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Bollywood *Masala* movies and Indian Society: A Narrative of Changing Times

—Anamika Chakraborty

Abstract: When it comes to cinema, Indian society has a curious convergence of life and art that makes it difficult to distinguish one from the other and equally difficult to say if art imitates life or life imitates art. Social and moral values, political philosophies and affiliations, the culture of food, dress and language, religion, class, caste are all reflected in cinema in their various aspects which, like a mirror, is reflected back in the society. A major reason for this merging is that a number of famous and popular film stars cross over from the fantasy world of films into politics and often turn out to be powerful and eminent political figures who guide the destiny of the masses. Thus, it appears natural to view Bollywood movies, considered as the main film industry of the country; the others being termed as 'regional' industries, as a metaphor of the Indian society and its politics.

This paper is an attempt at understanding how Indians perceive themselves in terms of the social, cultural, ethnic values and behaviours with respect to the films made in Bollywood and also how these films narrate the cultural aspects of society. While delineating the above, this paper shall also seek to explore how the changing nature of popular Hindi cinema has reflected the change in the ethos, dreams and dilemmas of Indian society. Indian cinema as a whole is a very broad canvas not restricting itself to any particular locale, language, genre or theme, which is not possible to bring under the purview of a single article. This paper shall restrict its focus on popular Bollywood movies that are commercially viable and are termed as *masala* movies or *hit* films.

Keywords: Bollywood, Metaphor, *Masala* movies, Popular culture, Hit films.

When it comes to cinema, Indian society has a curious convergence of life and art, and the real and the magical which makes it difficult to distinguish one from the other

and equally difficult to say if art imitates life or life imitates art. It is a make-believe world that the masses want to believe in; thus most of the *masala* movies ensure a happy ending. Social and moral values, political philosophies and affiliations, the culture of food, dress and language, religion, class, caste are all reflected in cinema in their various aspects which, like a mirror, is reflected back in the society. A major reason for this merging is that a number of famous and popular film stars cross over from the fantasy world of films into politics and often turn out to be powerful and eminent political figures who guide the destiny of the masses. Starting from Dilip Kumar and Nargis, to Sunil Dutt, and later from Amitabh Bachchan, Rajesh Khanna, Vinod Khanna, Raj Babbar to Hema Malini and Jaya Prada—all had made a crossover from Bollywood to politics. In South India too superstars like N.T. Rama Rao, M. G. Ramachandran and Jayalalitha made the crossover from the fantasy world to the field of politics. Thus, it becomes conceivable to view Bollywood movies, considered as the main film industry of the country, as a metaphor of the Indian society and its politics, though the film industries of the South and that of Bengal compete closely. In fact, half the cinemas of India are made in the South, but they are still termed as 'regional' industries.

This paper is an attempt at understanding how Indians perceive themselves in terms of the social, cultural, ethnic values and behaviours with respect to the films made in Bollywood and also how these films narrate the cultural aspects of society. While delineating the above, this paper shall also seek to explore how the changing nature of popular Hindi cinema has reflected the change in the ethos, dreams and dilemmas of the Indian society. Indian cinema as a whole is a very broad canvas not restricting itself to any particular locale, language, genre or theme,

which is not possible to bring under the purview of a single article. For this purpose, the issues have been kept simple with broad perspectives as otherwise the pluralistic society of India, with its complex and hybrid customs, different religions, race and languages shall overwhelm the scope of the analysis. Therefore this paper shall restrict its focus on popular Bollywood movies that are commercially viable and are termed as *masala* movies or *hit* films. *Masala* is a hindi word which means spices, an assorted combination of which makes Indian cuisine more palatable and tasty. Typically these films have a mix of action, romance, comedy, song and dance sequences, melodrama and exotic locales that make the movies a concoction of pure entertainment.

There are some major factors that have made Bombay, or modern-day Mumbai, the centre of gravity for the Indian film industry, commonly referred to as 'Bollywood', a portmanteau derived from 'Bombay' and 'Hollywood'. Bombay, as a modern port, attained not only significant European influences, but also developed into one of the most important business centres. People from all over the country came to this place in search of livelihood and better prospects, thus making it a major metropolitan city. Moreover, Bombay had been fairly neutral in its religious passion with all classes and religions living in relative harmony. Other than films, English drama as well as poetry also flourished in this state from a long time, resulting in an amalgamation of the Western and the Indian ideas, thoughts and beliefs. Another point to note is the language of the Hindi movies which is primarily a mix of Hindi and Urdu. To sum up, Bombay had a curious mix of ideas, beliefs, cultures and languages of the East and the West, with the ancient Indian mythical stories of gods,

goddesses, demons and spirits alongside the contemporaneity of the West.

Bollywood began its journey with the 1913 silent movie, *Raja Harishchandra* by Dadasaheb Phalke, and has since carved a long path for itself through the changing Indian society, its life and times. From its inception Hindi/ Bollywood films have been majorly hero-centric, barring a few exceptions here and there. The typical heterosexual male hero has been the central character around whom the script of any film is developed. In this paper, we shall begin with the post-independence movies of the so-called 'triumvirate'– Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor and Dev Anand, and the likes of Manoj Kumar and Rajendra Kumar from a few years later. The post-independence films were influenced by the thoughts and ideals of Nehru, who himself was a cult-figure and under whose patronage the film industry basked. Nehru was often seen attending film-award ceremonies and the stars were frequently photographed with him.

So, in the early years of its inception, commercial Hindi cinema used the ideas and values of Nehru through the character of the film's hero. Characters of popular heroes like Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, and Dev Anand talked about ushering in a new era, a new light (*naya zamana, nai roshni*); spoke of love, peace, duty, and love for the motherland and raised their voices against oppression (*zulm*) and wrong-doing. While Mukesh lent his voice to the Raj Kapoor starrer, *Jis desh mein Ganga beheti hain*, Manoj Kumar came to fame with his patriotic films like *Purab aur Paschim*, *Upkar* or *Roti, Kapda aur Makaan*. The films were usually longer and their themes and songs distinctly echoed the political mindset of the country at that post-independence era—to live in peace and harmony (as India had recently undergone a bloody

partition), to love the motherland and not consider to be inferior to any western nation—as India began to take its first steps towards a new age with its hard-earned freedom. It also called to lay emphasis on nation-building by consolidating the three basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. But whatever the theme and focus of the movie, one thing came across loud and clear in almost every film—the message of love and tolerance.

If non- violence and universal brotherhood were a part of Gandhian philosophy, the concept of romantic idealism came from Nehru. This message of love, tolerance and brotherhood was important in an India demarcated with class, religious differences and also the gory days during and after partition. Cinema, as the most important form of entertainment, became a metaphor of our society which was primarily village-centric. The moving pictures, the talking figures mesmerised the masses as they saw their favourite movies again and again, learning the dialogues of their favourite heroes by heart. Immersed in that make-believe world of fantasy the common man could escape from the realities of life, the social and political discriminations, disillusionments and communal dilemmas.

Hindi films have the quintessential hero, around whom the whole narrative is built and on whose shoulders the success of the movies primarily rest. It is curious to mark how Bollywood heroes have changed with the changing political and social landscape of the country. In the earlier films, the hero embodied nobility and moral superiority, bound with innocence and simplicity. He would be thin and slim, with soulful eyes and a melancholic, often pensive face, winning people's heart with a child-like innocent smile, but one who would always be morally upright and righteous. As the film-going population mostly belonged to the villages, the hero too was often a village

young man. Thus, we see Dilip Kumar as the dhoti clad village lad in films like *Mela, Naya Daur, Daag* or *Gopi*. The hero would also embrace death both physically and metaphorically in order to uphold his moral uprightness. We find him drinking himself to death in *Devdas*, after he fails to marry his lady love, or provoking his brother to kill him in *Ganga Jamuna* or blinding himself after losing his heroine in *Deedar.* The tragic ending of his films gave Dilip Kumar the title of 'tragedy king', but made him popular at the same time because no matter how gloomy the plot was, the common masses of the Indian villages could understand and relate to the moral superiority of the hero.

If on one hand Dilip Kumar developed the image of 'tragedy king' through the choice of his plots, another pillar of the triumvirate—Raj Kapoor, under the comical façade of Charlie Chaplin, portrayed the social dilemmas of the common man; their trials and tribulations. Almost all the popular films of Raj Kapoor portrayed the dualities of truth and falsity, good and bad, moral and immoral, rich and the poor, tradition and modern, village life and city life. Films like *Aawara, Aag, Barsaat, Satyam Shivam Sundaram, Shree 420* and many of his other movies showcased these dualities. Beyond being the central figures with pretty faces, the heroes adhered to particular themes with a social relevance. Raj Kapoor portrayed the common Indian, who was financially weak, tired of circumstances, but held his head high with dignity and self-respect, whose moral values once again were high. In a scene in *Shree 420* the hero (Raj Kapoor) takes the heroine (Nargis) for a cup of tea, knowing that he does not have the money. He then asks for *do anna* (two pence) from her saying that he has 100 Rs with him and the *chaiwala* (tea seller) does not have change. His sense of dignity does not allow him to expose his meagre means to others.

Whatever the theme of the film was, upholding Indian tradition, culture and moral values were of utmost importance. Westernization was shown in a negative light. Portraying physical intimacy on screen was largely avoided, which was usually symbolically shown by two birds or two flowers coming together.

Indian stars seldom changed or experimented with their styles or type of roles, once they became successful in a particular character. Sometimes they even kept their real names in their reel roles. Seeing the heroes in a particular role-type again and again, and often in their real names, the audience came to associate them with the film characters they played thus merging the reel and the real into one. As such, Dilip Kumar, who retained his name Dilip in many films became 'Dilip, the tragedian', Raj Kapoor, again keeping his name, Raj, in most of his hit films, became Raj, the comedian. Dev Anand's flamboyance, on the other hand, earned him the title, Dev, the debonair. So, naturally, Dilip Kumar would usually be clad in the village attire of a *dhoti* and *kurta*, Raj Kapoor took to the Charlie Chaplin way of dressing and Dev Anand's dressing would be that of a suave debonair.

One must notice the body language of the heroes in the movies, even a decade later in case of stars like Manoj Kumar and Rajendra Kumar. A feeling of inferiority, a kind of lack of confidence exuded in the gait and body language of the characters, as if still hovering on to the colonial hangover of being the 'colonized', of being the one in the disadvantageous space, as if still on the back foot. Thus, he stands with his shoulders drooped despite being morally upright. He preaches love, peace and brotherhood but cannot take up against the ills of society in an explicit way because he himself is socially and economically weak and has to strive for his and his family's basic needs. Struggling

to secure a foothold in the social milieu, he strives for social and financial security. The hero has to fight this personal battle first and only after that is secured can he take up and act against social injustices and discrimination.

But the political scenario of India changed significantly after the 1971 war. It was nothing like the earlier wars of 1946-47 and 1965 with Pakistan or the 1962 war with China, that reflected the muddled and indecisive role of the country helmed by Nehru and the likes. By then, Mrs. Gandhi had come to power, who dismissed the gentle, idealistic and liberal philosophy of Nehru. In the words of Akbar S. Ahmed:

> She (Indira Gandhi) would not allow smaller neighbours stepping out of line talking to her like equals (Pakistan was taught its lesson in 1971); she would not tolerate opposition at home (Emergency was proclaimed in 1975) and would not deal with minorities like pampered children (invading the Golden Temple in Amritsar to quell the Sikhs). India now acquired sophisticated tanks, ships and planes in abundance. (296)

Thus, India became the big leader of South Asia who no longer lived in fear of Pakistan or the other neighbouring countries. The results of the 1971 war had far reaching implications in every aspect of Indian society and cinema was only a reflection of that change. As the tone and pace of the new era was set, the gentle, peace-loving and honourable heroes of Bollywood movies became a thing of the past; the gentler romantic era was over. Hindi films required a new kind of hero who would be tough, physically strong and ruthless, ready to take on the society, single-handedly, if needed. Thus, was born the

'angry young man' who would not hesitate to accept violence as the order of the day.

The social and political change brought about a change in the audience's taste too, who now wanted action-packed movies. Amitabh Bachchan became a cult figure, who even surpassed the popularity of Rajesh Khanna, considered to be Bollywood's first superstar. The stupendous success of films like *Karma, Pratighat* and almost all Amitabh Bachchan movies (*Deewar, Kalia Aakhri Raasta, Zanjeer*, etc.) gave a clear indication of the change in the taste of the Hindi-film viewing masses. The audience loved the fact that the hero would be unafraid to raise his voice as well as fist against any kind of injustice and would emerge victorious at the end, no matter how formidable his enemy is. His body language was no longer that of the introverted, soft-spoken figure, but of one exuding fearlessness; a person who could single-handedly bring down a dozen villains to their knees. He was that wondrous hero who took it upon himself to reprise the poor and the oppressed. When this huge superstar made the crossover to politics there was a general perception that he would have the capacity to singlehandedly redress the grievances of the country's oppressed.

As India moved from village to town and subsequently to the city, the backdrop of the plots and the dressing of the characters changed too. One no longer saw Mithun Chakraborty or Vinod Khanna or Amitabh Bachchan as a dhoti clad village peter pan like guy. Even the nature of dialogues changed. Instead of ideas of *pyar* (love), *shanti* (peace) and *bhaichara* (brotherhood) came dialogues related to *dhanda* (business, mostly illegal), *maal* (money),and *dada* (the villain or the negative character). Even when they romance the heroine, they are shown in cars and motorbikes or near beaches or in the snow-

capped mountains. Because the success of films came to be measured by the amount of action and violence, numerous fights were included in them. This concept gave rise to multi-starrers like *Sholay* and *Kala Patthar* that had so many fight sequences throughout the film by different actors. As action and violence became the fundamental formula for a typical Bollywood *masala* movie, depiction of moral values became restricted and slowly waned in appeal. The heroes no longer had any qualms at taking out his bottle of drink at any occasion or in talking of moral judgement and righteousness.

After the initial phase of basking in glory following India's victory in the 1971 Pakistan war, materialism set in and disillusionment also grew. New consumer products, like Television, fridge, VCR etc started entering the market, which in turn increased people's needs and wants. Television and VCR became a craze as cinema entered the living rooms of people. Cinema reached more people. It became more powerful and more colourful. People were much more influenced by the way heroes and heroines dressed, their hair, the furniture, homes and cars shown in the films and followed their favourite stars' styles. Thus, we see a lot of the young generation copying Amitabh Bachchan's hairstyles. New possibilities and new avenues opened for the middle-class. Urbanization took place at a rapid pace with high-rises for the upwardly mobile class in the cities and clumsy small flats in the suburbs for the middle class.

The rise of the middle-class, their desire to assert themselves and have a good life increased which also resulted in disillusionment and despair, if one could not successfully acquire all that the modern society had to offer. Disillusionment, uncertainty, joblessness and fragmentariness also became a social reality, which can be

seen in films by actors like Anil Kapoor (*Tezaab, Woh Saat Din* or *Mashaal*), Jackie Shroff, (*Hero, Karma* or *Diljala*) and others. Films of this time depict the thwarting angst, frustration and disillusionment with the corrupt social order. The hero is restless and frustrated at the sight of red tapes in society, corruption in government, and the consistent and continuous deterioration of law and order. He is demotivated enough to stop caring about changing society because of his realization that he is powerless to change the system. Corruption is rampant at every level, with corrupt politicians further fermenting the system. Thus, we see a dishevelled and scruffy Anil Kapoor or a Jackie Shroff using expletives in the typical *tapori* (rowdy) language.

Over the years India has consolidated its stronghold upon the world stage, in various areas of politics, economy, sports, scientific progress and invention, and the film industry is not far behind. It is no longer the underdog in any respect in the international arena. In every aspect, be it politics, sports, scientific progress, education or economy, we see the emergence of a supremely confident India, Be it beating its arch-rival Pakistan in the cricket field or operation of a surgical strike, it is India that calls the shots. Two films of this new India, *Lagaan* and *Gadar-Ek Prem Katha*, both huge blockbusters released in 2001, were not only critically acclaimed, but also immensely accepted by the masses. *Lagaan* brilliantly showcases the turnaround performance, the grit and resilience of the poor villagers of a remote village in the dry and arid topography in 'the heart of India', and how they take on the eighty British when they are cornered unfairly to pay tax or *lagaan*. The film gives out the message of brotherhood, and displays the strength of unity, that can overcome any challenge. These impoverished villagers

have the guts to defeat the British in their own game of cricket. The indigenisation of cricket becomes a metaphor for the entire struggle for independence.

If *Lagaan* expresses nationalism of one kind, Sunny Deol's fist pumping blockbuster, *Gadar- ek Prem Katha* exhibits hyper-nationalism to its extreme. Set against the backdrop of India's partition, the film is a highly melodramatic and depicts the blood-soaked love story of a Sikh truck driver and his Muslim lady-love, Sakeena. The movie delineates how the hero (Sunny Deol) braves all challenges and risks to enter the enemy country illegally to bring his woman back after she is tricked into staying back in newly formed Pakistan by her aristocratic family. Both the films display the fearless Indian mindset that is ready to take on any challenge and considers no disadvantage as a stumbling block.

Keeping in line with India's modern supremacy, Bollywood too has taken long strides to become one of the biggest film industries of the world, its movies getting international releases. Hindi films are watched worldwide, its top stars gaining international fame and stardom. So many actors from India have their wax statues at Madame Tussauds. The modern suave India of multiplexes saw the advent of the Khans (Shahrukh, Aamir, Salmaan, Saif) and the Ajay Devgans and Akshay Kumars. This India, a super-power in South Asia and a force to be reckoned with in international economy and politics, belonged to the new generation—cool and confident, mostly urban and a considerable section educated in English medium schools. They came from secure backgrounds who did not have to worry about the basic needs of living and whose lives were comparatively less difficult. This generation was more balanced in their approach, with an increased number of

working women contributing to the economy of the country.

At the same time, with so many options around, this generation easily got distracted and bored, and wanted variety. Repetitive plots were not something that the new generation was interested in. Bollywood too took a balanced stance, a space that depicted both romance and action. The heroes of the movies of these films were more confident to take the plunge and raise their voice against injustice, but not always in violent ways. Gone were the days of the frugal and poverty-stricken hero, immersed in self-pity. This new brigade was less bothered with developing and retaining a particular image and was confident enough to experiment with different roles and break stereotypes.

On the one hand we see Aamir Khan choosing films having a social message (*Taare Zameen Par, Rang De Basanti, 3 Idiots, PK*) while actors like Shahrukh Khan and Hrithik Roshan have portrayed superman and super-heroes (*Ra One* and *Krish* respectively). Films like *PK* and *3 Idiots* are direct critiques on the present education system of the country and the hypocrisies of institutionalised religion, but the films are made in such a way that audiences find them pleasing too, which in turn rings in the cash back to the producers. Many have gone beyond their comfort zone to play grey characters (Ajay Devgan in *Drishyam* and Irfaan Khan in *Maqbool,* which is a reworking of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) and even outright villains (Shahrukh Khan in *Baazigar*, *Darr and Anjaam*, Akshay Kumar in *Ajnabee*, Ritesh Deshmukh, in *Ek Villain*, Saif Ali Khan in *Omkara*, etc.) But whatever the theme, message and plot, Bollywood *masala* movies are made keeping in mind that the movies are ultimately mass entertainers, replete with all kinds of the *masala* package.

Finally, Bollywood found the courage for experimentation as more new young directors, including women directors who had learned the craft of filmmaking, entered Bollywood. Themes of movies ranged from romance, action to socio-political issues, from nationalistic to LGBT *(My Brother… Nikhil*, *Dostana*, *Bombay Talkies*, etc) and even carried the topics of sperm donation and artificial insemination *(Vicky Donor*). The broadening of the mindset of the Indian middle-class encouraged more and more film-makers to experiment with new themes and plots. But amidst all the experiments the industry never lost touch with its fundamental formula, i.e, love and romance, keeping in tune with India's culture and age old tradition of universal love, peace, harmony and brotherhood. So huge romantic blockbusters kept churning out from Bollywood at regular intervals that took the national as well as international film-going audiences by storm, like *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak, Maine Pyar Kiya, Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge, Kaho Na Pyar Hain,* and numerous others. Even the super hit social satires, *Munnabhai MBBS* and *Lage Raho Munnabhai* talks of conquering people's hearts through love and empathy, and with the help of *jadu ki jhappi* or 'magical hug'. Typical *masala* movies with tried and tested formula have never really stopped churning out from Bollywood. But at the same time, it keeps reinventing itself in new avatars so as not to lose its relevance with changing times.

