Literary Voice

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Editorial Note

Literary Voice March 2018 offers multiple focus on a Jnanipith Award winning Punjabi novelist, Sahitya Akademi Award winner Playwright of 2016, a very resonant female voice of Indian English poetry and contemporary Literary Biopics on Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. From the British poet, Philip Larkin who gave expression to a clipped, anti romantic sensibility prevalent in English verse in the 1950s, Bernard Malamud and Mordecai Richler who negotiate the dilemma of Jewishness, and James Baldwin whose novels fictionalize fundamental personal questions and dilemmas amid complex social and psychological pressures thwarting the equitable integration of African-Americans in the American society, the focus shifts to the immediate concerns that agitate the consciousness of creative artists about the dangerous signals triggered off by the Global Warming and how the litterateurs in different parts of the world espouse the cause of ecological environment by training their lenses on the potentially devastating drift in the thinking of the modern man. The modern maladies as the existential angst, diasporic traumas of home, identity and alienation thrown up by dislocations of South Asian migrations and politically induced migrations of Middle Eastern communities in search of new havens, have been subjected to in depth probing from the socio-politico and historical perspectives. Dr. Swaraj Raj's incisive article offers fresh insights and new directions to the quest for identity and roots.

A unique feature of *Literary Voice* March 2018 is the engagement of the scholars with the two contemporary Indian writers who have captured the imagination of the readers. Dr. Swarajbir Singh, Sahitya Akademi Award Winner in Panjabi for the year 2016, shares the formative influences on his writing craft and the social issues which inform his *oeuvre*. Meena Kandasamy,

an authentic, articulate and bold feminist poetic voice, shares her sense of outrage at the ages old prevalent social disparities which crush a woman's self worth under the repressive patriarchal heels. In a no holds barred interview Meena lashes out at the flagrant domestic violence against women in abusive marriages and the physical brutalities directed against the Dalits in India.

The subalterans' fight against injustice in an agrarian setting, the plight of the Tibetan woman at the hands of the repressive regime which constantly undermines her dignity and self worth, the politics of the Partition of India in 1947 actuated by the communal considerations and the current turmoil in the highly sensitive Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir where the Kashmiri Pandits were hounded out of their homes and hearths, have been critically appraised from different perspectives. The role and function of the Reader with the advent of Literary Theory, consequent eclipse of the author, and how a character in a fictional work assumes the role of the narrator in defiance of the writer, have been analysed. Two incisive Reviews of recently launched Gulzar's *Footprints on Zero Line: Writings on the Partition* and Sidharth's *Celestial Beings – Tales & Paintings*, and introduction of two powerful new voices in the contemporary Indian English poetry under the Poetry Column, have added riches to the present number of *Literary Voice*. Dear Readers, partake of the variegated feast and revert with your feedback.

With a heavy heart I share with you the sad and untimely demise of Dr. A.A. Mutalik-Desai (Dharwad, Karnataka) who has been associated with *Literary Voice* since its inception. A profound scholar, a reliable person and a fine human being who taught in American and Indian universities, he was the President of the Indian Association for English Studies and Indian Association for American Studies. The present number of *Literary Voice* is dedicated to his memory.

T. S. Anand

An Interview with Dr. Swarajbir Singh, Sahitya Akademi Awardee for 2016

Dr. Swaraj Bir Singh *is recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award for Punjabi for the year 2016 for his play,* ***Maseya di Raat (Moonless Night)****. Besides, he has been honoured with several national and State awards. A medico by training and an I.P.S. officer, currently posted as Director General of Police, Meghalaya, Dr Swaraj Bir Singh "writes freely and fearlessly." His writing odyssey began with poetic musings, authored three books of verses. His forays into mythology triggered the process of play writing. Religion is a recurring thread in his plays. His first play,* ***Krishan*** *was hailed as a masterpiece. Be it the much-acclaimed* ***Dharamguru, Medhini*** *or his favourite* ***Shayiri****, he often reverts to religious themes, for "religion plays a very significant part in our lives, more so in Punjab, where it was a dominant thread both in the 1980s and 1990s and also during the time of Partition. When asked by an interviewer as to what could be the triggers for his inspiration in contemporary troubled times, he opines, "the genesis of a new play lies somewhere within the one I may be currently writing. It is a continuous and an organic phenomenon."*

Ms Sapanpreet Kaur, *Doctoral Research Scholar from the Dept. of Languages and Comparative Literature, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, spoke to* ***Dr Swarajbir Singh*** *about various crossroads in his literary career, rigours of writing and his*

persistent engagements with contemporary socio-cultural concerns, in order to bring to fore the inherent thought process of an erudite and enlightened playwright who has enriched Punjabi literature through his probing insights into the myths, history and cultural mores of the people of Punjab.

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Swarajbir is a quaint amalgam, medical doctor, I.P.S. officer, poet and playwright. Please enlighten us about these shifts in your career?

I think this perception is not correctly placed and you will find many more persons more qualified and more diverse if you look around and in history as well.

There is general perception that people from Science background have fewer inclinations towards creative writing. What inspired Swarajbir to try his hand in writing? How were your initial experiences with writing and when did you actually start writing?

I think that the division between science, arts, humanities and social sciences is a modern phenomenon. I started writing poetry at about 20 Years age in 1977-78 and it was mostly a personal and confessional type of poetry. Some of the poems were published in well known literary journals as *Preet Lari, Aks* and *Vikendrit* in 1979 but after that year I didn't publish anything up to 1984. It was on the killing of my friend Sumit, Editor, *Preet Lari* that I got a long poem *Gumshuda Di Talaash* published in *Nawa Zamana* Daily in March, 1984 and my first book of poetry *Apni Apni Raat* was published in 1985. All the poems in *Apni Apni Raat* were born as reaction to those traumatic times, thus, one can say that it was the trauma of those times which pushed me towards sustained creative writing and getting published. It was the politics of violence which forced my hand.

From poetry to plays, any special reason for this transition towards writing plays? The poetic rhythm is perceptible in your plays and you seem to use poetry as a dramatic device too. What is your favoured genre?

My favoured genre is poetry but I realised that my command over the language, idiom and rhythm are not enough to make me a

good Punjabi poet. Poetry demands extreme perfection which I lack. Further, I was more attracted towards the clash of ideas and social forces and theatre seemed to me more appropriate genre for expressing my views. Further, theatre is a more engaging medium, it simulates and interrupts, it gives voice to some and says something by silences and pauses, it has climaxes, beginnings and endings, it involves people. It tells many things to you on the face.

The poetic pieces in your plays also appear to be a sort of "interruptive device." So can we place your plays in the category of Brechtian tradition?

Yes, the many poetic pieces I use in the plays are interruptive in nature in the Brechtian tradition but not always. Brecht in theory and Brecht in his plays are also not the same. In many plays like *The Caucasian Chalk, Circle, Galileo, The Good Person of Szechwan* and many others, Brecht himself has not been able to maintain the distance between the play and the audience which he wanted to maintain as he elaborated in his theoretical pieces. Similar is the case with me.

Your plays undergo a long process from writing to publishing. First of all from your readings you conceive of an idea, churning it as it filters through your consciousness and then choose to write. The written plays are staged first. After a gap of a few years they are published with a lot of refinements. Any special reason behind this?

Not many reasons. I think most of the playwrights go through this process.

What are the possible influences in your evolution as a playwright??

Influences are many and difficult to enumerate. But definitely classical Greek plays, Shakespeare, Modern American, British, Russian, French and Italian drama, all influenced at various times and in different shades. Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Balwant Gargi and many others from the contemporary Indian scene also attracted and influenced. Bhaji Gursharn Singh was an influence in multiple ways of motivation. But definitely it was after reading the plays of Sartre, Camus, Brecht, Edward Bond, Horward Brenton, Arthur Miller, Tennesse Williams, Charan Das Sidhu and

some other playwrights that I realised that I could write plays.

A perusal of your plays reflects your strong reservations about some of the ailments that afflict socio-cultural and political domains of life. Does your personal-political ideology leave its imprint on writerly craft?

Definitely. As we know today everything in our lives is political. All social and personal relations and conflicts are political in nature as they say personal is political. As I said above, I was pushed towards regular writing and publishing by the trauma of 1980s. That was also political in nature.

In Indian society, Lord Krishna is an adorable deity; as a hero and as Bal Gopala, you have tried to deconstruct the persona of Lord Krishna in ***Krishan*** *which is deeply rooted in people's consciousness. How did you conceive this idea, what made you do so?*

Correct. Lord Krishna is the most complex character to emanate from the Indian Sub-Continent. He is in *Mahabharata*, he is in *Puranas*, he is even in *Upanishads*, he is in folk songs and folk tales. *Mahabharata* presents a different Krishna and *Bhagwat Puran* and other *Puranas* present a different Krishna. The motherly instinct of women of the sub-continent created Bal Gopala and the young women of the sub-continent created the Krishna with the flute, love and desire. These efforts of the women of the sub-continent were to create their personal God who is loveable and free from the trappings of Brahmanism. Problem is that *Brahminical* traditions are so strong that they appropriate the folk god in their own metaphysical mesh. I have tried to deconstruct this appropriation by Brahmanism.

Giving voice to the most silenced community, the low/outcasts in ***Krishna*** *is quite manifest. Could it be attributable to your personal-political ideology?*

I think it was the force of the circumstances and the societal injustice which we see in front of our own eyes which taught me that we should always take positions. It was also the influence of student, trade union and left movements of Amritsar and Punjab which strengthened this resolve.

In the process of socialisation the problems like exploitation of nature for development and political games played by Krishna and his men of valour

are quite prevalent in the contemporary socio-political system. What is your take on the Indian socio-political system?

The present Indian socio-political system is deeply communalised, casteist and patriarchal. It is geared in favour of a few privileged. Both the political and bureaucratic classes are highly corrupt, inefficient and anti-people. The caste and class wars are being fought at many planes and levels. A vast majority of people are forced to live a life which is called bare existence and devoid of human dignity. We are living in difficult times and sometimes I experience a deep sense of shame about the condition of helplessness in which we find ourselves. There are a lot of parallels to present condition in my plays *Krishan, Dharmguru* and *Agni-Kund.*

You have endeavoured to raise voice against sexual objectification of woman in ***Medhini****. Also there are some significant points we find in* ***Dharamguru*** *about the deprivation of the rights of woman. Does it spring from your commitment to socialism or your feminist's conscience as a writer?*

Yes, there is a definite strand of anti-patriarchy in my plays. You will find the same in *Maseya di Raat, Haq and Agni Kund*. In fact, this strand is elaborated more in *Pul Siraat* and *Ahilya* which have not been published yet. All these ideas i.e. about anti-patriarchy and about justice are inter-connected.

The Sahitya Akademi award winning play, ***Maseya di Raat*** *touches upon a very sensitive, contemporary problem of female foeticide in Indian society. In Punjabi drama a similar issue has been artistically negotiated in* ***Sukki Kukh (The Dry Womb)*** *by Ajmer Aulakh. Both the plays lead towards similar sort of solution. Any special reasons for treating this subject in your own artistic manner?*

This play was written in 1996–97 under the name *Puttar Mithe Mewe* and was performed around the year 2000 by Nita Mahindra under the name *Treemat* in which Neeta Mahindra changed the play to a happy ending. Kewal Dhaliwal performed it as it is written and gave it the name *Maseya di Raat*. I can't say why I chose this subject and why I wrote this play. I had read *Yerma* about a decade before writing this play and it had left an indelible

impression on me about the demands which a feudal society makes upon the women. When I came to Meghalaya which has a matrilineal society, I saw the contrast that in Punjab the demand upon the women is to reproduce male children and in Meghalaya it is to reproduce female children. I used to think that the desire in Punjabi women to give birth to sons is an elemental one but seeing this contrast changed my thinking. Another influence was a presentation by economist Navsharn Singh (daughter of Bhaji Gursharn Singh who later wrote the preface of this play) about the missing daughters i.e the female foetuses which were aborted. I discussed the issue with Navsharn and realised that this desire in Punjabi women to have male child is not an elemental one but socially and culturally constructed. I think this is the reason for the tragic end of the play. Ajmer Aulakh's play *Sukhi Kukh* also has similar end and I think he also realises that the social and cultural forces in Punjab in this context have been very very regressive and powerful and the woman has little choice when in grip of such forces.

The Indian economy is basically an agrarian economy. However, the frequent suicides of peasants/farmers in the present is a big challenge to it. You are also discussing about agrarian crisis in ***Kallar****. Can we expect a transformation in the stance of peasants? If yes, then how?*

I have written a play, *Fasal* on the agrarian problem particularly focusing on farmers' suicides. Kewal Dhaliwal has staged this play at many places including *Ghadri Babian Da Mela* at Jalandhar last year. The agrarian crisis is the result of the agrarian economy becoming part of the vast machine of capitalism and there is no escape from it. Capitalism was barbaric in its origins and continues to be so in the third world countries most of which are mostly under-developed. It is whitewashed by social welfare State trends in the European countries helped by the loot of colonialism and in United States of America by the loot of neo-colonialism. The third world countries continue to suffer in the grind of under-development. Transformation on a large scale does not seem to be an imminent possibility and the scene is very pessimistic. On a personal level I think that the human beings including the peasants are very resilient and they resist on many levels in

diverse ways. Only hope lies in the local struggles in a focused way in which the demands should be specific and are articulated in a new language of hope which such struggles should invent and also involve other sections of society. The struggles should not be for utopian ideas and far placed future but for the immediate and the specific.

How do you see the situation of contemporary human beings? Do you feel there is huge existential crisis in the present generation? If yes, then describe where does the modern man locate himself?

I cannot relate to contemporary human existence in an abstract sense. I try to relate to it only in a limited sense to the human condition in Punjab which was divided in 1947 and parts of which are now the parts of political India and political Pakistan. As I have no experience of existence in Western Punjab, I relate only to the human condition in Eastern Punjab. 1947 The Partition had fractured the Punjabi identity and post-colonial Eastern Punjab was initially buoyed the Nehruvian optimism and Green Revolution. It had legacies of Ghadar Movement, Akali Movement, Kirti Movement, Bhagat Singh's revolutionary movement and Congress Movement which were all anti-colonial in character. But Punjabi man's interface with modernity had many paradoxes. It broke the little cultures of the villages of Punjab which were communitarian and brought the high cultures of Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam into the lives of Punjabis which led to partition. Same high culture ideologies played devastating role in creating the extremism of 1980s and the tragedies of 1984. All this mixed with ruthless capitalist drive along with rampant corruption and bankrupt educational system and highly non-committed political leadership and waning away of the Left, brought Punjab to a station where the drugs or immigration to foreign countries were and are the only alternatives. The present Punjabi generation faces the huge existential crisis in the present patriarchal society which still has vestiges of feudalism and also has the small enclaves of capitalism. The society of the spectacle places huge demands on the youth as well as others. The dismal agrarian and industrial scenarios in Punjab drive the youth towards desperation where immigration seems to be only hope.

The Punjabi youth and in general men and women of today find it difficult to place themselves in the domains of hope. What they are trying is to put themselves in the domain of survival. Last century for Punjab was difficult and traumatic and the present is also going to be same especially in Punjab. But Punjabis are resilient people, they survive and definitely they will survive these difficult times as they have history of struggles. They try to anchor themselves in their democratic traditions of these struggles and heritage of the Sikh Gurus which is not vandalized by religious zealots.

In the architectonics of your dramatic craft, myth has been used as a literary device, quite differently from other contemporary playwrights. Do you conceive a mythical play in terms of its contemporary relevance only or because of other reasons?

Myth is a device as well as a source. Levi-Strauss gives us the example of myths of Vaupes area of Columbia where the myths are very coherent mythological stories all divided into chapters following each other in a quite logical order. We have similar situation in the Indian sub-continent where myths are organized in a logical way of their own in various epics and *Puranas*. Levi-Strauss argues that the myths were put together in an order by native wise men and philosophers who do not exist everywhere, but only in some societies of a given type. While applying the Straussian argument to the context of Indian sub-continent, I question that who were these native wise men and philosophers and I argue that these so called wise men mostly belonged to the Brahminical schools of thought which strived to keep the controls of society within the privileged castes and deprived and excluded huge body of men and women from the domains of knowledge. They brahmanised the folk tales and the historical events to suit their own interests. I question this brahmanisation which is highly favoured in favour of privileged castes and patriarchy and try to interpret and deconstruct them to find their meanings in the contemporary situations.

As Roland Barthes says "Myth is a type of speech." As a playwright, do you think it is easy to mould set patterns of consciousness by using it in your plays?

What Roland Barthes calls myth is actually the ideology of the bourgeoisie in the modern world and how the bourgeoisie constructs the modern myths. If I correctly recollect it is Levi-Strauss who argued that myth is a part of human speech which goes beyond parole and langue. He also stated that myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling. I have elaborated on this theme in one of my articles, *"Asin Hindustani Bare – Sagir (Up-Mahandeep) Diyan Mithan Nu Kiwen Padia Te Samjhiye" (How should we read and understand the myths of Indian sub-continent)* published in Magazine, *Wagha* (Fourth Issue) and I somehow agree with the American playwright Naomi Lizuka who states that myth is strong and slippery and quick and in theatre, the dead are always in the room. She also says that myth is a lesson in paradox. I use the myths to say what I want to say keeping in view the contemporary situation and I found myths and mythology as rich source to articulate my views.

What are your views about contemporary Punjabi drama? Do you ever wish to represent Punjabi drama on national/international level?

I am not concerned with any levels, national or international. In fact, I have a lot of hostility to these levels. I am more concerned with the local levels, with the Punjab of the Eastern side and Punjab of the Western side but that doesn't mean a divorce from the neighbouring areas or from other countries. At present I am more concerned about the local than the global.

How do you view contemporary Punjabi drama, with Swarajbir and without Swarajbir? What sort of contributions do you want to put in it?

I can't answer the first part of the question. About the second part, I want to say I along with other writers of all genres and activists and the people of Punjab, want to create more space to question the discourse of dominance in the present society articulated through the instruments of casteism, patriarchy and greed-driven capitalism. I want the people to raise questions and through my plays I want to encourage the motivation to question the tradition and strange untruths which are presented before the people as

truths due to societal norms and for the sake of societal acceptance.

We do have a rich Indian dramatic tradition yet plays written in other Indo-Aryan languages reflect the influence of western dramatic tradition. What are your preferences while framing the plot of a play?

I believe that the content drives the form of the play and this so called division between the creative traditions of the East and West is sometimes more hyped than to be real. I am conscious that a lot was written in the medieval and the modern times which was Europe-centred as well and had lot to do with the context of imperialism but even then the creative traditions of every place have predominantly questioned the establishment and I value the same.

What kind of works do you like to read in spite of heavy professional demands on your time?

I like to read plays from other Indian languages and literature written all over the globe. The award winning plays like Pulitzer Prize, Tony Awards, Obie Awards and various Critics Awards of Broadway and Off-Broadway and also in UK, get preference as they give some direction to reading habits. I like the medieval Punjabi poetry and read it over and over again. I like contemporary Spanish and Latin American fiction. I love to read and re-read myths and mythology of Indian sub-continent and short stories by contemporary Punjabi writers.

What is in store for the Punjabi readers/viewers from your ever flowing pen and fertile creative imagination?

My plays--*Jan Da Meet, Pul Siraat, Kachi Garhi, Fasal, Ahilya*, and *Tasveeran*-- have been performed by Manch Rangmanch, Amritsar under the direction of Kewal Dhaliwal and are to go for publication. At present, *Tasveeran* is under publication and will hit the stands in a month or two. Similarly my One Act and One Actor plays as *Pasand, Eh Gallan Kade Phir Karange, Scalpel, Sab Ton Changi Janani* and *Khushbu* have also been presented by Manch Rangmanch, Amritsar under the direction of Kewal Dhaliwal. The publication will take time. Wish me and those plays good luck.

An Exotic Evening with Meena Kandasamy

Meena Kandasamy *(b. 1984), contemporary Indian English poet and novelist, grew up in Chennai, India before moving to London in 2016, holds a Ph.D., in Sociolinguistics, and has actively sought to combine her love for the written word with the struggle for social justice through poetry, translation, fiction and essays. Her debut collection of poems, Touch was themed around caste and untouchability, and her second, Ms Militancy, was an explosive, feminist retelling/reclaiming of Tamil and Hindu myths. Her critically acclaimed first novel, The Gypsy Goddess, critiques the 1968 massacre of forty-four landless untouchable men, women and children striking for higher wages in the village of Kilvenmani, Tanjore. Her second novel, When I Hit You: Or, The Portrait of the Writer As A Young Wife, drew upon her own experience within an abusive marriage, to lift the veil on the silence that surrounds domestic violence and marital rape in modern India.*

Dr. Bhagyashree S. Varma*, Associate Professor of English, University of Mumbai spoke to Meena Kandasamy, contemporary Indian English poet whose poetry "is naked, screams in anger, writhes in pain, smells of blood . . . speaks for her people." She met the celebrated poet twice in 2012-13, followed up by online and offline conversations and emails to date, in order to fathom the concerns which inform her poetry and fiction. Through her probing serious and personalized questions Dr Bhagyashree Varma lays bare the meticulous mind with the intensity of a creative*

speaker, an honest writer and critical thinker.

Yes, Meena, I would begin with a very cliché question and request you to tell us about how did you begin writing? Was there a moment as you recall, which you can say, was a moment of your discovery that you wish to write and how did you start writing poems?

I know, that is how people begin asking about how I began, well, there is no such moment I find to be that epiphany in discovery of myself as a writer probably I was already writing by the time I came to know that I am going to write a lot . . that is not as concrete a moment as we probably imagine. In fact, when I found myself thinking I was writing. Poetry was not so formed as poetry in the beginning to tell you frankly. I found myself scribbling my thoughts and before I realized that I had already started writing people started telling me oh you have written a nice poem . . . so I had to know that I was writing poems while I thought I am only putting down my thoughts as I was probably lost in thinking. I think the form does not come to you in its usually thought of display look but many a times it is as natural as you never imagine it can be . . . have you heard of three line poetry called haiku, for example, a thought briefly put on paper. People devised a form and gave it a name and also it was a trendy thing once established and they started writing in the same fashion with count of words or syllables and so on…

Ok, but you do not write like that. I mean haiku seems to be very spontaneous thought many a time while in your writing as I have noticed lot of thought taking its shape and form of expression only after it had been through your mind for a long time . . . as it looked to me was it not after a lot of churning and agitation that the expression got itself on the paper and the poems which are all more content than form. So technically I don't find you a conscious poet.

Yes, you are right. In fact, that is what I am saying. I cannot think of the form and write accordingly rather I would like to always find out how my thoughts in themselves are formed structure since I use language which is a structure in the so formed expressions . . . and this has been changing when it comes to writing other than poetry. Recently my novel that narrates the trauma and evolution of the woman trapped in the fatal marriage I cannot detect whether the writing as a process could be segregated into thinking

and simultaneously writing or recapitulating the memories to some extent of my own life. It was more a desperate desire to de-romanticize the myth of ideas like happy couples or at least the system like hegemonized patriarchal family in India. I constantly feel it is the duty of a writer to de-structure these time-bound structures that are imposed timelessly on us.

I was about to ask you about the novel When I Hit You Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife. On the cover it is mentioned so concretely common truth of Marriage in India, perhaps in all over the world, even if it happens to be a love marriage, "is a bond of love" for woman, while for man, "a contract of ownership" as it seems to be. Unfortunately, we have been sanctifying marriage so much as a social institution, despite its abusive power over women as wives, how did you overcome that fear of 'suffering woman,' which all the women, who suffer are grappling with and how did you achieve this courage of 'telling the truth' be it semi-fictional, or how would you describe the way you came to write this book?

There is no hidden moment again, of knowing when I found my urge or say, the decision to narrate came to the forefront of my mind, it was a long-buried self-expression that had been seeking its way out till it finally found the space and the voice to articulate itself . . . if you read the foreword of *When I Hit You,* you will notice my fixation with my mother's anxieties over a daughter and the 'stress-bound' daughter with the multiplying lice in her hair draining her head, till "the use of the sun and the strongest shampoo," the Runaway daughter, defending the liberated zone for herself, occupies the center of "mother's unending unconditional, over-conditioned love" . . . (She laughs and continues) My book is only an outcome of my fear that the over-engaging narrative may not override the truth. 'I must take some responsibility over my own life' was my decision. 'I must write my story' was its prologue.

You have completed a Doctorate of Philosophy in Socio-linguistics from Anna University, Chennai. And your professional career as a writer clearly has its focus on multiple live questions related to caste *annihilation,* feminism *and linguistic identity of women writing from India, being a very fierce reviewer of academic language, you had stated in your speech "**Poetry is not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain set of practices while you***

present your ideas in the way that academic language is" *and thus, you prefer to use it for activism. A review in The Hindu put the negative criticism into context, describing your work as difficult for anyone whose politics were "mainstream." How is your experience in writing when you confront language styles or choices?*

I think language is obviously very important when you speak of the issues that relate to your urge and respond to them through the very heartfelt pangs and you suffer because of them so you speak to alleviate that suffering. As a writer visibly I hold my central focus on multiple occupying as well as continual social questions related to as you mentioned caste annihilation, feminist issues and language choices and freedom of women writing from India; I have to be eloquent in and about academic language; I uttered the statement about poetry as "not caught up within larger structures that pressure you to adopt a certain set of practices while you present your ideas in the way that academic language is" in the same context of grappling with this gap between real issues and their representation in language. I prefer to use language for activism rather than for aesthetic decorum because may be I am shaped by my parents in that sort of pragmatic wisdom. It's not simply utilitarian but that seems to be the very intent for a writer why a language is made for. If the news paper and media reporter find it not a part of their idea of what can be called mainstream, it's not my concern at all.

For me as a writer what really matters is those questions that occupy my mind and make me write when actually I am not consciously creating any language style for my writing. The style is an offspring of that occupancy and it is born out of what ways you prefer to write when you start and design your expression. Yes, design you have to because a writer like me is certainly bothered about preferences in design of my expression as I constantly must think of what way this expression would augment its appeal and value for the readers and for those to whom it aims to reach out.

It seems slightly peculiar and not so wonderful to ask but just to note it down for the readers who do not probably know your writing, are there any specific experiences which flamed your creativity to this degree of say, fiery protest against not only patriarchy but the whole human side of

politics in gender-based and caste-discriminating scenario in India, which was shown 'right' always, and you preferred to be on the left, like all great revolutionaries?

I think many women are now vibrantly writing about the gender-bias in patriarchal set up and about the caste-discrimination as well. My worry is for the women who write half the truth and confuse their readers too about what can be their take on the truth they have been trying to express. I have read the stories of women who narrate the traumas of their lives but do not come out with the proper names. I can understand the fear of getting ostracized for being that bold, as I recall Kamala Das who graciously wrote the Preface for my first anthology of poetry, was an unbound spirit of courage and the first bold voice of women from India when she exercised her freedom to the extent of conversion only to break those rigid fanatic frames of thinking patterns that we cling to, she was threatened again and again.

For me, life is always the source and the reference of my writing. I did experience a lot of trauma in my personal life in the self-driven marriage and coming out of that 'closet' say, for breathing my own life. When I use the word closet, people relate it properly to the coming out of the new community too, and I am talking about myself as a straight person who needs to come out in such a typical case of traumatic experience and depressing life cannot be continued for longer duration if you desire to live. So obviously, I am fired for all my writing from the fuel of my experience as well as I started looking around with wide open eyes and the conditions around us are not very blinding; rather eye-opening situations that tell you screamingly about why don't you speak out against this or why don't you write against this and this, such and such scenario…? I need not go searching for issues once I found that voice of a writer and my ink has to pour fuel in turn to the resistance and protest against these burning issues as you said.

The latest book *When I Hit You* is destined to bring the change that is desirable. It is written, more than to narrate any personal account thought lot of personal knowingly goes into the making of it, to pour that fuel of protest and spread the fire of, say power to self-govern especially in one's own life, be it a woman from any caste or class. The book is described as an incredibly personal

account because it is written in a first-person point of view; the story begins with the mother of the narrator telling of her escape from her husband and tormentor. So further, when the nameless narrator asserts the right to tell her account for herself, including the series of life situations she had encountered, of disastrous love, misunderstood sentiments, and a woman who fights, scratching her way towards the release that has to be her conquest.

As a writer, I prefer to be on the other side is what you find now, when I speak, but for me, I had been on the other side always as I was left there to be on my own . . . to be what I am. The society did not stop its trials to convert me into the tamed creature in the role of wife, mother or daughter and so on but I have found myself where I have been…on the left..!

I am glad you mentioned Kamala Das who has been one of my ideals too and I have been writing on her even after my Ph.D thesis chapters, especially after she gave me the written permission to translate her poems. I am now engaged in bringing those in Marathi and Hindi.

Oh really, that is a worth doing indeed . . . good work I should say.

T*hank you. It is interesting indeed that after the orthodoxy-ridden post-independence history, women have moved on to write and the more they write nowadays the more their education seems to be fruitful to them though not equally useful to their well-wishers, in societal sense. The question that usually props in my mind is also about the women who can write, not only being literate but also having "a room of their own" to begin with….are there more efforts to preserve the creativity in women, especially in the art of writing and prevent them from becoming extinct?*

I guess the flame of creativity was ever burning and we had witnessed the women who were writing in pre-partition times of Indian history or even in pre-independence India, though their diaries or writings may not have been as much preserved and brought to print versions for us to read through and also the then society was not really prepared to hear women speaking or read their writings with open vision of offering them some access to the public living and politics of the times.

Virginia Woolf probably was restrictedly talking about the European context in general to refer to the woman writer's freedom representatively missed by not having a room of her own

in historical past while if you go back to Indian history we have women who wrote on the leaves of the trees and the walls of the houses even in their imprisoned conditional lives. My take is humanist and may be radically feminist in your academic terminology yet not that westernized feminist to concretely describe the differences of cultural and native Indian context again.

The question of women on the other hand, becoming extinct, despite their creativity and heard or unheard voices, situates one back into the gender politics of Patriarchal set up all over the world, not only in India.

Would you react like the nativist writers to English as a language of the colonizers and we need to be decolonized but being a very impactful writer who has been both bilingual and nativist in the liberal sense of the term, would you accept English as the language of Indian mind today, especially for the writers on the left . . .?

One central factor is mother tongue which has to have its share in shaping your thoughts, actions and reactions while being educated in English today's citizens in India or any country except the European ones, would naturally feel oriented to speak and write in English. When poets like Kamala Das were criticized for writing in English, the reaction was nativist and it had been the same case with many writers in India who are inclined to write in English. For me as a person I don't really feel any political sense of belonging or un-belonging is attached to English because I have always preferred the language as a medium to reach out to whom it is meant for.

You have been passionately involved and always been vocal in the Facebook and life book activism related to all types of contemporary issues from the aboriginal people or native community which is so far away from home, to the trafficking of girls and rapes or child abuse cases, caste-atrocities, corruption of the politicians, violence towards the weak and women's rights in democracy. How did you manage to keep your anger flamed upward all the time . . . I know it is very disturbing to think about all these burning questions . . . and you cannot in fact escape that sensitivity if it is a part of your being?

Well, I won't say I did try to maintain my responses but most of the

times as you said, I cannot escape being vocal as it is my spontaneity. In today's digital scenario can you be influential without regular media presence? I recall the days when we were striving to reach out to the few reachable masses for the spread of our journal and now if you get a limitless access to the whole humanity, how can one restrain from using it?

I find it not only an access but a very vibrant mode of also getting feedback from those who care to send it and I may not expect the same from all yet I do look at things minutely when I get time enough for that. The worst fear that can engage a writer is of criticism and I did escape the haunting fear because my concern in writing is always greater that what other may say of what I write or the way I write. I think every writer has to go through this darkening tunnel once at least or frequently but if you just hold the self-lit torch for yourself you can march ahead and the light is only sourced from what ways you think when you are determined to vocalize numerous questions.

Two of your books were reviewed by New Indian Express wherein Ms. Militancy was seen as the "disastrous, if not worse" about the "female self and body in ways not allowed by this discourse." Further, in the journal of Postcolonial Cultures and Societies, it was commented that Meena "authors a poetic discourse that not only castigates the prevalent modes of subjugation but also resolutely strives towards futures that are yet to be born." I see the great leap you had after your first publication and now up to this last one, the words that end your novel move every woman who cannot fail to understand and experience the same conclusion: "I am the woman who asked for tenderness and got raped in return. I am the woman who has done her sentence. I am the woman who still believes, broken-heartedly, in love." May I ask you to sum up your journey of authoring this venture of a woman trapped yesterday, to come out as a woman liberated today?

I know people take a writer as an anti-caste very easily and judge through anti-feminist lens if only one tries to retell mythical stories especially from the scriptures of the Hindus or even the Tamil myths. As I stated earlier my botheration will not ever be what share of critiquing in society comes to me as much as it has to be the reasoning out of not only what we believe via mythical

references and dependent are our practices on our credo, so if woman is seen as inferior to man because it has ever be so in mythical stories and scriptural writings somewhere someone has to put finger on that journey of wrong ideas coming down to us.

Gender roles have always been cited from scriptures and mythology to prove how women have been sacrificing their priorities because they are meant for sacrificing those, one has to understand the politics of gender-discrimination and relate to it in contemporary light. And what ways is it going to make a difference to me whether I am read like a feminist writer or am critiqued like an anti-something in my writing. My poetry is "about the female self and body in ways not 'allowed' by this discourse." Women have been facing sexual abuse and violence for ages but had never been vocalizing their predicaments.

My prime analysis of women's reactionary voices suppressed ever, are attempted in the expressive forms in *Touch* and *Ms Militancy; while* society does not stop critiquing me, and any woman who writes this straight way, it terminates the efforts to author a poetic discourse that can rebukes the ubiquitous advances of demoralize women who stubbornly endeavor towards opportunities that are hitherto unthought-of. When I declare My poetry 'smells of blood,' my poetry 'salutes sacrifice', it's a 'verdict of truth' as well as the 'agony that speaks of my people,' and I claim that my poetry speaks for my people.

You were made a featured poet at the City of Asylum Jazz Poetry Concert held in Pittsburgh*, the 14th Poetry Africa International Festival (2010),* Durban *and the DSC Jaipur Literature Festival (2011). Did you imagine these recognitions would come to you as to establish your identity as a Dalit woman writer and using a feminist and anti-caste perspective to retell the story of abuse, hatred and threats to the very existence of an author in contextualized class or minorities?*

(Smiles and continues), yes, to tell you the truth and ironical it is as ever, I did not imagine any formal recognitions especially from abroad. When I began my writing it was for reaching out and as I said all writers and any writer for that matter cannot think of what will be the otherwise recognition of his or her work as the prime

intention of writing happens to be, though different for the writers as per their self-made choices, mainly the change they dread of. So when I receive a kind of harsh remark or threatening repercussions from the fundamentalist people I recall the thoughtful statement of mine to stabilize and prompt to myself, "This threat of violence shouldn't dictate what you are going to write or hinder you in any manner."

Bravely I should say, you have been attending occasions like Osmania University "Beef Festival" after the controversy in 2012, when a group of Dalit students of Osmania University, Hyderabad, organized a beef eating festival to protest against the "food fascism" in hostels. Participating in it more than 200 people, including both teachers and students who ate various dishes made of beef, and the right-wing student group Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) staged protests against the event and the organizers, turning the campus into a "battlefield." You had to face some twitter abuse by the rightwing supporters also in effect of this. The Network of Women in Media India (WMNI) released a press-statement condemning the attack on you. My query is how did you manage to encounter all this in addition to your ongoing personal upheaval and also what was the worry of your parents at such occasions….did they counsel you to withdraw because finally you are a woman and women must not invite more suffering if they are already bound to the pattern of so-typically-gender-bound set up?

