches and empowers creativity. Looking back to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* in composing *Geet* and *Ganturbury Tales*, are you in agreement with Eliot's view on the significance of tradition in inspiring creativity? How do you perceive Eliot's theory in your creative endeavor?

JSA: We have grown out of the past. The present issues forth from the past. What has been going on in literature put together, is our literary tradition. If I have read T.S. Eliot, he has entered my blood stream. If I have read Greek dramatists, they also enter my thought processes. Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and Greek tragic hero Oedipus, all form our great literary tradition. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* presented the England of those times quite faithfully, and Milton recreates the religious fervour of earlier ages. We are standing on the rock of the present, which is supported by the past. And, it is not possible to disagree with T.S. Eliot regarding the inspiration which we draw from the tradition, in the same way as we draw water from the well of eternity.

But getting inspiration is fine. Beyond this, I believe that a poet must not stick to the

tradition if it twists his vision of the future. Who can move forward by looking backwards? We must adopt all that we find best in our tradition, and move forward, and change those norms, to suit our times. I find some of the people trying to recreate old times in literature and even in films. But I think our literary creation must focus on how we are to negotiate the present in the pursuit of a better future.

It is also wrong to think that what Eliot has said is final, or William Wordsworth's definition of poetry as 'a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' is final and it is all sealed. It means we have nothing different to say, nothing more to offer. They represented their times, and we must represent ours. Have our minds stopped working? We must say something of our own, independent of what these great masters have said.

BS: *How do you look at the romantic concept of literary art, especially poetry?*

JSA: Major Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Coleridge departed from the existing neo-classical school of poetry which was based on themes related to courtly life, bound mostly in the heroic couplet, and talked of man in general. Dryden and Pope were the major poets of this school, against whom Wordsworth and Coleridge revolted. They brought the individual back at the centre of poetic creation, and preferred the rural life, in comparison to courtly living. They believed that the real language of poetry was the language spoken by the swains. In effect, romantic poetry had magic, mystery, melody, music and melancholy, which brought it nearer to the warmth of humanity.

As a poet, I do not disbelieve in anything. In my blood flows Donne as well as Milton, Shakespeare and Sophocles, Wordsworth as well as Coleridge. And, I oftentimes see myself in conversation with T.S. Eliot also. I can neither defy them, nor deny them. The authors of today can trace their poetry to any of these streams of thought. At present, I find realistic poetry having an edge over the romantic.

BS: *Living in the Age of Technology, how do you look upon significance of literature in contemporary digital robotic world?*

JSA: The contemporary digital robotic world poses a grave challenge to humanity. It is sucking out its humanity. It is taking over the decision making from him. When Wordsworth and Coleridge celebrated the individual, and we have a world view which believed in human free will and a liberal regime, all was well at least on the surface. But we cannot stop our evolution. We are now evolving into a post-individual generation. Even literature is being digitalized and robots can write speeches and poetry too. These are danger signals in a way. But we shall have to learn to live with them. We shall have to learn to change ourselves to suit the new evolving conditions. Certainly, these developments are going to create a useless class, as Y.N. Harari cautions us. In such a scenario, where ethics will be the first casualty, literature will be the only mainstay of humanity. At least for the next 30 years. Because, by 2050, we are not sure what will happen to our civilization. Just as Dr. Faustus had bartered away his soul with the Devil, we are sharing our personal data [our modern soul] with the Computers; and the lethal combination of Biotech, and Bioinfotech is fast replacing organisms with algorithms and we are losing our feet in the fast flowing river of the present.

BS: *In the fast paced changing scenario how much pertinent are Matthew Arnold's averments*

about the higher aims and redeeming power of literature?

JSA: As I have already said, literature has an exalted position in the scheme of things and, if we talk of the present, it is still very relevant. Arnold is not off the mark when he says literature aims higher. This 'higher' stands for the transcendent powers of literature which elevate human existence, from a mere animal level, to the level of human beings. In future also, we can hope that literature will be the mainstay of humanity. In order to save humanity from the onslaught of robots and Artificial Intelligence, our only hope is the deeper study of human emotions. And literature offers 'heart of light' in the enveloping darkness.

