Research Centre, Department of English
St. Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala, India

ISSN 0973-0990

Conspectus A Journal of English Studies Vol. 7, 2013

Conspectus

a journal of english studies

2013

7

CONSPECTUS

CONSPECTUS

a journal of english studies

Volume 7, 2013

This journal is published annually by the Research Centre & PG Department of English, St Thomas College, Thrissur, Kerala, India.

Editorial Office
Dept. of English
St. Thomas' College
Thrissur, Kerala, India, 680 001

Cover Design by Pradeep J.

Production and Layout by REDACT Editorial Services

Printed at Impressions Press, Bangalore, Karnataka

Regn. KERENGO1731/11/1/2004-TC

ISSN 0973 0990

CONSPECTUS

a journal of english studies

Volume 7, 2013

Contents

Articles

Resistance

The Quintessence of Language and Writing in Post-Colonial Literature

Maya N. Menon

Resistance Theory is an aspect of political thought discussing the basis on which constituted authority may be resisted, by individuals or groups. Stephen Slemon in his essay "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World" explains Resistance as follows:

> The first concept of resistance is most clearly put forward by Selwyn Cudjoe in his *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* and by Barbara Harlow in her book, *Resistance Literature*. For Cudjoe and Harlow, Resistance is an act, or a set of acts that is designed to rid a people of its oppressors and it so thoroughly infuses the experience of living under oppression that it becomes an almost autonomous aesthetic principle… ….Resistance literature can thus be seen as a category of literary writing which emerges as an integral part of an organized struggle or resistance for national liberation. (77-78)

Language is often a pivotal question in post-colonial studies. During colonization, colonizers usually constrained the colonised multitude to accept the dominance of their foreign language, even forbidding the natives to articulate their mother tongues. Many writers, educated under colonization, recount how students were demoted, humiliated, or even beaten for speaking their native language in colonial schools. In response to the systematic

imposition of colonial languages, some post-colonial writers and activists advocate a complete return to the use of indigenous languages. Others see the language, such as English, imposed by the colonizer as a more practical alternative, using the colonial language both to enhance inter-nation communication and to counter a colonial past through de-forming a "standard" European tongue and re-forming it in new literary forms.

This article focuses on the marginalized and oppressed people and their employment of language to frustrate the white supremacy. Resistance is the most puzzling term in contemporary literary and cultural critique. Varied genres of writing such as Post-colonial writing and Gynocriticism have its roots fixed in the fertile land of Resistance writing. Wide-ranging theorists such as Gayathri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Benita Parry have worked to examine the ways in which resistance in writing surpass the mere questioning of colonial authority.

Post-colonial Literature open up the story of resistance, transformation and survival. Post colonialism is committed to the task of revisiting, remembering and most crucially interrogating the colonial past as different facets of resistance. Post-colonial writers and intellectuals write in English, but they use English language in a way different from the colonial writers. To them, language becomes a valid tool of remonstration and resistance. Resistance manipulates the language of empire in such a way as to rebut its dominant ideologies. In other words, the colonized nation is "writing back," speaking either of the oppression and racism of the colonizers or the inherent cultural "better-ness" of the indigenous people. The paradox of marginalization and empowerment seem to coexist in the ideas of representation and resistance.

Post-colonial writing as a literary genre utilizes the concept of resistance to its optimal level. The term post-colonial refers to all the cultures affected by the imperial processes from the moment of colonization to the present

day. Literatures of Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Malta, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka thus became Post-colonial Literatures. What each of these literatures has in common is that, they have surfaced in their present form out of the exposure to colonization as resistance against it. They asserted themselves by foregrounding the struggle with the imperial centre. Resistance against the political, intellectual, cultural, social and linguistic over powering can be seen in the works of writers such as Vikram Seth, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe etc.

Reinterpretation of History in a new dimension, exploration of the untread paths of suffering and exploitation, writing back from the margins, search for identity, voicing the feelings and emotions of the oppressed and doubly marginalized feeling of women are some of the major dimensions of resistance writing as reflected in the works of prominent post-colonial writers.

More than just a counterpoise against the injustice shown to them, resistance is a genuine search for identity. It is not just a mere questioning but an attempt from the part of colonized victims to find a secured place, both physically and psychologically, in their own land. Resistance through writing is an endeavour to satisfy their split personality and an act of justification they are doing for themselves. It is a challenge to rejuvenate Indians in their self; not only in their customs and manners but in their blood and spirits also. We had a culture about which we were proud of. 'Nostalgia' or longing for such imaginary homelands, untainted by a foreign culture is one of the most eye-catching textures of post-colonial writings.

Essays of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayathri Spivak focus more on the theoretical segment of resistance writing. They are unambiguous act of resistance against the so called 'empire where the sun never sets'. While assuming language as a chief tool of protest, it must be scrutinized from different angles. The colonizers, before making a

political conquest, made a linguistic take over. They educated natives using their language as a medium of instruction, and what they taught us was the enormity of their empire and the uncultured, savage ways of the natives. Psychologically they instilled in us a feeling of inferiority complex using their language. They used English language as a status symbol and succeeded in developing an antipathy among natives towards their vernacular languages, custom and cultures.

Using the same language to write back sounds much amusing and something of a sweet revenge is involved in it. We made their language our own. Kamala Das's and Arundhati Roy's Indianised English are perfect illustration for this. The use of native language amidst English makes it more indigenous and can be best used to express native socio-cultural condition. And it sounds more acceptable for the Indians too. Language and writing thus became a major tool of protest and proved to be the best in expressing the voice of the "silenced".

The post colonial writing unveiled many untold stories exploring the real culture, tradition and moral values of their own nation. Such writings showcased a highly different outline of their nation, contrary to the backward, uncivilized image put forward by the colonizers. It was a sort of revelation to both the once colonizers and the colonized too. It gave them a chance to rethink and re-imagine their notion about the nation. Using the language of the colonizer sounds paradoxical from the surface. But while reading it from another aspect, we can say that no other language can best serve the purpose as it is equally comprehensible to both.

Most radical among those writers who have chosen to turn away from English is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a writer from Kenya, who began a successful career writing in English before turning to work entirely in his native language. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ says that through language people have not only described the world, but also

understand them by it. For him, English in Africa is a "cultural bomb" that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history, and installs the dominance of new forms of colonialism. Writing in Gikuyu, his native language, is Ngũgĩ's way not only of going back to Gikuyu traditions, but also of acknowledging and communicating their continuing presence. In a general statement, Ngũgĩ points out that language and culture are inseparable, and that therefore the loss of the former results in the loss of the latter:

> …Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other … Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world … Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (15-16)

Salman Rushdie's perspectives regarding language must be taken to serious contemplation. Although Rushdie's novels often tackle the history of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Great Britain, his comments have wider relevance, particularly considering his status in world literature. He comments on how working in English can be a therapeutic act of resistance, remaking a colonial language to reflect the post-colonial experience. In the essay "Imaginary Homelands" (from the eponymous collection published by Granta in 1992), he explains that, far from being something that can simply be ignored or disposed of, the English language is the place where writers can and must work out the problems that confront emerging/recently independent colonies:

> One of the changes [in the location of Anglophone writers of Indian descent] has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this

> language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the opinion that we can't simply use the language the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (17)

The theoretical and scholarly debate about language is addressed in detail in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin explore the ways in which writers encounter a dominant, colonial language. They describe a two-part process through which writers in the post-colonial world displace a standard language (denoted with the capital "e" in "English") and replace it with a local variant that does not have the perceived stain of being somehow sub-standard, but rather reflects a distinct cultural outlook through local usage.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, a novel which carries the essence of African way of writing is set in Nigeria in the early 20th century when colonization by British government officials and Christian missionaries was well under way. Ezeulu, the protagonist is the chief priest of Ulu, the god of Umuaro tribe. The entire novel can be perceived as a tragedy of Ezeulu, who failed desperately to withstand the blazing anger of colonials, when he refused to accept the role of a puppet chief as demanded by them. According to S. A. Khayyoom, in "Myth and Symbolism in the Novels of Chinua Achebe",

> Negritude is a cultural and political myth used by Achebe in his novels. This ideological movement, an Existential philosophy, according to Leopold Sedar Senghor, is not only a way of being, but also a

> way of living. It attempts to redefine the ethnological aspects, and reevaluate Africa within a non-western framework. It has helped in rediscovering Africa and African and in establishing a new social order. It tries to liberate the man of colour from himself and has rejected what the white world stands for. Achebe, like Negritude writers, in anthropological novels tries to glorify and celebrate what is good in the African past, but unlike them appears to have denounced the unhealthy traditions and inhuman rituals by exposing the social evils and political injustices. (72)

Native folktales, proverbs and cultural festivals woven into the novel create an atmosphere of traditional Nigerian culture. Certain expressions used in the work such as "mgbe gara aga" and "mgbe dianya mgbe" shows more of the spirit of Igbo system. The novel is replete with typical Nigerian proverbs such as, "When the roof and walls of a house fall in the ceiling is not left standing" (105) and "When we buy a goat or a cow, we pay for it and it becomes our own. But when we marry a wife, we must go on paying until we die" (73).

Achebe in his novels intentionally draws white characters as flat characters, for they totally do not represent any people, but together they symbolically stand for forces of an alien culture, to which the central characters respond. Achebe has deliberately made his white characters just phantoms playing insignificant roles in the history of their province. Though, not intentionally, Achebe's novels can be cited as perfect examples for making use of language in such a way as a tool of resistance against the colonizers way of writing.

V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* is conspicuous for its post colonial implication. It's all about a man named Ralph Singh who adopts writing as a means to decolonize himself. The novel presents and examines a newly independent country in the Caribbean, the island of Isabella, with a

pessimistic view: the previous colony has now become independent but the formerly colonized people of the island are unable to establish order and govern their country. The colonial experience has caused the colonized to perceive them as inferior to the colonizer. Colonial education and cultural colonization have presented the English world, with its rich culture, as a world of order, discipline, success, and achievement. As a result, the natives consider their own culture, customs and traditions, religion, and race to be inferior to those of their master and try to identify themselves with the empire. Since they are far away from their original homeland, their own original traditions and religions have become meaningless to them, and thus, they cannot identify themselves with those remote rules and codes. However, as they are different from the master in cultural, traditional, racial, and religious backgrounds, they can never successfully associate themselves with the colonizer either. They suffer from dislocation, placelessness, fragmentation, and loss of identity. They become mimic men who imitate and reflect the colonizer's life style, values, and views. As these psychological problems cannot be solved after independence, sovereignty itself becomes a word but not a real experience. Without the colonizer, the colonized behold themselves as lost in their post-colonial society that fails to offer a sense of national unity and identity.

Ralph Singh, the main character and narrator in the novel, is a 40-year-old colonial minister who lives in exile in London and he is trying to impose order in his life by writing his memoirs. Singh presents different times, places and situations, in his attempt to seek order, and rewrite his life but fails desperately to follow a chronological order, thus not achieving the order he seeks. *The Mimic Men* depicts the wretched plight of a displaced and disillusioned man for whom language and writing becomes a final resort in his journey for the search for identity. Ralph Singh, by writing his memoirs, craves to reconstruct his identity, and get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement. In

other words, Singh is the representative of displaced and disillusioned colonial individuals, and colonization is depicted as a process that takes away their identity, culture, history, and sense of place. Singh's final detachment is an expression of a distance from any clear-cut national identity or notion of home. Hence, in *The Mimic Men*, "home" can never ultimately be more than the books he writes or, perhaps more precisely, the action of writing them. In *The Mimic Men*, it is said,

> Singh does not find a complete solution to his psychological problems. Hence, his writing reflects moods of displacement, disillusionment, and sadness. Alienated from his own society, Singh travels to different places to overcome his feeling of isolation but he is aware of his "imminent homelessness". (249)

In conclusion, post-colonial writers examine and analyse the colonial and post-colonial periods, historical, cultural, and political backgrounds, economic problems and psychological conflicts, finally to arrive at a conclusion that, Resistance writing itself can be an act of decolonization. They apprehend that colonial societies suffer from lack of cultural, historical, and racial homogeneity. Although majority of them fail to reconnect themselves to, their homeland, or to connect themselves to colonizers nation by writing, they finally takes control of their sense of dislocation as they realizes that there is no ideal place with which they can identify themselves.

The significance placed on resistance writing and language raises the great debate: what should become of the colonizers language in the former colonies? Should it be rejected, embraced, or perhaps subverted? Does writing in their language suggest the betrayal of the mother tongue or the assumption of a new post-colonial identity? Whether the language has evolved to fit the need of its speakers in the post-colonial world?

WORKS CITED

Achebe, Chinua. *Arrow of God*. New York: Anchor, 1969. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Khayyoom, S. A. "Myth and Symbolism in the Novels of Chinua Achebe." *Indian Response to African Writing*. Eds. Visweswara Rao and A. Ramakrishna Rao. New Delhi: Prestige, 1993. 58-65. Print.

Naipaul, V. S. *The Mimic Men*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.Print.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1981. Print.

Slemon Stephen. "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World." *Contemporary Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. 72-83. Print.

Cultural Dislocation and Disoriented Relations in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*

Priya K.

Roots, language and culture are the three important components to define a human being. Culture constitutes certain identity markers represent through art, legends, myths, customs, religion, rites, food and others. These are adopted, retained or discarded at different times but a feeling of oneness persists even after several years, or sometimes, centuries. Physical displacement from the homeland may raise social and cultural identity questions. Salman Rushdie in his essay "Imaginary Homelands" states: "It's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (9). He hereby presents an immigrant's ambivalent position. The immigrants are torn between the two worlds—past and present. Homi K. Bhabha says,

> The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities. (4)

The immigrants are in dilemma as to whether they should remain in a ghetto of old values without interaction with the majority or break barriers to get assimilated with the new culture.

Diasporic literature mirrors the immigrants' experience of dislocation and re-location. It often raises questions regarding the definitions of home and nation. The concept of home "can act as a valuable means of orientation by

giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated from and where we belong" (McLeod 210). In the case of migrants, the notion of home "becomes primarily a mental construct built from the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past. It exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with the present" (McLeod 211). Diasporic writers are mostly nostalgic about their cultures.

Among the Diasporic writers, Jhumpa Lahiri adorns a significant position. She is the daughter of first generation immigrant parents who later settled in America. Sharda Iyer comments:

> One of her strength is her unique socio-cultural positioning as a second generation North American female with enough of South Asian cultural influence to reach out to, and potentially capture, a global audience. It is all the more interesting because it is not common for a young South Asian female living in US to write about the conflict of culture, modern relationship and memories of a home left behind. (157-58)

She being a second generation immigrant suffers from an identity crisis which enables her to write about the question of identity among expatriate communities. She recounts the lives of Indian–Americans who are caught in-between the two worlds. This "middle passage", as Bhabha says, "is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience" (5).

Lahiri's second short-story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), deals with the second generation Bengalis raised in America who find a new sense of belonging. The immigrant children are adhered to Indian culture at home while they follow the American culture in the public. Their existence "between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 4). Lahiri, through her stories, tries to bring out the conflicts among second

generation immigrants due to cultural dislocation and disorient relationships. "Lahiri shows an astute understanding of human relationships", says Iyer (158). The characters in the eight stories struggle to create connection. But relationships that are built on a connection that is not mutual or stable have a minimal chance of success.

The *Unaccustomed Earth* comprises of two parts—first part with five stories and second part titled "Hema and Kaushik" contains three interlinked stories. The eight stories in this collection expand upon Lahiri's epigraph, a passage from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne argues that fortunes will improve if people strike their roots into unaccustomed earth. It's an apt and rich metaphor for the stories Lahiri deals in this collection. It seems that Lahiri does not agree completely with this notion because though transformations improve their fortune there are certain uncontrollable facts that may control them.

The first story of the collection titled "Unaccustomed Earth" deals with the dilemma a daughter faces in receiving her father in her new house and her anxiety of how it is going to affect her family. Ruma, a Bengali girl brought up in America, marries Adam, an American and they have a son Akash. When her father, a retiree and a recent widower, announces his visit, Ruma feels that "her father would become a responsibility" and "an end to the family she'd created on her own: herself and Adam and Akash, and the second child that would come in January" (7). His visit brings back old resentment and a deep reflection on father–daughter relationship. Ruma is conscious of the feeble relationship that exists between herself and father. "She had never been able to confront her father freely…she feared that any difference of opinion would chip away at the already frail bond that existed between them" (37). Akash's attachment with his grandfather makes Ruma "briefly envious of her own son" (48). He soon picks up a companion in his grandfather, an attachment which will tie him to his roots. Even though a graduate in law, Ruma

repeats her mother's life pattern as she gives up her promising career and follows her husband to a distant city, Seattle. Her father advices her to continue her job, not only for "financial stability" but also for "mental stability" (38). Her attachment with family worries him:

> That loss was in store for Ruma, too; her children would become strangers, avoiding her…He wanted to shield her from the deterioration that inevitably took place in the course of a marriage, and from the conclusion he sometimes feared was true. (54)

After the unexpected enjoyment of a blissful week, Ruma longs for a life with her father which is rejected to her in her childhood. Her father realizes that "it was not for his sake that his daughter was asking him to live here. It was for hers" (53). He has already made plans for a new life with a more independent Bengali widow, Mrs. Bagchi, and "did not want to live in the margins of his daughter's life, in the shadow of her marriage" (53).

The story also throws light on some of the cultural issues faced by the second generation immigrants. A question of identity often pervades in Ruma. She seems to take pride in her father who "resembled an American in his old age. With his grey hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere" (11). Likewise she is proud of Akash's "curling brown-blond hair" (24) which he inherits from Adam. Her mother often blames her: "You are ashamed of yourself, of being Indian" (26). When her son sticks to English, she feels "Bengali had never been a language in which" she feels "like an adult" (12). From this identity crisis, there arises a sense of loss. Ruma feels "she and Adam were separate people leading separate lives. Though his absences contributed to her isolation, sometimes it was worse, not better, when Adam was home" (26).

The story "Hell-Heaven" is narrated through the eyes of a Bengali–American girl, Usha and it mirrors how cultural conflict leads to tension in relationships. She

describes how her mother finds pleasure in her relationship with a Bengali, Pranab Chakraborthy, a graduate student at MIT. As he becomes part of their family, Aparna (Usha's mother) finds a better companion in him sharing common interests in music, film and food. Usha states: "Wherever we went, any stranger would have naturally assumed that Pranab Kaku was my father, that my mother was his wife" (66-7). Later when Pranab picks up a relation with an American girl Deborah, an estrangement appears in Aparna's relationship. "At larger gatherings, they kissed and held hands in front of everyone" (68) which alarm the conventional Bengalis. Aparna comments: "I don't understand how a person can change so suddenly. It's just hell-heaven, the difference" (68-9). Differences in both cultures, slowly drifts Pranab from other Bengalis. They believe that Deborah strips Pranab "not only of his origins but of his independence" (75). Lahiri brings out the question of an immigrant's identity through Pranab's twin daughters Srabani and Sabitri (called Bonny and Sara) "who barely looked Bengali and spoke only English" (75). Usha remembers that:

> They were not taken to Calcutta every summer, they did not have parents who were clinging to another way of life and exhorting their children to do the same. Because of Deborah, they were exempt from all that, and for this reason I envied them. (75)

Cultural conflict in Pranab becomes evident through his divorce of Deborah, after twenty three years of marriage, to unite with a Bengali woman.

As a second generation immigrant, Usha's conflict with culture begins with her mother's rejection of Deborah's American ways, which she admires as best. Usha's craving for freedom soon finds excuses for that: "I told her I was sleeping over at a friend's when really I went to parties, drinking beer and allowing boys to kiss me (76). She begins to keep secrets from her mother and "evading her" (76) with the help of her friends. As she grows up, Usha begins

to realize her mother's position, the depth of rejection she faces from her husband and daughter:

> I began to pity my mother; the older I got, the more I saw what a desolate life she led. She had never worked, and during the day she watched soap operas to pass the time. Her only job, everyday, was to clean and cook for my father and me. (76)

Her mother finally succeeds in adapting with her daughter's foreign culture: "My mother and I had also made peace; she had accepted the fact that I was not only her daughter but a child of America as well" (81-2). Thus a peaceful mother-daughter relationship establishes between them through understanding each other's position.

"Only Goodness" is the story of Sudha and her alcoholic brother Rahul who try to follow the American dream of successful life. Sudha always makes sure that 'her little brother should leave his mark as a child in America' (136). Her efforts at making Rahul's childhood and adolescence as Americanized as possible are her ways of dealing with the identity crisis that she feels growing up as an Indian–American. Sudha introduces him to alcohol and helps him to use it without parents' notice. Unknowingly, her actions relate to the fact how alcohol and independence from parents go hand in hand. She considers her parents "were prudish about alcohol to the point of seeming Puritanical" (129). She waits "until college to disobey her parents" (129). "The idea of excess, of being out of control, did not appeal to Sudha. Competence: this was the trait that fundamentally defined her" (129). Sudha possesses the true knowledge to exist with two cultures which her brother lacks. Though Rahul easily adapts to his college, his habit of alcoholism baffles him and later leads him to a drop out. Their parents who are always proud of their children's brilliance now feel ashamed to explain the reality about Rahul. "They told people Rahul was looking for a job, and then the lie became more elaborate, and Rahul had a job, a

consulting job from home, when in fact he stayed home all day doing nothing" (151). Among the Bengalis he became

> what all parents feared, a blot, a failure, someone who was not contributing to the grand circle of accomplishments Bengali children were making across the country, as surgeons or attorneys or scientists, or writing articles for the front page of The New York Times. (151)

He slowly slips away from his family and picks up a relation with an American woman Elena, who is "thirty eight years older than" (154) him and with a daughter. While Rahul is fitting to the position of a failure, Sudha creates the image of a successful second generation immigrant. Parents give her consent to marry Roger. Even though he is previously married and they have an age difference of fourteen years, her parents

> approved of his academic qualifications, his ability, thanks to his wisely invested inheritance, to buy a house for himself and Sudha in Kilburn. It helped that he'd been born in India, that he was English and not American, drinking tea, not coffee. (152)

Later when Rahul meets Sudha with her family, his alcoholism becomes active in the presence of Sudha's successful life. Sudha feels guilty of destroying her brother. She thinks "if seeing her had reminded him of the past, of those nights they had defied their parents together, pouring warm beer into cups of ice and forging a link all their own" (172). The balloon in the story "a shrunken thing incapable of bursting" (173) seems to be an image of Rahul once inflated with extraordinary intelligence and American dreams by his parents. Sudha's confession steals Roger's trust in her and the shrunken balloon thereby becomes the symbol of her family too.

> She clipped the ribbon with scissors and stuffed the whole thing into the garbage, surprised at how easily it fit, thinking of the husband who no longer trusted

> her, of the son whose cry now interrupted her, of the fledgling family that had cracked open that morning, as typical and as terrifying as any other. (173)

The desire for a successful life is always a driving force for the immigrants to leave their homeland and to take refuge in alien lands. But the tension it creates in the second generation is always neglected.

