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**Editorial**

It gives us immense pleasure to present the second issue of volume 10 of Sahitya, the journal of Comparative Literature Association of India (CLAI). We are pleased to note that the papers included in the previous volume of Sahitya (Vol. 9) received warm and enthusiastic appreciation from readers. It may be mentioned here that the number of papers of good quality received for the volume 9 of Sahitya could not be accommodated in a single issue. It was therefore decided to bring out a next volume of the journal in which eight papers exploring several fascinating aspects of comparative literature and a book review could be featured. Some of these research papers have placed the study of comparative literature in an international context and two of the papers undertake a fascinating analysis of the relationship shared by a film, tv series, animation, music and literature.

In his paper, Indra Nath Choudhuri explores core issues relating to translating culture. Using insightful examples he draws upon Indian aesthetics to suggest a middle path between extreme positions adopted by translation theorists. Soma Marik's paper throws light on aspects of survivor literature produced during the period of Great Terror in Soviet Union with special reference to women's writing. In his paper on Mani Kaul's film *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, Dattatreya Ghosh explains how it creatively blends influences from diverse sources and fashions a unique language of cinematic expression. Tagore's seminal influence on distinguished Hungarian writers is studied in detail in Savita's paper. The ways in which Southeast Asia was imagined in Bengali travel writings form the theme of Pratim Das's paper. Aratrika Ganguly vividly maps an uncharted territory in her paper on "coolie literature" in Bangla. Tanvi Sharma perceptively traces the emergence of "digitales" which synthesise elements of folktales, mythology and animation. Nazneen Hoque provides a nuanced perspective on the colonisation of Australia and the experience of aborigines through a perceptive analysis of two graphic stories. This issue of Sahitya also features a review by Malashri Lal of *Dusk to Dawn*, an anthology of poems written during the pandemic.

Comments and suggestions from our esteemed readers will help us improve the quality of future issues of Sahitya.

— Jatindra Kumar Nayak.

## Translating Cultures *Sanskriti: Anuvad-Vivad*

Indra Nath Choudhuri <sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract:**

Translation is more than a mere transfer of meaning from one language into another as it involves a complex process of negotiating between different cultures. In this process, the importance of cultural context cannot be underestimated. Ancient Indian theorists emphasized that both verbal and cultural meanings should be conveyed by a translation for it to be successful. Translators have to choose between formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. This leads to a controversy over the appropriateness of foreignization and domestication as translation methods. Analyses of various translations of foreign texts into Indian languages may lead one to choose a middle path between these two extremes.

**Keywords:** *linguacultures*, literariness, *pramanaantar*, autonomous aspect, communicative aspect, formal correspondence, dynamic equivalence, *cultureme*

Language, an important part of culture, grows in a socio-cultural context and is used in all kinds of literary creation. With so many languages around us, translation grew as a natural phenomenon for fulfilling social necessities and disseminating human expressions.

However, there is a clear historical division between the perception that language is culture and the perception that language and culture are two distinct entities and therefore translation is seen by them, as a universalist encoding-decoding linguistic activity, transferring meaning from the source language to the target language, using what M.J. Reddy called the method of “conduit metaphor of language transference.”<sup>2</sup> In this conception of translation, culture and cultural differences can be carried by the language without any significant loss. Others such as Eugene Nida believe that “the context actually provides more distinction of meaning than the term being analysed.” Hence, meaning is not ‘carried’ by the language but is negotiated between readers from within the contexts of their own culture.

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<sup>1</sup> A distinguished professor and author on subjects such as Comparative Literature, Aesthetics, and Religion, written in both Hindi and English. He has taught at universities in India, Europe, and the UK. He was also an Indian Cultural Ambassador. He was a visiting professor at numerous universities including Central University of Hyderabad, CIEFL Hyderabad, Jadavpur University, and JNU Delhi.

<sup>2</sup> M.J. Reddy, “The Conduit Metaphor” in A. Ortony (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*, pp. 164–201, 1973/1993.

Readers are hence bound to receive the text according to their own expectations, and translation is necessarily a relativist form of ‘manipulation’ (Hermans 1985),<sup>3</sup> ‘meditation’ (Katan 1999 [2004])<sup>4</sup> or ‘refraction’ (Lefevere)<sup>5</sup> between two different languacultures (Agar 1994).<sup>6</sup> In other words, language always rests on the dialectical relationship between complex linguistic and extensive cultural systems. Nida, Newmark and many others rejected the linguistic theories of translation which deal with word and text as a unit but do not go beyond to take into consideration aspects of culture. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere even dismissed the efforts of the earlier translation theorists who undertook painstaking comparisons between the source text and its translation by arguing that these exercises do not place the text in its cultural environment.

Culture as an integral part of language is never lost sight of in translation studies but sometimes it is emphasised more or at other times, less but never entirely ignored. Bassnett and Lefevere rightly go beyond language and focus on the interaction between translation and culture, on the way in which culture impacts and constrains translation and “on the larger issues of context, history and convention.”<sup>7</sup>

According to ancient Indian theorists the inner significance of the meaning is rooted in the context of the verbal art and that determines the ‘literariness’ of the artefact and without this knowledge the translation is never successful and therefore both the verbal and cultural contexts facilitate in recoding the text by the reader-translator for a meaning which emancipates *artha* from material reality. Kayyat and even Tolkapiyar refer to *pramanaantar* or the contextual meaning; when this meaning is transferred translation becomes a reality.<sup>8</sup>

In the heyday of linguistic translation theories, equivalence in the translation process was perceived as a dialectic between the linguistic and cultural systems of the writer and those of the translator. These took into consideration the

- i) dimensions of language user – geographical origin, social class and time
- ii) the dimensions of language use – medium (simple/complex)
- iii) the social role (relationship between the addresser and the addressees)
- iv) social attitude (the degree of social formality as evident in style)

As a result, the source text is developed having a linguistic as well as a cultural frame.

The translator also lives in her/his own socio-cultural context and while analysing the text s/he is governed by the linguistic and cultural systems and the end-product is the semiotic transformation of autonomous and communicative aspects of sign orders. For this

<sup>3</sup> T. Hermans, (ed.) *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> D. Katan, *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*, 1999/2004

<sup>5</sup> A. Lefevere, “Mother Courage’s Cucumbers”, in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 239-55, 2004 [1982].

<sup>6</sup> M. Agar, *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (Eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*, 1998, P. 11.

<sup>8</sup> I.N. Choudhuri, “Towards an Indian Theory of Translation”, *Indian Literature*, vol. LIV, no. 5 (259: Sep/Oct 2010)



reason, the translator realises that equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness. Equivalence rests on the relationship between signs, what they stand for (autonomous aspect) and those who use them (communicative aspect).

These two referential systems (the linguistic and cultural systems of the writer and the translator) help us understand the translated version of a literary text with reference to the translator's strategies, and the degree of objectivation, the extent to which the general is modified or replaced by the specific and the type of bilingualism.