BS: *Dr. Anand, your books have been translated and published in Iran. And much has been written about your works by Iranian scholars. Have you visited Iran? How it all happened?*

JSA: I have never been to Iran, although I have visited Italy and Nigeria on literary missions. In fact, I had a Facebook friend, Prof. Nargues Mohammadi, who borrowed it from a friend. Her parents found in it something that offered them a lot of solace and hope. Then, her father asked her to translate the book for the benefit of their countrymen. Nargues translated another book also, *I Belong to You into Persian*. The main reason behind this is the spiritual content of the books, which is very close to Khalil Gibran and Rumi. In fact, another scholar Dr. Roghayeh Farsi, has compared *Bliss* to Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* and *Beyond Life Beyond Death* to T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. These have been really proud moments for me.

BS: *Apart from many international honours and recognition as a major voice in the field of Spiritual Poetry, what is your specific contribution to literature or lit theory?*

JSA: In all humility, I would like to say that the Theory of Biotext that I have co-developed is my lasting contribution to the literary world. I believe that no poem can get rid of its author, and I call it Unique Literaria Biographia of every writing. I have also lectured extensively on my idea of Poetic Creation and Cloud Syndrome. Recently, I have authored papers to re-invent Sisyphus and given a kick-start to reopen the debate on the question of absurdity. Vishwabharati Research Centre came up with Companion on Dr. J.S. Anand, which is a collection of 16 research articles on my works by eminent poets and researchers. Even my book of criticism, *Creative Consciousness* was highly appreciated by learned readership. Moreover, I have inspired the young generation of Nigeria with my philosophy of Peace. I was a Guest at a recently organized Literary Event on Fertility by Manouba University, Tunisia. I am in the pursuit of a literary culture which can be an ideal response to the deteriorating human values. I believe that poets with their vision can transform human lives, and inject new values in the system. Human life stands badly brutalized and human psyche grievously traumatized. In the present attenuating times, literature is the only mainstay of humanity.

Book Review

Mapping South Asian Diaspora: Recent Responses and Ruminations. Edited by Ajay K. Chaubey and Asis De. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2018. i-xxii+296 pp. ISBN 978-81-316-0901-9.

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There is a steadily growing corpus of critical articles and books on South Asian diaspora. The book under review is yet another addition to it. The question naturally arises as to what new insight, information or novel perspective this volume provides. This anthology is certainly different from most other anthologies as it accommodates a good number of interviews of creative writers and diaspora critics. The presence of critical interactions with them build up a dialogic platform and help problematising critical issues. Most anthologies merely collate essays, often disparate, with no links whatsoever between them. From this point of view, this volume offers a refreshing change for the readers interested in Diaspora Studies. It aims at projecting the 'new' reality in the South Asian diasporic scenario (emerging mainly from the phenomenon known as globalisation) and identifying the paradigm shifts taking place in Diaspora Studies.

As one flips through the pages of the anthology, one finds that it has its main thrust on essays on literary works produced in the diasporic space (Section B). This section contains two introductory essays which offer a critical survey of the field. There is a section on South Asian diaspora seen from interdisciplinary point of view (Section D). Two other sections are devoted to 'conversations' and interviews (Sections A and C). The editors' Introduction provides a thorough overview of the history of the South Asian diaspora, both old and new, and of the nuances of diaspora theories. This comprehensive introduction will help the readers in perceiving the diachronic trajectory of the migratory movements across and beyond South Asian nations.