I remember those days yes, parents did worry a lot but never even once they wanted me to retreat for the sake of security or not that they tried to hide their worries. After that occasion I had written an article on Outlook India, titled 'A Cowed-Down Nation.' I could see that it prompted me to write more on why the left wing has to survive despite all encounters. The beef controversy was just one illustration of what is happening in Indian democracy now will all said liberal governance and exaggeratingly propagated sense of justice.

Especially in talking of freedom and freedom that offers you choices to opt for yourself, I do not find much encouragement in the plans and propagations of the right wing and like the previous party-based political set up we continue to suffer because we are the part of 'Janata' the common people as it is mentioned. The only

choice left to me is again writing what I need to write and bring out and spread the ideas for more mobility of thinking and freedom of choices in so framed democratic spaces.

As translator, though you have been writing in English you have also translated prose and poetry from Tamil. I have read about the works of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, Thol. Thirumavalavan *and* Tamil Eelam *writers such as Kasi Anandan, Cheran and VIS Jayapalan whose writings you brought into English. What is your take on the act of translation especially when a writer like you feels the pull to translate and bring the chosen scripts to other language?*

I know what you mean. I won't call it only an act or a pull to translate, these writings have been framed into one language and the ideas they serve in fact, deserve the spread outside the frame of one regional tongue like Tamil. I know that there is no limit, no boundary, no specific style guide to poetry, which you are free to experiment, that you are free to find your own voice, which you are free to flounder and also free to fail once in a while, because all this happens all the time when you translate. A writer of all the added interests of his or hers, can easily transfer the meaning from that so described source language to as you say, target language in particular as the writing practice too becomes a media to help that.

Interestingly, you have acted in a film recently and it looks like a stunt to most of the readers, I am not speaking for myself, but in general was it a fashion-like freak out into acting or just a way you did the film as a part of curiosity to act like all of us want to be a part of the big screen as they say…

Ah yes, ha ha . . . .that was not a stunt really, nor had I been peculiarly curious about the big screen appearance, it happened so unexpectedly even to me that I found someone with the offer and I thought of accepting to act. This was a Malayalam film, Oraalppokkam, the first of its kind, as it is the online crowd funded independent Malayalam feature film. Once you start doing things in life you know many variations come to you on the way. Like I mentioned many a times talking to people, if one is closed in the self-chosen or imposed structures, the choices narrow down to what you think of yourself as, in your own individual capabilities. Once you open up the spaces, the choices

too vary and broaden to offer you more life to find for yourself.

I don't really wish to sum up the talk but as you said you have to move on elsewhere, I will not take more of your very valuable time. Meena, it has been thoroughly a pleasure and an enlightenment talking to you. .

Yes, thank you so much, Professor.

Quest for Identity and Roots: A Critical Analysis of Minal Hajratwala's *Leaving India: My Family's Journey from Five Villages to Five Continents*

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The present paper examines Minal Hajratwala's non-fictional text *Leaving India*: *My Family's Journey From Five Villages to Five Continents* published in 2009. Minal Hajratwala, a writer, poet and gay activist of Indian origin was born in 1971 in San Francisco, US. She was raised in New Zealand and Michigan in the US. In this sprawling text she traces the history of her family's migration from Gujarat to five continents, the migration which began more than one hundred and fifty years ago and is continuing till today.

The narrative raises some basic questions about migrancy, belongingness, identification and identity. This very well researched narrative is genre blurring too as it is a mix of reportage, memoir and reconstruction of history excavated from colonial archives, history museums and interviews with many members of the author's extended family living in different parts of the world – in India, Fiji, New Zealand, South Africa, Hong Kong, America and Canada. Hajratwala sets out to explore "the meeting place, where character intersects with history" (19). She wants to find out the choices made by her migrating ancestors–personal, economic, political and those necessitated by the needs of colonial powers–and how these choices collide with history.

She also explores her personal life and the dilemmas she had to face in making her life choices as a lesbian-bisexual and an activist. The text is focused on migration, on "gain and loss . . . the fundamental tropes of migration, the ebbs and flows that are certain as travel itself" (225), on what it is to be a queer child of

migrants, on identity formation and emergence of creole languages, and on how the diaspora space is a space of economic production too, a fact that often gets ignored in discussions on diaspora. In the process, the narrative also throws light on racism – overt and covert – apartheid, colonial/postcolonial policies, persistence of caste among Indian diasporic communities, and dynamics of interrelations between different diasporic formations. In doing so, Hajratwala problematizes certain familiar coordinates of diaspora theories such as identity, home, homeland, and nostalgia; she also demystifies them by removing from them the crust of esoteric theorizing which mesmerizes discussions on diaspora. The text thus lets us have a fresh look at some abiding and also some emerging concerns in migrant/diasporic literature.

At the heart of the text is the question: why do people migrate? Are the motives purely personal or historically contingent? Hajratwala confronts this question at the very outset:

> Your GREAT-GRANDFATHER wanted to go to Fiji, so he went.
>
> In our families, migration stories are told like this – the motives purely personal, almost arbitrary. In books, the recovered histories, I find other origin myths; not desire but economics, politics, the needs of colonial powers. I have set out to find the meeting place, where character intersects with history. (19)

This also entails an engagement with how diaspora is theorized, how psychologists have tried to define it in terms of pathologies of "disorientation, alienation, difficulty in assimilating" (12). She turns inward to ascertain "If the grief I have felt, sometimes in this writing, a kind of transmitted nostalgia–a mourning for what was lost, against the narrative of progress and accomplishment that characterizes most contemporary stories of our diaspora?" (12). Thus, despite being a text narrating in detail the economic progress made by her ancestors in different parts of the world and the frisson of excitement they must have felt in doing so, it also foregrounds grief and a lingering sense of

mourning at the loss they all suffered in their deracination and in finding new affiliations and scripting new identities. It is obvious that Hajratwala makes use of both analepsis and prolepsis in narrating her story.

> Historical records provide her relevant details which she pieces together and unscrambles the jigsaw puzzles of multiple migrations of all the descendants of Motiram, filling in the gaps, all ifs and buts, with fictional, imaginary retelling of the story. She makes it clear that in tracing the story of her family, she will be "using imperfect methods: documents, memories, legends" (13).

The narrative begins with a description of the likely circumstances in which the author's Great-Grandfather Motiram Narsey, belonging to a weaver clan of Khatris in Navsari in Gujarat, migrated to Fiji in 1909. How he would have weathered his first days at sea, the author would never know, nor can she calculate the "precise combination of ambition, wanderlust, and desperation which led him across two oceans" (19-20). The only thing she is sure about it is that it was "an empire in need" (20) that pulled Motiram across the seas. This is an example of imbrication of history and personal destiny. Not only this, Hajratwala claims that the "history of Surat is intertwined with the history of our diaspora" (23). This interweaving of history, memory and fiction blurs the arbitrary boundary between them. An example of this blurring is when she muses over the likely causes of Motiram's journey:

> To pay for his passage, he mortgaged the ancestral land. He left two brothers, his mother, his wife, and two sons at home, the year was 1909, and he was not afraid.
>
> Or: He was desperate. His father and three of his brothers had already died; he was the man of the house; he had to do something.
>
> Or: They had not yet died; he was carefree. He was young and did not think of his own death.
>
> Or: He thought of dying far away from home. When he took his family's leave, none of them

dared to hope to see each other again.
Or: They planned to meet in two years. He would work and make some money and come home.
Or: He might never come home again.
He would come home only once. (29-30)

This ambiguity in pinpointing what actually motivated Motiram to undertake a journey is emblematic of diasporic consciousness as well, split as it is between the discrepant centrifugal pull of staying on the margins of the host culture to maintain cultural difference which helps diasporic subjects preserve their concrete particularity and their unique nativist identity, and the centripetal pressures of assimilation in the host culture, which has its own compelling seductions.

The interweaving of the personal and the historical gives an opportunity to the author to go into detailed causes of indentured labour transported in the service of the growing Empire to countries like Fiji, South Africa, and the the Caribbean Islands initially. Digging out historical records from colonial archives she gives a graphic description of the difficulties and challenges faced by the first migrants, the racial abuse to which the *girmityas* were subjected and the middle space–geographical, psychological and identitarian–they occupied between the natives and the white colonial rulers, the space which gave them the scope for work and economic advancement away from grinding poverty of their home country.

Motiram made economic progress in Fiji. He did come back to Navsari, but rather than a homecoming or the proverbial return of the prodigal, his "trip became a recruiting mission. He turned evangelist, encouraging others of his caste to make the transition he had made" (37). He did all this because of plentiful opportunity in Fiji for economic advancement in contrast to Navsari which was in the clutches of severe famine at that time. Once he was able to take many people with him, they set up ghettos in their adopted land and their interactions with other Indians who did not belong to their caste were dictated strictly by their notions of caste purity and impurity. Hajratwala lays emphasis on persistence of caste in the Gujarati ghettos. In fact, the persistence of caste among upwardly mobile Gujarati families

settled in foreign lands highlights the ambivalences and dichotomies which mark the precarious existence of the diasporic communities as they negotiate different cultures at the same time. However, this conservatism of Motiram and other members of his caste gives the lie to those ludic versions of diaspora which claim that diasporas are exemplary transnational communities which are open minded and they resist autochthonous claims on their native identities. Motiram and his kin lead a peripheral existence and they very assiduously maintained their periphery although they sought economic prosperity. The diasporic liminality, as Hajratwala shows, covers the entire gamut of either/or to neither/nor repertoire of affiliations and alienations. To use the words of Maykovich, a sociologist, this "bicultural repertoire in action" (378), involves the entire dialectic of the modes of incorporation of periphery to centre and very diligent maintenance of periphery. Conventional, linear models of assimilation and acculturation cannot account for complex nature of diasporic belonging.

If, in an alien land, language is the home of a stranger, then contingency marks the linguistic home also. Cultures, languages and identities are on the move. Hajratwala shows how the "bicultural repertoire in action" leads to the emergence of new languages among diasporics. She writes:

> For Motiram the difference between the old and the new lands was also in the tongue. Of the three thousand free Indians who lived in Suva in 1911, two dozen, at the most, spoke Gujarati. The rest spoke a local version of Hindustani, quite distinct from any known in India. This linguistic innovation – and its sister tongues that were developing in Trinidad, Guyana and other indenture colonies – was a uniquely diasporic phenomenon, born of necessity. Flung together in these foreign lands, people from various parts of India blended together languages and invented a new way of communicating across regional barriers. (31-32)

From Fiji, the narrative moves to South Africa,

> Durban's "Little India", the Gray Street and the Indians drawn towards the Dark Continent with the lure of the lucre knowing nothing "of the greater forces of empire and conquest that were at play" (44). Ganda, Motiram Narsey's son, who migrated to Africa "did not intuit the heart of his new country, nor could he have foreseen how it would invent, over his lifetime, the world's most thorough and systematic net of anti-Indian restrictions; how it would grow more and more hostile to its dark citizens, against the flow of human progress, till it became a world pariah; or how fiercely his people would have to fight, in that golden land, for the right to earn their daily bread" (44-45).

However, given their never-say-die spirit, Ganda and his kin tried to convert all adversity into an opportunity. Ganda's eatery invented "bunny chow", a take-away loaf of bread filled with scoopful of vegetable or bean curry, which was born of South Africa's extreme and relentless version of segregation (60). Bunny chow is an example of performative hybridity given rise to by economic imperatives. It emerged as a culinary cultural artifact at the intersection of migration, racism, economy and politics. Like the bunny chow which became indigenous, the members of the Indian diaspora who were politically aware started considering themselves as South Africans. Despite all their sufferings, the Indians who fought for the rights of the blacks and the browns did not "see themselves as Indians who merely lived in South Africa. Instead, they were South Africans who happened to be Indian: sons of the soil, as much as any other" (74). However, the rising tide of apartheid in Africa around this time made Indians extremely vulnerable to racism of the white colonizers and the middle position of "pariah capitalism" (63) which they occupied between the colonizers and the truly oppressed natives made them vulnerable to backlash from the natives: "Because of the empire, impoverished Indians left home; because of empire, they had somewhere to go. And when the backlash came, it was empire to which they turned for redress" (63). Over and over, Hajratwala says, this "multi-level hierarchy would lead to a dangerous backlash against Indians in nations as far-flung as Uganda, Burma, the United States, Fiji – and South Africa" (63). This is borne out by how Indian-Africans are being targeted in many trouble-torn African countries.

Migration implies constant mobility and instability. It implies interminable search for belonging to the constantly changing other. In this unending flux, the quest for a non-contingent home remains a sort of unrealizable ideal and is replaced by what Avtar Brah, in her *Cartographies of Diaspora*, calls "homing desire" which is not the same as desire for a "homeland." According to her, "The *concept* of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*" (192-3). In this sense, diaspora does not create an unrequited desire for a lost homeland but a "homing desire", a desire to reinvent and rewrite home, and a desire to come to terms with exilic separation from home. Thus home acquires new meanings for diasporics. Hajratwala endorses this position: "Every migrant constructs, or spends her life seeking, a new definition of home. For me it is a word of many edges, multifaceted as a crystal or a goddess of a thousand and one names, an infinity of arms" (328). Home, in its multivalent forms remains a recurring trope in the text impacting Hajratwala's kin in Fiji, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and the United States. However, those who undertake multiple journeys leave behind not only their homes – whatever this word may connote to them – they leave behind something of their own selves. Talking about her father, she writes:

> My father's memories of 1957 are, naturally, distant, made more so by the fact of his multiple migrations ever since. Each time we move, we must leave something of ourselves behind; perhaps then the map of a diaspora consists, like a constellation, mainly of gaps, as in our personalities; we lack the physical objects, buildings, people whose presence might remind us of what we once were, might lend us some continuity." (169)

It is the acute consciousness of social, economic and cultural discontinuity, the consciousness of the inability of a fixed identity to be self-identical that opens up the Pandora's box called 'identity' for those who are on the move. Even the names of diasporic subjects, which are primary identity markers, change. Hajratwala's paternal great-grand-uncle, who would have been known as Ganda Dayaram (Dayaram being his father's name) throughout his life if he had lived in India, had to reinvent himself as Ganda Chhagan Kapitan in Durban (53).

Hajratwala's narrative grapples with the question of identity on umpteen occasions and on several levels. However, she confronts this question head-on and with great honesty when towards the end of the text, in the chapter titled "Body," she gives an account of her "border crossings," her journey from trying to meet parental expectations to living in San Francisco as a lesbian.

The problems of self-definition raise their head in an irrepressibly forceful manner in the minds of children of migrants, especially those who are second generation diasporics. How does the author define herself? Who does she affiliate with for affirmation of her identity? Where is her home? As an adolescent looking for a self-definition, she confronts these questions. She belongs neither here nor there. Subjected to hate crimes on account of the colour of her skin, she longed for total assimilation and escape from her Indian identity which told her apart from the whites in Detroit where her parents lived and where she had her schooling. Her alienation and her schizophrenia are evident in these words: "Between home and the world, between the India whose values my parents wanted to impart and the America in which I lived and learned to breathe, there seemed to be no overlap. Or rather, I was the overlap, and always there was the sensation of straddling, of being stretched" (319). It is thus this loosening of belongingness that raises the issue of identity for her.

It would be pertinent to invoke Zygmunt Bauman's ideas on identity to understand why and how we are infatuated with the issue of identity. It is, as Zygmunt Bauman suggests in his book *Identity* (2004), the loosening of the sense of belonging which is the root cause of this infatuation a. Bauman discusses the idea of identity in the context of what he calls liquid modernity which

signifies the late phase of modernity in which rapid change is the only constant in our society and social forms are in a state of flux, thus transforming the very experience of being human. According to Bauman, the "idea of "identity" was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the "ought" and the "is" and to lift reality to the standards set by the idea – to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea … Identity could only enter the *Lebenswelt* as a task, as an *as-yet-unfulfilled, unfinished task*, a clarion call, a duty and an urge to act …" (20). Thus, for Bauman, identity is performative, and it is an unfinished task.

When Hajratwala was in Michigan, she decided to leave Michigan to study at Stanford. Racism in Detroit, Michigan was quite rampant but she claims that was not running away because of racism; she was running away from her parents, her Indianness which gave her different coloured skin than that of American whites. She was also running away to find her own identity, especially her sexual identity. As a daughter of migrant parents, she says:

> … I have lived through multiple migrations, shifts from one world to another; and these geographic shifts were mirrored and amplified into emotional, mental, and even sexual ones. Each time I cross a border, I feel the push and pull in my body, a cacophony of competing desires. And always there are choices to make: what to assimilate, what to reject. Is it true that we are always, as migrants, and the children of migrants, attempting to choose what my parents call "the best of both worlds"? Or is it possible to transcend – no, not transcend, but enter into – the dualism, the splitting, the uncertain interstices between the worlds? Is it possible to integrate, even heal, the trauma of crossing; of many crossings? (301)

Her uncertainties, ambivalences and weakening of solidarity with her own people drove her to look for an identity which could help her bridge the gap between "is" and "ought" (Bauman) and make her feel whole once again. This migration

away from migrant parents is disorienting and yet, in Hajratwala's words, "To free oneself from a family already in free-float means taking a heady rush of air, the illusion of being an individual. One forgets the original nature of the longing, deep-rooted, almost atavistic, for clan, tribe, home" (329). However, this desire for freedom to becoming an individual comes at a price, the price of reinventing oneself. She did find freedom in reinventing herself as an American adolescent, in losing her virginity within a week of reaching Stanford and then migrating away from her taken-for-granted heterosexuality towards lesbianism. But despite all her efforts at fashioning a new identity for herself, she realized that earlier dichotomies persisted in new forms and that her "difference was immutable" (311).

Her repudiation of her Indianness, of her parents and their ways of life in order to assimilate, but the impossibility of doing so makes her offer the advice that "Perhaps each migrant should be warned at the border: Your children will be foreigners to you; are you prepared? It would cut the rate of chosen migration by half" (312). There is a hint of grief in this advice born perhaps of "transmitted nostalgia" (12) that marks her narrative, as she claims.

Her search for identity, in a way, also propels her to delve into those silences which mark lives of all human beings, especially those of diasporics. No wonder she writes "There is so much we do not know about our own lives, so many ifs and perhapses that guide us toward becoming ousrselves" (168). No wonder the roots search she undertakes is also a byproduct of this quest for identity, identity which is precarious in this era of constant change and disposability. This is what makes her cast a backward glance at all the routes her ancestors took and, in a manner reminiscent of Frost's "The Road Not Taken", the routes which they did not take – the choices they made out of their own volition and/or are forced on them by economic/historic necessity.

Thus, Hajratwala's *Leaving India* is a story of migration, but it is also, as Hajratwala reminds us, about "the ones we leave behind." In the process of narrating this story she teases out how personal motives for migration intersect with the forces of politics

and economics and in the process, she discovers how the fundamental tropes of migration "Gain and loss, give and take," and "the ebbs and flows" are as "certain as travel itself" (225). *Leaving India* is a quintessentially diasporic text that engages with diaspora in all its existential possibilities and potentialities.

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History and Contemporaneity: Conflicts and Changes in Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* and Mordecai Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero*

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The flavor of Jewish experience is significantly pervasive in Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* and Mordecai Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero* yet both the novelists do not let it cloud their vision and limit their scope, and rather present the Jew as alienated and Jewish history as the cause for this alienation. Both seem keen to put an end to this alienation and advocate the need for assimilation. In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, the generation of orthodox Jews like Melech Adler is not ready to forget history; but the younger generation of his grandson Noah Adler is already in the path of assimilation. It is shown to be an inevitable change with the passing of the generations. The life of Melech is controlled and guided by the history--the memory of the progroms, the Holocast, the fleeing, the diaspora and all the problems and sufferings associated with it. But Noah rejects this total banality of contemporaneity. The present, for Noah, has to include the future while for Melech, the present is just a continuation of the past. Malamud's faith as embodied in *The Assistant* is that any man can be a Jew by being good and any Jew can be a humanitarian propelled by his goodness.

In spite of Frank Alpine and Noah Adler being the protagonists of the novels under scrutiny, Morris Bober and Melech Adler also play vital roles. Morris Bober, though a Jew, is secular in his outlook and interprets the Jewish Law in broader terms:

> But they will tell me and I will believe them, if I forget the law. This means to do what is right, to be honest to be good. This means to other people.

> Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt anybody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. We ain't animals. This is why we need the Law. This is what the Jew believes (Malamud 106).

Frank seems to endorse the view of the writer when he remarks, "I think other religions have those ideas too. . . ." (106). The laws of the Torah are identified with the universal law and the Jew is synonymous with all good people. Morris Bober demonstrates through his meaningful life that what makes man truly religious is his inner struggle to evolve and to become a perfect individual by adhering strictly to all human values. Morris Bober can be taken as an ideal model presented to the Americans who are drifting away from their religion and values.

Melech Adler is a degenerate representative of the institution of religion. Judaism is taken up as an example because it happens to be the religion of both the writers. Morris Bober finds meaning in the eternal laws of Judaism and not in its temporal codes. Hence, he is considered Jewish though he does not follow the Jewish laws like going to the Synagogue, wearing a hat, keeping the kitchen and dietary requirements. But to Melech Adler "if a Jew bought things on the Sabbath he might as well go without a hat, and if a Jew went without a hat, he might as well miss evening prayer and if a Jew missed the evening prayer . . ." (Richler 17). Melech would perhaps conclude the statement remarking "he ceases to be a human being." Thus to Melech Judaism is just a bundle of codes. He does not follow the spirit of the religion. He is hypocritical and dishonest. His religiosity is not even valued by his own children.

His son Wolf Adler has not inherited anything religious or spiritual or humanistic from his father. The juxtaposition of the funeral meetings of Morris Bober and Wolf Adler would serve the purpose here. Condoling the death of Morris, the rabbi pays a rich tribute to Morris because he was loving, kind, honest, selfless and was always willing to serve and suffer for others. The rabbi adds

> There are many ways to be a Jew. So if somebody comes to me and says, 'Rabbi, shall we call such a man Jewish who lived and worked among the gentiles and sold them pig meat, trayfe, that we

> don't eat it, and not once in twenty years comes inside a synagogue, is such a man a Jew, rabbi?' To him, I will say, 'Yes, Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered and with the Jewish heart.' (Malamud 195)

While the Judaism of Morris Bober could create martyrs, saints and real heroes like Morris Bober and Frank Alpine, the religion of Melech Adler and Wolf Adler can only boast of 'bogus heroes' and 'smaller heroes.' Referring to Wolf Adler who died in his attempt to grab from the flames of fire th box that 'contained' his father's hoarded money, Rabbi Milton says, "Wolf Adler died for the Torah" (Richler 148).

To Frank, Morris has always been a symbol of saintliness; to Noah, his grandfather Melech, who hitherto had been his hero, now represents degeneration. Morris Bober has indeed demonstrated the possibilities through religion. Thus, Melech is a foil of Morris and that precisely causes the differences between the attitudes and choices of the young heroes. While Frank undertakes a centripetal journey and embraces Judaism as a mark of a good beginning in the path of his evolution, Noah takes a centrifugal journey to run away from the religion of his father and grandfather. While Frank Alpine prefers total surrender and suffering, Noah rejects both. Though Frank prefers to embrace 'religion' and Noah to escape 'religion,' one cannot come to the conclusion that Frank totally rejects the American dream and Noah delinks himself fully from his Jewish tradition. Frank's interpretation of the American dream would include ethical and moral values; and Noah's broad outlook would contain Judaic as well as Christian ethics. Like their models, they may not touch the extreme positions in life but strike a balance between the two.

There are signs of immaturity in both heroes. There is fact in Leslie Fiedler's argument that Frank "becomes a Jew without knowing in any explicit way what a Jew is" and in Laura Groening's observation that even his understanding of certain aspects of Jewishness is mechanical and misses the essential, human element that is represented by his mentor Morris Bober (56). Had he understood fully the lessons that he took from Morris Bober who never goes to synagogue, never keeps kitchen kosher,

not even prays three times a day and keeps his store open on Jewish holidays, he would not have started as a beginner from circumcision.

In the case of Noah Adler, we find no such awakening or understanding. His awareness of Jewishness is limited to an observation of the life-style of Montreal ghetto, particularly that of his grandfather. And as his grandfather, his role-model, is not trustworthy, he hates all Jews. This inductive leap in his understanding of the essential philosophy of his religion is the sign of immaturity and his knowledge of Judaism is inadequate. However, Noah's attraction towards the Jewish tradition cannot be denied. Even when he finally leaves the ghetto, rejecting the narrow world, as Ray Smith puts it, his "disengagement is complicated by attraction" (204). As he tells his grandfather, "it's freedom that I want" (Richler 34), and therefore, he decides to leave. But when he leaves, he takes one of his grandfather's scrolls with him and promises, "I can no more leave you, my mother, or my father's memory, that I can renounce myself. But I can refuse to take part in this . . ." (199).

Frank accepts entombment and imprisonment because it gives him security from vagabondage. Frank Alpine was Ward Minogue's slave--a slave to a rogue. Now he becomes a slave to a system that facilitates his evolution. Hence, he accepts it. But in the case of Noah the enslavement is to meaningless tradition and stultifying environment. Hence, he escapes the enslavement. To Frank, the store is the prison; to Noah the home is the prison. The former finds a home in the 'prison' and therefore, does not leave; the latter is homeless in his home and hence, he has to flee. To Alpine the store becomes a training ground, a monastery where he is free to emulate his spiritual guru. This physical imprisonment helps him to free himself from the imprisoning forces within him; it becomes self-discipline. As Abramson puts it "Alpine is imprisoned more by his own character flaws than by external walls" (31). As Tony Tanner opines, one sees in Malamud's writing the ways in which "an imprisoned man can forge a new self in his reaction to the imprisoning forces" (152). In both the novels imprisonment is used as a metaphor for the human dilemma.

While Malamud believes that one can attain moral

evolution through suffering. Richler dismisses the very concept saying "suffering is not meaningful; rather it destroys innocence and beauty" (Gibson 285). The ascetic monk St. Francis emphasised the need to give up physical desires. Morris taught him the need to suffer for others. Both have taught him that the right way of living is not living for oneself but living for the cause of others with an unconditional love for humanity. Frank accepts all these virtues and starts living a new life as implied through the act of circumcision. He has taken upon himself the mantle of his master by accepting responsibility and suffering. He perpetuates the tradition of the suffering Jew and becomes another Morris Bober. Noah has no inclination to suffer whatever the cause may be. He is even ready to leave his mother at a time when she needs him near her to share her problems and emotions.

Frank's love for Helen and Noah's love for Miriam are revealing. Frank undergoes the period of crisis in his life and overcomes the desire towards the carnal. From the level of a rapist he evolves to understand the real spirit of love. But Noah prefers the carnal in his decision to live with Miriam; while Helen and Frank as lovers include the physical and the spiritual, Noah and Miriam indulge in the consummation of each other. Noah is ready to leave behind his Jewish identity in order to join Miriam, to attain Canadian identity and to embrace humanity. Frank acquires an identity and finds meaning in his pursuit of love. Helen Bober reminds us of the Helen of Troy and Alpine has to wage a war within to win her heart.

Frank's difficulty is in getting Helen 'fully' -- body and soul. And to reach her soul, he has to evolve. But Miriam, like the Miriam of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, is voluptuous and lustful and needs the body of Noah very much. None of the two transcends to reach the level of the soul. Frank's love could be long-standing while that of Noah is temporal; and as Miriam doubts, Noah may change if he gets a better woman than herself. He has to still go a long way as he has not even made a good beginning like Frank Alpine. Like his grandfather he is going to commit the same 'sin' of living with a gentile woman. His love affair with Miriam parallels with the affair that his grandfather had with Helga. Frank has already crossed this stage and after he commits the rape he understands the futility of his flesh-hunting

and realizes that mere body without the soul cannot become a man's search; it could only be an animal's thirst.

Malamud and Richler, through their characters, criticize the current American and Canadian values. Good people like Morris Bober are no more respected; selfish people not only thrive but are also rewarded by the society. It is by dehumanizing the customers that Julius Karp exploits them and succeeds as a business man. In the material race, the competitors indulge in cut-throat competition and therefore Morris Bober falls apart and fails in his life. Even in his dealings with Helen, Nat is only business like, manipulating and justifying wrong deeds. He, like Louis Karp, wants to acquire Helen in the name of love and use her as a commodity. All that he wants is a lay without much trouble and Helen, half in love, obliged and regretted. It took a long time for her to realize how little he wanted from her. In his attempt to persuade Helen, Nat says,

> You got some old-fashioned values about some things. I always told you, you punish yourself too much. Why should anybody have such a hot and heavy conscience in these times? People are freer in the twentieth century. . . . "What", Nat argued, "would people's lives be like if everybody regretted every beautiful minute of all that happened? Where is the poetry of living?" (Malamud 92)

And when Helen rejects him, she becomes a "bitch" for him.

The 'problem' with Helen is that she has conscience. We find a freer 20th century woman in Miriam, while Jenny and Leah represent the traditional Jewish women in *Son of a Smaller Hero*. When Miriam comes closer to Noah who is younger to her by ten years, she decides to leave her husband and live with Noah as he is more satisfying. The final parting of Miriam and her husband Theo proves how family as an institution has lost its hold and value:

> Their parting has been clumsy. She had expected that there would be a sadness shared, or a kind exchange for the sake of memory. Instead, she had said that the alarm clock was hers and he had said that the radio was his--when it wasn't. What was

> to be done with the dishes? Wedding gifts? Which records were hers and which books were his? Finally and between sobs she had said that she would take nothing. But he had said no, he wasn't in need of her charity. So they had quarreled again. She had fled the apartment, leaving everything behind. But she had returned the next day when she was away at lectures and had taken her things away. She had left the alarm clock and radio behind. (Richler 112)

While Helen remains a "funny kid" with "old fashioned values," Miriam changes to enjoy "every beautiful minute," without any regret for leaving her husband with whom she lived for five years. But Helen, in all her attempts to come to terms with her "lovers" and to confront hard realities of life, is trapped in a constant conflict between the temporal and the perennial, the physical and the spiritual, the wealth and the values. Morris's struggle is not only with the materialistic Jews around him but also with his wife Ida who is bothered more about her husband's moral sensibility. Ida knows that Morris is good and honest; she also knows that these values and virtues are no more helpful in making a man successful in business life. She is not able to get the minimum comforts that she wants in her life. Helen is unable to continue her education due to poverty. There is always a widening gap between the aspirations and achievements of Bobers. Ida would argue with Morris.

> "So why you didn't have the sense to make out of your grocery a wine and liquor store when came out of the licenses?"
> "Who had cash for stock?"
> "So if you don't have, don't talk."
> "A business for drunken bums."
> "A business is a business. What Julius Karp takes in next door in a day we don't take in two weeks." (Malamud 6)

This kind of conflict between the need for humanisation and the pull towards dehumanizing materialism might leave Morris restless for a moment but could never change him.

The family of Melech Adler is already in doldrums. His

eldest son Wolf Adler could never make a real beginning in his life because he could not get the wealth of his father or become a partner in his business. He wastes his precious life in dreaming about the box that 'contains' the hoarded money of his father. He is neither a good son, nor a good husband nor a good father. Noah, his eldest grandson, who had already decided to leave and live with Miriam tells his grandfather:

> Can't you see how everything is falling apart around you? Your sons are Canadians. I am not even that. Don't you think . . . I can't be something, or serve something. I no longer believe in. As it is, well . . . I'm sort of between things. I was born a Jew but somewhere along the way . . . You can't go back Zeyda." (Richler 34)

Leah is unhappy in spite of her sacrifice, unlike Miriam, in the loveless life she had been leading with her husband Wolf Adler. Shloime is leaving for Germany after his assimilation to the world of the Goyim. Max has already become a heartless politician and a business man and is known for adultery and corruption. While the family of Adlers is thus disintegrating, the family life of Bobers is often disturbed by doubts and disillusionment.

Indeed, as Iska has aptly remarked Malamud has "fictively presented the decline of the American dream into the nightmare of an entire civilization in decay" (1981:3). While Richler is content with a portrayal of the Montreal ghetto, Malamud continues to be a humanistic spokesman and presents symbols like Morris Bober and Yokov Bok as good models. Jewishness is a metaphor for human condition in Malamud but it is not so in Richler. While Morris' stand is philosophical, ideal and metaphysical, Richler's is practical, pragmatic and mundane. While secular humanism shapes the life of Morris, Frank is shaped by him in turn as history carves out the direction in the life of Melech and acceptance of contemporaneity causes all the changes in the life of Noah.

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Stereotyping Women Authors in Contemporary Biopics

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Biographical films have long been a staple of Hollywood with many films achieving a high status for their success. The biopic has also earned popular appreciation and awards in recent times. Dennis Bingham defines the biopic as a film that "narrates, exhibits, and celebrates the life of a subject in order to demonstrate, investigate or question his or her importance in the world" (10). Both film biopics and adaptations distil and dramatise their sources—a life and a source text respectively. As with the written biography, screen biography is also a fusion of the factual and the fictional. It is a refraction of the story of the historical subject through the lens of adaptors who take liberties to make the biopic a commercially successful screen drama. A complex web of intermediality and intertextuality arises out of the directorial style, the screenwriter's perspective, the connotations of casting, multiplicity of sources, convergence of different media and the collision of the 'real' and the 'reel.' It is an important genre because it is one of the ways in which a cultural myth is created and disseminated. As adaptations, biopics could be reverential or subversive, could make or break myths, under-present or even misrepresent. It is a controversial and hybridized genre which provokes a variety of critical responses and calls for a more intensive academy attention than it has received so far.

This paper aims at studying the literary biopic and within it a further sub category—the woman author biopic. Cultural and commercial agendas are often involved in cinema's love not only for literary material but also the literary process. Literary biopics involve not only glamour and intellectual respectability but also a ready fan following and awards-friendliness. But invariably they

end up as intensely fictionalised tales that feed on personal misfortune, conveniently ticking off the events that inspired the fiction. What ultimately happens is that it takes away the subject's literary importance.

What lives Hollywood chooses to celebrate depends on a complex set of motives: women's achievements are often not given the big screen treatment. Like the literary canon, Hollywood too is dominated by male voices. In the real world women are hardly encouraged to be heroes and the same is reflected in the mirror offered by the biopic. While we have many 'Great Men' biopics, female biopics are few. Dennis Bingham's recent book *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?* discusses the role played by gender in the biopic. Bingham argues that the female biopic is different from the male biopic in that it depicts its protagonist on a downward journey and typically stages conflict and tragedy in women's success. He proposes that the female biopic is very rarely revisionist: "Madness, hysteria, sexual dependency, the male gaze and a patriarchal authorship: that is the classic female biopic" (310). He states that only a very few films were exceptions to this rule of showcasing the suffering of the woman protagonist. Two films that Bingham assigns to this group are *I Do Want to Live!*(1958) and *Star* (1968).

As mentioned earlier, this paper focuses on recent woman author biopics in order to test how far the life stories presented by mainstream cinema reinforce sexual stereotyping and to what extent have they succeeded in liberating the biographical subjects from the same. The two biopics chosen for analysis are *Sylvia* and *The Hours*---based on the lives of two very distinguished women authors of the twentieth century--Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf respectively. *Sylvia* (2003) raises two vital questions in the minds of the viewers: firstly, why make a biopic about Sylvia Plath and secondly what does the film actually tell us about the writer? Plath's suicide on 11 February 1963, at the age of thirty eclipses her legacy even today. She has often been tagged as 'schizophrenic' and 'mad'and the trend is to look at her as a victim of Ted Hughes' adultery and subsequent desertion. Plath is often compared with Marilyn Monroe. Like Monroe, the archetypal tragic Hollywood blonde, Plath has become the model of the mentally afflicted poet, the betrayed and abandoned woman. Munroe and Plath are not

simply two celebrities who committed suicide, they are women who are famous for dying young, marked by their femininity, public visibility, power and suicide stories. Their lives were defined by severe instability and have turned into bestsellers. Thus, as a famous and tragic heroine, Hollywood found Sylvia Plath both alluring and irresistible.