Comparison of seven significant English translations of *Gita Govinda*—William Jones (1792), Edwin Arnold (1875), George Keats (1940), Lakshmi Narayan Shastri (1956), Duncan Greenlees (1962), Monika Varma (1968) and Barbara Stoler Miller (1977)—provides not only an insight into literature but also captures the change in sensibility that marks different epochs and the mood and temperament of the translator. In fact, this kind of a comparative study of the source text having linguistic/literary and extra-literary conventions gives an idea of the literary idiom and cultural tenor of the source text and its translations in different ages and brings forth unique cross-cultural manifestations of the original.

Because of the personality and period of the history of the translator and the language s/he uses, the impact of linguistic, generic, or ideological forces remains so powerful that we may have different tastes in different works of translation.

We may notice as explained by John Fletcher<sup>9</sup> that Yeats's rendering of Ronsard's "When you are old", a fine poem in its right, alters the tone of the original fundamentally. Ronsard is confident that his verses will immortalize the lady but chides her for her arrogance. Yeats eliminates the element of arrogance. Here a great poet takes a theme from another great poet and recasts it in a subdued manner entirely his own. Analysis of this kind of translation helps us establish an "explosive contact" with the author and the translator and nurtures an interest in cross cultural translation studies.

In this study of translating cultures one can benefit from a systematic comparison of six significant translations in Hindi of the Omar Khayyam's *The Rubaiyat*. All these are retranslations from the English translation of the book by Edward Fitzgerald. One of the *rubaiyats* as translated by Fitzgerald goes like this:

Dreaming when Dawn's left hand was in  
the sky  
I heard a voice within the tavern cry  
Awake my little ones, and fill the cup  
Before life's liquor in its cup be dry.

<sup>9</sup> John Fletcher, "The Criticism of Comparison...", in Malcolm Bradbury et al (eds.), *Contemporary Criticism*, p. 127.

Now ‘my little ones’ is wrong translation of Khayyam’s ‘A rind kharavati’ which means ‘drunkards of the tavern.’

This wrong translation continuing in the Hindi translations gives rise to different connotative meanings in the minds of various translators according to different cultural contexts which they inhabit. Harivansharai Bachan translates it as “mere sishuo nadan”, Keshab Pathak as “mere sishudal’ and Maithilisan Gupta as ‘o mere bachhe”. Sumitranandan Pant has a pedagogic attitude to this term and translates it as “madira ke chhatra”. Bachchan does not stop at the filling of the cup and persuades others to drink the wine, “bujha lo pi pi madira bhukh”. Maithlisaran Gupta, being a vaishnavite, slowly utters “patra bharo na vilamba karo”, as if he is afraid of drinking.

A comparison of these translations can shed light not only on the changes in a given civilisation’s attitude towards literature, but also on the changes in a society’s attitude towards certain other aspects of culture. These culture-bound attitudes so thoroughly stylise our perceptions that we experience our ‘traditionality’ as natural but without going deep into the historical causes, the roots of determinism which underlie the ‘recursive’ structure of our sensibility and expressive codes we cannot translate properly.

The cultural contexts of a given discourse could be deep-rooted, e.g., in “Asadhya Veena” by Ajneya the terms *kesha kambali*, *gufa-geha*, *hata sadhana*, *krricha tapa* are taken from the Buddhist Hinayana yogic terminology, indicating that communion with the ultimate in a state of selflessness may lead to spiritual accomplishment. Ajneya picks up this cultural reference to project his idea about the creative process. In his translation of this poem with the help of Professor Leonard E. Nathan the corresponding terms ‘whose robe a rug,’ ‘whose home was a cave in the hills’, ‘irresistible vow’, ‘disciplined devotion’, could not project the culture-bound meanings which reside in our unconscious.

In the same way “mein kanfata hun; heta hun”– a line of a poem “Mein Tum Logo Se Dur Hun” is translated as “I am the split eared, the underground wretch” by Vishnu khare which cannot express the philosophical meaning of *kanfata* and *heta* of our cultural milieu and as a result the cross-cultural communication does not take place properly.

Another example can be given from the translation of Kalidasa’s *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* by William Jones. Jones’ Victorian morality was responsible according to Romila Thapar in deleting or toning down many passages, which was according to him erotic and hence immoral and linked to the primitive.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, this kind of an attitude towards a text like *Sakuntala*, announced the birth of Orientalism, which tried to colonize the oriental texts and define and comprehend the culture of the colonized in European terms. Thus, the colonized are viewed as civilized, but their civilisation may take some unpalatable forms, and these can be corrected or deleted.

<sup>10</sup> Romila Thapar, *Shakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, p. 213.

Jones colonized the text in an effort to resolve his individual aesthetic crisis – a crisis that for an Indian was totally absurd. More importantly, Jones’ prejudices were responsible for the mistranslation of several passages of *Sakuntala* to impose a value judgment and tie *Sakuntala* to a vision of etiquette which was wholly western and according to European societal norms. As a result, his work presents a tendentious vision of India and in the process consistently fails to recognize Kalidasa’s humour, puns, irony and certain cultural nuances. This can be termed as the “resistency” method (Venuti’s term) which highlights the ideological dominance of the translator.

It will be interesting to note that Tejaswini Niranjana in her book *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1992) expresses the same view that translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism. Moreover, she presents an image of post-colonial as “still scored through by an absentee colonialism.” And while referring to the translations of Kannada *vacanas*, she attacks the existing translations including the translations done by A.K. Ramanujan as “attempting to assimilate Saivite poetry to the discourses of Christianity or of a post-Romantic New Criticism” almost analogous to nineteenth century native responses to colonialism.<sup>11</sup>

We all know that no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; so the exact translation can only be a hypothesis. Translation is always done for a unilingual readership bound by its own cultural properties. It means that any discourse in the SL and its translation in TL, should be accepted as two sets of possible worlds having a “dynamic equivalence” (Nida). The question of equivalence is related to meaning, to be precise, pragmatic meaning.<sup>12</sup> “Equivalent” does not mean identical: the response can never be identical because of different cultural, historical, and situational settings. So, it is always necessary to aim at equivalence of pragmatic meaning, if necessary, at the expense of semantic equivalence.

Pragmatics relates to the correlation between linguistic units and the user(s) of these units in a given communicative situation. We may therefore consider translation to be primarily a pragmatic reconstruction of its source text. Only then does cross-cultural communication become feasible. But this can raise many serious issues; the most important issue is that by accepting meaning as pragmatic meaning the focus of attention shifts from the cultural patterns of the source-language message to the reaction of the receptor-translator of that message.

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<sup>11</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, p.180, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> In *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*, p. 49, Juliana House says that translation is to be considered primarily as a pragmatic reconstruction of its source text. Pragmatic meaning relates to the correlation between linguistic units and the user(s) of these units in a given communicative situation, i.e., “the communicative value an expression.... over and above its purely conceptual content.” (Leach Semantics), (1974), pp27-28

In this context, one may refer to two translations—one in Bengali and the other in Hindi—of T.S. Eliot’s famous poems “Ash Wednesday” and “Gerontion”. The original passage of the “Gerontion” is as follows:

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,  
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk  
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero  
With caressing hands, at Limoges  
Who walked all night in the next room;  
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;  
By Madam Tornquist, in the dark room  
Shifting the candles; Fraulein Von Kulp  
Who turned in the hall, one hand in the door.