In arguing that popular Bollywood cinema acts as a metaphor of Indian society and politics, this paper, in its limited scope, has focussed only on the social and political changes and shifts that have affected the Bollywood *masala* movies with respect to its heroes, or typically the 'Hindi film hero'. But Hindi film is more than just the hero; it is a complete package that comes along with the

heroine, the villain, the vamp and the other woman, its music, and song and dance sequences, without which any commercial film is incomplete. These technicalities, which could not be included in the present analyses, are as important in exploring the present topic. It is interesting to see how the dramatic change and progress in technology have brought about a sea-change in film making and its choice of plots. It is also engaging to probe how the use of Indian mythology has changed with the changing dimensions of Indian society. All of these indicate further areas of research that would broaden the horizons of this context. One may conclude by safely saying that more than being a mere object of entertainment, Bollywood *masala* movies go a long way in understanding Indian society, its culture, tradition, and its politics.

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Religious Syncretism in the Paradigm of Cultural Diversity: Reading Dara Shukoh's *Sirr-i-Akbar*

—Laki Molla

Abstract: This paper deals with issues that had a bearing on the relationship between religion and politics in Mughal India. From the very beginning, Indian society has been a mosaic of distinct cultures, religions, languages and ethnic groups. A synthesis of the traditional Hindu and newly flourished Islamic tradition characterized the social and political life of Mughal India. The confluence of the two major religions of South Asia gradually produced a cultural synthesis. From this perspective, I will attempt for an exploration of religious syncretism that Dara Shukoh's famous Persian translation of fifty two *Upanishads* (titled *Sirr-i- Akbar*) tried to construct in the society. This translation of a Sanskrit Hindu text into Persian, a language popular in Muslim culture, confirms Dara Shukoh's faith in the Sufi doctrine of 'Wahadat-ul-wujud'(Unity of Existence) which also became wider and more broad-based due to his assimilation of the principle ideas of Hinduism. The Mughals brought with them a rich Persianate culture that had strong ties with the wider Islamic world. Dara's translation of the *Upanishads* is the movement of a Hindu text into that tradition and can be seen as an example of 'textual migration.' This can be interpreted in the theory of Kantian Hospitality propounded in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. The paper aims at the exploration of the reasons that made Dara Shukoh to translate *Upanishads* into Persian, its effect upon his literary career and its importance in making an alliance of opposing religious and philosophical doctrines, with an objective of forging a coherent national identity negotiating with Separatism – a completely different cultural solution to problems of religious differences. The paper also traces the significant role this translation plays in spreading the philosophy of Indian spirituality in the Globe.

Keywords: Composite tradition, Pluralistic synthesis, Religious syncretism, Textual migration, Spirituality.

"O you, you who are looking for God everywhere;
You're really God, not apart from God, I declare!
It's like you are in the middle of an infinite ocean:
Your search is like a drop in an ocean …"

—Dara Shukoh[1]

The very essence of the pluralism of India is reflected not only in the biological variations but also in the cultural spheres. From the very beginning, Indian society has been a mosaic of distinct cultures, religions, languages and ethnic groups. Diversity works in different levels of Indian life and society. People of different races, from different parts of the globe came in different times and assimilated perfectly with the Indian way of living. While most countries, at the time of consolidating their nationhood, adopted the policy of absorption or elimination of minority groups, India chose to nurture diversity. The strongest base of diversity in India is its spirit of giving equal rights to the people of different cultures, creeds and races. The organic link between the people of diverse ethnic and religious groups in a particular region, did not violate the distinct identities of their own and in the long run contributed in creating a cultural persona (Das 32). The sharing of this common ethos erases the ethnic and religious differences and helps people in creating an 'imagined community'. From this perspective, my paper aims to explore how Dara Shukoh's translation of the *Upanisads* from Sanskrit to Persian tried to construct a kind of syncretism from the religious angle in the society during the Mughal era in India.

If we look into the evaluation of Indian civilization, pluralism which characterized the Vedic period was further

reinforced at the advent of Buddhism and Jainism. During the medieval era, the Bhakti movement contributed in a significant way to this composite ethos of Indian civilization. There was a synthesis of the distinct traditions of the Hindu and Muslim cultures. By the time the Mughal Empire was established, the power in the countryside lay mostly in the hands of the large and small 'Hindu' family and kin groups whom the Mughals referred to as 'Zamindars'. The policy of their absorption into the Muslim state power was not started by the Mughals. Since the rule of the Tughlaqs, the Hindus began to figure in state services and by the time of the early Mughals, Hindu presence in the Muslim state was so pronounced that it began to threaten some sections of the Muslim notables (Alam 107). For pilgrimages, migration and other reasons, in India, there had been a tendency to share the spaces and cultures of one group with other groups from the very ancient times. This continuous exchange of cultural and religious features, concepts and practices played an important role in the cultural synthesis of the country. In *People of India: Introduction,* K. S. Singh compared the Indian society to a "honeycomb" in which different communities interact vigorously and share each other's spaces, essence and cultural characteristics (111).

To interpret these complex dynamics of ethnicity and interconnectedness, 'Syncretism' emerges as a valuable tool. In the present era of cultural condensation, syncretism is a worldwide religious challenge. According to Andre Droogers and Sidney M. Greenfield, syncretism, first used by Plutarch, is used to "describe the temporary coming together of the quarrelling inhabitants of Crete in the face of a common enemy" (21). Etymologically the word was derived from the Greek word "synkretismos", meaning "unite on communities" or "to combine against a

common enemy".[2] In the seventeenth century, the word came out with a negative connotation of the undesirable reconciliation of the differences in Christian theologies. It was only from the second half of the nineteenth century that the term became used to describe the mixing of religious elements from diverse sources. So in a general sense, syncretism is the mixing of two distinct traditions (in thought or rituals) to generate a third. Differentiating syncretism from "Hybridity" which has been sometimes criticized for its pejorative origins and meanings—about individuals of mixed racial ancestry and seen as embodying the sins and evils of both, P. K. Nayar argued that syncretism is seen as a more positive merging of distinct ideas and beliefs so as to transcend the problems of either individual strands (150).

Gauri Viswanathan in her essay "Beyond Orientalism: Syncretism and the Politics of Knowledge" views syncretism as a product of state formation, and more akin to culture in its supplantation of both religious belief and religious ideology in its disinterested, universalizing aspect. The celebration of religious artefacts, festivals, and monuments as cultural symbols, affiliated to no particular group but belonging to the 'national' heritage as a whole, is an example of the state's nonpartisanship expressed in a syncretic view of communities. Just as the state is for Matthew Arnold "culture's best self," syncretism similarly defines the state as religion's best self, transcending petty sectarian interests. As an embodiment of disinterestedness, syncretism creates conditions for a form of governance where class differences, allegiances, and interests vanish, with the state functioning as the sponge that absorbs the difference. Syncretism is thus harmonization without disproportionate empowerment of any one element of the whole (Viswanathan). While

syncretism is regarded by some as a positive strategy promoting tolerance, it is seen by others as promoting the decline of pure faith. It is seen as “a loss of identity, an illicit contamination, a sign of religious decadence.

In theological disputes, it was generally regarded as a betrayal of principles or as an attempt to secure unity at the expense of truth” (Veer 186). In Indian society, we find secularism as a defining aspect of national culture. Ashis Nandy, one of the most vocal anti-statist intellectuals in modern India points out that in the 1911 Census, the Muslims of Gujarat identified themselves as “Mohammedan Hindus” and the once-existed state of peace between Muslims and Hindus was shattered by the colonial rulers (323). Thus the debate shifts from religion to national culture, from syncretism to multiculturalism and from conversion to assimilation. From this perspective, I have attempted to explore the importance of Mughal prince Dara Shukoh’s *Sirr-i-Akbar* in making an alliance of opposing religious and philosophical doctrines with an objective to forge a coherent national identity, allowing for the possibility of the peaceful co-existence of different ethnic and religious communities under the umbrella of a secular state where one community respects the religious practices of the other.

The eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, Dara Shukoh (1615 – 1659), noted for his comparative study of Muslim mysticism and classical Hindu philosophy has contributed to the mutual epistemological enrichment and rich pluralism of the Indian tradition. In spite of being the “Padshahzada-i-Buzurg Martaba” ("The Prince of High Rank") and the heir-apparent of Sha Jahan, he was defeated by his younger brother, the orthodox Aurangzeb and was executed in 1659. His famous work *Majma-ul-*

Bahrain (The Confluence of Two Oceans), published in 1655, tried to find affinities between the Sufi philosophy of Islam and the Vedanta philosophy of Hinduism. Dara "arguably did more than anyone else to attempt to bring together the two great religions of South Asia" (Dalrymple 136). The Al-Quran reads in Surah *Al-Waqia* (The Event):

> That this is indeed a noble Quran
> In a well preserved Book
> Which none shall touch except those who are purified
> It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. [3]

Dara's search for the "Kitab-ul-muknam" (the well-preserved book) and the Quranic injunction that no lands have been left without prophetic guidance made him interested in the scriptures of Hindustan. He found the *Upanisads* as "the ultimate scriptural spring of all monotheism" and, in accordance with the holy Quran, considered it the ultimate source and the genesis of the ocean of unity (Smith 155 - 156). He discovered the Doctrine of "Wahdat-ul-Wajud" (the Unity of God) in this philosophical text of Hinduism, with which he principally dealt with in his first three books on Sufism—*Safinat-ul-Auliya*, *Sakinat-ul-Auliya* and *Risala-i-Haknama.* Initially, his concept of 'wahdat-ul-Wajud' was based on Ibn-al-Arabi's ideas which later became wider because of his contact with Hindu Sanyasis and he tried to assimilate the principal ideas of Hinduism to make it more broad-based. 'Wahdat-ul-Wajud' postulates that there is only One Being and the physical world is the manifestation of that One Being. Dara expresses the fact in one of his *rubaiyat*:

> The wise see not a second in essence
> we and you are mere calling words,

See One contained evident in many -
See One hath formed in shapes many.[4]

Dara's close and friendly interaction with the Sufi mystics like Hazrat Myan Mir, Shah Muhibullah, Shah Dilruba as well as Hindu pundits like Baba Lal Das Bairagi, Jagannath Mishra led him to seek to establish bridges of understanding between Sufism and Hindu mysticism. Dara described in detail this journey in his introduction to *Sirr-i-Akbar*. In 1640, he travelled to Kashmir. He was moved by the desire to know the Gnostics of all sects and hear about monotheism's lofty expressions. He had gone through many books on mysticism and written some treatises on that subject. His quest for making unity among different sects seems to be an endless ocean which only gave rise in his mind, subtle doubts without any possible solutions except the words of the Lord and the guidance of the Infinite (Smith 153). Realizing the truth that the words of God are commentaries on themselves, Dara goes on to view all the heavenly books and scriptures of different religions. Dara's title of the translation of the *Upanisads* is also very significant. 'Sirr-i-Akbar' means 'The Great Secret'. Sanskrit etymological roots also show that 'upanishad' means "a hidden secret" or "that which is taught in secret". Shankaracharya calls the Upanishads '*paramam guhyam'* which means "the greatest secret" (Tazi 46).

Talking about the ancient Indian theologians and mystics, Dara notes that they did not disavow the unity of God. But the ignoramuses of the time distorted this fundamental truth. Very few Indians are thereby thoroughly conversant with the treasure of monotheism. He also hoped to understand the enigma that underpins their desire to keep it hidden from the Muslims (Smith 155). Dara also

translated into Persian the *Gita*—one of the important parts of the epic *Mahabharata* and *Yoga Vasistha*—one of the earliest Sanskrit texts on yoga. It confirms that he made an extensive study of the *Mahabharata.* Throughout this endeavour, Dara's fundamental concern was to draw out commonalities in the scriptures of the Hindus and the Muslims. Stressing the affinity between these two major religions, Dara writes in his great treatise on Sufism *The Compass of Truth*:

> Thou art in the Ka'ba in Mecca
> As well as in the temple of Somnath
> Thou art in the monastery
> As well as the tavern. (Dalrymple 136)

Another beautiful analogy is found in Dara's discourse on the four worlds in which he lays down the four spiritual stages all beings must go through according to the Sufis. In *Risala-i-Haknama*, the seeker (salik) is portrayed as starting from the *Alam-i-Nusrat* (The Physical Plane) and after passing through the stages of *Jabrut* and *Malakat* finally reaches the *Alam-i-Lahut* (The Plain of absolute Truth) which corresponds to the Hindu concept of the *Avasthatma* or the four 'states' of *Jagrat* (the world in which humans are awake and conscious), *Swapna* (the inevitable world where humans are unconscious), *Shushpati* (Where 'I' and 'We' dissolve) and *Turiya* (the world of His Existence). Dara also showed that some of the physical exercises employed by the Sufis are similar to those used by the Hindu Tantriks and Yogis.

Dara's translation of the *Upanisads* is "an exact and literal" one and he included in it a Sanskrit-Persian glossary. At the same time, it displays a rephrasing of Indian philosophical terms and names of the Vedic Gods in terms of Sufi

parallels. For example, Mahadeva becomes Israfil, Vishnu becomes Mikail, Brahman Jibrail or Adam; and likewise, *Brahma-loka* is rendered *sadrat-ul-muntaha*, and *om* as *ism-i- Azam* (Ganeri 180). Another attempt of Dara towards Hindu-Muslim unity is *Majma-ul-Bahrain* (translated as The Mingling of Two Oceans) in which the scholar prince asserted that the underlying nature of Hinduism and Islam were the same. Using the technique of lexical similarity Dara posited that the cosmologies and mystical practices of Muslim Sufis and those of the *Upanishads* correspond. For example, 'ruh' or 'soul' in Islam is equivalent to 'atman' in Vedic Hinduism. The Sufi concept of love is the same as the Hindu notion of 'maya' or illusion. Dara had "The Mingling of Two Oceans" translated into Sanskrit under the title *Samudra Sangam* to make it accessible to Hindu scholars (Richards 152).

Dara also attacked the mindless ritualism of the *ulemas*[5] of Islam. In *Hasanat-ul-Arifin* (The Aphorisms of Saints, 1653), he bitterly criticizes the *ulemas* who ignore the inner dimension of faith and focuses simply on external rituals. Dara's tolerance in religious matters annoyed the orthodox *mullahs*[6] who dubbed him 'a kafir' and ultimately he was executed with utmost cruelty in the year of 1659. Despite the fact that his quest for truth took away his life, he was a pioneer in religious synthesis or syncretism.

Apart from that, the translation of *Upanishads*, a Sanskrit Hindu text, in 1657 into Persian – a language popularized in India by the Mughals by making it the official language can be cited as an example of 'textual migration'. In the 17th Century, India was the political dominion of the Mughals who brought with them a rich Persianate culture that had strong ties with the wider Islamic world. Dara's translation is the movement of a Hindu religious text into

that tradition – an "Islamization of Hinduism" (Tazi 45). This can be interpreted in the theory of Kantian Hospitality propounded in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*. By Hospitality, Kant means "the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another" (328). When the stranger is not a threat to the people of the land, it is unnecessary to treat him with hostility. At the same time, it is also true that an outsider cannot demand to be a permanent visitor of a place. In order to become a fellow inhabitant of a place for a certain period of time, an outsider should adhere to a special beneficent agreement. But all men on earth have the right to associate with each other by virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth.

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Jonardan Ganeri argues that the translation project of Dara Shukoh is different from another large-scale translation project involving Sanskrit texts—the Tibetan reception of Indian Buddhism. Prudentiality is one of the reasons for being hospitable. One might welcome the stranger because one has something to gain from them. This was certainly the motive for the Tibetan interest in Sanskrit Buddhist texts. However, no such thought motivated Dara to translate this mystic Hindu text. As a devout Muslim and as an adept Sufi practitioner, he was already firm in his convictions about the true nature of things. Dara's hospitality had its roots in a different idea altogether—that the stranger, if welcomed and understood, would turn out to be no stranger at all. Dara Shukoh hoped to show that treating the Hindu as an alien and an Other was a fundamental mistake, that there existed between Hinduism and Islam a pre-existing affinity, even an identity. The cosmopolitan right to hospitality is, perhaps, the right to have one's common humanity affirmed (Ganeri 179).

Dara's works on the mysticism of Islam and Hindu scriptures, particularly his translation of the *Upanishads* played an important role in stirring Western academic interest in the subcontinent's wisdom. The French traveller Francis Bernier[7] took the translation to France in 1671; fourteen years after Dara completed the translation. In 1775, the Persian version was translated into French (though not published) and Latin by Anquetil Duperron, the famous traveller and discoverer of the *Zend Avesta*. The Latin version was brought out in 1801 and 1802. The *Upanishads* also fascinated German scholars such as Friedrich Von Schelling, Arthur Schopenhauer and Paul Deussen. Believing that the message of the *Upanishads* should get wide circulation in Germany and the whole of German intelligentsia should be aware of it, Fredrick Schelling asked Max Mueller to translate them. Thus Dara Shukoh's *Sirr-i-Akbar* gave many people in West Asia and Europe their "first glimpse of Hindu philosophy" (Sen 61).

It is believed that there had been some political purpose influencing Dara's translation project. He tried to strengthen his kingdom by following in the footsteps of the great Akbar. Niccolo Manucci[8], the Italian writer and traveller who worked in the Mughal court claimed that Dara Shukoh had no "fixed religion in the presence of his followers. When with Mohammedans he praised the tenets of Muhammad; when with Jews, the Jewish religion; in the same way, when with Hindus, he praised Hinduism" (Katz 144 - 45). But there is no denying the fact that the meeting of Sufism with Advaita Vedanta made Dara realize and impart the metaphysical principle of Oneness. His effort could be interpreted as a serious attempt to create a bridge between Hindu and Islamic

metaphysics and played a major role to efface the aspect of domination by projecting religious tolerance.

Notes

1. The poem was originally written in Persian. This translation into English is Paul Smith's.
2. For more detail about the evolution of the term, one may visit https://www.etymonline.com/word/syncretism
3. The excerpt (Part-27, Chapter-56 Line: 78-81) is the English translation of the Holy Quran by Maulawi Sher Ali published by Islam International Publications Ltd. in 2004.
4. The poem is translated from the original Persian by Gyani Brahma Singh Brahma and cited by Rana Safvi in the article "The House Dara Sikhoh Built" published in *The Hindu* 16 April, 2017.
5. From the Arabic "Ulama" (literally scholar or the learned one), "Ulema" is a Muslim scholar having knowledge of Islamic law and theology.
6. "Mullah" is a title given in honour to a Muslim leader. The title is also given to a person who has higher education in Islamic theology and Sharia law.
7. Barnier was a French doctor who travelled to India in 1659. Dara employed him as his physician before his final battle with Aurangzeb.
8. Manucci is famous for his detailed account of the Mughal history and life titled "Storia do Mogor" which was translated into English by William Irvine as "A Pepys of Mogal India 1653 – 1708".

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Nature as Nurturer: An Analysis of Selected Poems of Mamang Dai

—Tapashree Ghosh

Abstract: Mamang Dai, a poet and novelist from Pasighat, East Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh explores themes related to nature, myths and postcolonial identity through her poems. In her poetic universe, these diverse issues are interlinked. The members of Arunachalee tribes do not believe in an anthropocentric world and hence they do not disrespect the non-human environment. Their respect for the connections between man and nature make their approach holistic and full of ecological wisdom. Centuries before theorizations on eco-criticism, these tribal people of the Adi community understood that man is only a small part in the natural world. He must belong to the same and protect the same instead of violating and degrading nature. This research paper analyses selected poems of Mamang Dai to reveal her major poetic concerns, as Dai's understanding of nature influences all her poetic concerns. They are intertwined. This paper also makes a brief comparative study of other poets living in these areas as they explore similar themes in their poems. Reading these poems are particularly crucial in today's world of climate change where environmental changes, concerns and challenges pose threat and deeply impact the future of the planet.

Keywords: Nature, Nurture, Violence, Myth, Ecology, Gender.

In an interview with Arundhathi Subramaniam, Mamang Dai defined poetry as voice of love and protest. She said, "Poetry is the voice of protest, and it is the voice of love. By this love I mean everything that one knows and has felt"(448). Again, in her article titled "Arunachal Pradesh: the Myth of Tranquility" Mamang Dai points out that the ancient customs and practices are carefully preserved in Arunachal Pradesh. "Arunachal is still one of the frontiers of the world where the indigenous faith and practices still survive in a form close to the original belief handed down

since generations" (qtd in Sati 453). This oral tradition and wisdom teach them to respect and show reverence to nature. The members of Arunachalee tribes do not believe in an anthropocentric world and hence they do not disrespect the non-human environment or view human interest in nature as the "only legitimate interest" (qtd in Rangarajan 5). Their respect for the connections between man and nature make their approach holistic and full of ecological wisdom.