In the biopic *Sylvia*, screenwriter John Brownlow and director Christine Jeffs tell the story of the fatal death and mutually destructive relationship between young American poet Plath and British poet Ted Hughes. The casting of Gwyneth Paltrow as Sylvia Plath is incredible—the actress not only resembles the writer closely in appearance, her rendering of Plath as a gifted poet plagued by nightmares, is brilliantly restrained in its inwardness. But unfortunately the biopic misrepresents the author's life through its melodramatic plot, sensationalism and absence of poetry. The film portrays the passion and romance of the early relationship between the couple and its progress into jealousy, suspicion, infidelity and separation, culminating in Plath's suicide in 1963. The downward spiral commences as the couple begin to lead a secluded life in a farmhouse in Devon where the Wevills are invited over the weekend. The scene that results in Hughes' decision to leave is the one that follows the visit of the Wevills to Devon. Already in a fragile mental and emotional state, Plath becomes unhinged when she rightly suspects Hughes of having an affair with Assia Wevill (Amira Casar). On discovering her husband's infidelity, Plath retaliates and consumed by fury at his betrayal, she destroys and burns his work and then asks him to leave. Plath's life is painted in banal shades of emotional torment and domestic distress as she is caught up in maternal duties during the day and engages in writing sprees during the night. As the film proceeds towards the end it becomes increasingly loaded with foreboding and premonitions of death. Finally, on a particularly bleak winter, alone, feeling abandoned and locked inside her only 'blackness and silence,' she puts an end to her life.

Directed by Stephen Daldry, with a screenplay by David Hare, the 2002 film *The Hours* is an adaptation of Michael Cunningham's 1998 novel of the same name. Cunningham's novel in turn uses the original working title of Woolf's novel and bears an intimate affiliation to *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Cunningham

makes Woolf a character in his novel. Thus, *The Hours* is no longer just an adaptation of Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, it becomes an adaptation of Virginia Woolf herself. Mrs. Woolf in *The Hours* is a construct of three men who desire to define her: Michael Cunningham, Stephen Daldry and David Hare. Both the text and film versions of *The Hours* have an enduring impact on Woolf's identity as a writer. Cunningham's fictionalisation of Virginia Woolf in his novel has resulted in an ever increasing distance from the historical author. The reader of *The Hours* looks at Woolf through Cunningham's filter, which is once removed from the historical Woolf. The viewer of the movie *The Hours* looks at Woolf through several filters: David Hare's, Steven Daldry's, and even the actress Nicole Kidman's. Finally one approaches Woolf through a distorted refraction of various lenses.

The act of reinterpretation of the life of an author on screen, in the form of biographical film, is often also a political act. Biopics of troubled and gifted authors usually serve to reinforce the traditional binary construction of gender. In both the film texts we find that the cultural depiction of insanity and suicide are problematic. Whereas biopics with male protagonists such as *A Beautiful Mind* represents heroic psychological battles ultimately leading to enlightenment, those about mentally troubled women, such as *Sylvia* and *The Hours* portray darker, more morbid versions of personal struggle that end with suicide. The movie *Sylvia's* first visual is that of a headshot of Plath lying asleep, covered in a white sheet, pale as a corpse, eyes closed. It is an unsettling image and in the backdrop, in a sombre voice over, we hear about her innermost psychological turmoil:

> 'Sometimes I dream of a tree, the tree is my life. One branch is the man I shall marry and the leaves my children. Another branch is my future as a writer and each leaf is a poem. Another branch is a glittering academic career. But as I sit there trying to choose, the leaves begin to turn brown and blow away until the tree is absolutely bare.'

The message that is conveyed to the audience is that her life is foreshadowed by death. The theme of death is represented from the very outset in *Sylvia* in a similar way as it is done in the Virginia Woolf biopic *The Hours*. Both the biopics are framed by the

suicides of the authors in the opening and closing shots. The films thus set up the life-stories of these authors as heading inevitably towards their death.The decision to place it at the beginning of the films shows that the directors are ready to privilege the death of these women authors above everything else, thus suggesting that a tragic demise is the inexorable destiny of these twentieth century women writers. Through their focus on the suicides of these two women authors, Jeffs and Daldry powerfully foreground their deaths over their professional achievements and re-imagine these influential writers as mad, doomed victims.

In the film *Sylvia* there is no earnest attempt to look at Plath and her craft or the give and take of ideas between Plath and Hughes about art, politics, life or love. Plath is portrayed most of the time as a bitter, jealous housewife and only when their relationship fails, does she assert her identity as a poet-- the trauma of the separation feeds her muse. Early in the film we find Hughes and Plath reciting Shakespeare and Chaucer to one another as a playful act of courtship and later they join their friends to listen to a recording of Robert Lowell reading 'The Quaker Graveyard at Nantucket.' But after these early scenes, as the film moves forward, the conversation becomes humdrum which is rather disheartening because after all it is a biopic about two of the most distinguished writers of the English literature. The Hughes family's ban on the use of the poems in the movie may be the reason why we do not find the authors reciting from their own works. However, we derive no knowledge of what inspired Plath to use her art as an outlet for her emotional turmoil. She is seen to be cleaning the house and baking cakes to conceal her writer's block. During this time poetry was still a male domain. Plath finds herself embittered on witnessing Hughes' easy success while she keeps toiling for years to earn money and fame. Her inner demons start to emerge, provoked by the humiliation of seeing Hughes get attention from the literati and his female students while her creativity is constantly choked by the burden of mothering her children and bearing with Hughes' affair that eventually ruins their marriage. This renders the film as mere psychodrama of the Plath-Hughes relationship and not a biopic about the poets as writers. The central theme happens to be their relationship which again is related to other themes like jealousy, isolation, conflict,

infidelity, separation and guilt—all of which culminate in the suicide. As an oversimplified representation of Plath and Hughes as poets—the film fails to convince us.

In *The Hours* while Cunningham's portrayal of Woolf's insanity, thoughts, fears and homosexuality are fairly accurate, he provides no alternative for the reader but to perceive Woolf as a creative artist perpetually tortured by mental illness: "… she prays for dark the way a wanderer lost in the desert prays for water" (*Hours* 71). Cunningham foregrounds tensions in Mrs. Woolf's relationship with her husband. One afternoon, as Mrs. Woolf attempts to escape her life in the suburbs, intending to catch the train to London, Mr. Woolf comes in search of her "like a constable or proctor" (*Hours* 170). Contrasted against Mrs. Woolf's imagined freedom in London, Mr. Woolf, Richmond and the Hogarth House confine her. As Mrs. Woolf's flight to London is aborted, she reflects, "On this side is stern, worried Leonard, the row of closed shops, the dark rise that leads back to Hogarth House" (*Hours* 172). However, it is ironic that in her biography on Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee offers quite a different picture of Woolf's relationship with her husband: "Leonard Woolf's obvious suitability as a husband was both an attraction to Virginia and, perversely, an obstacle. He was the right age. He belonged to her 'family': he had loved Thoby . . . and he was the closest of her closest friends" (Lee 302). Cunningham's stress on Woolf's illness serves to fortify his reading of Woolf as a victim—trapped by society, by her husband, and by heterosexuality. By foregrounding lesbian sexuality, Cunningham makes Mrs. Woolf his own lesbian heroine. Contrasted against the sombre, morose relationship between Mrs. Woolf and Leonard is Mrs. Woolf's relationship with her sister, Vanessa. Just before Vanessa leaves Hogarth House, the two sisters share a kiss with hints of eroticism: "Virginia leans forward and kisses Vanessa on the mouth . . . behind Nelly's back, it feels like the most delicious and forbidden of pleasures" (*Hours* 154). The apparent innocence of the kiss diminishes and the repressed sexuality of Mrs. Woolf becomes more visible. Mrs. Woolf's engagement with lesbianism is also obvious as she creates her characters. As Cunningham's Mrs. Dalloway becomes the Clarissa of the future, her sexuality influences the interpretation of Virginia Woolf's Clarissa

Dalloway and her sexuality, and by extension, also the sexuality of the author herself. Although Mrs. Woolf is an imagined and fictionalized version of Cunningham's "Virginia Woolf," what is so perturbing is that Mrs. Woolf of *The Hours* could come to signify Woolf herself. It is not simply Cunningham's perception of Woolf which problematizes the issue, it is the mass media event of Cunningham's "Virginia Woolf" becoming the new Woolf--- the fact that people may now read and see Virginia Woolf and her text through Michael Cunningham's filter which is dangerous. The 2002 film *The Hours* adapts from Cunningham novel, ultimately amplifying the issues of madness, suicide and homosexuality. This in turn distances the viewers of the film even more from the original text of *Mrs. Dalloway* and from Woolf herself.

The subversive act of limiting Plath and Woolf is apparent in the two biopics, and though the filmmakers eulogise Plath and Woolf as woman authors and give them an after-life in media, they are completely unfaithful to the portrayal of both the feminist writers' message and their persona. What happens to the two authors in their cinematic representations is what Virginia Woolf had spoken about in *A Room of One's Own*--that if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of great importance," . . . some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband" (41). Indeed the 'reel'version of women authors mythicize the philosophy and personality of the author, in order to adapt the same into the popular mass medium of the film. The filters of the adaptors inevitably alter the way we perceive the author. Therefore, it is important to take into account the gender and socio cultural background of the adaptor. Biopics are endowed with clear ideological and cultural significance--they can influence, shape and construct public opinion. *Sylvia* and *The Hours* direct the audience to look at events and the authors in a certain way. They once again reinforce the impression that even today Plath and Woolf are figures typically depicted as one-dimensionally tragic, remembered for their traumatic lives and morbid deaths. The films thus engage in the 'mythisization' of Plath and Woolf in the Beauvoirian sense, i.e. when 'myth' is used as a tool to stereotype women and thereby to arrange society into patriarchy.

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Existential Angst in Philip Larkin's Poetry

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'Existentialism' is a subjective interpretation of human life concerned with the existence in its totality. It emphasises the interrelation and interaction of man with the outside world. For man existence has always become a problem. Because of his rationality man is able to look critically at his own life and at life in general. He cannot help comparing his own mode of being with that of other creatures. Man wants to know what he is and where he stands. Human being is concerned with his own existence as the weight or burden of life lies heavily on them.

The sense of 'exist' that inspired the name "existentialism" was first articulated by the Danish religious philosopher Soren Kierkegaard who is regarded as the 'father of existentialism.' Kierkegaard held 'existence' as a specifically religious category. He emphasises the importance of man's self-realisation. According to Kierkegaard, only those persons living in the religious mode of existence can come to the full realization of the self (Heinemann 2). Kierkegaard considered that existence is the 'attainment of self-possession in the spiritually directed and determined life of the individual' (Reinhardt 16). Friedrich Nietzsche, a German existential thinker in Kierkegaard's manner, 'valued more highly the subjectivity of the thinker than the objectivity of the "systems", more highly the growth of human personality than the conceptual integrity of abstract thought' (Reinhardt 60). But their religious belief differs from each other. As a Christian, Kierkegaard sought for a restoration of religious integrity of human existence. But Nietzsche, the neopagan, was in favour of dechristianization of man. He said that Christianity had brought about the corruption of human existence (Reinhardt 60). Realising that human beings fail to become what they are potentially, Nietzsche suggests 'a dynamic ethics of self-realisation.' Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, once said

'For me the haunting question is and has been not man's existence, but 'being-in-totality' and 'being as such'. But the central concept of his "*Being and Time*" is 'existence, not 'being' (Reinhardt 132). For the interpretation of the meaning of 'Being' Heidegger's first objective is to analyse human existence ontologically. Unlike other existents like a tree, a stone, or animals human life alone is concerned about its Being and its potentialities. Only human life makes choices and decisions and thereby exists authentically.

Karl Jaspers**,** the German psychiatrist and philosopher, was the first one to propound the philosophy of *Existenz* which is 'the properly human way of existing' (Flynn 132). 'The being which stands over against the world of objects . . . is that being which is essentially the potentiality of its own being. This is what Jaspers calls *Existenz*' (Copleston 160). A man is the possibility of his own being, and that he is not already made, finished and classifiable. He is in the constant process of creating himself and freely realising his being through his own choices. The fundamental thesis of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism is the proposition that 'existence precedes essence.' In every sphere of his life --- historical, social and biological --- man comes first into existence and then makes himself to be what he is. Unlike other things or creatures human beings are the outcome, not of their given and fixed nature or 'essence', but of the choices that they have made (Crowell 35). In his lecture 'Existentialism and Humanism' Sartre asserts that man is a 'being who exists before he can be defined by any concept . . . . At first he is nothing. Only afterwards he will be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it (Reinhardt 175). What Sartre means is that 'there is no predetermined human essence and there is no human nature fixed in advance of human existence' (Priest 25).

Though Philip Larkin, who was born in Coventry on 9 Aug 1922, is generally regarded as post-war Movement poet, he reflects in his poetry the 'existential questions of identity, choice, isolation and communality' (Swarbrick 1). Most of his poems focus an existential argument about the nature of individual identity. This individual self feels threatened by failure, disappointment, angst, depletion and above all death. No other post-war poet could catch the contemporary British life as Larkin

poignantly did in his poetry: the decline of English culture, military power and economy resulting from the dissolution of the British empire.Widely recognised as England's Unofficial Poet Laureate, 'Larkin came to be identified with an essential and enduring Englishness' (Regan 1). In *The Less Deceived* (1954), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), *High Windows* (1974) Larkin successfully portrayed the quality of ordinary life in the mid-twentieth century: dreary routines of existence, dreams and ideals beyond our grasp. Larkin once said, "I write poems to preserve things I have seen / thought / felt both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself" (Timms 59,60).

'Angst' or 'existential anguish' is a common aspect in many of Larkin's poems. The defeatism and rootlessness which Larkin incorporates as part of existence leads to this angst. His poems are characterised by a sense of loss, and of the changing qualities of English life'. Characteristic of much of his poems is his insight into the lives of the individuals trapped within an unsatisfactory situation (Day 10). Larkin shares in his poetry the existentialist idea that after death is nothingness. Following are the poems exploring the various facets of existential angst in Larkin's poetry.

A sense of frustration arises out of the poet's ambivalent attitude to the pictures of the album in 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album'. The poet's angst is created as he is shocked at the thought of the gap between the hopeful past and the hopeless present. A sense of anguish is created in the poet's mind by the photographs which represent a past that is irrecoverable and hence painful to recall. Seeing the girl photographed with a few young fellows causes some anxiety to the poet. The poet's existential angst arises out of the fact that he was not present at a time in the past when the girl existed in the company of other young men. So the girl as she existed in past remains inaccessible to him. The photographs arrested not the real girl but the girl as she posed herself by putting on 'a special posture for a fleeting moment' (Chatterjee 141). What caused great pain in the poet is his feeling of exclusion from the woman's past and his feeling of freedom to cry for the passing years:

'In short, a past that no one now can share,
No matter whose your future; calm and dry,

It holds you like a heaven, and you lie
Unvariably lovely there,
Smaller and clearer as the years go by.'

(*Collected Poems* 72)

'Church Going' focuses on the 20th century's agnosticism together with the poet's own existential dilemma. 'Larkin's dilemma is not whether to believe in god but what to put in God's place' (Regan 33). Larkin declared that the title of the poem suggests 'going to church, not religion and the union of the important stages of human life – birth, marriage and death – that going to church represents' (Chatterjee 166). Larkin's speaker feels isolated from the setting in which the church building is seen as surrounded by the forces of nature. The church building which contains some aspects of nature is turning into 'A shape less recognisable each week, / A purpose more obscure.' The sense of isolation and alienation which are the characteristic features of existential angst occurs when the speaker cannot easily identify his feelings with external phenomenon. The speaker visits the church alone, when nobody is there. This intensifies his sense isolation. The speaker's crucial dilemma occurs in the fourth stanza when he asks:

'But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone? (*CP* 98)

The loss of religious belief prompts the speaker to wonder what makes the church to stand for in an agnostic age. Though he struggles to set himself free from his 'disbelief, he is in existential anguish as he has no idea what can take its place. The speaker's wondering what will happen 'when churches fall completely out of use' lead him to a conclusion in which the fear of death and the loss of religious belief are counteracted by an ineradicable faith in human and individual potential' (Regan 33).

'A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.' (*C P* 98)

One of Larkin's prominent obsessions is alienation which in association with the theme of death makes him a representative post-war British poet. In 'Wants' Larkin's speaker 'looks through identity to nothingness' (Swarbrick 60). Beneath all our activities lies the desire for death, which is loneliness in the extreme.

However, the pretended anxieties resulting from the calendar showing social engagements, the life insurance as a protection against death, the printed instructions of the sex manuals for indulging in sex, the family is photographed under the flagpole for perpetuating the memory of family relationships, the fearful turning away from death – underneath all these activities there lies the desire to be alone. Social engagements cannot disguise our wish for death which is the ultimate form of aloneness. In spite of our existence as social beings we want to be isolated from all socializing and we most desire non-existence:

'Beyond all this, the wish to be alone:
However the sky grows dark with invitation-cards
However we follow the printed directions of sex
However the family is photographed under the flagstaff –
Beyond all this, the wish to be alone. (*C P* 42)

Larkin's willed solitude appears in 'Reasons for Attendance' where the poet attempts to explain why he prefers isolated life of the artist to the ordinary fellowship of everyday life. This time the speaker is a university librarian who at the time of passing a dance-hall watches from outside the young couples 'all under twenty-five', 'dancing on the beat of happiness'. In an attempt to defend his choice of a solitary mode of living, the speaker asserts by the negation that happiness is not just to be found in partnership. In comparison with this the excluded onlooker is drawn towards the solitary devotion to art. Rather than the dancers' search for happiness the speaker, in his self-conserving detachment, remains outside by persuading himself that happiness is not to be found by any single means. Thus the speaker is poised between two opposing pulls--between union and individuation, between intimacy with other person and solitary devotion to the 'rough-tongued bell' of Art. The title is reminiscent of existential angst not only in its reference to whether one should be at the dance hall but also to one's whole reason for attendance. The sting at the end of the poem strikes a note of doubt which echoes back through the whole: 'both are satisfied, / If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied.' Here it is obliquely hinted that both the dancers and the solitary listener are victims of self-deception.

Larkin's obsession with existential predicament finds

expression in 'Ambulances'. Here ambulances are seen as impersonal, frightening reminders of death which is the inescapable destiny of humanity: 'They come to rest at any kerb: / All streets in time are visited'. The arrival of an ambulance in the locality calls forth in the minds of the onlookers the prospect of immanent death. They become conscious of their own mortality and at the same time sympathise with the departing patient being carried by the ambulance: '*Poor soul*, / They whisper at their own distress'. With death 'the unique random blend / Of families and fashions' comes to an end. The entire life of an individual loses its meaning in the face of approaching death. With the confrontation of the ambulances the onlookers are brought closer to the nothingness of their own existence:

> 'And sense the solving emptiness
> That lies just under all we do,
> And for a second get it whole,
> So permanent and blank and true.' (*CP* 132)

'Mr Bleany' focuses on existential angst of an unlucky bachelor whose life is marked by meagreness and dullness. Mr Bleany, whose very name suggests 'bleakness' and 'meanness', was the previous tenant of the room which the speaker is now going to occupy. The landlady's detailing of the dingy lodging tells us a good deal about what sort of man Bleany was. The physical details of the room reveal the rootlessness and loneliness of Bleany's life. Bleany, who eventually becomes the speaker's double, played the football pools without ever winning, spent his summer holidays with 'the Frinton folk' at the same resort and passed Christmas always with his sister in Stoke. His shabby way of living exposes a life of monotonous regularity, a habit of foolish expectancy and above all, existential anguish. The little incidentals of his low-keyed existence suggest a life of solitary emptiness occupied only by the meagre substance of habit. Bleany's alienated life, in parity with his drab surroundings, seems to have been a failure and is 'like a death-in-life' (Timms 98).

Reflecting on bachelorhood and marriage, and on isolation and community 'Dockery and Son' reveals an existential crisis of the speaker who, while returning to his former Oxford College and on knowing that his junior contemporary Dockery now has a son there, self-justifyingly tries to deny the differences

between Dockery's life and his own (Swarbrick 111). He is excluded not only from his former college but also from his past since the existential angst of the present is emphasized by the immediacy of the past. The opportunity for indulging in past nostalgia has become a disappointment for the speaker. Feeling a bewildering sense of isolation the speaker thinks how young Dockery must have been when he fathered a son. By choosing to marry and having children Dockery acted on the false premise that 'adding meant increase' whereas for the narrator it means 'dilution' (Swarbrick 112). The speaker argues that such assumptions are not 'Innate' but 'more a style/ Our lives bring with them'. Considering fatherhood as a 'dilution' the speaker feels that his 'actual existence might be challenged by being involved in procreation' (Day 56). No matter how the speaker is different in not having a son and Dockery in having a son – the differences between the lonely bachelor and family man are 'reduced to sameness by the imminence of death' ,'the only end of age'. Both Dockery's fatherhood and the speaker's lonely bachelorhood follow an ineluctable succession from 'boredom', through 'fear', to 'age' and finally death:

> 'Life is first boredom, then fear.
> Whether or not we use it, it goes,
> And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
> And age, and then the only end of age.' (*CP* 153)

'Vers de Societe' hangs on the existential dilemma presented by an invitation to a dinner party: to accept it or to decline it. Accepting the invitation means socialising, while declining it means isolation, to be alone. Fear of loneliness and uncertainty of being alone in a treacherous dark urges the speaker to accept the invitation. On the other hand, peaceful comfort at home compels him to reject it. The speaker's angst is precipitated by the debate between the relative value of sociability and solitariness. Socialising necessitates one to go through the anguish of taking part in the narrow, materialistic conversations: 'Asking that ass about his fool research'. Though the speaker was at the beginning reluctant to accept the invitation, ultimately he settles for sociability. The bleakness of being alone impels the speaker to come to the conclusion that 'All solitude is selfish' and 'Virtue is social'.

'The Old Fools dwells on the horror of ageing and existential infirmity on behalf of the old people who lose self-awareness when decrepitude overpowers them. The poet's angst at the puzzle of ageing and his fear of death onto the aged is expressed with an acute sense of immediacy:

'At death, you break up: the bits that were you
Start speeding away from each other for ever
With no one to see. It's only oblivion, true:
We had it before, but then it was going to end.' (*C P* 196)

In a predominantly bleak atmosphere the poem depicts the horror of mortality and presents death as a frightening ultimate reality. The alienated condition of the old is explicitly stated at the end of the third stanza where the poet says that they really inhabit a different world: 'That is where they live: / Not here and now'. But the initially spoken contemptuous epithet 'the old fools' has by now become an expression of compassion in the proclamation that we all are turning towards death, the inevitable reality of life.

In Larkin's poetry man is shown as caught up in the tragedy of everyday life and as viciously brutalized in an uncompromising existence. Larkin's protagonists feel tormented by the awareness of transience and futility of life. They affirm that life is a perpetual struggle and unending search for meaningfulness to a meaningless existence. The melancholic and pessimistic vein, which runs through Larkin's poetry to give it a positive stance, emerges not out of the poet's failure to understand the truth of life but out of his notion that the end of life is death.

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Locating Connections: The Alienated Soul of James Baldwin

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Francis Bacon in his essay, "Of Friendship," has rightly said that "Crowd is not company; and faces are but gallery of pictures" (Qtd. in *Essays, Civil and Moral* 27). We all need an emotional anchor, a connection which may hold our life with what or whom we are attached. The canvass of our life is filled with many beautiful colors, if we are connected to it and the anchor is strong. But in this post-modern world the connection among human beings is conditioned, and acceptance depends upon the ideological terms of race, gender, caste and physical attributes. Difference of these said features does not diminish the humanity of someone. But the prejudice of the dominant class creates unseen barriers which separate people. People all over the globe have their share of sufferings. Physical wound can be healed up, but the one inflicting the soul of a human is ever tormenting. Alienation is one such wound which causes a long journey of a human being for locating connections. Through various routes, he tries to get to his roots. One such example is James Baldwin, a representative of Afro-Americans, who was torn between two worlds–Black and White–in the United States of America. It has been rightly suggested by Henry Louis Gates Jr. that: "If Martin Luther King's was the oratorical spoken voice of the Civil Rights Movement, James Baldwin's was its intellectual written Voice" (*The African-American Century* 237).

James Baldwin was an afro-American novelist and essayist who portrayed the pain of being twice removed from his roots in his works. He was born in America, but the racial atmosphere of his motherland forced him to lead a life of a gypsy. In his own words, he was born in exile. The roots of his forefathers were in Africa, so in a way, he was once removed from his roots. Then he

had to leave America and settle first in Paris and then in Switzerland in search of an 'imaginary homeland'. And in this way he is twice removed from his roots. His was the greatest misfortune that the country of his birth, whose foundations were laid down by his forefathers, denied recognition to him. But his soul could not accept existence out of his own country. Such was the dilemma of an artist who, along with his kin, was alienated within his own self and his own country. This pain of separation from his own people and country made his life wretched. Baldwin penned down his feeling of alienation and its effects in most of his works like: *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Nobody Knows My Name* (1961), *The Fire Next Time* (1963), *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), *No Name in the Street* (1972), *The Price of the Ticket* (1985) etc. His interviews were also full of agonizing experiences.

The sense of alienation is always in proportion to attachment. The stronger the attachment, the greater will be the pain of alienation. In the case of James Baldwin, both the things were in extreme throughout his life. But he made his suffering his strength, a kind of bridge to claim unconditional affinity with the United States of America, what though one-sided. In an Interview with Nikki Giovanni, he said that: "At some point you have to realize that your suffering does not isolate you, your suffering is your bridge" (Qtd. in *A Dialogue: James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni* 46). Why did he think so? It is because he, as a writer, felt his responsibility towards his country and countrymen. He cherished the dream of an American society wherein people would not be divided on the basis of color and race. And to actualize this dream he battles with American society not to defeat it, but to win its faith and love. He announces, in his essay "The Creative Process" that: " . . . the war of an artist with his society is a lover's war, and he does, at his best, what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to himself and, with that revelation, to make freedom real" (*The Price of the Ticket* 318).

Baldwin was born in a white racist society of America which was very hostile to the people of color. Child Baldwin was ignorant about this color line. He did not discriminate between white and black, and was equally attached to them. The innocence of child was shaken many a time by the warnings which he received from his father and other black people. But he retained

his faith in America feeling him to be a part of it. His humanist values forced him to understand the real meaning of the words like civil and Christian. Ironically enough, he understood it by being among the most uncivil and unchristian people, and both blacks and whites were among them.

It is true that the mother is the first teacher of a child. Whatever humanists values Baldwin has, have been given by his mother. It is she who taught him to be civil. She told him to show respect to the white ladies irrespective of the fact (Which history contained) that the black women had been subjected to all short of indignities by white people. In his conversation with Margaret Mead recorded in *A Rap on Race* (1971) Baldwin Says:

> I was fourteen and I was taught by my mother to always stand up on subways and give a seat to a woman. But some of the preachers told me that I should never give my seat to a white woman . . . This gave me a tremendous conflict for a while . . . I solved this problem very neatly by never sitting down in the subway . . . I had to think about it and think it through myself and decide weather a woman's color is more important then the fact that she is woman (47).

Such was the bond of Baldwin with his people, who never thought of any kind of separation from whites believing them to be his own. He narrates an incident where he accompanies his friend to his church. On being asked "whose little boy are you?" by the pastor, Baldwin replies: "Why yours" (The *Fire Next Time* 29). This again shows that Baldwin had formed an affinity with everyone.

But his quest for being loved and accepted was shattered by and by and he felt a kind of isolation from his own people, black as well as white and from God also. One who has put his utmost faith in love and fraternity, if the same person in confronted with almost opposite situations, naturally he will feel cheated, and lonely. Baldwin says: ". . . it was as though I were yelling up to Heaven and Heaven would not hear me. And if Heaven would not hear me, if love could not descend from Heaven . . . Then utter disaster was my portion" (The *Fire Next Time* 30).

Baldwin's works describe his process of realization that he

lives in a racist society in which his existence is hardly noticed. Living in his own country, paradoxically enough, he was out of it. As he writes in 'The American Dream and the American Negro" (1965): "It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you" (*Collected Essays* 715).

White America did not accept him which leads him to find out where does he belong to? He felt like an alien in his own motherland. He was standing in the middle of a road, one end leading towards Africa, the other into American mainstream from his marginalized position. Both ways had their own difficulty. Certainly he could not go back to Africa. Alex Haley poses this problem in *Roots* (1976): "After I've found out where I come from, I can't understand a word they're saying" (680). On the other hand, white America relegated him to a secondary position. That precisely is the problem of blacks who neither can go back and nor cannot be all Americans. They inhabit two worlds--one African and one American--within them. W.E.B. Du. Bois writes in *The Souls of the Black Folk* (1905) that:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (3).

Racial discrimination made it impossible for Baldwin to continue his writing career in America. So Baldwin had to leave his mother country. But there was no home for Baldwin anywhere. France and Switzerland made him more lonely and nostalgic. His works while living abroad clearly shows his helplessness as to what he should do to change the situation. His soul was torn inside as he told Margaret Mead: "I am an exile. But I was an exile long before I went away. Because the terms on which my life was offered to me in my country were . . . entirely intolerable and

unacceptable . . . My country drove me out. The Americans drove me out of my country" (*A Rap on Race* 220-221).

Baldwin had a lot of reasons to be angry but he never let it overpower his hope. Despite his separation from his country; despite his alienation from his own people; and despite all that he was forced to endure, he always thought himself to be an American. He showed America his complex fate and experience wherein he found it difficult to go and meet happily his kinsfolk; found it difficult to love his white brother; found it difficult to live in America; found it difficult to leave it; found it difficult to live abroad; and found it difficult to make lies with his African roots. As he said: ". . . this depthless alienation from oneself and one's own people, in sum, is the American Experience" (*Notes of a Native Son* 89).

But Baldwin made this his strength, not his weakness. The world into which he was born seemed to work against his talent, trying to crush him down, but he dealt with it in a different way. First he took full authority and connected himself completely with America, then in a frank and honest manner criticized the wrongs of his people and country. As he stated: "I love America more then any other country in the whole world, and exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually" (*Notes* 9). He had made his 'truce' with the reality of his existence, yet one cannot fail to see the unspoken pain of alienation behind his words:

> I know, in any case, that the most crucial time in my own development came when I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West; when I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa . . . I was an interloper; this was not my heritage. At the same time I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use . . . I would have to appropriate these white centuries. I would have to make them mine – I would have to accept my special attitude, my special place in this scheme – otherwise I would have no place in *any* scheme (*Notes of a Native Son* 78).

James Baldwin died on December 1, 1987. It was his misfortune that he could not live happily in America and died

with an incomplete hope on a foreign soil. His sense of alienation again gets reflected in his essay "The New Lost Generation" (1960) where he says that: "the people who hate this country can never manage, except physically, to leave it, and have a wretched life wherever they go" (*Collected Essays* 663). His exile was self-imposed, but his distance from his country brought him even closer to it. On the foreign soil, he found out that he could never get far away from America. Ironically enough, it was outside America that he was known as an American, whereas he was hardly accepted inside it.

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Global Warming: Development and Significance of Climate Fiction (CLi-Fi) (Climate Change - Threat and Challenge)

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The litterateurs or those interested in 'Indology,' know fairly well that Indian way of life is full of idealism and the fables in all Indian literature of the kind are replete with directive principles aimed at preparing individuals to face all odds of life confidently and enjoy happy life in continuity, not one shot (or one time) happiness. Being so, let us start with one fable. In the celebrated story of an elephant that was described by six blind men, and adapted from an Indian fable by the famous poet, John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887); in that story, the six men attempt to comprehend an elephant, but each describes the part of elephant that is nearest to him. One touches its trunk, another tusk, yet another tail, and so on. Each blind man tries deducing the elephant's shape from the part that he has touched. We can observe that scientists fall into this same trap: they adopt myopic view, of course by choice, become engrossed in particular lines of research, and in the process, act those fabled blind men, and miss swaths of the burgeoning literature or they miss opportunity of putting together pieces of valued literature that might shed better light on the holistic life. Leave aside the researchers; each of us becomes a scientific blind-man in this way, trying to describe an elephant by parts. The question that I am attempting to address in this review is akin to the one that those six men individually faced: how much information has the scientific world accumulated thus far that could help us to comprehend the broader picture of climate change biology? This is the question related to life and concerns humanity all over.

The world-view comprehending the kind of humanistic social setting, as we all knew till about two hundred years in the

past is stylishly re-fashioned with look and living pattern that we proudly call 'modern'. That life-setting in 'nature' is gone, never to return due to science and technology blinding the human beings. We can fearlessly and shamelessly call the modern society afflicted with perpetual fear: fear of the unknown – fear of inhuman conduct of humans using devices of inflicting untold oppression and pain. Even if nobody is talking explicitly about it, it's clear that something terrible has happened and in its wake, realising dark era ahead threatening the very existence of humanity, the human race must once again reset its priorities and aim at steering clear of the mess. Keeping in view the will to live – and live in harmony and happiness - can we, in this resource-scarce emerging world, fashion some kind of idyllic agrarian commune, adopting conducive living-pattern with shared goods, serene faces, and hemp robes? Or are we designed and doomed to be selfish hoarders, creating even greater scarcity for sheer self-aggrandisement, which we can then leverage for our own benefit? Should we not think of life as participation with nature, mutual fulfilment, sharing of natural resource, searching for alternate energy resources, and creating environment for bonding of humans across borders of all kinds.

Present Study

Living in the state of nature, as naturalist political scientists like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, James Mill, John Stuart Mill and Jean Jacques Rousseau have mentioned rather philosophized using dialectical approach, was full of peace and harmony, and most satisfying as all individuals were free in every respect and there was no oppression or cruelty in relations. It was anarchy with rigorous self-discipline in group life. We find that a frail risk analyst rediscovers his inner frontiersman in a devastating flood that hits Manhattan; an insightful rural woman glimpses the grace of God in the revelations of biological science; genetically engineered hominids who purr themselves to wellness inherit a devastated Earth. All of these plots (bounties of nature, destructive potential of modern scientific devices, need of humankind to live in peace and harmony) belong to the genre of "Cli-fi". Cli-fi, though thought by many as cliché or jargon, is the latest literary genre that is growing very fast in popularity as the theme and the topics tough humanity as a whole, not in fragments.

Climate fiction (Cli-fi) has been described as a close cousin of science fiction, and rightly so, as they both engage with controversial political problems, making use of fiction's ability to conjure up possible worlds. As a matter of growing concern since 1985, the topic of climate change demands more scientific subtlety and moral nuance in its literary treatment and presentation before the intelligentsia than the problems presented by technologies intended to destroy the world or threaten humanity. Now the gas-fuelled car, rather than the bomb, is the centre of impending disaster. The science fiction writer, Ursula K. Le Guin, has noted rather defined the relationship of sci-fi to realism. Like sci-fi, Realism is based on a common belief that science shows us what is real. This is also the case with climate fiction. Some say Cli-fi is a new literary genre that will help us prepare psychologically for confronting the monstrous problem, called global climate change. There is growing acceptance of the fact that sci-fi is a new form of literature which truly faces the unknown consequences but is based on solid foundation of awe-generating realism (reality).