Section A begins with an interview of Vijay Mishra taken by Asis De in early 2017. Mishra in fact takes up his discourse on South Asian diaspora from his earlier articulations, particularly those in his book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007), and goes on to discuss the area with insightful comments on the emerging diasporic reality. He focuses on issues such as indenture/girmit diaspora which is being discussed with considerable importance in contemporary times. Being a descendant of indentured labourers himself, Mishra (like others such as Brij V. Lal and Sudesh Mishra) backs up his discussion on indenture diaspora with insights drawn from his own personal, family and community archives. In this interview Mishra discusses the issue of citizenship which has assumed great importance now (particularly after the emergence of President Trump and the refugee crisis in Europe) and the role of the cyber world in the diaspora. In

another interview (a reprint) included in Section C, Tabish Khair speaks of contemporary issues like the 'new xenophobia' which operates in 'the context of high capitalism' (198), and the effect of Bollywood on diasporic subjects. He also deals with the theoretical issue of whether movements within a nation can be called diaspora. This has also been one of the topics discussed in an interview piece entitled "In Discussions with Critics" (Section C) as well. These eminent critics are Somdatta Mandal, Makarand Paranjape, and Manjit Inder Singh who have responded to a wide range of questions from different perspectives. One of the questions asked and answered relates to whether 'internal migration' should be called 'diaspora.' This needs to be probed further in view of an indiscriminate use of the term which renders it useless as a critical tool. The two interview sections are very useful as some of the questions (not all) are really well thought out. They serve as a useful platform to generate more questions regarding the critical discourse. The present reviewer, however, is a little baffled by the editors' rationale for dividing all these 'conversations' or interviews into two sections instead of one, since they are all interviews, howsoever different the modes of conducting the interviews may be.

Section B includes eleven articles. The first two offer critical overviews of diaspora theory and its changing trends while the others concentrate on text-based discourses. The first one "What Diaspora? Whither Diaspora?": Some Random Questions, Answers and Ruminations" written by Somdatta Mandal is a very useful article. It focusses on the postcolonial ground reality and traces the history of the term 'diaspora,' explores how it evolves over the decades, the role 'home,' 'routes,' 'roots,' citizenship and similar other issues/phenomena plays in the process of diasporic formulations. She argues that contemporary diaspora has already taken a transnational turn and this is reflected in the literary and critical writings of the time. In the next article entitled "South Asians in North America: Inter-ethnic Reflections for the New Millennium" Amritjit Singh also posits his views on a *particular body of literature* (South Asian American) being produced in the *new millennium*. It traces the symptoms of changes evident in the lives and works of South Asian immigrants in North America mainly from the point of view of Globalisation and its aftermath. Like Mandal's article, it too points out how transnationalism and its networks cast an invasive impact on the individual/community lives. As a natural corollary, he speaks of technological progress (for example, faster transport system and the advent of the internet) and new modes of social and economic activities. Suspicious of metanarratives of a single 'homeland,' the new diasporic subjects straddle countries, establish networks and reconstitute their identities. Downplaying the importance of nation-states, they assert new codes of cultural values and re-orient their socio-cultural (and economic) lives. Singh takes up the assertion of gay identity by new diasporic groups to elaborate this point. The new immigrants, he maintains, compensate their lack of 'whiteness' by having "real estate, material acquisitions, and other investments in class privilege" and "a consciousness that is often 'white' and assimilationist" (64).

Other articles in the section are based on particular texts. Nilakshi Roy reads select works of some relatively unknown British Asian authors, all very contemporary, who deal with characters suffering from Asperger's Syndrome, schizophrenia, and similar other