The field of Ecocriticism "undertakes a critical reconceptualization of dichotomies like nature and culture, self and other, and body and mind that have been ingrained in Western thinking since the Enlightenment" (Rangarajan 1). Marginalization of nature, silencing of nature and violence on women and nature percolated into our worldview with colonialism and remained deeply entrenched in our lives as a colonial aftermath. Reading poems of Mamang Dai enables us to re-examine our thinking. Deep ecology, as argued by Jelica Tosic in her essay "Ecocriticism: Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment", emphasizes the fact that man is only one part in a "complex life net in nature in which everything has a certain value" (Tosic 45). The traditional, mythical wisdom of Arunachal Pradesh also focuses on the same. Thus, centuries before theorizations on ecocriticism, deep ecology and ecofeminism took place in the Western world and gained prominence all over the world. These tribal people understood that man is only a small part of the natural world and hence must belong to the same, protect the same instead of violating and degrading nature.

Mamang Dai, a poet and novelist from Pasighat, East Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh explores themes related to

nature, myths and postcolonial identity through her poems. In her poetic universe, these diverse issues are interlinked. Mamang Dai received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2017 for her novel *The Black Hill*. This researcher consciously avoids categorizing Mamang Dai as a poet of 'Northeast' as it ends up homogenizing "a geographical area of nearly 2.55 lakh square kilometers that consists of eight different states, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura-each area varying greatly in terms of traditions, culture, religion, language and dialects" (Basu 419). The use of the blanket term 'North-East' deeply pains the inhabitants of this area as it makes it a "homogeneous province" (Ngangom and Nongkynrih ix) thereby erasing the differences that exist in this region. In the Introduction to *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East India* editors Robin S. Ngangom and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrihpoint out that the eight states of this region are "inhabited by such a conglomeration of peoples, a mélange of cultures, languages and religions that it would be a grave injustice to make any generalized statement about them" (ix). Lack of awareness about the racial composition and cultural diversity of India is largely responsible for othering, racism and political marginalization of people living in these eight states. Writers, poets living in this region also face literary marginalization.

In "Small Towns and the River" Mamang Dai juxtaposes the man-made world of small towns which reminds her of the stillness of death with the natural world of rivers that represent "the immortality of water" (437). Nature is full of energy and is always in a state of flux. The dust flying, the wind howling and the river flowing seamlessly through the land is contrasted with the stillness, boredom and

inertia of small towns where men live and die. The community rituals connected with the death are also part of Arunachalee life and enables Mamang Dai to come to the philosophical realization that life and death are held in a fine balance. Death is the ultimate reality of life. Every mortal man has to face death. Only mountains, rivers, etc. are eternal and represent immortality of nature. In this world only these rituals and myths are permanent. It connects the past with the present and is a part and parcel of tribal life.

In the essay titled "Mamang Dai: The Postcolonial Paradigm" Nivedita Basu writes, "The tribal belief in animism serves as a philosophical framework for Dai's Poetry" (429). Quoting from Dai's *Legends of Pensam* in support of her argument Nivedita Basu mentions that "animism is the belief that plants, objects, weather and other natural aspects have "a living soul", and that there is a power that controls and organizes the universe" (429). Nivedita Basu concludes her observation by pointing out that this philosophy of animism is in "opposition to the colonial attitude towards environment that leads to wide scale degradation and an overall marginalization of nature" (429).

Thus, myth and nature go hand in hand in Dai's poetic universe. Consider the lines from "Small Towns and the River":

> The river has a soul
> In the summer it cuts through the land
> Like a torrent of grief. (Dai 437)

Human life is transient. River represents the permanence of nature. River is seen as a living soul sharing human attributes like pain, joy and happiness. But life here is not

idyllic. People living in these regions cannot overlook the violence and uncertainty of life. References to political turmoil, violence, terrorism and bloodshed recur in Dai's poetry as her poetry is not divorced from the challenges of living in the border state of Arunachal Pradesh. Mamang Dai brings together myth and contemporary reality of existence. In 'Small Towns and the River' she writes, "Small towns grow with anxiety/ for the future" (438). Set against the backdrop of political turmoil and uncertainty, anxiety-ridden future, this philosophical poem on the permanence of nature and mortality of man assumes great significance.

The poem "The Sorrow of Women" revisit this theme as women are afraid of losing their children "to war and big issues" (90). They are ordinary women who live among small things and love to see their own reflection in their children. The thought of losing children give them nightmares. They care for them and the fear of losing them to attain political stability in the region paralyses them. Their sorrow is too deep for tears as "the urgency of survival" (91), desire for liberty is pitted against their love for their children. These helpless women can only seek solace and companionship in the lap of Mother Nature and hence they compare their lives with nature:

> Life is so hard like this,
> Nobody knows why
> It is like fire
> It is like rainwater, sand, glass (Dai 91)

These words reveal their pathos, anxiety and fear. It also reveals their helplessness. Violence on women has different shades. It not only includes physical violence but has several ramifications like political violence, sexual violence, psychological violence and verbal violence. The

poem "The Sorrow of Women" reveal various shades of violence as fear, anxiety makes life difficult for women. However, they are not mere victims. They fight back and survive amidst all hardships, uncertainties and insecurities.

The poem "The Missing Link" celebrates the glory of nature and the rich, oral culture of Arunachal Pradesh. There are no written records or documents but stories, myths, legends passed from one generation to another. Memory, recollection, repetition play a major role in keeping these tribal understanding of nature alive till date. They serve as 'the missing link' between past and present. The great river links the land and is as crucial for their survival as veins in the body of men. Old women play a very important role in educating the children of the tribe with these stories containing ecological wisdom, faith and mythical tales of the origin of the world. They teach them a sense of belonging to the land. They must "remember"(445) these tales "because nothing is ended" (445). Thus, tribal understanding of nature, mythical tales related to the origin of the world, place of man in the natural environment are recurrent themes in Dai's poetic universe. Dai belongs to the Adi community. The history of the Adi community and its belief in union of life is also present in Mamang Dai's novels such as *The Sky Queen*, *Once Upon a Moontime* and *Legends of Pensam.* Thus, there are thematic links between Mamang Dai's poetic ventures and her novels.

The poem "An Obscure Place" points out the central importance of stories in understanding "the history of our race" (88). The poem also focuses on the uncertainty of their tribal history as nothing is recorded or certain. Due to the oral nature of the stories new elements are added, altered and this makes it uncertain. They do not know

whether the tribal languages they speak have a written past which was obliterated by colonialism. However, they live close to nature and are "surrounded by thoughts of beauty" (89). The mountains and the river nurture them. These stories about the glory of their homeland and closeness of man and nature are juxtaposed with themes of violence, insurgency and terror as people of Arunachal Pradesh cannot escape from the harsh realities of their lives. Again, Mamang Dai's career as a journalist may have brought her face to face with the harsh realities of their lives. She carefully includes the same in her poetic world.

The poem "Tapu" revisits rituals of the Adi community. "Tapu is a dance performed by male members of the Adi community during the annual practice of community fencing. The dance is a rite in exorcism to drive away the Spirit of Fear" (81). One has to accept the fact that there are forces of oppression and violence in the beautiful land of Arunachal Pradesh. Faith in rich cultural heritage of the land sustains them. Courage is the keyword for survival in this hilly region and hence this ritual dance is very important. Nature gives them inspiration to withstand the forces of oppression. Like the 'Tapu' dancer they must triumph over fear, they must learn the harsh truth of life "that dying is not so hard if the image survives" (87).

The mountain is a living force and has a voice of its own. In the poem "The Voice of the Mountain" the speaker is the mountain. It knows the towns, the estuary mouth and can "outline the chapters of the world" (439). It is aware of the myth of the origin of the world and the history of Arunachal Pradesh. The mountain communicates with the members of the Adi community. The poem speaks of the relationship between man and nature. As per tribal traditional customs gifts are given to the mountain. The

mountain in turn symbolically acknowledges this relationship between man and nature:

> I, also leave my spear leaning by the tree
> And try to make a sign (440)

Arunachal is caught in the vortex of change and changelessness. Modern capitalism has brought in changes. At the same time ancient, tribal ways of life co-exists. Rituals play a very important role in preserving the old, ancient ways of living. Hence, these territories are "forever ancient and new" (440). The mountain is as wise and knowledgeable as an old man and yet "forever young"(440). Being deathless, it is ageless. Decay, death and fear of disease does not bother the mountain. The sea waves and the mountain peaks act as the voice of the mountain. The indigenous people understand its symbols and gestures. It also instructs with "history and miracles" (440). Belief in union of life is reinforced in the lines "I am the desert and the rain/ the wild bird that sits in the west" (441). Nature is all knowing. "I know, I know these things/ as rocks know, burning in the sun's embrace/ about clouds, and sudden rain" (441).

Mamang Dai juxtaposes this eternal, traditional ways of life with tensions of modern life and hence points out that "peace" (441) in the valley is a "falsity" (441). The universe can yield nothing except a dream of permanence. Nature is a secret sharer of man. It shares the turmoil within the poet's psyche. It is not viewed as a passive observer of life and is believed to participate in local myths and legends:

> From the east the warrior returns
> With the blood of peonies (Dai "The Voice of the Mountain" 441)

Like “Sorrows of Women” this poem too identifies woman and nature. Violence against women is common in this conflict ridden, border state. But women here are not mere victims of violence. They are real life fighters who survive amidst all hardships and carry on with life. The poem ends with an affirmation of traditional ways of living. Memory is of utmost importance in preserving tribal, oral, mythical wisdom and the mountain is a symbol of permanence set against the transience of human life.It is a witness and active participant in the traditional, tribal life. Hence, it has a “mind (442) and “voice” (440) of its own which it shares with the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh. “I am the place where memory escapes/ the myth of time,/ I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain” (442).

The poem “The River” revisits the mythical belief that nature is a living soul. The river, as per tribal beliefs, is seen as a drowning spirit, a strong-armed god and hence the poet warns the readers. “Do not stay too long by the river” (89). It is a “wayward god” (89) that is compared with ferocious animals living in the Himalayan forests like an elephant, a lion, a horse or a peacock. This poem too celebrates the bond between women and nature. A woman shares with nature her bounty, fertility and nurturing qualities. This makes the poet write “I thought the river is a woman” (90).

Ecofeminism, one of the significant ecological and feminist movements of the 1970s, is based on the connections between women and nature. Theorists like Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature* points out that historical domination of nature go hand in hand with the subjugation of women and other subalterns (269). In *New Woman, New Earth*, Rosemary Radford Ruether critiques

"the male monopoly over 'culture' and also the uncritical association of women with nature" (Rangarajan 113). Indian Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva sees women as "natural custodians of indigenous earth wisdom that has been passed down orally from generation to generation" (Rangarajan 120). Mamang Dai too sees women as protectors of nature and oral, ancient, tribal knowledge. Women play a crucial role in preserving tribal customs, rituals and beliefs.

Dai does not believe in the nature/culture duality and sees women as active agents in preserving ancient history and culture of the Adi community, a community which has little documented history, majority of its traditional history, myth and ancient wisdom is told orally from one generation to another. In this worldview, myth and nature are deeply intertwined and cannot be segregated from one another. Thus, in Dai's poetic universe nature, myth and challenges of living in the periphery of the Postcolonial Nation co-exists. Dai is aware of the traditional customs and challenges brought forward by postcolonialism. Assertion of postcolonial identity as an Arunachalee woman is also present in her poems.

Mamang Dai is a well-known poet from Arunachal Pradesh. Other poets from Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram also share some of her poetic concerns. The poem "What Does an Indian Look Like" by Cherrie L. Chhangte, a poet from Mizoram raises a fundamental question regarding National identity, Indianness and ethnicity. The poem registers the protest of a citizen from Mizoram as people of mainstream India often view people from Mizoram as an ethnic specimen and unnecessarily dissect their past due to their difference in physical features. They must acknowledge and accept

the diversity of India.The line “What does an Indian look like? / -An Indian looks like me, an Indian is Me” encapsulates the theme of the poem. Temsula Ao’s poem titled “Soul-Bird” revisits customs and tribal beliefs of the ancient Ao-Naga religion where it is believed that when a person dies the soul takes the shape of a bird or an insect in order to bid its final goodbye to its dear ones. Hence, the “keening bird” (5) in the sky is viewed as “your mother’s soul” (5) that is bidding its final goodbye to her children who must henceforth learn to accept death as the final truth of life, stop mourning and carry on with their respective lives.

The poem titled ‘Bullet’ by Manipuri poet Robin S, Ngangom focuses on the violence and uncertainty of living in this conflict-ridden area. Thus, these poets are rooted in their culture, myth and tribal folklore and at the same time are aware of the challenges to living in contemporary, Postcolonial India. However, we must not make the mistake of typecasting these poets on the basis of the broad themes that these explore in their poems. Rather it is important to read these poems as “celebration of life in all its unpredictable variety” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih xiv).

Mamang Dai is a powerful poetic voice from Arunachal Pradesh apart from being a novelist of repute. She sees nature as a nurturer in her poetic universe. Issues of postcolonial identity co-exist with local history, myth and nature in Dai’s poetic universe. This makes her poems an important and necessary read. Again, it is crucial to read and understand her poems in today’s world of climate change where environmental changes, concerns and challenges pose threat and deeply impact the future of the planet.

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Non-performing the 'Female Appropriate Behaviour': A Feminist Study of Emma Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*

—Tanima Dutta

Abstract: When Judith Butler says that gender is performance, she actually means that the role playing of a person of any gender in a patriarchal society is conducted through a set of actions, gestures, postures, dressing styles, movements, speech, which in turn set a standard of 'gender appropriate behaviour(s)' in a discursive way, and are associated with cultural constructions of masculinity/femininity. Within such gender discourse, the stereotype of an ideal wife, ideal mother, and ideal woman usually not only internalises such values in a normative gendered social order, but also performs them often willingly in all cultural matrix, and the training of such 'gender appropriate behaviour' is a repetitive and continuous process. While the feminists question the fixity of the gender roles within a society, there are several sensitive writers, who have created certain characters in their fictions, who non-perform such fixed roles, often by jeopardising the definite 'gender appropriate behaviours'. The present paper attempts to show, how the character of Emma Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's French novel *Madame Bovary* (1857), non-performs such stereotypical gendered role(s) by violating the restrictive 'female appropriate behaviour(s)' that the contemporary patriarchal- bourgeoisie French society expects her to perform, culminating in her psychosomatic sufferings, distress and eventual death.

Keywords: *Madame Bovary*, (Non) performances, Gender (/female) appropriate behaviour, Madame Bovary Syndrome, Motherhood, Sexuality.

> "We open the factories, the offices, the facilities to women, but we continue to hold that marriage is for her the most honourable career freeing from the collective life."
>
> —Beauvoir

The French existential philosopher cum political activist as well as feminist theorist, Simone de Beauvoir opined this in her 1949 book *The Second Sex* while she talks about the position of a woman in a patriarchal society as an 'other' in relation to a man. Her famous statement that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, hints at the restrictive gender roles of women in almost every society, indoctrinated down the ages (195). This also reminds us of Judith Butler's ideas of the 'performativity of gender', by means of some "[...] repetitive words, actions and gestures" (Sengupta 154). This discursive act of performance of certain gender roles includes, to quote Ashis Sengupta again, the "[...] patterns of posture, movement, dress, adornment, intonation, speech and the like, associated with cultural constructions of masculinity/femininity, build up a pattern of constraint on practice in the social structure of gender, which offers individual potential" (154).

Within such gender discourse, the stereotype of an ideal wife, ideal mother, and ideal woman usually not only internalises such values in a normative gendered social order, but also performs them often willingly in all cultural matrix, and the training of such 'gender appropriate behaviour' is a repetitive and continuous process. While the feminists question the fixity of the gender roles within a society, there are several sensitive writers, who have created certain characters in their fictions, who non-perform such fixed roles often by jeopardising the definite 'gender appropriate behaviours'. Emma Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's French novel *Madame Bovary* (1857) is such a character, who, being discontented with her middleclass life of a wife and mother, violates the so called 'female appropriate behaviours' that the contemporary

patriarchal- bourgeoisie French society expects her to perform, culminating in her psychosomatic suffering, distress and subsequent death.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* tells the tale of its female protagonist, Emma Bovary's dissatisfied life as a middleclass wife of a provincial doctor and the mother of a daughter, leading to her acting out of her own romantic fantasies by involving into adultery and disastrous love affairs, eventually causing to financial ruin and suicide. Emma's inability to find contentment in life is identified by the French philosopher, Jules De Gaultier as *le Bovarysme*, meaning 'Madame Bovary syndrome' which, later, is described by Wilmot E. Eillis as: "I pattern my life on some 'ideal'; I am disillusioned by hope [...] I have secret inhibitions and monstrous longings [...]" (21-22).

Throughout Flaubert's novel, Emma is inflicted with such 'chronic affective syndrome' as she cannot accept her life as it is, and desires for more. Although Flaubert identifies Madame Bovary as his inner self, critics divide paradoxically regarding his attitude towards the women in general. While some criticise him for seeing women only as aesthetic objects, or associate them with sex and adultery, some notice a complicated gender roles that he assigns to his characters out of his own personal experiences. As Audrey C. Giesler states in "Madame Bovary Syndrome: The Female Protagonist's Plight" that, "[u]sing Emma Bovary, Flaubert depicts the female experience in the nineteenth century by using his own feelings he experienced as a male, which is the likely reason she possesses what were considered 'androgenous traits' of the nineteenth century" (9).

The complexity of the gender roles, (non)performed by Emma, are clear from the very beginning of the novel. Flaubert's use of different phallic symbols associated with Emma's feminine self is clear from the way she dresses herself. In her first description we see a tortoiseshell lorgnette is tucked into the front of her bodice, just like a man fashions himself in contemporary French society. This continues when in Chapter Seven of Part One we are told that "She often changed her coiffure; she did her hair a la Chi noise, in flowing curls, in plaited coils; she parted in one side and rolled it under like a man's" (Flaubert 167). In the next part of the novel, after arriving in Yonville, wearing a man's hat and a riding costume, she steps out of the carriage:

> Her looks grew bolder, her speech more free; she even committed the impropriety of walking out with Monsieur Rodolphe, a cigarette in her mouth, 'as if to defy the people.' [H]er waist [was] squeezed into a waistcoat like a man; [...]. (252)

All such instances of masculine behaviours unleash her from the so called stereotyping cultural restraints of a woman.

Emma is supposed to live a life under her father's control before her marriage, then the husband's after marriage, and after giving birth to her child she should dedicate herself to the 'solemn' task of 'motherhood'. But Flaubert's characterisation of Emma does not restrict her to such normative role playing of a woman within a society. From the very beginning she finds pleasure in secretly reading novels that she continues even after getting married to the provincial doctor, Charles Bovary:

> Before marriage she thought herself in love; but the happiness that should have followed this love not having come, she must, she thought, have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in life by the words felicity, passion, rupture, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books. (47)

Being disillusioned by her marital life, she develops her day-dreaming traits day by day by her reading habits, wanting a life of adventure, thrill and romance:

> Accustomed to calm aspects of life, she turned, on the contrary, to those of excitement. She loved the sea only for the sake of its storms, and the green fields only when broken up by ruins. (49)

Her intellectual indulgence is in reality a cultural route to escape the restricted gender roles during that time, although no attempt to achieve economic independence could be located on her part. Despite others' attempts to make her convince of renouncing reading books, which were usually considered to be a waste of time for women in the then society, she nurtures her passion more effectively, and she desperately needs a companion with whom she can exercise on her intellectual experiences. Recalling Beauvoir again, the 'eternal feminine' of Emma is actually a cultural 'womb' (47).

Emma's hatred for non-mediocre life is strengthened once she attends a ball at La Vaubyessard with her husband Charles; she desires for another such enchanting life:

> Her journey to Vaubyessard had made a hole in her life, like one of those great crevices that storm will

> sometimes make in one night in mountains. [...] The memory of this ball, then, was an occupation for Emma. (Flaubert 75-76)

Her dissatisfaction with life makes her give up the passions of her life like love for music, playing piano. Even, "[s]he was becoming more irritated with him [Charles], for his unsophisticated, heavier, old manners (83). Such socio-cultural isolation and her staying at home also affect her psychosomatic self: "She grew pale and suffered from palpitations of the heart" (89). Charles failed to see beyond the symptoms of her illness, that she actually needs a companion who can solace her mental as well as intellectual restlessness; rather he "[...] fancied that her illness was no doubt to some local cause, and fixing on this idea, began to think seriously of setting up elsewhere (90).