In the Hindi translation by Vishnu Khare the “formal correspondence” method is used which seeks to produce a counterpart in the receptor language whose form corresponds to the original as nearly as possible:

*Kalushit mai, dagwood tatha akhrot ke per,  
Phulte huey judas briksha ke samay,  
Phusphusaton me khaye, bante, piye jane ke liye,  
Limoges men dularte,  
Hatowale Mister Silvaro dwara/  
Jo dusre kamre men sari raat tahalte rahe;  
Titian ke kritiyon ke bich jukte huey hakagawa dwara/ andhiare kamren me  
Mombattiyan sarkti hui/ Madam de Tornquist  
Dwara/ Fraulein Von Kulp dwara,  
Jo dwar pur ek hath rakh bhavan me aae*

This formal correspondence method in translation does not require the reader to understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context to comprehend the message and seeks to produce a counterpart in a receptor language whose form corresponds to the original. As a result, the effect of this method on the reader can be sometimes unnatural or otherwise tiring.

Vishnu Dey in his Bengali translation transforms all these terms of a different culture into Indian/Bengali terms, particularly which are familiar with the unilingual Bengali readership. As a result, the depraved May turns into *pacha bhaddro*, Dogwood, Chestnut, flowering Judas into *kochushak*, *kalojam*, *mohini dhatura*.

The title of the poem “Gerontion” in Hindi is same written only in Devanagari script whereas in Bengali Vishnu Dey translates it as “Jarayan” which immediately communicates the meaning to a Bengali reader. Besides, some of the names of persons and places which occur in the poem like Brussels, London, Mr Silvero, Madame de Taranquist, Fraulin Von Kulp are exactly reproduced in the Hindi version whereas in the Bengali version Brussels and in London are changed to Kanpur, Kolkatai (in Calcutta); and Mr Silvero, Madam de Taranquist, Fraulin Von Kulp become Hatilal Mehta, Lady Mukherjee, and Mister Tarafdar.

The title of the poem “Ash Wednesday” is reproduced in Devanagari script. The question is how can a reader in Hindi without special knowledge understand “Ash Wednesday,” that it is the first day of Lent in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and some other churches? It is so named from the ceremonial use of ashes as a symbol of penitence in the service for the day. To cover the cultural gap, Bishnu Dey in Bengali transforms the title into “Charaker Gaan”, a similar kind of religious ceremony of Bengal of ushering in the new by discarding the old.

In Hindi translation, the ‘juniper tree’, ‘she honours the Virgin in meditation’, ‘blue of Mary’s colour,’ ‘hawthorn blossoms’ and ‘the May time’ of “Ash Wednesday” are turned into ‘juniper briksha’, ‘dhyān me virgin ka adar karti hain’, ‘neel Mery ka vastra pahane’, ‘bakain ke phool’ and ‘Mai ke samay’ whereas in Bengali translation Vishnu Dey instead of formal correspondence method uses the method of dynamic equivalence and does not attempt to fill the cultural gap, rather makes the difference between the cultures as clear as possible and turns juniper tree into jayatri briksha, Virgin Mary into Devaki mata, the month of May into phalguni, hawthorn blossoms into atasi puspa and Christ the tiger into Krishna narasimha.

Here, by matching the communicative value of the source text with the communicative value of the target text the pragmatic meaning of both the texts are complemented and in Popovic’s term<sup>13</sup> the invariant core is not lost, and the “proper” result is achieved and that makes us feel inclined to believe that only in this way the process of communication becomes meaningful. Here a major question is raised and that is, can a cross-cultural reference be reduced to such a level where the very idea of reading translations in order to enjoy foreign literature with its cultural contexts becomes redundant?

Scholars who favour the adaptations of alien cultural terms raise a *vivad* (controversy) by arguing that in interlingual communication, the link is the translator who is both the receptor of the original message and the source of the secondary message. Both these messages are embedded in their particular cultural frame and as a result in cross cultural communication there are interferences which signify difficulties that concern both the translator and the translation process and as such this *vivadi* group contends that once the translator is freed from his role as an objective mediator and keeps his receptor in mind and foresees their possible reactions, conditioned by the presuppositions and behaviour patterns

<sup>13</sup> A. Popovic, *A Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (1976).

of their culture, only then does literary translation become possible. It is therefore stressed by the *vivadi* group that to understand a discourse bound by an alien culture translation need not be a linguistically clear reproduction of the source text but should provide minimum information about the thought patterns and the values of the source culture. This is the reason why adaptations, as done by Vishnu Dey, are essential in cross-cultural communication but these must be minimal with an eye at equivalence of pragmatic meaning. It has also been argued that cultural differences and gaps could be filled with footnotes. However, the use of footnotes would unreasonably divide the source text into two parts, target text and footnotes, and this would disturb the autonomy of the source text and spoil the appeal of the source text.

Scholars of the *prativadi* or the opposite group in the *vivad* contend that while conveying the core meaning through the target text the translator should not forget that the source text in its totality manifests the core meaning and Vishnu Dey transforms this invariant core by Indianising the cultural references. It is very difficult to touch the core. We learn from touching it. Only by touching it we can know how profound it is and only then would we be able to bridge the distance between the cultures. Vishnu Dey does not allow us to do that.

The job of a translator is to turn strangeness into likeness and in the process the strangeness of the original becomes more vivid but the vividness itself liberates us from the cultural prison and gives us the taste of another culture. It is almost like providing a vantage point from where the reader looks at another culture and feels encouraged to understand it.

To sum up, the chief concerns of the translator in translating cultures are the text itself and the translation of culture-bound terms. Nord terms these ‘culturemes’<sup>14</sup> or ‘cultural categories’ which cover a wide array of semantic fields, from geography and traditions to institutions and technologies.

Scholars since Vinay and Darbelnet<sup>15</sup> have suggested several of strategies to compensate for the lack of cultureme equivalence. All these strategies are only testimonies of what has been said already in the presentation of the debate between *vivadi* and *prativadi* groups. Kwiecinski has summarised these into four groups:<sup>16</sup>

- i) **Exoticising procedures:** This procedure offers local colour and atmosphere or foreign terms into the target languages like burka used by Muslim ladies.
- ii) **Rich explicatory procedures:** The aim is to slide in an extra term or two which will cue readers to enough of the context, often through a local analogy, to guide them towards a more equivalent cognition. When where and how to explicate depends on the translator’s acute sensitivity to reader uptake.

<sup>14</sup> Culturemes are formalized, socially and juridically embedded phenomena that exist in a particular form of function in one of the two cultures being compared, Nord, C., *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalists Approaches Explained*, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Vinay, J.P. and J. Darbelnet, “A Methodology for Translation” in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2004 (2000).