Being life-threatening, climate fiction (Cli-fi) has drawn also the attention of mainstream literary figures; one of them being Margaret Atwood. A world famous fiction writer in her own right, she is one of the pioneer-writers in this field; she has penned her own Cli-fi trilogy, *MaddAddam* in a decade in which such literature proliferated, and she, being prolific writer herself, participated in turning over thoughtful and effective fiction; the decade began in 2003. Barbara Kingsolver, wrote masterly articulated fiction that stirred the conscience of the readers; she wrote of the warming (global warming due to climate change) in *Flight Behaviour* by focusing on one young woman's shocking discovery of millions of monarch butterflies near her home in rural Tennessee (USA).

Barbara Kingsolver's Flight Behaviour is a masterly piece of literature that offers a prime example of this symbiotic relation between science and story-telling. By the end of the novel that she produced in style that grabs the attention of the reader, who then forgets his/her dinner being deeply engrossed in the theme and presentation content, particularly the narrative, the central character in the novel, Dellarobia Turnbow, recognizes herself as a principal actor in the horrible crisis of our Sixth Extinction that pervades the world over through the particular instance of the

collapse of the North American monarch butterfly. The central character in the novel is guided by the novel's anti-hero personage in Ovid Byron, who enters her rural community facing climate change and denies recording the butterfly's disappearance. Dellarobia, as other mortals in unpleasant or dangerous (or even threatening) situations do, measures her community's evangelical preference (praying to God for protection and peace) for the immaterial and otherworldly against an increasingly persuasive scientific, realist point of view.

We find that Kingsolver's novel suggests that literature is necessary to make the scientific facts of climate change believable to the general public. Ovid Byron, a scientist named after two great writers, functions as a powerful storyteller in the narrative. The narrative portrays where science typically plays the role of a superior and "real" form of knowledge, cli-fi suggests that science only becomes knowledge through story-telling and image-making. Imagery in fiction drives the readers to serious thinking and thereby a general debate ensues. This is what the novel strives to do; the writers pen is powerful and makes an impact.

Climate fiction (Cli-fi) is important not because it provides solutions, but because it allows readers to imagine and experience the complexity and consequences of climate change. It acts as though to enter a fiction is to enter a commitment to shared imagination, to the social action of claiming a point of view in the interest of all humans – human value. "Humans are hardwired for social community,"*(Flight Behaviour*, 323). Kingsolver's Ovid Byron declares; it is though reinforcement of age-old view of sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists. Novels, all literature, certainly Cli-fi is such literature, are social forms of knowing and sharing what we know. It goes to remind the readers that sharing and exchange of information, ideas, opinion, feelings and emotions is the subject-content of communication, also of human communication, and the novel does so effectively to arouse the conscience of a human being and resolve to contribute to the common approach and agenda for community action. With the help of climate fiction (Cli-fi), the conversation thereby generated, might become large enough and result in mass movement to meet the challenge of climate change itself.

Another question to be answered at this stage is: how long

can we continue to teach Shakespeare and Shelley and make the readers/students aesthetically love the beauty of daffodils or skylarks when, in reality, they would soon become endangered species on earth, like the much talked about 'dinosaurs', if climate change is ignored and goes unchecked? There is no exaggeration in the statement that the predominating global concern to-day is climate change, which transcends geopolitical boundaries (of nations/zones) and connects humans in search of common solutions. Climate fiction ('Cli-fi') and climate films ('cli-flicks') offer an inter-disciplinary study and approach to the looming menacing phenomenon that the humans in the Anthropogenic age witness helplessly as if trapped on a sinking ship with little hope of rescue. The question again is how long can humankind afford to remain impervious (indifferent, casual or insensitive) to something that is so glaring, scaring and staring at the human race with gnawing teeth?

Let us pay attention to the fact that in the Canadian High Arctic zone, environmental shifts are occurring so fast that the inhabitants there do not have the words to describe the emerging awful changes which they now see around them. New species of fish, birds, and insects have migrated north of the island. Autumn thunder and lightning have been witnessed from unknown quarters there for the first time. "Permafrost" was coined as a term to describe age-old pile-up of ice in that region: it is no longer applicable (rather tolerable) as a term, for the ground-ice is started melting away.

Writers and participants at seminars, consultative groups and special committees are always engaged in serious and thought-provoking ideas and concerned for the welfare and perpetuity of human race with peace and harmony. The aim of bringing together environmentalists, scientists, and writer-thinkers "to explore the roles and responsibilities of contemporary art in ecology" are the needed events organised for a public discussion on climate change and to be reflected through literature. The aim is to discuss how art and science might find common ground to collaborate in fighting the menace that is climate change. Even, in response to the climate change, cultural climate is changing. Worrying is the prediction (or fact) that cultural change will in all probability be overtaken by the climate

change. The fact is that the effects of global warming may not remain discreet and incremental for long; the change may be quick, fast and devastating. Sudden climatic step changes may soon become evident, which might radically displace precipitation patterns, changing the moisture economies of whole territories with drastic rather dangerous consequences. It has been generally stated by the researchers and others, but not yet proved, that the severity of Hurricane Katrina was exacerbated by climate change. In view of the climatic changes taking place, and indeed in the future, it may become hard for writers not to take climate change as their subject. After all, to them, literature is not for living but it is for projecting anything or everything that concerns humanity, for good or bad.

Every human being, rather all living creatures, desire to live and fear death or consequences threatening life in any manner or in any form. Viewed in this background, we find that climate change is the cause of mass emigration today; this is stated by one of the world's finest novelists, Amitav Ghosh. He states: “I am from Bengal; I know how vulnerable it is. I've seen entire village disappear. There has been such an intense encroachment of lands that were once fertile, they are just being gobbled up by the sea.” Ghosh said that all who paid any attention to what is happening in South Asia would “be in no doubt about how vulnerable it is.”

Climate activists are targeting children, who are naturally of impressionable age and soft targets too, through a new range of 'Cli-fi' – climate fiction - novels which seek to highlight the dangers of global warming. David Thorpe, author of the book *Stormteller*, said that children were more open minded and claimed that writers could 'infect' their minds with 'seriously subversive viral ideas'. "I like writing for children because their minds are still forming", said Mr Thorpe whose novel is set in a coastal Wales that was ravaged by climate change and rising sea levels. They are asking all sorts of questions about how the world is working. He asserted that the children's minds haven't been tainted by ideological bias; they are still open-minded about it. He added with conviction that we need to get climate change out of the rational side of our brain and into the emotional part of child-readers because that is where attitudes are formed on the basis of our values. Mr Thorpe said that too many recent novels had

shown dystopian future and warned it was important to offer children a message of hope. He said: "for the last 10 years, they (children) have been reading nothing but dystopian of ... Fiction. If we make them think the future is terrible what are we doing to them? Cli-fi takes climate predictions to their logical conclusions and explores how people might survive in a completely messed up world. Writers like Paolo Bacigalupi and Margaret Atwood, opine that Cli-fi (climate fiction) takes climate predictions to their logical conclusions and explores how people might survive in a completely messed up world".

We know that Atwood, highly sensitive to social issues with humanist theme in her writing, has been interested since the 1960s in eco-critical issues that have currently turned into one of the hottest environmental debates in all countries. We also witness that change of Earth's temperature and its irredeemable repercussions, for instance, are one of the crises that surfaces every now and then in Atwood's poetics, playing the responsible role of conscience-keeper of humanity (more sharply of women's issues). Her poems with catchy titles namely 'The Weather', 'Spring in the Igloo', 'Bear Lament', 'Fogless', and 'After the Flood, We' – all of these fall into this "cli-fi" categorization. The poems shed light on extreme weather changes, the melting of the Arctic sea ice, extinction of species, natural habitat damage and loss, heat waves, and sea level rise which are all directly related to the subject of topical importance 'global warming'. They are selected from *The Circle Game* (1966), *Morning in the Burned House* (1995) and *The Door* (2007). She states that in the past, humans used to be very sensitive and mindful to Nature and were alert to the weather. "Once," Atwood observes, "we didn't bother"; human beings thought they were secure under 'umbrellas' and inside their 'rooms' in their elegant undefeatable established civilized world. However, when they reached the height of their pride of self-confidence at their command due to science and technology back-up and became 'careless' about their environment, the weather crept up behind [them] like a snake or thug or panther, and then cut loose". The weather is metaphorically likened to a dangerous reptile or animal unleashed, or to a ruthless killer set free due to the 'careless [ness]' of humanity. The uncontrollable forces of Nature are suddenly released and humanity has to face its ruthless anger in

its various forms like tornados, hurricanes, and tsunamis.

Regarding content, delivery, structuring of matter and/or topics/subject-matter of Cli-fi, climate fiction should not only be about the things that can't and shouldn't happen. The litterateurs have to imagine better tomorrows in order to change the reality present before the mankind to-day. We need stories that make sense of climate change and guide to chart a path to action, helping us to see the threats and challenges clearly but also begin envisioning our answers to those threats and challenges. We need infectious, thrilling, scientifically grounded stories about what might be... stories that invite all of us to see the world as it is - and make the world a better place than we found it. It is known that literature is always a comment on the times in which we live regardless of the period in which it is set. This is potentially fore-warning, awaking politically, economically, socially or now - environmentally. A growing subset within fiction is taking on what is possibly the greatest threat of our age: climate change. This expanding canon is seemingly genre-less, though it is most closely allied with science fiction. Climate fiction encompasses work from literary giants like Margaret Atwood, who have produced extraordinary works, on our continued abuse and mistreatment of the earth planet and our insatiable, irrational and unsustainable gluttony of its resources. Cli-fi novels will take the position that climate change and global warming are realities and are happening. Cli-fi is a fiction genre that might be helpful in waking people up and serving as an alarm bell. Cli-fi is a new fiction genre of its own kind and will define itself more and more as time goes by. Conditions around the world are getting altered much faster than was formerly predicted. One of the predictable results is famine, as crop yields decrease due to heat or flooding, water sources are polluted, new pests and diseases attack, and arable land undergoes desertification. Not only these consequences; famines are often accompanied by social unrest, even war.

Conclusion

We may take future as depicted by Cli-fi literature either as fictional or factual; but the truth that can conveniently be predicted is that the coming decades don't sound like picnics for the human beings. It is a scary and dreadful scenario and it will

continue to be so rather more alarming and tortuous if the subject is not addressed urgently and immediately. Let us not enter in the blame game. Let us appreciate the quote: "nature has enough to provide for everyone's need but surely not for anyone's greed." Peoples all over the world under the leadership of nation-states seem to be largely unprepared to face such grave situations. It is not that we were not warned enough, but it was easier to think of such things as happening not within our territory but elsewhere. As long as we are not affected personally, we would not like to pay attention to bad news emanating from scientist-researchers. That is simple human nature. Even recently, some people have said with sense of callous indifference that they "did not believe" in climate change, as if it was akin to Santa Claus or the tooth fairy. But chemistry and physics are not beliefs; they are ways of measuring the physical world. They do not negotiate, and they do not hand out second chances. Air, water, earth and fire were once known as the four elements, vital to human survival, and even worshipped like deities. They are still the things the extreme fluctuations of which stand to affect us adversely the most - and not in a good way at all. Would it still be right to show casual and indifferent attitude while dealing with such a topical and significant issue, 'global warming' or 'climate change,' and are the Cli-fi litterateurs providing 'warning bells' enough to arouse awareness and grave concern through their writings? Pen is mightier than the sword. Let the litterateurs continue highlighting climate change (or global warming) through Cli-Fi without fear or favour.

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Identity on the Ecological Borders: A Study of Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*

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India is a storehouse of diverse ecosystems. We are on one hand, encircled by the gigantic Himalayan range, on the other hand there is a vast expanse of the Southern plateaus. The east is enriched with the Sundarbans and the West is occupied by the vast deserts of Thar. With its rich natural resource-base, India has always been in a continuous engagement with ecology. However, with the changing climate and the increasing environmental disturbances, these interactions have undergone a paradigm shift. Due to the ever-increasing demands of the humans, the man-nature bond has been broken. Though the technologically charged modern man strives to strike a new bond with ecology, but in the process he loses his own identity.

This paper endeavours to address this problematic by suggesting an ecocritical continuum between man and nature, thus creating a humanistic emplacement. It brings forth the point that the identity formed by ecology is at once performed, constructed and inherited, and that it neither feigns indifference to history nor hides its own hand in the search for a new nativity. The paper will address the identity crises of a universal man, as presented in *A River Sutra*, beyond any boundary or land. The novel talks of renunciation and re-birth, one which can be achieved only through a communion with one's inherent ecological culture. Also, Mehta does not paint nature as an aesthetic element only, but as an inherent character of the novel. The River Narmada is presented as the *sutradhar* that binds the past and the present, the six stories incorporated in the text, and ultimately, the reader to his inner self.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minster in her Keynote Address to the United Nations Conference on the Human

Environment in Stockholm (1972) asserted:

People who are at cross-purposes with nature are cynical about mankind and ill-at-ease with themselves. Modern man must re-establish an unbroken link with nature and with life. He must again learn o invoke the energyof growing things and to recognize, as did the ancients in India centuries ago, that one can take from the earth and the atmosphere only so much as one puts back in them. (qtd. In DeLoughrey and Handley 17)

Asian civilizations have been looking at nature from a lens that is far different from that of West. The Holy Scriptures of Hindus and their epics *The Bhagwad Gita*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharta*, the *Vedas*, the *Vedanta*, the *Puranas* are replete with descriptions of nature as part of human oikos. In Indian ethos, harmonious synchronization with nature is the accepted norm of survival. An all-embracing universal spirit connecting all creatures in the web of life is a recurring archetype in all the scriptures. *Advaita Vedanta*, an ancient Hindu philosophy talks about the whole world as a coherent entity forming a big family, 'Vasudheva Kutumbhkam'. The Samkhya tradition acknowledges the five great elements, the Panchmahabhuta: earth, water, air, fire and space. The Hindus consider the earth as a mother, deserving utmost devotion and reverence. The Prithivi Sukta in the *Atharva Veda* pleads the human race to fulfil its devotion to mother earth: '*Mata Bhumih Putroham Prithivyah*'. In *Rigveda* and *Yajurveda* the coexistence of all life forms is emphasised. These scriptures urge mankind to desist from contaminating the purity of sky, as sun, the ultimate harbinger of life shines in the sky. Rivers such as Ganga, Yamuna, Brahumputra are considered holy as they are life-affirming and life-promoting. The Vedic Hymns are full of instructions on the judicious use of water, vegetation and natural resources. A mantra in the *Swergaswathasopanishad* pronounces: "*Yo devo agnau yo astu yo vishewam bhuvanam Avisesh/ya aushadhishu yo vanaspathishu thasmai devaya namo namah*" means to chop down a tree or to dirty a pool is a sin against God (Guha197). *The Chark Samhita* also gave instructions for the protection of animals. Vandana Shiva, an environmentalist, while talking of Earth Democracy and its basis i.e 'the recogonition of and respect for the life of all species and all people' (quoting the *Isho Upanishad*, observes:

> The Universe is the creation of the Supreme Power meant for the benefits of [all] creation. Each individual life form must, therefore, learn to enjoy its benefits by forming a part of the system in close relation with other species (qtd. In Koehg 168).

The epigraph of the novel, *A River Sutra* is from Chandidas. It reads: "Listen, O Brother./Man is the greatest truth/Nothing beyond." It tells the text is a truth about man, a universal man beyond any boundary. The full meaning of the novel becomes clear when one gets back to the epitaph. Mehta stresses the fact that it is the individual experiences of the human beings who struggle to attain that fullness of perfection embodied in the river's powers that make the river Narmada holy. The holy river becomes the symbol of love and immortality for mankind. However, for a man to truly understand himself and the implications of this love, he has to comprehend love in a broader sense. Human love must incorporate a mutual respect and care of everything that makes man a human. He has to re-connect with the physical, spiritual and ecological milieu that empowers his existence. Cheryll Glotfelty rightfully notes in his essay, "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," that the human culture is connected to the physical world affecting it and affected by it . . . " (Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xix). Gita Mehta exhorts that this re-connection can be established by showing concern towards nature and its varied entities. The Jain monk covering his mouth to prevent the killing of insects by sudden inhalation and the brushing of the paths with tufts of wool before walking are gestures revealing genuine care for fellow living creatures.

In *A River Sutra*, Gita Mehta integrates various religions, myths, traditions, philosophies with the ecology of the river, to create a culture of oneness and re-union. It explores the problem of identity through the narrator who is significant to the story though not as its hero, because it is the Narmada which surfaces as the main motivator and the protagonist. The nameless narrator suffers from the pangs of loneliness and meaningless, even though, he resides in his own native land. The narrator renounces his urban life to find solace in the caress of rural ecology. A retired bureaucrat, free from his worldly obligations, he has confined

himself to the forest, to reflect as a *vanprasthi*, following the four *ashramas* in Hindu philosophy, namely, *brahmacharya, grihastha, vanprastha* and *sanyasa*. His interest in the traditions of the River Narmada bring him in contact with the outside world whose stories he narrates and realizes that even at this stage he knows little of life. After getting a job in Narmada rest house, he befriends Tariq Mia, an old Muslim mullah, a Sufi, who acts as co-narrator-giving a second dimension to the story. The location of the beautiful rest house is ideal to his quest for peace and serenity. The narrator recounts unconnected stories about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics and music teachers, tribal folk beliefs and the anthropologists who study them. These stories are the journeys that the narrator travels towards the path to renunciation and re-birth. The confusion and dilemmas of the narrator, allows Gita Mehta to incorporate tales of love and tragedies, which continue to form the narrator's nemesis. They question his commitment to renunciation and seek the true meaning of the 'word' from him. At the end of the novel, he broods, "I stared at the flashes of illumination, wondering for the first time what would I do, if I ever left the bungalow." He is so absorbed and involved in the life's vagaries that he ultimately admits his incapacity to "renounce the world twice" (41). In the *Yoga Vashistha*, a person need not have renounced a world to be a recluse but living within the world, among the temptations of the life, he could still be non-attached. The novel records the bureaucrat's awareness that there can be no renunciation without involvement. The last chapter, "The Song of Narmada" expounds this belief further. It discloses the identity of Naga Ascetic as heavy spectacled and deep voiced 'Professor V.V. Shankar, the foremost archaeological authority on the Narmada in the country' (260). He used to head the Archaeological Department until he was 'Fed up from the red tape he resigned from government service.' And no one heard from him for absolute ages and he resurfaced with a remarkable book on Narmada. His coming back is a sign of having formed a true identity for himself, as an anthropologist of River Narmada. Just as Gautama Buddha wandered from one ascetic journey to another for true knowledge and Swami Vivekananda found true enlightenment in his guru Swami Ramakrishna, Naga Baba had to

reincarnate as Prof. Shankar to understand his true essence. The immortality of the River instilled the immortality in his identity, having being formed by a resurrection from the waters of the river. Nirmal Selvomany in his book *Essays in Ecocriticism* admits that a true identity can be formed only through involvement in "the nexus of humans, nature and the spirit beings" (xii). Even scientific or deep ecology admits the interrelation among the organism and its holistic environment. It allows the organism to create a new identity for himself, one which is somehow continuous with the being of another, thus creating an ontic continuity. Arne Naess interprets identification as "the mature experience of oneness in diversity" (Tobias 261).

- Laurence Buell in his text *The Environmental Imagination* lists the criteria which makes a text an eco-text. These are:
- The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device;
- The human interest is not…the only legitimate interest;
- Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's orientation;
- There is some sense of the environment as a process. (7-8)

As a true eco-writer, Mehta does not delineate Nature as just an aesthetic element that lends a picturesque hue to the novel. She weaves it into the fabric of the text to provide it new connotations and denotations. River Narmada, the surrounding valley and the natural milieu emerge as strong characters in the novel, making and marring the lives of other characters. It is a symbol of immortality and honesty. She used it as a character in this novel, one that purifies the soul of people who are swindled and deceived by cunning human nature and materialistic love. Each story is an account of the powerful impact and involvement of Nature and its cultural artefacts in man's life. In The Courtesan's Story, the mother feels happy that her daughter died in the Narmada because she would be purified of all her sins. In *The Musician's Story*, the musician's daughter cannot tolerate her lover's rejection and comes to find peace in the caress of the River Narmada. The third story of Nitin Bose is *The Executive's Story*, that narrates the imagined sickness of the protagonist, though, starts with the diary account of Nitin Bose' life read by the unnamed narrator, yet it slowly envisions into a tale of the healing

power of River Narmada. While staying at the estate, driven by solitude, Bose is involved with a tribal woman, Rima. Since Bose reads profusely the books from his grandfather's trunk and 'became fascinated by the endless legends contained in the *Puranas*', his affair has strong markings of hallucinations. He is haunted by erotic imaginings and he does not realize when he transcended, 'reading the labyrinthine ales of demons, sages, gods, lovers, cosmologies', from this world of reality into their world of dreams, 'Or perhaps I had already become the victim of my grandfather's books' (ARS 124). Thus begin his nights of delusion in drunken stupor until one evening he finds the tealeaf-picker in his bed, and surrenders without a fight in the arms of a woman from the "Naga world." In the cold light of day he recalls: ". . . her small teeth pierced my skin again and again, like the sudden striking of a snake, and I heard the hissing of her pleasure against my throat" (ARS 125). And when she left his bed, Bose was already asleep and "dreaming. I still held a creature half-serpent in my arms, my sated senses pulling me to the underground world of my grandfather's legends." Bose again started enjoying life at the tea-garden. When he was promoted to the tea company's headquarters in Calcutta, he abandons Rima and goes to Calcutta. Rima turns vengeful. She turns to her serpent goddess for help. Rima performs 'magic' of the Serpent goddess Mansa. Suddenly Nitin Bose starts singing a song and talking about Rima. He is said to have possessed by his lover. Bose turns to Narmada, the river goddess, who is related to the snake goddess Mansa as sister. (being formed by the same father Shiva). Manasa is believed to have been born from the erotic imaginings of Shiva and his seed fell on a lotus leaf and seeped into the underworld kingdom of Nagas, or serpents, where it took the shape of a girl, named Manasa, since her origin was in Siva's mind. The priest from Vano tribe remarks: 'If your sahib wants to recover he must worship the goddess Narmada at any shrine that overlooks river Narmada. Only the river has been given the power to cure him' (ARS 137) from the 'power of desire' (ARS 141). Nitin Bose gets cured only when he surrenders and makes offerings to Narmada. He is cured after the Vano tribe ceremony of immersing the idol in Narmada (which signify his sins drowned in Narmada). The tribals waded in behind him, their hands raised, their faces turned to the West

and chanting: 'Salutations in the morning and at night to thee, O Narmada. Defend me from the serpent's poison.' (ARS 145). The nature ritual, thus described marks Narmada as the true hero of the novel, one that saves the people in distress. The river is a motherly figure for them. Gita Mehta reports the legend of birth of Narmada, inspired by the old texts: "It is said that Shiva, the creator and destroyer of worlds, was in an ascetic trance so strenuous that rivulets of perspiration began flowing from his body down the hills. The stream took on the form of a woman-most dangerous of her kind: a beautiful virgin innocently tempting even ascetics to pursue her, inflaming their lust by appearing at one moment as a lightly dancing girl, at another as a romantic dreamer, and yet another as a seductress loose-limbed with the lassitude of desire. Her inventive variations so amused Shiva that he named her Narmada, the delightful one, blessing her with the words you shall be forever holy, forever inexhaustible. Then, he gave her in marriage to the ocean, Lord of Rivers, most lustrous of all her suitors" (ARS 08-9). For the Manager, the unnamed narrator, Narmada 'the river has become the sole object of my reflections.' And because he was fascinated by the river and wanted to learn more about it, he explains, "During my tours of the area I had been further intrigued to discover that the criminal offence of attempted suicide is often ignored if the offender is trying to kill himself in the waters of the Narmada' (ARS 02).

Mehta makes Narmada act as the '*sutra*' and the nameless narrator as the '*Sutradhar*' of her stories. Together they connect and capture Indian myths, rituals, traditions, culture and philosophy. The unknown narrator at once acts as the story teller, translator, and the audience or listener with complete ease. She spreads the canvas of the novel as the flow of Narmada. Professor Shankar says: 'Thousands of years ago the sage Vyasa dictated *Mahabharata* on this riverbank. Then in our own century this region provided the setting for Kipling's *Jungle Book.* In between countless other men left their mark on the river' (ARS 264).

Man is formed from Nature and dies in Nature. River Narmada is the harbinger of our life and though we may die and dissipate, yet the perennial flow of life will go on along the perennial flow of River Narmada. Moving from dust to dust, River Narmada becomes the *sutradhar* of our life, one that helps us understand the

perennial flow of life within us. When the minstrel completes her chanting Professor Shankar asks her, 'where do you go from here?' to which she answers 'to the coast.' Shankar adds, 'To find a husband, like the Narmada found her Lord of Rivers?' And Uma replies, 'You can see into the future, Naga Baba.' To which he replies, 'The future reveals itself to everyone in time' (*ARS* 267).

In *A River Sutra* Mehta webs a string of stories weaving in tales of Indian mysticism, animalism, spiritualism, though essentially she webs a tale of communion between man and nature. The identity of the protagonist is performed by the unifying omnipresence of River Narmada. The River Narmada becomes a symbol of narrator's culture that provides an instant identity to him. The need of the author to take the help of River Narmada to interpret the complexities of her characters brings forth her deep associations with the river. Thus, Gita Mehta in *A River Sutra* focuses on developing new perspectives on human culture and nature, with a sole objective to carve an identity for man, one that is rooted in the 'topsoil' of nature.

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Geeta Bhandari's *Odyssey of Love*— A Review Essay

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A poem is a composition written for performance by the human voice. What your eye sees on the page is the composer's verbal score, waiting for your voice to bring it alive as you read it aloud or hear it in your mind's ear.

-- Jessica Morell

Poetry means a lot of things to a lot of people. The uniqueness of poetry lies in its unwillingness to be defined or nailed down. Poetry evokes myriad emotions – love, anguish, anger, loneliness. It also has this wonderful ability to surprise, power to reveal, an insight, a vision and a power to comprehend the incomprehensible. Poetry is a state of imaginative awareness expressed through meaning, sound and rhythm, so as to evoke emotional response. The very nature of poetry as an authentic and individual mode of expression makes it difficult to confine it into water tight compartments.

Odyssey of Love, a collection of poems by Geeta Bhandari opens the doors to the persona and sensitive mind of the poet. The virtue of love and love being the greatest blessing stands at the core of almost all her poems. Her poems touch the untouched cords of the reader's being producing a sweet melody. It is wonderfully said that there is a poetic sensibility in each individual, which for various reasons lie dormant. Odyssey of Love helps the readers to break away from the shackles of dormancy and true love is activated to the core. It is true passion for poetry which brings out the compassionate side of the poet. Her poems suggest the presence of love in simple things. We fail to recognise love in simple pleasures that lie within our vicinity and

seek them in unknown, unheard things.

Loneliness is a poem which celebrates being in love. The heart being joyous fears absolutely nothing. She is not going to fall a prey to loneliness again nor will allow melancholy to strike at her again. Being courageous in love she has decided to keep loneliness at bay.

Self, Self, Self
I, Me,Myself **(***Self* **)**

It is only an egoist who places the Self before everything else. Selfishness and arrogance are vices which hamper the growth of selflessness. This dark world is full of spite and meanness; and it is only humility which can keep us sailing through the rough tide.

There is a peaceful calm today, she says in *Fulfilment*. It is the simple pleasures of life which can give us a true sense of contentment. Being true to each other, beautiful dreams, life in all its myriad forms, joy, love, light-----there is so much to be content about. Life is sometimes about struggle and anguish; but love can overcome all.

Like the body is to soul, the soul is to body,
We are to each other (*Bond of Love*)

Parting and separation no doubt cause pain; and to avoid this one has to be bound by the cords of love. The beloved seeks no separation from her lover as they are like the body and the soul which seeks refuge in each other. They are to each other the very life giving source.

The anguish of the Nature is wondrously captured in *Pain.* The meek/weak being oppressed by the strong, the cut - throat competition, a life devoid of compassion, lack of morals and passion, a valueless social order and the disproportionate accumulation of wealth causes nature deep agony. Very aptly it is said, *This is the world, where Nature is at pain.*

The sea of suffering is vast
And obscure **(** *The Sea of Suffering)*

Man is always bogged down by a cumbersome load of care, pain, sorrow, fret and fever. This brings to mind the passage from The Bible which states:

The days of our life are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength but labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fade away. (**Psalm 90 : 10)** In spite

of this, He is always there as a stronghold, teaching us to pave our way through all difficulties.

Come be my Valentine
You are all mine, I am thine (*My Valentine* **)**

The beloved wants him to give her roses of love and set a seal of permanence to their relationship. Love, happiness and perpetual bliss would be their lot. However, along with roses and love, the speaker mentions various other virtues which they must instil within themselves in order to be successful. A number of flowers like daffodils, violets, tulips, crocus, daisies, freesias, hyacinths, chrysanthemums and the beautiful qualities associated like respect, faith, trust, joy, innocence, thoughtfulness and much more are breathtakingly brought to fore.

Love is a religion
Religion par excellence (*Love*)

Love makes no distinction nor does it discriminate. Love is indeed a blessing from none other than the Creator himself.

Indeed the rainbow of life is vibrant with bright colours. *The songs of love, joy of dove/Dance of waves, sounds of the wind . . .* are simple pleasures which enthral the heart. Little passions, brief sensations, simple delights, go on adding strokes to the multi spectral rainbow called Love. Meeting causes pleasure, parting causes pain and anguish. Hopes wither, aspirations fade but it also brings along an intense desire for a reunion. Sights and yearning may be our lot today, but we must learn to cherish the pangs; for there is a bright future in store.

A ray of lightening highlights
The darkness of the night
Darkness of the life (*Cry*)

Sometimes even Nature seems unconcerned about the suffering humanity. The silent night is filled with strange whispers and some evil plot is being executed. Fear, horror and helplessness break the frightful silence of the night. *Innocence is raped.* There is no justice got. Nature is unperturbed. Every element of this universe witnesses this brutal act but feign ignorance. No one to aid, none to rescue, man's life goes on.

In the poem, *Joy*, the poet seeks joy in simple things. Memories of the past, happenings of the present and sweet hopes for the future should fill our being with joy.

For what was there
What is there and
What will be there? (Joy)

Life is transitory and let us be joyful every single moment.
Charlotte Bronte wonderfully says:

I am no bird, and no net ensnares me,
I am a free human being with an independent will.

The same feeling is echoed in *Freedom of Choice*. A life without a free will to make a choice lacks lustre. Freedom should go beyond the physical and include both the emotional and the spiritual. A relationship sans domination and strife goes a long way and finally emerges victorious.

Love is knowing the other
To know the otherness of the other (The Other)

Love is not something only skin deep or merely superficial. It is loving the person for who he/she is. Truly understanding the other, caring, sharing, respecting and not encroaching upon their 'personal space' guarantees a long term relationship. We need to realise that each person is a distinct personality, different and unique. Helping each other to seek the self, aiding in self-definition and tapping each other's potentials will definitely add positive dimensions to the relationship. Do not hold back in love, let go and grow.

The world is filled with sweet simplicities. A little approval, an expression of love, acceptance and rejection, being humane and courteous fills life's bounty. A life devoid of misgivings, ruthlessness, meanness and cunningness fills our being with the world's sweetness. *(World of Sweet Nothings)*

Let our joy burst forth like flowers this spring! Spring is Nature's way of saying 'Thankyou Lord'. The spring comes along bearing flowers and fruits. Every element of Nature awakens after a long sleep. The air filled with fresh fragrance stirs happiness within every heart. The bounty of the Nature is a feast to the eyes and a source for the mind to reflect upon. This is also the season when we sow wonderful ideas and "reap a harvest of thoughts". Truly a blessed season brought out visually in the poem *On the Advent of Spring*.

How courageous, spiritless, spineless
The modern man has become! (The Little Actor)

Man is an actor donning different roles at different times. Inspite of the various odds, he keeps up his spirits and faces all the challenges thrown his way. However, this world devoid of values, beliefs and love take its toll on him. He fights but all that he gets back is ' dullness, unhappiness and fruitlessness'. Finally, his spirits are saturated, he is worn out and completely defeated. But life goes on!

The sweet summer morning adorned in all its grandeur is brought out in all its colours and beauty in *His Sounding Bugles.*

All the values and hills
Wear the coronal of shine
Scene to enjoy the warmth
Germinate love

There is happiness all around and once again the creator is at his best. The vibrant summer also has a message for the people.

March forward
Do not dither

Every little thing shows us the beauty of life and reminds us that life is worth living. The Almighty's presence is found everywhere and the summer's eternal music stands as a witness to this.

Conflicts in love are caused chiefly because the heart is at conflict with the head. Very often our head tells us 'hearken not to the heart', but our sensitive persona goes the heart's way.

Feelings
Brimming with notions
Creating turmoil
And commotion (Misgivings in Love)

But, in love it's the heart that emerges triumphant. However, emotional conflicts can also damage a beautiful relationship. No answers sought, no justification given and Alas! Love is ruptured with no chances of a repair.

Success doesn't come on a readymade platter. On needs to sweat out to be successful. The path to success is wrought by trials and tribulations.

Accept the challenges,
Climb the ranges (For Success)

All the strength, dedication, devotion and determination that we put in will definitely bear fruit.

Seasons of Existence brings forth the beauty of Nature and the

different seasons which correspond with the various stages in the life of man. Spring, the fairest season symbolises childhood in all its freshness and innocence. Adolescence, a period of scanning and analysing along with youthfulness is spent hopelessly in love. Middle age has its quota of aches and takes; and finally all hopes are lost during old age. Although everything is lost, hope still springs eternal in the human breast.

The grandeur of the omnipotent is found in every element of Nature in the poem *His Almighty.* The sparkling rainbow, the rolling waves, the mighty mountains…..all speak about his presence and power. It is this powerful hand which designs our destiny.

The poet experiences second childhood through the little pranks, sweet talks and innocence of her little child. The flesh and blood of her own being, she sees her dreams being fulfilled through her lil child. She says, *I see in your dreams, dreams of my own (Second Childhood).* Every parent sees a reflection of their own persona in their children and see their wishes being materialised through them.

The poem *Conscience* reminds one of Robert Frost's poems, *The Road Not Taken.* Good conscience is the best guide to take us through thick and thin. Follow the conscience with great precaution and that will make all the difference.

God exists
Love exists (Is this the End)

This realization makes us face all odds and walk through the roughages of life. So many queries, so many unanswered questions, seeking our own identity even while probing and pondering over the reality of our existence; we still keep up the good faith and move ahead because the Almighty and Love are our guiding stars.

This is the world where…..Face shatters, pride prevails (Beware)

The world is filled with a lot of goodness. But there are negative forces always at conflict with the good. Beauty, love, money, faith and pride beguile and so have become a mockery. Inspite of this, virtues like love and faith keep working at the wheels of our life.

Celebration is a manifestation of love, where the lover wants to keep coyness at bay and make use of time to the fullest. Life is short, time is fleeting, and so there is no time to ponder and wait. A

few lines echo the feelings of Andrew Marvell, who tells his coy mistress,

Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

There is a sense of urgency and also an awareness regarding the transitoriness of life.

How much space do we need
In the world so full of emptiness? (Space)

All our lives we struggle and are in conflict to possess a space of our own. Assault, rage, shame and conflict make man more of a beast. The 'mine' element reduces man to a level where he ceases to see anything beyond himself. Nothing is going to stay, everything is going to vanish with mortal man.

Note for my Daughter beautifully brings out the little child's pranks, innocence, kindness which are all a solace to the mind. The child is a reflection of the mother and she finds happiness in her company.

We design to malign (Humanly Design)

Human beings have ceased being human and possess beastly qualities. We use all our energy to design evil, to plot, malign, design and create commotion. Little do we realise the anguish we cause our dear and near ones.