Flaubert shows a sharp "[...] irreconcilability between motherhood and sexuality" by connecting these "two facets of women's experience" (Rooks 3). On the news of her pregnancy she dreams of bearing a male child in order to compensate the lack of control in her life:

> [...] this idea of having a male child was like an expected revenge for all her impotence in the past. A man, at least, is free; he may travel over passions and over countries, overcome obstacles, taste of the most faraway pleasures. But a woman is always hampered. [...] Her will, like the veil of her bonnet, held by a string, flutters in every mind; there is always some desire that draws her, some conventionality that restrains. (Flaubert 118-19)

To her utter dismay, the news of the birth of a baby girl aggravates her maternal reluctance to nurture her

daughter as she consigns Berthe to the wet nurse, Mère Rollet in a woeful shack of the town. It is to be noted that, this is the same place where Emma's first sexual fantasies become manifested seeing her future lover Leon, who, like her, shares some common habits like listening to (German) music that makes one dream, and reading books: "And indeed, what is better than to sit by one's fireside in the evening with a book, while the wind beats against the window and the lamp is burning?" (111)

True that Emma's sexual fantasies are "[...] more powerful than her maternal or domestic attentions" (Johnson 165). The so called glorified notion of the romantic relationship between a mother and her child, and the motherly concern are completely dismissed when Emma in her internal monologue expresses her frustration seeing her daughter (who "fell down while she was playing, and has hurt herself") in her sleep:

> Madame Bovary did not go downstairs to the dining-room; she wished to remain alone to look after her child. Then watching her sleep, the little anxiety she felt gradually wore off, and she seemed very stupid to herself, and very good to have been so worried just now so little. [...] Big tears lay in the corner of the half-closed eyelids [of Berthe]. Through whose lashes one could see two pale sunken pupils; the plaster stuck on her cheek drew the skin obliquely.
> 'It is very strange,' thought Emma, 'how ugly this child is!'(Flaubert 155)

Undoubtedly, this is one of the most disturbing instances about Emma's repulsion from and rejection of her daughter that obliquely "[...] creates a subtle inference of

her contemplation of infanticide" (Rooks 6). The expectation of the role playing of a woman even further deepens the rift between Charles and Emma. Charles' conviction that Emma is a happy wife and mother utterly irritates her:

> Her own gentleness to herself made her rebel against him. Domestic mediocrity drove her to lewd fancies, marriage tenderness to adulterous desires. She would have liked Charles to beat her, that she might have a better right to hate him, to revenge herself upon him. [...] she had to go on smiling, to hear repeated to her at all hours that she was happy, to pretend to be happy, to let it be believed. Yet she had loathing of this hypocrisy. She was seized with the temptation to flee somewhere with Leon to try a new life; but at once a vague chasm full of darkness opened within her soul. (Flaubert 146)

Meanwhile, the guilt-conscience at the thought of ditching her husband makes Emma pretend to 'perform' momentarily the role of a dutiful wife and mother at the cost of quitting 'music', the sustenance to her cultural self:

> 'Music? Ah! Yes! Have I not my house to look after, my husband to attend to, a thousand things, in fact many duties that must be considered first?'
> [...] 'A good housewife does not trouble about her appearance.'
> [...] It was the same on the following days: her talks, her manners, everything changed. She took interest in the housework, went to church regularly, and looked after her servant with more severity.

> She took Berthe from nurse. [...] She declared she adored children; this was her consolation, her joy, her passion, and she accompanied her caresses with lyrical outburst [...]. (*ibid*. 142-43)

The resultant delay in accepting Leon as her lover, makes the latter frustrated, and before their love story takes a shape, Leon leaves for Paris to study law, leaving Emma utterly dejected. Her performance of playing the role of a perfect domesticated woman becomes dysfunctional, and she prefers to act in a way that society never approves of, as she indulges herself completely into adultery and sexuality. Soon she gets herself out of her miserable condition once she falls in the romantic allurements of Rodolphe, a local landowner. Rodolphe knows well of her likes and dislikes:

> 'She is very pretty,' he said to himself; 'she is very pretty, this doctor's wife. Fine teeth, black eyes, a dainty foot, a figure like a Parisienne's. [...] I think he [Charles] is very stupid. She is tired of him, no doubt. He has dirty nails, and hasn't shaved for three days. While he is trotting after his patients, she sits there botching socks. And she gets bored! She would like to live in towns and dance polkas every evening. (174)

He guesses it right that this "poor", "little", "tender" but "charming" lady is desperate to be loved by a man who can pamper her with even "three words of gallantry" (174). But her passion and obsession for love would make it difficult for the prospective lover to get rid of her in future.

From the very beginning of their relationship, the hypocrisy of the lover in Rodolphe is insinuated. On the

other hand, the dissatisfaction caused by Emma's husband's incompleteness intensifies her passion for Rodolphe. She even does not hesitate to borrow money to purchase expensive gifts for her lover. Her indifference towards Berthe in terms of maternal affection is substituted by her excessive motherly caring towards her lover(s) which in turn suffocates them. Her insistence and continuous romantic longing to elope, however, make Rodolphe annoyed, resulting in their break up. Being heartbroken, Emma falls severely sick, almost bed ridden, and also bringing the financial ruin to her family.

In the later part of the novel, during her illness, Emma completely non-performs her domestic as well as cultural role, and rather becomes contemplative in nature. Her sudden religious epiphanic experience reminds her of the Catholic fervour that she used to practice in her youth. The devout Catholic Christian in her becomes a renewed sustenance to her troubled mind by making her more considerate and compassionate to her husband and daughter. But a woman, suffering from chronic discontentment syndrome, soon catches melancholia. Even her devoted religious 'performances' fail to offer her any peace of mind. Thinking that taking Emma to opera would make her better, Charles takes her to opera, where again she gets irritated with Charles' unpolished behaviour. However, the opera reminds Emma of her old passions for romantic fantasies, and to her utmost surprise she meets Leon that rekindles the fire of her heart advancing her once again to non-perform the role of a virtuous woman. The flashing past, of playing cards at the druggist's place, or their walk to the nurse's shack, their occasional readings together, "the tête-à-tête by the fireside", and all the "poor", "tender", "calm", "protracted" and "discreet" love, soon possesses her

memory and makes her think, "[w]hat combination of circumstances had brought him back into her life?" (298). Although, Part Two of the book ends with the hint of their impending affair, the next part of the novel would reiterate the futility of Emma's attempts to violate the social norms again by indulging herself in an unsuccessful relationship with Leon, her subsequent bankruptcy, and the unbearable psychosomatic suffering causing her committing suicide. The irony lies in the fact that, when Emma, attempts to compensate the financial loss by asking for money to her so called 'lovers' and the town's businessmen, she is refused by everybody, including Leon and Rodolphe. In desperation, she even thinks of offering herself to Rodolphe once again, memorising the old good romances between them, but, in reality, unconsciously bringing herself into the flesh-trade, another instance of non-performing 'female appropriate behaviour':

> Suddenly she struck her brow and uttered a cry; for the thought of Rodolphe, like a flash lightning in a dark night, had passed into her soul. He was so good, so delicate, so generous! And besides, should he hesitate to do her this service, she would know well enough how to constrain him to it by re-waking, in a single moment, their lost love. So she set out towards La Huchette, not seeing that she was hastening to offer herself to that which but a while ago had so angered her, not in the least conscious of her prostitution. (402)

Thus Flaubert builds up a complex character in Emma, whose one action negates another, whose '(non)performances' are questioned by orthodox contemporary French society. The appropriation of her behaviour makes her "[...] an androgynous character that

could not fit within this nineteenth century sexual order. [...] Her 'narcissism' is a reactive mechanism in order to find some sort of satisfaction within her life that was not possible for this type of woman in the nineteenth century" (Giesler 12).

To conclude, it can be said that, in her desperate attempts to non-perform the socially formulated 'female appropriate behaviour', Emma outdoes herself, as the society, in which she lives, sets a standard for women: "The grand function of woman, it must always be recollected, is, and ever must be, Maternity, […]", the most "endearing charm" that the 'Angel in the House' (a term used by Coventry Patmore to talk about the ideal of Victorian womanhood) can exercise over anything (Lewes 155). Emma vilifies her own status quo; in her defiant violation of normative gendered performances, she might perish, but wins as an individual-woman of her time.

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Engaging with 'internal diaspora' in Mamang Dai's *Stupid Cupid*

—Sanjukta Chatterjee

Abstract: Postcolonial Indian English writers have explored the concept of Indianness in relation to the multiple belongings that every Indian skillfully manages to negotiate and yet which becomes a zone of conflict with their fellow citizens thereby problematising the entire concept of unity in diversity. News of students from north eastern states having to undergo race based violence in the capital city, often die down after the candle marches and the incessant movement of the periphery to the centre for education; employment and other needs continue and so do intolerance and resistance. In Mamang Dai's *Stupid Cupid*, the phenomenon of 'internal diaspora' is seen at work amidst the all invasive sense of domination by the host culture. The present study aims to locate the formation of an 'internal diaspora' in India and the stages of contestation that it has to undergo in the process.

Keywords: **I**nternal diaspora, Terror, Migration, Culture, Community, Assimilation, Integration, Resistance.

Introduction

Diaspora studies have repeatedly interrogated the idea of territory, not only on the geo-political level but also on the level of psychosocial being. The field has extensively dealt with locationality and deterritorialisation mostly in the context of transnational migration. However in the glocalised world, migration is a constant. It is becoming increasingly difficult for identity researchers to identify the cultural markers that made the settler community stand

apart from the native one. The borders being crossed are not necessarily political ones and the movements of groups are also not unilinear. Therefore one of the latest areas that is being studied is the notion of 'Internal Diaspora'. In Mamang Dai's *Stupid Cupid*, this phenomenon of 'internal diaspora' is seen at work. The migration of people from the North eastern states to Delhi and their survival amidst socio-cultural opposition and othering by the native groups constitute the subtext of this seemingly light-hearted tale of romance. Dai's novel lays bare the cold reception that the people from the North eastern states face when they travel to the capital of India. These 'internal immigrants' constitute an 'internal diaspora'. Situating this study in the context of internal migration of the people from north east to the capital, the article would try to read the novel as a text of record of the way threat, terror and cultural othering affect the internal diaspora of the North East in Delhi.

North East India: Displacements and Migrations

The geographical distance of Arunachal Pradesh from New Delhi, its inaccessibility till early twentieth century and the demographic difference from mainstream Indian population contributed to the amnesiac attitude of the rulers towards this region. Its distance from the Ganga plain also added to its isolation. It was the British who ended the 600 year old rule of Assam by the Ahoms and created the seven sister states of North East. "Early in their occupation of Assam, British had no idea of controlling and administering the area now known as Arunachal Pradesh … A difficult terrain, which was divided into bocks by deeply entrenched valleys, made intergroup communication difficult, giving rise to independent tribes. The principal groups, which were a perpetual headache to

the Ahoms, and subsequently to the British administration, were the Akas, Daflas and Apatanang on the west and Abors, Mishmis, Khamptis and Singphos on the east." (Dikshit and Dikshit 44). The people of this region live in tightly knit social groups that are divided into tribes and clans. Mamang Dai belongs to the Adi Pasi tribe. The territories of each tribe are demarcated and trespassing which often led to bloodshed in the earlier days. The frequent visits of the British to Assam/ Brahmaputra valley and their incessant trials to enter Arunachal Pradesh often resulted in conflicts. In Mamang Dai's *Black Hill* (2014) the travails of the journey of British Missionaries into this impenetrable region are present.

After independence, North east India still remained alienated due to multiple factors. The Refugee influx from the adjoining countries threatened the indigenous population of the region as they felt that their claim over their land would be compromised. Lack of developmental infrastructure and the realization of their literally and metaphorically marginalized existence contributed to mass discontent. Identity crisis followed suit. The people failed to identify with the majority of Indian populace. Discontent bred violence and insurgency happened. Terror groups emerged with cessationist demands. Drug trade became rampant in the region.(Bhaumick 183). Mamang Dai refers to this issue in passing in *Stupid Cupid* where Adna wonders about Moran being involved in illegal activities like "drug or gun running businesses" (Dai 87).

In his book *Troubled Periphery* (2009) Subir Bhaumick discusses these issues at length in the chapter "Insurgency, Ethnic cleansing and Forced migration":

> Ever since decolonization, India's north east has been scarred by violent agitations, sustained separatist insurgencies, ethnic riots and heavy handed state response, all leading to considerable bloodletting. The region has witnessed large scale insurgent violence, frequent fighting between militia factions representing different ethnicities or competing for the loyalty of the same ethnic group and the huge deployment of security forces on a sustained basis. The consequent militarization has impeded the growth of civil society and restricted space in which it can thrive. Rampant violations of human rights and use of terror by both state and non-state actors, ethnic cleansing and extra judicial killings have weakened the political system and the social fabric and have led to substantial displacement of populations. (Bhaumick 88)

Displacement and forced migration, Bhaumick goes on to discuss, have become indelible features of the North East since independence. The Chakma and Hajong refugees have settled extensively all over Arunachal Pradesh thereby adding to the displacement issues in the region. People from this region have had to migrate to various parts of India in search of alternative livelihoods. This internal migration has in its wake given rise to hate crimes or ethno-cultural clashes in the parts of India to where they have migrated.

Internal Diaspora, Terror and Territory

Postcolonial Indian English writers have explored the concept of Indianness in relation to the multiple belongings that every Indian skillfully manages to negotiate and yet which becomes a zone of conflict with their fellow citizens thereby problematising the entire concept of unity in diversity. As they say there are many 'Indias' living in this country. However, the notion that there is peaceful cohabitation among the various communities is a myth and in case of 'internal migration' the racial, linguistic and cultural differences emerge as zones of discontent precipitating in riots and individual acts of violence. Social historians will definitely be able to track the rise in the frequency of 'hate speeches' and 'hate crimes' that have plagued India ever since its independence from the British rule. News of students from north eastern states having to undergo race based violence in the capital city often die down after the candle marches and the incessant movement of the periphery to the centre for education; employment and other needs continue and so do intolerance and resistance. The psychosocial contestation for territory ensues.

Bodo Barna in his work "Internal diaspora-Assimilation – Formation of the Internal Diaspora" (2010) accepts that 'internal diaspora 'cannot be exactly defined and mentions in the footnote that the terms 'local diaspora' and 'ethnic diaspora' are used by researchers to express the same phenomenon and I choose to use the term 'internal diaspora' as it perfectly denotes the movement of the people from the eastern border of India towards its capital, which keeping in mind the vastness of India is not neither 'local' nor 'ethnic'. In such a vast geo-political space such as India, social behaviour of groups change as

soon as an intra-state border is crossed and the occurrence of 'internal diaspora' can be noticed. Barna say that the occurrence of the internal diaspora was studied in Europe in relation to the settlement of groups in Hungary. In the aforementioned article, he refers to various sociologists and diaspora scholars and tries to define 'internal diaspora'. He writes,

> The essence of the internal diaspora can be rendered properly by a *politological* interpretation, i.e., that the internal diaspora is a state of daily decisions.(Bodo 2005). This situation is present also when the member of an internal diaspora does not think of it, does not care for it, since it functions in each of their conscious and involuntary decisions from the language they use to the life partner they choose, from the friends they make to the workplaces they select. The background and context of each decision is the fact that members of internal diasporas cannot live as completely free social beings for they do not benefit from the natural feeling of being among those of their own kind, for they are being surrounded by members of another ethnic group living there in a compact mass – they are under constant pressure. (Bodo 64)

Ben Lampert too discusses this concept of internal diaspora in context to Nigeria and shows how this act of internal migration influences the economic matrix of that country. Lampert states, "Unlike the idea of migrant transnationalism, emerging notions of the translocal allow

a multi-scalar perspective that can capture agency, movements and linkages that connect places not only across but also within national boundaries as in the case of internal migration" (Lampert 841). Thus the members of internal diaspora participate in the act of assimilation but even that process is constantly hindered due to the behaviors of the group dominant in that region. Barna explains at length how the internal diasporas tend to acculturate the ways of life and language of the majority group without losing the essence of their original group behaviour. In the case of *Stupid Cupid*, Adna is the example of the diasporic individual who has integrated in herself the ways and manners of leading a life in Delhi. Mamang Dai discusses the issues of terror and territory on the microcosmic level. Stuart Elden, in book *Terror and Territory* (2007) states that the words share the common root of belonging to a particular space and strongly hints at the idea of borders and exclusions:

> The linkage between "terror" and "territory" is more than merely coincidental. As theorists such as William Connolly (1995) have argued, territory is formed both from the Latin *terra*—land or terrain—as is generally recognised; but also from the notion of *territorium*, a place from which people are warned. *Terrere* is to frighten away, and thuson this argument "territory" and "terror" share common roots. (Elden 822)

Elden discusses the formation of "new geographies" of 'fear, threat and division" charted out by contemporary colonialist superpowers. Dai's work subtly shows the discontent in the people of the north east on being

exploited by merchants for their natural resources alongside the pain of being called an outsider in one's own country. Here the terror mongering machine is not a foreign power but members of the host community who feel threatened by the inflow of these people from the borderlands of India. Terror is more psychological here. The surveillance machinery is always at work as is evident from the incidents in the narrative. The invisible tension to belong to the new place is felt by members of the internal diaspora all along.

The plot revolves around the narrator Adna. Adna's love nest 'Four Seasons' in the heart of Delhi becomes the haven of people engaged in extra- marital affairs and offers a 'safe' place for them to meet. The place had belonged to an aunt of Adna who had been single and who had bequeathed the property to Adna who decided to run it like a love nest. The secluded world of extra marital affairs and the fact that Adna herself had an extra marital affair and repeated the idea of being city bred, shows Dai's attempt to establish the fact that she was not an outsider to this glamorous world of south Delhi. Adna does not appreciate Delhi. To her Delhi is a very rude city and also lacks culture. Adna does not like this relocation and yet wants to join the bandwagon of people who try to live a happy life in this city by getting themselves good jobs, living quarters and recreation. To Adna Delhi is the place that is the originary source of the problems back home in the north eastern states. These states are regularly milked for their minerals and oil and tea and yet in return all that the people get when they manage to come to the main city is rejection and humiliation. Dai writes,

> In the mid eighties, if anyone asked who we were and what we were doing in Delhi, my

> friends would have shouted back : We are here because we want to be here! We like it here and that's it. Now beat it! (Dai 13)

Adna is the voice of the people from the periphery. The most important word in the quoted lines is "anyone". The mongoloid features of the people of the north east stood in stark contrast to the general demographic attributes of the people of Delhi. From the lines it is evident that the question of who they were was a common one. Anyone could question the presence of these people in Delhi. The assumed normalcy of the question hints at the idea of territory. The Delhiites who questioned the presence of these different looking people in the city were answered back in the most defiant way – "shouted back" (Dai 13). The answer would assert that the person replying to the question was aware of the right of everyone to live in Delhi. Adna refers to the protests by All Assam Students Union against the exploitation of the natural resources of the state and the arrival of their leaders for talks with the Central government in New Delhi. The "pride' of " fellow north- easterners" upon the arrival of the representatives from their part of the country to the centre can be read from the angle of the second meaning of territory that Elden speaks of – it relates to the zone of ownership. The questions regarding their presence were implicitly answered with the arrival of the student leaders on invitation to the geographical space otherwise not naturally attributed to them. Dai writes,

> Just when everyone was saying, Oh, the North-East is a different country altogether" there was an exodus from our parts to Delhi, as if the revelation of differences had cast a spell on us all, and we were turned

> into a motley caravan of pilgrims eager to reach the capital. (Dai 13)

Here she uses “everyone’ instead of “anyone’ and this indicates the general tendency of the people in the heartland of India to consciously speak of the states of the North east India as the other.

Ironically Tagore’s fear of nationalism gains ground here. Tagore has written about the presence of diversity in India on the social level and has extensively dealt with the problematic handling of inter-racial issues within the boundaries of India. He writes, “India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle.”(Tagore 102) The arrival of the people from the North east and their camaraderie with “others from every small town and settlement of the country” point at the silent rewriting of the centre- margin dialectics (Dai 13). The newcomers joined educational institutions and the professional sphere and became a part of the city thereby “assimilating’ and becoming a part of the culture of the place of their arrival. Unfortunately this inflow of the people from the far off parts of India was not welcomed with delight in the central parts of India. The migrants who came to Delhi did not wish to return to their hometowns. Their families back home were aware of the hostile reception that they would be getting in Delhi and warned them –

> ‘“It is a jungle out there!” They warned us. In Itanagar, where the neighborhood called it a day by six in the evening, they followed the news about the shocking murders and the cruelty of Delhi, which was reported daily. (Dai 14)

The anxiety of the people back home was increased immensely due to such reports of violence against their wards. Dai wrote this novella in 2009 and the incident of lynching of Nido Tainam, a student from Arunachal Pradesh in 2014 kept the country in a state of shock for days. Intolerance bred terror and the message of staying out of the territory of the Delhiites made its way in the most hideous manner to the villages in the north east. Dai's novel seems prophetic at this point.