"A Choice of Accommodations" deals with the life of Amit who after a long gap visits his formal boarding school Langford Academy with his wife Megan, a successful American doctor, for the marriage of his former classmate Pam Borden. Surprisingly, he had

> no nostalgia for the school…Apart from this loose connection with Pam, and a sweatshirt he still owned with the school's wrinkled name across the chest, there was nothing to remind him of those years of his life. (86)

The striking feature of this story is the reversal of the roles of husband and wife. Here Megan adopts the role of the bread winner of the family while Amit takes care of their children, Maya and Monika. Even though he is always concerned about his children, the fact that they do not share his features bothers him. "His daughters looked nothing like him, nothing like his family" instead they "inherited Megan's coloring, without a trace of Amit's deeply tan skin and black eyes, so that apart from their vaguely Indian names they appeared fully American" (94). Amit keeps an insecure feeling of being abandoned due to his childhood experiences. In his childhood, when his parents decide to move back to Delhi, they put him in Langford. "He sought traces of his parents' faces and voices among the people who surrounded and cared for him, but there was absolutely nothing, no one, at Langford to remind him of them" (97). This builds up a sense of loneliness and insecurity in him. His childhood isolation, leads him to admire and love Pam who is always under the care and attention of her brothers

and friends. His quest for completeness and a secure life drives him to a married life with a woman who is five years older than him. He considers his marriage as revenge to his parents: "He was aware of what an insult it was to them. For all their liberal Western ways he knew they wanted him to marry a Bengali girl, raised and educated as he had been" (112). As a result of the insecurity from his childhood isolation, he often imagines accidents to his children:

> In each of these scenarios, he saw himself surviving, the girls perishing under his supervision. Megan would blame him, naturally, and then she would divorce him, and all of it, his life with her and the girls, would end. (91)

His extreme attention to the children is an effort to give them what is deprived to him in his childhood. He considers this more important than his professional success. He often feels bad about Megan's overwork even though she is doing it to support the family. After being drunken in the wedding party, he openly agrees the fact that it is after the second child that their marriage "disappeared" (114). Their married life turns in to a new phase when Megan realizes that "nothing happened" (125) between Pam and Amit. Towards the end both of them are able to understand each other. Thus Pam's wedding, more than a background, serves as a metaphor for a healthy relationship between Amit and Megan despite their cultural differences.

Lahiri shows a totally different picture of second generation immigrant in "Nobody's Business". It does not throw much light on the theme of cultural conflict like the other stories. Sangeetha Biswas, a Bengali–American girl is a Harvard dropout who wants to be addressed as Sang instead of her real name. It seems as an effort to hide her Indian origin. She rejects her Bengali suitors for her boyfriend Farouk who in turn cheats her. When Paul her American housemate, gives evidence of Freddy's treachery, Sang shatters. She leaves the house unable to face Paul. This story is the one which stands out in the collection *Unaccustomed*

Earth. Lack of real compassion and understanding in the relations of immigrants' life is obvious in the story.

The second section of *Unaccustomed Earth* includes a trilogy—"Once in a Life Time", "Year's End" and "Going Ashore". Cultural dislocation leading to breach in relations are more evident in these stories than the previous section. The characters in these stories "challenge the notion of fixity and inhabit a sort of fluidity in newly forges cultural patterns that are redrawn on the palimpsest of the previous cultural bearings" (Gholipour 54).

"Once in a Life Time" is narrated through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old girl Hema, addressing Kaushik. Mothers of Hema and Kaushik establish their friendship at Cambridge irrespective of their families' economic status at Calcutta. Hema remarks: "Here they shopped together for groceries and complained about their husbands and cooked at either our stove or yours, dividing up the dishes for our respective families when they were done" (225). Though the story begins by describing the farewell party to the Choudhuris (Kaushik's family), rest of it deals with their return from Bombay, after seven years. When they return "Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge" (235). Parul, Kaushik's mother is "no longer interested in her cooking, as she had been in the Cambridge days" (242). Hema remarks that Kaushik's mother "had remained thin, her collarbones glamorously protruding, unburdened by the weight of middle age that now padded my mother's features" (232). Her way of wearing "bright lipstick", "her slippery dark hair cut to her shoulders" and speaking "English, in a pleasant unhurried way" (232) attracts Hema. But her mother remarks that Parul "had become "stylish", a pejorative term in her vocabulary" (236). Their journey in first-class and their habit of drinking 'Johnnie Walker' creates tensions in Hema's family. She remarks: "My parents, who had never set foot in a liquor store, wondered whether they should buy another bottle—at the rate your parents were going, that bottle would be drained by

tomorrow" (236). Johnnie Walker becomes a dominant symbol of Westernization of Kaushik's family. Jhumpa Lahiri in an interview with Book Forum explains the drinking habit of Kaushik's parents. She says that Hema's mother

> makes more of the drinking that it really is, brings to it her feelings of being left out feeling like her friends left her in the dust somehow. But drinking is simply something Kaushik's parents have come to enjoy.

Even in the selection of house there is stark difference between the two families. Hema remembers that her "parents felt slighted" and "ashamed of the modest home we owned" before the "extravagant visions" (245) of Kaushik's family.

In the case of Kaushik, he is a victim of double migration. As his father says, Kaushik is "furious that we left, and now he's furious that we're here again" (238). But even in Bombay his parents "managed to raise a typical American teenager" (238). It seems because of the American element in him, Kaushik says "I missed the cold" and "the snow", (235) the only thing he misses in his stay at Bombay. The disparity in culture and the lack of warmth in relations never bothers Kaushik. The only evidence of his love for someone is his remarks to Hema about his mother "It makes me wish we weren't Hindu, so that my mother could be buried somewhere. But she's made us promise we'll scatter her ashes into the Atlantic" (249). The grave and snow are symbols of his cultural dislocation. The story comes to an end when Hema's parents come to know about Parul's cancer.

"Year's End" is narrated by Kaushik addressing Hema, though she is not present. After his mother's death, his father replaces the voidness by a second marriage. More than love, Kaushik's mother is a metaphor for everything American in him. His reaction to his father's second marriage is notable:

> No turbulent emotion passed through me as he spoke, only a diluted version of the nauseating sensation that had taken hold the day in Bombay that I learned my mother was dying, a sensation that had dropped anchor in me and never fully left. (254)

Chitra, Kaushik's stepmother, is closer to his age than his father's. She is a typical Bengali woman, a widow with two children, Rupa and Piu. To Kaushik "seeing her was a shock" (260). Unlike his mother's American ways, Chitra is purely Indian in her ways:

> Her hair was long and dark and she had a broad nose on an otherwise pleasant face, though it was too round for me to find beautiful. She was tallest than I expected her to be, a little taller than my mother. She wore vermilion in her hair, a traditional practice my mother had shunned, the powdery red stain the strongest element of her appearance. (260)

More than her appearance, Kaushik is upset by the way things change in his house. Though he has "no sentimental attachment" to his mother's things, "the thought of Chitra going through" and "watching her sift through everything" (279) upsets him. When his father tries to remove the signs of his mother from the house, he "blamed him for being excessive, but now I blamed him for not having done enough" (279). Chitra's "old fashioned" ways of "heavy smell of cooking" (258), the covered dining table and appearance of his father with "no drink in his hand, no bottle of Johnnie Walker set out" (259) irritate him. Chitra's presence in the kitchen sickens him:

> I had no memories of my mother cooking there, but the space still retained her presence more than any other part of the house. The jade and spider plants she had watered were still thriving on the window still, the orange-and-white sunburst clock she'd so loved the design of, with its quivering second hand, still marking the time on the wall …I imagined her

> hands on the taps of the sink, her slim form pressed against the counter. (263-64)

He wants to ask his father "what on earth had possessed him to marry an old-fashioned girl half his age" (264).

Though Kaushik is disturbed by his father's way of attending Chitra and her children, he soon picks up a rhythm with his step-sisters. He thinks "Like them I had lost a parent and was now being asked to accept a replacement" (272). Kaushik knows that Rupa and Piu need him to

> …guard them, as I needed them, from the growing, incontrovertible fact that Chitra and my father now formed a couple. My presence was proof that my mother had once existed, just as they represented the physical legacy of their dead father. (282)

But he never wants to share his mother's memories with anyone. This angers him when Rupa and Piu go through his mother's pictures: "Your mother is nothing in comparison. Just a servant to wash my father's clothes and cook his meals. That's the only reason she's here, the only reason both of you are here" (286-87). He fails to understand that like him they are also in a fluid state in a foreign culture. Later they adapt to American culture forcibly forgetting their relationship with Kaushik.

Kaushik's father becomes more Indian due to his new wife, so the family shifts to a less isolated traditional house. There were other Bengalis nearby and an Indian grocery in the town, things that were "more important to Chitra than the proximity of the ocean and Modernist architecture had been for' Kaushik's mother" (292). Kaushik considers both his father and him "were both thankful to Chitra for chafing under whatever lingered of my mother's spirit in the place she had last called home and for forcing us to shut its doors" (293). Like characters in Lahiri's other works here also with "their fragile emotional states, hesitant gestures, and tight rope walking on the brink of psychological raptures" they

are "coaxed in to exploring assorted facets of morality, alienation and dysfunction" (Iyer 156).

"Going Ashore" shows Hema's adoption of American culture around her instead of the Indian in her home. Due to a failure in her previous affair with an Englishman and out of her need for a secure life she decides to marry Navin, an Indian. After a long gap she meets Kaushik at Rome. Kaushik becomes a "psychological refugee" and "appears to be most comfortable" in his "un-homed condition, the lack or existence of a home makes no difference" to him "whose identity is fluid and who has a double consciousness" (Gholipour 55). Hema realizes that her knowledge about his mother "bound them closer together" (313). The story concentrates on the transient nature of immigrant relationships. Hema considers that "In another two weeks everything would be wiped clean—they would be in different countries" (317) which makes her more courageous in her relation with Kaushik. Kaushik's selfishness compels her to leave him. "Unlike Navin, he was not offering to come to her" instead "he was telling her what to do" (321). Hema chooses Navin not of love but out of the belief that "it might fix things" (313). She addresses to Kaushik, her thoughts about Navin "I was repulsed by the sight of him, not because I had betrayed him but because he still breathed, because he was there for me and had countless more days to live" (332). This reaction, again questions the sincerity of relations when there is no truth in emotions and actions. Like his mother who loves seas, Kaushik also seeks his eternal rest in water due to Tsunami. By Kaushik's death, Hema's past and their relation have nothing to remember. Hema's missing bangle here becomes a symbol of her past life which she is forced to forget in her future life with Navin. As she says "we had been careful, and you had left nothing behind" (333).

Lahiri, through her stories, provides life "to the feeling of alienation, loneliness and hope that so often mark the immigrants' experience" (Iyer 156). *Unaccustomed Earth* deals

with "the state of eternal un-homeliness" (Gholipour 55). As Bhabha puts it:

> To be unhomed is not to be homeless' but 'the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (9)

Unaccustomed Earth explicates that the cause of disoriented relationships among immigrant children is their hyphenated existence. Parents who instruct them to stick on to Indian culture simultaneously exhort them to chase the American dream of success. Only a few like Sudha who has skill to exist in 'middle passage' succeeds while the others like Rahul remains puzzled by America's hybridity. Even after rejecting the homeland, dilemma of identity still wildly baffles Amit and Pranab in the forms of their children who are more American than Indian in appearance. While Hema tries to find security in an Indian husband, Kaushik is irritated by his Indian stepmother. Likewise in one way or other, the characters struggle hard to find completeness in their relationships but most of them miserably fail in their attempts.

Lahiri succeeds in the portrayal of her characters especially immigrant children who are "finally made to exist in a liminal space, a suspension between two cultures that creates un-homeliness" (Gholipour 55). They bear the markings of a particular culture still they are conditioned in another. The cultural conflict results in tension among the characters as they endeavour to mediate between the demands of the age old tradition and contemporary living and relationship. Her characters shed their Indian identity and face the struggle to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western culture. They are defined by their indifference, sorrow, identity crisis and alienation from their family and homeland.

WORKS CITED

Bhabha, Homi K. *Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Gholipour, Mojtaba, and Mina Sanahmadi. "A Postcolonial Perspective on the Short Stories of Jhumpa Lahiri." *International Journal of Humanities and Management Sciences* 1.1 (2013): 53-57. Print.

Iyer, N Sharda. "Interpreter of Maladies—A Voice across the Seas." *Musings on Indian Writing in English: Fiction*. New Delhi: Sarup, 2003. 155–62. Print.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth*. Noida: Random, 2009. Print.

---. "Migration, Assimilation, and Inebriation." *Bookforum* Apr./May 2008. www.bookforum.com/inprint/015_01/2250. Web.

McLeod, John. *Beginning Post colonialism*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. Print.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. New York: Penguin, 1992. Print.

From Obscurity to Centre

Subaltern Resistance in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Susan Joshi

In the twenty-first century, amidst the uproar of the economic boom, there grew a greater economic disparity in the society with the poor being invisible than ever before. Their very existence being under threat they were vulnerable to offense. The evidence of their involvement in crime is seen in the rise of armed rebellions in many parts of India.

Aravind Adiga, in his novel *The White Tiger*, realistically paints the agonising feelings of the downtrodden section of the Indian society and delineates the two contradictory sides of India: the India of underdogs and the India of elites, India of Light and India of Darkness.

In India there are clearly very rich people in the cities living lavish, extravagant, and showy lifestyles; and living side by side with them are slum-dwellers and those who sleep on pavements. There are also urban and suburban developments that boast of sky scrapers and shopping malls. However, it is mandatory to remember that 1.8 per cent of Indian society is holding 80 per cent of India's wealth and the rich-poor divide is only widening every day. But this growth is of a sort that can induce instability.

Keeping in view these aspects, the novel *The White Tiger* presents a startling contrast between India's rise as a global economy and the plight of the marginalized class of society living in devastating rural and urban poverty through, Balram Halwai, the narrator and protagonist. The novel is

about his journey from the darkness of his oppressive village life to the light of entrepreneurial success.

Adiga is a writer who demonstrates modern life with great aptitude. He is fine tuned to the various quirks of contemporary society and is alive to the eccentricities of the globalized world. He deals not just with the mad chaos of modern living but also with the gaping absurdities of disparate distribution of wealth.

He opted an epistolary form for *The White Tiger*. There is innovation in Balram's narrative voice, and in the framing device where each chapter consists of a message sent by Balram to Wen Jiabao, the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, who is about to visit Bangalore to hold a meeting with successful entrepreneurs. Balram writes, in his letter to the Chinese Premier,

> I offer to tell you, free of charge, the truth about Bangalore by telling you my life's story …And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them. (4)

This epistle form permits Balram to present himself as a Third World voice and not just that of an individual. It is from the desk of Balram's communion to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao the political culture, social milieu and entrepreneurial success of India in a globalised world is reported. Ania Loomba, in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* writes:

> The newly independent nation-state makes available the fruits of liberation only selectively and unevenly. The dismantling of colonial rule did not automatically bring about the changes for the better in the status of women, the working class and the peasantry in most colonized countries. (11-12)

However, within the spectrum of postcolonial subaltern representation, *The White Tiger* is a great literary effort to bring into notice the issues of subaltern and their miserable condition before the world audience. The novel exposes the difficulties that accumulate the task of recuperating the consciousness and the voice of the oppressed and their subjugated histories in India.

This paper intents to analyze the representation of subaltern in the post colonial gamut and construe their confrontation for identity and status as a struggle aspiring to move from periphery to centre. A perception is done on how in the age of ruthless global capitalism and technocracy concepts and morals are reshaped and redefined.

The term Subalternism was first used by Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist critic to refer to any person or group or of inferior rank in respect of ethnicity, race, caste, creed, religion and gender. Subalternity refers to a condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, or cultural dominance. Subaltern studies are, therefore, a study of power. Who has it and who does not. Who is gaining it and who is losing it? Power is intimately related to questions of representation—which representations has cognitive authority and can secure hegemony, and which do not and cannot.

In several essays, Homi Bhabha, a key-thinker within post-colonial thought, emphasizes the importance of social power relations in his working definition of 'Subaltern' groups, as oppressed minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group. He implies that Subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.

In the novel the protagonist Balram Halwai belongs to the lower strata of society and becomes the mouthpiece of numerous marginalized, poverty-stricken Indians. He who follows a string of roles like rickshaw puller, driver,

murderer and finally businessman is studied from the subaltern marginalized and oppressed point of view. The plot of the novel lingers around him in the village Laxamanagarh, where the villagers, family and friends are subjected to exploitation, torture, and torment by the village land lord. Laxamanagarh is always addressed as the Darkness and there only poor people lived and worshipped Hanuman because, "He is the shining example of how to serve your master with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion" (19).

Adiga through the portrayal of Balram shows how the low caste people are ill-treated by the high caste. The subjugated ones are helpless to raise their voice and powerless to resist the exploitation inflicted on them. Though they remain inarticulate they have strong desire to come out of this mess in which their destiny has confined them.

They have the instinct of rebellion, but keep them under check by remaining in the service of their masters. They become well acquainted with the life style of their masters, their strengths and their vulnerability and then wait for the opportunity to strike back at the 'beast'. They also have the seed of evil in them and this iniquity finally force them to challenge the existing order- the man made order of discrimination on the basis of class and caste. This is what Balram does in the novel.

He belongs to a poor family of low caste shudra which is a badge of shame and humiliation to him. His father who had been living like a "donkey" wants at least one of his sons to live like a man. As a bright little boy Balram was called the White Tiger of the jungle because of his good performance during a school inspection. But the severe poverty forces him to leave school and work in a tea shop.

Balram by nature is ambitious and try to improve his social status. Violating the rules of his caste he becomes a driver because though ironically, the only person close to his circle that he ever saw treated as a man was the driver of

the local bus. Adiga's character is then a non conformist or dissenter who struggles to break away from his own imposed social identity in order to assume a role that will allow him to enter into a new globalised India.

As a driver in Dhanbad at Stork's household, he has to bear humiliation and distress from the masters. He is rebuked even by the Nepali servant when he handles roughly two Pomeranians in chains: "Don't pull the chain so hard! They are worth more than you are!" (78). This comment by a senior servant shakes Balsam's inner consciousness and accelerates his avarice to get success at any cost.

In the postcolonial subaltern discourse the notion of class is interpreted as binary division. The novel explicates in its theme the dominating issues of class conflict which shows the big gap in the life of the rich and poor (half baked people). The dominator- rich or high caste people attempt to keep status quo in their favour while the deprived and disadvantaged strive for their rightful place in the world.

Balram is subjected to suffer culturally, socially, politically and professionally in the hands of dominant class. He comprehends that it is unfeasible to be visible, as long as he remains in the powerless position of an underdog. So he decides to attain power to ascertain his existence and establish his voice. His transformation from a destitute village boy Munna to a wealthy entrepreneur Ashok Sharma is presented as a tug of war between rich and poor. Balram's ambitious nature and craving to escape from a tradition bound identity bring him to Delhi as the driver of his landlord's westernized son Ashok.

Delhi is adulated as a location for the fulfilment of desires and a site where new identities are created. There begins his real education to penetrate the restricted domain for subaltern. He initiates to acquaint himself with the metropolitan city and its life style. He often drives his master and his wife to various shopping malls and marts and

is exposed to the glitterati of "the shining and rising India". He becomes aware of the immense wealth, corruption and opportunity all around him.

It is in Delhi that he observes the great gap between rich and poor. Balram claims:

> To sum up—in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat- or get eaten up. (64)

He is subjected to mistreatment by Pinky Madam and Mukesh. "You are so filthy! Look at your teeth, and look at your clothes! Get up -clean up the mess you have made in the kitchen and get out" (146). The domination and ruthlessness of upper class is again shockingly brought out when a child is killed by Pinky madam while driving the Honda city and the responsibility is being thrusted on Balram by the Stork family.

The Rooster Coop functions as a major metaphor in the novel. In Old Delhi in the premises of Jama Mahjid, Balram is haunted by the scene of hens and roosters cramped in cages. He presumes that just as they have no option to escape so is the case with the lower class people. Despite being conscious of their exploitation and vulnerability, they cannot come out of the hibernation. The 'rooster coop' symbolizes Balsam's conscious expression to describe the oppressed, confined and helpless condition of the average Indian citizen.

He recognizes that those who are eaten are trapped inside this small and closed cage—that limits their opportunities. Even worse, they begin to internalize the limitations and indignities of the coop, so that after a while they're unable to imagine that they deserve any other world than the cramped one in which they exist. Balram's dream is to break free of his coop, to shed his feathers and become what for him is a symbol of individualism, power, and

freedom: a White Tiger. Randhawa affirms this with the following lines:

> Since the marginalized have known only the language which has been handed down to them by their exploiters, they should if need be, as Fanon would have probably suggested, use the language of violence at their disposal to give at back and at the same time to deconstruct it from within. (33)

The social, political and economic disparities which Balram witness all-round gradually inculcate in his mind the spirit of revolt, resistance and vengeance which remained suppressed for long. He gradually loses the sense of patience, justice and humanity and chooses the beaten trail just to gain materialistic prosperity. He is lured by the way of crime. He experiences that all the political, social and official domains are controlled by money. The administrative system, law and order and bureaucracy had been gripped by the rich, elite and political leaders. Balram wants to be a predator, a man with a big belly, at any cost. He doesn't want to be eaten rather is desperate to be one among the eaters.

His work propels him into a hybrid identity capable of "affiliations which are based on political practices and ethical choices than authentication of origins and identities" (Bhabha 17). He contemplates over his situation and realizes that there is only one way in which he can achieve his target; join the bandwagon of the affluent class and be a part of this glamorized world. He executes his decision by murdering his employer, Ashok Sharma and gets away with his loot to Bangalore.

This is a freedom process seen in terms of economic liberation, in the style of ruthless capitalism, whose ruling ethical principle is the survival of the fittest. Therefore as he tries to liberate himself from the prejudices of his own caste, he embraces the moral of the upper caste.

As Bhabha points out, people who have been vested with meaning define themselves by struggling against other meanings, other allegories. Somehow the choice is always between alternate inauthenticities and competing imposters (125). What matters to the White Tiger inspire of all his fears, is that "for once he is in command" (46). He has been able to experience "just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant" (276).

The irony is that he kills not to be a parasite like his boss but to become an entrepreneur. Balram observes: "My country is the kind where it pays to play it both ways: the Indian entrepreneur has to be straight and crooked, mocking and believing, sly and sincere, at the same time" (9).

The viciousness of the so called modern rising and shining India is shown in stark contrast to value based traditional India. Balram too becomes an entrepreneur of the new India. From driver he becomes the owner of a taxi company, "White Tiger Drivers" that take the employees of many outsourcing companies in Bangalore back home when they leave offices.

He breaks the dichotomy of traditional India between servant and the landlord to assume a new role of the entrepreneur. The theory of resistance or subversion is strongly communicated here. The master–servant relationship that exists between Balram and Ashok is deconstructed. Balram, reverses the role and becomes the master.

Once in Bangalore, by changing his name to Ashok Sharma, he feels to be a part of the affluent class and society. He indulges in all the corrupt practices, of bribing, fixing politicians and bureaucrats, very much part of high society, he learnt from his master ignoring all virtue. He encourages his drivers to ape and imitate him if they wanted to succeed in life. Though his methods to resist and get success are unethical, according to the author that is his way "to get out of the jungle" (63).

Adiga seems to point out that one is the result of one's circumstances. If treated with violence to the point of having no way out and reducing ones habitat to a rooster coop the individual will answer with the same type of violence against the institutions that pulled him down.