The poem Betrayal showcases broken dreams, tales of treason, unfulfilled hopes and desires, broken vows and accusations. Betrayal ends everything. Faith is not something we give or get so easily. It has to be nurtured and cultivated with love. Betrayal damages the roots from which love grows. Faith comes to stay only when we honour the spiritual connection with respect, love, faith and kindness.

Today, he was accused
Of being honest and truthful (Accusations)

Sometimes, it does not pay to be honest in this world. Often we are accused of things not done. Confessions are misinterpreted and reason looked upon as treason. But a clear conscience laughs at false accusations. People will someday definitely have an accurate understanding of your values.

Life without love is worthless. The absence of his beloved makes his life aimless. She was the reason of his existence; and the fact that he would never meet her again burns him down with agony.

How barren and bleak,

Desolate, I feel (My Love is No More)

He simply wishes to vanish as life without her is beyond comprehension. He has only memories to bank upon. He wants her back but death is cruel. Although she is in a happy place, safe with angels, the loss is too much for him to bear. It is wonderfully said that we understand death for the first time when He puts his hand upon the one whom we love.

Saving the Mankind honestly talks about what we, as human beings, can do for humanity. We are so engrossed with happenings/events that actually are not related to us directly. We take up larger issues like the cosmos and the universe and care less about things that lie within our capacity. Why not muster up all our energy and work for a healthier, value based society and humanity at large. Let's work for the sick, the suffering, the sorrowful and the dying. Let's do something for the orphans, the childless, and the widows. Let's comfort and pray for the oppressed and those who suffer persecution. Then the world would definitely be a better place to live in.

Invasion speaks about how we often encroach upon other's privacy and invade their personal space. Elements of nature also act as pirates and invade mother earth.

Poems like *Arrogance, Slaves of Love, The Battered Soul, Prisoned bird, State of Confusion, Sparkle* etc. talk about the significance of freedom, doing away with slavery, positivity of mind, trials and tribulations, ignorance, helplessness, redemption, turbulence, deliverance and liberation. These elements are focused upon, analysed and emotionally researched upon.

In the poem *Rebirth,* the poet yearns for a world away from strife and insanity. A world where man would get the basic necessities of life free of cost. A world filled with compassion and good thoughts

No shackles
No chains
No struggle
No strife (Rebirth)

Blind Gestures are full of erotic images. Her sensual lips, photogenic face, seductive eyes, beautiful frame, tantalising offer and upsurging emotions makes her the dream of any poet, the charm of any painter and the intense desire of any person.

Sounds of Death is an announcement that none can escape death which is not only cruel but also inevitable. The church bells ringing atop the hills create despair and hopelessness as one more soul has left this world. Death causes parting and pain. She will have to wait hopelessly here till death takes her away to join him. She suffered endlessly and the dreariness seems to on forever.

Now an intense urge to relive life and see all her shattered dreams come to her. Miracles do happen, magic still works.

I will create my own magic
I will make wonders
Miracles happen

She is now ready to live life on her own terms and bring back a sense of self-worth within herself.

Summing up, Geeta Bhandari uses a lot of images and skilfully describes abstract concepts with concrete images. She writes about what intrigues her. A keen observer, she probes into the universal theme of love and seeks to find it in simple things. She chiefly banks upon nature, music, love, human emotions, freedom and much more.

A remarkable feature worth mentioning is that she focuses on simple words, rather than experimenting with form and technique. There is clarity and conciseness in every poem and she holds each poem very close to her heart. William Greenway says *Images can communicate the unsayable*, similarly Geeta's poems come alive with images. She weaves a whole world of love through apt images and creates a whole landscape on a multi-spectral canvas. This collection of poems helps us look at things with love and seek happiness in small, everyday happenings. They touch the innermost recesses of the reader's sensibility and helps emerge successful and dignified even in the phase of multiple hurdles and hardships.

She also writes about her innermost feelings and her poems offer a glimpse into her sensitive mind. Her poems reflect upon the way she perceives life as she comes to terms with what it has to offer her interactions, her encounters, observations and reflection on minute details which very often we as onlookers fail to notice.

Community Consciousness in MG Vassanji's *No New Land* and Rohinton Mistry's *Tales From Firozsha Baag*

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The sense of unease or difference that members of the diaspora feel in their countries of settlement often results in a felt need for protective cover in the bosom of the community.

Robin Cohen 1996

The complex relationship between individual and community has ever eluded all anthropo-sociological attempts at any conclusive pronouncements as to how the two should ideally relate. However, the two have as yet managed some or the other form of a symbiotic tie. So, the two are inescapably related. Taking this as a starting point, the paper attempts to develop an understanding of how the people in diaspora—individually as well as collectively—approach this issue.

Of a wide array of writers in diaspora, MG Vassanji and Rohinton Mistry have been taken for discussion for two reasons; one, both the writers are experiencers of multiple dis-locations (Mistry as a Parsi in India and then in Canada, and Vassanji as an Ishmai'li Khoja first in East Africa and then in Canada); two, both the writers come from communities that share not only the label of 'minority community' in India but that of the 'supporters of colonizers' as well. Given these two factors, the community consciousness in their works acquires an additional dimension of their diasporicity.

As writers, both Mistry and Vassanji have almost exclusively focused on their communities for their subject matter. This decision, however, must not have been so easy to take as it involves making two crucial choices—those of subject matter and

perspective i.e. who to write about and from whose point-of-view. Any attempt to write about Canada attracts charges of inauthenticity while that of turning to one's own community brings them a label of 'ethnic writers' or 'writers from elsewhere'. This is where Mistry and Vassanji are at one with Kroetsch who stresses the right choice of narrative mode by saying, "The very ability to see ourselves is based on the narrative mode: the I telling a story of I, of we, of the they that mirror us" (88). The outcome of this conscious choice is highlighted by Jaydipsinh Dodiya as he who observes:

> There are a few novelists like Rohinton Mistry whose works centralize their community. This is especially true of immigrant writers from the minority communities. For instance in M.G. Vassanji's novels *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land*, it is the odyssey of his Khoja community in particularly and that of Asian community in general. . . . Their works exhibit consciousness of their community in a way that the community emerges as a protagonist relegating human protagonists to the background. (93)

On the subject of writing about one's own community, Vassanji commented in a symposium, "one should operate from strength rather than ask for sorrow or pity. Black, Native, Asian, and other peoples should tell their stories and tell them in abundance" ('Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?'). Indeed, his writing is aimed at restoring his people's history and thereby produce an alternative perspective of the people forced out of East African and turned *en masse* into "lost children of Britannia" (*Gunny Sack* 237) who eventually land up in Toronto, "cold Eldorado of the north" (*No New L*and 249). Thus, to relate the saga of how the Asians of Shamsi (Ishmai'li Khoja) community felt being wedged between the White rulers and the Black ruled, Vassanji becomes the preserver of his own community's collective tradition and makes an effort at writing the alternative history in his bid to "contest master narratives of history and progress, to set models of difference, marginality and 'ex-centricity' over against the center" (Hutcheon 57). When questioned as to how his exclusive concern for his community becomes reconciled with his Canadian

experience Vassanji claims:

> . . . We are telling the stories not only of there, but also for people here. They came with their clothes, and sometimes with their pots and pans, and left it on us to bring their stories here. Their stories are not only for their consumption; they are not for nostalgia; they are their history, describing their being. And they are for their future generations as well. (11)

Vasssanji is thus a "vocal representative of the ambiguous experience of the Asian African as a cultural community in (post) colonial East Africa" (Moore 2001). Giving a socio-cultural leverage to the writer, Vassanji tends to view him/her:

> . . . as a preserver of the collective tradition, a folk historian and myth maker. He gives himself a history; he recreates the past, which exists only in memory and is otherwise obliterated, so fast has his world transformed. He emerges from the oral, preliterate, and unrecorded, to the literate. In many instances this reclamation of the past is the first serious act of writing. Having reclaimed it, having given himself a history, he liberated himself to write about the present. ('Postcolonial' 63).

The novel *No New Land* is the second of the tripartite saga (*The Gunny Sack* and *Uhuru Street* being the other two) of globally 'floating' community of Shamsis that populates Vassanji's fictional world. These Indian Muslims made their first voyage to East Africa (depicted in *The Gunny Sack)* in the closing decade of the nineteenth century. They migrated as part of labor in service of the British Empire. Largely, they were semi-skilled workers, small "dukawallas" (*Gunny Sack* 16) and traders. As such, they came to occupy the mid-space between the indigenous Africans and the colonizers. Their second voyage began in the 1960s towards Europe and North America, the latter being easier to access received more of them than the former. This was, however, not a voluntarily undertaken journey. Rather, the racially charged atmosphere of post-African nationalism forced them into an international diaspora. The dramatic turn of events can be

summed up like this: the abolition of slavery caused severe paucity of labor, so the British turned to India for supply. As a consequence, Indians migrated *en masse* under the indentured labor policy to places like Jamaica, Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Natal, Suriname, as workers on sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa and rubber plantations. And it is one such family in Canada that the piece *No New Land* depicts. This is the Lalanis- Nurdin Lalani, his wife Zera, their son Hanif, and daughter Fatima. They find shelter in Don Mills at Sixty Nine Rosecliffe Park Drive.

The novel is depiction of how the Indian Shamsi community in East Africa first turns into "a buffer zone between the indigenous Africans and colonial administration" (Malak 277), and then Nurdin and his family, as synecdoche of this society in Canada, suffer the "ironies, the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds neither of which provides the harmony of a life that the mind imagines and craves for" (Kanaganayakam 200).

Soon after the euphoria of adventure is over, the Lalanis come to face the 'othering' forces. First they have problems finding accommodation but this is resolved by Don Mills, the semblance of Dar in Toronto. It does create a sense of the old and familiar in the residents. It is here that the immigrants from Dar es Salam find shelter and solace. Whenever they are intimidated by the dominant culture and its attendant machinery, they turn to this cocoon or what Neil Bissoondath calls "an almost classic ghetto" (110). The inhabitants of the Sixty-Nine Rosecliffe Park Drive are of "several different sects, singly or in packs, using all manners of approaches, bearing literature and tidings, goodwill and goodies, warnings and mercy" (*NNL* 49). These migrants go to such lengths in replicating the worlds left behind that the narrator has to say, "… the Shamsis of Dar had re-created their community life in Toronto: the mosques, the neighborhoods, the clubs and the associations" (*No New Land* 171).

Nurdin too, on failing to adjust to life in Canada, almost compulsively turns to the community's meeting place. The simple implication is that the immigrants must first resolve this dilemma if at all they are to make any headway in Canada. The focus of the tale is on bringing out the scenes of inner strains of adjustment, especially for the older immigrants: Nurdin fails to get a job and

soon turns into a good-for-nothing; surprisingly, his wife Zera manages to get one; and, his children Hanif and Fatima are not so uncomfortable with Canada.

For the Shamsi community, its confinement of immigrants to Don Mills can also be read as an effect of systemic marginalization that Canada's official policy of multiculturalism tacitly supports. Seen thus, the cultural mosaic of Canada's much-trumpeted distinction seems turning into what John Porter calls "vertical mosaic" (70) of different races and ethnicities.

Therefore, it seems that *No New Land* is essentially Vassanji's perception of the immigrants' mode of engagement with the alien culture. While the outcome of such an engagement, in a large measure, depends on how this intercourse unfolds, the author's view comes across as highly ambivalent. He, however obliquely, suggests that the way ahead of inter-group prejudices-racial, ethnic, religious or whatever—lies in this: "You acknowledge the past and you move forward" (Ball 205). This is also expressed through the beckoning of the CN tower of Toronto that "blinks unfailing in the distance" (*No New Land* 59). The tower turns into an embodiment of Nurdin's idea of his future in Canada.

In an almost idyllic ending, the novel depicts an apparent victory over alienation by way of purging of the past for a more open-minded initiation into the present. It comes through the resolution of Nurdin's dilemma: "He sat back with a satisfied sigh. Canada to him was a veritable Amarapur, the eternal city, the land of the west in quest of which his community had embarked some four hundred years ago. This was the final stop. He was very happy" (*No New Land* 198).

In the latter half of the 20th century, Parsi writers began emerging as prominent Indian writers in English. Their writings asserted a distinctively Parsi experience. Writers like Bapsi Sidhwa, Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga, Boman Desai, and Dina Mehta were almost exclusively focusing on their own community. Mistry called it "last grand stand" to describe the efforts of Parsi Indian writers devoted to the task of 'group self-preservation'.

Mistry's first venture in fiction came in the form of *Tales From Firozsha Baag*, a collection of short stories depicting the life of Parsi middle-class families in Bombay and their inter-connectivity

with the members of their community in Canada. Of the eleven stories, only three concern Canada in some way. Rather, his attention is mainly given to the Parsi life in Bombay. The Canadian writer and critic, Uma Parmeswaran stressing the point observes: "The themes- of boyhood initiations, of everyday frustrations and of nostalgia- are universal but the details are essentially Indian, indeed essentially Parsi" (184). Another notable point is that the fictional world seems to be an attempt to resist the dominant culture and identity by way of being turned into a minority in the world where Parsis exist in majority and their culture is the dominant way of life portrayed in great detail.

The collection is representative of Mistry's political stance insofar as it encompasses the fundamental issues like minority versus majority encounter in Bombay, the same in Canada, the impact of cultural politics on Parsis in India, the effects of local cultural milieu on the Parsi way of life: their language, their cuisine, their economic profile, their social standing, and their sense of insecurity. To elaborate it further, the stories are examined below in greater detail.

The event of all the stories are set mostly in the Firozsha Baag, an apartment complex in Bombay, where middle-class Parsis reside. Almost all the stories are written in the spirit of building a cultural narrative of the Parsis. In fact, the opening story 'Auspicious Occasion' itself gives an exposition, so to say, on the Parsi culture. It introduces the Parsi religious terminology by way of describing the routine of an ordinary couple living in the chawl. How and where they pray (Kusti, Fire-temple), what practices they observe, what their festivals are (Behram Roje, Nau Roje), the place and manner of their funeral rites (The towers of silence, vultures) and such other routine things that characterize a cultural-religious identity are mentioned in a natural and effortless manner. But this ease is also an attempt at asserting the naturalness of what for 'others' appears the cultural distinctiveness.

The stories are invariably inscribed in the Parsi space in Bombay, i.e. the Parsi residential complex. This space is, however, not the closed one. Rather, the Parsi residents *do* go out and interact with the members of other communities. They are, in fact, embedded in the cultural matrix of Bombay. The neighboring

locality is Tar gully where Marathi Hindus reside. There are other shops too- the Irani restaurant, the Cecil Cycles. So, the life around is awash with plurality- cultural, religious, ethnic and so on.

The narrative structure of the *Tales From Firozsha Baag* is, in the main, influenced by the Eastern story-telling techniques insofar as it makes use of the story-within-story and the telltales. Mistry uses Nariman Hansotia as the "tribal spokesman and the repository of the community's heritage" (Malak 190) who imparts his knowledge and wisdom to the community's children. There are also hints at Anglicization of the middle-class Parsis which point to the fact that this community has adapted to the Indian milieu in a selective manner. It has picked up what it found worthy while maintaining its own identity. This is what E. Kulke has called the 'selective assimilation' of Parsis (1974). In Mistry's hands this also turns into a means of underscoring the fact that a pure Parsi identity could never exist. Rather, the 'other' is a constant presence in all these short stories. For example, Gajra, the Marathi maid in 'Auspicious Occasion'; Francis, the Christian odd-job man in 'One Sunday'; and Jaakaylee, the Goan ayah, in 'The Ghost of Firozsha Baag' are all embodiments of the 'other' voices and the 'other's' memories. Thus, the Parsi world of Mistry's fiction is heteroglossic. The 'other' voices also engage in dialogue with the Parsi voices. So, there is no pure Parsi identity. In fact, 'The Ghost of FirozshaBaag' is entirely rendered from the 'other's' perspective. It is Jaakaylee, the Goan ayah, whose experiences are narrated. She is herself an embodiment of the merger of 'self' and 'other' as her 'name, language, songs' (*TFB* 45) are all a blend of Parsi and Goan cultures. While she has herself become imbued with the Parsi culture, her Goan hot curry has found space in her Parsi employers' household. Even the inscription of the 'other' in the Parsi space is typical of Mistry's political stance which seeks to abandon all 'essentialist' views of identity and, instead, seeks to promote a hybrid identity or an identity that is ever in making, but never a finished product that can be 'reified'.

The same note of ambivalence and hybridity is struck in the structure of the collection too. From 'Auspicious Occasion' to 'Swimming Lessons', it is a trajectory of movement from 'closed and cohesive cultural system' to the 'terrain where borders between cultures are porous and fluid'. The fluidity and

indeterminacy of the dominant note becomes manifest in the conception of home as it comes through in the stories. The conception is somewhat like Iain Chambers' idea of home as "a shifting configuration of transitive coherence" (39). The suggestion of the text seems to offer both 'home' and 'identity' as matters of 'becoming' instead of 'being'.

When compared with other immigrant writers from India, Mistry strongly asserted his unique position as a Parsi-Indian writer in an interview with Geoffrey Hancock: "My characters are outside Hindu India. And because of the history of the Zoroastrian religion, it does not provide a solid anchor like Hinduism or Judaism or Islam" (146). His Parsi identity is of vital concern to him as I have mentioned earlier. He fondly takes up the task of writing to 'preserve a record of how they [the Parsis] lived, to some extent.

He, however, rejects ethnic difference as 'a suppurating sore of a word, oozing the stench of bigotry' (*Tales From Firozsha Baag* 176), and he seeks to re-define the mainstream culture's self-perception and the perception of the 'others' too. In other words, he rejects the hegemonic grounds of Canadian multiculturalism and attempts to re-configure the dominant narrative of Canada as a nation. He is acutely aware of the 'presence of xenophobia and hostility' (*Tales From Firozsha Baag* 153) in Canada, and gestures towards redefining the Canadian multiculturalism in a way that allows to 'de-ghetoise and de-hyphenate it'.

Thus both Vassanji and Mistry seem to suggest through their fictional renderings what Bhikhu Parekh asserts in his deliberations on the issue of politics of identity among communities:

> As sharers of human identity, they are morally equal and make certain claims on each other. As the bearers of particular identities, they are related to some individuals by varying degrees of special ties. While some of these ties . . . are relatively marginal, others are central. They give depth and meaning to their lives as well as a sense of rootedness and belonging, and their lives would be unliveable without them (03).

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Diasporic Trauma and Identity Crisis in I. Allan Sealy's *The Trotternama*: *A Chronicle*

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All peoples and all nations have a story; often not one story, but stories- tales of who they are or were, how they came to be, and who they are meant to be. As boundaries between people and nations blur, the exigency with which the search for meaning takes place, points to a full out crisis of identity- one that has individuals, cultures, nations, races, crying out "Who are we?" and in the search for answers, the stories are revised and reconsidered to make sense of the past, explain the present, and anticipate the future. Down the centuries, history has recorded the lives of people who have lived on the margins as minorities and as distinct entities but outside the mainstream flow of culture and civilization. Irwin Allan Sealy has emerged as the voice for the voiceless minority, the Anglo-Indians, also known as half-castes, blacky-whites and eight annas (there were 16 annas in a rupee, the official currency of India around the independence). Sealy stands tall among a foray of writers like Rohinton Mistry, G.V. Desani and M.G. Vassanji, who have penned the plight of the marginalised and the downtrodden in their community.

Sealy's *The Trotternama* is about the once-flourishing community of Anglo-Indians, who still live in India, confused between two cultures. The writer explores the trauma of diaspora as the characters suffer from a hybrid and hyphenated existence which is reflected by a low degree of integration or common values; and a high degree of distance or isolation from the natives and their culture. This progeny of the British who landed in India during the British Raj some two centuries ago experience a sense of rootlessness and double consciousness. The paper brings to the fore the issue of non-inclusiveness of the Anglo-Indians- where

Indians consider them to be of European descent and Europeans consider them to be Indians with Indian blood. As such, the Anglo-Indians themselves are not in a position to reconsider their standpoint in the context of ethnic conflict. The paper argues that only by renegotiating the complex relationship between the past and the present, can the Anglo-Indians assimilate into the present culture and at the same time reconcile with their strong past heritage, thereby constructing a new identity.

The troubled Anglo-Indian hyphenated identity is in a crisis to establish its roots or anchor. In an age of diaspora, where 'fluid identities' are emerging, Sealy brings in a whole new dimension to the atrocious concept of a single identity against the life of a certain Justin Aloysius Trotter and his seven generations. The family history, narrated by Eugene Aloysius Trotter or the Seventh Trotter, of our own generation, is written with a definite purpose. Justin Trotter was among one of the first Europeans to arrive and subsequently settle in India. In fact, the whole question of identity attains a ridiculous dimension as Justin's reality unfolds: French by birth, English by choice (had taken British citizenship), and an Indian by circumstance. The awareness of his muddled identity makes Eugene confess, "I am half Anglo, you know" (3). We are attuned to this concept right at the beginning of the prologue with the words, "Take up the Grey Man's Burden" (1). He hints at the interior terrain of living life as a person of "mixed race", a "hybrid" person when he says, "I'm white here (in India), but I'm brown back there (in England, Europe)" (3).

Midway between two cultural worlds, the Europe and the East, under the peculiar conditions of their origin and socio-cultural development, the Anglo-Indians could never really get to know the West to which they aspired to belong, nor did they develop emotional ties with India where they really belonged. The somewhat sudden and unexpected departure of the British from the Indian soil post independence, posed a series of tangled problems involving critical choice-making for this mixed community. Those who left for England were also not held in much esteem, neither here nor there. While Indians called them 'packers-and-leavers'; the English looked down upon them- the mixed blood people- in contempt. Many of these, however, returned to India because they did not feel at home there too, or

because they were offered only mean jobs there.

By definition, an Anglo-Indian is a person of mixed descent. Article 366 (2) of the Indian Constitution defines an Anglo-Indian as such:

> An 'Anglo-Indian' means a person whose father or other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only.

The term Anglo-Indian came into use after 1911 and Viceroy Charles Hardinge was the first to officially recognise it. Over the years, this community has had a conflicting existence. The progeny born out of a white man (British) and a dark woman (Indian) has seemingly had a disinherited life, for they neither are completely a part of their present or previous homelands, nor are they completely integrated into their adopted communities. In consequence, the Anglo-Indians suffer a double displacement.

The novel spans the story of seven generations of the Trotter family and the declining fortunes of their community. *The Trotternama* is set within the historical timeframe of two centuries and surveys the fate and fortunes of the Anglo-Indians- the hyphenated, mixed raced offspring from British/European and Indian sexual unions. It is a narrative and discursive chronicle of the lives of seven generations of Trotters, an Anglo-Indian family whose lineage in India began with Justin Aloysius Trottoire. Justin Trottoire came to India in the 1750s as a French mercenary, was later employed by the British East India Company, and with ambitious ruthlessness and talent, made a tremendous fortune, establishing what would become the ancestral home of the Trotters, Sans Souci, near the city of Nakhlau (Lucknow). His change of surname to the anglicised Trotter was politically expedient as the British gained more control over the Indian territory and Justin, responding to the shifting power base, realised that future opportunities lay in their hands. To his fortune, the Trotter land grows larger each year as the Moti Ganga River keeps moving further and further eastward, and as per the pact of the land, he is allowed all land to the west of the river's bank. Land is wealth after all and the Trotters had no dearth of it.

The Great Trotter married just once and the first wife Sultana died after giving birth to son and heir Mikhail (Mik). The Great Trotter (or Tartar Sahib as the locals called him in their peculiar tongue) did later have three other mistresses, Farida who was brought to nurture young Mik on the death of Sultana, which she did for a few years before the boy ran away; Elise, daughter of a German painter (she was popularly known as the German or Jarman Begam by the Sans Souci staff); Rose, daughter of an Englishman, all brought to Sans Souci during various periods in their early teens. After the Great Trotter's untimely death, a conspiracy of sort springs up during which illegitimate sons are born to two of Trotter's mistresses: to Jarman Begam through the yard manager Yakub Khan and to Farida through Fonseca, the Ice Manager; the purpose being to contest their rights of staying on at Sans Souci even after Trotter's death. The little tribes of Khans and Fonsecas, though not of true Trotter blood, still manage to hold onto their claims to the Trotter legacy by the simple edifice of attaching Trotter (with the hyphen) to their names. This meant that the Khans eventually became Kahn-Trotters and the Fonsecas became Fonseca-Trotters. This legacy of Trotter-by-default carries on in future generations too, so much so that the Atkins born of relations between a Trotter daughter and an Atkins became Atkins-Trotters, and even more unusually, Mr Montagu who married the Middle Trotter's (Fourth Trotter's) daughter Victoria, actually changed his own last name to Trotter rather than have his wife change her name to Montagu! This was the far-reaching effect of Trotterization at Nakhlau.

As the years and then centuries go by, the Trotter family expands. Times too change and future generations of Trotters face revolt (1857) and wars (the two world wars) and the effects of the Indian Independence, all the while faithfully serving the British Empire and some of them decorated accordingly for their services. They also enjoy the benefits of technological advances such as the telephone, cameras, radios, televisions which shape their characters and lives accordingly. At the same time, even the most British amongst them slowly begin to incorporate Indianness in their daily lives so that truly the Anglo-Indians (synonymous with Trotters in this book) become a tribe unto themselves, fence-sitters, belonging neither to Britain nor to India.

As in the case of many other ethnicities, there happened a fusion of distinct cultures in Anglo-Indians as well, which resulted in the formation of a composite or shared value system, beliefs, tastes, behaviour, consciousness, cultural memory and loyalty. There are also difficulties arising from this mixing, such as the difficulty arising in defining their loyalty. While many preferred to go back to their father's land after India gained its independence; others preferred to stay back in India, considering India as their homeland. There are many instances in the novel exemplifying this confusion. While Montagu remained a strong nationalist and completely loyal to the interests of India; his wife was very much worried about the 'Indianising' of everything. As Montagu (who starts wearing a dhoti, like Gandhi) gets married to Justin's great-great-great-granddaughter, Victoria (her name symbolic of Queen Victoria, British), and Victoria's disgust at his attire and eating habits becomes apparent soon after, a split in the Anglo-Indians themselves appears, estranging them from the British and the Indians alike. Young Paul feels terribly upset over the British discrimination of Anglo-Indians. When denied membership of the Nakhlau Club, immediately after serving the empire in the war, he responds, "When it suits them, we are British ... when it doesn't, there is another club" (42). He was asked to join the club for Anglo-Indians.

Indeed, this is the crux of the matter dealt within the book - the plight of the exiled Anglo-Indian. With hard-won independence to the country, most of the highly skilled Anglo-Indians (i.e. Trotter tribes) deflected to Britain. Those left behind, willingly or unwillingly, found themselves deprived of real rights that are granted to the locals, such as jobs and other benefits as they were not considered true Indians. This is the other extreme of the racial spectrum, when previously in the old days of the British rule they were refused commissions in the army and other posts because they were half-breeds, not pure British. The author treats this subject with insight and humour, and though we laugh aloud at the sardonic take on the experiences of the characters and their dangling existence, we cannot help but sympathize with their pain and confusion caused by being neglected pieces of Indian society.

The author suggests that though the Anglo-Indians lived an ordinary life, yet, they could not escape the shadows of a

disinherited life. During the British rule, they did not understand the contemptuous attitude of the natives towards them. However, what they understood and felt was "the insult of the British attitude and nursed a standing grievance" and "[t]here hung over their consciousness the shadow of a disinherited life cast by the knowledge that all their potentialities were limited by something over which they had no control, namely, their birth" (Chaudhry 260). It took about two centuries for the Anglos to form a feeling of connectivity in India. They became conscious of themselves, their peoplehood and difference from the British as well as the Indians, when their community was targeted and referred to as "half-castes" and other similar cynical undertones.

The theme of cross-cultural encounter they face between the East and the West that causes an identity crisis, is a serious concern of the novelist. This crisis is not cultural alone; it goes beyond and includes language and status too. The crisis has accumulated over the years due to loneliness, alienation, longing and despair. The 'Nama' told by the narrator Eugene Trotter, the "chosen" Trotter who continues the family trait of one blue eye, one brown, reflects on his world travels, ostensibly undertaken to reconnect the narrative fragments of the diasporic Trotters into a unified, coherent and complete family story. As Eugene says, "Because we came from all over, not just England, and went all over, not just to England" (7).

As the 'Nama' unfolds, we realise that a coherent story is impossible to attain. The Trotter chronicle begins with Justin Trotter's death as he falls out of a hot-air balloon while floating above Sans Souci. The 'Nama' ends with Eugene misplacing the chronicle and resuming his life in the city of his birth, Nakhlau, his own Trotter origins in question and the Trotter chronicle lost forever. The Sans Souci estate is sold off and dismantled, but the Trotter remnants continue to live on the outskirts of their former ancestral home. As a means to survive their displacement in the political machinations of the colonial disengagement, the Trotters become globetrotters. Globally dispersed, the Trotter genealogy becomes as increasingly fragmented as their memories. The climax of the book is the shock delivered to the Trotters when after a month of torrential rains in the mid 20C, the Moti Ganga River suddenly turns course and swallows up four-fifths of the Trotter

land!

Here Sealy takes Bhabha's position that 'hybridity' is not a third, stable term that resolves the tensions between races and cultures, or that inverts the power relations between dominant and subservient, colonising and colonised (113). It is instead a third term that disrupts and dispels the notion of fixed identities, cultures, races, and power relations. Sealy demonstrates in *The Trotternama*, that the hybridised state can be a disruptive, confusing place to inhabit. The Anglo-Indians were seen as half-castes by both the British and the Indians and regarded as impure, as well as physically and mentally inferior to both races. The 'Anglo-Indian' appeared to belong neither here nor there. Here perhaps the author seems to point out that as being a trotter who is centrally moving from one place to the other and having a long line of offspring to follow, identity remains uprooted. There is no permanent root with which they can identify themselves.

Out of all the Europeans, the British stayed in India the longest, and they had more contact with the native Indians. They were the rulers and Indians were the ruled. It is interesting to note the intention of the East India Company in promoting these mixed bloods as they needed the services of some educated men whose anglicised upbringing would be useful so long as they ruled India. Stracey observes, "It was not in the interest of the community to let them (Anglo-Indians) integrate with other Indians or develop a sense of attachment to the country" (3). Hence, the Company ensured their loyalty through limited benefits, education and employment. However, historians opine that Britain, which was morally responsible for the creation of this community, betrayed them by not thinking of their rehabilitation in the post-independent India.

This situation of the Anglo-Indians puts them in such a position that their affinity and affiliations become their biggest problems. They have a hyphenated identity. Therefore, swinging like yo-yos they could never establish their credentials. The historical situation of the Anglo-Indians, the pangs of cultural assimilation and resistance, the diasporic trauma of belonging to a minority group, the cultural spaces between the two nations and the attempts of this community to lead a compatible life in India and at the same time their affinity and loyalty towards the English,

provide the creative tension to the novel. The author in a way legitimises their divided loyalty. The community served the English masters, who later rejected their mass migration to England after India's independence. Under the Indian rule, the community suddenly found their elite status converted to that of the subaltern! This is also suggested by way of the Moti Ganga River swallowing up a major chunk of the trotter land, which metaphorically, would mean the elite status of the Anglo-Indians humbled and crippled in the independent India!

Through the narrator, the author also traces his own history to find the roots of his ethnicity to resolve the difficult question of cultural identity. As the last of the Trotters (Eugene) returns home, to India, with his trunks, Sealy suggests that India is their permanent homeland. As long as the characters in the novel straddle between two worlds, two cultures, two ideologies and two traditions, they continue to live a marginal existence. Drawing a balance between the past and the present helps them inscribe a new self and reconstruct a better future. In the end, the narrator, Eugene, symbolizes 'New Promise' because 'History' has been left far behind with hope of a better future and enlightenment about the process of history making.

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Gurdial Singh's *Night of the Half Moon*: A Heroic Journey of a Peasant's Fight Against Injustice

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Nihalsinghwala (Moga).

Gurdial Singh, honoured with the Jnanpith Award for 1999, is a Punjabi novelist of epic dimensions. Born in a poor family of artisans in Malwa region of Punjab he studied the hard way and eventually retired as University Professor. He attributes his Jnanipith Award to "Punjabi literature and its rich cultural heritage. In a way, it is in recognition of those about whom I write." Though his literary career started in 1958, success came to him as a novelist with his first major work, Marhi Da Deeva in 1964. Translated into English as The Last Flicker (Sahitya Akademi), it was hailed as a modern classic. This was followed by a list of significant works of fiction - Anhoe, Addh Chanini Raat, Anhe Ghore Da Daan and Parsa. He has authored eight collections of short stories, nine novels, three plays, two prose works and nine books for children. Apart from Marhi Da Deeva, two other novels - Addh Chanini Raat (Night of the Half-Moon), and Parsa have been translated into English. For Gurdial Singh, "art has never been very far from life. . . it is a way of connecting with people." In the words of the novelist, "Punjab . . . has had a long-drawn out history of invasions, of continuous, uninterrupted assault and aggression. Its cultural history has constantly been under attack. This has given rise to the tradition of protest and dissent in Punjabi literature." The streak of protest in the form of rebellion is discernible in the fight of a peasant against injustice in Night of the Half-Moon.

Night of the Half Moon (1972) is Gurdial Singh's fifth novel. It got immense appreciation from readers and also remained focus of discussion among the notable literary critics. The novel got Sahitya Akademi Award and Nanak Singh Novelist Award in 1975 for its literary merits. On the surface level, it presents the story of a feud between two agrarian families of rural Punjab, though on a deeper level, it peeps into the real Punjabi life explored through different cultural and social metaphors. While the narrative compels its readers to re-think and re-organize the traditional value systems about suffering, justice, murder and punishment, it dwells at length on the transcending nature of human relationships which, more or less, have been shown based on personal priorities rather than sticking to the traditional familial system.

Modan, the protagonist of the novel, has been depicted as quite different in temperament and attitude from his brothers Sajjan and Chhottu. Their father was trickily killed by Ghana. Modan could not control his rage and in sheer revenge, murdered Ghana and was imprisoned for twelve years. During his absence, his brothers develop friendly relations for economic benefits with the sons of Ghana who are also crooks. When Modan returns home after completing his sentence, he finds everything changed around him, feels lonely and abandoned by his own family. He rules out any relationship with his enemies though his brothers do not find any harm in it as long as they are getting some economic and personal benefits out of it. Thus, Modan decides to sever ties with his brothers and decides to choose the path less travelled by i.e. the path of unending struggle. He knows very well what it means to be different and uncompromising while being conscious of dangers inherent in the chosen path. Something gnaws inside him as he heads against the tide and readies himself to encounter the difficulties and troubles. In order to understand his particular behavior and attitude, we need to speculate the conceptualization of justice especially in the backdrop of those motifs which constitute the concept of self-respect (*anakh*) in traditional Punjabi culture.

Justice, as an idea and concept, in itself, is a very complex matter. In earlier times, when God was considered the starting point of everything, the unique source of existence as well as its destiny, the meaning of justice was not as difficult to approach as it

is in the contemporary era. Religion, with all its morality integrated, served as the judgment point against whom the actions of human beings were evaluated. Religion was the guiding principle behind all the judgments made by some influenced human beings on the actions of other humans on its name. God enjoyed this supreme position for a long time in the matter of justice because of his incontestable superiority over human beings.