<sup>16</sup> Kwiecinski. P. *Disturbing Strangeness*, 2001.

- iii) **Recognised exoticism:** Some well-known geographical and personal names and titles have ‘accepted translations,’ e.g., Ge`neve in Swiss is now well known as Geneva in translation but one will always need to check how recognised the exoticism is.
- iv) **Assimilative procedures:** These procedures transform the text from the original into close functionally equivalent target terms, or it is even deleted if not considered integral.

In other words, the *vivad* between domestication and foreignization or what Venuti says the ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values and the ethnodeliant pressure on target language cultural values to register the linguistic and the cultural differences of the foreign text can be solved by using the middle path as mentioned in the sum total of four strategies of translation. This helps in the cultivation of a varied and ‘heterogeneous discourse’ where foreignization remains embedded in the domesticity of the target text.

**Historians and Literary Studies:****A Study of the Literature of Soviet Women Survivors of the 1930s****Soma Marik<sup>1</sup>****Abstract:**

The second half of the 1930s has been called the period of the Great Terror in the Soviet Union. Historians have often focused on quantitative data. This paper looks at women survivor literature, to make sense of the social dimensions of the era.

Nadhezhdha Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope* is a story of her loss of Osip Mandelstam, her life thereafter, trying to keep alive his work, while on the run as widow of a "counter-revolutionary". Evgenia Ginzburg's *Journey Into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind* look at how an honest communist's decision to challenge instructions from above led to a crisis, her trial as an enemy of the people, and long years in prison and the Gulag. Lydia Chukovskaya's *Sofia Petrovna* is a witness novel written during the Terror itself by the wife of an executed man. The questions we need to ask are, did the terror affect men and women all in the same way, particularly those who were not executed but imprisoned or lived in exile? What light do the women's writings throw for historians working on the Stalin era?

**Keywords:** Stalin's Terror; Gender Narrative; Survivor Literature.

**The Focus:**

This paper examines certain aspects of the impact of the Terror and Purges of the Soviet Union of the 1930s as seen and felt by women foregrounding gender as part of the narrative strategy. Four books have been taken up: *Sofia Petrovna* by Lydia Chukovskaya, is a novel speaking as a testimony of the times for future generations. Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope Against Hope*, shows how she tried to protect her husband Osip Mandelstam, sent off to the Gulag, where he died. Finally, Evgenia Ginzburg's two volumes (Ginzburg 1995, Ginzburg 1981) showed how a loyal party member arrested and asked to confess to crimes she could not even understand.

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### Three Women Survivors of the Great Terror

Nadezhda Mandelstam (1899-1980 hereafter NM) wrote a scathing memoir on the State Terror and the way her husband Osip Mandelstam, one of the outstanding Russian poets, was harassed and tortured to death in 1938 and how she led life of a fugitive in the fringes of the cities of Soviet Russia. Osip's poem on Stalin (1933) portrayed the 'Kremlin mountaineer', who saw every killing as a treat. It reached Stalin. Six months later, he was arrested. And the memoir started from the day when the police came to their apartment in May 1934. The poem was only memorized, so no copy was found. Nadezhda, for all her hostility to all the communists that comes out in the book, did approach Nikolai Bukharin, who made some efforts and got the sentence revised. However, after Genryk Yagoda, the director of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) recited the poem on Stalin to him he realized that he could not do much more. Bukharin's intercession got him shifted to Voronezh from Cherdyn in northern Ural. Their modest survival by getting stray work in the theatre or in the Radio Station etc. came to an end by late 1936.

In Voronezh, in the hope of saving himself, Mandelstam wrote 'Ode to Stalin' (1936). Writing in the 1960s, she refused to omit all references to that poem. For Nadezhda the lived realities made it necessary to lead a double life – an inner one where one spoke one's own truth, and an outer one, where one spoke what the state power wanted to hear. She explains how Osip was writing in two distinct ways and they show a premonition that he was still living under an implicit sentence of death.

*Unhappy is he who, as by his own shadow,  
is frightened by the barking of dogs and mowed  
down by the wind  
and wretched is he who, half-alive himself,  
begs a shadow for alms. (Mandelstam:204)*

In the USSR at that time, the one person from whom all begged alms was the all-powerful dictator. In these lines, the poet was hurling back his own Ode and its message, calling those who bowed to Stalin, unhappy and wretched.

In May 1938, Mandelstam was arrested for the second time. In August he was sentenced to five years in camps for "counter revolutionary crimes". He was sent to a camp

near Vladivostok, where he died of cold and hunger on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1938.<sup>2</sup> After the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress (February 1956), she started trying to reassemble Osip's poems and publish some of them. For the Soviet readers, Osip Mandelstam's poetic career had culminated in 1928, for he published very little after that. But he had again started composing in the 1930s. It was in Voronezh that they compiled three notebooks of these later poems. Nadezhda writes:

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*I have often been asked about the origin of these 'Notebooks'. This was the name we used to refer to all the poems composed between 1930 and 1937 which we copied down in Voronezh in ordinary school exercise books (we were never able to get decent paper, and even these exercise books were hard to come by) .... which had been confiscated during the search of our apartment....(Mandelstam: 192-3)*

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It was in course of her years after Osip, and in particular the years after the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress, that she came to write *Hope Against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned* (a play on the Russian word, for *Nadezhda* means hope).

Evgenia Semyonovna Ginzburg (1904-1977) was a communist. In the 1930s she was accused of having failed to denounce her former colleague, Professor Elvov<sup>3</sup>, now 'unmasked' as a Trotskyist. Instead of immediately trying to bow, to denounce others, she persistently demanded justice and stuck to her position that she did not commit any crime against the party. This made her visible to the higher echelons of the Party bureaucracy and the NKVD. In 1937 she was arrested after being ritualistically expelled from the party. She

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<sup>2</sup> The death of Osip was not something immediately recorded and communicated to his wife. The death certificate said it was due to heart failure, on 27 December, 1938. This was communicated to his brother Alexander. However, through about 20 pages of printed writing, NM attempts to show how she persisted in tracking details from others who had been to the GULAG, and how that raised doubts about the nature and date of death. In the end that remained obscure, because official records were never cleared up. (Mandelstam: 380-401).

<sup>3</sup> Nikolai Naumovich Elvov, Professor at the Teachers Training Institute of Kazan University and an elected member of the Party's regional committee municipal board. His chapter on the events of 1905 in the four volume (edited by Y.Yaroslavsky) *History of the All-Union Communist Party* led to the accusation that his analysis of 1905 was close to Trotsky and he misrepresented Stalin's views on the theory of permanent revolution. As member of the Editorial Board of *Krasnaya Tataria* (Red Tataria) Elvov was also a senior colleague of Evgenia Ginzburg also worked. (Ginzburg 1995:5-6).

spent the next eighteen years in prison and in camps, where she heard of the death of her eldest son and husband (she had lost track of him). Here Ginzburg met her younger son after twelve years, and married another prisoner. All this is narrated in the two volumes, *Kpymoï Mapyupym* (*Steep Route*), translated into English as *Journey into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind*.