Dai, in a serio-comic manner showcases the various incidents in this novel that highlights two important tendencies of these voluntarily dislocated people from their originary lands – firstly, the urgency to become a part of the city and secondly, to keep the cultural moorings of their life back home intact which can be identified as features of the members of internal diaspora. When Jia arrives, Adna notices that she stood apart from the crowd due to her dress and manners that spoke of her difference from the mainstream culture of Delhi. Adna repeatedly speaks of herself as being a "city bred" and is pleased with the anonymity that this city offered her. Being an earlier immigrant than Jia, Adna had already integrated the manners of Delhiites and she was anxious to blend Jia as quickly as possible into the rubric of Delhi life. Hence she is uncomfortable when Jia carries a strong air of the homeland with her. "My cousin arrived by train with a sack of rice and an assortment of bundles and plastic packets full of home-made preparations … I noticed a few people looking" (Dai 26). Jia is a reporter in a news paper back home and had come to Delhi to attend a media refresher course. Though Adna was very fond of Jia and was happy to have her in the city, she was uneasy about Jia standing

out in the crowd. Immediately she started grooming Jia about the ways of life in the city:

> She would learn. The city had a way of turning you around completely. Everything was the opposite here … I could have written a whole book of instructions for her, but Jia and I were of the same clan so I knew she was sturdy enough to survive. (Dai 27)

This is the tutoring that an earlier immigrant provides to a later one. In India where internal migration is plagued with the issues of language, religion and racism, Adna uses experience as a shield to protect Jia from the onslaughts of cultural terror that is inflicted on the outsiders.

Mamang Dai's works namely, *Legends of Pensam* and *Black Hill* speak of cultural conflicts between the different clans and between the natives and the Europeans who had ventured into the hills of Arunachal either to spread Christianity or to exploit its natural resources. In *Stupid Cupid*, the conflict is reversed as the people from North eastern states migrated to Delhi and the resultant resistance of the 'natives 'of those places who considered them as outsiders. Dai therefore creates the incident where Jia resorts to uncivil means to combat racial violence. Jia and TD had hailed a taxi to go to Connaught place and when the taxi stopped, a "big, hard-faced woman pushed past her and plonked herself down in the back seat." (Dai 51) Two young men also rushed past her and occupied two seats in the front and the rear. Jia too entered the taxi and sat down beside the woman and the man in the rear seat. The taxi driver also did not seem keen to take them and informed that another taxi was

coming behind and did not spare a word for the forceful occupation of his taxi by the woman and the two men. TD and Jia did not give in and when Jia asserted that she would not get down the woman shouted at her, "*Hey you! Jao! JAO! Go back to your own ... DESH!*" (Dai 52). Jia was infuriated at this unexpected hate speech and jumping out of the taxi, she landed blows on its roof and shouted,

> How dare you say such a thing? Do you think I'm Chinese, huh? I am Indian. Do you know where I come from? Do you know where that is you idiot woman? ... Its people like you who create hatred, you know that? (Dai 52)

Jia ended her speech and spat at the woman in the taxi who also spat back. Then Jia banged on the hood of the taxi before leaving the place in a fit of rage. The incident is important because the reaction of the woman to Jia's actions were clearly targeted to make her feel that she did not belong to this geographical territory. Dai very skillfully borders this incident with two casual incidents of lunch with friends and a visit of Adna's lover with a bag of sandwiches and show ironically that the communities who arrived in Delhi were getting accustomed to such moments of violence. Jia's reaction upon return to Adna's house and her statement that she could imagine the woman running down the street with a sword and shouting slogans telling people to go back to China or to Pakistan is indicative of the ingrained dislike for them in the common people of Delhi. This is the violence that precipitates from the sense of territorial occupancy. A war was fought. The reluctant attitude of the driver is significant in this regard. The incident is narrated with laughter to Adna when they go back to her apartment. This shows how the migrant learns

the act of resisting the terror inflicted by the majority group.

Conclusion

Mamang Dai weaves several incidents in her narrative that show the adaptation of the immigrant to the host culture, all the while maintaining her focus on the ways in which this diaspora is formed. The meeting of Adna with Mareb and Mesochenla are examples of the diasporic individual's desire to maintain the bonds with the home community. This interaction among the group empowers the diasporic individual to come to terms with the challenges proffered by the majority community. *Stupid Cupid* thus becomes a doctrine of the integration of the internal diaspora into the host culture of Delhi albeit after overcoming the silent terror of the territorial majority.

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In Search of 'Paradise' in the Heart of Africa: Reading Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*

—Pradip Mondal

Abstract: The winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature, Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Paradise* (1994) is a brilliant depiction of the contemporary issues of migration and displacement in the heart of Africa. Though written at the turn of the 20th century, migration is a burning issue even today, in the first quarter of 21st century. The novel *Paradise* (1994) is set in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) during the period of German colonisation. Gurnah, himself being a migrant to the U.K. in his late teens, has written novels that mostly deal with the problem of migration that are very much evocative. The main character of this novel is a young man called Yusuf who is taken away from his parents at a young age and sent to live with his 'Uncle' Aziz, made affluent by his trading in the hinterlands of Africa. The present paper is going to show how Gurnah represents an ironical version of the much sought-after paradise. From the angle of Paul Gilroy's concept of 'culture', and 'racism', this paper is going to pinpoint how Gurnah's novel tries to focus on the life and culture of the displaced tribe in the 'heart' of Africa.

Key Words: Paradise, Migration, Racism, Trade, Culture.

The novel *Paradise* (1994) by the Nobel Laureate Tanzanian writer Abdulrazak Gurnah, (1948-) mainly focuses on the multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and predicaments of migration in Africa like in his other novels. But this issue is relevant not only to Africa as it has become a global problem these days. Gurnah was born and brought up in Zanzibar (now in Tanzania). But he took resort in the U. K., when he was just 18 in fear of punishment under the oppressive regime of the Tanzanian President Abeid Karume.

The setting of the novel *Paradise* (1994) is roughly 1900-14, the time when the German colonial presence began to be felt in the everyday lives of the different communities in Tanganyika (Africa). The mistreatment of Africans is a proof of the inherent racism in Europe's imperialistic endeavours. A black subject can be represented only with reference to class, ethnicity etc: "... the question of the black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity" (Hall 445). The overarching topic of the novel is a centripetal journey into the core of Africa. Naturally, other colonial texts on Africa crop up intertextually: in the first place, the path-breaking novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) about Kurtz's boat expedition to the Congo river for ivory-trading, and in the second place, the notorious account of a Tanzania-born Afro-Omani ivory and slave-dealer Tippu Tip (1837-1905) who went on his slave-hunting spree.

Gurnah started jotting down about his traumatic experiences as a refugee when he was 21 years old and decided in favour of living in exile in Great Britain. The fluidity of identities of his itinerant characters is pivotal to his delineation of a shared experience as refugees in his novels. Though Swahili is his mother tongue, English becomes his potent literary weapon, as was used by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1930-2013). The aftermath of immigration is not always a smooth journey for Gurnah's characters as they feel a tug-of-war between the life that had been and the life that is now at their disposal in an unknown territory. Mostly based on his firsthand experiences, the characters get enmeshed in an equivocal, fluctuating, and unpredictable situation. They can never hope to bridge the gulf between cultures and continents. Through their trials and tribulations, Gurnah's

characters finally hope to find a world of emancipated humanity in which they can live freely. The noted German philosopher and sociologist Theodor W. Adorno (1903-69) aptly observes in his essay 'Heine the Wound' (1956) "… there is no longer any homeland other than a world in which no one would be cast out any more, the world of a really emancipated humanity" (Adorno 374).

Yusuf is the primary narrator of the novel. This boy in his early teens runs a hotel-cum-shop for Uncle Aziz. The issue of having one's roots somewhere but inhabiting in some other place has clearly been the recurring subject in Gurnah's entire oeuvre. Gurnah claims that he attempts to document the unheard or erased stories of his time in Africa rather than simply presenting before the readers, dry autobiographical or semi-autobiographical account. Gurnah in his article "Writing and Place" (2004) observes that, "Travelling away from home provides distance and perspective, and a degree of amplitude and liberation. It intensifies recollection, which is the writer's hinterland" (Gurnah 59). Issues of memory and history are integral parts of this novel like in many other African novels. Regarding the political responsibility of the critic, the noted Postcolonial critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1949-) observes in his essay 'The World and the Home' (1992) that "the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present"(McClintock 450).

The readers find that in Gurnah's writings, the issues of identity and migration are affected by the insidious tentacles of colonialism and slavery. The characters in his novels are constantly negotiating between their new-found lives and their past identities. Gurnah's narratives deal with the extreme adverse impacts that migration

generates for his characters' identities in new geographical and social contexts. Identity is in constant flux in his oeuvre and what the main characters in his novels try to do, is bring into disarray their stable identities in the new environments to where they migrate. There is a sense of fear, oblivion and strangeness along with coerced migration. This same sense pervades Gurnah's characters who often hark back to their pasts with the feelings of uneasiness, acrimony, and regret. So, memory is a crucial element in his novels. Sometimes, the characters do not feel any kind of proximity with their past.

The noted cultural critic Paul Gilroy (1956-) observes in his book *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (2000) that conflicts ensued in every case where alien settlement had taken place: "Where large 'indigestible' chunks of alien settlement had taken place, all manners of danger were apparent. Conflict was visible, above all, along the cultural lines. Of course, these regrettably transplanted aliens were not identified as inferior, less worthy, or less admirable than their 'hosts'. They may not have been infrahuman, but they were certainly out of place" (Gilroy 32). Gilroy thinks that social, political, and economic problems that followed their importation may be solved by restoring symmetry and stability. He also thinks that people are more comfortable in their own environments which correspond to their national and cultural ethos. The protagonists of Gurnah's novels think that their true identities get adulterated on an alien land. Gilroy thinks that racism happens when two or more races clash against each other. He argues that racial differences and racial identities are the products of racial oppression. Racism gets produced as a result of historical circumstances that bring two or more groups into conflict.

Gilroy argues that migration should not be seen as an equivalent to loosening of one's cultural ties. New geographical frontiers can be an opportunity to reframe a national identity as opposed to the erasure of identity. It can be called a 'transnational' identity. Migration, rather than lessening the connection with one's root, fortifies it: "The experience of migration sometimes builds on and strengthens one's ties to the place of departure, rather than automatically weakening it" (Williams 38). In this novel, the issue of migration calls for a negotiation for an inhabitable space for the characters.

Gurnah's novels, with its diverse textual references and its attentiveness to archives, reflect and touch on wider concerns in postcolonial literature. His novels bring up the issue of deliberate erasure of African narratives and perspectives post European colonialism. His novels raise the issue of how we can remember a past deliberately eclipsed and erased from the colonial archives. In highlighting conversations between an individual and the record of history, Gurnah's work has striking similarities to that of Salman Rushdie—another postcolonial stalwart who also explores the relationship between personal memory and the larger historical narratives in his writings. Gurnah's work continues this discourse about the long shadow of colonialism and employs a diversity of textual traditions in the process of commemorating erased narrative.

Trade and domestic slavery are the other important issues mentioned in *Paradise* (1994). His novel is similarly conceived as a coming-of-age narrative, though set earlier in time, at the turn of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, when imperialistic Europeans started to set up colonies on the East African coast. The novel also

addresses domestic slavery through the eyes of the bonded slave Yusuf—the protagonist of the novel. Gurnah's writing is heavily influenced by the cultural and ethnic diversity of his native land Zanzibar. Located in the Indian Ocean off the coast of East Africa, it was the hub of major Indian Ocean trade routes. The island attracted traders/merchants from the-then Arabia (conglomerate of modern-day Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the UAE), South Asia, the African mainland, and later Europe.

The action of the novel unfolds in a small town, viz, Kawa that came into trading prominence through the laying of the Tanganyika railway track. Kawa is like a threshold between savagery-heathenism in the heart of Africa and the coastal civilization of the Arab-Swahili Muslim elite. From Kawa, Uncle Aziz, a rich Arab trader, sets out on his trading expeditions into the hinterland, transporting his wares from the coastal area to Kawa by rail. In his noted book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Gilroy observes, "the time has come for the primal history of modernity to be reconstructed from the slaves' point of view" (Gilroy 55). Yusuf's father sends Yusuf to serve in the shop of Aziz to pay off his debts. In this way, Yusuf arrives at the coastal city to work as an assistant at a shop along with Khalil (senior to him by five years) who has also been sent to Aziz by his poor parents. The shop is posited at the edge of Aziz's compound, facing the city and the harbour. Inside his palatial home, Aziz boasts of a nice garden, which is supposedly modelled after the paradise as described in the Quran. Yusuf occasionally enters into this garden to assist Mzee Hamdani, the gardener and the guardian. The readers are really flabbergasted what the 'paradise' really

is in this novel when the teenage narrator is treated as a slave.

Through the course of the novel we also see that in the form of detestable trade dealing, Aziz hands Yusuf over to Hamid Suleiman, another shop-owner in an anonymous town at the base of Mount Kilimanjaro. Yusuf fails to listen to his heart as menial work completely bogs him down. "Work" is entirely distinguished from "artistic expression" which, as Gilroy notes in his book *The Black Atlantic* (1993), and becomes "the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation" (Gilroy 40). The dramatic juncture of the novel occurs when the readers find a shivering description of the journey into the hinterland across the Great Lake. Uncle Aziz's African safari does not bring fruition as per his desires as they reach the capital of the powerful African King Chatu, notorious for his savagery, treason, and lust for property. Before being successful in making a profitable deal, Chatu ambushes Aziz's camp at night, stabs many of the *entourage*, and robs them of all their wares. Aziz, Yusuf, and a handful others become fortunate enough to escape with their lives from that frightening place.

Paradise (1994) highlights the great diversity of Gurnah's literary repertoire, bringing together references to Swahili texts, Quranic and biblical traditions, as well as the work of Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899). But it is also a *bildungsroman* and an unrequited love story in which varied cultures and credos collide. The Biblical narrative of Joseph (in the Quranic version, the name is changed to 'Yusuf'), as retold in the Quran is presented to the readers, against the frightful context of colonisation. In a reversal of optimistic ending in the Quran story, where Yusuf (The Biblical equivalent of Joseph) is rewarded for maintaining

the resilience, Gurnah's Yusuf feels compelled to abandon Amina, whom he begins to feel a soft corner for, to get enlisted in the German army he initially abhorred: "… it is precisely in these banalities that the unhomely stirs, as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not" (Bhabha 15). The illusion of 'paradise' gets shattered for Yusuf as he gradually moves from 'innocence' to 'experience'. Gurnah draws an end to his novel on an uncertain note. It is a signature style of Gurnah to disappoint the reader's propensity for a *eucatastrophe*, or a clichéd ending conforming to so-called traditional novels.

The quest for identity is also a persistent issue in this novel. Originally a descendant of an Arab migrant family, Yusuf is compelled to move from his home to coastal Africa to work at a shop of 'Uncle' Aziz. Yusuf always knew Aziz to be his uncle. Later he comes to know from Khalil—his senior at the shop, that Aziz is not his original uncle. So, we can say that Yusuf has found a house to live in, but not a 'home' per se. Rushdie writes in his seminal essay "Imaginary Homelands" (1991), "... 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" (Rushdie 9). Khalil clearly states to him that he has been sent to work here to pay the debt of his father that he owed to Aziz. Gilroy observes in his book *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (2000) that "identity has become a significant element in contemporary conflicts over cultural, ethnic, religious, "racial" and national differences" (Gilroy 106).

The concept of 'paradise' is of crucial importance throughout the novel. In the novel, we find an important

issue of debate about religious concepts regarding 'paradise' between the Hindu Kalasinga and the Muslim Hamid. 'Paradise' can be visualized and concretized in the gardens: firstly, Aziz's garden in the city. This garden can be called a blissful paradise. But it is also where Yusuf is watched by the voluptuous Mistress. It is also a high-walled prison for Yusuf. So, it is at the same time claustrophobic. Secondly, 'paradise' can be visualized in the poor copy of the paradisiacal garden behind Hamid's shop at the foot of the mountain.

Pictorial descriptions of landscape during the calamitous trading venture underline the contrast between the uncouth natural scenery and the sophistication of the blissful garden. Gurnah also describes the makeshift residence of the barbarous king Chatu as a symbolic arena. This barbaric place is the polar opposite of the civilization of the Swahili elite class. Superficially, Aziz's garden looks like a paradise, but in reality it reeks of the toxic fumes of social and racial oppression. Mzee Hamdani, who tends the garden lovingly, is a mere chattel slave. The sexual craving of Aziz's senior wife for young Yusuf is a kind of sexual perversion and moral degradation. Moreover, her open sore, which she always tries to hide under her *shaddor*, can only be deemed as an image for the sickening ambience of Aziz's home. Aziz's young wife Amina, with whom Yusuf is enamoured, is another victim of circumstances. What might superficially look like a paradise and is supposedly designed according to the Quran, turns out to be veritable hell for the members of Aziz's household.

At the end of the novel, the Germans come searching for young black men as prospective soldiers, so they can wage

war against the British. And Yusuf decides to take his chances in the service of the Europeans, leaving his 'paradise' far behind him. At the end of the novel, the readers find a falsification of another idealized state in the pre-colonial Africa. Yusuf finally condescends to the German recruiting officer, although he has witnessed the violence with which the young Africans have been forced to join the German army at the onset of World War I. Yusuf obviously comes to his pragmatic conclusion that the brutality of the German colonialism is still bearable than the pitiless exploitation by the Arab merchants.

As the noted Nigerian novelist-poet Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) depicts the gradual disintegration of Igbo community in his path-breaking novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Gurnah also draws a vivid picture of the indigenous East-African society that is on the edge of massive transformation. Gurnah narrates his story with two plot lines—parallel but contrasting: the story of Yusuf is of growing up and of gaining a mature stature—a *bildungsroman* (literally "development novel"), while the historical plot-line is one of deterioration of the African society prior to its colonization.

Much has been written or talked about 'paradise', both in the ancient times by the sages and in the recent times by the scholars. According to the Hebrew Bible, 'Paradise' is associated with the Garden of Eden. But the moot point regarding paradise is about its precise location. 'Paradise' may denote the Homeric Elysium; it may also connote 'home', a place of safety, security, and ease. The title of the book "Paradise" is ironic, in the sense that it describes 'hell on earth'. It is, in a sense, an 'inverted' paradise. The jungle is concurrently hell and paradise—hell because of the imminent dangers, and paradise because of

the freedom Yusuf experiences and the wonderful sights that he sees there. Here in this novel, the idea of 'paradise' is not stable; it is constantly de-constructed and re-constructed in the mindscape of the readers. Similarly in the novel *Paradise* (1998), by the Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison (1931-2019), eight women characters search for their respective versions of 'paradise' in the town named Ruby and the Convent. To conclude, it can be assumed that we can create a version of an inferno or a paradise in our mindscape, as the great English poet John Milton (1608-1674) aptly expresses through the mouth of Satan, in his grand epic *Paradise Lost* (1667), "The mind is its own place and, in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven" (Milton 16).

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Stereotypes Go for a Movie: A Critical Analysis of Culture and Body in Select Disney Movies

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Abstract: The 'Disney princesses' brought forth by Walt Disney productions after the mid 90's introduced heroines of colour who are representatives of various ethnic communities around the world. However, these heroines who apparently appear to be a part of an indigenous community were mere extensions of the predominant white heroines. The aim of this paper is to identify the somatic construction of ethnic heroines portrayed in Disney movies and also to examine the effect of such bodily representation on child schema especially when body is identified from the lens of the dominant western group. The five non-white Disney Princesses chosen for study are Jasmine [Arab], Pocahontas [Native American], Mulan [Chinese], Tiana [African American] and Moana [Polynesian]. All these heroines were created during the epoch of 'Disney Renaissance', the period in which Disney claims to correct their representations based on Anglo-centric standards and introduced heroines from various indigenous communities around the world.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Multiculturalism, Corporeality, Stereotyping, Femininity, Alienation.

The animated movies of Walt Disney productions, released closely after the mid-90s, witnessed a great shift in their depiction of female characters which incorporated 'princesses' from other ethnicities around the world. However, when we analyse these non-white female heroines on a deeper scale, it is unveiled that these characters who ostensibly appear to be the representatives of the 'other' cultures were not promptly constructed to embrace their ethnic hallmarks. This research paper aims to re-examine the female bodies pictured in five non-white animated Disney movies—*Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *The Princess and the Frog*,

and *Moana* along with its debilitating effects of sex typing in children. The corporeal image of these princesses, when subjected to close scrutiny, reveals that they were pre-existing white bodies that underwent peripheral changes in order to cater to the needs of a larger audience.

Tori Brazier points out that, "Disney is an organisation synonymous with princesses". Walt Disney productions comprises of twelve 'official princesses' who are further categorised as indigenous and non-indigenous, along with a number of associated heroines. With the launch of *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs* in 1937, Disney embarked on its journey of creating the first official Disney princess which culminated in the emergence of the 'Disney princess franchise' that contains a list of fictional female princesses who have made their appearance in various Disney movies. The twelve princesses in this franchise are Snow white [1937], Cinderella [1950], Aurora [1959], Ariel [1989], Belle [1991], Jasmine[1992], Pocahontas [1995], Mulan [1998], Tiana [2009], Rapunzel [2010], Merida [2012] and Moana [2016]. Out of these, seven of them are white heroines while the remaining five are heroines of colour. Most of the movies portrayed white heroines with strict feminine behaviour and an 'impossible ideal of beauty' while heroines of colour are represented off way, presenting them as brave, determined girls, unwilling to follow the beaten track. This distinctive way of presenting heroines raises the question whether these so called princesses have to justify their seemingly inferior colour by being incredibly strong or brave (Klein 22).