Balram, is able to achieve what he craved. He is now an entrepreneur but with a cost, he at the same time is also a criminal, a murderer. He achieved success by leaving behind the traditional virtue. Molly Joseph M. rightly observed:

> The novel encapsulates the resilience of the marginalized. Balram pushes his way up in life through tactful resistance and perseverance. He outlives the harrowing experience of suffering and suppression that is the average lot of his kith and kin, struggles hard to become a driver, and ultimately emerges into a self taught, flourishing entrepreneur by slitting the throat of his master. (77)

Balram's action could be viewed as an effort to retrieve the voices, spaces and identities of the marginalised that was suppressed by colonial surrogates in the postcolonial environment. His act could be viewed as a rebellion against prevalent dominant ideology and cultural supremacy. It investigates the petrified condition, simultaneously issuing a warning for struggle of the marginalized because humiliation, resentment and grief are the fundamental components of their struggle. Thus Balram, a downtrodden from the backward village, Laxmangarh in Bihar by establishing himself as an entrepreneur in India's most technologically advanced metropolitan city Bangalore challenges or subverts the social hierarchy and subaltern ideology imposed on him.

WORKS CITED

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. London: Free, 2008. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Bhabha, Homi K. *Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge. 2004. Print.

Joseph, Molly M. "The Great Indian Rooster Coop: A Postcolonial Entry into Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*." *Littcrit* 35.1 (2009): 76-79.

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Randhawa, Harbir Singh, ed. *Dalit Literature: Contents, Trends and Concerns*. New Delhi: Swarup, 2010. Print.

(Re)Examining the Text of 'Her' Consciousness and (Re)Defining the Context of 'His' Canons

A Study Based on *The Day in Shadow* by Nayantara Sahgal

Sandeep T. G.

The creative output of women novelists Indian English fiction is fundamentally radical in its approach as it transgresses the pre-ordained social constructs and significations that try to demarcate specific positions to the female self. Apart from the literary revolution that they ignited it is also to be noted that the vehemence of their ideological input and dynamism of their resourcefulness are invariably immune to the codes of gender conditioning. Their creative endeavour was to redefine the socio-cultural influence on the construction of femininity and to reconstruct the formulation of the universal and irreversible canons of dominance seen within the cultural extent of patriarchy. Novelists like Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala and Anita Desai challenged the predictable female representations as 'other' through a more assertive declaration of dissent and rebellion and embarked upon a mission to emphasis female identity and experience as an inevitable component in forming literary as well as social perspectives.

Fiction, being the most characteristic and influential form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian literature. In almost all the languages, women novelists have taken a foremost position in the art of narrative and it is true of Indian English literature also.

What was once an almost inaudible whisper has now become a crescendo that echoes the thoughts, emotions, ambitions and values of the Indian women. All this has been possible because a number of Indian women have been the beneficiaries of a sweeping social reform, education and modernisation over the years. This has given them both the means and opportunities to express themselves more freely. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore in their essay "Introduction: The Story So Far" presents the revolting presumption of ecritue feminine as

> a writing which is suffused with metaphors of the body that link the extravagant of feminine sexuality to a writing whose opulent lyricism and blatant disrespect for common sense breaks all patriarchal code.'(10)

Such a context-specific writing became all the more significant in investigating the cultural prospects of the cult of female emancipation and its affirmation as an object d'art in those male-centred social/literary practices. Freedom, they asserted, is not to be deemed as a gift but an achievement and every generation has to do its job well in order to continue and preserve the tradition of freedom.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the distinguished Indo-English writers who writes in the stream of national consciousness. In almost every novel she is preoccupied with an individual's search for freedom and self-realisation. The daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Ranjith Seetaram Pandit, Nayantara had the privilege of an upbringing in which politics was inevitably a strong ambience. Sahgal is one of the predominant voices in contemporary Indian English fiction by women who likes to fight the patriarchal constructs, concepts and cultural codes that advocate a self-effacing and self-sacrificing female sensibility. Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* is a significant pronouncement of dissonance in emphasizing the struggle of a young, beautiful girl trapped under the burden of a brutal divorce settlement and the agony and unhappiness she faces within a gender-biased

social order. This work presents a vehement response to evade the traditionally emotive, irrational and inferior position that the rationality of male has reserved for 'her'. The author uses this powerful literary tool to make the inherent feminine qualities explicit by projecting the legitimate womanly goals and aspirations which remain submerged under patriarchal control.

As a writer Nayantara Sahgal is more concerned with the gender oppression and male domination seen in the orthodox constituents of our immediate milieu and in trying to declare female emancipation beyond established social taboos and conventions she reasserts female identity. The novel is carefully crafted study in which we can ascertain the methods of asserting identity and the attempts in voicing the instinctive rebellion against the patterns of dominance and control. One will not fail to identify the evident manifestations of the rebellious female self within the work and the expressions of dissent against the over-arching generalizations of womanhood and the coercive cultural practices of careful evasion.

Sahgal's women characters are either victims of conjugal unhappiness of hankering after extra-marital freedom. As a humanist Sahgal is for unfettered freedom and as a feminist she is concerned about the gender oppression and the marginalised and repressed position of women in a male dominated Indian society and delineates their psychological turmoil. Her women characters, wives of the social tie ups yearn for individual freedom which is one of the chief concerns of the novelists. Though her female characters are deeply and loyally rooted in Indian culture, they struggle to be free human beings. She pictures the new women, intellectual and sensitive, who have to face a lot of opposition from the narrow minded and orthodox society. She protests against the denial of freedom and against the outmoded, orthodox social taboos and conventions detrimental to the freedom of women.

The Day in Shadow is a fine example of the female literary tradition in Indian English literature. The novel is basically concerned with the emotional effects of divorce on a woman-Simrit. It has the theme of survival of a sensitive individual in ruthlessly materialistic society. Simrit emerges from the shadows to find happiness with Raj. The novel is revelation of what it is like to be a divorced woman in a nation in which 'women for use' has been the rule for too long. Her vision filters through the awareness of life in this novel and recognises the human being as the heart of the crisis in the modern world. *The Day in Shadow* the metaphorical expression of the title is suggestive of the need for freedom.

Simrit's marriage to Som has been somewhat a suffocating suffering of servitude. She is isolated and ignored like a piece of furniture. She suffers marriage as a solitary confinement of the human spirit. She respects certain values of life more than material prosperity. She longs for self-expression and freedom to live as an individual within the bonds of marriage. She has a conviction that the bond of marriage is to be cemented with respect and consideration. She withdraws from him emotionally which naturally impairs their physical relationship. She expects the physical intimacy between them to spread and envelop every act and gesture of life with tenderness and love. But Som considers Simrit as an object of physical attraction fit only for physical pleasure.

Simrit's unhappiness at Som's growing obsessions with material pursuits invades their sexual life and when he wants to possess her she stays separate, excluded and rebellious. Som feels insulted at Simrit's physical withdrawal and reacts wildly. She realises with suddenness:

> Sex was no more just sex than food was just food. The same spring fed all its facets- the day's work in the office, children at home, bed at night, Simrit felt on the verge of a fatal realisation. She was no longer able to follow the goals Som had set for himself and

> the inability seems to be spreading through her veins affecting the very womb of her desires drying up the fount within her. (90)

Simrit is a blend of both traditional and modern elements. She wants individuality and freedom, feels suffocated in the husband centred world and takes divorce from Som. She rebels against the conventional security of marriage as she yearns for a free communication of ideas with her husband beyond the sensations of sex. In this respect she is an awakened woman of the modern age who shows the courage of living alone in this world. But she does not get peace of mind after the divorce and it is tradition in her that makes her feel that by taking divorce she has offended something old and ordained. She feels that a part of her would be always married to Som. She gradually cops up with the emotional shock of the divorce. But Simrit the hapless divorcee feels nettled and rattles because it was a brutal divorce settlement that was inflicted on her. Simrit turns out with contempt Som's alternative proposal for the heavy tax payments that she might receive the income that accrues out of the shares provided she remained unmarried.

The climactic point in her family situation comes when instead of yielding to the temptations of the affluence and brashness of Som, she takes the momentous decision of moving out bag and baggage with children into her newly rented flat in defence colony. She forsakes her husband and her richly provided home because she thinks that she could no longer accept the status of a sex satisfying companion of her husband. As an intellectual and writer she had a different role to play, not merely to decorate herself and her home and rear children. Struggling to build a new life for herself and her children, she encounters Raj, a brilliant rising member of parliament.

One major theme of *The Day in Shadow* is the continued domination and exploitation of the woman by her husband despite the constantly increasing awareness of the need for liberation felt by every educated person

following the achievement of independence and abolition of slavery to the British. The continued tendency toward the exploitation of the woman by man provokes her to revolt against the social system and reconstitute it on her terms. This novel thus marks the emergence of the new type of woman who can present her own terms on which harmonious and dignified family life may be possible now and in future. The novel stresses the state of subjection of women to injustice of various kinds and the need for intensification of the women's struggle for liberation.

The feminist had to have like men iron in the soul. Having understood the message, Simrit feels freed at last to undertake the struggle no matter what amount of suffering it may involve. She is placed at a high spot where from "an immense valley of choices spread out before her gaze and she felt free at last to choose what her life would be." (236) Yet in carrying on her struggle she has gladly retained the link with her children. The link has remained unaffected and undisturbed despite the new horizon which has now opened out to her. By the manner in which she throws away the shackles of slavery to man, her husband, the novel seems to be an interesting and instructive illustration of the multiple paradigms of dissent.

Sahgal is deeply concerned with the need for freedom for women to become aware of themselves as individuals. Society has normally denied them this freedom. And this process towards selfhood is consciously realised by Simrit. The process has been a painful and slow one for women as they have had to overcome not only social opinion and orthodoxy but also personal hesitation and reluctance. Self-awareness is a two way process requiring not only the social circumstances conducive to it but also the sensitivity and fineness of individual sensibility. Sahgal does not view her women characters as wage-earners or career women but mainly as married women—as wives, daughters and mothers- and it is in these roles that they wish to experience freedom and to become aware of themselves as individuals

and to be accepted as equals . All this is a prerequisite for life to have some meaning for them and the man-woman relationship to be a fulfilling one. The concept of freedom goes beyond the merely social or economic context to become more real in an emotional and a physical relation.

It is Simrit's longing for freedom and individuality that urges her to take divorce from her husband. Simrit does not want to be known as a husband's wife but as her own self. When someone asks her about her husband's profession she thinks:

> Wasn't it odd, when you were standing there yourself, fully a person, not to be asked what you did? There was such an enormous separating gulf between herself and these women, most women – most people. May be the question would be different in the twentieth century. Simrit herself had never accepted a world where men did things and women waited for them. (6)

Pixie in this novel also moves towards self awareness but she is quite different from the author's other women characters. She is a working girl who does not have security of an affluent background. When she decides to break her relationship with Sumer Singh she has to weigh it against her need for a job and roof over head. But still she decides to break which shows her courage to seek self realisation.

Sahgal's women struggle to change the existing world order and usher in a new order, where there is no place for hypocrisy, pretence and dual morality. They come out of the bond, if need be, to live as free individuals. She pleads for a new marital morality based on mutual trust, consideration, generosity and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centeredness. She portrays her women characters to emphasis their selfhood assertions in the changing social milieu. She urges us to realise that human personality is precious hard-won achievement, worthy of nurture irrespective of sex.

Sahgal tries to portray the sensibility of a woman - how a woman looks at herself and her problems. She feels that woman should try to understand and identify herself as a human being and not just as an appendage to some male life. In the novels she has gone deep into the female psyche. She explores the nature and scope of the trauma of womenfolk. The feminist stance in her fiction is not the strident feminism of the Western writers. She believes that the potentialities of women are exploited to the full. Her female characters are individuals who can remain independent within the framework of society into which they are born. She explores freedom in all its varied manifestations. All her protagonists are shown to be in a state of transition. They are caught up in an intense psychological conflict as the inhabitants of a culture at crossroads. So they are all heirs to the strange culture conflict. They are all motivated by an inner urge to move towards the greater ambience of freedom. Her works deal with the birth pangs of a new civilisation. She deals with the theme of liberation of the individual and elaborates it against the backdrop of the nation's struggle to achieve independence. Her concept of freedom includes the full expression of one's personality and the discovery of one's true identity. Her protagonists show strong faith in an individual's capacity to communicate and reach others through debate and discussion.

Sahgal supports the new woman or an awakening of women into a new realisation of her place and position in the family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the new woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with men. Her novels make a deviation from the established practice of hero oriented one's. Her women appear as individuals with throbbing pulse, feelings and aspirations. They are involved in the vortex of life that is complicated, demanding and exhausting and are prepared to accept the challenges in order to have a meaningful life. She portrays a life-size picture of a contemporary woman with all her

longings, aspirations and frustrations. Women occupy the central position in the fictional world of Sahgal. She has a central woman character who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs. She protests in her novels against the denial of freedom and against outdated social opinions and the orthodox treatment of women in society. She has pictured the relationship of incompatible or ill—matched couples, a subject earlier considered taboo for the Indian writer, particularly when the writer happens to be a woman. But Sahgal with the courage of her convictions boldly highlights this murky facet of the Indian situation.

Sahgal's central pre-occupation is the sufferings caused to woman in the prison house of loveless marriage and her suffering when she makes a break through. Her 'New Women' escape from marriage, throw themselves into the arms of lovers who are ready to help them. The personal theme is set against the political bickering and manoeuvres in the upper circles of power in Delhi. In her novels, the heroines are awestruck at the injustice done to them in marriage and they either divorce or walk out of their homes. Sahgal projects a new angle of the concept of virtue. The conventional woman suffers quietly. The New Woman is determined to live with self respect. Her virtue is courage and willingness to risk the unknown. Her women need new partners after leaving their homes. They feel that man is not fit to be an equal partner and they languish in loneliness. They represent the new Indian women's voice. These women of self identity break the mythological image of Indian women in earlier fiction. The woes of traditional Indian women continue to be the central concern of the novelist. She pictures Indian women living in the suffocating atmosphere of deep psychic repression, economic exploitation and the tyranny of obsolete conventions and rituals.

Sahgal's women seek to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves, where there is no need for hypocrisy and where character is

judged by purity of heart and not chastity of body. The basis for a happy and harmonious marriage is the feeling of sharing, equality and true partnership. In the patriarchal division of values, equality is not possible because all the superior and positive qualities are attributed to men and the qualities associated with women are considered to be inferior. Man evokes fear in the mind of women by his muscular muscle power and by his extreme emotional indifference and callousness which make woman so vulnerable. Woman suffers not only by man's act of physical violence but is also often emotionally hurt and crippled through his arrogance, cynicism and indifference. He never admits his wife's services and sacrifices for the family and takes them as guaranteed by the institution of marriage. She is belittled or silenced and denied love, friendship and togetherness in marriage. According to Simone De Beauvoir for loyalty and friendship to exist between man and woman, the essential condition is that there should be free inter-relation to each other. Dialogue or discussion is essential for harmonious marital relationship. The need for communication through talk or dialogue is very much stressed in Sahgal's works. The absence of communication is in fact a bane of the twentieth century generation, beautifully expressed by T.S Eliot in "The Wasteland": "Speak to me; why do you never speak? Speak? / What are you thinking of? What thing? What? / I never know what you are thinking. Think?" (112-114).

The Day in Shadow is a strong voice of dissent in a patriarchal order that tries to delineate subjugated identity to women. The politics of male hegemony in the present order of things considers female as a definite signifier of the 'weak' and the 'other' who is to be identified as a nonentity at all levels of societal discourses and Sahgal expresses a vehement protest to earn a rightful position to female self and sensibility. She employs a language of 'her' own to assert the epistemology of the female as a co-agent in the cultural magnitudes as well as literary artefacts.

WORKS CITED

Asnani, Shyam M. *Indian Fiction in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999. Print.

Bai, K. Meera. *Indian Women Novelists*. New Delhi: Prestige, 1991. Print.

Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore, eds. "Introduction: The Story So Far." *The Feminist Reader: The Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Critics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997. 1–15. Print.

Eliot, T. S. *The Wasteland*. London: Faber, 1965. Print.

Jain, Jasbir. *Nayantara Sahgal*. New Delhi: Heinemann, 1978. Print.

Sahgal, Nayantara. *The Day in Shadow*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1988. Print.

Overt Equations of Domination and Covert Mechanism of Resistance

A Reading on *Cries in the Wilderness* by Narayan

Uma Parvathy V.

The histories of various human civilizations around the world demonstrate numerous cultural paradigms of hegemony and subjugation at various phases of their development. The polemics of domination, as a customary method of socio-political assertion and a subsequent exploitation, was deviously employed to erase the weaker identities (based on gender, class or race) from the ambit of social systems. It is also seen that in the different periods of such a phenomenon of dominance, the 'weaker identity' moves from unconditional subjugation to a self-assertive resistance in order to shape and voice their collective identity. The realization of the same was accomplished through the manipulation of the very sign systems like art, literature and other modes of cultural expressions that were previously brought into play by the politics of hegemony.

Literature as a powerful mode of expression was instrumental in determining the changing equations of cultural balance and in assimilating the consciousness of the deprived segments. The methodical evolution of the literature of the marginalised as a forceful responsive mode is what Frantz Fanon mentions in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> In the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying

> power. His writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country… This is the period of unqualified assimilation… In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. But since the native is not a part of his people, he is content to recall their life only…Finally, in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people…hence comes a fighting literature, and a national literature. (178-79)

In our subcontinent, one could clearly observe the fact that the encoded cultural canons were fashioned to delete or distort the selfhood of women, Dalits and Adivasis from the chronicles of human history. Within the socio-cultural sign systems their identity was considered as a definite signifier of the 'voiceless other'. Such a predicament of the female/dalit subject to remain mute within the patriarchal/authoritarian systems of control changed significantly by 1960's and 70's with the emergence of liberal ideologies from the West to the subcontinental landscape. The western theories that discussed the modes of dominance and methods of emancipation contributed much to the development of extensive discussions on gender and class based oppressions and resulted in the commencement of numerous liberation movements and immediate socio-political repercussions. Consequently those issues of marginalisation were properly attended by the intelligentsia and academia that put forward theoretical support to ensure a social rebellion to cause a solution to the questions of authority. But a closer analysis of the contemporary post-colonial discourses on the traditions of dissent within the cultural constituents, literary constructs or ideological standpoints will reveal the fact that they limit their scholastic enquiry to investigate and interpret the marginalised identity of woman and Dalits alone. The contemporary academia relishes on discussions on their subjugated subjectivity as well as identity and the

expressions of their inevitable predicaments. Feminist and Dalit perspectives have evolved recently as a strong stream of pedantic, literary and social discourse and consequently their persona and individual prominence are acquiring vehement social representation and cultural affirmation. In comparison with them the Tribal identity/sensibility are yet to gain discursive significance and deliberation.

Tribals/Adivasis in India need particular attention as their life is inextricably linked with the spatial limits of specific eco-zones in forest topography. They live a more deplorable life than the Dalits and they are engulfed by a persistent dilemma whether to leave the essential ethnic tradition or to embrace the possibilities of modern life. Today their traditional domains of existence face incessant intrusion and exploitation. Uprooted from their original cultural latitudes they are compelled to live among modern equations of domination propelled by the politics of globalisation. The attempts in contemporary art, literature and popular culture to delineate the anguish of Adivasi community fail to distinguish it from the predicament of the Dalits. Moreover presentation of Adivasi in the works of art as a specimen of an alien being was meant exclusively to generate curiosity and sympathy and such representation was employed at large as a marketing stratagem.

Unlike the condition of the Dalits, Adivasis in India evade the definition of 'marginalised' since they exist beyond the topography of civilization and the established margins of socio-cultural canons. At any given period in history, they were persistently thrown out of social, political, historical and cultural domains and were conveniently expunged from any intellectual discussions, administrative resolutions, and political manifestos. Devoid of individuality, identity or dignity the Adivasi existence and experience in the colonised and post-colonial India was proven to be more deplorable, since in a pre-colonised era they enjoyed ultimate political freedom of self-governance. Their struggles within our democratic system of individual

freedom and the proclaimed canons of equality were to assert their cultural and linguistic components and to reclaim the collective traditions, values and consciousness that were devalued by the 'civilized' systems of learning. As mentioned by Adolfo Gilly in the Introduction to Frantz Fanon's *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, ''the essence of revolution is not the struggle for bread but the struggle for human dignity'' (24).

Today like the female and dalit consciousness the tribal communities too have emerged out of their age-long silence to give expression to their voices of dissonance and rebellion. Being the first poets, artists, philosophers and scientists of this land their articulations need specific attention and consideration. The history of their revolts against the colonization like that of the Bhils in Gujarat, Santals in Bihar and Kurichyars in Kerala shall in no way be relegated or excluded. Their indigenous identity had already been colonized by the foreign powers and now it is to be preserved from internal colonization also as their land, language and culture are constantly eroded by the incessant cultural invasions by our own modern, sophisticated, progressive notions of living.

It is in this extensive historic as well as cultural atmosphere that the work *Cries in the Wilderness* by Narayan, the first Adivasi writer in Kerala, has to be explored. He entered into the literary scene with a blazing novel 'Kocharethi', a brilliant account of the life of Malayaraya Tribe in the hills of Central Kerala, and it won him the Kerala Sahithya Academy Award for best Fiction in 1999. *Cries in the Wilderness*, a vivid collection of ten moving short stories that were originally written in Malayalam as *Nissahayante Nilavili*, has been faithfully translated into English by various translators and further edited by K. M. Sheriff. It is significant that entire attempts in contemporary art, literature and popular culture to delineate the anguish of Adivasi community fail to distinguish it from the predicament of the Dalits. Moreover presentation of an

Adivasi in the works of art as a specimen of an alien being was meant exclusively to generate curiosity and sympathy and such representation was employed at large as a marketing stratagem. Narayan's proclaims;

> ...everything I wrote have been written from the vantage point of experience. I have put my everything – body, mind and soul – into my works...I had no higher aim than giving a true picture of the Adivasi community. I was bent on doing it without circumlocution and exaggeration. (97-98)

It is this artistic integrity of Narayan that makes his narrative strategy in *Cries in the Wilderness* distinctive, unfeigned and poignant.

In *Tribal Contemporary Issues*, Ramnika Gupta says,

> whereas on the one hand the Adivasi creative consciousness inheres in the self articulation of the pains and in finding its own solutions, on the other it also embeds an awareness of the conspiracy by which the established canon has tried to keep tribal people outside the ambit of civilization. (20)

Through this collection Narayan ventures to delineate the life of certain number of exploited beings and the anguishes of their existence, experiences of exploitation, moments of desperation, symptoms of extinction, and struggles for survival They are the characters, whom he excavated not from the world of imagination but from a real world of tears, sweat and blood. They are helpless beings who are culturally uprooted and are socially alienated. Being a part of that inevitable predicament of underprivileged class he could faithfully internalise their sufferings, agonies and anguishes directly from their exclusive regions. Thus, this 'bitterly sweet' literary endeavour of Narayan turns out to be a brilliant artistic response to the complexity of his own situation.