Lydia Chukovskaya (1907-1996) was the daughter of Kornei Chukovsky<sup>4</sup>. Her husband, Matvei Bronstein, a talented young physicist who wrote popular books on science published by the Leningrad division of Detizdat Publishing House<sup>5</sup>, was arrested in 1937 and executed in early 1938.<sup>6</sup> Chukovskaya was saved by not being in Leningrad at that time. While living in precarious conditions, she wrote *Sofia Petrovna* and explains: “I attempted to record the events just experienced by my country, my friends, and myself.”(Chukovskaya:1) So, while it is not a first- person memoir, it is, by the author’s own admission a novel about her era, about women like herself. And this was written when the events were still a living reality.

Too often, debates about the Terror<sup>7</sup> have been about how justified Stalin was (from his defenders), or about the statistical disputes, about specific areas and Stalin’s motives, like the Ukrainian charge about a Golodomor<sup>8</sup> (mass killing of Ukrainians by starvation), and so on. In most cases the human condition, the sufferings of individuals, get erased in the macro-level studies. Herein lies the immense importance of the testimonies and memoirs of survivors. Roy Medvedev’s great and painstaking work, *Let History Judge*, was substantially

<sup>4</sup> One of the most influential Soviet poets who wrote for children and often his popularity was used to help the persons arrested during the Terror.

<sup>5</sup> A publishing house for children’s literature, accused of ‘sabotaging’ the regime by being associated with Chukovskaya, labelled as a former ‘anarchist bomber’. See Szarapow’s review of Lydia Chukovskaya’s *Procherk* (A Stroke of the Pen) .

<sup>6</sup> He was one of some forty thousand who happened to be included in the so called “Stalin’s execution lists”. Stalin signed the execution list with Bronstein’s name on February 3, 1938. Two weeks later, there was a “trial” which lasted half an hour (according to the KGB file) and was followed by the execution that same day, February 18, 1938.

<sup>7</sup> There has been a great deal of work explaining the terror, tracing its origins, its details. There were certain elements of terror built into Bolshevik practice in course of the civil war. However, there was a major shift involved in the nature and quantum of the terror later. The rise of a party-state bureaucracy and the consolidation of its power required total smashing of the old Bolsheviks through the Terror. The Great Terror also strengthened bureaucratic privileges conditions and the total abolition of any democratic right while claiming that socialist democracy had been created. The present author has relied on the following works: Marik; Conquest 2008; Rogovin 1998 and Rogovin 2009; Applebaum; and Medvedev.

<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian post-Soviet writers have claimed that the famine of 1932-33 in the Ukraine led to mass hunger and starvation. See Wheatcroft 2001 for an estimate of total number of population losses to about 6–7 million. See also Conquest, 1986, which clearly assigns formal blame on the party leadership.

based on material collected from individuals and their memoirs. This text was among the early works of that genre.

A study of the three works enables us to see how women responded differently to the Terror. Mandelstam was born in 1899, Ginzburg in 1904, and Chukovskaya in 1907. Moreover, there were differences in their social and political standings. Osip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova, a great poet of the 20th century (also a friend of Chukovskaya) were both described as “internal emigres” (hostile to the Russian revolution) in *Hope Against Hope*. Mandelstam questioned not just the state, but the integrity of countless intelligentsia (irrespective of political affiliations) members.

Ginzburg continued to see the Stalin era as an aberration. Ginzburg was a young woman at the time of the revolution, and by the time she married Pavel Aksyonov (around 1930) the inner party struggle had been won by Stalin. Aksyonov was fairly high up in the party hierarchy (member of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and the mayor of Kazan) and Ginzburg was a party member who after 1956 reinstated in the party and continued to have faith in the party and what she saw as its restoration of Leninism.

Chukovskaya perhaps survived the Terror because of her father’s influence despite her husband being executed. Later she became a member of the editorial board of *Literaturnaya Moskva* (organ of the Moscow unit of the writers’ union).

All three of them suffered persecution at the hands of the Soviet authorities, even in the post-Stalin era. Chukovskaya refused to publish her other works inside the USSR until *Sofia Petrovna* was published in that country. Ginzburg was acknowledged as an inspiration by dissidents like Lev Kopelev. Chukovskaya stood up for Joseph Brodsky<sup>9</sup>, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn<sup>10</sup>, and Andrei Sakharov<sup>11</sup>. Through an examination of their three texts, we can get, not the whole truth, as Ginzburg herself acknowledges, but certain truths about women’s experiences and their political take, so vital if we are to treat the Terror as something more than statistical records and narration of tortures.

### Reactions to the First Threats and Police Actions:

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<sup>9</sup> Emerging poet who was expelled from the Soviet Union for his erotic poems in 1964.

<sup>10</sup> Uncompromising anti-communist critique of Soviet Union and the Gulag and forced labour system.

<sup>11</sup> A very eminent nuclear physicist of Soviet Russia who also campaigned for peace and disarmament.

When did the first threats and pressures come? NM puts it back almost to the years immediately after the revolution. From this time on the intelligentsia was under pressure.

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*“Was there a moment in our life when the intelligentsia could have held out for its independence? There probably was, but, already badly shaken and disunited before the Revolution, it was unable to defend itself during the period when it was made to surrender and change its values.”*

(Mandelstam:234)

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When we read her narrative, we are struck by an identification of the entire revolution with brute force and muzzling of independent voices. It is not surprising, given Osip Mandelstam’s stature as an Acmeist who was often regarded with deep suspicion by the establishment. But the striking thing is the identification of the nineteenth century with democracy and rationalism, and the twentieth century with dictatorship<sup>12</sup>. And for the decay of intelligentsia, she tries to trace a continuity from the revolution, the Civil War, the NEP, through the dissolution of the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) to the Terror. Yet, scattered through her memoirs there is some evidence that in the 1920s they had a mixed life. All the way to the 1930s, there was a closeness between the Mandelstams and Bukharin. The context of Mandelstam’s Stalin poem, the one for which he was arrested, also suggests why such a closeness could exist.

Between 1931 and 1933, nearly 150,000 criminal and political prisoners were sent off to build the White Sea-Baltic Sea canal link. Maxim Gorky was a fervent supporter of this project. Gorky edited a panegyric that concealed the forced labour and gave great praise to the bureaucracy. Contributors included some of the great names of Soviet literature – Viktor Shklovskii, Aleksei Tolstoi and Mikhail Zoshchenko. Mandelstam was disgusted with this whole canal project, Gorky and his collaborators. This was possibly the reason for his poem. This however is mentioned only in a scattered way by Nadezhda Mandelstam(32, 46-47). This is not a paper on Osip, though in Nadezhda’s memoirs, he and not Nadezhda is dominant. The poem has been hailed by a wide range of commentators from Isaiah Berlin(1965, 1980) to Adrienne Rich and Salman Rushdie as a touchstone of daring acts of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.257

witness and resistance to dictatorship. Bukharin too, as it is well known, was not in favour of the Stalin model of industrialization.