problems related to mental health. This is an exciting area which needs to be explored further in the context of diasporic dislocations. Aatreyee Ghosh's "Of Forgotten Remembrances" explores three texts in particular – Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Tahmima Anam's *The Good Muslim* and Mahmudul Haque's *Black Ice* – to explore the dynamics of amnesia and anamnesia for the Bengali *bhadrolok* subjects. Sharmistha De Dutta's article unravels Ghosh's discourse on the shadowy unreality of 'borders' and how human interactions move beyond Statist demarcations. Through an analysis of Vikram Chandra's works, Sulagna Mohanty and Amrita Satpathy establish how myths and legends facilitate a return to the past and how this 'return' helps reshaping the present identity. Ajay Verma locates points of intersections and deviations in postcolonial authors (e.g. through reference points like imposition of a state of Emergency in India). He makes a comparative study of select works of Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie. Rooted in the second-generation lived experience and mind set, Hanif Kureishi perceives South Asian immigrant lives in Great Britain as being different from those of other diasporic categories. Subashish Bhattacharjee and G.N.Roy bring this out in their article "Histories of Post-Diaspora: Neocultural Prototyping in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*." They approach Kureishi's works basically as belonging to the norms of 'post-diaspora.' Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam's article "Of diaspora and Native literatures: Reading Benyamin's *Goat Days*" is an interesting piece in the anthology for two main reasons. Firstly, it is about a work (*Aatujeevitham*) originally written in Malayalam by Benyamin. This was later translated by Joseph Koyipally and published in English by Penguin India in 2012. Secondly, it represents the life of a Malayali boy, immersed in poverty, who migrates to Saudi Arabia in search of a better livelihood. The book offers a different dimension of a diasporic life located in the oil-rich Middle East which hardly appears in diasporic literature written in English. The two other articles by Arifa Yesmin and Raj Gaurav Verma deal with Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* respectively. It may be noted that most of the articles deal with new fictional works which have not been discussed much and, therefore, they will be of much interest to the readers.

Section D includes articles on Nepalese diaspora, 'Asian Australian' writing, Bhutanese diaspora and Burmese diaspora. Thus, it is a very useful section which throws light on little-known and little-discussed areas in South Asian Studies. The section begins with Lopita Nath's article on Nepalese diaspora to the United States. She draws out the problematic nature of this diaspora as it also constitutes the Bhutanese refugees of Nepalese origin who migrate to North America through Nepal. She explores the ways members of this community negotiate the issues of 'homeland, memory and nostalgia' (232). Paul Sharrad's "Reconfiguring 'Asian Australian' Writing: Australia, India and Inez Baranay" posits the nomenclature 'Asian Australian' as flexible and of immense possibilities. The article traces the India-Australian literary cultural interface from various points of view and Sharrad feels that the nomenclature can be more inclusive in future to accommodate other Asian countries. It offers a survey and commentary on a wide corpus of literary works by both Indian and Australian writers. It will be very helpful for readers who want to engage with works related to the area. Alice Anna Verheij deals with the Bhutanese refugees who

had to flee feudal and State repression and settle in India and other neighbouring countries, and later were resettled in different countries of the world through the initiatives of the United Nations. The plight of the people, Verheij continues, goes largely unnoticed. This section ends with an article by Violet Cho who dwells on the Burmese diaspora in New Zealand and she analyses the role of the new media in the maintenance of links and networks.

The chapter survey of the volume in the editors' introduction (10-15) employs the terminology of 'abstracts' usually submitted for a seminar or a proposed volume ('proposes,'intends,' 'paper' etc). This has a little jarring effect. Otherwise, this anthology is a well-thought out and properly planned volume and will certainly prove useful for those interested in diaspora studies.

Book Review

Bhumika Sharma. *The African-American Journey to the Power Dome: Wright, Ellison, Baldwin*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp. 180. ISBN (10):1-5275-1394-7 ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1394-5

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Bhumika Sharma's book is a commendable effort to redefine the African American literary experience in the context of the prevailing socio-political and economic realities and the changing course of history which is surfacing with the evolving times. The book elaborates upon how the Afro-American authorship, in its artistic expostulations recorded the contrasting sentiments and conflicting ideologies, which appear with the advancement of time.

The African American Journey to the Power Dome: Wright, Ellison, Baldwin offers a linear critique of subtle progression adroitly represented in the African American fiction in general and in particular, in the novels of the 'Trinity' of Wright, Ellison and Baldwin as the author calls them. The decades of the 1940's, 50's and 60's were dominated by these three authors and their works constitute a unique perspective enabling readers to probe into the then prevailing African American consciousness. Sharma asserts, "Wright, Ellison and Baldwin construct a series of vignettes to witness the progress of the African American emotional and ideological journey—a journey from the nascent stage of an imposed primitivism to the ripened state of an exalted mind." The author views the fiction of Wright, Ellison and Baldwin with an exceptional perspective, offering refreshing gleanings with daring, by plumbing inter-textual layers, overt and covert, with amazing ease and admirable scholarship.