As long as religion remained the exclusive inspiration behind any judgment made to evaluate human actions, justice, however simplified its form may be, was logically proved as injustice in one or many other different ways. For instance, if someone murdered one's father, he was not expected to do the same. And if he did so, he was considered more serious criminal than the earlier. He was often consolidated with the idea that God himself would punish the culprit in the form that he will not be conferred salvation. In this way religion taught us to accept and not to react. The reaction was solely considered as the religion's part and not of humans. "The essence of His [god's] doctrine is summed up in total consent and in non-resistance to evil. Thou shall not kill, even to prevent killing. The world must be accepted as it is, nothing must be added to its unhappiness, but you must consent to suffer personally from the evil it contains" (Camus, *The Rebel* 60). Religion preached one, however pathetic condition he may be in, to live according to His will. Oppression was not seen as created by humans but it was believed a natural process designed by God himself as an integral part of the universe.

It was only after the Enlightenment, the birth of reason and logic in the matter of existence that the position of God was challenged. Nietzsche, who metamorphosed the purpose of human existence on this earth, declared the possibility of existence without the concept of God. Nietzsche and his ilk, reduced the identity of God to a mere psychological illusion. All the values regarding salvation and eternity died as soon as the death of God was declared. In this God-free world, man is believed either having salvation in advance or he is not interested in it at all. He no longer waits anyone for his salvation rather he knows that he himself has the power to negate his existence at any time. As far as life itself has lost meaning (or at least humans are still

unconvinced about it), how can death or salvation has it? The man of today is not interested in getting redemption from his sins rather he himself is uncertain about his position as a criminal as compared to the deeds of God.

Since there is no higher or superior authority against which the actions of humans can be evaluated, any judgment on justice or injustice, good or bad has become complex, individual-based and therefore often blurred and misjudged. This is the absurdity of situation of the post-modern world. According to Camus, "…since we have no higher value to direct our action, we shall aim at efficiency. Since nothing is true or false, good or bad, our principle will become that of showing ourselves to be the most effective, in other words the most powerful. And then the world will no longer be divided into the just and unjust, but into masters and slaves" (Camus, *The Rebel* 13).

According to Camus, however absurd the situation may be, "the very first thing that cannot be denied is the right of others to live" (Camus, *The Rebel* 15). In this way, any action that limits or influences the right of others to live comfortably in their personal domains will be judged as injustice or oppression. The one who creates these limits directly or indirectly for the other is an oppressor or in Camus' words falls under the category of masters. The oppression should not strictly be considered in the form of physical torture only. Its forms may vary with respect to the situation and the cultural contexts. For instance, in *The Last Flicker*, Jagsir is socially, psychologically and economically oppressed. Anything that hinders essential human dignity can be understood as oppression. Injustice therefore becomes an inevitable part of master-slave, oppressor-oppressed relationship. Taking account of *Night of the Half Moon*, Ghana and Modan, according to the categorization suggested by Camus, are in the relation of master and slave. Modan's father experiences physical, social and psychological oppression because of the false case planned by Ghana in order to trap him. Physically, he was beaten up by the police in front of his family and the whole village. His beard was pulled at by a policeman which is one of the metaphors that symbolizes the greatest insult of a man in the Punjabi culture. Socially, he is insulted for having relations with the dacoits and drug smugglers. Psychologically, he is depressed to such an extent

that he loses his strength to sustain his existence. He is victimized not by a natural situation but by a malicious person Ghana, thus his oppression is intentional. In this situation Ghana seems to be representing the category of masters while Pala belongs to the slaves.

The next and inevitable step in master/slave or oppressor/oppressed relationship is rebellion. It is the situation when an oppressed being individually decides to negate the direct or indirect dominance and authority of the oppressor. There comes a point when the oppressed decides 'I cannot tolerate anymore, not even a bit of it.' Modan, the son of Pala and the protagonist of *Night of the Half Moon*, seems to be following the similar attitude when he decides to act against Ghana. He was an ordinary farmer who used to help his father in their fields. It was only after the death of his father that the conflict starts between the culturally constructed image of a 'man' who lives with self-respect and his own position against it. There comes a point when Modan says 'no' to his present position and decides to take revenge for the death of his father. This image of a 'man,' which is highlighted by the author in the text and also has been repeatedly pointed out by the different characters in the discourse, belongs to the integral paradigm and is often understood as a typical Punjabi trait.

> It's not money that makes a person big, what one really needs is a generous heart … And the true son of a man should always be magnanimous…. When I finally leave, I want people to sit up and say: 'Well this was a man who was born with a purpose (91).

Being a 'Man' here means having a generous heart and the one who gives equivalent in return (generally in the context of injustice done against someone). This concept is exemplified by Modan in the novel by avenging the death of his father. He denies his victimized state by resorting to a violent action which his father fails to do. The novel hence presents a contradiction between two different modes of being. Pala, who is victimized by the situation, is sympathized by the people of his own culture, but fails to gain their respect for being pitiful and helpless. According to the cultural context of a 'Man,' the path followed by his son Modan, actually should have been followed by him (Pala). People

can sympathize with him for his gentle behavior, but they do not applaud the way he dies. People regard the death of Pala as injustice and expect his son Modan to do the same against "Ghanekiyan."

In order to understand the legitimacy of the murder of Ghana by Modan, the very first thing we need to enquire is Modan's oppressed state. Injustice is obviously there if the right to live of a person (Pala) is eroded by some other being (Ghana). Sartre says, "My death is not for me but for others; it is not my concern, but the concern of others who will notice it and need to deal with it as an aspect of their continuing concrete environment (Patka 132)." In this way, the death of Pala is a concern of Modan and he is the one who needs to deal with the situation after him. In the Punjabi culture, one is a coward and not a true son of a 'man' if he accepts the death of his father passively because it connotes that one is not able to protect one's family. One is considered as an inferior human being and socially oppressed in the matter of manhood and self-respect. What is at stake is his *anakh (self respect)* if he does not take any action against the killer of his father.

Anakh, according to the culture of Punjab, can conceptually be summarized as "a higher way of holding oneself" (Fox 2). It can be defined as a higher level of holding an individual's self-respect and pride in different human situations. The elements that hurt or maintain it have been culturally and socially constructed throughout the ages of a particular community. In the context of Punjabi community, *anakh* is an essential part of heroism. And to protect or maintain one's *anakh*, every action taken by an individual, even though it leads to the violation of the rules, is considered legitimate by the people of the community. Modan's reasons for killing Ghana are different from those of Ghana because he (Ghana) conspiratorially kills Modan's father for economic reasons but Modan kills Ghana to protect his *anakh*. The people of the village know this fact and internally appreciate what Modan does but no one except Ruldu comes forward to advocate Modan's righteousness overtly. Those, who criticize the aggressive action of Modan, criticize it for the economic hardships that Modan would have to face afterwards or they themselves fear of violating friendly relations with *Ghanekian* (the whole family of Ghana) because this may further lead to an

economic loss for them. Hence, Modan, like Jeona, Dulla, Sucha and Mirza, is left alone by the people of his community to fight his fate. Despite unspoken consent of the people of his community, Modan's rebellion remains personal in nature from the beginning till the end.

The strong inspiration that encourages this rebellion lies in the cultural assumptions whereas "mysterious energy" (a term used by Clarissa Pinkola Estes in the Introduction to Joseph Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces),* which is necessary to execute it (rebellion), emanates from within a human being. According to Clarissa Pinkola Estes, "…the mysterious energy for inspiration, revelation, and action in heroic stories worldwide is also universally found in human beings" (XXV). Pala (the father) lacks this "mysterious energy" while Modan (the son) possesses it in abundance, and after getting inspired, though in the form of an irony, from his friends Sheri and Gyala and *taaya* Lallu, it is difficult for him to control himself. Instead of going to his house, he goes to his farm, digs for the pistol, which he had concealed in a small earthen pot under the ground, and kills Ghana who meets him on the way by chance. With this murder, Modan is no longer the same human being as he was earlier. From an ordinary farmer Modan becomes rebellious in line with the image of an ideal 'Man" of Punjabi culture which has been shaped by different mythological characters, historical figures and legendary heroes. This vague image of an ideal 'Man' can metaphorically be replaced by the term 'hero.' The traits, or more suitably the tropes, attributed to that image are the traits of heroism. For example in the context of Punjabi culture, fearlessness may be seen to be drawn from Porus; to fight against social injustice and bravery from Dulla Bhatti; vengeance from Jeona Maur; pride from Sucha Surma and Mirza; the feeling of self-immolation from Ranjha and Mahiwal; patriotism, loyalty and devotion from Kartar Singh Sarabha, Udham Singh and Bhagat Singh etc. All these figures add something to the connotation of heroism in Punjabi culture and indirectly determine the behaviour of the protagonists in literary narratives. The source of inspiration or the heroic image that reflects in the character of Modan is the image of a legendary hero, Jeona Maur who is known in Punjabi culture for taking his revenge on Dogar

who had betrayed and killed Jeona Maur's brother, Kishna. Since then, Jeona has been revered as a great hero of the Punjabi community for his courage, bravery and determination to take revenge without caring for his own life.

Modan undergoes the same mental turbulence over the death of his father which Jeona must have experienced when his brother was deceived. The acute feeling of revenge dominates the psyche of both of these characters. Social morality and ethics cannot stop them for being in action for saving their honour and self-esteem. Modan's character is the true replica of the mental image of Jeona Maur. When he decides to take revenge for the death of his father, he is in the process, however unconsciously, of assimilating his 'self' to the image of a higher order of heroism. Estes too corroborates the notion by saying: "…the heroic self seeks an exalting spiritual countenance, that is, a higher way of holding and conducting oneself." This desire of "higher way of holding and conducting oneself" in Modan itself speaks for him as a hero- "superior in degree to other men and to [his] environment" (Fox 2).

The heroic images created through the lives and actions of different legendary heroes of Punjab serve as cultural metaphors for the people of the community. These images time and again keep on reflecting in the attitude and behaviour of Modan throughout the discourse. The narrator describes his position in the novel as:

> The earth seemed to tremble under the fury of his pounding feet, sending shivers down the leaves of the trees that stood motionless. And it appeared as if that moment he would be able to repeat the performance of the legendary Bhimsen; hurl elephants up in the air with such ferocity that they would forever keep zooming in the heavens, never ever to land on the earth again (42).

The "mysterious energy" due to which one sets to be in action, as it has been mentioned earlier too, emanates from within. It is an individual's response to the outside stimuli. Man is what he wants to be, or more specifically, chooses to be. This is the reason why individuals, in spite of sharing same cultural myths, beliefs, motifs, assumptions etc., behave differently in almost similar

circumstances. In this way, Sartre is right when he says "existence precedes essence." In *Night of the Half Moon*, Modan, Sajan and Chhottu share the same culture and familial atmosphere, but only Modan, out of the three, decides to be in action. Only he is not ready to compromise with the situation, while the other two brothers make alliance with Ghanekiyan for material gains without much difficulty. Thomas Carlyle in his influential book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* says, "A just man will generally have a better cause than money in what shape so ever, before deciding to revolt . . . " (249). This better cause, in the case of Modan, is his self-esteem, dignity, manhood or in Punjabi language *anakh*.

The phenomenal homogeneity shared by the legendary heroes and Modan is based on the importance they give to their lives lived with dignity and pride. Their personal dignity becomes the central point of their existence. Any social barrier, whether it is social morality or religious ethics based on *pap-pun* [(The Hindu concept according to which the person who commits *pap* goes to *narak* (hell) and who does *pun* (charity) goes to *swarg* (heaven)], fails to restrain them from committing violent acts. The dream of living prosperous domestic lif e is often been sacrificed by these heroes in order to achieve and maintain what as a cultural metaphor can be called *anakh*. Economic values are secondary in the life of Modan or in the life of any other legendary hero of Punjab.

Modan, reacting true to his temperament, goes to challenge the sons of Ghana and in the scuffle, gets a fatal wound on his leg by his own brother Sajjan who was on the side of his enemies. Modan fails to retrieve from that wound and dies afterwards. He fights with Ghana's sons to save the integrity of his being and self-respect of his brother Chhottu who himself is not capable of it. And even after his death, the feeling of revenge does not hit the conscience of Chhottu the way it hits the conscience of Ruldu. "And the very next moment, he sprang to his feet with the suddenness of a forest fire. Grinding his teeth, he screamed, "O Paapiya! How could you leave, setting the forest and postures on fire? Henh? – Tell me, how could you? – Henh? –" (159).

Modan thus fights against injustice that begins after the death of his father and ends with his own death. This fight changes

him from an ordinary peasant to a murderer. During this journey from a common man to murderer, despite the friendship of Ruldu, Modan suffers the agony of being desolate and lonely. He gets the company of Dani for a moment but the path he has already chosen for himself does not allow him to cherish the idea of a happy domestic life for long. This path is the path of rebellion. Now the question arises, "the question which constitutes the real progress achieved by Dostoyevsky in the history of rebellion, can one live in a permanent state of rebellion?" (Camus, *The Rebel* 53). Ivan Karamazov suggests the answer to this question as: "one can only live in a permanent state of rebellion by pursuing it to the bitter end" (Camus, *The Rebel* 53). Modan lives in this permanent state of rebellion after he commits murder of Ghana and takes it to the bitter end i.e. to his own death.

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Communal Violence and the Politics of Partition: A Literary-Historical Study of Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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I

On 15th of August 1947 India became independent and the country was divided into two separate nation-states on the basis of religious demographics. The Partition, however, was a highly controversial arrangement and has remained a cause of much tension on the subcontinent till today. According to Anita Inder Singh, anything between 200000 and three million people may have lost their lives. Between 1946 and 1951, some nine million Hindus and Sikhs crossed into India from Pakistan and about six million Muslims went to Pakistan from India (Anita Inder Singh 1). The Indian unity, brotherhood and political ideology, through which India achieved freedom, remained a failure. Instead, the new opposite chapter of inter-state and international politics began with the partition. Politics no longer appeared to be a passionate and selfless commitment but a game of intrigue and underhand manoeuvrings. The violent nature of the partition created an atmosphere of mutual hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan that plagues their relationship even to the present, and has led to two wars and a number of battles.

The partition of India and the associated bloody riots that followed have inspired many historians and creative minds in both the new countries to recreate the tragic events before and following the partition. In addition to the enormous historical literature, there is also an extensive body of artistic work---novels, short stories, poetry, films, plays, paintings, etc.--- that deals imaginatively with the pain and horror of the events. Even now, 70 years after the partition, works of fiction and films are made that relate to the events of the partition. The vast volume of partition

literature in English, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and other languages of the subcontinent faithfully records the gruesome human disaster in the wake of the partition. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Atia Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* (1966), Bhashma Sahni's *Tamas* (1973), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1991), Sucha Nand's *The Partition: A Novel* (2007), short stories by Saadat Hassan Manto and the poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz are some of the works that attempt to give us an insight into the public frenzy, communal hatred, extreme disintegration and large scale sectarian violence. Some references to partition can also be found in such recent works as Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995).

Historians, political analysts and social scientists have put forward heart-rending and mind-boggling chronological accounts of 'when', 'why,' 'what' and 'how' of the tragedy of the Partition, and there is no dearth of authentic documents or records available on the subject, written at different times. But as Asaduddin says,

> Historical accounts and official documents, despite their apparent 'tranparency' and 'factuality' can tell us only about statistics. But the human dimension . . . can never be fully quantified. This is where literature comes in, as it yields insights for a better understanding of the human situation (Arora and Dhawan Vol 1, 96).

The history books "do not record the pain, trauma and sufferings of those who had to part from their kins, friends, and neighbours, their deepening nostalgia for places they had lived in for generations", and "the harrowing experiences of the countless people" (Mushirul Hasan 1997, quoted by Arora and Dhawan, Vol 1, 13). Literatures are concerned more with 'what out of it' and 'what after it.' They seek to foreground 'another' history—the history of untold suffering, misery before and after the Partition and human agonies and traumas which accompanied it. A study of Partition writings, thus, "will offer historical perspective on some vital issues like Hindu-Muslim rift, the role of Indian leaders like Nehru, Gandhi and Jinnah, and the handling of the issues by the British rulers" (Arora, and Dhawan, Vol 1, 13-14). This paper is

an attempt to study Chamaan Nahal's novel *Azadi* in this context. The paper is intended to underline "the value of literature as human document that supplements historical reconstruction of reality" (M. Asaduddin 95).

II

Chaman Nahal was born in Sialkot in **1927,** formerly in India and now in Pakistan. His first novel *My True Faces* (1973) was followed by *Azadi* (1975). The novel,_ *Azadi* offers "an intensive picture of the effect of the traumatic experience of the partition on the life of the people living in the north-western border area of India" (Naikar in Arora and Dhawan, Vol 2, 217). Divided into three parts—'The Lull', 'The Storm' and 'The Aftermath', *Azadi* presents a vivid political picture from the announcement of the Cabinet Mission Plan on June 3, 1947 to Mahatama Gandhi's assassination. Although the novel is written from an omniscient point of view, it depicts life as seen through Lala Kanshi Ram's consciousness, who observes with keen interest the political turbulence that is going on in India during the pre-independence years.

The novel begins in the lanes of Siakot in mid-1947, with a vibrant community of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh families living together peacefully in communal harmony. In the beginning, Nahal shows how Kanshi Ram the Hindu, Barkat Ali the Mohammedan and Teja Singh the Sikh share the same Punjabi culture and language, and consider Sialkot their homeland. The novel ends with a sadly depleted family of Kanshi Ram trying to begin life anew as refugees in Delhi. Meticulous attention to details and a firsthand knowledge of the life of the characters enable Nahal to make the plight of the refugees real to the reader. *Azadi,* like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* or Manohar Malgonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges*, shows the cruelty as well as the humanity of both sides. The novel also shows the maturing of Arun, Kanshi Ram's only son, and gives an account of his love, first for Nur, the Muslim girl left behind in Pakistan, and then for Chandni, a low-caste girl who is abducted on way to India.

The novel opens on the third of June 1947 when the Viceroy was awaited to make an important announcement in the evening. Lala Kanshi Ram, the major character in the novel, lives a quiet life with his wife Prabha Rani and his son Arun. This

quietness seems appropriate to the title 'The Lull' of the first part. But Nahal also hints that there is some trouble. We find communal leaders using different frames of reference to incite one community against the other. The Hindu leaders made people believe that the ancient cultural tradition was decaying because of the Muslim rule, thus arousing hatred in the mind of the Hindu community. Arya Samaj in particular was consciously promoting religious orthodoxy as a part of the revival of Hinduism. It expressed its ideological agenda in several different ways though its main core and contours were defined by cow protection agitation, the crusade for Hindi, and the sangathan of a caste-ridden society. Lala Kanshi Ram was himself influenced by Arya Samaj. In the meetings of Arya Samaj, Lala Kanshi Ram realised that the true language of an Indian was Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas. Arya Samaj's crusade for Hindi drew the lines of cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims in Punjab. The Muslims suspected some foul play because the Hindus under the banner of the Samaj clamoured that Urdu should be replaced by Hindi. Urdu was conceived to be the language of the Muslims. But paradoxically, Lala Kanshi Ram knows only Urdu for writing and reading. He uses Urdu language for his daily business, which he learnt from his father and from a primary teacher in his village and neither of whom was a Muslim. In the beginning of the novel, it is shown that Urdu was very much language of the Hindus and the Sikhs as well as of the Muslims. Lala Kanshi Ram knows Hindi, but he speaks Punjabi. Thus despite the differences, there was a complete harmony and no prejudice in the communities before the partition. They were all "Punjabis" (*Azadi* 54).

Nahal in the novel also discusses the politics and the politicians of the times. From the very beginning, however, Lala Kanshi Ram is shown as suspicious of the moves and motives of the Indian leaders as well as of the British. He informed his wife that morning that the Viceroy was to make an important announcement that evening from the All India Radio. He looked worried and feared the horrible consequences, "if the English agree to give Pakistan to Jinnah." But Prabha Rani consoled him to rely on the faith that "Gandhi would never agree to a division of the country" (39). The novelist also uses Lala kanshi Ram, who notices the future calamity of the partition, to voice his comments

on the role of the political leaders. While the British were in a hurry to leave, the Congress leaders could not be trusted. Rajaji was the first congress leader to have seen the inevitability of Pakistan. In his eagerness to offer some solution to the communal question, he made the Madras Legislature accept a resolution accepting Pakistan in principle. He brought Gandhi and Jinnah to the negotiating table. The talks failed but they improved Jinnah's bargaining position considerably.

> "Didn't Gandhiji and Rajaji themselves as much as offer Pakistan to Jinnah in 1944? They were the ones who put the idea in his head…. Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too" (40).

Kanshi Ram thus found fault with Gandhi. Chaman Nahal seems to believe that the Rajaji's offer put Jinnah on the pedestal in the Muslim provinces.

Through Lala Kanshi Ram, the novelist also voices the fears of the minorities. Lala Kanshi Ram was greatly disturbed to think of the horrible consequences of the proposed partition. He was primarily concerned with the fate of the four hundred million people, if the partition took place. He had fears to leave his property and birthplace, if the new nation came into existence. He said to Prabha Rani: "if Pakistan is created, we'll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives" (41). Before the announcement, everyone was talking about the partition and the boundary line. In each home, on each street corner, this was the only subject discussed that day.

As the announcement is made by the Viceroy about the partition, people think that the congress had betrayed them by conceding Pakistan. In communal agitation all congress leaders were trying to achieve political power, while Gandhi was marching the states to keep peace and harmony among the communities. Nahal criticizes Nehru and his speech on the partition over radio, which created a fear and confusion in the hearts of the minorities. Through Lala Kanshi who ridiculed Nehru's message of sacrifice after the partition, Nahal voices the anger of the people against Nehru and the political leaders:

> "What stupid thing was he talking about? Was he really Nehru? . . . What had happened to his *akkal*, his mind? Have partition if there is no other way, Have it that way . . . Had he gone mad? Didn't he know his people? . . . What of your promises to us, you Pandit Nehru?" (65).

By such repeated interrogations, the author emphatically holds Nehru and the other leaders responsible for the partition. The Hindus looked with dismay and disbelief at their leaders' policy. Their hope that Gandhi and his associates would never give in to the demand of Pakistan was completely dashed. Chaman Nahal emphatically holds that Nehru failed to evaluate the predicament of the minorities in the newly formed countries. He makes it clear that the minorities were very reluctant to the idea of partition. Nahal exposes the gross stupidity of the national leaders who failed miserably to understand the communal dynamics. Kriplani, the congress leader is the worst, who asked the minorities to stay where they were. Kanshi Ram felt that the national leaders should have scented mass migration before the partition.

Nahal also examines the leaders' focus on "the two-nation theory" on religious and communal basis. This theory created barrier between man and man, between brother and brother, and hence proved to be tragic indeed. Thus, after the actual announcement is made, there is a change in the Muslim and the Hindu attitude. Abdul Ghani was a faithful friend of Lala Kanshi Ram in the past and had lived in peace and harmony with his neighbours, who treated him as an equal before the partition. But under the sway of Jinnah he changed and became a Leaguer. The League had filled him with communal hatred. Ghani thus started hating the Hindus. Nahal, however, has treated the character of Abdul Ghani ironically. As Lala Kanshi Ram comments, Abdul Ghani was blind to the historical truth that he was the product of "many crosses between low-caste Hindu women and Mogul foot soldiers", though he himself thought that he was the descendant of Prophet Muhammad (51). In fact the entire Muslim community became a puppet in the hands of their leaders, and followed them faithfully. The atmosphere was surcharged with horror, tension, worry and hatred. The Hindus in Sialkot feared, while the Muslims were cheerful and were eager to harm the Hindus and grab their property. Muslim communalists ensnared common people to be suspicious and nurture fear from and about the

Hindu community through their communal propaganda. The procession of the Muslims is taken out within hours of the announcement. In communal frenzy, the Muslims started to humiliate the Hindu minorities. They take out the procession to warn the Hindu and the Sikh population that they had no place in the new land and that they should quit. Lala Kanshi Ram at first was not ready to leave Sialkot but later on accepted the reality. He evaluated the situation and was convinced that the British already were not interested in preserving the unity of India. Jinnah had become the ideal of the Muslims. He was followed blindly by the Muslims. Nahal realistically views that the political leaders are guilty for the partition and its horrid consequences.

The partition affected immediately first of all the minorities. The minorities of both the newly born countries were uprooted from their homes and fields, and were driven by fear of death to seek safety across the border. In the second part "The Storm," Nahal describes the communal fire that engulfed the country. Many cities of the Punjab had been aflame for months; there were large scale killing and lootings in Lahore, Gujrat, Gujaranwala, Amirtsar, Ambala etc. Killing of the Hindus was a daily ritual of the Muslims. These brutal acts were followed by frightening and demoralizing fires. Violence followed violence. Minority community stood very defenceless. Both communities were killing each other mercilessly. There were communal riots everywhere. The English could put down the earlier riots with firmness. But now the government looked unwilling to control the rising storm. The political leaders also remained cool. In fact they exploited the situation to their advantage by fanning the communal fire. The Hindus felt unprotected and forlorn in the land for the Muslims. The leaders were hollow and uncertain and the governments remained unconcerned. Lala Kanshi Ram felt grieved at the strange role of the governments.

In the last part of the novel, "The Aftermath," Chaman Nahal depicts the plight and humiliation of the refugees in "free India". The whole novel is "an anti-climax" and the anti-climax reaches its climax when the refugees from Pakistan are treated in an abusive and indifferent manner at Delhi (Tiwari in Arora and Dhawan, Vol 2, 243). The Indian government was handling the situation carelessly. The refugees are treated as intruders, a

nuisance. Lala Kanshi Ram though was in free India now, actually felt no freedom, no identity in his own homeland. This freedom remained to him meaningless and futile. Lala Kanshi Ram is rebuked when he requests for a room and a shop to be allotted to him. He was made to feel "small and debased". His condition became more critical, when officers demanded bribe from him for the house. He broods over the bleakness and uncertainty of his future. And out of despair and humiliation, he stopped wearing a turban, "a sign of respect, of dignity" (366). The novel ends with his loss of "ability to communicate with his family."

> He wanted to talk about it to Prabha Rani or to Arun. That was another ruin azadi had caused. He had lost the ability to communicate with his family (369).

Nahal in this way shows how the partition was not only physical but psychological also. He unhesitatingly indicates that the two-nation theory was wrong. It did not solve the problem of the minorities. The basis on which partition took place is futile because there was total mingling of both communities in each and every corner of the country. Kanshi Ram, the mouthpiece of the novelist remarked: "One would have to go around with tweezers through all the villages to separate the Muslims from the Hindus." And according to the rationale of the partition, there could be no place for the minorities. Lala Kanshi Ram belonged to the majority, but to his dismay, in the free India, he became a new minority—the refugees. The partition thus created new minorities with permanent political upheavals.

Azadi is certainly a classic based on the partition riots. The novel is a heart-wrenching portrayal of the gender aspect of the Partition. The description of atrocities on women is beyond imagination. Thousands of women faced sexual violence during the Partition riots. This included not just rape but also other forms of violence such as parading women naked, sometimes with their private parts mutilated or their bodies tattooed with symbols of the other religion. Sexual violence against women of the other community was a way of asserting the superiority of the aggressor's community. Many were forced to drown themselves in wells, or get killed by their own families, lest they fall prey to such violence and destroy the honour of the family. Yet another

aspect was that women of the other community were abducted, forced to convert and marry. Two years later the governments of India and Pakistan decided to heal some wounds by tracing abducted women on both sides and returning them to their homes, without realising that they could be creating another problem: many of these women may have been married with children and may have resigned to their fate when they were asked to re-live the trauma of the Partition. In any case, the greatest problem for them was whether their families back home would accept them now that they had been "polluted."

Vividly painting all the realities, Chaman Nahal thus poignantly touches the subject of women victims. Women were the worst victims and were the hardest hit. The description of Sunanda, her grandeur, her untouched sophistication and then the description of the way in which she is dragged and ill-treated by Captain Rahmat-Ullan Khan is heart-rending. Vulnerable and open to the savage instincts of brutes, these women had no protection. The point to be noted is that it was not only Hindu women who were ill-treated; their counterparts in India were no less insulted. Seeing the pitiable and helpless condition of Muslim women in India, Lala Kanshi Ram stopped hating Muslims. In each hurt of Muslim girl, he saw his own daughter Madhu whom he had lost in Pakistan in the violence erupted by the partition:

> "whatever the Muslims did to us in Pakistan, we're doing it to them here . . . We are all equally guilty . . . Each of those girls in that procession at Amritsar was someone's Madhu" (338-9).

This is perhaps the message that Chaman Nahal wants to give through the novel.

Nahal has portrayed a realistic picture of the partition in the novel. While delineating the partition, he discusses the cause, the process of the partition and the butchery of political leaders with its effect on both the newly created countries. He also shows how the partition changed the political ideology of both the nations. The narrative brings to light the enormity of political decisions at the time of independence and the partition, and the subsequent human tragedy of slaughter and destruction. With the main focus on one Hindu family of Lala Kanshi Ram, a rich Hindu grain merchant, the novel describes the breakup of communities,

loss of life and material wealth and the despair suffered by so many people which eventually led to the mass exodus of the minority communities from one new emerging country, Pakistan, to the other and the vice versa. Extremely moving and brilliantly written with a very human touch, this is one of the most significant novels on the tragedy of Partition.

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, according to Shubha Tiwari, is a simple and candid novel about the realities of India's independence and her partition. The words like sacrifice, struggle, non-violence sound very grand indeed but certain aspects of this important historical event were grotesque and gruesome. *Azadi* strips off the layers of romance, valor and chivalry and lays bare certain historical realities which demand attention (Tiwari in Arora and Dhawan, Vol 2, 240). The creation of Pakistan solved no problem. The seven decades of post-British rule has proved that partition could not and has not solved communal problems. Innocent lives were unnecessarily victimized and sacrificed. Young girls and boys like Nur, Arun, Madhu, and Chandni were killed or separated from each other for no reason at all. Partition was not a historical necessity. The fact remains that the Partition has not ended; it lives on as communal violence rears its ugly head in India every now and then, and Mahesh Dattani has also indicated in his Sahitya Akademy award-winning play, *Final Solutions* (1993).

III

The Partition literature perhaps serves as a moral warning about what another Partition can do to us. As the brief discussion in section II has revealed, the novels that are written in the backdrop of partition give a vivid account of the communal violence that erupted in the subcontinent when the British announced its division into Pakistan and India. As Alok Bhalla writes,

> Most of the available histories of the partition, written either as accounts of victory or as nightmares, are constructed in the form of 'compelling narratives' concerned with the metaphysical identities of different communities and their collective fate, rather than with the everyday selves of people and their acts in profane

times.

These histories "use fragments of incontestable information gathered from government files, police records, newspapers, letters, public speeches, memoirs and reports about communal riots. Indeed, their repertoire of dates, events and characters is limited and repetitive". Many of these histories refuse to confront some "questions of social and moral values" raised by the partition. The best of the novelists who have written about the partition do not repeat what the historians already know. Instead, "they seek to make connections with the social and cultural life of a community in its entirety within a historically specific period" (Bhalla in Arora and Dhawan, Vol 1, 30).

As Urvashi Butalia also argues, the history we know deals with the State, with government, with rulers and hardly ever with people. The number of deaths, the number of men who were missing, these count as the 'facts' of history, but "how the experience actually affected men, women and children" hardly finds a place in history. Oral narrative and oral history, and journals, diaries, memoirs and personal accounts by people who were involved at the time, she believes, are important sources for the researcher who wants to explore and recover the 'hidden' dimensions or what she calls the 'underside' of history (Butalia in Arora and Dhawan, Vol 1, 61-63). The tools of conventional history cannot be ignored as 'conventional' tools can yield a great deal, for so much depends on the perspective you bring to bear on them. Thus, what Butalia suggests is not that these voices (oral narratives, e.g.) can "replace, or even be put up against, conventional or factual histories of partition". Rather that "they be placed alongside such histories, so that both can enrich and inform each other" (Arora and Dhawan, Vol 1, 79).

A novelist, according to Chaman Nahal, uses history as a metaphor. He uses "past to illustrate a theme that he might have in mind." As Nahal writes: "The artists have always leaned on myth for support. Couldn't they lean on history? History, thus, became for me a new myth—or metaphor, which is my understanding of a myth" (Dhawan 40). One of the themes Nahal was occupied with after the partition of India, was that of "forced exile." He looked upon *Azadi* "as a hymn to one's land of birth, rather than a realistic novel of the partition" (Dhawan 40). At the same time, Nahal

avers:

> "This does not absolve the novelist's obligation to history; paradoxically, it increases that obligation . . . For historical fiction to carry a deeper meaning, it must succeed at the realistic level first. Consequently, every historical novel has to move at two levels, if not more: realistic and metaphorical. Indeed, this is the only genre in which the artist cannot dispense with realism" (Dhawan 41).

As R.K. Dhawan says, "A writer of historical fiction then is as much a historian as a novelist. But history does impose limitations on him. He is not free to distort history: factual accuracy has to be strictly adhered to" (Dhawan 1985, 4). Nahal too is conscious of

> "the additional burden that a historical novel places on the artist. The novelist is obliged to do careful research into the period he has chosen for presentation and every detail of that period has to be accurate" (Nahal in Dhawan 43).

The novelist may be working as a "political historian for he is clearly manifesting a political preference, a choice, a preference that he displays by leaning more heavily upon one kind of political ideology as distinguished from the other ideologies of a given time" (Nahal in Dhawan 47). But that does not make him less a historian and his contribution to the interpretation of history cannot be denied.

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Woes of Exile and the Will to Live in Parineeta Khar's *We Were and We Will Be: Stories on Kashmir*

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An invincible feminine voice in Kashmiri Literature who terms Kashmir as, "the benevolent and ever pardoning mother: our kashir" (ix), Parineeta Khar, articulates the women's side of suffering during the displacement and exile effected by the armed uprising in the valley, from an unflinching and humanistic feminist perspective. In the acknowledgement of *We Were and We Will Be*: *Stories on Kashmir,* she owes to various women in her life the credit of shaping her personality:

> My personality, whatever final form it attained, has been influenced by women, yes only women, of power and strength of spirit. Here I don't mean the tyrannical stridency of arrogance, but the enduring stamina to withstand the ebbs and tides of life, the stature one attains by sacrificing what is dear, and the power to forgive. I was born to a mother, whom I have never in all my adult life, noticed, bearing an ill will towards any individual. Raw eyes of my early youth saw in her this quality, as a manifestation of meekness. Now in my middle age, the same meekness has proved to be her sterling quality; it has given concreteness to that pillar of strength. I am grateful to have been surrounded by aunts (from mother's as well as father's side) from whose endearments I have

> ingested some attributes, which stood me in good stead in my later life; I try to shower this love everywhere (xiii).

Most of the central protagonists who wield power, patience and equanimity in her stories are women of all hues and ages. Parineeta Khar's stories abound with the themes of love, family, marriage and children whether their setting is Kashmir before the exodus or the places of displacement all over India and abroad. One is reminded of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and wonders upon the ways the author could find time for her aesthetic *oeuvres*. Virginia Woolf believes that, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write a fiction" (Woolf 4). One wonders about the loss Parineeta Khar suffered in terms of her creative endeavours due to her engagements as a house wife. In the Preface to this collection of stories the writer thankfully refers to the memories that, "overcrowd my brain while I am cutting and cubing the potatoes, kneading the flour or scrubbing the floors of bathrooms. I scribble the reminiscences of bygone days on whatever is available on spot and later these jotted words find an arrangement in a story" (ix). Having spent her early youth in Kashmir till her Post Graduation from University of Kashmir in 1976, over a decade in Paris due to her husband's career and rest of her life in Hyderabad, Parineeta Khar could intuitively set her stories in Kashmir during the upheaval in Jammu and Delhi after the exodus, and creatively encapsulate and represent the troubles, breakdown of families, death and related struggles in her stories. Though Parineeta Khar is not a forced migrant but she, as a member of Kashmiri Pandit community can mentally relate to the problems faced by them. It won't be out of place to quote Amit Shankar Saha who says:

> Whatever may be the geographical location of the exiled writer, in the mental landscape the writer is forever enmeshed among the strings attached to poles that pull in opposite directions. The only way the writer can rescue oneself from the tautness of the enmeshing strings is by writing or by other forms of artistic expression. The relief is only a temporary condition for no writer's work is so sharp a wedge that can snap the strings that history-makers have woven (Saha188).