The essential artistic intention of Narayan in *Cries in the Wilderness* is to portray those wretched realities of the people's lives which he once found, seen and heard in his proximate social milieu. They were devastated by the administration, dismantled by social institutions, capitalised by religious institutions, exploited by the hegemonic upper crest and alienated by societal canons. Yet they try to resist such systematized imposition of power and their eventual failures and sufferings too are significant as they are affirming their self, sensibility and identity that will otherwise be vanished from the spheres of social signification. Thus it becomes a tale of self-assertion as well as dissent in a world order where their history and heritage are obliterated despite the constitutional protection within a democratic landscape. The dispossessed 'other' is often the protagonist in Narayan's narratives since he believes. ''Perhaps the recurring memory of dispossession is a great weakness of my fiction'' (97). In *Taxes for Heads and Breasts*, the first story of the collection, Narayan illustrates a historic anecdote of deliberate methods contrived to erase the collective existence of a community by depriving them their fundamental rights and even life. The 'Arayans of the Hills', who are willing to pay the state-prescribed taxes, are looted of their possessions and are physically tormented by the brutal arrogance of the Valiyaveettil Ittira who conspires in combination with the state machinery. The Royal Proclamation becomes a blessing in disguise for Ittira to plunder the already impoverished Arayans and he is insensitive in compelling them further to pay their taxes. They are also insisted on paying, ''two annas per head for every girl whose breasts have grown and for every boy whose head stands on shoulders….'' (98). The story is a touching one with heart-breaking narration on the assault and atrocities committed upon the Arayans and their final rebellion through the martyrdom by Kadutha and his daughter. It is a conscientious rendering of how the savarna community colonise those who belong to the lower limits effacing their rootlets of substance. The state's unscrupulous

administrative machinery too plays its active part in undermining the rights of those who are already being deprived. Thus the change in regimes and political systems hardly benefited the suppressed lot and they were targeted as ever by the manipulative devices of authoritarian governance.

Police in Narayanan's chronicles is a brutal and formidable entity yieldind ultimate authority and it is representative of the violence and force employed in maintaining law and order in society. And for the Policemen in this collection like Constable Veluppillai, Mathan, (in *Taxes for Heads and Breasts*), the unnamed Inspector (in *Driftwood*) Madhavan and Thomas (in *Guarding a Corpse*) what they prescribe is to be the law of the land and their tyranny is to be the order of society. The similar administrative apparatus can be found in a noxious manifestation in *Footprints of the Predator*, functioning along with the socially and economically mightier sections, aiming to get rid of the 'now unwanted' one, since his existence is deemed worthless and needless. It is the inexorable predicament of the enslaved community that they are the eternal scapegoats of utilisation, exploitation, persecution and the final annihilation. Selflessly imprisoned for his master, Kannan had to bear all the violence and outrage by the policemen and "What they wanted was not his confession, but his silence about the people who had done everything". After his eventual release he had to battle hard against some unknown kidnappers who had certainly come for his life. His adventurous escape and the ensuing visit to his master's house should have promised him needed comfort, assistance and protection. But what waited him there was indeed a macabre fate. Such undertone of negativism is evident throughout Narayan's writings but it not a fictitious world of illusory incidents; rather they are the factual narrations of a definite reality infested with the horror and pain of the subjugated subjects. Thus it turns out to be Narayan's lone creative crusade to find them a voice, a place and ultimately a life.

Narayan's sensitivity to human suffering and awareness of the causes of anguish can be witnessed in stories like *Driftwood* and *Ajamila Moksham and Kalan Kozhi*. Both these stories depict the predicament of the *avarnas* (Kumaran in "Driftwood" and Narayanan in *Ajamila Moksham and Kalan Kozhi*) who are mentally and physically tormented, segregated and affronted by the rich *savarnas*. Thus these illustrations turn out to be social treatises on issues like education to untouchables, unemployment, custom of *sambadham*, and the consequent deprivation. Both Kumaran and Narayanan were prey to a process of forced assimilation and eventually had to lose their platform of identity, culture, values and rights. But they were not ready to relent in front of such domineering proportions: Kumaran, after being victimised as a petty thief, escapes his family, education, village and ancestral roots and finds an earning somehow or other. But the girl who storms into his life has her own plights to narrate. Narayanan in *Ajamila Moksham and Kalan Kozhi* was lucky enough (compared to Kumaran in Driftwood) that he could earn the needful recognition at least a few years later, being the only son of the Namboothiri out of a 'sambandham'. His early days of deprivation, isolation, inaccessibility, hunger and humiliation had left so deep a scar in his mind that he detests his 'father' more than anything else. Finally when the news of his father's demise reaches him, Narayanan decided he needed a "smoke to clear his head". Through these narrations the writer is pointing to an imperative factor that the quandaries, distresses and agonies in the life of the marginalised are all pervasive.

The writer's rightful and turbulent proclamation embodies a new literary gesture of vehemence and outrage from an unvoiced universe of the afflicted tribal community: "it became news only if a savarna was beaten up. If a savarna was killed the earth shook. And God save the murderer if he was a Dalit or an Adivasi. He would die a dog's death" (27). But even in his scheme of verbalisation Narayan imposes enough space for a sombre silence so as to

construct a dramatic result and to provide a pause for contemplation. In "Thenvarikka", Ayyappan's (the protagonist) conscious silence as a dumb spectator is more potent than any verbal reactions and physical interventions. The jackfruit tree (thenvarikka) in this story is an eloquent symbol of that ecology which shelters man, (especially the poor one) by defending natural calamities and by gratifying the hunger during any seasons: "Ayyappan had brought up his children without ever letting them feel the pinch of hunger. He had to thank the thenvarikka for it" (33). Living in a time when culture, tradition, belief, memory, gratitude - everything erodes like the soil under one's feet, Ayyappan (who is Narayan's metamorphosed self) could remain voiceless, until towards the end of the story when Surendran, his son, out of illusion, listens to his father's voice uttering in a furious outburst: "...you don't know anything about the bond between a tree and the earth which sustains it....Go away to mother earth who will take you into her lap... (35). Here Narayan is posing a convincing reminder, through Ayyappan's dense silence, to the present generation that they are not supposed to sever their ancestral cords of livelihood by causing ecological destruction. 'The rubber saplings in plastic bags' which replace the gigantic thenvarikka, with their size-wise incongruity, denotes the trifling insignificance and worthlessness of the modern world of deceptive promises of instant monetary returns. They also denote the new set of values and lifestyles that have imposed their domination by causing unseen destructions. Surendran who was ever eloquent about such replacement also is now wordless—his silence signifying his late revelation on the disaster.

Apart from the social segregation, political exclusion and economic deprivation, the most prominent factor leading to the ever-lasting trauma of the Dalit/Adivasi persona, women in particular, is sexual harassment. They are the vulnerable victims of physical coercion and justice will not heed their laments since authority is held exclusively by the 'superior'. Those from an 'outer/upper' world enter into

their serene life and blemish it without any sense of sin or remorse. Their fragmented existence within infinite ignominy and humiliation is at all times left unseen and unheard. It is into this pathetic actuality that Narayan ventures in *Evil Spirit*. The Tribal Hostel under the Department of Harijan Welfare has its own heartrending tales to narrate and the story of Gomati is one such account of physical exploitation and her consequent ruination. Unfortunately she is not the lone victim; her roommate Nalini too had been a prey to 'their' (Rajan and Pratapan) yearning, but is hopelessly silent about it. Gomati desperately asks: ''Nalini, why didn't you tell me, if you knew?'' and Nalini is unemotional in answering - ''If I had, what would you have done? Moved mountains?''. The tale then takes a mythical turn with the customary ingredients like the Village Headman, ostracism of the family, suicide of Gomati, and her supernatural appearance as an evil spirit. Apart from those primitive elements Narayan honestly addresses the predicament of tribal women who are physically exploited, mentally devastated and socially secluded and they are not sporadic occurrences in the yester years but a contemporary social reality.

Entangled in an unacquainted world of market economy, where money, machinery and Industry demarcate the boundaries of human will and desires, Dalit/Adivasi existence is a persistent struggle for finding their own space. The new paradigms of profit, accessible in the global market are conducive enough to explore as well as exploit the human conditions and will end up only in displacement, migration, subjugation and dependency. Their land, water, air, ecology, heritage and even life will be pledged before the new economic equations and disregarding such hazardous tendencies of subtle manipulation man and mankind are engaged in a 'rat race', as Arthur Miller puts it, so as to ensure establishment of an 'elite' structure of development. It is from that enthusiastic zone of commercialisation and neo-colonisation that *A Cry in the Wilderness* emerges with a forceful note of disapproval and

opposition. Loud enough to shake one off from his convenient slumber, the cry of the protagonist in the story is dismal and touching. It undoubtedly functions as a strong statement against exploitative predisposition as well as an eye-opener to the present ploys of profit-making. According to Narayan ''the helplessness of the protagonist is the helplessness of his community'' (96). Being admitted in a hospital after a bike accident, Babu is lying unattended until an unknown Messiah appears to render him every necessary aid. Babu's heartfelt gratitude for the invisible philanthropist can easily be shared by the reader, but it suddenly turns into bewilderment when we (along with Babu) learn that he is deviously ensnared by a nefarious racket, engaged in the trade of human limbs. As he is taken away in a speeding car his last cry for help becomes futile as their grip is too strong to be evaded. Through this story Narayan tries to assert the fact that material dispossession is a part of Tribal existence and he says, ''the entry of Adivasis into civil life is almost always marked by an act of dispossession. As an Adivasi writer the bitter experience of dispossession colours my stories'' (96).

It is the same dispossession, not of his own body, but of his land, employment opportunities, financial stability and eventual advancements that can be witnessed in *The Boats are Burned*. The ecology of the protagonist Kuttykunhan is juxtaposed with that of shrimp cultivation with the assistance of helicopters, electrified meshes, modern feeds etc. A community, yet to emerge out of its environment, is thoroughly startled at this unexpectedly abrupt entry of alien cultural segments. For the 'aliens', profit is everything, and they carry little concern for the locals who are deprived of employment. It is a new civilization of machines, helicopters, giant walls and pumps, isotopes, poisoned balloons, containers and robots. The dispossessed locals could just stand puzzled at this unprecedented evolution of technological advancement. But the question remains – though his land lays the platform for development and profit, he is one who is deprived of everything in that

irresistible expedition. For indigenous communities, their affinity and dependency on land asserts their co-existence and community living. Now they are compelled to surrender everything before an emerging market of Corporatism which thinks only in terms of money and profit. Devoid of sentimental attachments, these masters of global trade practices formulate their theories of existence, contrive new idioms of progress and propagate an innovative monetary culture of competitive trade.

In a post-colonial era of 'globalised' cultural combinations and equations, subjugation of a specific community is relentlessly pursued so as to create ample space for formulating liberalised trade policies and market activities. These preconditions of neo-colonisation, as an internal practice of hegemony, insist on evacuating the 'unwanted' cultural elements so that a convenient order may be maintained in society. The cries that we listen to in Narayan's work are in effect a substantial effort to articulate the suppressed torment, hidden fear, restricted fury of the Adivasi community who yearns not to be fused to the modern cultural blaze but are satisfied to exist peacefully within their ethnic eco-systems. *Cries in the Wilderness* is a literary endeavour to imprint the identity of Adivasis and to pronounce the struggles of survival. As they are sincere anecdotes seen from the writers own cultural window, they are felt so moving and inspiring by a reader from an 'outside world'. Thus they are hardly 'cries' but are 'calls' for an urgent cultural restructuring, where the Adivasi could find his own space, voice, identity and recognition. In the Indian social context of cultural plurality, where every cultural segment participates in contributing to the tradition of artistic creativity, the Dalit/Adivasi voice need unprecedented assertion because in a historic perspective they had been socially ignored till the present and their art, music, literature etc. demand specific attention. The strong inner urge for resistance as well as the call for renaissance of the Adivasi community can be perceived in *Cries in the Wilderness* which epitomises their hunger for social

emergence without relinquishing their values, systems, heritage and culture.

The excluded identity of indigenous communities, the discarded history of their struggles for survival, self-governing system of polity, oral traditions of articulation, inherent resources of endemic knowledge, atypical ritualistic practices and above all the anthropological significance of their life forms are to be directly addressed within our collective narrative and discursive practices. Considering the the indigenous as a misinterpreted 'text' within the 'civilised' paradigms, *Cries in the Wilderness* makes an attempt to re-narrate the authentic sign-systems of Tribal identity. Even within the post-colonial political structure their issues remain the same and the politicos provide promises alone to the Tribal problems, as Frantz Fanon puts in *The Wretched of the Earth*, "to make the people dream dreams" (59).

The mainstream mindset of post-colonial India still asserts neo-imperialist predisposition of cultural imposition and marginalisation. Fundamentally the tribal selfhood is a part of our national character that is to be incorporated into our socio-political equations and their intense voices, though of late, are loud enough to be listened to. *Cries in the Wilderness* being one of the primary voices of dissent is to be considered as a candid call emblemic of long awaited self-assertion and resistance of the Adivasi community. So it is for us, the prophets of modernity, the propagators of progress and promoters of civilization to consider the questions of cultural imposition on the tribal sensibility, and the colonial invasions into the tribal environment. We as the members of the world of higher learning and progressive thinking have to decide whether we, who once thwarted the colonial dominance with will and vigour, want ourselves to be called colonizers.

WORKS CITED

Aronowitz, Stanley. *The Politics of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967. Print.

Gilly, Adolfo. Introduction. *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. By Frantz Fannon. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Monthly Review, 1965. i-xi. Print.

Gupta, Ramanika. *Tribal Contemporary Issues*. New Delhi: Concept, 2007. Print.

Nair, Krishnan M. *M. Krishnan Nairude Prabandhangal*. Calicut: Malayalam, 1987.

Jordan, Glen, and Chris Weedon. *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern*. London: Blackwell, 1997. Print.

Lindfors, Bernth. *Early Nigerian Literature*. New York: Holmes, 1982. Print.

Narayan. *Cries in the Wilderness*. Thrissur: Kerala Sahithya Academy, 2009. Print.

Satchidanandan, K. "Speaking from Below: Dalit Poetry and Namdeo Dhasal." *Malayalam Literary Survey* 30.2 (2009): 26-33. Print.

Double Consciousness of the Migrant in Meena Alexander's *Illiterate Heart*

Judith Sophia L.

Caught between the two worlds, Home/origin and 'away', the Diaspora writers behave like transnational beings, in the process of moving from one cultural scenario to another, in a way responding ambivalently to dual cultures attempting to integrate between the other and the self. Immigrant experience is a bitter experience of loss, marginality and exile and the immigrants are often cut off from their roots, their land, and their past. The identities of the immigrants undergo constant transformation transcending place, time, history and culture. They are always and already fused, syncretised with other cultural elements. Meena Alexander, in her collection of poems, *Illiterate Heart* (2002) translates her experience of an exile. This paper attempts to analyse her autobiographical poems in *Illiterate Heart* to unearth the double consciousness of the migrant moving between memory and present-day experience illuminated by multiple languages towards the formation of fluid identity.

Meena Alexander, a much acclaimed South Asian–American poet, novelist, memoirist, literary theorist and thinker, has spent her childhood in India and North Africa, got education from England and settled in America. As a result, her writings reflect her special interest in question of migration, trauma and memory. Her diasporic experiences are translated into the immediate exploration of her connections to both India and America. Her *Illiterate Heart*, a collection of poems, winner of the 2002 PEN Open Book Award, reveals a consciousness moving between the two

different worlds of memory and present-day experience lit by multiple languages.

Illiterate Heart opens with the ten couplet poem, "Provenance" signifying "the place of origin" in two of Alexander's languages, French and English. Setting the tone of the collection, it remains as the place of origin of the text and prepares the readers for the subsequent poems. The dual significance of the word provenance introduces the central theme of the collection. Alexander shows how identities are formed by and in languages and how languages merge with and inscribe female body. Speaking about the origin, she insists the reader to look at "The bowl on the ledge" having "a golden mark / pointed like a palm" (1-2). This visual image reminds the reader of the Biblical story of human origin. The poet then says:

> I lead you into the page.
>
> With you I enter a space where verbs
>
> have little extension, where syntax smoulders.
>
> I hear you murmur:
>
> What consciousness takes
>
> will not survive itself. (7-12)

These lines reveal the restricted knowledge of the alien language that prevents the free play of signifiers and hence the emotions of the diaspora exist in a suppressed or concealed state as expressed in a murmur. The poet also hints the origin of human knowledge that emerges with the "Mohenjo Daro of the mind" (16). The word picture,

> A grown woman might stoop to enter,
>
> gazing at walls stuck with palm prints,

and on damp ground, pitchers of gold

holding clear water. (17-20)

reveals the role of language in the inscription of female body as figured in the "wall stuck with palm prints" and "pitchers of gold holding clear water."

Analyzing the predicament of the writers of Indian diaspora, Salman Rushdie reveals:

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the Mind. (56)

The idea of a homeland is the quintessence of immigrant literature. It involves a displacement from original homeland, feeling nostalgic, a curious attachment to its tradition, religion and language, an ability to return psychologically if not physically, making a new home and a crisis of double identification with the original homeland and the new home. To Stuart Hall, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (438). Diasporas thus struggle to identify themselves with the fixed identity of either their imagined homeland of the past or the home away home of their present. In Avtah Brah's words, "the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given" (444).

In the poem "She Hears a Gold Flute," Alexander displays the consciousness that moves between two worlds, memory and present-day experience. Her experience of an

exile is translated into the intimate exploration of her connections to both India and America:

I am walking over snow

no, not toward you

but toward that place

where the hills are blue. (1-4)

She desires to have a psychological journey toward home/India while walking over snow. Her Indian body and mind is concealed by American apparel as she unfolds in the following lines:

Under her coat

the woman wears a sari,

under her boots

her skin is dark. (5-8)

Feeling nostalgic, she states, "I am going over stones/ stumbling to a place/ I never thought I'd know" (10-12). She finds herself in an alien place which seems to be unknown even after she has been living there. Her present place is metaphorically described "hill of bones" (20), without life giving energy. This present place contradicts with her childhood experience of hearing "a tin drum … a gold flute/ at the door to a house, / a small house of stones" (13-16). Living in America, the poet's psyche constantly moves between the present and the past.

The poem "Elegy for my Father" expresses her nostalgic feeling as Alexander recalls the death of her father. She contemplates on the father's way of dealing with familial and social responsibilities. She says, "I am in another country" and finds memory as her companion that helps her remember the past. The last line in the poem: "*Almav avide, avide, avide*," written in her mother tongue, means "The soul is there, there, there" not only strikes an optimistic note on the everlasting life of her father's soul but also

suggests that Alexander's soul dwells in India and not in her present place of residence. She also takes back the reader to the colonial era through the memorable reflections on her father's life, and to historical references like reference to Mahatma Gandhi, who emerges here as a highly influential historical figure for Alexander, as he is for many Indians. In "Diary of Dreams" she analyses the contrast between colonial India and the present. She recalls, in the past, before her birth "a republic was dreamt/ fought for with prayers / burnt indigo and steel" (1-3). She identifies Gandhiji as her leader and grandfather and proclaims "I want to be a satyagrahi!" (15). The march to make salt has been contrasted with the present Pokharan incident where "Salt fumes/ in a red desert" (59-60) and she calls it "small scale jottings/ from a new republic" (53-54).

The migrant persona is nostalgic again in "Indian April" as the poem is composed in memory of Allen Ginsberg. Alexander evokes Ginsberg in the Indian setting which she herself has left long back. Her memory seems to be a collage of images of American and Indian places, rivers, gods and a mixture of scriptures. She asks Ginsberg to "teach us to glide into life/ teach us when not to flee/ when to rejoice, when to weep" (42-43), so that she can survive in an alien circumstance.

As an immigrant, Alexander has struggled with the process of coming into terms with the English language while trying to retain other Indian languages that were de-emphasised by the colonizer. She exposes the violence of colonial pedagogy through the imposition of a colonial language. It is quite evident in the title poem, "Illiterate Heart." There is the painful disconnect between the reading Indian body and the colonial body which is symbolised by the images of "little English children," Tom and Bess in a textbook, itself the figure of pedagogical colonial discourse. Colonial ideology persists in postcolonial India. The postcolonial Asians are constituted through colonial language and images of whiteness still, because of

colonization. Even after independence, for many Indians, English remains the language of desire, promotion, and transport. Thus, while using English, Alexander also critiques the continued institutionalization of that language in contemporary India.

The twofold tyranny of colonization and patriarchy is explicitly revealed in the title poem, "Illiterate Heart." During English lessons as a child, Alexander reflects:

> My body flew apart:
>
> wrist, throat, elbow, thigh,
>
> . . ..
>
> then utter stillness as a white sheet
>
> dropped on nostrils and neck.]
>
> .....
>
> longed to be like Tom and Bess
>
> dead on paper. (74-83)

Historically, colonization is enforced through pedagogy. The compulsory acquisition of a colonial language metaphorically "breaks up" the subject's body and her sense of self. The child of the poem has to learn multiple languages: "At noon I burrowed through / Malayalam sounds, / slashes of sense, a floating trail" (84-86). It is the "harsh tutelage" (100) of colonial pedagogy that the poet writes of in order to free self and reader from that "cage of script" (106). She shows how colonial and postcolonial subjects are made, violated and trapped by language and how language inscribes identity and breaks it apart in the following words: "In dreams I was a child babbling / at the gate splitting into two, / three to make herself safe" (111-113). English, French and Malayalam are the three languages loom large in the poet's self and psyche. The self fashioned here is inseparable from her native and colonial languages, ". . . stuck forever at the accidental edge. / O the body in parts, / bruised buttress of heaven!" (116-119).

Using these languages and creating poetry with them, the poet makes constant attempts to bind body and self into a unified whole: "These lines took decades to etch free, / the heart's illiterate, / the map is torn. / Someone I learn to recognize, / cries out at Kurtz, thrusts skulls aside, / let the floodwaters pour" (138-143). The language learning process is both "painful" and "heavenly" since it is inscribed violently through dominating forces and it is through language the self is conceived, written and revealed.

Like the title poem, "An Honest Sentence," "Fragments," and "Translated Lives" there is "the movement toward self definition" (132), the conspicuousness of the 'I', is fully realized. Alexander seems to speak directly from the core in much of this volume while maintaining her trademarks: painstaking precision with language and exceptionally well-honed poetics. An attempt has been made by the poet in "An Honest Sentence" to take the reader from the terrain of colonial pedagogy into the related realm of patriarchal pedagogy: "I cannot see my mother. / Yet I see Agamemnon" (1-2). Here, Alexander returns to the old pages of Greek mythology and Agamemnon's sacrificial lamb, Iphigenia, who stands in this time as the figure of broken, violated woman -- vocal cords cut, incapable of utterance, dying by the hands of a father. She is at once a mythological figure and the poet herself, "...in part-time English, / trying to forge an honest sentence / such as: *Someone has cut her cords*" (35-38). Iphigenia, the poet and "woman" merge and emerge as the injured voiceless sacrificial lamb of history -- *the female*.

Alexander tries to bring the woman back to life, revivified through birth and re-birth, found and found again, in the poems such as "Giving Names to Stones," "Water Table," and the stunningly evocative closing work, "Black River Walled Garden." The woman is enabled to realize the spirit of creativity within and she becomes "a grown up girl giving names to stones" in the poem "Giving

Names to Stones" and on the heavy water she has set a table to edify the readers in "Water Table." The woman in "Black River Walled Garden" learns the art of survival amidst "migrant missing selves" (185). The woman has thus learned the fact that "Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure" (Said 442). She has to resist and face such hostile situations with fortitude making the best of the bad situation. Immigrant experience is a bitter experience of loss, marginality and exile and the immigrants are often cut off from their roots, their land, and their past. This traumatic experience should coexist with the art of survival. The identities of the immigrants undergo constant transformation transcending place, time, history and culture. They are always and already broken, fused and syncretised with other cultural elements.