The book is spread over five chapters followed by the Conclusion. Chapter I—*Black Authorship: Socio-Historical Perspectives* overviews the journey of African American literary tradition through its most turbulent convolutions. It highlights the socio-political scenario of the African American history and also delineates the changing literary perspectives of the Black authorship. Initiated with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and passing through *Uncle Tom's Children* to the non-violent philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the African American odyssey traversed untrodden paths and passed through labyrinthine courses in its advancement. The historical struggle of a black man, who was initially called a 'Negro,' later on became a 'n-gger,' and got segregated as the 'colored' with the passage of time, continued till the restoration of his dignity and he came to be known as the 'Afro American,' now called the 'African American,' a wholesome symbol of the blending of both the cultures. Indubitably, African American writing has passionately contributed in the journey of this

uprooted man from the invisibility of his existence to the metamorphosis of his modern identity.

Chapter II--*Richard Wright: A Voice of Protest*--explores the subtly embellished dramatic situations created in the fictional cosmos of Richard Wright. It unravels a black man's emotional and ideological upheavals, thus plunging into the depths of the African American consciousness at that point of time. Wright created a new genre that acceded to the righteousness of 'aggression' in the heart of the oppressed black man against his oppressor i.e. the unjust society. Sharma characterizes it thus, "(u)sing his fiction as a surgical tool, he probes into the body politic to expose the source of pain." The analysis put forth by Bhumika Sharma also encompasses Wright's thought process regarding the myriad driving forces and ideological drifts at different stages of progression in the African American historical voyage.

Chapter III--*Ralph Ellison: An Epitome of Equilibrium*--provides a detailed analysis of the contribution of Ralph Ellison, who is considered to be the most gifted and rightful successor to Richard Wright, and methodically demonstrates that Ellison prefers to assume a comparatively moderate and balanced approach while carrying forward the inherited tradition of protest. The author elucidates that "Ellison's fiction is an amazing blend of art and protest that indicates the literary growth of the African American artist in the course of his development."

Chapter IV--*James Baldwin: From Chaos to Cosmos*--demonstrates the socio-political, economic and psychic double consciousness of the black American as depicted in the fictional world of James Baldwin. The author astutely posits that, "(w)hat distinguishes Baldwin from his literary predecessors is that instead of turning black anger into a destructive narcissistic rage, he translates the Afro-American agony into an impassioned rancor of the average black." Baldwin's perspective is progressive as it reflects the American Black's assimilation into the mainstream with the underlying awareness of his deeply entrenched African roots.

Chapter V--*African American Stalwarts and the Art of Narration*--focuses predominantly on the fictional techniques and stylistic features used by the trio of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. Sharma encapsulates the same by pointing out that "(i)t not only draws upon the mainstream Euro-American literary cult but also researches and further explores African roots and folk traditions. The whole endeavor has imparted additional aesthetic value to the cumulative, inherently aesthetic black experience."

The last section of the book titled *The Final Destination* emphasizes the socio-artistic relevance of the literary journey of Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin as an inevitable corollary of the foregone meticulous study of their fiction and supplements the same with objective reasoning. In this concluding chapter, the author makes a comparative study of the trio and highlights the relative strengths and shortcomings of each. Finally, Sharma ends the book on a positive note, proclaiming that "(t)he African American journey finally culminates in the victorious step of Barak Obama being ushered into the White House to solemnize the interminable bond of the black with America."

It may not be an exaggeration to conclude that in a self-reflexive way, the book under review also bugles the author's commendable accomplishment as a perceptive critic

of the works of Wright, Ellison and Baldwin with an admirable reservoir of scholarship at her beck and call. By any canon, the book is a rich addition to the critical enquiry relating to the fiction of the trio. Certainly, it would serve as a well-recommended guide for any scholar interested to pursue research work in the domains of African-American fiction and is the one bright book of life for any serious reader with a literary bent of mind. The form and content delivered by Bhumika Sharma is capable of motivating one and all to enter into communion with it.