In the titular short story, *We Were and We Will Be,* the author

represents with pride the stoicism of the Kashmiri Pandit community which it reflected for survival in the light of unannounced sudden exodus, the vagaries of existence in an unknown land besides exhibiting a strong sense of Kashmiri values, culture, morals and above all humanism. Parineeta Khar's characters feel a need to establish ties with the past because the exile "has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 440). Having being tossed from Kashmir to a migrant camp in New Delhi; the central protagonist Sundari emerges as a strong feminine character who not only proves to be the only source of security and well being for her old grandparents, she also ends up in a successful marriage with a volunteer Dr. Raman Raina of New Delhi whose parents had left Srinagar in early 50's.

> We forgot that behind these adulatory slogans of compassion are the human beings who have to think of their own safe existence first. The comraderie and community sense take a back seat when people like us encroach upon your private world... This will never happen again. (24)

Raman Raina has volunteered himself to provide medical aid to the migrants living in a camp in New Delhi where he is smitten by the beauty, courage, intelligence and the honest audacity of a migrant girl Sundari. Much against the wishes of his snobbish mother Khema, Raman Raina decides to marry Sundari. Khema on the one hand would visit migrant camp in her big car and distribute alms to the poor but on the other hand looked down upon them as "They speak grammatically inaccurate Hindi with an accent of their own" (3). As per the author the "Problem with Khema was her total denial of anything to do with her early youth in Kashmir . . . She abhorred those filth-littered bylanes of Srinagar" (3). Sundari had witnessed the intimidating conditions in Kashmir and had to flee along with her grandparents to New Delhi. As a personification of feminine charm, ethereal beauty and confidence Sundari could easily win Raman's heart. As a rejoinder to Khema's repeated insults and abominations, Sundari pleads a more empathetic approach from the better placed Kashmiris in New Delhi. She tells Khema, "More than sympathy, we seek empathy from our own community. For others we may be poor

migrant Kashmiri Pandits, but with you, we feel a bond of brotherhood" (15). After marrying Raman, Sundari remains a stranger to her mother-in-law Khema. As an empathetic migrant Sundari continues to visit the camp to address various problems of her fellow migrants; be it the issue of sanitation, relief, medical aid or helping the migrant mothers in getting their children admitted in schools. Moreover, some migrants from the camp would also visit her

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at her in law's house for the solution of their problems. In one of the incidents when the migrant camp didn't have water supply for two days Sundari asks a group of boys and girls to use her bathroom, her mother-in-law retorts, "Stop this encroachment . . . My house is not a charity house or a *dharmasalla"* (23). Khema's demeanor throws ample light on the hypocrisy, snobbery and the insecurity of people who have been reduced to the insensitive guards of their hard earned money in a foreign land. Sundari's acerbic response to Khema's behaviour verily diagnoses and lays bare Khema's psychology. As her first ever response to Khema's repeated insults for her daughter-in-law, Sundari says:

> We forgot that behind these adulatory slogans of compassion are the human beings who have to think of their own safe existence first. The camraderie and community sense take a back seat when people like us encroach upon your private world . . . This will never happen again (24).

By highlighting the treatment meted out to Sundari and her family at the hands of Khema, the author touches upon another brutal facet of forced migration and displacement. Khema wouldn't accept Sundari, a raw and typically Kashmiri girl as her daughter-in-law but would readily accept Bharati who is born and brought up in Britain and is well bread. Bharati is a person for whom, "the turmoil of fundamentalism and exodus of Kashmiri Pandits were nothing more than news item" (28). A

clarity of thought coupled with the strength of character armed Sundari as a balanced and audacious person, in the light of troubles that the forced migration has inflicted upon Kashmiri Pandits like her. On the other hand, Khema cannot be completely demonised for her behaviour towards Sundari because in accepting a pauper as a daughter in law, what Khema "dreads is the frugality of the days when they had freshly entered the precincts of Delhi; they had come here in search of greener pastures. Migrants represent that frugality; that penury with which they started" (25). This statement made by Doctor Raman becomes important as it differentiates between the condition of the forced migrants and those who have migrated because of economic compulsions. The title of the story, *We Were and We Will Be* gets amply justified with respect to the stoicism of Kashmiri migrants and their ability to fight and emerge victorious in the light of displacement and exile. The confident declaration of Sundari's grandmother regarding her grand daughter that she is a 'gazetted officer' and Dr Raman's goading at Sundari saying that you are "a qualified educationist. Don't indulge in self pity. This is not like you . . . you have raised yourself, resurrected fresh every morning like a Phoenix." (26) are the pointers towards it. Even Raman's elder brother and sister-in-law look at Sundari as somebody who is, "a unique blend of courage and honesty, a person of unflinching integrity and very essentially lovable" (27-28). Despite the vagaries of being displaced from homeland, Sundari reflects a strong awareness about moral accountability associated with marriage as well as complete family of the in-laws. She introduces the family, "to the actual Kashmiri culinary marvels, where the food has delicate aroma, not the strong flavours of onions and garlic" (20). After the death of her father-in-law and the paralytic stroke suffered by Khema, it is Sundari who becomes the dedicated housekeeper and tends Khema something that melts the latter's heart:

> She fed Khema, gave her baths, helped her in toilet management, combed her flowing tresses. She would massage her wasted hand and talk incessantly to encourage her last speech, to come to her mute lips. Six months went by, mourning over the death, waiting for the reprisal of the lost

> faculties of Khema. Sundari was endeavouring with all her energies to keep her job, look after her little girl and sick mother-in-law. The visits to camp became few and far between. Looking after her invalid mother in law carried the priority (32-33).

According to the author, Sundari exemplifies a typical Kashmiri girl who is trained from the very beginning to adjust in the family of in-laws with very little to expect in response. Sundari becomes an emblem of sacrifice, feminine strength and courage, who can read through the structures of the institution of marriage in which the role of a woman is distinctively wrought to fulfil its requirements. Sundari's character, to a great extent becomes the projection of a Kashmiri girl as the author herself had been. The same spirit gets amply reflected in a conversation between Sundari and her husband Dr Raman where she delineates the trajectory of life of a young Kashmiri girl:

> Raman, let me tell you a truth... we Kashmiri Pandit girls are raised with very subtle kind of preparedness; like girl scouts we are trained to face adversity, eventuality and heartbreaks. We are not a pampered rot. The perpetual fear of the unseen future in variv (in-law's-house) is put as a shock-pad in girl's psyche. She does not expect any effusiveness of overindulgence. Expectations are less. There are no hurts, she is wrought shockproof" (33).

The author, through the character of Sundari, depicts that people of Kashmir have a strong sense of rootedness in the Kashmiri culture, besides emphasising their general humanitarian concerns. The people of Kashmir carry the undaunted spirit of love, identity and a sense of responsibility in the wake of such calamitous events as their mass exodus. Bharati, the elder daughter-in-law of Khema, has been very meticulously used as a foil to the character of Sundari in order to highlight the latter's sense of courage, responsibility and exemplary humanitarian approach. Bharati, while conveying her 'emancipated women's thoughts,' urges Sundari to engage a nurse for their mother-in-law. She expresses her displeasure over

Sundari's penchant for making sacrifices. Bharati prods Sundari to follow her own career rather than wasting her life in the service of invalid Khema. Sundari's response to Bharati's advice reflects the former's strength of character and her sense of self-effacement. Sundari answers:

> Sacrifices make human beings human. Animals don't recognise relations and responsibilities. The base instinct of existing and adding to the progeny is not everything. Human beings need content, which for me comes in helping others . . . besides Delhi is not safe; leaving a handicapped person alone . . . with the stranger may end up in some untoward eventuality. But it is not a practical solution . . . How can you carry on your life looking after an invalid? The idea simply astonished Bharati (34-35).

On Khema's elder son's proposal to take her to England, Bharati immediately inserts a condition saying:

> We will take her for two months... my mother has offered her help. Mom is not eligible for any kind of medical insurance benefits. We cannot engage a nurse.... It will be a crushing financial burden - we will be broken in days...For a change to her and to let Sundari repose for a month or two . . . we will let her accompany us . . . but mind you . . . for a very short period (35).

Bharati's conditional and superficial extension of offer to look after Khema highlights the dilution of the ethos of the joint family given the financial constraints and consideration of a Metropolitan life. After having lived a life uprooted from native cultural and familial values, Bharati's preferences are different from those of Sundari, someone who carries a sense of familial bonding and cultural rootedness. It is on the insistence of invalid Khema that the proposal of sending her to England is dropped. The author ends the story on a very positive note of expectations and hope, depicting the final settlement of Sundari at Khema's much covetous home. Sundari's grandparents continue to live in the migrant camp where their attitude becomes an emblem of their stoicism and love for life, "the corner of that hall demarcated

with sarees and piled up oil tins was their home and they felt safe here . . . They would assemble in the evening to sing the praises of the Patron Goddess Sharika. On *Ashtamis* they worshipped Ragnya, the vegetarian mother goddess who is offered sweets of milk and votive lamps" (36). Somjyoti Mridha in this context, opines that, "The Pandit home has been portrayed as a site of cultural and religious activity-a sanctified space of intimacy . . ." (50). The old couple, like many other migrants in the camp, have become acclimatized with the given condition but not without the hope of going back to their Homeland that is Kashmir after the normalcy returns.

The ending of this story on a positive note and open-endedness illustrates the tenacity of the Kashmiri Pandit community to take the bull by the horns in general and Kashmiri women in particular. On the whole, the story weaves a narrative of loss, displacement, fear and struggle which ultimately culminates on a note of achievements, hopes, settlement and fulfilment. The author, Parineeta Khar, has very dexterously structured the narrative and has viewed the issue of displacement and exile from a feminist perspective and highlighted as to how Kashmiri Pandit women have suffered. Moreover, the women have also been portrayed as custodians and carriers of the cultural and moral ethos of Kashmiri Pandits, which is a result of centuries of their life in Kashmir.

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Construction of Home in the Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Ali Ahmad Said Esber: A Comparative Study

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Exile is more than a geographical concept in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Ali Ahmad Said Esber also known as Adonis. Mahmoud Darwish, Poet Laureat of Palestinians, is one of the greatest Arab poets of modern times. Darwish gave voice to an exiled people. Encapsulating the Palestinian tragedy, Mahmoud Darwish lived in constant exile and continuous displacement. Adonis, the Syrian-Lebanese poet, literary critic, translator, and editor, is a highly influential figure in Arabic poetry and literature today. Like a number of Middle Eastern writers, Adonis has explored the pain of exile. Mahmoud Darwish and Ali Ahmad Said Esber are prolific writers whose works have been translated in many European languages.

Eric Hobsbawm, Marxist historian evidently declares that "short twentieth century" is an "age of extremism" which has closely witnessed the megadeaths, barbarian wars and a mass enforced dislocation of people from their original home. His assertion also seems true about the Palestinian wretched land endlessly enduring the pain of displacement and bloodbath since the beginning of nineteenth century. According to *the Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2010–2012*, "the percentage of refugees in the oPt [occupied Palestinian territory] is about 42 percent of the total population. Out of every 100 residents of the Gaza Strip, 58 are refugees, and out of every 100 residents of the West Bank, 42 are refugees", and the survey further estimates that "at the end of 2011, there were at least 7.4 million displaced

Palestinians representing 66 percent of the entire Palestinian population (11.2 million) worldwide (BADIL Resource Center), and resultantly those who were once identified as Palestinian now have only identity of 'exile' and they are " left literally with nothing-no home, no family, no state- [devastated] by the Nakba" (Mattar 113-114). After the Israeli army razed his home at al-Birwa in Galilee, Mahmoud Darwish, a prince of poets also emerges from the enormous throng of exiles to give the voice to the uprooted and suppressed people of his land and he himself houses in the home his poetry constructs "with all the particulars of its landscape" (Darwish 234). For him language becomes an unbreakable shield resisting the gigantic brutalities inflicted upon Palestinians by the cruel oppressors, and it replaces reality not only to flower hopes on burning Palestinian terrain, also to unveil the serene past of his home, Palestine; Darwish claims:

> "Language will take the place of reality, and the poem will look for its myth in the entirety of human experience, and exile will become literature, or part of the literature of human loss, not to blow out the fire of the special tragedy but to the become part of the general human history…I was lucky enough, more than a quarter of a century later, to see a part of my country, Gaza, which I had only perceived in the poems of its late poet Mou'ine Bsissou who turned it into his own paradise" (Darwish 234).

Now let's swerve to the poet, Ali Ahmad Said Esber 'Adonis', a perennial contender of Nobel Prize since 1989, hailing from historically and culturally rich country, Syria now a brutally governed state which has been echoing with the exploding of bombs and missile and its unfortunate soil is taking into her bosom even the corpses of innocent children for eternity. Adonis, "a staunch secularist who sees himself as a pagan prophet" (A. A. Esber) was imprisoned during his days of serving in the military in 1955-56, for his allegiance to the Syrian National Socialist Party, and later to escape the ensuing heap of troubles coming across his way, he exiled to Lebanon in 1956. When civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1981, he had to continue his exilic journey until he

settled down in Paris that becomes his dwelling place. Adonis' poetry is truly his autobiography unraveling all the strands of his life, who believes that poetry is the exploration of an individual's metaphysical sensitivity not a collective political or socially oriented vision while his counterpart from Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, 'the poet of resistance' encapsulates, "poetry could never reflect on itself in the absence of external events and political influences" (Darwish).

Adonis so often does not deplore 'exile' in his poetry but he embellishes his verses with the 'rare feelings' of exile that as he says, "is not given to everyone" (N. Esber 29). For him creativity is the banishment in itself in that sense and the creative person is always at the borderland of exile. Unlike poetry of wailing and angrily screaming his poetry demystifies a Sufi notion of exile that claims while being in exile one learns about the 'existence of another invisible reality' that was unknown to him/her before, and Adonis calls such experience of exile an epiphany which becomes his muse to engrave his poems on the plank of language. How he celebrates his epiphany of 'exile' can be conjectured by reading the following verses:

> "A stranger to you
> I reside on the other edge,
> A nation that belongs to me only.
> In sleep and in walking,
> I open a blossom and live inside it."
> (Adonis, *Mihyar of Damascus, His Songs* 50) .

His banishment could not deter his freedom but it liberates him from the territorial boundaries and also opens the new horizons of unknown segments of the universe. When being on the foreign land, he seems to have been exploring the different "vivid, dynamic and changing" (Aslop) realities but concomitantly his nation-his homeland- is also glued to his soul in his "sleep and in walking" that his language constructs to let him live in what he calls "blossom" of his poetry. These verses also reflect his belief of mysticism that "goes beyond nationalism, race and religion" (Adonis) and propels him to hold a cosmopolitan disposition and deconstructs a widely preconceived idea of home; for Adonis exile seems to be what Joseph Brodsky refers as a "metaphysical condition" that (exile) "has a very strong, very clear metaphysical

dimension; to ignore or to lodge it is to cheat yourself out of the meaning what has happened to you or to doom yourself into remaining forever at the receiving end of the things, to ossify into an uncomprehending victim" (Brodsky 23). His homeland is not the geographically divided particular piece of land but the whole earth, he believes, is his home; he makes an assertive claim about it that:

> "I believe that human being must live and must belong to the universe, not to an identity that differentiates him from other peoples or other identities. What is human is the identity of creator. It is beyond nationality, beyond geography, and I would say, beyond language too. We are human before we have a language, a culture or a nation to which we belong. Therefore in poetry we feel that above all we are human, and therefore above all we are universal" (Adonis).

Adonis's poetry unleashes resistance but with a unique fashion that spurs a highly humanitarian attitude encouraging the reader to adapt a humane outlook towards the world; his one of the purposes of writing poetry is "to write a perpetual revolution against the reigning powers. It is to revolutionize ideas and ways of seeing things, always with the aim of creating humane and more beautiful world" (Adonis). Now let's again swerve to the poet, Mahmoud Darwish whose "work carries the mark of the sensitive émigré's obsession with his own fate and his hopeless attempts to make any satisfying contact with his new surroundings" (Vyas). The visible discrepancy of these two poets lies in how they deem exile in their poetry; Darwish like modernist laments and angrily screams in his poetry , on the other hand, Adonis like post-modernist celebrates his 'exile' in his verses. In his poem, *Identity Card*, Darwish quells at his oppressors and warns them that his anger may turn into a gigantic explosion,

> "I do not hate people
> And I do not steal from anyone
> But if I starve,
> I will eat my oppressor's flesh
> Beware, beware of my starving

> And my rage" (Darwish, Haaretz)

Darwishian imagery also constructs his *Heimat* or homeland in the form of poetry but unlike the Adonisian idea of cosmopolitan approach drawing on mystic philosophy, Darwish transforms his poetry into homeland with the myth and history of his nation; he revisits the history of his homeland through his poetry and presents the animated images of it with striking metaphors where he finds shelter:

> "No land on earth bears me. Only my words bear me
> A bird born from me who builds a nest in my ruins
> Before me, and in the rubble of the enchanting world around me.
> I stood on a wind, and my long night was without end.
> This is my language, a necklace of stars around the necks
> Of my loved ones. They emigrated.
> They carried the place, and emigrated, they carried time and emigrated…
> ….this is my language, my miracle, my magic wand.
> This is my obelisk and gardens of Babylon." (Darwish 91).

Language becomes an embodiment of resistance and freedom that liberates Darwish from the manacles of exile, and in order to resist his tyrant oppressors, he triumphantly lives in the country of words where he wanders freely with no fear because "home is no longer constituted by land or people but by the possibility of a poetic gathering of voices" (Rahman 41). There lies a distinct similarity between these two bards of exile; Adonis also buttresses the idea of freedom and he makes his poetry a place where he survives with liberty. Being a universalist and experimental poet often called the T.S Eliot of Arabic poetry, Adonis creates the different new worlds to shack up in the abode of poetry but contrary to him, Darwish, a nationalist always seeks his lost home, Palestine in his verses with dynamic images of past. Adonis, a modernist poet not only believes in experimenting the new forms of poetry in Arabic language with complete liberty, but he also

seeks absolute freedom in his life that affords him power to resist:

> "Freedom is not only the right to live and move within the known standards and limits but it is the right to search, create, reject and overcome. It is the practicing of what we never practiced. This goes beyond all devotion and all authorities. It is a contrast to criticism, which will light up everything. It is the opposite of acceptance and it is the initiative to dive into the unknown" (Adonis 195).

Conclusively both poets of undying fame end up "entering [into] the language of homeland, quest for homeland, or overcoming being exiled from homeland" in their poetry that does reflect a collective existential predicament of which their fellow countrymen (who are exiled internally or externally) have been enduring. Their poetry mirrors the prevalence of tumultuous situations in their respective country Syria and Palestine. Mahmoud Darwish was rightly called "the Essential Breath of the Palestinian people", on the other hand Adonis was named as a "revolutionary of Arabic verse." Both are epoch making poets, and "it would be hard to argue for a poet of greater stature [between the two] in a literary culture where poetry is the most prestigious form as well as being popular" (A. A. Esber).

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Notes

The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century by Eric Hobsbawm (published in 1994) discloses the stark cruelties of twentieth century especially with the perspectives of proletariats living a repressive life and continuously falling to prey to the unkind state regimes.

Nakba (ةبكنلا) is an Arabic word meaning "disaster", "catastrophe", or "cataclysm" that is usually associated with the 1948 Palestinian exodus when more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were expelled from their homes.

After facing many rejections for publishing his works at

17 Ali Ahmad Said Esber adopted the name Adonis (pronounced as Adon-ees with the stress on last syllable) meaning the Greek god of fertility to "alert the napping editors to his precocious talent and pre-Islamic, pan-Mediterranean muse" (Esber A. A., 2012).

"On Nov. 16, 1932, Saʿādah founded the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, a secret society that grew from a few students to about 1,000 members by 1935. During the 1930s the party expanded into Syria, Transjordan, and Palestine. Saʿādah had created perhaps the first indigenous Arab youth organization" *(The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica)*.

In an interview with Laura Allsop, Adonis Says," "Mysticism helped me to realize the existence of another invisible reality, which is also very vivid, dynamic and also constantly changing. It's like a human being; outside, there is his or her face, body and movements, but behind all of that is an astonishing reality that is deeper, richer and often full of unknowns. So that movement between the visible and the invisible, it's a form of exile because in looking for the invisible, you force yourself into exile to understand that different reality. Sufism alerted me to this unknown world, which remains unknown" (Aslop, 2012).

Heimat, a German word with loaded connotations is often translated as Homeland in English but that is not the correct English equivalent. It incorporates palpable emotions of childhood memories of home, acquired affinity to one's homeland, earliest experiences and language of homeland.

Naomi Shihab Nye known as "wandering poet" whose father was also a Palestinian refugee, calls Darwish "the Essential Breath of the Palestinian people" to praise him.

The Role of the Reader and its function with the advent of Literary Theory

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The business of literary criticism is interpretation. But we have come a long way since Eliot declared in 1923 in his essay entitled, '*The Function of Criticism*' that the business of criticism is "elucidation of work of art and the correction of taste" (24). Now we do not talk of literary text as primary and the criticism of the text as secondary. Literary work is no longer accepted as host and criticism as parasite. 'Text' is not what the author makes it to be but it is as the reader takes it to be. 'Text' and the 'Reader' not only act upon one another but there are many reversible reactions between them.

Reader-Response School of Criticism is of recent origin. The Constance's Reception and the main works of Reception Theory were published between 1969 and 1978. It takes off from the middle position intellectual climate succeeded by the formalist structuralism system, The Prague School and the New Criticism. As Gurbhagat Singh has rightly pointed out:

> In these schools, the text was thought to be a "being" or a structure with its own rules yet it was thought to be a 'code' or a sign system, that the reader shared and that he had to decipher for the text's adequate understanding (51).

Reader-Response Criticism has drawn on different intellectual background but it lays primary emphasis on the reader's response. The reader-response critics can be grouped into four broad categories: Purely subjective as in David Bleich, objective as in Jonathan Culler, partly subjective and partly objective as in Norman N. Holland and Stanley Fish, and finally there is Wolfgang Iser who admits the interaction between the text

and the reader in so many words.

Reader-Response Criticism owes an important debt to Phenomenology and the Geneva School, particularly in the person of the German critic Wolfgang Iser. Iser's essay, "The Reader Process: a Phenomenological Approach" is a good example of the creative development of a number of aspects of Phenomenology and, too, of the way in which phenomenology leads naturally to some of the preoccupations of reader-response critics. Take for example, the first sentence of the essay:

> The Phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text.(1)

Iser then moves on to discuss Ingarden's theory of artistic concretization, and concludes that the literary work has two poles: the artistic pole (the text created by the authors and Aesthetic pole (the realization by the Readers). Iser stresses in particular the work's virtuality: like the text of a play which can be produced in innumerable ways, a literary work can lead to innumerable reading experience. He also makes use of Husserl's argument that consciousness is intentional, that it is directed and goal-seeking rather than random and all-absorbing. So far as reading of literature is concerned, this allows Iser to place a high premium not just upon the reader's 'pre-intentions' what he or she goes to the text with but also upon the `Intentions' awakened by the reading process itself. Reading brings the subjectivity of the reader and the objectivity of the text together. The written text almost being the same for everyone the unwritten text varies from reader to reader depending on the individual imagination. Iser gives one analogy to make his point clear:

> . . . two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough and the other will make out a dipper (57).

Rajnath explains it lucidly and convincingly in the following words:

> . . . the "Stars" in literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable. The fixed and variable points are the two poles of the literary work which can be designated as impersonal and personal, the impersonal supplied by the text and the personal by the readers (12).

One of the best-known of Iser's arguments involves the literary work's 'gaps.' According to him, no literary work is complete: all have gaps which have to be filled in by the reader and all readers and readings will fill these in differently. Thus, Iser says:

> Meaning is not something hidden in a text; it is the result of a very subtle interaction between the text and the reader" (20).

According to David Bleich literary criticism is totally subjective and the objectivity about the text is an illusion. He distinguishes between response and interpretation by saying that the former is symbolization and the later re-symbolization. Response and interpretation both are subjective. According to Bleich though in interpretation there emerge some kind of consensus, the reading experience varies from reader to reader.

Jonathan Culler argues for an objective base for Reader-Response criticism. Because the 'text', in the printed page was there before the reader came to it and it will be there after the reader leaves it. The 'text' is unalterable and a thousand readers could not alter a single word in a text. Thus though the individual reader's response is subjective, it has an objective base depending upon form and conventions. According to Culler:

> Meaning is not an individual creation but the result of applying to the text operations and conventions which constitute the institutions of literature (127).

He believes that a change in the system will change the meaning of a work.

Norman N. Holland and Stanley Fish believe that though the reader's response is subjective, there is room for interaction between the text and the reader. Holland subscribes to the view that a work of literature is not an artifact, but an experience. According to Holland, "Meaning whether we are talking simply of putting black marks together to form words of much more complex process of putting words together to form theme- do not

inhere in- the words on the page but like beauty, in the eye of the beholder (98)". Please correct this quotation.

To Holland, the reader is a maker and he places him on the same level as the writer. He believes that what the writer offers to the reader is an artifact but not a finished product. Hence, the reader recreates his work of art out of the material supplied by the writer. Since the readers deal with the same text and text sets a limit on the reader's response there is bound to be some consensus among the readers. Hence, criticism for Holland is a kind of equation between the personal and impersonal.

Stanley Fish takes a slightly different position when he states that "the place where sense is made or not is the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book" (397). In "*Is There a Text in This Class,"* Fish suggests that the meaning of a sentence is in the mind of the reader or listener. Likewise, the meaning of a text lies in the reader's experience and not in the structure of the text. The text has no determinate meaning. But on the other hand, Fish suggests that there are reading conventions and norms and strategies that we have gathered which tell us what a poem is. As reading conventions are impersonal shared by the readers of a community with individual variations, so what is objective becomes subjective and what is subjective takes an objective base for analyzing a text. Hence, criticism for Fish is a combination of both the personal and the impersonal.

Hence it is quite evident that there are various opinions about the aspects of reader-response criticism. It swings from pure subjective criticism enunciated by Bleich to a kind of objective criticism advocated by Jonathan Culler and Wolfgang Iser. Like any good criticism, reader-response criticism is a combination of both personal and impersonal. My conclusion is that this school of criticism though valid to a great extent, is not absolute because while it highlights the text and the reader on the one hand, it eclipses the author on the other. The reader has overtaken the author and it is a serious loss.

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A Reading of H.H. Munro's *The Open Window* and William Saroyan's *The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse*

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H. H. Munro (1870-1916) was a British writer who wrote witty mischievous stories with the pen name Saki in the Edwardian Period. William Saroyan (1908-1981), a popular literary figure ranked with Hemingway, Faulkner and Steinbeck started writing in the Depression-ridden America. Both the writers succeed in relinquishing their role of narrators to the characters they create, albeit neither of them wrote for the movements that celebrate such narrative techniques. In spite of the different time frame, locale and literary movements which characterize their lives, there is a discernible streak of romantic existentialism in their fictional craft in so far as the post-modern idea of 'reader's creation' of text. Such traits can be traced in various writers belonging to different ages. For example, Shakespeare's Hamlet is said to have procrastination as a flaw in the character which may be explained as the inactivity of a hero who suffers from the philosophical pangs and the notion of absurdity of life that are common among the Existentialists. Existentialism is a modern philosophy, started as a movement in the second half of the 20th century to express the sorrows of being born to lead a meaningless life due to death that is thrust upon us. Likewise, the romantic traits were common in literature much earlier than the evolution of Romanticism as a movement. However, the time and place of a writer cannot be ignored for either real understanding or proper evaluation of the creative work. A famous text has a history of readings; every reading re-shapes the content and dimensions of the text. Eagleton (1983, 12) says, "All literary works... are 'rewritten', if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them." The present article focuses on

Saki's (1914) *The Open Window* and Saroyan's (1940) *The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse* to buttress the point how the created character in a fictional work assumes the role of a narrator in defiance of the writer.

The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse is a powerful story in which the very commonplace incidents in the story confirm Saroyan's unique skill to make the narrator the master of the narrative situation. The text theorizes its own impact of 'being' what it 'means,' as Archibald Macleish (1982) wants poetry to be as it is evident in the last lines of his poem "*Ars Poetica.*" The words in the first sentence of the story, " . . . when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream . . .," show the romantic spirit and that spirit is the power of the fiction. It is the spirit and power of Saroyan that the character stands in place of the writer so much so that the writer is defied in a sense.

The Open Window by Saki too portrays a fifteen year old girl, Vera, a charming teenager, who plays a practical joke on a nervous visitor, and eventually tricks him into fleeing from the house. Her narration of the story about the so called tragedy in Mrs. Sappleton's life punctuated with witty comments to justify the actions of Framton, the strange visitor, fall in line with the exploits of the young chaps with the 'stolen' horse in Saroyan's story. While Vera enjoys cooking up an imaginary tragic event in her aunt's life, Aram and Mourad enjoy riding the beautiful white horse as their own even in front of the real owner of the horse without being recognized by him. The explanations they put forward to hide the secret about the horse in Saroyan's story, are similar to Vera's version of the explanations in Saki's *The Open Window*.

The readability derives from the narrational embeddings in both the stories. In Saki's *The Open Window*, Vera narrates the tragic event that happened in the life of Mrs. Sappleton to frighten the strange visitor at first and invents another tale to defend herself at the end. Likewise, in Saroyan's *The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse*, Mourad's coming with the horse; Aram's hesitation to question the honesty of his cousin; riding the horse and hiding it; meeting John Byro, the owner of the horse; uncle

Khosrov's irritating character; Mourad's repairing the wings of a young robin; returning the horse etc. give rise to the situations for the successful fiction. The reader finds himself elevated to the level of the narrator of the story. In other words, there is equality between the narrator and the narratee. In the same way, Vera keeps up the narration till the end of the story and the reader does not get the faintest idea that she was just fabricating a story in order to entertain herself.

Vera takes advantage of Framton's being a stranger to the area, and the unknown background of the visitor gives her ample opportunities to let her teenage fancy hold sway. The truth that only Vera knows, paves the way for creating her own dreamy world in which her own aunt and the visitor are victims of disaster. Saki lets her go unscathed; or rather she takes control of the author in narrating the events more realistically than the reality. A reader might wonder, when the last sentence of the story reveals her specialty, how naughty a teenage girl could be when no one has control over her to make her behave herself!

The truth, which only Mourad had access to, in Saroyan's story, was like a delightful, mysterious dream to Aram. Their well-known family background and the mythical honesty reduce Aram's ability to distinguish truth from outward appearance of the situation and produce a duplicitous confusion in him at first. The fame and honesty of Garoghlanian family might be equated to a state of mythical entity. In no time he reads the mystery in the eyes of Mourad and the horse, and reconciles with it as he too had the imaginable kind of magnificence ingrained in him. Mourad and Aram are of the same texture though Mourad is the personification of assumed authority. Only an authentic character can deal with critical situations in an adventurous feat. Mourad's self-possession takes mastery of his means – resourcefulness – in all the later events in the story. He manages to keep the owner of the horse in the dark and cash on the credibility of the family to have the horse for themselves as long as they want. He has a way with everybody and everything -- farmers, horses, dogs, and so on. In Mourad's replies to the nine-year old Aram, on many occasions, the reader finds what romantic ideas 'are,' not what they 'mean.'

The 'imaginable magnificence' Saroyan talks about is seen

in Saki's Vera as well. She too makes use of the credibility of her family to terrorize the stranger who visits her aunt to enjoy the tranquil ambience of the countryside. In her case also self-possession takes mastery of her mental resourcefulness. Her quick replies, about Frampton's experience of being chased by dogs in a cemetery, to the questions of Mrs. Sappleton's brothers and husband prove her ingenious character. A reasonable explanation for the character to defy the author, in this case, may be Saki's own early childhood burdens that he could not shake off even after becoming a famous writer. It might be a psychological revenge of the author that is reflected in Vera, and it might account for the Vera's defying her 'creator.'

In Saroyan's story, the representation of fictional power in the story is a model in itself. The name, 'My Heart,' given in response instantly by Mourad when John Byro asked them for the name of the horse, makes Mourad's activity as fictionalist figure of text itself. The quick-acting Mourad and his disciple-like-cousin Aram encounter the obstacles with their freewheeling ardent romantic spirit. The romantic exploits leading them to steal the horse are just for the thrill of experiencing the imaginable kind of magnificence, not for any material benefit. The narrator of the story doesn't seek to produce in the narratee anything like John Byro's 'suspicion' and ignore it as the mythical fame of their family makes him do so; nor does he keep the narratee in the dark (about stealing the horse) as poor John Byro remains in the dark forever. The reader is informed, not deluded by the witty lies of Mourad, of his juvenile character. A white lie adds colour to it. However, the essentials of suspense are kept from the narratee as to what will happen to the mythical fame and popularity of the family. The ill-tempered uncle Khosrov rouses the curiosity of the reader to make him guess what will happen to the adventurous happy-go-lucky kids in the renowned family. But nothing happens to it at the end.

So that is the claim of the text as it should be seen in the incidents and narration of the story. A romantic existential leaning of the text as an existentialist would take in a drama of the Absurd Theatre, reminds us of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The claim is distinctly self-effacing: the text of the story seems to say, 'Do not give me more importance than I deserve; I am not great literature, just a trivial passing fancy' and like Mourad's lie, a momentary

expression just to get out of the tight corner.

In view of the witty nature of a teenager, *The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse* resembles Saki's *The Open Window*. Saki talks about Vera, a naughty girl of fifteen who cooks up stories to tease others and amuse herself. She troubles Framton, a stranger who came to her aunt for taking rest in a peaceful countryside to get over with his nervous trouble. Mourad's stealing the horse and hiding it for pleasure-riding can be as romantic and thrilling as Vera's false story about the death of Mr.Sappleton, his brothers-in-law and their dog. Saki uses a metanarrative comment, "Romance at short notice was her specialty," at the end of the story to reveal the character of Vera. Saroyan, on the other hand, doesn't need to explain it so in his story as the story telling is plain, being the romance itself. He doesn't illustrate what it means: he just shows what it is. If Saki's story is well-painted picture, Saroyan's is the model by itself for such a picture. Vera's romancing is the power of the story but it lies in its being recognized by the reader to treat it as a fiction, whereas in *The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse*, the reader doesn't have to strain himself to perceive the fiction.

Saroyan's involvement story is so deep that he doesn't need to interpret it to convey the implied idea. It is so obvious that he is both the storyteller as well as his cousin. There is no need of any explanation for his giving the name 'Aram,' his own son's name, to the storyteller in *The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse*. Similarly, in *The Open Window*, a self-possessed girl acts with wit and smartness of a performing artist which is exactly what the writer is. According to Barthes (1977, 143), "it is language which speaks, not the author, to write is . . . to reach the point where only language acts and performs." When writers write they are also *written*. No wonder in the year 1968 Barthes announced "the death of the author" and "the birth of the reader," declaring that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1977, 148). In both the stories, childhood experiences and adolescent exploits are naturally blended to show how the story is to theorize the effect justifying Archibald Macleish's norm of poetry.

Notes and References

1.Munro was born in Burma, taken to England after his mother's death, when he was around two years old, and was raised by a household of women at Broadgate Villa in Pilton, North Devon, his father's mother and two sisters (fierce spinsters) who ruled with an authoritarian hand whom Saki depicted again and again in his stories with a mixture of hatred and affection.