Arrested, Osip was put up in the notorious Lubianka and interrogated. The pressures led to an attempted suicide by cutting his veins with a razor (Mandelstam:77). Forms of torture varied from being cut off from all contacts with his family and friends, to being given salty food and too little fluids or to being told that his wife was also arrested. This was as yet a period when actual confessions, however ridiculous, were being sought (Rogovin 1998: 483-499; Rogovin 2009: 7-13, 173-235). So, the poems of Osip Mandelstam were presented as “documents”, the writing of which constituted a “terrorist” act. Surprisingly, Osip was naïve enough to confess that he had written the poem about Stalin when some of the lines were recited to him, saying only that they represented the first draft.<sup>13</sup>

Evgenia Ginzburg in 1935 found herself being asked to admit her guilt, by a ‘Comrade Beylin’, the chairman of the bureau of Party-political control. When she tried to assure him that she had never taken up arms against the Party, he told her that “objectively, anyone who refuses to disarm, when called upon by the Party to do so, gravitates toward the position of its enemies...”(Ginzburg 1995: 14-15). Unable to understand what was being expected Ginzberg went on protesting her innocence. A colleague of Beylin, whom she mentally called Malyuta,<sup>14</sup> used to hurl sexist political abuse at her – Left-right mongrels! Trotskyist abortions! Mangy opportunists!...” (Ginzburg 1995:15). While still a party member with a regular job she was living with her family. Ginzburg narrates that this was the period when she mentally suffered more, than in later years, even when she was kept in solitary confinement or made to chop trees in the forests of Kolyma camp, situated in the far eastern frontier of Russia (Ginzburg 1995:15-16).

The tragic case of Pikovskaya, a loyal party member was an eye-opener for her. She denounced her husband when he was arrested for his 1927 “crime” (for being a former Left Oppositionist). But she lost her job and increasingly found it difficult to get any work, and eventually committed suicide. Seeing this, Ginzburg decided to resist. The result was more deadly than she could have sworn. She was advised by her mother-in-law as well as another

<sup>13</sup> “We live, deaf to the land beneath us,  
Ten steps away no one hears our speeches.  
All we hear is the Kremlin mountaineer,  
The murderer and peasant-slayer” .....

<sup>14</sup> After Grigory Lukyanovich Skurakov-Belskiy, better known as Malyuta Skuratov, one of the most notorious henchmen of Tsar Ivan Grozhny.

person accused of “rotten liberalism”, to run away to distant areas, while her husband issued a notice of her death, so that she could keep her head down in the emerging period of Terror. As good communists and rationalists, she and her husband refused to do all this. Her appeal against the penalty issued, resulted in a political commissar, Sidorov, an older era Party member, trying to reduce the penalty. But Beylin, hearing this, appealed to Yemelyan Yaroslavsky, who now accused her of even harsher crimes, such as collaborating with the enemies of the people. She shouted at Yaroslavsky for this. On 7<sup>th</sup> February 1937 she was expelled from the party. Eight days later she was arrested.

Accused of counter-revolution, Ginzburg was put in the NKVD jail in Kazan’s Black Lake Street. Put in a cell with another prisoner, she learnt how prisoners communicated with each other, as well as how prisoners were tortured. She was shouted at, told that she would be shot if she did not sign the record and kept awake at nights. But, as she writes, “Later, I was to learn what a lucky number I had drawn in the political lottery. My investigation was over by April, before the Veverses and Tsarevskys were authorized not only to threaten their victims but to use physical torture.”( Ginzburg 1995:69)<sup>15</sup> Later, when she realizes that she will not be sentenced to death, she resolved to stay alive “Just to spite them”( Ginzburg 1995: 174). She also records physical beatings during investigations. Zinaida Abramova, wife of the head of the Council of the People’s Commissars of the Tartar Republic, even when she was arrested, was sure it was a mistake, and tried to keep away from others in the cell. But when Zinaida came back from interrogation... “Her lips, bruised and split by a man’s fist, trembled like a hurt child’s.” (Ginzburg 1995:124)

Like Nadezhda Mandelstam, Lydia Chukovskaya’s heroine Sofia Petrovna was herself not arrested. Unlike the Mandelstams, or even the family of Ginzburg (sufficiently high up with fair amount of privilege), Petrovna was a humble person. She was the widow of a doctor, Fyodor Ivanovich. Prior to the revolution they had been privileged, employing a maid. But in the new era, with the death of her husband, she had learned typing in order to take on a job. She joined a typing pool. In course of time, she became socially involved, while her son, Nikolai, joined the Komsomol (Chukovskaya:3-12). As he grew older, he became an enthusiastic worker activist. But she was less clear about the twists and turns of politics. So, when in 1937 the full force of the Terror fell, she was unable to understand what was happening. She could not believe that people she had known as good humans, whether

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<sup>15</sup> Veverse and Tsarevsky were two of the interrogators.

the doctor friend of theirs who had been Godfather to her son or the Party Secretary of her workplace, could all turn out to be in the hire of the Nazis or be saboteurs. And then Nikolai's friend Alik comes and informs her that Nikolai has been arrested.

What follows is a description of the harrowing experience of a mother in search of information about her son. The bureaucratic machinery is described in fewer pages, but along lines very similar to what Mandelstam portrays. Sofia Petrovna believes, however, that while Kolya was arrested due to a misunderstanding, the others, including the accused in the second Moscow Trial, were really guilty people. After all, there was so much being written about them in the newspapers.

As she waits for the "error" to be rectified, however, Sofia finds other things happening. Her friend, the typist Natasha, is fired for a simple typing error where she had typed Ret army instead of Red army. Natasha was the daughter of a colonel under the old regime. While still searching for her son, Sofia discovers what was happening to people sentenced to jail, and to their family members sent off to distant places like Kazakhstan.

### **Surviving Torture at Prisons and Gulags:**

There is a surprising dearth of archives-based work on women in the Gulag. Anne Applebaum's *Gulag: A History*, includes a chapter (307-333) on "Women and Children," primarily based on memoirs and interviews.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, experiences of prison, whether one's own experience or those of people close to the narrator, as well as experiences of the camps or the uncertain lives of "relatives of counter-revolutionaries" are crucial for a reconstruction of the human costs of the terror.

Nadezhda's accounts show various forms of torture inflicted on Osip Mandelstam leading to his having hallucinations.

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*"...he still had auditory hallucinations...It could have been the words of guards who had led him along the corridors of the Lubianka when he was called out for interrogation at night. They sometimes winked at each other,*

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<sup>16</sup> Of the 115 footnotes for this chapter, 33 refer to published and unpublished documents; the remaining footnotes cite memoirs, interviews based on Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. For printed archival documents see Mironenko, S. V. and N. Werth, Eds.; Bezborodov, A. B., I. V. Bezborodova, V. M. Khrustalev, Eds.: *and* Kokurin, A. I. and N. V. Petrov, Eds. for understanding the experiences of women prisoners.