Walt Disney Productions released their first full length princess led animated movie in 1937. From here, the characteristic hallmarks of most princesses and fairytale movies stem: an enchanting beauty with delicate

composure and possessing a heart filled with compassion (Brazier). The classic era of Disney, beginning from 1937, produced heroines who ingrained the notion of an ideal feminine beauty vis-à-vis prevailing gender stereotypes. These movies stressed the motifs of 'love's first kiss' and 'happily ever after' which make the heroines completely reliant on their male counterparts. The next era, commonly known as the Renaissance era, was marked by a revival of Disney (Laemle 4) which brought in heroines from literature [Esmeralda in *Hunchback of Notre Dame*], history [Pocahontas], mythology [Megara] and legend (Fa Mulan in *Mulan* [Hu]). These heroines who correspond to the third wave of feminism reflected society's evolving feelings about women (Laemle 7). Although these films incorporate more diversity, Disney still exerts their dominion in reinstating an unbalanced social hierarchy that supports the dominant class and subjugates oppressed groups (Laemle 6). Post-Renaissance era consists of Tiana [*The Princess and the Frog*], the first black princess ever created by Disney and Moana, the Polynesian princess. Post-Renaissance princesses exhibited more strength and independence that led to alternate female portrayals headed towards representing an ideal woman in place of an oppressed one (Alblas 1). Despite such noticeable differences, stereotypical gender portrayals remain dominant even within recent female lead movies. These modern princesses have, in fact, turned out to be perfect examples of global heroines that give us insights into what the dominant cultural trends are regarding fashion, beauty and lifestyle (Hankart).

It is a truism that we live in an epoch where transnational space create bifurcations in global cultures (Hankart). Before globalisation, every culture had their own concepts on body which originated from their traditional

perspectives on gender. However, globalisation is altering such ethnic cultures and integrating them into a universal standard of beauty. Such global beauty concepts are, to a large extent, still determined by western ideals (Hankart). In the aforementioned movies, the five princesses of colour, who claim to represent five distinct cultures, preposterously fits into the western beauty ideal of having thin bodies, round eyes, and high cheekbones. Though Multiculturalism has paved the way for inclusivity in Disney movies, it has often failed to incorporate the intricacies and miniscule detailing that an ethnic group often represents. The inadequacy of these heroines to confirm their own sense of self is mirrored through their bodies that fails to convey clearly and persistently of how one perceives to be a part of an indigenous group (Klein 22).

Globalisation has played a dominant role in determining the deviant ways of Disney which prompted them to feature non-white heroines from ethnic minorities with a positive body and mind of their own (Klein 146). While Disney set out to create history by presenting fierce non-white heroines who are highly different in their movements and behaviour, the beauty stereotype and the banal bodily perceptions associated to it has been overlooked. Although these heroines intend to reflect the cultural diversity in movies, they are more often created by artists who judge them by Anglo centric standards. As Gillian Klein argues in *Reading Into Racism*, "[w]hen white authors set out to create black characters for whom they and their audience are intended to feel sympathy, they may judge them by white standards" (2).

The Stigma of Thinness: Body, Beauty and Belonging

Human bodies and their differences in shapes, are intimately tied to social customs and they often reflect a society's ingrained notions and beliefs. Hence they construct identities which are either affiliated to or estranged from a cultural group. Taking into account, the size and shape of our bodies, various researches suggest a huge difference in perceptions and norms on body in different cultures, varying from eulogizing to reprimanding of bigger bodies (Schrimpf 27).

It is intriguing that Moana's physique stands in stark contrast to the Polynesian cult who is traditionally known to value bigger bodies. The plumpness of a female body, as observed by the pacific islanders, relates to fertility and physical attractiveness (Schrimpf 27). Tattoo art is yet another aspect that is intimately tied to Polynesian culture. On most Pacific islands, both men and women were frequently tattooed. Girls around the age of 12 would get tattoos on their chin, thighs or hands (Cipriani). The portrayal of Moana, in the movie, as a free willed girl determined to cross the vast depths of the ocean counterposes the former Disney heroines who are, by nature, submissive and docile. While Moana is devoid of love relations, the former heroines hope for a prince to come to their rescue. In spite of all the revolutionary changes made, Moana's body still reflects the indifference of the west in accepting an indigenous body of its own accord. Her flawless body attributes to the refusal of the west to recognise a body adorned with tattoo art as an acclaimed beauty standard. While the secondary female characters in the movie [e.g.: Moana's mother and grandmother] adhere to the tattooed and obese bodies of Polynesia, the protagonist's body is, as usual, idealized by the spotless and slender body of west. On the other hand,

Mauvi who features alongside Moana as her male counterpart has a body filled with tattoos. Be it a deliberate intent or careless indifference, Mauvi's tattooed body corroborates the double standards opted for male and female bodies: the notion that female bodies should remain essentially anglocentric while male bodies can be freely experimented with endemic intricacies.

The pejorative stereotyping is also found in the quintessential Chinese character Mulan whose dusky skin tone and slant eyed face perpetuate ambiguous and misleading conceptions on ethnic bodies. In the movie, Mulan undergoes a makeover which symbolically transforms her from a girl to a man when she cuts her hair and wears the traditional male attire in order to join the imperial army (James 99). Here Mulan's act of styling her hair and tying up into a knot qualifies her to be portrayed as a male warrior. Her physique hinges on the unquestioned assumption that all Chinese people look alike, no matter what their gender is (Klein 55).

The importance ascribed to the 'cult of thinness' in contemporary western society has long been a topic of public debates and academic research (Bienkowska 40). The popularity of the size zero models and the images of lean bodies promoted through popular culture testifies the western world's growing preoccupation with body size (Ibid). While teen girls are often urged to embrace 'slim body' as a standard of feminine beauty, infants and toddlers are many a time, illustrated as plump figures. In *Moana*, baby Moana is portrayed as a fat baby and as she grew up, her chubby cheeks and jiggling belly gave way to the idealized slim body. Reminiscent of this wider trend, it is evident that age often acts as powerful element in shaping female corporeality. The different beauty

standards ascribed on to a female body at different stages of their lives not only represent how aging determines the definitions of gender but also negotiates how women's bodies were controlled and transformed over their lives (Lamb 181). The pejorative social conceptions on body, often determined by age and gender, impinges on the emotional and psychological constitution of a child, who is not only building their intellectual abilities but also busily assimilating sex roles and concepts (T. Yawkey and Yawkey 545).

The Princess and the Frog, which is in fact, a reworking of the German folk tale *Frog Prince*, presents an African heroine who is transformed into a frog as she tries to break the spell cast on the frog prince. Popular culture reveals African race as one among the most vulnerable group, often subjected to intense body shaming and discrimination (Sorisio 14). Most of the illustrators perceive that it is almost impossible to depict an African without a flattened nose and grotesquely thickened lips (Klein 81). The culturally conditioned body of a woman of colour is based on her subservience and at last she is given a better name, body and clothes, with her nakedness and waywardness rectified (44). Unlike the other princess movies, *The Princess and the Frog* depicts Tiana as a frog, a creature which is normally considered weird (Laemle 10). Here the motif of bodily transformation envisions a range of meanings centred on gender, identity and sociality (James 143). This carries within it the notion that it is not problematic for a racial inferior to undergo bogus bodily transformation while the so called 'classic princess' cannot be chosen for such repugnant altercations. This is a kind of racial normativity in terms of Catherine McCormack where, "[w]omen of colour are much more likely to experience violence related to sexual racism in our culture

and these are issues that are acutely reflected in the history of art and visual culture in denigrating, hypersexualizing and fetishising images" (49).

The heroines in *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin* are of no exception when it comes to body stereotyping. Pocahontas' depiction as a 'tribal version of Eve' underscores the bodily crisis that occurs when female body is perceived from the point of view of a man. This includes the emphasis laid on their desirability and sexuality that corroborates the expression of female heterosexuality in farcical form. Jasmine who symbolises the Arab world, is shown with narrow face and tiny waist which opposes the Arab culture who have a more accepting philosophy on body shape. Arabs who prefer body weight around the middle consider the midrange of fatness as the most socially acceptable body size, while lean or obese bodies were less preferred (Khalaf et al. 2).

These female heroines that purports to represent different cultures underwent queer recorrections that serve the interests of the dominant group which makes them totally disparaging to their own culture. The makers of the movie have unwittingly produced tailor-made heroines that neither present the lived bodily experiences nor the perceived cultural meanings inscribed onto their body. These customized women models that satisfy the whims and fancies of the preeminent group gives a sense that body is an 'object of desire' as one observes a female body through fetishised lens (Garcia 125). The failure of their bodies to define their self and the inability to fall into place, in effect, reflects the acceptance of prejudiced bodies which are neither questioned nor reconstructed, but simply acquiesced out of Anglo-centric racial superiority. Sandra Wallman's 1983 conference 'Teaching

about Prejudice' postulates such notions on stereotyping and according to Klein, who encapsulated her discourses:

> It is the dichotomy between identity and identification that Wallman explains as being at the root of prejudice…. We are all content in the way we choose to describe ourselves: too often, however it is a view formed by others, dominant others, that forms the basis of the stereotype and is therefore likely to be disparaging. For if the dominant group is the norm, and inevitably its members so perceive themselves, then any other group is deviant- deviant along, a spectrum from exotic and quaint to threatening, or inferior. (Klein 35)

Such representations reflects the interests of the dominant sector that imposes a dominant ideology, based on pejorative stereotypes, which in turn, manifests the construction of ethnic bodies as the absolute 'Other'. The specificity of these heroines' bodies lies in the fact that their bodies are not constituted as 'other' through mere subjugation. The way they are depicted as 'other', happens through objectification.

The princesses of colour, who are highly different from their classic sisters (Laemle 7) are encumbered by their ethnicity that globalises their body politics (Wild 11). Since these heroines are produced in a political climate where cross cultural relations were a stifling issue, movies tend to negotiate their ideas on indigenous and non-indigenous. In this context, body is presented in a state of instability, picking up on features and attributes that are unusual. The result is a technologised body that receives a form and shape through strategic selection, presumably confirmed by an anglocentric or male viewpoint (James 120). The

newly formed body contains a hybrid physique that can neither be separated nor be fused into a new homogenous self (Wild and Naguschewski 38). By constructing an ambiguous body that comprises of all the ethnic features at its crust but obstinately remains western at its core, children are forced to foresee their bodies as always in need of correction.

Theorising Bodies

Academic interest in the body and its sociology has grown substantially in recent years, yet understandings of the body continue to be marked by uncertainties (James 22). Bodies are shaped by the world we live in, which makes them undeniably and indisputably political (26). Sandra Bem in her 1981 article on 'Gender Schema Theory' proposes that all societies allocate adult roles on the basis of sex and expect their individuals to acquire gender specific skills, to be masculine or feminine, as defined by a particular culture (354). Clearly, the developing child who learns content specific behaviour and attitudes imbibes not only those features related to gender personas, such as anatomy or reproductive ability, but also those elements which are vaguely or allegorically related to sex such as the roundedness or angularity of body shape (Bem, *Gender* [1981] 354). Gender schema theory begins with the observation that the developing child learns the appropriate repertoire from his/her cultural environment (Ibid). In the words of Bem, "a schema is a cognitive structure that organizes and guides an individual's perception…. Gender schema construes perception as a constructive process… that prompts a child to regulate his or her behaviour so that it conforms to the culture's definitions of maleness and femaleness" (Bem, "Gender" [1981]355).

In psychology, the process of acquiring sex appropriate personality, behaviour and self- concepts is referred to as 'sex-typing'. Sex typed individuals differ from other individuals not in terms of their masculinity or femininity, but in terms of their self -concepts and behaviour that are organised on the basis of their gender (356). Feminist scholars often argue that children become sex-typed because sex happens to be the basis of socialisation in their culture. Bem's second article that claims to introduce gender schema theory to feminist scholars, reinstates that cultural dogmas often treats the child as a "passive recipient of environmental factors rather than as an active agent striving to understand and comprehend the social world" (Bem, "Gender"[1983] 600). According to Bem, "gender schema theory is a theory of process, not content …. The process of dividing the world into masculine and feminine on the basis of meanings that a particular culture provides is central to the theory" (605). Gender schema theory thus insists that children are less likely to become sex typed if the society limits its cognitive network related to sex and temper its persuasion on gender dichotomy (609). In her research, Bem attempts to attenuate possible sex linked correlations by working on the illustration of children's picture books by drawing long hair onto male characters and avoiding pronouns that implied gender (611). Gender schema theory is proposed with the intention that human behaviour and perceptions should be devoid of gender and one should not drag gender into unnecessary situations (Bem, "Gender"[1981] 363). Our masculinity and femininity are self- evident and rarely would we be prompted to assert it. The unnecessary constraints of gender on an individual's behaviour should be eliminated (*Ibid*.).

Disney's representation of female corporeality is observed in the light of this theory, it leads to the hypothesis that such depictions leads to pejorative sex stereotypes that distort perceptions of reality. This is problematic because a girl child will begin to formulate a sense of herself as a sexual object as what she understands about her body is framed through the notions of what it means to be female (James 98). Various researches have shown that children are not aware of the personality traits associated with sex until 10 or 11 years of age (qtd. in Martin and Halverson 1120).Once they learn the stereotypical roles for men and women, their perceptions and attitudes are confined to sex defined course of operating (Ibid).

Alienating Bodies

Animated movies are endowed with expressive powers that makes to our aesthetic development (qtd. in Hunt 8). Hence they are an excellent medium to enculturate children with open attitude towards gender, identity and expression. Despite the changes made on the portrayal of women from a 'damsel in distress' to a saviour by herself, Disney still has a long way to go, for it still relies on the age old convention that 'you are how you look'. Consequently young girls are urged to follow the path of desired femininity in contrast to unwanted femininity. (Hu). In the words of Laura Mulvey, "In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" ("Visual Pleasure" 62).

This has serious repercussions on developing children who are busy accumulating diverse sex-roles and concepts. Body should be perceived as an expression of our

subjectivity and one's physical self—Its beauty, abilities and its capacity as a source of pleasure. However body is often considered as a site where culture and tradition are experimented, transmuted and projected (Perez 30). As Simon de Beauvoir puts it:

> The little girl feels as though her body is escaping her, that is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing; in the street, eyes follow her; her body is subject to comments; she would like to become invisible; she is afraid of her flesh and afraid to show her flesh. (qtd. in Leboeuf 116)

This results in a feeling of aversion toward our bodies which arises from the negative perceptions on bodily functions. In a patriarchal society, women are often tamed to be ashamed of their body and by oppressing their bodies, men claim their right over women's bodies (Bose 196). As a result, girls and women feel alienated from their bodies or in other words they consider their bodies as foreign and not as their own.

With reference to the studies made on the Disney movies mentioned above, and also taking into account the theory used for substantiation, it can be hypothesized that body alienation occurs primarily due to prevailing gender and race issues, stereotyped beauty concepts and observation of body through a fetishised lens. Cultural motifs also play a significant role in determining bodily norms which categorise male and female bodies as 'bound' and 'unbound'. In many cultures, such conceptions on the relative openness of female bodies are quite evident. Carol Delaney finds that male body in a Turkish society is self-

contained while the female body is relatively unbound (qtd. in Lamb 187). Sarah Lamb, in her seminal work, *White saris and Sweet Mangoes* mentions about the openness attributed to female bodies in Indian culture which restricts their movements and makes them susceptible to various religious dogmas. Since time immemorial, society has taught humanity how culture conditions our body and how it affects our inability to relate to the world. The importance attributed to slender bodies and the conviction that women should invest their time and money for making their appearance seem perfect often leads to the oppression of female bodies that culminates in estrangement from bodily potentials (Leboeuf 63). In this regard, we are compelled to ask, who creates such images? And what do these images signify? (Klein 111). The enticing world of beauty franchises that glamorizes certain lifestyles and beauty ideals often projects body as a commodity and transforms it to fit into the commercial space of consumerism (Leboeuf 64). As Henry Giroux remarks, in his article, on Disney movies:

> Children's films provide a high tech visual space where adventure and pleasure meet in a fantasy world of possibilities and a commercial sphere of consumption and commodification….Disney now produces prototypes for model schools ,families, identities, communities and the way the future is to be understood through a particular construction of the past….But Disney does more than provide prototypes for upscale communities; it also makes a claim on the future through its nostalgic view of the past and its construction of public memory as a metonym for the magical kingdom.(qtd. in Hunt 64)

Instead of presenting a holistic worldview on ethnic heroines, Disney promotes an essentialist approach, doing nothing more than providing unnecessary emphasis on glamour and physical beauty.

To conclude, Body alienation is presumably a defective way of taking one's body as it discerns our inability to realise oneself in one's bodily endeavours. If only children are acquainted with bodies that does not confine to a particular set of beauty standards, they'll begin to perceive body as the expression of one's life and consider bodily activities for their own wellbeing. Even deliberate or transient breaks from social rules can strongly reconstruct bodies, devoid of stereotypes; bodies that does not confine to the prescribed doctrines of femininity (Leboeuf 67). Pursuing body as one's own, is the way to overcome feelings of estrangement that lure them into the compulsions of femininity. By celebrating one's bodies one can refine their alienated behaviour which, in turn, helps in unveiling their true conceptual personage.

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The All-seeing Central Registry: Power and Surveillance in Jose` Saramago's *All the Names*

—Rachel Berkumon

Abstract: The notions of power and surveillance are often viewed as sites of perennial controversy and conflict in every society. The awakened individuals exist in a constant state of resistance and struggle against the invisible web of authority, be it political, religious or domestic; yet are unable to completely liberate themselves. While these themes have been problematized by many of the philosophers like Foucault and Gramsci, their ideas of power or hegemony are best understood through the genres of literature, especially fiction. The works like Jose` Saramago's *All the Names*, transcend the realm of ordinary fiction with its unique and thought-provoking plot that delves deep into the psyche of the Central Registry which serves as a Panopticon of surveillance both internally and externally. The citizens as well as the workers are effectively kept under the control of the Central Registry and the protagonist Senhor Jose reaffirms this through his futile attempts to liberate himself from its authority. This paper aims to shed light on the workings of the Central Registry as a tool of inescapable surveillance and discipline using the ideas of Power, Panopticism and Hegemony.

Keywords: Central Registry, Power, Surveillance, Resistance, Panopticism, Hegemony.

Looking back at history, one can definitely say that every society, irrespective of varied cultural backgrounds, had its fair share of power and control mechanisms. Sometimes the authority rested with monarchs and at times with religion; but in all cases there is a constant attempt to keep the subjects in a desired mould of activity that is acceptable to the ruling class. But today, the systems of power and authoritarian control have drastically metamorphosed to a subtle and more effective form of

discipline and surveillance. Foucault rightly points this out in his colossal work *Discipline and Punish* when he says, "The theatre of punishment of which the eighteenth century dreamed and which would have acted essentially on the minds of the general public was replaced by the great uniform machinery of the prisons, whose network of immense buildings was to extend across France and Europe" (116). This is in fact a monumental step towards the less violent, yet a dozen times more potent, new techniques of surveillance and ideological control that have effectively been passed off as "common sense" to this date. These evolved methods of control and authoritarianism can be best understood through the work, *All the Names* by the Portuguese author Jose` Saramago, where he spins an exquisite tale that investigates the true power of surveillance and its effects on people.

When we consider the term Surveillance, it appears too aloof and almost seems docile in comparison with the cruel capital punishments and such terrifying modes of discipline that was practiced earlier. In its literal sense, "surveillance means to 'watch over', an everyday practice in which human beings engage routinely, often unthinkingly" (Lyon). So how does this seemingly 'gentle' practice ensure a far greater degree of obedience and crowd control than its 'barbaric' predecessors? Enter Saramago's Senhor Jose, a lowly clerk of the great Central Registry where births, marriages and deaths of people are recorded meticulously. And through his eyes the discerning reader can finally manage a glimpse at the real infrastructure of the many Panopticons of public surveillance like the Registry.