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Societal Ghosts in Githa Hariharan's *The Art of Dying and Other Stories*

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Githa Hariharan's collection of short stories, *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* abounds with examples of her realistic understanding of humanistic ideals which she upholds through all her fiction. The stories portray the problems of men and women in the present scenario, through a truthful account of what might seem a trivial matter or event. Hariharan highlights the struggle of individuals through the protagonists of her stories. The stories selected for study are "The Art of Dying" and "Halfway Animals", which highlight the emptiness, yearning, temptation and suppression of human beings. The pathetic plight of individuals is evoked through these short stories which clearly represent the marginalisation of men and women in the domestic as well as the social sphere. Her stories reflect the ongoing power relations which control the inner recesses of the minds of her protagonists. Rajul Bhargava opines that she uses this genre of the short story to sketch out the "inner workings of the protagonists who are enmeshed in the lateral mappings and the relationships which reveal the cartography of power and social control" (*Indian* 226).

Her stories reflect the social restrictions or the oppression and suppression inflicted by various social institutions which act as the societal ghosts. Avery Gordon, who is a writer, social theorist and critic, has written about societal ghosts as well as the ideas of complex relationships and complex personhood in her first book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. She expresses that life is complicated and the power relations that move any society are never simple or clear as the names which are given to them signify. Although theorists are

forced to name these forces in order to describe them (patriarchy, nepotism, etc.) these names are too limited to express the power that permeates every relationship and too broad to express the unique ways in which power moves in particular relationships. Gordon argues that ghosts and haunting are social phenomena, which affect the networks of power and society. She actually believes ghosts to be personal figures, social figures and institutions (shaped by history) that reproduce power relations and structures of inequality. She writes, "A haunted society is full of ghosts, and the ghost always carries the message . . . that the gap between personal and social, public and private, objective and subjective is misleading in the first place"(*Ghostly* 98). Gordon questions contemporary methods of examining the relationships between knowledge, experience and power . . . talks about power structures via which we navigate daily without questioning it. She looks upon the societal ghosts as "a form of power or malificent magic, that is specifically designed to break down the distinction between visibility and invisibility, certainty and doubt, life and death that we normally use to sustain an ongoing and more or less dependable existence" (*Ghostly* 126).

Like Foucault, Gordon argues that power is not merely an institution or a structure or an ideology, but a force present in every interaction in society. It is dynamic, ever changing, productive and inhibiting. Power is never unidirectional i.e. it never comes from just one source and applied to another. Rather it is a cumulative effect of various sources of power which could be a person, an institution, a value, perception, etc. Foucault's works analyse power as a mobile and constantly shifting set of relations that emerge from every social interaction and thus pervade the social body. As he expresses, "Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere . . . Power is not an institution, nor a structure, nor a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (*History* 93).

The inequalities that exist between men and women are not natural but social, not pre-ordained but created by men so that they can retain power. Power is retained by men as women are socially and psychologically taught to believe that they are destined to be subordinated. Hariharan's variegated analysis

showcase men and women performing different roles therein and losing their independent selves. However, Hariharan does not confine her description of oppression to the description of women only. She is equally sympathetic towards men who are reduced to insignificance due to the vagaries of modern living.

A close reading of the stories of Hariharan hints at the theme of death that surfaces even though feminist concerns comprise key issues in most of her stories. Death is the central preoccupation in her anthology. It either pertains to physical or psychological death where human beings are forced to curb all their heartfelt desires. It is not shown merely as an event but as a shadow looming large over life. Life is seen as a journey, and death its only destination. Hariharan's skill at describing the process of death/dying is reflected through her characters who possess immense courage in accepting the inevitability of death and that becomes the author's prime concern. Krishna Daiya writes, "She shows her characters fading away, thinning away to embrace a slow, sure death. They are also aware of this unavoidable end towards which they are advancing."(*Post-independence* 47) In the title story, "The Art of Dying," the mother lying on her death-bed tells her daughter that death is an act that requires strength and understanding. "Death, she says, the word rolling off her tongue with intimacy, demands strength, not a final weakness"(70).

The title story "The Art of Dying" deals with a dying woman. The daughter of the dying woman is the narrator in the story. Her son, Ram, is a practising doctor in Australia who collapses "on his own examining table" (64). The news comes as a shock to the mother. ". . . she was completely dry-eyed. Without a whimper or a moan, she groped for her widow's narrow bed. She lay there for days, eyes open, arms frozen by the sides of her body, playing dead"(67). She survives without food for three days but on the fourth day, her daughter forcibly feeds her as she was leaving for Australia to bring the body of her brother. The mother confronts several stages of grief such as shock, denial, resentment, guilt, sadness, dejection and finally acceptance. Guilt is a feeling which all the grieving parents feel at one time or the other. It does not matter whether they are really responsible for their child's death, the feeling of guilt always persists. The dying mother's confession is also reflective of her feelings towards her

dominating husband. Her speech clearly shows the bitterness and hatred in her voice as her husband had been subjugating and dominating the children all his life. She is not ready to forgive him even at her death bed and both the mother as well as the daughter had grudges against him. A few days before her death, the dying mother seems to have a contented look on her face. It is certainly not the acceptance of her son's death but a strange happiness that she is going to join him in the other world. So death is not a suffering for her, rather it becomes a salvation for her, an escape from the present physical suffering.

The story "The Art of Dying" projects the post feminist ethos with perfection. It talks about the stereotypical tenor of women's life through the narrator which is so monotonous that it leads to a feeling of emptiness and frustration. The narrator works for hours at the Counselling Centre, looking after her teenage children and also the distractions from her husband. The society looks at it as a "peaceful, gentle existence" (64) but to women it is a "contraption" which moves only in one direction – negation of the self, leading to a "yawning emptiness." It is an art which women have to acquire throughout their lives. The more they control their desires, the more are they appreciated by society. Though women live apparently full lives "dedicated to the housekeeping of the body," their minds and hearts yearn for much more. They want to break away from the trauma of being framed as one-dimensional figures for posterity. As the protagonist reflects "Death–or madness–is far too sudden, dramatic. The tenor of my life–wifing, childbearing--has been determined by the subtle, undulating waves of progress creeping over my body. Bleed, dry up; expand with life, contract with completion. A peaceful, gentle existence; motion, not quite blunt-edged change"(64).

The story "The Art of Dying" showcases feminist strains where women are hegemonised by agencies of power. Feminist theory has several theoretical approaches and positions, whether socio-eonomic, psychological or literary, it primarily concentrates on power and freedom which have traditionally been denied to women. Susan Faludi in her book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* examines the strategies which "aimed to divide and isolate women at a crucial moment in the struggle for equality, independence and autonomy" looking at the failures and tracing

their causes (Smith xiv). Women are often placed on the margins. Sometimes, women tend to go beyond the traditional boundaries laid down by the institutions. Thus, post-feminism is not merely a phase but an aspect of feminist strategy to reframe the margins and to prevent feminist aesthetics from reaching a dead end. Jasbir Jain opines that post-feminism is a move which talks about feminism in a different perspective. It releases the movement from the stereotypical women's matters and presents a more contemporary perspective. She talks about feminism which explores the self or the identity of an individual. Post feminism moves a step ahead as it is free from the stereotypical image of woman and shows its concern towards humanism:

> Feminism is about the self, about rights and about difference; post-feminism is a move towards reciprocal change, and expresses a need to look anew at the harsh political realities. It is motivated, to my mind, by the need to put feminism in a forward gear, to free it from its woman-to-woman dialogue, and prevent it from being devalued by repetitive, superficial analysis. Post-feminism, in its impact on literary aesthetics, shifts the issue from identity to relationships, from a concern with oppression to one with the concept of freedom. (*Indian* 91)

The stories in *The Art of Dying* give us a variety of images taken from all spheres of human life, the domestic as well as the business world. The writer describes the endless influence of one or the other system on both men and women who are struggling for survival in hostile circumstances. The advent of machinery and technology has reduced humans to a pitiable condition resulting in unemployment as is evident in the story, "Halfway Animals." Hariharan's approach shifts from feminism to humanism in this story. The story portrays the oppression, repression, dejection of the individuals as a whole at the hands of the callous societal ghosts /institutions. "Halfway Animals" is the story of a male stenographer who works hard like an animal. He had been given the lessons of hard work and sanctity by his father. 'How is the work going, boy? Remember, Work is Worship!'(17) He becomes a victim of the social system which subjugates weak individuals. He

feels stressed, lonely and neglected, indulging in excessive hard work. He is exploited in work and treated like an animal. "The stenographer is a peculiar kind of animal that does not hunt. It lies in wait for a more strong-hearted animal to come by and find its prey"(17).

With the advent of technology, he is reduced to a man having no importance, a mere redundant feature in the business world. He is relieved of his job without being given a prior notice, but does not disclose it to his wife or family. He gets up at the same time, gets ready for his office and follows his daily routine. He finds his respite in the zoo, watching the animals. He could relate his plight with that of animals in the zoo which remain in the cage and are forced to act according to the will of their masters. As the narrative unfolds, "Then I found the zoo. It was convenient, it opened the same hour as the office, and there were not too many people on most weekdays. I had my newspaper, and when that was finished, I could watch the animals"(19). He would watch the animals for hours – gharial, apes, monkeys, thus invoking atavism i.e. the tendency to go back to the ancestors. He finds an association with them and calls them companions, "Apes are man's nearest cousins. Like us they have no tail, and can stand upright, although normally they walk about on all fours" (21). He studies and observes the primates closely and believes in Darwin's Theory of Evolution. The story foregrounds the idea through the description of the life of animals and the Darwin theory that individuals have to adapt to the environment in order to survive in this callous world and lead a comfortable life. The world is changing forever and we have to adapt ourselves and change our lifestyle accordingly. The narrartor opines, "As long as an animal fitted into its surroundings, like a worm in the ground, a fish in water or a monkey up a tree, it would survive. But surroundings change constantly. To live successfully in an everchanging world, life itself might change as well" (20).

At the end of the story, he narrates a sick baby chimpanzee's plight which needs some medical aid. When the mother chimp resists, she is shot dead. Hariharan highlights a very serious situation which is going on in the present times. We have to submit to the will of the social institutions or else resistance will result in the end of our life. The narrator is

psychologically weak and sick. He is bound by the pressures of the society. The stenographer observes pain in the eyes of the father chimpanzee and realizes that it is time to get back to work, "I decide to leave the zoo though I have not put in a full day. I leave earlier than usual, having received my forefather's legacy a second time around. Even unemployed, redundant stenographers know when it is time to go back to work" (23).

"Halfway Animals" shows the day to day deteriorating plight of a common man who becomes the victim of the system and is forced to lead life accordingly. In her stories, Hariharan describes everyday occurences, things taken for granted about women's lives, their behaviour and conduct. Being a social activist, Hariharan deems it her duty to create awareness among people about the present and ongoing situation. Her short stories provide ample scope for a study of this kind as she is an enlightened citizen who is intellectually sensitive and actively involved in the welfare of the society. As a writer, she feels that it is her moral duty to make the public aware of the actualities of life and her times. She states in the essay, "Discrete Thoughts"

> But writers' voices are heard on the public stage. So they have a special responsibility to discharge, especially in a country like India. I am a writer, but I also live in modern India and am very much an engaged citizen of our multicultural society. So it is inevitable that I am interested in examining certain relevant themes. The tussles between tradition and modernity, or better still, the making of modernity; equal rights for women, in the arenas of legislation as well as social practice; and in recent times, the strengthening of secular ideas and movements to combat growing fundamentalism (*Desert* 214).

The Art of Dying focusses on the problems of men and women and the underdogs who suffer from the worst sort of marginalisation in the orthodox and highly stratified Indian society. These narratives have broken the long silence which enwraps one half of the society, portray the plight of people who are forced to accept the inferior status and do tightrope walking for survival, and have artistically challenged the social laws

which have belittled the human dignity since times immemorial. Through her short fiction Hariharan has portrayed confident and determined women in spite of the road blocks erected by society and the presence of societal ghosts who insidiously undermine the vestiges of dignity and humanity in them, through curbs on their autonomous selves. The rupture in tradition has been caused though the process of salvation is painfully tardy yet symbolic of the winds of change which will breathe new hopes and new aspirations in the lives of women who numerically constitute more than half the human race.

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Homeless in their Homeland: Plight of the Tibetan Women

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> "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."
>
> — George Orwell, Animal Farm

Men and women are born equal but society baptises men as more important than women. Although women form an integral part of any community's social fabric, there are innumerable instances of injustice and discrimination against women. This could be social discrimination resulting in female foeticide and infanticide, sexual subjugation of women, discrimination at work place, unequal educational rights, subtle discrimination in the form of jokes about women or legal discrimination such as stringent marriage and divorce laws but most importantly women are victims of violence.

The Istanbul Convention[1] defines violence against women as

> A violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

While violence is against the law yet sexual and gender-based violence is inevitable in all societies of the world and is to a certain degree acceptable. It is the outcome of gender inequality and a blatant violation of the human rights. The present paper talks about the gender based violence meted out to Tibetan women within Tibet.

Tibet is a plateau region in Asia, north-east of the Himalayas, in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is the traditional homeland of the Tibetan people. It is the highest region on earth and is popularly known as the *Roof of the World.* But Tibet paradoxically does not exist in 'reality', at least in the official diplomatic world. In 1951, Tibet was assimilated into the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the previous Tibetan government was abolished in 1959 after a failed Tibetan uprising. The PRC refers to Tibet as Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and governs it. In 1950, the PRC incorporated Tibet and laid down the Seventeen Point Agreement. According to this Agreement, Tibet was given an autonomous status but under China's sovereign power. The Dalai Lama would remain the religious and spiritual head but the actual political power was vested in China. Due to this move of the Chinese, there was huge unrest in the entire Tibetan region. Open rebellion erupted in Eastern Tibet in 1956 and in Lhasa in 1959. According to PRC statistics[2], 87,000 Tibetans were killed during the 16 month period following the 1959 Uprising. An estimated 100,000 Tibetans, including the 14th Dalai Lama fled to India seeking shelter and since then hundreds and thousands of Tibetans have been living in India as well as other countries as refugees. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile in Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh) has been trying to preserve Tibetan culture and tradition which seems to be on the verge of extinction due to various reasons.

For the next 20 years after the Uprising, more than 6000 Tibetan monasteries, nunneries, temples, and shrines were destroyed by the Chinese and much evidence of Tibetan culture was suppressed. A comprehensive survey conducted in 1984 by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile estimated that, as a direct result of the Chinese occupation, 1.2 million Tibetans have lost their lives as victims of war, famine, forced labour, execution, torture and suicide. After a series of pro-independence demonstrations by the Tibetans in 1987, the PRC sanctioned a policy of merciless repression of all the rebels and in 1989 martial law was declared in TAR. In order to keep their cause burning, the Tibetans have been registering protests against the Chinese leadership from time to time for occupying their homeland, and in this manner they try to garner international support. Many Western travellers who

witnessed the repressive conditions of the Tibetans within Tibet helped in intensifying an international movement to assist them in their non-violent struggle.

Hundreds of Tibetans have made the supreme sacrifice by immolating themselves in a bid to awaken the world from its slumber and open its eyes to the plight of the Tibetans. In the present times, China's rule in Tibet is characterised by well-documented evidence of widespread human rights violation that threaten Tibet's distinct national, cultural, and religious identity. Tibet had been forced into an involuntary exile; the Tibetans were forced by the abysmal Chinese monstrosity to flee their homeland. They had invaded Tibet in 1950 bringing along their 'gift' of Communism but gradually they plundered the ancient monasteries of all their wealth and grandeur, torturing monks and nuns and killing the innocent Tibetans who did not bow before them.

The Dalai Lama relinquished his political position in 2011 when a *Kalon Tripa* or Prime Minister was elected by the Tibetan population in exile for the first time. The Dalai Lama is a supporter of democracy and feels that the Tibetan community should be democratic and liberal in their outlook so as to keep pace with the changing tide of time.

Despite their positive re-settlement in exile, the Tibetans living within Tibet faced the barbarity of the Chinese authorities. They were beaten up and tortured before being imprisoned if they rebelled against the Chinese occupancy or even showed the slightest devotion to the Dalai Lama. Women were not safe under the Chinese presence. Women and girls of around 400 families were marched naked in public, tortured and raped. Even the nuns were not spared, they were raped in the open and put to shame in front of monks; the Chinese soldiers forced the Tibetans to watch this. Nonetheless, these religious minded nuns actively partook in demonstrations and agitations against the Chinese occupancy of Tibet. The activists were imprisoned and tortured in the incarceration cells. 1959 had marked a turning point for Tibetan women with their involvement in the resistance movement against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

Despite their patriotism, the Tibetans have been suffering. The lack of education and job opportunities, coupled with forced

resettlement has resulted in a number of women turning to sex trade to support themselves and their families. Tibetan men too suffer; jobless and forced to live in refugee camps, many have turned to alcoholism which in turn is a glaring cause to the perpetration of violence against women.

There are around 1,50,000 Tibetans in exile spread across the world with the majority living in India. For a long time, Tibetan women in exile have faced discrimination within the refugee community in India. They could neither pursue higher education nor were allowed to work. These women were mostly confined to their homes and destined to perform the traditional role of home-maker. Nyima Lhama, General Secretary of the Tibetan Women's Association[3] reveals:

> The patriarchal nature of the Tibetan society allowed discriminatory attitudes and practices to continue against women for many years.

Over the years, the increasing role of women in politics within Tibet has been affecting their compatriots in exile. In a report, the Special Rapporteur on "Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences"[4], expressed her concern about the situation of Tibetan women within Tibet. She said,

> Women in Tibet continue to undergo hardship and are also subjected to gender-specific crimes, including reproductive rights violations such as forced sterilisation, forced abortion, coercive birth control policies and the monitoring of menstrual cycles. There have been many reports of Tibetan women prisoners facing brutality and torture in custody.

Various incidents indicate that women and nuns are subject to gender-specific violence which is far more vicious than torment against men. These *female tortures* include stripping female prisoners naked, use of electrical batons in their private parts, using lighted cigarettes, and attacking female prisoners with dogs. Men are not given this sort of sexual torture. Chinese soldiers rape women prisoners using electric cattle prods. Another perverse crime, cutting off the woman's breasts, is gradually becoming prevalent. The Chinese police force women to run continuously while beating them with cattle prods. A

female prisoner, Ngawang, was tied with an electric cord and beaten with cattle prods. Dogs were made to attack her while the electric cord was tied around her breasts through which electricity was passed at regular intervals.

Another woman prison-inmate, Nima Tsamchoe, took part in a peaceful demonstration in 1988 when she was merely 19 years old.[5] She narrated her harrowing tale of imprisonment and torture thus:

> Dogs were set on us while we were naked. Lit cigarette butts were stubbed on our faces, knitting needles jabbed in our mouths . . . kicked in the breasts and in the genitals until they were bleeding . . . made to hang from trees and beaten on bare flesh by electric batons. Containers of human urine were poured over heads . . . many were raped. However, even those who were raped were very secretive because they were ashamed and embarrassed . . . I was hung up from the wall with my legs up and beaten with electronic rods in the genitals and in the mouth. After this I could not even go to the toilet.

The sexual torture that PRC officials direct on the Tibetan nuns is far more humiliating, cruel and sadistic than that performed on the monks. Raped nuns become guilty of having broken their vows of celibacy and often consider themselves unworthy of continuing life as nuns and ashamed of themselves they do not return to their religious life. The soldiers force the nuns to touch and feel their private parts and they are beaten if they do not concede. The soldiers make them undress in front of the monks so as to humiliate them further.

A young Tibetan protestor in her twenties was taken into custody by the PRC soldiers for peacefully protesting in Lhasa. She was made to undress in front of thirty male prisoners and was beaten up during the interrogation. The three policewomen interrogating her crossed all limits of barbarity when they tortured her with not one but two electric batons.

> Before I could comprehend what was happening to me, the electric baton was mercilessly rammed into my vagina . . . in and out, in and out, in and out . . . It was no less than being brutally raped . . . I thought I was dying. Then the same stick was forcefully shoved into my mouth. Horrified, I vomited out something – thickened blood mixed with saliva. I couldn't think of anything . . . nothing mattered any longer. I prayed that I would just die, there and then . . . As I groaned in pain and humiliation, I could hear the taunting laughter of the Chinese: 'Have you got freedom? Have you got independence? How does it taste?' (Vahali, 223).

Men and women and children all suffer due to political upheavals. Tibetan women, like their men, have suffered enormously because of the political conflict in their land. In the Tibetan social, cultural, religious and political hierarchy, women were placed secondary to men and did not enjoy the same freedom or privileges as men. Tibet has been in exile for the last 57 years. Exile is a state of homelessness despite the presence of a *home*. Tibetan women had always been a reticent lot back in Tibet but having been thrust into a new and altogether different space in exile, they are emerging as independent-minded, dynamic women who have overcome the trauma of displacement and violence with utmost resilience and helping their men folk in adapting to life in exile. Their exploitation at the hands of the Chinese has turned them into furiously independent women ready to face the hurdles that life hurls at them.

A surge in the number of Tibetan women writers is indicative of the freedom of expression exercised by the cosmopolitan Tibetan women; exile has given them a new-found sense of freedom leading to newer identities being formed and re-formed. Tibetan women have emerged as strong-willed individuals who have overcome their trauma by facing their fears with great grit. Their conviction and dedication to the cause of Tibet is exemplary. On March 13, 2013, the Tibetan Women Association held a protest march in Mcleodganj, Dharamshala, against the brutality and atrocities on the people of Tibet committed by the Chinese government. Due to this barbarity, more than hundred Tibetans have immolated themselves so far. The Tibetan women are raising their voice against the Chinese

atrocities by all possible means and garnering international support. The Tibetans living in exile have become the voice of their fellow countrymen and women within Tibet. Their perseverance and concerted efforts have caused many a ripples on the global front, making the world aware of the poignant state of affairs in Tibet and the brutal treatment given to the native people.

The successful organisation of Miss Tibet pageant every year in Mcleodganj heralds hope for the Tibetan women who get a unique platform to showcase their talent while drawing attention of various quarters of the world towards their cause. I would sum up my paper with a quote from the famous American actress and singer Beyoncé Knowles,"Power's not given to you. You have to take it." So women have to fight for themselves and empower themselves. They do not need someone else to validate their existence.

Notes

1. Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, 2011
2. According to Radio Lhasa broadcast of Oct.1, 1960
3. In an interview to Deutsche Welle on Jan.1, 2014 talking about India's Tibetan women assuming bigger roles
4. United Nations Commission on Human Rights in resolution 1994/45, adopted on March 4, 1994
5. Gender specific torture and sex crimes against Tibet women within Tibet

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"Live, Alive, Living Partition": A Book Review

"Once we were one, now Time has made us two!"(108)

Poet, author, lyricist, and film maker Gulzar's latest book *Footprints on Zero Line: Writings on the Partition* is not a book about frozen memories; longing and belonging; history re-narrated or partition glorified in any way; but it's a book that places itself in present times; a consequence of Partition; a continuum of what happened in August 1947. To put it into Rakhshanda Jalil's (the translator's) words: "for him it is an *opus de projectus*, a work in progress." The book is an amalgam of 19 poems, 13 stories and excerpts of an interview with Joginder Paul and Sukrita Paul Kumar. The poems included in this collection are printed in both languages–original Hindi and translated English. It is typical Gulzar style poetry–emotional, psychological, nerve touching, political as well as it gives wings to imagination. The poems do not portray pain, trauma, agony and fragmentation alone, but also teach us to accept and adapt ourselves with the horrendous reality with a sane mind, infinite tolerance and above all, an effort to build harmonious and cordial relations between the two nations. For many people the roots spread to each other's nation. For example:

"When I came to stand at the Zero line
My shadow fell in Pakistan!" (Zero Line, 2)

Or *"How desolate the past becomes*
How desolate becomes childhood (Dhaiyya, 16)

Or *"Kites hover over corpses in your city*
In much the same way they do
In my city, on its crossroad.
....
In this, our two countries
So much is common among the common people" (Karachi , 36)

Also, *"That the job of dividing and cutting is still in progress,*
That partition was the first one
Some more partitions remain!" (Toba Tek Singh, 38)

The poem "*Toba Tek Singh*" is a reference to Manto and his deep seated faith in communal harmony.

To sum up Gulzar's poetry, I'd like to endorse Rakshanda Jalil's words from her note at the end of the book: "He cloaks his poetry in a many - splendoured robe of words - words that have a mesmeric spell . . . tilisimic enchantment . . . image conjured up by the play upon words . . . many layers of meaning in all its crystal clarity, its freshness and poignancy . . . rawness and . . .tactile" (198-99). She further highlights that "the images, motifs and symbols are culled from the minutiae of memories and real, lived experiences" (199). The personal and political, the past and the present across the barriers, the sad and happy moments, the lived experiences and the introspection merge to give birth to this poetic narrative on Partition and "the result is a fine dust of memories that settle over . . . like sepia– tinted particles glimmering with wistfulness and hope" (201).

Before discussing the stories, a pertinent sentence from the interview in the book needs attention--"Perhaps it has something to do with the age at which one witnessed Partition" (184). For every person affected by the Partition, before and after, the meaning and analysis differed according to his/her situation. The only reality common to all was 'riots,' 'empty roads,' 'half burnt bodies' 'stinking corpses all around' and 'refugee camps.' Gulzar voices and documents the feelings, thoughts, emotions and testimonies of many people in his words: "Hardly anyone felt that these refugee condition meant having to leave their homes forever . . . We'll go back to our homes as soon as the confusion subsides" (189). Perhaps, Gulzar and Joginder Paul reiterate the same hopes for reconciliation when they say:

[Gulzar] ". . . the process of coming together between the

two communities has been so slow that it may appear as if there has been no progress at all. But I have experienced the progress" (196). And

[Joginder Paul] "Today, that desire to live harmoniously together is still present . . . Freedom demands responsibility and Independence proves to be dangerous if we do not take on the responsibilities"(196).

Gulzar's confidence in common man's wisdom reverberates in a statement like: "Today common man is far wiser. He cannot become an easy victim to the designs of the politicians" (196).

The stories incorporated in this collection range from the harsh, brutal event of Partition and its aftermath to communal ill-will and the shadow of this historico-politico decision even today. If "*Crossing the Raavi*," "*Two Sisters*" and "*Jamun Tree*" highlight the shift and movement at the time of Partition then "*Search*" and "*Scent of the Man*" takes us to the Kashmir of present times. "Partition" is about the false hopes of the people who were separated from their loved ones and yet with open eyes they dream of meeting their dear ones someday. Similarly in "*Kuldip Nayar and Pir Sahab*" the spiritual ties between people is accentuated. "*LOC*" and "*Two Soldiers*" are about the Zero line border between the two nations. In the latter story, the conversation between Asif and Arun in verses at the border makes the reader think about the relevance of war.

Asif: "*What if I had got hit in my heart*
You would have been left alone without an enemy.
The loneliness would have killed you in the desert
You would have gone mad in this checkpost . . ."

Arun: "*What will anyone do alone at the border*
Without an enemy, it has no meaning, no purpose (108).

The trauma of living on borders is well depicted in this story which ends with the lines:

"*Long are the sages of borders*
The words of brothers hurt
They speak with bullets now."*(109)*

Short, curt sentences encapsulate the ideology and present the view point of Gulzar firmly. For example, in the story "*Over*" a statement like, "Our borders are amazing places" (179),

or in "*Smoke*" "The living had been cremated. And the dead had been buried" (132), summarize the very fact of repercussions of hatred, enmity and hostility between nations. They are similar to anti-war poems--a subtle protest.

The places referred to in stories apart from Delhi, Kashmir, Amritsar and Lahore are tiny hamlets of India or Pakistan like Khorda zilla, Campbellpur (Attock), Dera Khail Khan, Sachetgarh, Chhajra, Din,etc. Border areas refer to Chamba, River Raavi, Pochina and the time span in specific years are 1947, 1965, 1971, 1975 (year of emergency), 1998, and 1980s. Names of people who have been referred to range from Manto, Kuldip Nayar, Sai Paranjpye, Amol Palekar, Madhu Dandvate and his wife, his own name as Sampooran, Zafar, and Faraz to list a few.

The book is a chiaroscuro of sunlight and shadows, days and nights, silence and dreams, fragmentation and hope, sky, moon, stars, smoke and much more but all painted on one canvas, against the same backdrop of history but arranged in a new framework which carries the identifiable signature of Gulzar.

Sidharth, *Celestial Beings—Tales & Paintings*, Tr. Jaspreet Mander. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2017, pp. 185, Rs. 1995.

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Celestial Beings is an act of contemplation, an embodiment of meditative journeys undertaken by Sidharth – the fountainhead of this eclectic work. A painter, musician and writer, all rolled into one magnanimous self, Sidharth has painted around two hundred and twenty five characters on the literary canvas in addition to his effortless artwork and paintings. A well known Delhi based artist, with a diploma from the College of Art, Chandigarh, he enhanced his formal education by learning fresco painting techniques from local artisans in Punjab, the richly coloured Thangka paintings from Tibetan monks in Dharamsala and techniques of Madhubani and Kashmiri paper mache crafts from master crafts-persons. An apprentice at the studio of Sardar Sobha Singh, the celebrated Indian painter, Sidharth has garnered much appreciation for his dynamic use of colours which he creates by mixing natural pigments.

Celestial Beings is a series comprising fourteen canvases depicting themes that are close to his heart and are a result of years of meditation. A conversation that seems to ensue as he paints finally culminates in the form of sensitive poetic stories penned by him in Saraiki – the language of Guru Nanak. These poetic tales have been translated in English by Jaspreet Mander, a sensitive poetess and academician. Each poetic tale is a journey of self-discovery for the reader who is rendered transfixed in a realm of identification with the poet's experience, so much so that it becomes his own.

The poems are a manifestation of the enigmatic, insightful visualisations of the mystic epiphanies. Depictions of the surreal encounters of the poet, each poetic tale speaks of all

earthly beings as celestial beings. Sidharth doles out life-lessons through his keen observation of objects of nature usually taken for granted. The message he wishes to impart is that if one opens one's self to the universe, the mystic becomes tangible and the seemingly inaccessible realms turn palpable. Echoes of Sikh mysticism resonate with the sounds of *Azaan* through the more spiritually motivated poems, which are the product of years of meditation in the lap of Nature. The string of words very skilfully weaves through his multifarious experiences showcasing pearls of wise mythical imagery, intensely illuminating and enchanting. Whether he talks of an ant, a grasshopper, a monkey or a sex worker, his courtyard tree or a mountain, Sidharth manages to spin a heart-warming tale that is so easily identifiable and relatable that it ceases to be his work and becomes universal.

The straightforward translations by Jaspreet Mander do not interfere with the fluidity of the original Punjabi poems and retain the same magic and verve. Equally awe-inspiring and richly loaded with meaning, the translations do not compete with or overshadow either the paintings or the original poems, thereby succeeding in providing the same profound food for thought as Sidharth's work. The translated work – a metaphorical birth – provides the same nectar and the poetess seems to have undergone the same pangs as the creator. The language remains simple and conversational, alluring the reader into the magical mellifluousness of the tales told from the heart. In a nutshell, the work provides fresh insights for the fettered soul seeking liberation.

POETRY COLUMN

Dr. Basudev Paul*

The Elegy Born in Forest

South wind mars the dry season in spring
Trees sustain pulsation bright; expose low
Yellow leaves fall with murmuring moan

As if they were in chorus, sing a willow song
With its soughing sound bring centuries' howl
Lamentation was heard of a bygone age; gray

Verdant flu became subdued in low lying flute
Leaving behind a song, dirge in nature, in tone
Sorrow laden branches didn't flutter as before

They are heavy with groans and grunts, lonely
Other trees are there standing, no speaking terms
Side by side they are together, pushing them regular

Their glum is broken only with birds' note, rueful
For they represent their melancholia with gumption

After and Before

We want after and before
We look after and before
Two terms sat so close
But maintained huge difference

They are silent movement
Someone builds; someone demolishes
Someone cautions; someone pulls string
Thought not proper before; pined after

We are not after, not a before either
We just swing on the eternal imbalance
Prudence and wisdom commingles
At times at loggerheads; never aligned

Prudes and polish coexists on plane
They are the coins; they remain the same
Time pierces on, not respecting the age
After and before did they reconcile?

**Basudev Paul has been an Associate Professor in English under the affiliating university, North Bengal University (NBU). Parimal Mitra Smriti Mahavidyalaya has been his academic pasture, since 1986. A person of impeccable academic credentials, his intellectual brooding insistence and persistence on the essential beauty of life and language, and the deeper immersion in his own beliefs/values are manifested in his oeuvre. Prof. Basudev Paul can be reached* @ vasu_lonelyvoice@ yahoo.co.in *or* basudevpaul01@gmail.com

For Those Who Would Brave Tempests

Mohammed Usman*

“Who thinks tempests dance too quickly?”
Asked the Master, moustache thickly
Brimming, bristling with indignation,
“Consign the lepers to damnation!
None may tarry here who can't
Wield a terror so puissant
That all the diseased vermin flee
In the dread face of its potency."

To them:
"Strong winds, blizzards, thunder, hail,
Are no friends to those who flail
Helpless in the face of woe,
We conquer both friend and foe.
Judge us, lowlies, if it please thee
If judgement thus doth appease thee
Where we stand you cannot reach
Stagnate below and empty preach!"

To us:
"Revel, rejoice, let the wine flow
Face undaunted the Inferno,
What fear could Hell bring to us?
We are the children of Dionysus!
Dance like a newly birthed star
Be not neighbours, rather fly afar;
Dig deep within yourselves, then tell
The frail ones of the depth of your well."

To Mankind:
"This land our Paradise is, embodiment of majesty
We will not stoop to vulgar bliss, death is not a travesty
We fear not teetering upon this peril-fraught precipice

On the edge is our Eden, and beyond is the abyss!
We are the madmen who claim our time is not yet come
Let the naïve seek their fame, we will allow them martyrdom
Flourish, men of fortitude, we need neither aid nor succour
We are Nature's objective, the weak are a mere detour."

When You Crumble Into Eternity

Luck glimmers, then swift expires
Life blazes, then fate conspires
And each of us on our merry way

Who can tell what fate befell
Adam, was Earth his heaven or hell?
'Tis obscure till this very day

He was the very first of men
A wealthy, worthy citizen
And he committed the gravest folly

He fell prey to curiosity's curse
And lo! In manners most diverse
Exposed his kind to melancholy

He taught us shame and fear and guilt
The foundations on which faith is built
He tainted our Eden forevermore
And now he sleeps in grim repose
Bereft of the life that he chose
To surrender to fork tongued lore

But criminal he, he the fiend uncouth!
The burden that we could do without
Why associate us with his wretched name?

He the rascal, he the snob
The gullible, ignorant slob
Why should we, then, take the blame?

Cast him off, he is not our father
Not our origin, conversely, rather,
He probably never lived at all

Mankind must have invented him
To bridge over the interim
Betwixt his Eden and his fall

He is a chain in fair disguise
A noose designed for our demise
A death trap lying hidden in our tracks

Cast off at once this moral burden
Celebrate life, exalt the uncertain
Let the wings sprout from our backs

Fly amongst the heady, wafting clouds
Break through the all smothering shrouds
Of love, of life, of expectations

Seek out nature in its fury
Let it be judge and it jury
Glory in its devastations

And when, at last, it comes to be
That you crumble into eternity
And your life-wave nears its final crest

You will be glad that day, I'm sure
That you were neither gentle nor demure
But stormed through life like a tempest

**Mohammed Usman, based in Bangalore, has written over 130 works including short stories, poems, quatrains, academic articles and philosophical treatises. His highly developed conceptual perception is implicit in the lyrical intensity of his poems.*

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