*snapped their fingers in a symbolic gesture meaning death by shooting, and also exchanged occasional remarks calculated to terrify the prisoner.”*

(Mandelstam: 66-67)

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Memoirists say that arrested persons were threatened by Article 58 of the Penal Code (introduced in 1927 and modified in 1937) which gave sweeping power to the police and redefined counter-revolutionary activity extremely broadly. Section 10 discussed anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation. Section 14 talked about sabotage and extensively used for the imprisonment and execution of many prominent people, as well as multitudes of non-notable innocents. Ginzburg was “convicted under Sections 8 and 11(Ginzburg 1995: 129), which meant terrorism and membership in a terrorist group, both carrying a minimum penalty of hard labour and a maximum of death.

Sentences were long, up to 25 years, and frequently extended indefinitely without trial or consultation. Inmates under Article 58 were known as "*politichesky*" (*политический*, short for *политический заключённый*, or political prisoner).

Torture was used to get confessions. In the light of the memoirs like those of Ginzburg, we know exactly how much torture was inflicted, and why many people broke. Ginzburg herself refused to sign anything, and despite such terrible forms of torture like being sexually assaulted in the solitary underground punishment cell(Ginzburg 1995: 128), hosed down with ice-cold water or interrogated in the conveyor belt system (interrogators taking turns, while the person interrogated is made to stay awake round the clock) (Ginzburg 1995: 79, 83-88). But this was possibly because she had not been broken over the years even repeatedly being made to confess to party crimes.

Sofia Petrovna found herself being written up in an anonymous article as a person hand in glove with saboteurs. She submitted her resignation rather than wait to be thrown out. The next day she discovered that her friend Natasha had consumed poison (Chukovskaya: 82-89).

Her son survived, at least the first year and a few months. And she received a letter from him, where he mentioned how he had been tortured: “Mama dear, Investigator Ershov beat me and trampled me, and now I’m deaf in one ear.”(Chukovskaya:106) When she took the letter to Mrs. Kiparisova, the wife of Kolya’s Godfather, she found the woman packing to leave since, as the wife of a counter revolutionary, she was being deported. (Chukovskaya: 107-8) And

she advised Sofia not to apply on behalf of her son. To do so would be to draw attention to herself as the mother of a convicted counter-revolutionary. At the same time, it was likely to result in further punishment for her son.

Lydia Chukovskaya therefore gets her principal character to do what Ginzburg had been advised but what she refused to do. Possibly, it was easier for an obscure Sofia Petrovna than for Ginzburg. As a teacher and author, a colleague of a man Stalin himself had condemned, and as a party member married to a high functionary, Ginzburg's visibility was far greater. As Vadim Rogovin shows, there was substantial sympathy for Trotsky's criticism of the Stalin regime in the ranks and even in the leadership of the CPSU, and support for his demands for inner-party democracy, greater social equality and an international orientation to the Bolshevik goal of world revolution. It was this political fact, as Rogovin demonstrates, that accounts for the purge reaching so deeply into the party apparatus, the military, the Komsomol youth movement, and the broader layers of the population (Rogovin 2009: 28-34, 79-91; 129-217).

In the first period, that is, between the first arrest and second arrest of Osip, the world was closing in. This was a period when people could understand who their friends were, who were courageous under difficulties. In Moscow, Nadezhda tells her readers, "The Shklovskis' house was the only place where we felt like human beings again." (Mandelstam:351)<sup>17</sup> They avoided staying overnight, as the women who looked after the building were under police instruction to report such people.

As they tried to negotiate the bureaucracy, not even realizing that it was no longer a matter of privileges being taken away but death looming, they met numerous writers and semi-intellectual party members. Nadezhda remembered three meetings with Alexander Fadeyev, a founder of the Union of Writers, who honoured Stalin as "the greatest humanist the world had ever known". But in his suicide note he had denounced the Stalinists for having exterminated the best people in Soviet literature.

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<sup>17</sup> This refers to Viktor and Vasilisa Shklovski. Viktor was one of the major figures in Russian Formalism, considered in Stalin era as an elitist theory of art talking about forms of art which has no so-called connection with proletarian masses. In the 1930s Shklovski survived by not writing about formalism. On formalism see Erlich, Victor Erlich, and Bennett, Tony .

Life in the camps was different from life on the run, as the narrative of Ginzburg reveals. Surviving the extreme terror of Yezhovshchina,<sup>18</sup> Ginzburg with her sentences on, did not know what would happen afterwards. The second volume of her memoirs, *Within the Whirlwind*, begins with life in Kolyma camp. The narrative of survival is a deeply gendered one. Her tree-felling duty was changed to looking after children in other side of the camp when people failed to produce according to quota and the food ration was reduced. (Ginzburg 1981: 4-11) Even when the women were in the tree-felling site, the dominant male figures would turn up and ask for sexual services in exchange for goods.

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*“I’m the forwarding agent at Burkhala” (one of the most terrible of the gold mines), “so I can put you in the way of sugar, butter, and white bread. I’ll give you shoes, felt boots, and a really good padded jacket... we can come to an arrangement with the guards... There’s a shack available.”*

(Ginzburg 1981: 4-11)

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We need to make a distinction between the idea that gender mattered to the women (that is, being a woman had an effect on experience and perspective) and the fact that presentation of the self, did not always deploy categories of gender. This comes out clearly in many of the essays in the collection by Vilensky, *Till My Tale is Told*. Much of Ginzburg’s discussion is also told in terms of class and status and gender is often pushed to the background because the subordination of the woman-oriented agenda to a male oriented revolutionary model goes back considerably in the revolutionary tradition in Russia. This however in turn raises a question. For all the attempts at pushing gender to the background, memoirists like Ginzburg do end up presenting some parts of their lives as human beings and as women. Men’s memoirs all too often take on such a purely “political (read masculine)” colour, so that the daily lives, the attitudes toward self, family, workplace, etc. do not figure so clearly. So, it is possible to suggest that the gender of the author did have an impact on the structuring of the narrative.

Life in the camps plays an important role in Ginzburg’s narrative. The camps strip away ideological assumptions, and allow her to reconsider principles that determined human value.

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<sup>18</sup> Worst phase of the terror in 1937–38 under the new NKVD chief Nikolai Yezhov.