At the beginning of the novel *All the Names*, Senhor Jose is nothing more than a mindless worker bee who is obsessed with doing his duty in its highest perfection. And he's not alone in this pious venture of serving the greater cause. There are many such lowly clerks who need to report to the head clerks, who in turn report to the queen bee of the office, the Registrar. There is a clear hierarchy of power flow from the vantage point of the mysterious and supreme Registrar to the lowest rung of clerks like Senhor Jose. The very physical structure of the Central Registry is a blue print of Bentham's Panopticon and this enables the Registrar to easily 'watch over' his subordinates who would be automatically spurred to do nothing short of their best at work, given the feeling that they are under constant scrutiny:

> The room is arranged naturally enough, according to a hierarchy, but since as one would expect, it is harmonious from that point of view, it is equally harmonious from the geometrical point of view, which just goes to show that there is no insurmountable contradiction between aesthetics and authority. (Saramago 4)

The first row of desks seats the eight clerks who interact with the general public. This is followed by four desks occupied by the senior clerks that disappear into the interior of the Registry. Beyond them the two deputy registrars are seated deep inside the structure. At last, isolated and unseen sits the Registrar at the very origin of the concentric circle which the structure represents. Symbolically, this arrangement also represents the power concentrated in the position of the Central Registrar. Also, while the amount of power increases as it moves towards the centre, the work load decreases to almost nothing.

The carefully designed architecture plays a major role in giving insurmountable power to the Registrar just like the watcher in Bentham's Panopticon model of prison. The Registrar, who is safely hidden behind massive shelves and desks, strike terror in the hearts of his employees and is "considered as monumental and superhuman by anyone" who dares to take a peek into the dark interiors of the Central Registry (Saramago 5).

In such a well-organized and chilling setting, it is impossible for anyone to act out of order, let alone think against its system. Also, the blank authoritarian indifference exerted by the Registrar makes the relentless surveillance very much discomfiting for the employees. Yet the fifty year old protagonist, Senhor Jose surprises himself when he decides to sneak in to the Registry at night to collect the details of celebrities and add it to his personal collection; a hobby that in a way mirrors the workings of the Central Registry itself. Jose considers these night-time escapades as something liberating and a form of resistance against the tyrannical power wielded by the Registry that forbids any entry into the building after office hours. Despite living in a room adjoining the Registry for more than two decades, Senhor Jose is barred from opening the door to the Registry inside his room and must enter his workplace through the main door, by taking the roundabout route every day, be it rain or shine. This forbidden door that stays locked all day becomes Jose's source of emancipation at night as he directly defies the orders that were given to him at the very beginning of his stay at the attached quarters:

> The door that opened into the Central Registry was kept permanently locked. They ordered Senhor Jose to lock it and never go through it again. That is

> why, each day, even if the most furious of storms is lashing the city, Senhor Jose has to enter and leave by the main door of the Central Registry just like everyone else. (Saramago 11)

This form of obedience from the part of an employee is indeed a clear-cut depiction of what Gramsci describes as "common sense" where the individual unwittingly follows the rules set before him thinking it to be the 'natural order' of things or the way things ought to function. There is an effective "manufacture of consent" where the dominant class (here, the Central Registry) sustains its hegemony over the workers by convincing them of the dos and don'ts that it puts forth as necessary. "The reason that the key to the communication door was still in Senhor Jose's possession lay in the Registrar's unshakable belief in the absolute weight of his authority, that any order uttered by him would be carried out … without risk of arbitrary digressions on the part of the subordinate who received it" (Saramago 15). This assumption is exactly what Foucault talks about when he describes the concept of Panopticism:

> Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. (201)

And surprisingly enough, Senhor Jose's ardent desire to know more about the lives of celebrities is the only thing that finally gives him the courage to break free of the

invisible lines of authority that fetter the workers and citizens day and night.

But what Jose does not realize is that by doing so he is creating his own mini Central Registry which keeps a keen eye on the people whose lives he carefully records in his work sheets. Thus Jose unknowingly becomes a miniature version of the Registrar himself, a phenomena that probably stems from his deep inner desire to one day gain the god-like power of his superior, who commands the entire Registry and the lives of all associated inside and outside of its walls. This is reflected in Jose's penchant for sitting in his superior's chair every time he breaks into the office building at night; a feat that is unthinkable and totally off-limits during the day. Here "Senhor Jose is sitting in the Registrar's chair and he will stay there until dawn" which is quite symbolic of his dream of replacing the Registrar and establishing his own rule in the Registry (Saramago 18).

The plot takes an unexpected turn when one night Senhor Jose accidentally stumbles upon the index card of an unknown woman whose name is never revealed. This later proves to be a life-altering discovery for Jose as he begins to deconstruct his own identity in his mad dash to gain the identity of the unknown woman. This is when he truly becomes aware of the innumerable weavings of power and surveillance that had been wrapped around him and his colleagues for years, not to mention the unsuspecting public. In a way Jose's attempts for a radical change prove that, "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations" (Foucault 780).

Suddenly, the lowly clerk previously unnoticed by all, becomes the object of everyone's attention including the Registrar's who takes the pains to summon Senhor Jose and speak to him in person, in a clear violation of all hierarchical protocols of the Registry. But then, the Registrar is probably the only person who can take liberties with the Registry's rules as he "doesn't allow people to ask him questions, just gives orders" instead (Saramago 51). By attempting to find the identity of the unknown woman who has captured his interest, Jose realizes that he too had been an unknown person in his own office, despite working there for more than twenty years. This contradicts the general characteristic of the Central Registry which prided itself in knowing everything about everyone. "The Central Registry knew them all, knew their names, where they had been born and who their parents were, it counted up and counted off their days one by one" (57). So it becomes quite clear that he was in reality, just one of the many subjects in a mechanical system of surveillance that took interest in controlling every aspect of the bodies and behavior of its victims, including their thoughts even before they are formed:

> It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Foucault 781)

But the truly alarming part of Senhor Jose's transformation is that, he unknowingly enters into the same corrupt lineage of the Central Registry and begins to use its

hegemony to glean the information about the unknown woman's life. Jose in fact, becomes the very embodiment of the Central Registry; a human representative that goes from house to house to extend the reach of the inhuman system that he works for. At first he takes the liberty of searching through the Registry's records to get more information on the unknown woman and her whereabouts. This is quite easy from his position as an insider in the Panopticon and he momentarily ignores his own experiences as a prey to the same system of surveillance. But then he probably adheres to the office policy that "as far as the Central Registry is concerned, there are no personal matters" and everything is open to the scrutiny of the system (Saramago 48).

Then Jose goes as far as to forge letters of investigation on behalf of the Registrar, which enables him the privilege of gaining access into the private lives of the innocent public in the name of law and order. In her essay on Gramscian and Foucauldian theories of Power, Elise Kropla mentions that both the philosophers agreed on the fact that the primary tool for exploitation in a society is indeed the ignorance of the masses. This is exactly the aspect that Senhor Jose uses to his advantage and becomes the magical key that opens every door in his difficult investigation. He merely has to say "I work for the Central Registry … I did come here on official business" and just like that any resistance on the part of the individuals disappear; they no longer complain about the broach into their privacy (Saramago 40). Thus, "a real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation" and it becomes quite evident that the Central Registry and its surveillance find no real resistance among the unsuspecting civilians who never think beyond the system with any "good sense" (Foucault 202).

In this manner a simple clerk of the Registry, soon becomes a mighty force of unquestionable authority, who easily digs up the life of an unknown woman from even the most remote spheres of her life. All the people he questions, from the unknown woman's godmother to her former employers, ultimately succumb to the threat of authority present in the brief authorization letter that Jose carries on behalf of the Registry. Not one finds it absurd that the Central Registry should suddenly take an interest in the private lives of unknown individuals, which is a clear indication of the institution's hegemonic status. Bates remarks that the concept of hegemony actually means "political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class" (352). The public is easily manipulated by the likes of Senhor Jose partly due to their state of forced ignorance where they are purposefully kept in the dark by the Registry to suit its many purposes. At the same time the vastness of the control that the Registry and its employees enjoy reflect the possibility that "man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas" (Bates 351).

On taking a closer look at Senhor Jose's out of the blue 'investigation', it is impossible to miss the similarity it shares with the 'investigation' of the hapless civilian Joseph K of *The Trial*. In this seemingly surreal story, Franz Kafka introduces a normal and unsuspecting banker Joseph K, who finds himself undergoing a trial for an unknown crime on the morning of his thirtieth birthday. Just like the name of Jose's unknown woman, K's crime and charges remain a mystery to all present in the story including K, to the very end. Yet, like the oblivious citizens and staff who accept the unending surveillance of the Central Registry in *All the Names*, the other characters in

The Trial, and finally the victim K accept the trial as inevitable and even as a natural part of their social life. There is no real resistance or rebellion at any point and no awakened individual who questions the chains of authoritarianism imposed on them. In this regard Senhor Jose fares slightly better than K, as he begins to test the limits of the cage of discipline imposed on him by the Registry despite knowing the terrible consequences of his actions.

As the novel progresses, the character of Senhor Jose undergoes a tremendous evolution from a subject of this authoritarian system to a stern authority himself. He learns to coerce and manipulate his acquaintances into willing subjects who eagerly supply him with the necessary details of the unknown woman. Just as the "Registrar's brain is a duplicate of the Central Registry", Jose too turns out to be another replica of the all-seeing Central Registry and its unending invasion into the lives of the people (Saramago 49). While the Registrar frequently gives elaborate speeches to his staff for ensuring their active consent and keeping up their passive labour, Senhor Jose too tries to use similar ideas to gain the trust and agreement of the people he meets in his quest for the unknown woman. In either case, the hegemony is maintained through a careful balance of coercion and consent that aims at conditioning the mind of the people to accommodate the ruthless surveillance of the Central Registry.

The only institution that at last, manages to hold its own against the Central Registry's power is the General Cemetery which shares the former's motto of 'All the Names'. The cold apathy of the Registry finds an unholy connection with the Cemetery as both value only the birth

dates and death dates of people. Both the institutions act as Panopticons of surveillance that go beyond the grave of individuals and the Registrar's position can only be rivaled by the equally mighty position of the Keeper of the Cemetery. Even then it is the slightly crazed Shepherd that Jose encounters in the cemetery during his search for the unknown woman, who strikes him as the most powerful person, as the former manages to trick the Panopticons by swapping the tombstones in the cemetery. In the ancient times, the "body of the condemned man became the king's property, on which the sovereign left his mark and brought down the effects of his power" (Foucault 109). But this not just restricted to the old times; body becomes an important tool for the exercise of power by Panoptic structures of surveillance as well, even if it meant the dead body of the subject. Therefore, we can say that the actions of the eccentric Shepherd in a way, liberate the bodies of the individuals from the relentless surveillance of law and order and thereby breaks the vicious cycle of power and knowledge.

Towards the end of the novel, we see an awakened individual who realizes the unthinkable reach of surveillance and control of the Central Registry. To his utter shock, Senhor Jose learns how his superior, the Registrar had been a willing participant in all his illegal activities and abuse of the power of the Central Registry right from the start. The clerk understands that even though none can see the Registrar, apparently, the Registrar could see all and that everyone including himself had been unwitting puppets in the hands of the Central Registry. He awaits his punishment at the hands of his ruthless superior but finds that there is none except for the instruction to complete his adventure through an unthinkable act of corruption. "To find the suitable

punishment for a crime is to find the disadvantage whose idea is such that it robs forever the idea of a crime of any attraction" (Foucault 104). So in a way Jose becomes completely cured of the fanatic drive that made him undertake the illegal 'adventure' in the first place, leaving him gasping at the omnipotent power of authority.

The protagonist realizes that the constant surveillance and the unlimited knowledge that it entails has elevated the Registrar to the position of unbridled power where he can forgive and condemn anyone as he pleases. The disillusioned Senhor Jose is finally compelled to destroy the death records of the unknown woman and write a fresh card for her to be placed in the records of the living, despite discovering that she had died a few weeks before he began his search for her. His character reaches a full circle where he is once again forced to revert to his previous state of a powerless lowly worker, but this time with the full knowledge of its inevitability. The system has successfully managed to gain the reins to his rebellious mind and coerce his consent in Gramscian terms. Thus the Central Registry emerges the ultimate victor proving itself to be the indestructible symbol of surveillance and control that cannot be defeated despite the individual's resistances and desire for freedom.

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Myth and Modernity in the Ritualistic Space of Sarpamthullal: An Ethnological Instance

—Priyanka Aravind P and Syam Sudhakar

Abstract: The narratives and practices of traditional cultures and communities apparently make meaning through their legends and origin myths. Even as they safeguard their 'sacred spaces' and customs, the turn of modernity has influenced them in a number of ways. This paper tries to understand such negotiations between the traditional communities and the many aspects of modernity; with special reference to the ritualistic performance of *Sarpamthullal*. The origin myths of pulluvas, the transformation in preparation, performance and reception of the ritual etc. are explored. While serving as a 'public ritual' that allows the intermingling of different households in a neighbourhood, the ritual is still exclusive for Hindu community; and in a way, reinforces specific trends like vegetarianism, observing purity and pollution of the body, fear of god and faith in religion.

Keywords: Myth, Modernity, Tradition, Sarpamthullal, Ritual.

Modernity in Kerala has been largely associated with the Kerala renaissance (late nineteenth and early twentieth century) that is 'believed' to have served "as the point of departure from an 'old Kerala' which was pre-modern and feudal, divided into several local chiefdoms and ridden with casteism but ethnically united since long before colonial invasions, with a 'common linguistic-cultural bond' that united various castes and communities" (Bose and Varughese 3). In the scope of this paper, modernity is dealt as the technological and secular shift that happened in Kerala. This incomplete project of 'modernity' in the region of Kerala has influenced its traditional cultures and ritualistic spaces to evolve. For instance, the ancient liturgy and chantings of the sacrifices conducted by Nambudiris are amplified using microphones and loudspeakers in their

modern performance. This paper tries to analyze the tense configurations of the 'traditional' and 'the modern' in the ritualistic space of rural Kerala via ethnography of sarpamthullal.

Kerala has been known for the serpent worship from time immemorial. Sarpamthullal also known as Kalampattu or Nagampattu, is a ritual performed in Kerala by the pulluva[i] community. Every year, the six months from January to June (Malayalam months Dhanu till Edavam) are considered auspicious for the ritual; which is often held by individual Hindu households or temples which have sarpakkavu (sacred groves) under their protection. The ritual functions as a metonym for the devotees' submission before the might of the serpent gods, who are capable of giving and taking back their lives. On the one hand, serpent is worshipped for its life-giving and rejuvenating power; which is why the thullal is associated as a fertility ritual. At the same time, there is deep fear for the serpent in the psyche of the Malayali community; so much so that the serpent is considered capable of taking revenge and causing diseases or even death. The relationship between nagas and the devotees is so complex that both the god and devotee function as the 'saviour' and the 'saved' at the same time. Over time, the ritualistic space and performance of the sarpamthullal have undergone notable changes. Nevertheless, the tradition of nagaradhana[ii] and pulluvanpattu[iii] manage to survive through generations, emphasizing certain narratives in the subconscious of the devotees.

Sarpamthullal involves the drawing of kalam[iv] on the ground; singing songs of serpents by the pulluvas to the accompaniment of kudam, veena and kuzhithaalam; thullal (serpent-like bodily movements) of the female

oracles, murapooja (wing dance) by kalathilkkammal (member of the host family) as well as tiriyuzhichil (flame dance) by a pulluvakarmi (priest). In times of hardship, the believers usually pledge *kalams* for snake gods. If their needs are met, the ritual is performed as thanksgiving. It was usually performed for begetting healthy offspring and good harvest. The main performers of this fertility ritual (apart from the pulluva singers and the kalathilkammal) are two or more girls/ women, who observe a life of austerity and penance weeks in advance to the holy performance. These *Kannyakkal* or *komarangal*[v] are advised to follow special diet avoiding non vegetarian food, spices etc. At the time of the performance, they tie a white *mundu* around their waists and are sat in the middle of the *kalam* with open hair and palm fronds in their hands held against their chests. It is believed that during the ritual, as the *pulluvanpattu* gains pace, snake gods enter their bodies enabling them to perform the stylized way of dancing- *thullal*. These girls in a state of frenzy give blessings and solutions to the doubts of the believers after they have undone the *kalam*.

Mythological Narrative and Cultural Materialism

The mythological narrative that functions as the driving force behind the 'nagaradhana' in Kerala, is the origin myth of Pulluva i.e. the Brahmin Nallamma of Nagam ChirutheyiIllam saving the Anjanamaninaga from the fire at Gandava forest. The myth says that once Agni, the fire god devoured the primeval forests of Ghandava with the aid of Arjuna. Most of the birds, beasts and serpents perished in the flames but an 'Anjanamaninaga', a sacred serpent managed to escape half alive. It went in many directions seeking shelter but was finally saved by a Brahmin woman Chirutheyi Nallamma of NagamcheryIllam

(Ramesh 35). She was drawing water from a well when this half burnt snake appeared. Without a second thought the good lady secured the serpent in her pot and took it home, covering the mouth of the pot with her *chittada*[vi]. On reaching home, she deposited the pot over *mullathara*, a jasmine altar in front of the house, which suddenly transformed into '*nagasreechitrapeetha*'[vii] with 7 corners. Unfortunately, the elder Brahmin in the house was unhappy about the woman's deed and so expelled her. She lay crying near the *chitrapeetha* when a disembodied voice (*asareeri*) blessed her. The sacred serpent told the good woman that from then onwards it shall spread 96 diseases across the land like leprosy, cough, fever, swelling, indigestion etc. Nallamma is supposed to go from house to house with an earthen pot covered with the hide of heifer and sing praises of the snake, following which the snake shall leave the affected body with blessings. This is how *Pullothi* was born and the 'Pulluvan' was later given form by the snake god as a companion to her.

Another myth about the Pulluvan says, he was Puliyedath Nair; the manager (*karyasthan*) of that Illam whom the elder Brahmin sent with Chirutheyi to assist her. However in Thurston's entry of the myth in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, he doesn't mention the woman who saved the serpent's life was of Brahmin descent. In the first version, Thurston writes, "the maid servant of a brahmin" (6: 226) and in the following variant, the myth is set in Kuttanad (a place in Alappuzha of Kerala), and the rescuer is a woman of unknown descent, who safekeeps the serpent in a room as requested. Her husband disturbs the anthill and dies of snake bite. The myth says, the divine serpent advised the widow to maintain herself by collecting customary dues for saving the people from the wrath of the serpent.

These myths gives *Pulluvas* (or so they believe), the propriety to perform the art forms like s*arpampattu*, *Naverupattu* etc. They are the magicians closely associated with the snake gods. All rituals in connection with the worship and appeasement of serpents take place through the mediation of *Pulluvas*.

Another narrative goes in line with the Parasurama legend of Keralolpathi. The pulluvas extend the legend adding that the Brahmins who were assigned to keep the serpents' wrath in check by Parasurama, failed to worship them (the snakes) at the lower caste households. Therefore, the sage sought the help of Brahma- Vishnu-Maheswara, who in turn gave form to the Pulluva community for worshipping the serpent gods of the lowly. However, it is interesting to note that the Pulluvas give more voice to the former narrative that traces a Brahmin legacy to their community. The particular origin myth also emphasizes the meaning, identity and function of the community, i.e. to protect the nagas, urge the people of Kerala to save them, and heal the devotees from all ailments caused by the nagas.

Pulluvakkudam was made by Kumbhara community, in the traditional manner after observing a week's penance.A large earthen pot is taken and its bottom removed in circular shape. Heifer skin is used to entirely cover much of the pot, except its mouth. A string is attached to the centre of the drum (by virtue of two holes made in the skin), and the other end is attached to the cleft of a stick. The performer sits cross-legged, holding the mouth of the pot downwards, with right hand on her knee. The stick is held firmly under the right foot. The performer strums on the string with pluctrum (a piece of smoothened tamarind wood), and the stretched string produces a pleasing

'brumbrum' sound.Pluctrum is 'vaayanam' in Malayalam. They usually play five kind of beats on the pot: *Muthaalam*(5 *matra* (moment)), *Naalamthalam* (4 *matra*), *Panchaari* (6 *matra*), *Chamba* (10 *matra*) and *adantha* (16 *matra*) (Choondal 28). Generally, it is pullothi who plays on Pulluvakkudam and pullon (male member) the Pulluvaveena. However, during the performance of Sarpamthullal, it is the Pullon who strums on the Pulluvakkudam (for Sarpamthullal, larger pots are used), while Pullothi handles the Ilathalam and sings chorus to their men's songs.

Pulluvaveena is a stringed instrument like violin. Both the instruments are played using a bow in the right hand, while the four fingers on the left hand are pressed and moved against the strings to produce the music. However, the bowing technique is quite different in both cases. A violin is tuned in a softer and sophisticated manner, whereas Pulluvaveena/ nagaveena is rustic and produces raw music. Pulluvaveena is exclusively played by men in the central Kerala. It is said to be made from soft wood which 'doesn't sleep at night', some of which are jackfruit tree, Arali (Kumkum) and Kumizh tree. There are three important parts for a veena: a round hollow portion called 'kinnam'. The mouth/ front part of this 'kinnam' is covered using the skin of monitor lizard ('udumb') and fixed to the bottom of the hand of *veena* by virtue of a string. The bow is made from the wood of arecanut tree, and the strings on both the veena and bow from *nagachittamrith*. Some artists use metal strings instead of *chittamrith*. The instrument is about eight inches in length, with the handle coming to a foot length (Choondal 28).