Double consciousness brings more problems to the immigrants which cannot be solved by the mores of the old world. The culture of the transplanted people is "always-already fused, syncretised, with other cultural elements" (Hall 437). They have also lost a distinctive historical past for "Diasporas, in the sense of distinctive historical experiences, are often composite formations made up of many journeys to different parts of the globe, each with its own history, its own particularities" (Brah 444). Clifford's puts it, "Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/ desiring another place" (453). The editors of *Memory, Narrative and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*, in the "Introduction" comment, during immigration, "identity instead of being seen as fixed, becomes a dynamic construction that adjusts continually to the changes experienced within and surrounding the self" (17). The poet is thus caught up in a pathetic situation where she couldn't either identify herself with the ethics of her mother culture or with the other culture. In the poem "Gold Horizons" she emphasizes that she has "entered a new world" that is the third space or a transnational space allowing the play of memory within the present state of life.

Consequently, this double consciousness forces the poet to realize a fluid migrant identity.

WORKS CITED

Alexander, Meena. *Illiterate Heart*. Illinois: Northwestern UP, 2002. Print.

Brah, Avtah. "Thinking Through the Concept of Diaspora." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Noida: Sirohi, 2006. 443-46. Print.

Clifford, James. "Diasporas." Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. 451-54. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. 435-38. Print.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism*. London: Granta, 1991. Print.

Said, Edward W. "The Mind of Winter." Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. 439-42. Print.

Singh, Amritjit, Joseph T. Skerret Jr. and Robert E. Cogan, eds. Introduction. *Memory, Narrative and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literature*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1994. 3-25. Print.

Unveiling the Real Self

A Quest of Identity in Kamala Das' Poems

Sanil Raj J.

Kamala Das occupies a pivotal position in Indian English Writing. Her poetry highlights the conflicts between her external and internal worlds, and her struggle to find a position in the turbulent world along with her troubled inner self. Contrary to the Indian context, her themes are open and challenging and she explicitly demands her need for love with a sense of urgency. Her poems describe "the contradiction women feel between essential aspects of the self, between what is socially prescribed on the basis of gender and what is defined on the basis of the self, between what a woman feels she should be and what she feels she is" (Iyer 207). A substantial number of her poems explore this dual aspect of pain and frustration. She accepts the position of a "misfit" in a patriarchal society and the question is whether such a state of being is her own choice or something imposed upon her by the society with the established societal norms and ethos.

Being a woman renders her a very subordinate position in a conservative society. Historically speaking, women have been denied opportunities from time immemorial in all walks of life. They have been denied social justice and thus they enjoy only an inferior status. They do not boast of any glorious past as past holds nothing special for them. Inhibitions and misrepresentations deliver them lack of wealthy subject matter and the established notion of the society is that men write out of his harsh experiences and with his thorough knowledge of the external world whereas

women's experiences are silly and trivial. Out of such a sense of alienation, Kamala Das pens down her writings:

> I did not have the educational qualifications which would have got me a job either. I could not opt for a life of prostitution, for I knew that I was frigid … I was a misfit everywhere, I brooded long, stifling my sobs… (*Story* 109).

This paper views Kamala Das from such a perspective and selected poems from different anthologies have been analyzed to verify whether she really deserves such an inferior position or it is just a mask to hide her physical agonies and inner mental conflicts.

Kamala Das' poem "The Looking Glass" is her frantic outbursts on man-woman relationship. It is not a bonding based on understanding or mutual trust, but one like that of a seducer-victim. The poem is a gaze into human identity and the poetess follows the compulsions of her inner self to articulate the workings of her feminine consciousness. The woman in the poem is quite optimistic that she could charm a man into her own ways as his dominant passion towards her is a sort of carnal desire. She finds herself successful once such desires are evoked: "Getting a man to love you is easy, / only be honest about your wants as / woman" (1-3). The relationship is not intimate and the desires remain unfulfilled as lust alone is the dominant mood. The way the poet exposes the female passions in a seemingly bold manner appears to be a severe blow to the male chauvinism. The woman occupying a very submissive role in marital relations has all of a sudden publicly declared her interests and fancies in matters of sex.

> … Admit your
> admiration. Notice the perfection
> of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
> shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,
> dropping towels, and the jerky way he

urinates. (16-21)

Then she gives a call to surrender the female body to male passions:

> … Give him all,
>
> gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
>
> long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts
>
> the warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
>
> endless female hungers (7-11)

Man woman relationship has been reduced to the level of a show business, especially for women. She must invent something new so that she can continue in the show because once the male excitement settles down the woman alone has to bear the bitter consequences. The aftermath of such a relation is disastrous as the man is nowhere in the scene even though she desperately needs his presence and consolation.

> … A living without life when you move
>
> around, meeting strangers, with your eyes that
>
> gave up their search, with ears that hear only
>
> his last voice calling out your name and your
>
> body which once under his touch had gleamed
>
> like burnished brass, now drab and destitute. (5-10)

Here her sufferings become universal and she accomplishes epic stature like Ibsen's Nora in *A Doll's House* who keeps something in "reserve" so that her husband Helmer continues to love her.

> Oh yes, some day perhaps … in many years time, when I'm no longer pretty as I am now. You mustn't laugh! What I mean of course is when Torvald isn't quite so much in love with me as he is now, when he's lost interest in watching me dance,

or get dressed up, or recite. Then it might be a good thing to have something in reserve … (17)

Kamala Das presents her real self without any pretensions in her autobiographical poem "An Introduction". She is so despondent and her inner world is tormented and as such she looks forward to a way out, but the voyage is not easy. Her freedom is limited and she asks:

… Why not leave

Me lone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Everyone of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? (6-9)

"She couldn't receive love, in its true sense, at the legitimate sources, and her sense of attachment was never fulfilled" (Dwivedi 81). The very concept of her identity is at stakes and she stands confused between two worlds—the world in her conscious self and the unknown world that has been imposed upon her. "I was child, and later they / Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs / Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair" (12-14). Thus a very complicated woman persona emerges from her writings.

…Dress in sarees, be girl,

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,

Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh

Belong cried the categorizers, (17-20)

Here also she listens to the pertinent command: "Fit in". The "so called categorizers are there to offer a contrast to the speaker's assertion as a free individual" (Baral 229). Finally she declares:

… I am a sinner,

I am saint. I am the beloved and the

Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no

Aches which are not yours.

I too call myself I. (20-24)

Her painful assertion here is ambivalent and it obtains broader dimensions as we look for varied interpretations. It is the revelation of the bitter agonies she experiences for being a woman and she attains an identity which, though acceptable is contradictory. This poem ensures much discourse on a woman's identity in a patriarchal set up.

Most of her poems are the unfoldings of her plight and tragedy. They reveal her miserable existence and helpless state in a world devoid of real love. "The Freaks" is a record of "the woman's impatience and frustration with the man as well as the moment: with the man because of his sexual passivity and slackness and with the moment because it mocks integrity" (Kohli 64). Both the lover and the loved are freaks and they behave in an abnormal manner. The woman expects some help and guidance but it couldn't be accomplished by any mortal man. The man cannot enter deep into her inner self, but he could just unleash "the Skin's lazy hungers". In a very dejected tone, she asks: "… Who can / Help us who have lived so long / And have failed in love?" (22-24). Her passionate yearning for love remains unfulfilled and it remains a fleeting illusion throughout her life. Finding a solution to such a crisis may be difficult and the romantic poet Shelley says in his "To a Skylark": "We look before and after and pine for what is not". At the end of the poem she admits that her being freakish is only a sham. It is her struggle for survival and in a horrid way she says: "I am a freak. It's only / To save my face, I flaunt, at / Times, a grand, flamboyant lust" (36-39).

The poem is intrinsically patterned and it serves as an authentic testimony of the lovelessness, mental detachment, emotional sterility, the frustrations and disillusionments that she experienced in a male dominated hypocritical world. She cherishes a feeling of tenderness and heart to heart correspondence with her husband whereas he fails to fulfill her heart's desires or rather he is quite indifferent. She does not confer a superior position to her husband as a typical

Indian wife and for her husband is a partner in her pleasures and entertainments and she believes in a life of mutual trust and respect. These lines are a mix of her suppressed anger and the pathos that arises out of it, and in a very sarcastic way she acknowledges that she is a freak. Otherwise in such a background she considers herself as a "misfit".

Her frustration in love gives way to lust in "In Love". Unfortunately her "unending lust" is only a "sad lie". The sun's "burning mouth" reminds her of passion and lust. Lust is something attainable and it ends with the consummation of love and each embrace is a valid substantiation of it. She longs for love and unfulfilled love compels her to listen to the corpse-bearers cry 'Bol, Hari Bol', in Burdwan Road. Sleep has totally evaded her and in this mood of dissatisfaction, she says:

> For moonless nights, while I walk
>
> The verandah sleepless, a
>
> Million questions awake in
>
> Me, and all about him, (11-14)

She is a little bit puzzled and wonders the kind of relation that prevails between them. In a very desperate tone, she acknowledges it cannot be identified with love. "This skin-communicated / Thing that I dare not yet in / His presence call our love" (16-18). As an adult she was denied love and thus a 'misfit', but there was a time when she experienced the joys of childhood. In "My Grandmother's House", she is reminded of the house where she experienced unadultered love and childhood bliss. It was the same happiness that Dylan Thomas enjoyed when he was in Aunt Jones' estate as a child in the poem "Fern Hill": "Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs / About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green".

Kamala Das is so nostalgic about her ancestral home in Malabar and immediately, there is an overflow of her innate childhood memories. "There is a house now far away

where once / I received love……. That woman died, / The house withdrew into silence," (2-4)). She possessed the sense of belongingness here and her grandmother and the old house remained as a fascination for her throughout her life. Those days are now out of her reach, 'far away', but she still takes extreme delight in those eventful days. Today, she begs for love at the doors of strangers, but her thirst remains unquenched. Her only alternative is to ruminate over her childhood: "…you cannot believe, darling, / Can you, that I lived in such a house and / Was proud, and loved…." (9-11)).

Her dejection in love gives vent to an open encounter in "A Losing Battle". The poem is a call and publicly addresses to all the women folk. She is bitter in her tone and asks the women to use the cheapest of all baits to catch men and they should never use "love" because for women, it is synonymous with tears.

Men are worthless, to trap them

Use the cheapest bait of all, but never

Love, which in a woman must mean tears

And a silence in the blood. (15-19)

Patriarchal society denies women independent existence and in "Krishna" she laments that she is being imprisoned in the man's body. Her freedom of movement is curtailed and she is like a caged bird who is a misfit to lead an ordinary life.

Your body is my prison, Krishna,

I cannot see beyond it.

Your darkness blinds me,

Your love words shut out the wise world's din.

(25-29)

But she finds it difficult to accept such a social status and her dissension is disseminated in "The Maggots". A woman's

inner world remains alien to a man and it is evident in the following lines:

That night in her husband's arms, Radha felt

So dead that he asked, What is wrong,

Do you mind my kisses?

Her response is sharp and disturbing when she says:

No, not at all, but thought, What is

It to the corpse if the maggots nip? (15-19)

The mute complaints and passive discontentment takes an unexpected turn in "The Old Play House". The poetess conveys her deep sense of sorrow and remorse at surrendering her precious body to a man's demeaning demands. She openly accuses her husband of his selfishness. Her intention of getting married was something more than physical love and bodily pleasures. It was a means to have a better understanding of herself and thus to arrive at a positive outlook towards life. But instead she loses her freedom and is "dwarfed" (Raizada 125) by his egoism. She feels empty and her genuine mirth and original thinking has almost deserted her. All her dreams were instantly shattered when she realized that he was interested in himself alone.

It was not to gather knowledge

Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn

What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every

Lesson you gave was about yourself. (12-15)

He was captivated by her external charms and her presence could evoke only sexual passions in him though her quest was for a union which is sacred and more than mere physical love.

… You were pleased

With my body's response, its weather, its usual shallow

Convulsions. You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured

Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed

My poor lust with your bitter-sweet juices.

Being a wife, she was taught to undertake the domestic exigencies.

You called me wife,

I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and

To offer at the right moment the vitamins. (11-20)

Ultimately, she ends up in a state of extreme helplessness and self devastation and gets trapped in the inescapable tragedy. "… There is / No more singing, no more dance, my mind is an old / Playhouse with all its lights put out" (25-27).

"Kamala Das caricatures the feminine role to emphasize the plight of women in the world" (Iyer 214). Her expedition into the inner self in order to have a clear understanding of herself made her recognize the shocking reality that there was no more singing and dancing in the old play house and, like her deceased mind all its lights have been put out.

Kamala Das's poetry is a portrayal of the predicament of contemporary women beset by the crisis of inner conflicts. Her identity of being is a 'misfit' in her writings is only a veil to undermine her feelings of anxiety, alienation, meaninglessness, futility, isolation, fragmented self and loss of identity. Irrespective of being a child or an adult, she had the feeling that she was an 'unwanted' in the lives of others. She experienced physical paralysis in her relations especially in matters of sex owing to her mental distress and suppressed tender feelings. Her poems are an examination of

the psychic disintegration when her self rejects the established social norms. The psychological trauma that she undergoes is the result of her revolt against the male dominated society and the world as a whole. In this struggle she appears to be a 'misfit' incapable of undertaking heroic deeds and carrying forward the struggle. But such a dehumanizing identity should not be discarded as something irrelevant for it is a warning to the established society and its norms. The way she uses her language is sometimes shocking and often disturbing, yet it is a call and an awakening and it can render fresh energy to all women who are being suppressed and denied of free expression of their thoughts and feelings.

WORKS CITED

Baral, Bhabani S. "The Contours of Individualism in the Poetry of Kamala Das." *Indian Writing in English*. Ed. Mohit Ray K. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2003. 225–33. Print.

Dwivedi, A. N. *Kamala Das and her Poetry*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2000. Print.

Iyer, N. Sharada. *Musings on Indian Writing in English: Poetry*. New Delhi: Sarup, 2005. Print.

Das, Kamala. *Poems*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008. Print.

---. *My Story*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004. Print.

Kohli, Devinder. *Kamala Das*. New Delhi: Heinemann, 1972. Print.

Parthasarathy, R., ed. *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Raizada, Harish. "The Confessional Note in the Poetry of Kamala Das." *Indian Poetry in English*. Ed. Hari Mohan Prasad. Aurangabad: Prakashan, 1983. 113–35. Print.

School Full of White Tigers

Individuation as a Process in *The White Tiger* and *Slumdog Millionaire*

Betsy Paul C.

The interaction between the individual self and the collectivity which encircle it is a subject that engages continuing intellectual enquiry. This paper intends to see how far an Indian self is shown as individuated within the framework of two internationally acclaimed fictional narratives on contemporary India in the first decade of the twenty first century, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) and the Danny Boyle directed film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). The novel had won Man-Booker prize for fiction in 2008, and, the film won eight Oscars in the same year.

These works were meant for a global audience and were accepted by the same as the prestigious awards conferred to them corroborate. It could be argued that these works, moreover, catered to the perspectives which an "international" (western) audience had nurtured on the India of the first decade of the twenty-first century. At the same time, any literary work worth its name cannot be categorized and compartmentalized based on its author's interests or in the interests of any of its temporally and spatially fixed audience. This leaves open a large scope for interpretations not limited to such concerns, without, of course, bypassing the significance of those concerns.

In the philosophical domain, the concept of individuation has drawn the attention of thinkers like Georg Simonden and more recently, Bernard Stiegler. Simonden considers individuation as a process involving a

preindividuated milieu from where individuation and collective individuation emerge. If you want to understand the individual, you need to "inscribe the individual in a process of which he is only a phase". Then, "the individual is only an aspect, or phase of a process….of individuation." For humans individuation is not only "a vital individuation, that is, an individuation of the living organism, of life, but an individuation of the psyche as well, so it is operating as both conscious and unconscious processes". And since psyche can hardly be isolated in its existence, Stiegler reasserts Simonden's opinion that "the individuation of the psyche is always already an individuation of a group of psyches, because a psyche is never alone. It always operates in relation to another psyche".

Thus when an individual Indian psyche individuates itself, it does not do it alone, but along with a group, and thus it involves a collective individuation. This is then, the basis of social transformation and hence Stiegler emphasizes the value of education, in all three levels, "family, academic, and cultural," in the individuation of selfhood.

The first decade of the twenty-first century is marked in India by the liberalization and globalization of its markets. Further, this was a time when India's economic prosperity elicited a hitherto unseen market oriented and consumer centred interest in India by outsiders. The narratives studied here have, in their ways, opened avenues for the west (and east) to view, rightly or wrongly, India (or rather the New India). Further, since literary fabrications deal with inner as well as outer worlds, they are bound to contain within them insights into the tensions underlying individual interactions on a social plane in the Indian context.

An individual in India, like his/her counterparts elsewhere, is situated within a complex web of identities. A historical legacy specific to this geographical location has added a further tier for identification and stratification, namely, caste. As economist Amit Thorat concludes his paper on how caste, ethnicity, and religion influence

poverty, "religious and social identity…. goes a long way in determining people's final level of well-being, at least in economic terms" (53).

The two fictional narratives discussed in this paper are both written by non-dalit, non-lower class writers. They put forth images of middle to lower caste and lower class individuals. The inscription of "religious and social identity" in their selves and how they subvert their conventionally ascribed identities to achieve prosperity can indicate similar trajectories traversed by millions of Indians.

In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the hero is given a Muslim name, Jamal Malik. Yet he is shown as following hardly any religion. "if it wasn't for Rama and Allah," Jamal is made to say in the film, "I'd still have a mother." Yet the film has transcended the name of the original protagonist, as the protagonist of Vikas Swarup's novel, *Q & A*, from which the film borrowed the basic storyline, was, ironically, Ram Mohammed Thomas. Instead, the film attempted to fixate his identity as a poor Muslim slum boy. At the same time, the world of the film itself seems to sense the inadequacy of such an identity fixation. We find Sergeant Srinivas asking Jamal for his name and when he answers, replies, "you have a name. Good!" It was good for the film too, for by giving the slumdog a Muslim name, (rather than a Hindu one), the film could easily transcend the ubiquitous caste and its influence in the generation of poverty and the creation of ghettos in modern India. And, the name Ram Mohammed Thomas would have been too unreal a reality that may point to the inadequacies of Indian secular state and may lead to more serious ponderings than the film's feel-good fantasy may warranty. It may jerk the viewer back to the undesirable realities of present day India than the desired sceneries of the dreamland trajectory to a globalized India.

The story is, actually, structured into a series of escapades, all accidental, culminating in Jamal winning a quiz competition in a reality show to win a million dollars. Thus, Jamal is individuated elevated from his slumdog

community. This meteoric rise was seen by many as metaphorical in relation to the globally perceived elevation in India's progress. And everything depends on how one views it. For example, one could exult with Anthony Lane of the *New Yorker*, who gave his choice by stating, "you can either chide the film….for relinquishing any claim to realism or you can go with the flow—surely the wiser choice."

Or, one could turn vituperative, as Adoor Gopalakrishnan, internationally known Kerala filmmaker, who in an interview charged it to be "a very anti-Indian film." According to him, "all the bad elements of Mumbai commercial cinema are put together and in a very a slick way" in the film. And, he adds, the film:

> underlines and endorses what the west thinks about us. It is falsehood built up on falsehood. And at every turn is fabricated. At every turn it is built on falsehood. I was ashamed to see it was being appreciated widely in the west...Fortunately Indians are turning it down.

Ironically, Gopalakrishnan was very wrong in his wishful thinking about "Indians turning it down." According to "Results for Week Updated 3/15/2009" by *IBOS*, as of 15 March 2009, the film grossed Rs. 158,613,802 at the Indian box office. Though not as successful as major Bollywood releases in India during its first week, this was the highest weekend gross for any Fox film and the third highest for any Western release in the country, trailing only *Spider-Man 3* and *Casino Royale* (Singh).

The interesting fact is that both the supporter as well as the detractor concurs on its lack of "realism" (Lane) and its "fabricated" (Gopalakrishnan) twists and turns. And, it is this very fantasy which makes it a film worth the watch for the individuals who thronged in masses to view it. For, it gives them the combined product of their desires. On the one hand, it offers fulfilment of the dream of individual emotional gratification for which the hero overtly strives

for. On the other hand, it vicariously gratifies the viewer's desire for economic abundance without any seemingly actual effort. And what matters most is the escape the film offers for the individual from identities fixated on to him. It is this that finally made the film the "feel good film of the decade," as flaunted in its UK trailer quoting Robbie Collins of *News of the World* (Shahota).

The White Tiger brings in another version of this escape. The novel too was much disparaged for the negative light in which India was portrayed within its world, yet had its share of applauses too, both from home and abroad. In it, Balram Halwai, the low caste hero escapes from his caste, his village, and his destined jobs. More than everything else, he escapes from what he calls, the "rooster coop," the people like him, members of his family, his caste, his village community, and, the servant community in general. The rooster coop forces its individual members to stick to the status quo. This power of community is felt all the more as one goes down to the lower echelons of status, wealth and power, as Kerl and Duffey had found in Euro-American culture.

In the case of Balram, as he moves up the social ladder, we find his sense of self becoming stronger as compared to the power of community felt by him. In the beginning the "rooster coop" members like his cousins and his grandmother forced him into a subservient self, who was hardly ever individuated. Not only that, they actively prevented his individuation, by cutting off his chances for education and personal achievement. (It was to pay for the expenses of his cousin's wedding that he had to be pulled out of school).

The philosopher Bernard Stiegler defines individuation using terms like "short circuit" and "long circuit," where, "short circuit" refers to a break or departure in thought, and "long circuit," "that intimate a range of connectivities that allows for the passage of thought across time".

Balram, as he moves up the social ladder, short circuits his connection with the "rooster coop" and its way of thinking. Instead, he individuates himself by making "connectivities that allows for the passage of thought across time." Thus, after having violently resisted his grandmother's design to arrange his marriage, he goes on to murder his master, and goes to the city which he had carefully chosen as his destination, Bangalore. There, in India's blooming IT city, he turns into a successful business man, an "entrepreneur," in his words.

And, in the process of becoming a businessman, and even after it, he does make horizontal connections, thus renovating himself and his milieu. Even when he was on the run, he takes his nephew who was in his charge, along with him, and brings him up. And, when one of his drivers hits and kills a cyclist accidentally, he takes the responsibility and compensates the victim's family, unlike his murdered master, who wanted to put the blame of his wife's irresponsible action on Balram, the driver. Further, he assumes that violence and ruthlessness are involved in any human endeavor, which is why he considers himself on par with the visiting Chinese premier and writes him letters about his life story. "In my way," he tells the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in his first letter to him at the outset of the narrative, "I consider myself one of your kind" (3). He even invokes the pre–India-China war slogan of the Nehru era, "Hindi-Chini Bhai bhai" (317).