Book Review
Basavaraj Naikar. *The Golden Servant of God (A Religious Play)*.
New Delhi: Guttenberg India. Pp.79+vi. Rs. 500.

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Drama is an ancient performing art. From the time of Kalidasa to present modern plays of Mahesh Dattani the plays have been very effective medium in dealing with mythological, historical and social themes. After the advent of British in India, in the 19th century, Indian community got exposed to theatre companies of England. As a result, our own 'drama, companies' were formed to enact Indian experiences and to narrate our own tales. However the early English dramatists in India were not impressive. The critics have opined that the Indian dramatic writing in English lacked quality and are not penned for actual stage production. With the advancement of technology both quality and quantity got improved by 20th - 21st century. Sri Aurobindo (1892 - 1950) contributed to the richness of Indian English Drama through his eleven verse dramas. However he could not move out of mythological or legendary themes. In Karnataka T.P. Kailasam (1885 - 1946) too wrote English plays, picking up themes from mythology but his treatment was very different. The characters became more civilized and presentation very sharp. Girish Karnad (1938 -) with his critical analysis, rich literary background further improvised and enhanced the quality of Kannada Drama. Unfortunately the Indian English Drama is not as rich as the Indian Regional Language Drama like that of Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil and Hindi.

The play under review *The Golden Servant of God* by Basavaraj Naikar depicts Saint Kanakadasa's life in the form of a play and adds to the wealth of Indian English drama. Running into 79 pages and divided into five acts, it makes a valiant effort to reflect an elephant through a hand mirror. Even the number of characters is less (listed to a dozen). Kanakanayaka, later Kanakadasa is a 16 century saint from Karnataka hailing from Kagineelli, a small village of Haveri District. He is initiated by Vyasaraaya Swami and into the devotion for the Lord. Along with Purandaradasa and other *dasas*, (Dasa - Servant of God) Kanaka stands apart for two reasons; one, he is from the lower strata of the society and two, his specialty in producing *mundiges* (a riddle song). It is also believed that Lord Krishna idol at Udupi turned 180 degrees to give Kanaka a *darsan* from the backside, as he was not allowed to see the lord from the main entrance. The author also brings in a romantic element by introducing Lakkamma, who declares her love for him. However Kanaka rejects the love or marriage and advises her to be a nun and serve Adikesava at Kagineelli. It is a simple play which dramatizes Kanaka's rejection of mundane for the spiritual life.

The characterization runs like a biographical sketch with the main character, Kanakadasa portrayed as dynamic (round) and all other characters static (flat). The playwright depicts the social conflict, particularly the caste conflict. Right from his childhood to death, Kanaka's birth in a non-brahmin (Kuruba) caste, with Lord Bireswara as

his family deity, after spiritual revelations turns into an ardent devotee of Kesava (Vishnu) and his different forms - Adikesava (Kaginelli), Lord Venkateswara (Tirupati) and Sri Krishna (Udupi).

The caste ridden society of 16th century had deprived the lower strata of its self respect and self confidence. This is well reflected in the play when Kanaka's father Biregowda confesses to Srinivasacarya (a brahmin teacher). Biregowda says; "Acarya Sir, you know, both you and me were of the same age. But fate led us in different directions. You became an educated man and hence became a teacher, whereas fate did not allow me to become an educated man. Hence, I became an administrator." Through these lines the play indicates that the *varna* system was in full force, a Brahmin becoming a teacher and a *sudra* an administrator. It also reflects how education, a tool for empowering an individual is denied to the lower castes. The 'fatalist' thinking too is echoed in these words. Biregowda is successful in admitting his son in Srinivasacarya's pathasala, however the caste tag had its own effect later too in Kanakadasa's life. By the divine vision Kanakanayaka gives up his earthly possession and becomes a *dasa* (Servant of God) and hopes to get some spiritual training under Vyasarayya Swami. Here again the caste hood spreads its hood and haunts Kanaka. The Brahmin disciples around Vyasarayya Swami obstruct not only his entry for training but later play a series of tricks to belittle him. Other than caste hatred they had no motive for these acts. Divine grace and spiritual character of Kanaka bails him out of these straits. He reaches the horizon of spiritual level where he could see God in everything; even in a dog or a serpent. Though the guru is pleased, his other disciples appreciate him not out of love but out of fear that he is close to the God. Even in Tirupati he is not accepted that easily. It is repeated in Udupi too. Only miracles make the priests to accept Kanaka as a true devotee.