Sarpamthullal Ritual and its Social Functions

Temples and conventional Hindu households across different communities (Tiyya, Ezhava, Nair, Nambudiri etc.) have been holding sarpamthullal ritual annually or as directed by the astrologers for prosperity. Earlier, the setting of this ritual would be crowded by people in the locality who used to spend day and night, around the pandal[viii]. This is especially a public ritual, where the people experience a community consciousness ('communitas' as mentioned by Turner), a feeling of oneness in the activity of rituals. Apart from the religiosity and metaphysics involved, the 'space' of thullal (the whole area around the kalam and the host temple/ household) teemed with life as kids, men and women caught up with their friends and family; lovers exchanged letters and gazes; gossips made rounds etc. The times have changed introducing people to electricity, cinema, mobile phone, transportation, camera etc. We have more 'private' life and everyday rituals which hardly leave us any time to participate in a sarpakkalam from evening till the break of dawn. A kalam could run for one, three, five or even seven days; according to the will of the host family. Even in the days of poverty, people in the neighbourhood were fed to their fill, during the days of sarpamthullal. It was a custom to invite everyone in the vicinity to partake in the afternoon feast or *prasadaoottu*.

The spot where the *kalam* is to be drawn is decided beforehand and prepared by smearing the solution of cow dung, and drying it in the sun. This is because cow dung is considered to possess purifying ability. This un-elevated *pandal* (stage) is about 2 square meters wide. The four pillars to the stage, made of *devappala* (devil's tree- where ghosts dwell) are fixed at the four corners of the stage and

strings connecting them are decorated with palm fronds, leaves of mango and banyan, flowers etc. The 'un-elevated' stage where the gods appear might suggest the equality of god and the believers. The five important colours used for drawing *kalams* (*Panchavarnappodi*) are green, yellow, red, black and white. Green colour made from leaves symbolizes 'fertility', whereas yellow obtained from turmeric stands for 'faith'. Rice powder gives the white colour that represents 'purity' and black colour from burnt rice chaff signifies 'strength'. Red colour is obtained from mixing turmeric and lime, which signifies 'anger'. Today, in certain areas there is a tendency to use artificial colour powders to save time and energy. There are even artists who use glittering powders to make the *kalam* more attractive. The traditional practitioners, however, do not encourage such trends, although majority of the artists have already compromised in the matter of instruments they use.

Today many prefer fiber pot to earthen pot for the ease of transportation and durability. The pulluvas testify that their shift to fiber pot happened about three decades ago. It is also a fact that today it is almost impossible to obtain heifer skin for the making of *pulluvakkudam* and the skin of monitor lizard (*udumbu*) for making *pulluvaveena*. Earlier, the pulluvas would visit the Kumbhara community (earthen pot makers) and specify the required features of the new kudam; the kumbharas would observe strict penance and make the kudam for them (Radhakrishan).The shift has of course resulted in the change of the sound of the kudam. However, the introduction of microphone and loudspeaker in the thullal event makes up for the reduced sound quality of the instruments and the rising distractions of noise from outside the ritualistic space of the kalam.

The bulbs and fluorescent lamps that light up the space, along with the pandal of tarpaulin sheets are silent invitations to the devotees in the locality to watch out for the event. As thullal commences from evening till dawn, it is important that the devotees feel comfortable and secure from the fear of reptiles and animal attack. The 'day-like' light of the electrical bulbs ensures the smooth functioning of the event, while also blurring the day- night dichotomy. Nevertheless, the lighted electrical bulbs that makes everything 'visible' plays down the visual aesthetics of the ritualistic performance. This is evident if one compares two 'photographs' of the thullalpandal and the adjoining space with and without the bright white light. Here comes the next game changer of the ritual experience- camera and mobile phone with advanced picture quality.

Everyone with a mobile phone is a photographer, in the age of camera. The sarpamthullal ritual is primarily a visual treat with the kalam (colorful floor drawings of serpents, gods etc.) burned camphors, lighted earthen lamps, palm fronds etc. Everything about pulluvas is performative, from the drawing of the kalam, singing and playing the instruments, to directing the kalathilkammal and mediums for thullal. It is no surprise that the audience easily get carried away by the 'visual' rather than being attentive to the 'sung' hymns and narratives of the serpent gods. The mobile phone enables the audience to store and reproduce the images from the ritual elsewhere. This potential empowers them to 'act upon' the event, rather than being a passive spectator. Nevertheless, the pulluvas have different views about this turn. They think that use of camera and mobile phone during the event distracts the devotees. Some artists ask the devotees to switch off or

put their phones in silent mode, prior to the ritual. They allow taking photographs of the kalam and video of the whole ritualistic performance, until the women are seated in the kalam (Radhakrishnan).

In most of the performances now, the mediums start swaying way before the thullalpattu gains pace, thereby limiting the time to listen to the hymns at length. Earlier, there used to be elders who demanded the singers to sing certain narratives; but as time passes the number of devotees who know and understand the hymns is getting decreased (Radhakrishnan). The ritual still manages to survive through the fear of serpent wrath—as an offering or 'vazhipadu' for the nagas.

Conclusion

The sarpamthullal ritual performed by the pulluvas in Kerala is being subject to changes based on the socio-economic transformations. The tensions of tradition and modernity are visible in every stage of the preparation and performance of the same. Starting from the making of the instruments, stylized drawing of kalams, to the performance and reception of sarpamthullal, the sacred ritual has undergone changes to catch up with time and popular taste. However, through all these negotiations, the pulluva community has remained flexible and continues to make meaning in a 'modern' social arrangement which carries its vestiges of tradition and fears.

Notes

[1] The community associated with nagaradhana in Kerala.
[2] Serpent worship

[3] Song of the Pulluva
[4] Floor drawing with colour powders.
[5] The spiritual mediums or possessed women who perform the thullal in a trance-like state, who supposedly convey the word of the spirit world.
[6] *Mundu* tied by women around waist.
[7] A sacred stone with 7 corners usually seen in serpent groves where lamps are lit.
[8] A make-shift tent where religious ceremonies are performed.

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Book Review

Rebecca

—Nila Rajeev

The novel *Rebecca* by Rajeev Shivasankar published in May 2021 by DC Books is an intriguing murder mystery in Malayalam. The plot of the novel is based on a real-life incident that created an upheaval among Keralites. The mysterious Punchakurinji and the Patthekkar house located there will create fear, suspicion, and doubt among the readers. When the central character of the plot, Rebecca teacher decides to write her autobiography, the people of Punjakurinji anticipate the unveiling of some brooding mystery that revolves around her.

Rajeev Shivasankar is a novelist and senior editor at *Malayala Manorama*. His literary oeuvre is replete with more than fifteen novels, two short story collections, and a study called *Meeshamahatmyam*, based on S. Hareesh's novel, *Meesha* (Moustache). His novels are unique in their themes and the presentation style is also different. His debut novel, *Thamaovedam* is based on the Satan worship

cult in Kochi. *Pranasancharam* and *Divyam* are novels based on fantasy and magical realism. His third novel, *Kalpramanam* discusses the environmental issues caused by quarries in Kerala. His fourth novel, *Puthrasooktham* unveils the intricate connections that hold up a family. His magnum opus, *Maraporul* discusses the life of Aadi Sankaran. *Kalipakam* and *Pennarasu* are novels that can be analysed through a feminist lens. The novel, *Kunjalithira* is a historical enquiry into the life of Kunjali Marakkar. In 2021, his novel *Rebecca,* a crime fiction was released.

The novel belongs to the genre of a psychological thriller. Rebecca as the name suggests is a complex character. She is a woman who cannot be contained within the realms of the patriarchal society. She lives in the Patthekkar house with her accomplice, Kunjatha, and her faithful Irish wolfhound, Thopran. The novel progresses with Rebecca's narration of her autobiography to Mohanan, a budding novelist in Punchakurinji. As her narrative progresses, the dark and horrifying secrets in her psyche are revealed and it becomes evident that she will destroy anything that comes in her way for fulfilling her desires.

The novel begins precisely at the moment when Rebecca decides to write her autobiography. She assigns the task of writing her narrative to Mohanan, who hails from Punjakurinji. He secretly cherishes a desire to write his own novel. He gets the opportunity to write Rebecca teacher's autobiography through Pathrose Mash, who was his former teacher and a colleague of Rebecca. Nobody knows anything about Rebecca's life except that she was the daughter-in-law of a Gandhian, called Joseph Pappan and Annamma. She married their son, Antony who married her from a village called Kochom in Nadapuram. Later, he died and Rebecca married his first cousin,

Thomas who was also their neighbour and his wife and daughter have died a year ago. But, Thomas fled from Punjakurinji due to unknown reasons and nobody knows his whereabouts except Pathrose Mash and Mohanan's father.

Rebecca was a sewing teacher at a local school in Punjakurinji. Even though she was childless, she was never fond of the children at her school. She had a traumatic childhood due to her father, Pappi who was a womaniser and a criminal. Her sister, Rachel became a victim of their father's lust and she committed suicide. Her mother, Eliamma was a mere satellite that revolved around her husband. Rebecca, drawing from Pappi's experience believed that she should conquer everything in life. It is with this motto that she came to Patthekkar house at Punjakurinji as Antony's wife. She says to Mohanan that she has never confessed in her life. She believes that it is the sinners who should confess and whatever she practised in her life was correct from her perspective.

The narrative structure of the novel is in the form of a novel within a novel. Two narratives that unveil simultaneously in the novel include the narrative that progresses through Rebecca's autobiography written by Mohanan and Mohanan's novel called 'Gopyam', based on the incidents revealed by Rebecca about her life. There are twenty-one chapters in the novel, out of which ten of the chapters belong to Mohanan's novel *Gopyam.* He was unable to resist Rebecca's offer of money for writing her autobiography. He thought that if there was nothing interesting about her life, he could use events from her life in writing his own novel. On the contrary, he was bewildered by Rebecca's life, and his doubts and fears on

hearing her narrative gets transferred to the readers as well.

The plot gains a twist when Mohanan's elder brother, Subhash who works at the police department reads his novel. Subhash and Mohanan used to play the roles of the famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, and his assistant Watson in their childhood. After reading Mohanan's novel, the detective in Subhash becomes deeply suspicious of Rebecca teacher's life. He realises that six murders took place in the Patthekkar house in the subsequent years after Rebecca's arrival. He was amazed by the fact that all the victims died after consuming some food or beverage and he felt quite sure that the poison might have entered their bodies through the food. The readers will eventually realise that the novel is based on a shocking incident of mass murder or serial killing that took place in Koodathayi, Kerala.

The novel focuses on the life of Rebecca teacher who is aged between the late sixties and seventies. She is an independent woman who lives her life to its fullest without heeding the comments of the patriarchal society. Therefore, she was the 'other' who bewitched men. She was often compared to a yakshi and a worshipper of Satan by the people of Punjakurinji. Therefore, no one dared to enter her compound surrounded by the high walls which further, ostracized her from the rest of the society. Mohanan believes that Rebecca would be able to seduce anyone with her piercing gaze and charming dimples even at this age.

Rebecca questioned the ruthless rules that existed in the patriarchal society with her powerful assertion of femininity. She tells that the aim of her life is to conquer

everything that comes in her way and nothing less than victory will give her satisfaction in this regard. She further criticizes that even in the Holy Bible, there are only fourteen thousand words reserved for women. She believes that it is easy for a smart woman to control the men around her with her personality. It is rather difficult for the readers to like a negative character such as Rebecca but the author with his deftness of style has immediately entrenched the character to be popular among his readers. The book with its unique theme, language, and presentation provided a good reading experience for me. The anticipation increased after reading each page. It is impossible to finish the book without an appalling sensation of fear.

The novel has an open ending where the author leaves it to the imagination of the reader to complete the story. Since it is a crime thriller, it is a bit perplexing to find a suitable ending on our own. But at the same time, it was essential not to have a cliché end to the novel. It was rather a wise choice for the author to give complete authority to the reader to find an ending suitable for their own imagination.

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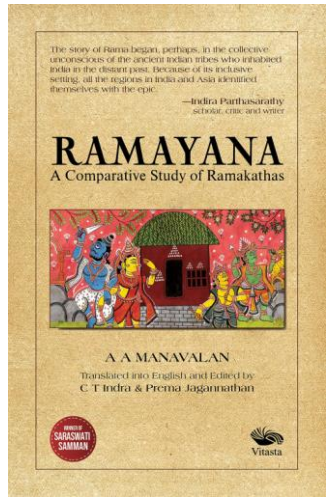
Ramayana: A Comparative Study of Ramakathas

—Sreelakshmi Renjith



Ramayana: A Comparative Study of Ramakathas is an award-winning opus by A.A. Manavalan. The book is a meticulous exploration of the diverse versions of Ramayana found within and outside the Indian subcontinent. Beginning with a preface written by C.T. Indra, who wrote its English translation, followed by a foreword by the critic Indira Parthasarathy, the work contains a total of five chapters. The book takes a comparative approach in which forty eight different versions of Ramayana belonging to different parts of the world are analysed, compared and contrasted. Moreover, the author lays special emphasis on the intricacies found in Bala Kaandam, Ayodhya Kaandam and Aranya Kaandam which he deals in three separate chapters. Before probing deep into the cultural and ideological aspects of Ramakatha, the author has clearly laid out a historical framework that describes when and how Ramayana

gained a pan Indian outlook. For the ease of analysing these many versions, the author has attempted a hermetic division of the selected Ramayanas into Northern, Southern and South Asian recensions respectively.

Ramayana is one of our country's greatest literary testaments that form an inevitable part of our Itihasa-Purana tradition. The rudimentary beginnings of Ramakatha existed mainly in the form of orature and the source of these many versions were "an oral tale charged with mythical quality" which was transmitted from generation to generation. As an oral phenomenon, it was widely spread all over India and as a part of migrations and invasions, has transcended the boundaries of the nation. This resulted in a single story having multiple versions, with each version reflecting the language and culture of a distinct terrain. In a country like India, where linguistic diversity and regional differences are at its peak, each version of Ramakatha has attained a distinctiveness of its own.

The earliest form of written Ramayana was found in the Buddhist manuscripts of Jataka tales which were compiled around 5th century BCE. The work represents Rama as an alter ego of Buddha before he attained salvation. Since the completion of *Valmiki Ramayana* in the 4th century BCE, Ramayana has attained the form of an epic and has been in existence in more than twenty different languages. Valmiki's narrative, the most popular among the various Ramakathas, is set on a vast canvas of myths and legends collected from various parts of the Indian subcontinent.

In the subsequent chapters on 'Bala Kaandam', 'Ayodhya Kaandam' and 'Aranya Kaandam', the author carefully picks up certain core episodes and examines how it is

interpreted differently in different versions. In the chapter on 'Bala Kaandam', he probes mainly into the birth of Rama, his marriage with Sita and the stories pertaining to his valour and divinity. The incidents in 'Bala Kaandam' like the slaying of Tadaka and the redemption of Ahalya are interpreted differently in different versions. For instance, the Buddhist versions of Ramayana have presented the characters and events in accordance with their value systems. Hence they have omitted violent incidents such as the slaying of Tadaka that goes against their philosophical doctrines. It is said that Valmiki has written his version inspired by the Buddhist Ramayana but his characters were not endowed with Buddhist values. Valmiki has presented Rama as a Kshatriya king and Buddhist notions like peace and non-violence are incompatible with the code of Kshatriyas.

In *Valmiki Ramayana*, Rama is depicted as an incarnation of God and hence an ideal being. On the other hand, *Uttara Purana* and *Pampa Ramayana* have not presented Rama as an incarnation and in turn asserts that the son of Dasaratha was born in a natural way. In the chapter that deals with 'Ayodhya Kaandam', the character of Dasharatha and the events leading to his death are discussed. In the final chapter on 'Aranya Kaandam', Rama's journey to Panchavati, their life in exile and the abduction of Sita are examined. Rama's rendezvous with Surpanakha is explained differently in different versions and so is the abduction of Sita by Ravana. Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa* is a prime example known for its bold rendition of this incident. Here the author himself questions the depiction of Rama as an ideal being, especially during his encounter with Surpanakha.

As a country where each state represented a unique and distinct culture, its nature of representation and ways of expressing them will inevitably differ. At a time when India hadn't emerged as a nation-state entity, Ramayana swept into the cultural phases of different regions which resulted in numerous local versions of the single text.

Though the book explores in detail the regional variations in the various narratives of Ramakatha, the author's diplomatic rendition and moderate tone has never taken a chance on evoking the religious and political sentiments of a group. In a country like India where one comes across a plethora of cultures, religions and languages, this is indeed a laborious task. The book is an excellent choice for beginners, to reckon with, for it gives a broad idea on the different versions of Ramayana found within the Indian subcontinent. The way in which these narratives have evolved overtime without losing its characteristical mytheme is dealt in an intriguing manner. The work also unravels certain interesting elements which are rarely heard of and that would truly invoke the reader's curiosity. For instance, the book speaks of versions that present Rama and Sita as siblings and even mentions a Ramayana that glorifies the abduction of Sita. Moreover the writer has succeeded in collecting vital information on the diverse versions of Ramayana which was hitherto scattered throughout various historiographic accounts. In this regard, the book is a remarkable compilation and is the first of its kind to assimilate several versions under a single roof.

Some of the prominent versions of Ramayana are also seen in South Asian countries such as Burma, Tibet, Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia and Philippines which the writer specifically comments upon. Scholars are of the

opinion that Ramayana has crossed the Indian boundaries during the reign of King Asoka when people migrated to Tibetan Burma after he conquered Kalinga. It is worth noting that the writer never ascribes any special importance to any of the versions, particularly, the ever popular *Valmiki Ramayana*. He places it as one among the myriads of Ramayanas that have shared their perspectives on the life of a righteous man. The book carefully pinpoints the minute details that are found in one particular version of Ramayana and this may not be found in the other versions. For instance, the position of the planets at the time of Rama's birth was only found in the southern recensions.

Though the work gives a profound understanding of the various versions of Ramakatha one cannot say that that the work is an impeccable record of the authors understanding of the epic. Rather than presenting an in-depth analysis on the work, the author chooses to be more selective, picking up certain fragments and episodes which he finds engaging. This approach is, in a way problematic as the book gives only a brief idea on the various versions of Ramayana and has never looked into detail on how the values mentioned in Ramayana has guided the society and its way of life.

One might also feel doubtful regarding the comparative methodology which the author has claimed to use while compiling the work. Most of the contrasting points are scattered throughout and one might feel a lack of continuity while reading them. Also, there are a lot more interesting versions of Ramayana which have not been included in the book such as the *Mappilah Ramayana*, recited by the Muslim community of Malabar and the *Wayanadan Ramayana* which has more of a feminist tone

and retells the epic from the perspective of the Adiya tribes of Wayanad.

The book has proven beyond doubt that Ramayana is not a literary epic that merely narrates the exemplary life of Lord Ram. Rather, it is a timeless classic that unveils the Indian historical consciousness which is highly different from the Western perceptions of history. Unlike Western literary epics that aim to record a significant event that occurred in a definite time and space, Indian epics are mostly defined as a 'philosophy in motion' which are brought to light through the life of an ideal man and the role he plays in shaping society. Hence in most Western literary epics, descriptions of the country and capital do not find a place. On the contrary, Valmiki in his *Ramayana* describes the city of Ayodhya in 47 shlokas.

Ancient Indians have never considered history as an inquiry into the past with the intention of explaining its logic and consequences. Hence we do not have separate text for recording history in the way the West and the Chinese had. Our historical narratives were a mixture of genealogies, legends and myths that conveyed instructions in 'Dharma' or morals. Our history is embedded in stories, epics, biographies and folk songs which have to be mined and scrutinized for obtaining factual data.

Ramayana, when placed in a sociopolitical context, provides vital information about the contemporary political scenario such as royal lineages and dynastic powers. It also sheds light upon the prevailing customs and manners, the art of governance and moral philosophy of king. The mechanics of existence driven by the culture and polity of a particular place also find its space in the narratives of Ramayana. The book also speaks about how

Ramayana as an Indian epic has presented a symbiotic interaction of Northern and Southern cultures and how it has impacted the various other Ramayana versions. The different versions found at different periods point to the societal changes that have been taking place down ages in history.

On the whole, the book gives an enlightening vision to its readers—that Ramayana, hitherto considered a pious Hindu text, is a convulsing narrative which has pan Indian versions and that it offers a wide arena for research and other academic endeavours. It is a text which gives ample scope for a learner to analyse, compare and contrast the diverse elements that each regional variation has and this is exactly what A. A. Manavalan has meticulously done in his book. One can undoubtedly say that Ramayana is not a sacred import from the Northern belt; rather it is a classic fable which was always open to interpretations by the communities that owned it. The book can be regarded as an end product of his unrelenting research on the nuances of Ramakatha as found in the different versions of India.

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