The choice of the Chinese, rather than any other premier, has further implications than what may be dubbed as just a neighbourly gesture. For the immediate post-independence generation of India, the name China evokes feelings which are not very cordial. China was seen as the traitor who betrayed India's trust by encroaching into her territory. The well cherished slogan of *India-China bhai bhai* (which Balram quotes in his last letter [317]) had turned sour by this incident and it was even rumoured to have hastened the much loved first Prime Minister Nehru's

untimely death. Though three decades hence the relationship between both countries has improved, and both India and China were hailed to be the next economic superpowers, and, people like Columbia university economist Jeffrey Sachs talked about "the return of India and China to global economic prominence"(185), the invocation of China still brings in mixed emotions in the mainstream Indian psyche. But in the case of Balram Halwai, this connection with the Chinese premier suggests something more. Somehow, Jiabao is equated with Balram and both their successes are seen in the same light, thus introducing Balram to a new community of similar people.

And Balram, the village boy dares to write letters to the Chinese Premier to educate him. This communication, thus, becomes a "long circuit," a communication that, to repeat Stiegler's words, "allows for the passage of thought across time," educating generations of even Chinese children.

Education, which according to Stiegler resulted in "inter-generational transmission" creating long circuits, incidentally, is a serious concern for Balram too in the novel. Even though, before being pulled out of school he did quite well there, he did not worry much about not getting an institutionalized education. Learning was something which happened to him all through his life. Further, when he became rich, Balram did care enough to send his nephew to "a good school here in Bangalore." And, he watches with "pride as he does his long division on clean white paper at the dinner table" (316). What is more, in his last letter to Jiabao he reveals his future plans and dreams. "after three or four years in real estate, I think I might sell everything, take the money, and start a school…. A school full of white tigers" (319).

He had in the course of the story individuated himself at every step, and even as an entrepreneur, he creates himself differently. These actions actually make him, to use Stiegler's term, "transindividualize" himself, meaning, he

has become someone "who is recognized as a singularity who has created a new type of circuit on which other people can come and continue the circuits." Stiegler considers such an individuation as "extremely important." In his mind, Balram visualizes himself as a projection of the "new India" so powerfully that he considers himself worthy of representing that India to the Premier of the most powerful country nearby.

And, it happens to be a very ruthless representation, where the individual Balram hardly don any of the identities thrust on to him in disciplined obedience. He is neither Halwai, nor a hotel worker, nor driver, nor even a typical entrepreneur. Identity is always a choice which is related to his milieu and relational frameworks. But that does not mean that he becomes a super individuated being. He has his connections, though they are expendable at any time, as and when circumstances demand. Thus, the nephew he brings up, he knows, may, one day, question him about his actions. "One day, I know, Dharam, this boy who is drinking my milk and eating my ice cream in big bowls, will ask me, *Couldn't you have spared my mother? Couldn't you have written to her telling her to escape in time?*" And, Balram knows that he will have to "come up with an answer – or kill him." But then, for him, "that question is still a few years away" (316), and he goes on to live his life.

Though in such thoughts, the revealed murder instinct may cast him as a murderer, still he vehemently refuses that identity by justifying himself later in the story. He accepts murder to have "darkened his soul" but, "isn't it likely," he asks, "that everyone who counts in this world, including our prime minister (including *you*, Mr. Jiabao), has killed someone or other on their way to the top?" If one killed enough people, one's statues may be put up near the Parliament house in Delhi, but Balram does not want to be among those seekers of glory. What he wanted was just a chance to "be a man," and for that, "one murder was enough" (318).

Thus, *The White Tiger* and *The Slumdog Millionaire* show individuals who have broken away from the barriers of their caste, class identities to bring in individual financial success. They could be seen as selves who have individuated themselves from their respective milieu, but at the same time, their individuation can hardly be seen as an isolation, an isolation which could ever be categorized by the adjective "lonely at the top," for at each respective stage of individuation, we find these characters finding their "community," people similar to them, or people who may accompany them physically, mentally or emotionally.

The individuation of a self does not mean to be a process which completely cuts off a self from others. It is just a cutting off of a community around a self, so that the self can shake off a lot of undesirable elements which constitute that community. It is a radical shift in the self's temporal trajectory of relationships, or, a "short circuit," in Stiegler's term. At the same time, not all old relations are cut off, though the continuation of these remnant old relations exists in entirely different planes. That could be the reason why, in the end of the fictional narratives studied here we find renewals and reconnections. In *Slumdog Millionaire* Salim is reunited with his childhood sweet heart, Latika, and, in *The White Tiger* Balram has his nephew with him.

But, there are sharp breaks and loss of even pined for relationships. Salim lost his brother, and, Balram his family, including his loved brother. But they are seen as inevitable losses, losses without which the individuation of the protagonist's self might not take place. Moreover, as Simonden proposed, individuation is not a principle, but, a "process itself as it unfolds" (301). Thus, the individual self which could be seen as having emerged at the end of each narrative is not a product, but part of a process of the individuation of the individual, and, consequently, part of a process of the individuation of the communal entity, and that of the nation, India.

WORKS CITED

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: Harper, 2008. Print.

Gopalakrishnan, Adoor. "Adoor Gopalakrishnan - Exclusive Interview on NDTV Hindu Night Vision- Part 3 - 3". *YouTube*. 18 July 2009. Web. 28 Feb. 2013.

Lane, Anthony. "The Current Cinema: Hard Times". *The New Yorker*. 1 Dec 2008: 130–131.Web. 16 Apr. 2011.

"Results for Week Updated 3/15/2009." IBOS – The Complete Channel on Indian Film Industry Box Office. 15 Mar. 2009. Web. 20 Mar. 2009.

Sachs, Jeffrey D. *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make it Happen in Our Lifetime*. London: Penguin, 2005. Print.

Shahota, Shalimar. "What Went Right: Slumdog Millionaire." *Box Office Prophets*. Crystal Tech. 2 Dec. 2013. Web. 5 Dec. 2013.

Simonden, Gilbert. "The Genesis of the Individual." Trans. Mark Cohen and Sanford Kwinter. *Incorporations*. Ed. Jonathan Crary & Sanford Kwinter. New York: Zone, 1992. 297–319. Print.

Singh, Madhur. "Slumdog Millionaire, an Oscar favourite, Is No Hit in India." *Time*. Time Entertainment. 26 Jan. 2009. Web. 20 Jan. 2014.

Slumdog Millionaire. Dir. Danny Boyle. Perf. Dev Patel, and Freida Pinto. Eros Entertainment, 2008. Film.

Stiegler, Bernard. "Transindividuation: Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff." *e-flux*. 14 Mar. 2010. Web. 6 Dec. 2011.

Thorat, Amit. "Ethnicity, Caste and Religion: Implications of Poverty outcomes." *EPW* 45.51(2010): 47-53. Print.

Image of the Empowered Woman in *Saiunkoku Monogatari*

Sindhu Padmavathy

Anime (Japanese Animation), like *Manga* (Japanese Comics), is a cultural product of Japan and hence mirrors the changes that have taken place in Japanese Society. This is especially true in the case of the representation of women. Before World War II, the position of women in Japanese society was very low. Under the patriarchal *ie* system, women were "consistently subordinated to the will of the household head, father, parents-in-law and husband" (Buckley 138). Women were supposed to be *ryōsai kenbo*, that is, 'good wives and wise mothers' (Mackie 24). Confucian concepts of women confined them to the roles of childbearing and childrearing. They were regarded as subordinate to men in the family and in society. Learning was considered as unnecessary and harmful for women (Takemaru 44). After the War, the new Constitution that was promulgated in 1946 guaranteed, for the first time, the equality of men and women under the law:

> On May 3, 1947, the new Constitution became effective, and its Article 14 guarantees equal rights for women and men under the law. Furthermore, under the revised Civil Code issued in the same year, the patriarchal *ie* (family, household) system was abolished, and legal equality in marriage and the family was granted to women. (Takemaru 74–75)

The legal status of women in the family, the workplace and in society improved generally. Individual rights were given preference over responsibility to family. The changing

position and role of women in Japanese society is mirrored in anime. This paper is an endeavour to focus on the image of the empowered woman in the anime *Saiunkoku Monogatari*.

Saiunkoku Monogatari, directed by Jun Shishido and produced by Madhouse Studios, is based on a series of Japanese light novels written by Sai Yukino and illustrated by Kairi Yura. It is divided into two seasons, each consisting of thirty-nine episodes. Set in the fictional empire of Saiunkoku, it tells the story of Ko Shuurei, the daughter of an impoverished noble, Ko Shouka who works in the Royal Archives. Shuurei can be regarded as *atarashii onna* or the "new woman". In Japan *atarashii onna* refers to a woman who transgresses social boundaries and questions her dependence on men. Sato says that such women pose a threat to gender relations:

> From the early twentieth century, the term *new woman* in Japan connoted a progressive group of educated young intellectual women who found solace in self-cultivation through reading, writing, and meditation. The liberation these women sought, which included a demand for social equality, overturned the common notion of femininity. (13-14)

The feminist literary organization, the Seitosha (the Bluestocking Society), and its journal, *Seito*, founded by Hiratsuka Raicho, one of the most well-known feminist pioneers in Japan, made significant contributions to the overall liberation of women as well as the emergence of the Japanese New Women (*atarashii onna*), who would challenge old conventions and expectations (Takemaru 72). Shuurei epitomizes those new women who try to triumph over the constraints set by a patriarchal society. She does so by destabilizing gender roles and stereotypes.

In the first episode itself, Shuurei strikes the viewer, not as a submissive heroine, but as a woman who is extremely

ambitious and dynamic. In order to make both ends meet, she not only works as a teacher in a temple school, but also as a professional erhu player and as an accountant. She is also proficient in doing household chores. Her venture into the world of the Imperial Palace (and thus into politics) comes when the Emperor Shi Ryuuki's Grand Advisor Shou offers her 500 gold ryou to enter the imperial household for six months as the concubine of the Emperor. Shou asks her to transform Ryuuki into a judicious ruler. Tempted by the money and the prospect of improving her family's financial situation, Shuurei readily accepts the mission.

When Shuurei encounters Ryuuki for the first time, he pretends that he is Ran Shuuei, but she recognizes him as the emperor. She decides to take him outside the palace so that he may perceive for himself the lives of the common people and try to reform himself. Her plan succeeds and he stops running away from his responsibilities as emperor and agrees to change for the welfare of his subjects. After meeting Ryuuki, she realizes that he has the potential to become a distinguished ruler. She resolves to work hard for the wellbeing of the Emperor and of Saiunkoku.

Shuurei's aspiration was to become a Court Official. She used to study with her father in order to take the Imperial Examinations. But when she came to know that women were not allowed to take the exam, she became a teacher and passed that dream on to the children she taught. Shuurei's condition reflects the condition of educated women who are restricted to the domestic sphere. In Japan, women are forced to conform to the traditional notion of woman as *ryōsai kenbo*, that is, good wives and wise mothers. Girls were given education mainly to prepare them to become *ryōsai kenbo*.

Shuurei's wisdom and her aspiration to work for her country makes an impression on Ryuuki and he decides to make real her dream of becoming a court official. For this purpose he works hard to get the proposal allowing women

to sit for the Imperial Examinations passed as quickly as possible. In the meantime, Shuurei in the disguise of a man becomes a personal assistant to the Senior Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and works for the Outer Court. She uses the name Kou Shuu for this purpose. Even though she is apprehensive that her real identity would be exposed, she enjoys every opportunity to work there. At night she even gets Ri Kouyuu to help her with her studies. Minister Kou is so impressed by her that he even asks her opinion of how she would utilize the excess funds in the situation of a national budget surplus. She replies that she would establish a subsidy system for midwives and pregnant women, set up scholarship funding to assist poor scholars and also invest in research towards the development of more disaster-resistant crops. Her answer reveals that she is intelligent and conversant with matters relating to her country.

Shuurei's dream of becoming a court official comes true when Ryuuki passes the law allowing women to take the Imperial examination. The other candidates for the exam are shocked to find her attending the exam. But Shuurei does well and takes the third place. The title of *Tanka* is awarded to her and at the age of seventeen, she becomes the first female Imperial Court official of Saiunkoku. But the path that she has chosen is full of thorns. When she goes to attend the *Shinshi* ceremony, she realizes that she will have to put up with much discrimination. Shuurei is assigned menial tasks, with no opportunity to prove her abilities. She is assigned the duty of cleaning toilets and organizing documents in the Archives in the afternoons.

Shuurei's situation reflects the discrimination employed women face in Japanese society. Yukiko Tanaka in *Contemporary Portraits of Japanese Women* points out that women are hired "primarily to assist men and are valued primarily for their ability to organize, work cooperatively, and improve office morale. They are given jobs that involve little training and have few, if any, opportunities for advancement" (102). "The assigning of predetermined

gender roles as a matter of course in, for example, social organizations . . . functions to limit women's freedom as well as their abilities" (Okano 16). Although the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (*Danjo Koyo Kikai Kinto Ho*) was enacted in 1985, it failed to prevent gender discrimination in the Japanese workplace. Working women are still regarded as *shokuba no hana* (flowers in the workplace) indicating that they are ornamental and disposable. They are expected to resign by the end of the *tekireiki* (the period of marriageable age) that ranges from the mid– to late 20s for women.

The other Shinshi think that Shuurei was allowed to slip through the examination. They find it hard to believe that a woman can be intelligent enough to get through by her own merit. People at the court are so strongly opposed to the admission of female officials that they even state the wrong time in the letter addressed to Shuurei, so that she may become late for the Shinshi ceremony. Senior Secretary Sai is so venomously prejudiced towards her that he calls her an annoying female official and even thinks of getting rid of her. He is of the opinion that women's place is at home, taking care of men and pleasing them. Senior Secretary Sai's opinion points out the prevalence of gender based role division in Japanese society, which is indicated by the phrase *otoko wa shigoto, onna wa katei* (men at work, women at home).

Okano in "Women's Image and Place in Japanese Buddhism" points out that in Japan women were regarded as subordinate to men because religions like Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism have contributed considerably to the growth and preservation of separate gender roles and of gender inequality.

> These religions have encouraged people to accept a notion of ethics which proclaims that people are born with differing abilities and into different statuses within society, thereby serving to maintain the prevailing social order. (16)

Despite all the hardships that she has to face, Shuurei does not give up. She even works late into the night. Finally the other Shinshi acknowledge her hard work and her abilities. Their attitude towards her undergoes a dramatic change. Shuurei also gets an opportunity to prove herself when Senior Secretary Sai spreads the rumour that improper conduct was involved in the Imperial Examination and that Kou Reishin of the Ministry of Civil Affairs manipulated things from behind the scenes in order to let Shuurei pass the Imperial Examination. Sai issues a petition asking Shuurei to surrender her Shinshi title. An inquiry is held at the Imperial Palace to look into the matter. To prevent her from clearing her name, Shuurei is detained at the kouga house. But she manages to overcome all obstacles and arrives at the appointed time for the inquiry. She also exposes the corruption within the Ministry of Rites with the help of To Eigetsu. A public oral exam is held and she passes with flying colours, thus clearing all doubts about her legitimacy as a Shinshi and also changing the way people think about her. To cap it all, the Emperor, Shi Ryuuki, appoints her along with To Eigetsu, as co-governor of Sa province—an area in utter chaos. He also presents them with flowers—a symbol of his absolute trust in them. Shuurei thus succeeds in subverting gender roles and stereotypes. "She unsettles the socio-political system in which she inserts herself by contravening age-old conventions that categorically exclude all members of her gender and social class from political life" (Cavallaro 84).

Due to her efforts to save Sa province from collapse, Shuurei gains acceptance as its co-governor. She presents a proposal regarding Sa province to Shi Ryuuki. She wants to make it a centre of academic research, which will benefit it after many years. Her proposal is met with approval. When a strange epidemic spreads in Koringun village in Sa province, she calls an urgent meeting of doctors and makes necessary arrangements to dispatch court physicians to the province. She also successfully bargains with the National Merchants' Guild to provide the necessary help. She does all

these without consulting the members of the court because the situation demanded immediate action. When she is summoned by the Imperial Court to justify her actions, she is able to convince its members that she omitted court procedures in order to save the people of Sa province. Despite grave danger to her life, she decides to go back to Sa province to disperse the rumor that the epidemic was caused because she, being a woman, was allowed to become the governor. She is even willing to sacrifice herself in order to establish peace in Sa province.

The rumour that Shuurei caused the epidemic reflects the tradition of *nyonin kinsei*, that is, "no females allowed". This tradition was created by the association of women and blood impurity and caused the exclusion of women from various spheres of life. It prevented women from taking part in Shinto and Buddhist rituals and festivals and from visiting Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and mountains called *reizan* that were revered in Shinto and Buddhism. Women were also not allowed in many secular places including fishing boats, construction sites, sake breweries, sumo rings, and behind the sushi counter (Takemaru 14). Those who spread the rumour wanted to exclude Shuurei from the political arena, which was formerly dominated only by men. Although the Japanese government issued a decree in 1872 to abolish the tradition, *nyonin kinsei* still continues to be observed in Japanese society.

Saiunkoku Monogatari also subverts the notion of *danson johi* (men superior, women inferior). When the men of Koringun village, believing that Shuurei is responsible for the epidemic, try to attack her, the women come to her aid. The women are shown to be more sensible than the men and they succeed in making the men see reason. The doctors are able to operate on the patients and save all of them because of the efforts of Shuurei and the women in the village, who memorized perfectly the stitches needed for the surgery.

Through Shuurei the anime reflects the changing roles of women not only in Japan but all over the world. *Saiunkoku Monogatari* has indeed succeeded in subverting gender roles and stereotypes. Since Anime are viewed by many people inside and outside Japan, those like *Saiunkoku Monogatari*, which present women in a positive light can easily influence and change the way people view women.

WORKS CITED

Buckley, Sandra. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Cavallaro, Dani. *The Fairy Tale and Anime: Traditional Themes, Images and Symbols at Play on Screen*. NC: Mcfarland, 2011. Print.

Mackie, Vera. *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2003. Print.

Okano, Haruko. "Women's Image and Place in Japanese Buddhism." *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future*. Eds. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda. New York: Feminist, 1995. 13-22. Print.

Saiunkoku Monogatari. Dir. Jun Shishido. 39 Episodes. Madhouse Studios. April 8, 2006 – February 24, 2007. Anime Series.

Saiunkoku Monogatari Second Series. Dir. Jun Shishido. 39 Episodes. Madhouse Studios. April 7, 2007 – March 8, 2008. Anime Series.

Sato, Barbara. *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan*. London: Duke UP, 2003. Print.

Takemaru, Naoko. *Women in the Language and Society of Japan: The Linguistic Roots of Bias*. NC: McFarland, 2010. Print.

Tanaka, Yukiko. *Contemporary Portraits of Japanese Women*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995. Print.

Survival in the Sands

Mapping New Historiography in J. M. G. Le Clezio's *Desert*

Preetha M.M.

> The history of the novel is the history of human liberation; by putting ourselves in others' shoes, by using our imagination to free ourselves from our own identities, we are able to set ourselves free.
>
> —Orhan Pamuk

History no longer tends to be seen as a closed and linear narrative of the past but as a construct. The past is transmitted as a series of texts and history becomes a narrative, reconstructed by means of selection and interpretation. J. M. G. Le Clezio, the Franco-Mauritian writer and Nobel Prize Laureate is one writer who has been able to use his imagination to free himself from his own identity in order to relate to humanity at large and whose concern is with men and women who are treated badly by fate and by others. Born in Nice to a French mother and British father, he has a Breton surname and Mauritian grandparents. His education in England and teaching experiences in Bangkok, Mexico and Boston has enabled him to step outside his culture to experience and understand other cultures, not resting with a single idea or one location. He has over forty highly acclaimed books to his credit, works which echo the bonds of ethnicity and 'lost culture' which hold together the peoples of this world and which are more enduring than the barriers of political prejudice.

Le Clezio's *Desert*, set in Morocco and France and spanning a century in time, depicts the Tuaregs, the blue robed warrior tribe of the desert and their flight from French occupying forces in the early part of the 20th century. By recreating the desert and the desert people, the writer engages himself in "race retrieval", as Wole Soyinka calls it, an "activity of recovering that which has been lost, hidden, repressed, denigrated or simply denied by the conquerors and their Eurocentric bias of thought and relationship" (78). By incorporating indigenous referents and imagery, the writer reads into the sands and rocks the silenced history of the natives. The narrative unfolds through two viewpoints in a double time scheme. It moves forward in a zigzag manner, the story of Nour set in 1910 when the Tuaregs had to flee from the encroaching French colonialists and that of Lalla set in a different time scheme around 1970, after the Second World War, her encounter with the French becoming a site of cultural resistance, emphasizing the persistence of a primitive culture into the postcolonial period. Both Nour and Lalla are descendents of the blue robed desert warriors, and so, though belonging to different time schemes in the narration, are able to commune with the ancestral spirit al Azraq. The spectral figure links the novel's twin narratives, one located at the dawning of colonization in the Western Sahara, the other in the postcolonial present. Hence this vast epic of the desert land with its glistening sand, jagged rocks, blistering heat, sand dunes, wind and sea gulls reveals itself as home to a group of natives who are held together by strong bonds of ethnicity. Their endurance and will power in the face of harsh realities can be traced to their ancestry- they are descendents of the desert warriors, the indigo robed Tuaregs. As Nour, along with a group of dispossessed natives, plod along through the blistering heat of the desert, they are guided by the faith in their spiritual leader Ma-al-Ainine. They reach the Smara camp in the valley of Sanguiet al Hamara to seek the aid of the great spiritual leader known as Water of the Eyes. The legendary sheik

Ma-al-Ainine is revered by his people but demonized as a fanatic and witch doctor by the French thereby questioning history as a grand narrative which is ideologically constructed to claim authority over the colonized other. The religious chief sends them out from the holy city of Smara into the desert to travel still further. Spurred on by thirst, hunger, and suffering, Nour's tribe and others flee northward in the hopes of finding a land that can protect them at last. On the way the sheiks, chieftains and Tuareg warriors spoke about the "soldiers of the Christians who made incursions into the Southern oases bringing war to the nomads" (24). There were troops of soldiers "guided by the black men from the South who encircled the camps and killed anyone who resisted them on the spot, and then took the children away to put them into Christian schools in the forts on the coast" (24). Nour was aware of the terrible danger that was threatening the city and all the men. Anxiety began to mount at the Smara Camp as new bands of nomads arrived each hour, followed by half starved camels, limping horses, goats and sheep. Weary from thirst and hunger some of them died and the sound of women crying could be heard. It is a losing battle for them and they are finally slaughtered by the French and the few who remain disperse and disappear in the sands but not before leaving behind a power, a spiritual power, which is taken up by Lalla some six decades later, empowering her, offering to resist imperialist culture and re-establish the lost national identity and history. As Fiona Barclay observes;

> The ghostly presences of the past offer a means of recovery, bidding readers to reach out to the lost bodies, and stories of victims of colonial atrocities, but also to the invisible yet tangible bodies of the immigrant community. In doing so, through the process of narrative recognition they offer some hope of restoration. (38)

Memories of past keep informing the present and the desert landscape itself becomes a repository of the primal and the

elemental as Lalla enters into communion with the land and with its moving spirit. This orphan girl was brought up by her aunt in the shantytown of Tangiers, called the Project. The beach, the plateau of stones, the sea gulls and the sand dunes fill her with delight. She loved listening to stories of the sea by Naman the fisherman and enjoyed the silent company of Hartani, the mute shepherd boy. Language, which becomes a medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, is rejected as Lalla admires the mute shepherd boy who seemed to communicate silently, not only to her but also to the insects of the desert:

> He doesn't speak. That is to say, he doesn't speak the same language as humans. But Lalla hears his voice inside her ears, and in his language he says very beautiful things that stir her body inwardly, that make her shudder. Maybe he speaks with the faint sound of the wind that comes from the depths of space, or else with the silence between each gust of wind. Maybe he speaks with the words of light, words that explode in showers of sparks on the razor-edged rocks, with the words of sand, the words of pebbles that crumble into hard powder, and also the words of scorpions and snakes that leave tiny indistinct marks in the dust. He knows how to speak with all of those words, and his gaze leaps, swift as an animal, from one rock to another, shoots all the way out to the horizon in a single move, flies straight up into the sky, soaring higher than the birds. (100)

Lalla understands that "so many things are conveyed through silence. Other people expect only words, or acts proof, but the Hartani, he looks at Lalla with his handsome metallic eyes, without saying anything and it is through the light in his eyes that you hear what he is saying, what he is asking" (100). Lalla can derive from the gaze of the Hartani the "essence" of things, maybe even those beyond the capacity of words to express:

> Now Lalla knows that words don't really count. It's only what you mean to say, deep down inside, like a secret, like a prayer: that's the only thing that counts. And the Hartani doesn't speak in any other way; he knows how to give and receive that kind of message. So many things are conveyed through silence. Lalla didn't know that either before meeting the Hartani. Other people expect only words, or acts, proof, but the Hartani, he looks at Lalla with his handsome metallic eyes, without saying anything, and it is through the light in his eyes that you hear what he's saying, what he's asking. (100)

Through Lalla's wordless relationship with Hartani, Le Clezio seems to challenge the convention that reality is constructed primarily through language. It deploys language and narrative, thus modifying and generating a rhetorical strategy of self identification. There is a contradiction between silence and the power of words to convey the innermost feelings. Hartani represents an old way of life, dependent on the natural elements, which is powerful enough to overwhelm Lalla as opposed to the modern city life which fails to attract her later in Paris. Lalla takes a nativist political position as she is enthralled by the stories of Naman, the fisherman. The local cultural beliefs and symbols tend to reinforce the strong bonds with her native land. Being a descendent of the blue robed desert warriors, she frequently has a communion with al-Azraq, the ancestral spirit. She enters al-Azraq's presence on the high plateau of stones and is drawn into the timeless world of her ancestors, altering her perspective and enabling her to see mysterious dreamlike visions of the desert. When the gaze reaches her it makes a whirlwind in her head;

> Lalla stops breathing for a few moments. Her pupils are dilated. She squats down in the dust, eyes closed, head thrown backward, because there is a terrible weight in that light, a weight which is entering her and making her as heavy as stone. (162)

This cultural memory suffuses her with vitality as the gaze enters the smallest recesses of her body, driving out the pain and "illuminating her whole body" (162). In her vision she walks through endless paths leading to a land with only stone, sand and wind. As if in a dream she recognizes each detail of the landscape and feels "as if she had walked there long ago" (163). She could hear music, a folk song, a strange song which seemed to come up from the sand and which suddenly turned into the chleuh language, the language used by the Berber ethnic group of Morocco in the pre-colonial era:

> One day, oh, one day, the crow will turn white, the sea will go dry, we will find honey in the desert flower, we will make bedding of acacia sprays, oh, one day, the snake will spit no more poison, and rifle bullets will bring no more death, for that will be the day I will leave my love . . . (164)

This oral song poem reverberates throughout the narrative, seeking to retrieve the indigenous culture of a native community which, in olden days bonded through sharing of familiar stories. The song also has echoes of an impending colonial legacy which would make all familiar things unfamiliar, forcing them to part with everything they love. Though Lalla could not understand the words, "the song goes straight to her heart and her eyes fill with tears, despite her holding them closed with all her might" (164). In her vision, as she moved forward, she could make out a city of mud which, though wasted by time and worn with the wind had a beautiful light over it "forming a clear pure dome of tranquillity in the eternal dawn sky" (164). There is a white dome like an egg shell from where the light of the gaze is coming from, which Lalla realizes is the dwelling place of the Blue Man. There is something terrible, yet at the same time beautiful as the gaze reaches her:

> It is as if something deep down inside of her were being torn and broken and allowing death, the unknown to enter. The burn of the desert heat

> inside of her spreads, courses through her veins, mixes with her entrails. The gaze of al-Ser is terrifying and painful, because it is the suffering born of the desert: hunger, fear, death, which come, pass over her. The lovely golden light, the red city, the delicate white tomb from which the supernatural light is emanating, also carry with them sorrow, anxiety, abandonment. (165)

Myths have a certain political role—interrogating and undermining the monologic control of western forms. Through a negotiation with her racial past Lalla reconstructs an identity not only for herself but also for the desert people, an identity different from the one imposed on them by the French colonialists and their 'new order'. As historiography has itself been a weapon of the colonial, written from specific racial, class, ethnic and political standpoints appropriated for imperial purposes, the spectral figure in *Desert* is a return of that which has been written out of history. This necessitates a new historiography, questioning a history which is ideologically constructed by the European power forces to claim authority over the natives. The traditional conception of reality according to Eurocentric definitions is distorted here, in order to develop a cultural and national identity.

In Le Clezio's narrative, the ancestral ghost is a transformative power, demanding a reconsideration of the relationship between industrialized French society and the cultures of the community of immigrant origin. By its presence at the intersection of colonial and postcolonial cultures, it offers an understanding of the postcolonial present using the trope of haunting. The ghostly trace of a primitive way of life seems to persist in the postcolonial period, seeking to retrieve the lost cultural elements of a bygone era. According to Faris, the presence of the ghost is oppositional in the narrative as it disturbs "the scientific and materialist assumptions of Western modernity: that reality is knowable, predictable and controllable" (498). This

recurrent journey into the past, through the ancestral character, entails the breaking of a linear narrative prescribed by the Western literary canon. Later Lalla runs away from home, with the help of Hartani, to escape marriage to an elderly man. Hartani continues his journey southward towards the caravans, because that was what he always wanted to do. Lalla experiences the presence of the omniscient even in Marseilles when she becomes a successful fashion model in France. The westerners looked at her with wonder and admiration as her gaze seemed to be charged with the haunting pre-colonial potency of al-Ser and the desert. Her French photographer looked upon this mysterious Arab girl with awe as she is described as "holding the burning force of the desert in her eyes" (280). It is Lalla who is in control as the photographer tries to capture her image in different ways but always finds something elusive about her. He feels an emptiness as Lalla walks away, tired of being photographed. There is transference of discursive power from colonizer to colonized as Lalla appears exotic and mystifying to him:

> To keep from feeling the emptiness, he'll continue to look at her for hours, in the darkness of his improvised laboratory in the bathroom of his hotel room, waiting - counting his heartbeats - for the handsome face to appear in the developing pan, most of all the eyes, that profound light flowing from the slanted eyes. That dusk coloured light, from ever so far away, as if someone else, someone secret, were looking out from those pupils, judging silently…There's something secret about her that sometimes just happens to be revealed on the paper, something you can see but never possess, even if you take pictures every second of her existence, until she dies. (284)

The mesmerizing world of Paris fails to entice Lalla and she makes a conscious attempt to move away from European styles and influences. She appears disinterested in the

material success as is evident when she gives money away to the beggars and gypsies on the streets. She was aware of her growing belly and knew that Hartani's baby was growing in her womb. Lalla refuses modern society and attempts to create a new world by returning to her desert homeland, a paradise of pre-modern cultures. It is here that she delivers the baby, under the very tree, among the gigantic roots, where she was said to have been born. Lalla seems to be charged with primal energy as she hauls herself up against the trunk of the huge fig tree. "Instinctively, she repeats the ancestral motions, gestures whose significance goes beyond her, without needing anyone to teach them to her" (339). As the narrative of Nour ends in death and destruction of the natives, that of Lalla ends optimistically with the birth of a 'culturally pure' native, a girl child, who holds the promise of ushering in new generations and a New World, a world free from colonialism's pervasive influence.

Works Cited

Barclay, Fiona. *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature and the Maghreb*. London: Lexington, 2011. Web.

Faris, Wendy B. *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004. Web.

Le Clezio, J. M. G. *Desert*. London: Atlantic, 2011. Print.

Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976. Print.

The Impact of Polygamy in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Linda Primlyn A.

So Long a Letter is, the blurb of the book describes, "a sequence of reminiscences, some wistful, some bitter", recounted by Senegalese school teacher Ramatoulaye, who has recently been widowed. The letter, addressed to her old friend Aissatou, is a "record of her emotional struggle for survival" after her husband's abrupt decision to take a second wife.

Polygamy has been in existence in different cultures far longer than monogamy. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* defines it as a marital situation in which "a man has more than one wife". Polygamy is not working well in some of the advanced Western societies because it depends upon the conduct and character of the women concerned. Many Muslim African societies have strong cultural and traditional tie-ups with the stipulations of their religion. The Holy Qur'an states that men can have a maximum of four wives. At the same time, it also says that one wife is the best. The Holy Book does not say in any way that polygamy is a way "to oppress women, but to ensure that they are taken care of" (Ayah 4:3). Against this, in some Islamic cultures women are considered as a curse to their families. They are, Mariama Ba says "despised, relegated or exchanged . . . abandoned like a worn-out or out-dated *boubou*" (41).

The purpose of the present paper is to show the impact of polygamy on one's own life and how she reflects on it through a few fictionalized women characters in her novella entitled So Long a Letter. The paper examines the various problems and issues that arise in Islamic polygamous marital

structures. In the novella young women and children are dominated by some Islamic social attitudes and values and are denied their proper place in the society. They struggle emotionally for survival after the head of the family all on a sudden takes up a second wife. It is to be understood that the comfort of polygamy can be enjoyed as per the religious condition that the men should fully support and are fair to the first as well as to the co-wives. But many of the males fail to keep up their words after their entry into their co-wives. Hence the first wife and her children suffer as they are being simply neglected and ignored. Although in African Islamic societies the action is sanctioned by religious consciousness, it has to be calculated only as betrayal of the first wife and a brutal rejection of her children.

Mariama Ba takes interest in depicting the pitiable predicament of married women in polygamous situations prevalent in Western African society. Polygamy oppresses Muslim women and they are treated like property and have very few rights than men. They are afraid of joining the ranks of feminists worldwide, because they would be considered as supporters of anti-Muslim ideals and ideologies. Also, they are not fully aware of the inhibitions that patriarchal practices generally create. Islam requires that "the husbands should treat their wives equally" (Ahmed 20). It emphasises the idea that only men who are capable of loving and financially providing all their wives and children alone should marry a second time. "The practice of polygamy in Islam was created for the purpose of taking care of fatherless children or orphans" (Wadud 83).

In the novella, Ba is very much concerned with Africa's need for societal changes which are more political than systems which merely make speeches. Hence, Farah Udegbunam is of the view that this work is "the most deeply felt presentation of the female condition in African fiction." Ba was awarded the first Noma Prize for it and it was published in Africa in 1980 itself. Her commitment to the feminist cause has stemmed from her background, her

parents' life and her schooling. She was married to a Senegalese and as a divorcee and "a modern Muslim woman," She has been very active in many Women's Associations ardently promoting education to the African Islamic wives and children.

The act of polygamy and its aftermath is the main focus of the novella. It consists of some of the worst situations experienced by a widowed school teacher, Ramatoulaye. As her experiences are too bitter and unpleasant she is compelled to convey them to her friend in the form of a long letter. In her letter, Ramatoulaye records her anger at both her polygamous husband, Modou, and the culture that favours polygamy. She reflects on the past and looks forward to the future. She muses on how Aissatou's marriage with Mawdo has also been ruined by the values of polygamy. She experiences heartbreaking pain when her husband decides to take on a second wife.

The two women happily live in Senegal with their husbands during the postcolonial period of national reformulation. They represent the women of the "New Africa" and though highly educated, they are victimized by traditional customs that deny them equal status with their husbands. Their hearts break because of their husband's betrayal which comes as bolt from the blue. Ramatoulaye says "they leave us utterly destitute, we who will need material support" (7). However, both the women become successfully independent, without accepting the position of submissiveness. They face identical situations in their life, but each chooses a different way to solve the problems.

The most common impact of polygamy on Ba was quite obviously the creation of inward conflicts and psychological problems. This can be seen in the case of Ramatoulaye who becomes a prey to all kinds of confusions and conflicting situations. Conflicts arise as there is a favourite second wife who would destroy the peace and happiness existing in the family. Hence the first wife, the neglected one, feels trapped in the polygamous situation and she suffers psychologically.

Divorce or leading an independent life is the only option open to her to come out. Ramatoulaye's husband, Modou, betrays her by selecting a second wife, Binetou. Tamsir, Modou's brother, together with his friend Mawdo Ba and the local *Imam* comes to her house to inform the "sad" news. They say that nothing can be done "when Allah the almighty puts two people side by side" (36). However, the visit is deliberately planned by them. Tamsir simply says:

> Modou sends his thanks. He says it is fate that decides men and things: God intended him to have a second wife, there is nothing he can do about it. He praises you for the quarter of a century of marriage in which you gave him all the happiness a wife owes her husband. His family, especially myself, his elder brother, thank you. You have always held us in respect. You know that we are Modou's blood. (37)

Ramatoulaye has given Modou thirty years of her life and twelve children. In such a situation he decides that he must have someone new and younger. Not only the new wife, Binetou is a young one, but also a classmate of their eldest daughter, Daba, and precisely it is this becomes the cause for Ramatoulaye's untold mental agonies and worries. Modou comes in contact with Binetou when Daba brings her to her house while preparing for baccalaureate. Binetou wears expensive dresses bought for her by her "sugar-daddy." Then, one day she tells Daba that Modou wants to marry her and he has promised her "a villa, Mecca for her parents, a car, a monthly allowance, jewells" (35). Binetou being innocent confides all the secrets to Daba.

Polygamy's impact on the family is unquestionably very serious. It changes totally the attitude of Modou. He neglects his wife and children and almost destroys their lives. The stipulations of Islam are too strong to allow Ramatoulaye to walk out. It never bothers to shoulder the responsibility of bringing up the twelve neglected children. She is left alone and she struggles to bring them up. The

elder ones who are at the age of Binetou are mentally very much upset. The eldest daughter Daba is furious as her pride is wounded. She repeats all the nicknames Binetou has given her father when they are together: "old man, pot-belly, sugar-daddy" (39). She insists her mother to send him out: "Break with him, mother! Send this man away. He has respected neither you nor me. Do what Aunty Aissatou did: break with him. Tell me you'll break with him. I can't see you fighting over a man with a girl of my age" (39). It is pertinent to quote here what Farah Udegbunam has remarked. She has said: "the treatment of Third World women did fascinate me, and being a Muslim woman myself, I wanted to get a feel of what Muslim women of other cultures had to endure."

Another impact in the polygamous home can be seen as issues leading to competition for resources among wives. Maintaining a polygamous family is not an easy affair. The male has to feed many wives and many children; put them in the best schools and satisfy all their needs. The paradox, however, is education does not help them to accommodate to the existing situation. The women come to realise the hard and harsh realities of polygamy and hence they want to give some sort of awareness to the African society so that they may live independently eschewing their husbands. In their younger days men regard educated women as: "scatter-brained. . . . and many wanted to possess us" (15). The women knowing the conduct of men become bold and learn to succeed in their life. Ramatoulaye keeps the basic foodstuff at home, pays electric bills and water rates, and for security sake she replaces the locks and latches of broken doors and windows. She goes to cinema all alone in order to get relieved from her mental conflicts. She leads an independent life without taking up any initiative for any break. She faces the situation bravely: "I carried out my duties; they filled the time and channeled my thoughts. . . . My love for my children sustained me. They were a pillar; I owed them help and affection" (53).

Like Ramatoulaye, Aissatou also refuses to condone her husband Mawdo Ba's action of taking a second wife. He marries his mother's choice who just to take revenge upon Aissatou arranges their marriage. He, also like Modou, forgets the love and time (twenty five years) she has spent with him as his wedded wife. He does not drive her away. He does his duty and wants her to stay on in the same house with him and the co-wife. However she wishes to make a break with him because of the inward conflicts created by his changed attitude. She divorces him and seeks power in her own right. With her four sons she leaves for America leaving everything aside. In the States she works for the Senegalese Embassy, overseeing her sons' education, and proves the worth of her independence. The author is hypercritical of the African Muslim society and culture which deprive women and children of all their due rights and values. In the novella, 'woman is against woman'. The cause for all the sufferings faced by Aissatou is her mother-in-law who is venomous to the core. Aissatou has always been defiant and she believes correctly that her sons can only be strengthened by her resolve. Education has given both the women under study an awareness not to get themselves entangled in the mire and dust created by their husbands who prefer to have young wives.

Another psychological impact caused by polygamy is depression which comes due to ill-treatment and ill-feelings. In the beginning Ramatoulaye finds it hard to accept her husband's absence in the house. She does not find suitable accommodation in the same house living with Modou and his "new-found joy". She is confused and she wonders why she and her children are put to shame and loneliness.

> I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage. I loved my house. . . . I anticipated his slightest desire. . . . I made peace with his family. . . My children too grew up without much ado. Their success at school was my pride. . . . In a word, a man's success depends on feminine support. . . .

> Why did Modou detach himself? Why did he put Binetou between us? . . . Despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth. Aissatou, I cry for Modou, and I can do nothing about it. (56)

She is rudely shocked by her husband's negative attitude although she has lived with him for thirty long years. He has betrayed her for a girl of his daughter's age. All her musings to find the reason or reasons for his betrayal bring no proper answer and peace of mind. She ruminates:

> Was it madness, weakness, irresistible love? What inner confusion led Modou fall to marry Binetou?
>
> To overcome my bitterness, I think of human destiny.
>
> And to think that I loved this man passionately, to think that I gave him thirty years of my life, to think that twelve times over I carried his child. The addition of a rival to my life was not enough for him. In loving someone else, he burned his past, both morally and materially. He dared to commit such an act of disavowal.
>
> And yet, what didn't he do to make me his wife! (11)

Generally, polygamous males do not pay attention to the upbringing of their children and that makes them go astray. The mother has to take care of them all alone and she comes to face all kinds of trials and tribulations. Once Ramatoulaye is surprised to see her young daughters smoking in her bedroom:

> Everything about their manner showed that they were used to it: their way of holding the cigarette between their fingers or raising it gracefully to their lips, of inhaling like connoisseurs. . . . The unexpectedness of it gave me a shock. A woman's mouth exhaling the acrid smell of tobacco instead of

> being fragrant. A woman's teeth blackened with tobacco instead of sparkling with whiteness. . . . Did they also drink? Who knows, one vice leads to another. (76-77)

On another occasion while she is on her knees to have her evening prayers, her sons arrive in tears saying that they have met with an accident. They are in a pitiable state--clothes torn, bodies covered with dust and knees bleeding beneath the shorts. Immediately they are taken to Dr. Mawdo by their sister for treatment. Ba, incidentally points out that the upkeep and education of young children pose serious problems to the neglected women as they face "the nearly daily battle against sores, colds, headaches" (75). Finally, the mother's heart breaks when she finds her daughter is three months pregnant. The same daughter, who has calmed down the mother's nerves when she was torn with sorrow, has now indulged herself in a more dangerous game.

According to Ba, polygamy has a negative impact on children. The husband rejoicing in the lull of a young wife forgets his duties to the children. Modou and Binetou are at the heights of happiness as they have now nothing to do with the children. They go to nightclubs wearing long, costly garments and a gold belt. They dance until they become tired and do not care for the people who make sarcastic comments on their behaviour. Sometimes Daba and her lover too go to the nightclubs and they sit in front of the father: "It was a grotesque confrontation: on one side, an ill-assorted couple, on the other two well-matched people" (50).

Another impact of polygamy which Ba experienced in her own life is that the polygamous husbands do not extend their wealth to the first wife and her children. But they lose all their wealth and happiness in order to satisfy their young wives. They reject their first wife and children and it appears to the wife that she is being simply rejected for no good reason. Mawdo and Modou grow highly successful.

Mawdo is a heavily sought after surgeon and Modou is a social promoter and an ideologue for union workers. Modou occupies a high position and is promoted to the rank of a Technical Advisor in the Ministry of Public Works, but he dies "without a penny saved" (9). He abandons his first family and lives with his "new found happiness" (46). Binetou who wants him to lavish on her every luxury she needs and her demands go higher and higher everyday. As a result "Modou exhausted himself trying to provide" (48). The complete lifestyle of Binetou's mother "the Lady Mother-in-Law" also changes because money inflows from her son-in-law. While his school-going children get themselves stifled and smothered in the crowded buses, Modou's new wife and Lady Mother-in-Law drive along the roads and visit all the four corners of the town in their own cars. The children know the predicament of their mother and once the eldest daughter, Daba, advises the younger children: "Above all, don't let mum know that it is stifling in those buses during the rush hours" (53). The mother hearing her words sheds tears of joy and sadness together—joy in being loved by her children and sadness for not being able to change the course of events. Hearing the destiny of her friend, Aissatou buys for her a Fiat 125 by paying the full amount. Friendship does wonders that love knows not.

Ba feels that males many a time think that polygamy does not adversely affect the family. They often forget that they are responsible for the family's welfare and have to provide the children all the care and support they need. Tamsir, Modou's brother marries three times and his income can neither meet his wives' needs nor his children's. After the fortieth day of Modou's death, he seeks to have liaison with Ramatoulaye. She rejects him saying: "I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you" (58). She points out to him his financial obligations: "one of your wives dyes, another sells

fruit, the third untiringly turns the handle of her sewing machine" (58).

Like Tamsir, Modou also changes his character impulsively. He completely forgets his role in the family when he comes into contact with a young girl. He betrays his wife by habitually slipping out of the house. Ramatoulaye broods over the past:

> I thought of his absence, all day long. He had simply said: 'Don't expect me for lunch.' I thought of other absences, quite frequent these days . . . under the guise of Trade Union meetings. He was also on a strict diet, 'to break the stomach's egg,' . . . Every night when he went out he would unfold and try on several of his suits before settling on one. The others, impatiently rejected, would slip to the floor. I would have to fold them again and put them back in their places: and this extra work, I discovered, I was doing only to help him in his effort to be elegant in his seduction of another woman. (38)

By narrating some of the incidents and situations faced by the husband, wife and children in a polygamous family, the author warns her society that the role of a co-wife will finally end pathetically one day or other. In due course, Daba and her husband buy all the property lost by Modou from Binetou's hands:

> The jewels and presents given to Lady Mother-in-Law and her daughter were theirs by right. . . . She was being stripped, and she asked for mercy. She did not want to move out. . . . Daba is like all the young, without pity. . . . Remember. For five years you deprived my mother and her twelve children of their breadwinner. Remember. My mother has suffered a great deal. You deserve no pity. Pack up. (71)

Binetou and her mother are thrown into the streets for their deeds. Ramatoulaye controls her passions and feelings and

patiently waits till her children grow up. And at the end the reward comes when she gets back all her lost happiness.While fictionally rendering her own bitter experiences in polygamous situations, the author convincingly proves that polygamy is dangerous not only to the women concerned but also to the children and to the entire society, whether Islamic or not.