The play effectively evokes the main events and miracles of Kanakadasa; his act of not eating banana (as he was supposed to eat it in a secluded place - he believed that God exists everywhere and he cannot escape these eyes), pawning Krishna ornament, Krishna turn around view for his sake etc. However the playwright could have elaborated the work a little to avoid the fast pace and added few more songs of Kanaka. The end piece (Act V - SC III) where Rana Pratap appreciates Kanakadasa doesn't easily connect to the play as it has no link to the main plot. This time jump could have been avoided. Except these few drawbacks Basavaraj Naikar has put in the best effort to present Kanakadasa to English readers. It will definitely light up the stage; within and without. It is certainly a welcome addition to the realm of Indian English Drama, especially religious plays like *Siddhartha: The Man of Peace*, *Ramanujar* and *Fall of Kalyana*.

POETRY COLUMN

Rendezvous

Shabnam Kaur*

Black butterfly, white-splashed,
Made my heart leap to life
For two minutes today,
When you flitted out of
What I can only imagine to be
A crack in space and time,
An incongruity
In this jejune heart of city, like the
Ringing of temple bells,
Paid a perfunctory
Obeisance and homage
To my skeleton of a lemon tree,
And skipped to the greener
Pastures of the neighbour's China-rose bush.

Autumn

The Sun's prime is past, yet winter's not cast.
The click-clitter-clatter of ceiling fans
Is silenced for now: just enough silence
For me to hear my thoughts; just enough noise
For me to dampen my thoughts. Autumn's come.

Longer days are past, nights yet to be cast.
The pit-pitter-patter of leaky clouds
Is silenced for now: just enough silence
To hear the rustling of leaves; just enough noise
From the whooshing winds to herald: autumn's come.

Longer days are past; longer nights, I know,
Are yet to be cast. Still, I do not fear
The coming of darker nights, and moan not
For brighter days that lie behind. There is
Light enough to fill my eyes, and darkness
Enough to sober them. Now, autumn's come.

*Shabnam Kaur has independently published seven collection of poems, and currently works as Assistant Professor of English in Guru Gobind Singh College, Chandigarh.

To Mam, With Love

Dr. Nutan Garg*

I

Life was like
a parched land
freckled with fissures
sans fertility,
sans productivity,
arms eternally raised
in prayers
for drops of nectar
to wake up
the dormant
being in me . . .

In wakefulness
I raved and craved
sighed and prayed
for one to peel off
false personas
and open up pavilions
of cerebral lights,
to illumine deeply
and hear me keenly.

And,
Behold . . .
My prayers
He hears
places me
in the sanctuary
of followers.

II

Reclining at your feet
lost count of days
months and years
as warmth of
intellectual discourses
permeated the voids
of my being
and nurtured

my failing spirits
with maternal care.

Your undying founts
of love and concern
caressing and blessing
bathed my arid zones
with fecund mind
and reservoirs of ken.

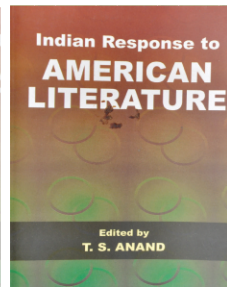
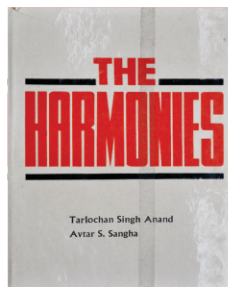
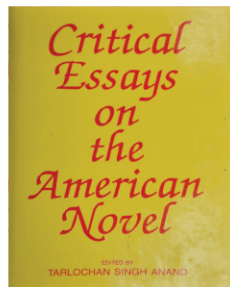
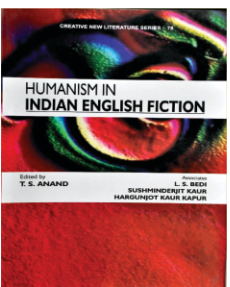
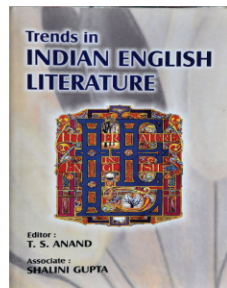
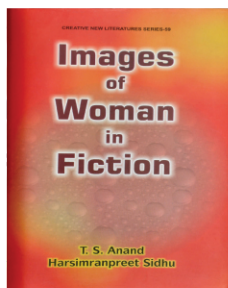
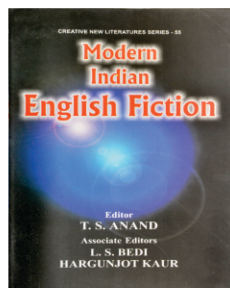
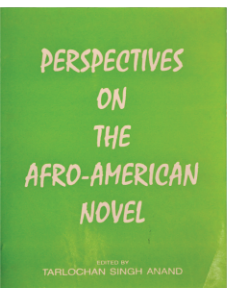
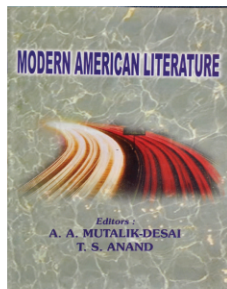
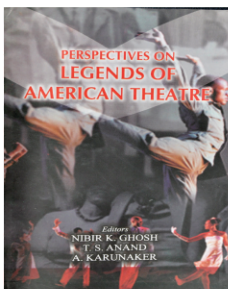
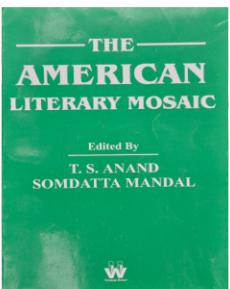
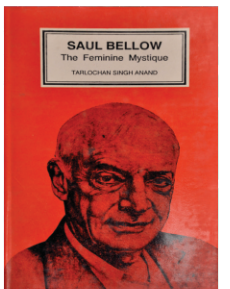
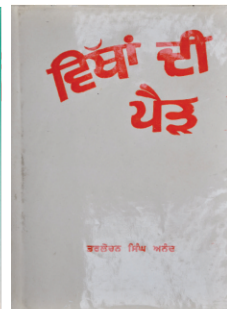
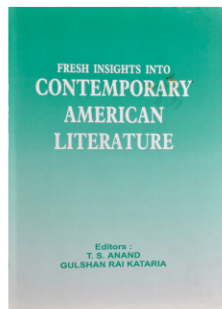
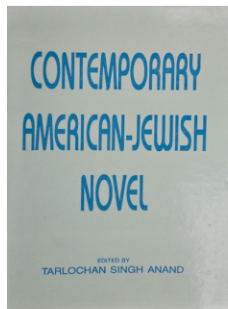
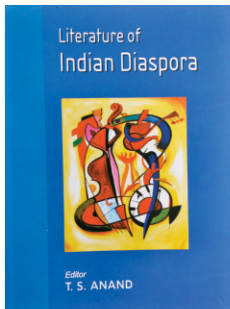
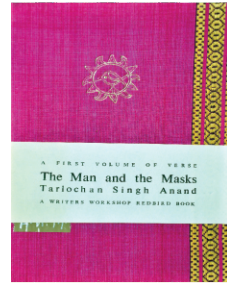
The benign mentorship
opened gates of vision
vistas of power
to tackle the treasons
of the world gone askance.

The rock of Gibraltar
infused confidence
powerful defence
against all odds
and human sods.
Thy maternal touch
like the Monsoon showers
gave new lease of life
to the one
lying motionless
in mobile world
and looking up
for a few drops . . .

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