Though the present paper has taken up the study of the impact of polygamy on the author, it certainly has many of the feminist perceptions which readers encounter in feminist and post-feminist novels. The important feminist traits are betrayal and male chauvinism exhibited by the dominant husbands. As in most of the feminist novels, Ba suggests some of the ways possible for the suffering women for their escape. She says that women must, first and foremost, educate themselves and the children. A search for independence in all matters regardless of what the husband may say is a must for their survival. She also suggests that the women can separate themselves from the oppressive husbands by seeking "pastures anew" in alien countries. According to Ba, friendship and proper relationship with neighbours and children can also alleviate miseries and sufferings. The difference, however, is that as in many of the early feminist novels, Ba does not take up for discussion the oppressed women's submissiveness to the patriarchal male authority.

Another major issue that strikes the minds of the readers while reading the novella is that it has some of the potential characteristics of a post-feminist novel. In a post-feminist novel, women do not bother much about the suppressed role they have to play. They are more concerned with maintaining tolerance and adjustment when crises arise and they do worry about their own duties to their husbands and children. When carefully read, the novella does not offer chances for considering its women characters as "Post Modern Titanic Women", as feminist-theorist Anita Myles propounds. Ba's female protagonists do not in any way

shatter "the myth of phallocentric superiority" by "a pattern of matrilineal creativity" (122). Again, Ba does not advocate that the polygamous male should be eliminated.

Ba's novella has the unique feature of depicting the most deeply felt sorrowful predicament of the females in African Islamic societies. Ba herself has felt these to the highest possible degree and she conveys through her characters that education and the consequent independence it brings are essential for the victimized women to escape from all kinds of unpleasant situations which try to deprive them of the rights they want to enjoy in the company of their wedded husbands. The novella has, undoubtedly, many literary qualities that make it highly readable and relished. One can never forget its simple language and the presentation and articulation of the sufferings of women in a social milieu dominated by males who enjoy and try to preserve their traditional, conventional and religiously sanctioned values.

WORKS CITED

Ahmed, Leila. "Historical Roots of a Modern Debate." *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale UP. 1-24. 1992. Print.

Ba, Mariama. *So Long a Letter*. London: Heinemann, 1981. Print.

"Polygamy." *New Oxford American Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 2010. Print.

Udegbunam, Farah. Rev. of *So Long a Letter*, by Mariama Ba. Jan. 11, 2012. <www.is.wayne.edu>. Web.

Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Women's Perspective*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

Interview with **Alain Porte**
translator of the *Pañcatantra* into French

Anto Thomas Chakramakkil
[with the help of Virginie Douglas, July 2013]

ANTO THOMAS CHAKRAMAKKIL. Evidently, you are not the first translator of the *Pañcatantra* into French. Maridas Poullé, in the 18th century, is now considered as the premier translator. Abbot Jean-Antoine Dubois accomplished the translation in 1826. Édouard Lancereau also translated this work in 1872. Apart from them, there are abridged versions by Martine Delattre and Marguerite Faure-Alpe. What prompted you to accomplish yet another translation?

ALAIN PORTE. Several reasons prompted me to embark on a new translation of the *Pañcatantra*. When I started studying Sanskrit in Aix-en-Provence in 1964 with Jean Varenne, I discovered some excerpts from the *Pañcatantra* in the collection that he was to publish in 1966 at Éditions Ophrys under the title *Textes sanskrits*. Moreover, in 1974, Jean Biès published a major work at Éditions Klincksieck, entitled *Littérature française et pensée hindoue, des origines à 1950* [French literature and Hindu thinking from the origins to 1950], in which he identifies the 12 fables by Jean de La Fontaine that originated in the *Pañcatantra*. In the preface to his second collection of fables (1678), La Fontaine acknowledges everything he is indebted for to "Pilpay, a wise Indian" (Pilpay seems to be a distortion from the Sanskrit "*Vidyâpati*"—the Master of Knowledge). Finally, as time went by, Édouard Lancereau's translation, which dated back to 1871, was republished in 1965 by Louis Renou, a scholar

specializing in Indian studies, in the series "Connaissance de l'Orient, NRF", at Éditions Gallimard. It is generally admitted that source texts never age, while such is not the case for translations, which are dependent on the fluctuating status of language. For the translation of these texts I chose to liberate myself as much as possible from over-demanding scientific accuracy, which tends to overlook the literary tastiness of a text.

ATC. What do you think is making your translation unique from other attempts?

AP. When I translated the *Pañcatantra*, I mainly had to deal with the Sanskrit language. You often have to listen to the implicit meaning of words. And a dictionary—even Monier Williams's—cannot be used as a lexicographic ready-to-wear clothing store! The contexts are so multifaceted that you are compelled to use innovation, imagination and invention. The dimension I chose to enhance in the *Pañcatantra* is that of the "human comedy". All the same, I am not sure whether this makes my translation unique! I simply translated the text as I felt I should, carefully examining the structure of the Sanskrit language and trying to follow the architecture of the sentences and the order in which the words occur as closely as possible.

ATC. How do you assess the other two prominent translations by Dubois and Lancereau?

AP. To tell the truth, I haven't consulted Abbot Dubois's translation. I have already mentioned É. Lancereau's, and I can only repeat that although it is accurate, it does not seem lively, colourful and rhythmical enough: on the whole, it is faithful and unimaginative, and yet it remains very useful.

ATC. How are you indebted to your predecessors in translating this work and what do you think is the key factor in your work that may influence your successors in translation?

AP. My approach to translation did not aim to compete with or to "do better" than anyone. And I have had no such ambition as that of producing a definitive translation. I enjoyed giving life to a host of characters, whether men or animals, and I did so with my taste for the French language, and with the purpose, at the back of my mind, of giving the impression that the *Pañcatantra* might have been written directly in French…

ATC. Your title is striking: *The Five Books of Wisdom*. It suggests the quintessence of *Pañcatantra*. Can you comment briefly on it?

AP. It is said—rightfully, I think—that the *Pañcatantra* is based on a learned treatise on public affairs—the "Arthashâstra". It consists in life lessons. Using "Les Cinq Livres de la Sagesse" as a subtitle came naturally.

ATC. Abbot Jean-Antoine Dubois claims in his introduction that he referred to the Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada versions of the tales. I think Lancereau translated from the Sanskrit text. You, too, know Sanskrit. Do your translations have a different source text?

AP. I used Kale's good Sanskrit edition, which provides interesting notes.

ATC. Your translation was published by Philippe Picquier. What reception have the French reading public shown to your work? Who are the other leading publishers that have encouraged translating these tales?

AP. Frankly I know nothing of the readers' reception of this translation. The first edition is out of print. The *Pañcatantra* was published again as a paperback in April 2012. In a small private theatre, we have often given multi-voiced readings from the tales. These readings captivated the audience, and many spectators wished to acquire the book published by Picquier. I don't know whether other publishers have required other

translations, but I don't think so. It is something unusual. Few people master Sanskrit.

ATC. Many of the French versions of these tales are meant for serious adult reading. I think you also made some abridged versions meant primarily for child-readers. How have French children responded to them? Are contemporary French children familiar with these tales?

AP. I'm afraid this is a false question…There is no difference of consciousness between adults and children. The only hindrance is obviously the complexity of the language that is used and the child's degree of knowledge of the vocabulary. But—admittedly, I'm being paradoxical—I am now working on a shortened version of Book 4 (*Labdhapranâsha*), illustrated by graphic designer Karen Sheckler-Wilson. We have a first draft, which has been shown to several publishers, but most of the time we only get such hypocritical excuses for rejection as "This work does not match our editorial line". But we are not discouraged.

ATC. As a researcher in children's literature I am interested to know if there are French versions of these tales as picture books or comic books.

AP. I am not very familiar with this field, but what I was able to consult seemed to me disappointing, rather patronizing, if you see what I mean. At any rate the text felt as if it were no more than a simplified paraphrase of the original. I also think that those French texts are derived from English versions which have been adapted in a more or less satisfactory way.

ATC. Do you think that the translations of the *Pañcatantra* into French have also influenced the construction and dissemination of the image of India from the colonial era to the present?

AP. I have no idea about this. But these tales are part of high-brow culture and are aimed at a well-read readership. I think that India is rather perceived through

Bollywood movies, the metal industry (Mittal), diamonds (Surat in Gujarat), yoga of course, spirituality (mainly used in a commercial way)—and the image of a newly-emerging power with considerable growth rates!! In other words, through mere stereotypes.

ATC. Arthur W. Ryder, the English translator and prominent scholar in *Pañcatantra* asserts that the *Pañcatantra* is the best collection of stories in the world and has had an all pervasive influence in western literature. According to you, to what extent is French literature influenced by this work?

AP. Unfortunately I don't know Arthur W. Ryder… But to state that "the *Pañcatantra* is the best collection of stories in the world" may be over-exaggerated, or too general, and actually does not teach us anything about the deeper message these tales convey, a message which, in my view, is based on an all-encompassing vision of life, which transcends all philosophical and ideological manipulations: going beyond the conditionings of the birth that thrust us into duality. I cannot see any particular influence on French literature, but I am far from knowing everything…

ATC. La Fontaine popularized the tales in France through his *Fables*. He has internalized the tales into French culture without attempting a translation. Perhaps, one of the most acute hindrances to the French readers is the constant presence of Indian names and Hindu cultural signposts in the translated text. Are there any abridged editions that narrate the stories omitting these difficult names and cultural signposts?

AP. That is a very true remark. This problem is one you are always faced with. To take a very simple example, in Book 4 of the *Pañcatantra*, the Monkey's name is from the Sanskrit: *Raktamukha*. I translated it by *Face Rouge* [Red face]. I did the same for many other names, in order not to hinder the reading. But many terms remain untranslatable, so they are transcribed without alteration.

In a text like the Bhagavad Gîtâ, which I translated and which I'm still working on, you can imagine the difficulties one meets with, with such a word as "*âtman*"! And when Krishna drones out « *Âditya, Vasu, rudra, ashvin, marut* », etc. …, one has to keep the original Sanskrit term.

ATC. Do you think you know India better after your translations, especially the *Pañcatantra*?

AP. All I can say is that one's knowledge of the spirit of India grows as a result of translating these texts, in the sense of a particular way of READING the world, of perceiving life. Besides, one realizes that the Sanskrit in these tales is brimming with the whole Indian culture: Upanishads, Gîtâ, Mahâbhârata, etc. …

ATC. What were the major hazards you experienced while you were in the process of translating this text? According to you, what has your text gained or lost in the process of being translated? Did you find it extremely difficult to translate some peculiar cultural aspects into French?

AP. This translation was a sort of "dramatization" of a world into a foreign language. But nothing felt really difficult. There are of course some cultural features which are unknown to French civilization, but more than once, I was surprised to find out that for some dialogue lines or *shloka*, the French equivalent seemed to come of its own accord, as if the Sanskrit text were contemporary, as if feelings knew nothing of the passage of time or as if human nature in the past were the same as in the present.

ATC. Apart from translating *The Five Books of Wisdom*, you have translated the Bhagavad Gîtâ and quite a few contemporary works. Can you say something in general about these missions? Can we not consider these translations as available opportunities for French readers to encounter India?

AP. This is a rather complex question—which would deserve a long answer. I would only like to say that the outreach of a work (I am thinking of the Bhagavad Gîtâ, which is dearer to me than anything else, particularly Rig-Veda, Book 10, hymn 129, a sublime poem…) emancipates itself from its place of origin, speaking a universal language. Ananda Coomaraswamy, an outstanding Indian thinker and writer, had understood this clearly and was the author of a short, essential work about Hinduism and Buddhism. Besides, Anjana Appachana's short stories, which I translated for Éditions Zulma under the title *Mes Seuls Dieux* [My only gods], show particularly well to what extent Indian society (in the 1980s and 90s) is still subject to traditional attitudes that weigh on the conscience and lives of the natives of Bharata… (but this is not limited to India, every culture can go through convulsions).

ATC. You must definitely have been in India. What is your impression about contemporary India?

AP. It seems commonplace to stress the Indians' kindness and open-mindedness: all this is true indeed, but one is appalled in front of the increasing VIOLENCE while India used to be regarded as the home of non-violence (*Ahimsâ*). In a novel, *Fireproof*, which I translated for the Éditions Actes Sud under the title *Et les morts nous abandonnent* [And the dead are leaving us], Raj Kamal Jha told the atrocities committed in Gujarat in 2002 (Hindus burnt to death in a train and the ensuing bloody repression against Muslims).

ATC. The French scholars were one of the pioneers in learning about India, the Sanskrit language and literature. The title *Pañcatantra* was first used in French, although the content of the stories was known in Germany and England much earlier. It is a fact that scholarship in these topics is predominantly in German and in English. What do you think prevented the French scholars from further

taking interest in Indian religion, philosophy and literature?

AP. This is a complex question! The *Pañcatantra* became known in France in 1648 thanks to François Gaulmin, whose pen-name was David Sahib, and there was a long tradition of travellers and explorers, like François Bernier, under King Louis XIV! And there is a whole list of eminent scholars specialized in Indian studies in France, such as Louis Renou or Madeleine Biardeau, or Michel Hulin as well, nowadays. This would require a thorough historical investigation!

ATC. Let me conclude this dialogue with one final question: the greatest threat every modern democratic nation faces today from within and outside is increasing misunderstanding and lack of healthy relationships with each other. Don't you think a reading of the *Pañcatantra* will help everyone to a better living?

AP. Do you think that art, in all its forms, was ever able to quench peoples' thirst for power, wealth or domination? Art has never been a political tool or a weapon of war. Its inner nature lies in freedom, disinterested creation. It is completely at odds with any ideologies. Official art is irrevocably perverted.

Note

Anto Thomas Chakramakkil (Associate Professor, Department of English, St. Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala, India) received the UGC/FMSH Indo-French Cultural Exchange Fellowship of 2013-14. Dr. Virginie Douglas (Agrégée d'anglais and Maître de conférences at the Département d'études anglophones of the Université de Rouen, France) supervised his research stay in France in May 2013. As a part of this research project, entitled "Cultural Diplomacy: A Historiography of Re-translating *Pañcatantra* Tales in France", Anto Thomas Chakramakkil conducted an interview with Alain Porte, a Sanskrit scholar and translator of the *Pañcatantra* into French for publisher Philippe Picquier (2000), with the assistance of Virginie. The fiscal assistances of Fondation de la Maison de Science de l'Homme and the University Grants Commission of India are acknowledged with due gratitude.

Celebrating 200th Year of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

Keerthy Sophiya Ponnachan

This year is the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen which continues to hold sway over the collective imagination of literature enthusiasts across the world. Inarguably it has the most famous opening line of any novel from the nineteenth century.

> *"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."*

This famous first line from the novel is loaded with multiple meanings and beautifully sets the theme and ironic tone of the novel. It is indeed a truth universally acknowledged that *Pride and Prejudice* is a phenomenon! Exalted by scholars and embraced by the masses, *Pride and Prejudice* is indeed a literary treasure for everyman. It is probably one of the very few novels that has had its plot subtly and overtly transformed into the stuff of hundreds of romance novels and movies. The classic plot line where boy meets girl resulting in a war of words and wit with an undercurrent of sexual tension and a final resolution of misunderstandings, leading to a 'happily ever after', is perhaps best exemplified in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Jane Austen is the English novelist generally credited with first giving the novel its modern character through her treatment of the details of everyday life in provincial English middle-class society. She was born on December 16, 1775 at the parsonage of Steventon, in Hampshire, a village in which her father was rector. She was the youngest of seven children. In 1801, the family moved to Bath, where they

lived until 1805 when, upon the death of her father, the family moved first to Southampton and then to Chawton in 1809. It was in Chawton that her major works were composed, although she had begun as a child to write for family amusement.

But Jane Austen's best-known and viewed by the author as her "own darling child" wasn't an immediate hit. Being a woman and a debutant writer, Austen suffered her own share of tribulation to get the novel published. She completed the manuscript of the novel when she was merely 19 years old. In 1797, at the age of 21, she approached a London publisher Thomas Cadell and Davies, the prominent publisher of her day, to get the novel published under the title *First Impression*. The publishers rejected it. Years later, in 1813, Egerton's Military Library, which had hitherto published only military history, published the revised novel under the title *Pride and Prejudice*. It is believed that the title of the book is taken from a passage in Fanny Burney's popular 1782 novel *Cecilia*.

Pride and Prejudice was popular with Victorian readers. Unaware how popular her novel would become, Austen decided to sell the copyright of the work to Whitehall publisher Thomas Egerton. She asked for £150 but eventually settled for £110. According to estimates, Egerton later made about £450 from just the first two editions of *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel would go on to sell more than 20 million copies worldwide and inspire hundreds of literary, film, television, and theatre adaptations. If Jane Austen had had copyright her estate would today be worth billions. In 1894, George Allan and Co. of London published a lavish edition with more than 100 illustrations by Hugh Thompson. It's now known colloquially as the "peacock edition" for its cover.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was published as her second book. In her first published novel *Sense and Sensibility* the author is referred to as "A Lady" and in *Pride*

and Prejudice, the author is referred to as "Author of *Sense and Sensibility*". Though women often wrote under pen names at the time, Austen was adamantly determined to keep her identity hidden because she disliked attention and notoriety. In her lifetime she completed six novels, including *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, Mansfield Park, Emma,* and *Persuasion*. Four of them were published before her death.

Jane Austen's identity was revealed to the general public only after her death on July 18, 1817 at the age of 41. Austen was buried in Winchester Cathedral alongside bishops and kings. On her gravestone, there was no mention of her books. By 1869 Austen's books were fading into obscurity when her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh published the biography *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. The book was based on interviews with relatives and Austen's surviving correspondence, and created a portrait of "Dear Aunt Jane" that captured the public's imagination. Austen's works were propelled back into the hands and hearts of readers, and have never left.

Pride and Prejudice is a simple love story. The story follows the main character Elizabeth Bennet as she deals with issues of manners, upbringing, morality, education, and marriage in the society of the landed gentry of early 19th-century England. Elizabeth is the second of five daughters of a country gentleman living near the fictional town of Meryton in Hertfordshire, near London. At the Netherfield party Mr. Darcy makes an unpleasant observation about Elizabeth and thus she is prejudiced against him. They were not able to understand each other. This lack of understanding and ego separated them. After a chain of events Elizabeth and Darcy united.

Though the novel was generally well-received, garnering favourable reviews with noted critic George Henry Lewes and even the future wife of Lord Byron, who called it "the fashionable novel," not everyone loved *Pride and Prejudice*. In a letter to Lewes, Charlotte Bronte called

the novel "a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but... no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck." Even Austen herself dismissed the novel as "rather too light, and bright, and sparkling."

The enduring appeal of the novel lies in the fact that it has something for all categories of readers. On the most superficial level, it is a humorous and entertaining 'Mills and Boonish' account of a witty woman who brings down an arrogant aristocrat with love. A more intellectually incisive reading brings out a sharply nuanced portrayal of the cultural demography of rural English society and the attitude towards the institution of marriage. Be it Mr.and Mrs. Bennet's marital monotony, Charlotte's and Collins' "marriage for convenience," Lydia's and Wickham's scandalous elopement, Jane's and Bingley's conventional marriage or Elizabeth's and Darcy's passionate and romantic relationship, Austen gives the readers slices of multi-hued perceptions.

Feminist writers see the novel as a commentary on the mandatory male-dependency of women. Marrying a financially secure man is often a woman's only chance to attain economic and social stability. Since the late 1970's, Austen's writings have been seriously analysed in the context of feminism. In fact, many academicians consider her a proto-feminist.

Today Jane Austen is literally a global brand with her works, especially *Pride and Prejudice* being adapted into different media. Also, fan clubs all over the world actively discuss and react to her work. Fan fiction, most of which are spin-offs of *Pride and Prejudice*, attempt to look at the novel from the perspective of different characters and are generally postmodern in nature.

Jane Austen is the last exquisite blossoms of the eighteenth century. She is essentially classical in spirit as well as in form, though she was born in the age of Wordsworth

and Scott. She shares unquestionably the dominant qualities of the classical age.

Famous adaptations include BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* television series (1995) and Joe Wright's critically acclaimed *Pride and Prejudice* movie (2005). Rosamund Pike and Simon Wood played Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley in the 2005 movie version. Gurindher Chaddha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) celebrates the story in true Bollywood style. P.D. James *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011) is a murder mystery. It catapults Elizabeth and Darcy, now a married couple. Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and the Zombies* combine the novel with zombie fiction. Other inspired works include *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a serial told in the form of video blogs. It is an entire YouTube series surrounding this book set in today's day and age.

As the world celebrates the 200th anniversary of this iconic novel, one is awed by the plethora of literary reactions and devoted fan culture that *Pride and Prejudice* has spawned over the years. Hence it can be concluded that this novel bears the mark of a true classic—a story that has stood the test of time and still remains accessible, relevant and interesting to the masses.

List of Contributors

Maya N. Menon is a Guest Lecturer in English at St.Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Priya K. took her master's degree in English from the University of Calicut and has worked at Little Flower College, Guruvayur, Thrissur, Kerala.

Susan Joshi is an Assistant Professor of English at St.Aloysius College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Sandeep T. G. is an Assistant Professor of English at Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Uma Parvathy V. is an Assistant Professor of English at Sri Vyasa N.S.S. College, Wadakkanchery, Thrissur, Kerala.

Dr. Judith Sophia L. is an Assistant Professor of English at Scott Christian College, Nagercoil, Tamilnadu.

Dr. Sanil Raj J. is an Assistant Professor of English at St.Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Dr. Betsy Paul C. is an Associate Professor of English at St.Aloysius College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Sindhu Padmavathy is an FIP substitute in the department of English at S.D. College, Alappuzha, Kerala.

Dr. Preetha M. M. is an Associate Professor of English at Sree Kerala Varma College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Dr. A. Linda Primlyn is an Assistant Professor of English at Scott Christian College, Nagercoil, Tamilnadu.

Dr. Anto Thomas Chakramakkil is an Associate Professor of English at St. Thomas' College, Thrissur, Kerala.

Keerthy Sophiya Ponnachan is a Guest Lecturer in English at St. Mary's College, Thrissur, Kerala

CONSPECTUS

CONSPECTUS is an international peer-reviewed academic journal which provides a forum for the discussion of various issues related to literature, cultures and societies and invites contributions from the disciplines of literature, literary/art criticism, language, cultural studies, semiotics, gender studies, film, media and communication arts, and contemporary critical theory. This periodical approaches problems in these fields from a number of politically, historically, and theoretically informed perspectives. The journal publishes original research articles concerned with the above areas, as well as a variety of creative forms of writing, while its interview/event/review section offers an analysis of related recent literature and a commentary on relevant cultural events.

Information for Contributors

Conspectus invites papers on literature, language, literary criticism, film & media, theatre & performing arts, cultures & societies, gender, race & ethnicity, popular culture, semiotics, critical theory and any other forms of cultural expression. The journal also seeks to publish short pieces of creative writing, as well as reviews, event reports and interviews.

Complete manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor, both in electronic form and in a hard-copy (if possible). Full-length articles (approx. 5000 words) should be formatted in accordance with the MLA-based journal stylesheet.

Please contact the Editor should you wish to contribute to any other section of the journal.

Contact Details:

The Editor
Conspectus
Research Centre & PG Dept. of English
St Thomas College, Thrissur, Kerala – 680 001, India
E-mail: <conspectus13@gmail.com>