In course of the two volumes read as a whole, Ginzburg emerges as a figure who reconsiders principles she had been taught, and emerges due to the camp experience as a morally informed and transformed figure. The first volume tells us that they are the memoirs of a typical communist. The epilogue to the second volume tells us that it is about

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*“the gradual transformation of a naïve young Communist idealist into ... a human being who amid all her setbacks and sufferings also had moments (however brief) of fresh insight in her search for truth. It is this cruel journey of the soul and not just the chronology of my sufferings that I want to bring home to the reader.” (Ginzburg 1981: 423)*

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Nadezhda Mandelstam’s two volumes of her memoirs have a parallel in their histories. Both Ginzburg and NM wrote their drafts after the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congresses of the CPSU. Both found it easier to be read abroad and in Samizdat (Soviet underground literature) than in legal print version in their own country. So, both wrote the second volume with a sense that the past had not been mastered yet – that I, the narrator, had suffered, yet telling that truthfully to the country, getting the truth published and widely circulated, was yet impossible. Interestingly, for all their differences, both Ginzburg and Mandelstam tell their readers that they will be telling the truth, nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth (since neither claimed to know the whole truth about the repression and the system that produced it).<sup>19</sup> In the case of Ginzburg this leads her to a detailed and analytical presentation of the prison and camp system. In the case of Mandelstam, there is a keen look at the intelligentsia. She does look at some of the more courageous figures. For example, Boris Pasternak gets a favourable mention for *Doctor Zhivago*, both as a novel and as an act of courage. But flaws in his character are also mentioned. (Mandelstam:151-55)

Unlike Chukovskaya and Ginzburg, Mandelstam writes as someone who is opposed to the whole communist creed and not just Stalinism. While Chukovskaya is concerned with the impact of Stalinism on ordinary people, Ginzburg examined its impact on the Communist Party and its project. Mandelstam is concerned wholly with the intelligentsia. Ginzburg’s keen eyes let her see the lives of different kinds of people – politicals, including non-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 175, *Within the Whirlwind*, p. 420.

Communist politicals, people accidentally caught up, different kinds of police and security staff, and so on.

Sofia Petrovna, in order to survive, decided to burn the last letter from Nikolai (Kolya). Was it cowardly? In 1937, at the height of the Terror, survival called for many strategies. Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, memorised an eight-paragraph long letter, addressed to a future generation of party leaders. For years, while she languished in prison cells and internal exile as a "relative of an enemy of the state." (Larina) But as we will see below, a more complex literary-political motive may have existed for Chukovskaya's plot.

### Gender and Genre:

Finally, the generic features of the writings and the nature of gendering in them will be examined. Beth Holmgren's major study shows the gender imbalance in post-World War II Soviet Union was not due solely to the War, but also to the mass execution of male victims. So in many cases, there appears a reversal, and it is the men who appear mute, silent victims, while the women appear to be people empowered at least to lament, and also to remember.

Ginzburg's book suggests that gender may not always be primary. She describes her encounter with the women 'criminals' at one stage in an extremely contemptuous manner, when she was sent to work in a farm as a nurse for the children. Afterwards Ginzburg was given the duty of medical-in-charge of women of a 'production brigade' where she had to spend half the day. Her narrative reveals that these women, all being made to do a huge amount of work, wanted illegal permission slips from her, so that they could avoid working for the day. Obviously, she was not in a position to hand out such sick-leave certificates at random. But there is a certain lack of recognition that these women were also being brutalised by the state. (Ginzburg 1981: 7-8, 54-55).

There are cases where gender does not matter for other reasons, and Ginzburg highlights one such with clarity. She talked about an honest bureaucrat, Vallentina Zimmermann, in the camp disliked by corrupt elements among the camp bureaucracy. But Ginzburg simply sees Zimmermann as an oppressor. "Of what value are virtues such as honesty, moderation, and even incorruptibility, when the person endowed with all these qualities is performing the role of a butcher vis-à-vis others?" (Ginzburg 1981: 75).

It is however in Ginzburg's treatment of Pavel Aksyonov and Anton Valter that we find a gendered narrative. The first volume was written with the hope that her memoirs would be published in the USSR. The second volume was published without such expectation. At the

same time, there is a sharp break. Her relationship with Aksyonov is dealt with in *Journey Into the Whirlwind*. The second volume looks at Valter. In fact, Ginzburg had tried to establish contact with Aksyonov from Kolyma. A considerable number of her letters to him exist in the Research Centre for East Europe in Bremen. (Babenysheva papers) Instead of tracing any decline in the relationship with Pavel, Ginzburg lets the reader feel that it was her belief that he had died, that ended their relationship. (Ginzburg 1981: 316).

Why does this happen? It is worth thinking of the function of the family within the narrative structure. Ginzburg eventually divorced Pavel in 1951. (Duda) This does not appear in the memoirs. Two linked reasons can be advanced for this. At the end of the first volume, full of hope, she records her happiness as a communist, that the great Leninist truths can now come out in this public document for future. So, in this work more for the historian than for personal communications, the breakdown of a relationship for personal reasons apparently could not find space. Kathryn Duda suggests (based on another writer, Natasha Kolchevska) that Ginzburg wanted Valter to be shown as an improved Aksyonov. Using Ginzburg's letters, Duda argues that the failure was due to 'personal' reasons, and therefore does not find space in the narrative. So, the personal is 'not political' here. The relationship with Anton Valter is traced with greater care than the relationship with Pavel Aksyonov, and the emotional bond is shown. The record of the issue of divorce is shown in terms of hesitation over getting a formal divorce since she was not certain whether he had died. The memoir shows the urge felt by Ginzburg for a formal civil marriage with Anton Valter to avoid their being separated, since Valter had been freed and the difference in status could have presented a problem. (Ginzburg 1981: 316-17).

What role does the family play in the narrative structure? It is possible to suggest that there is involved a break from the *partiinost* style imposed by Stalinism. In the first volume, she brings up cases that showed a political culture where family ties were less important than party ties, but family ties were at the same time exploited to obtain confessions (as when she herself was pressurised by being told that Aksyonov had disowned her, so she might as well confess). (Ginzburg 1995:50).

When "Little Anna", a party member arrested by the NKVD, was told by the interrogator that her marriage had been an artificial one at the orders of an anti-Soviet underground, she could confide about her pains only to Evgeniia. She was also afraid of

accusing communist interrogators and of being overheard by the Social Revolutionary Derkovskaya, a 'class enemy'. (Ginzburg 1995:109, 111).

By making the second volume one about building a family she traced positively her meeting with her younger son by Pavel and her adoption of Tonya. Anton Valter in the second volume is introduced at a much greater length than Pavel in the first. There is a narrative of how a Crimean German, Valter was arrested for supposedly being part of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, how he got repeated punishments while in camp in 1938. But as doctors were in great demand he survived. (Ginzburg 1981:108-110) The growth of their relationship, from one between doctor and nurse, to friends and lovers, is traced at length (Ginzburg 1981:116-133, 181-195). Her meeting with her younger son Vasya, is also sketched with much display of maternal love. Interestingly, in the first volume, which discusses a period when the children were much younger, she does not display much maternal concern, presumably because, as before, the first book was being written as a public document to expose the "cult of the personality", while the second book is to a much greater extent a personal narrative. Hence the gendered role (mother, wife etc.) can be permitted.

At the same time, these writings have been received, particularly in the USSR and in post-Soviet Russia, not as fiction or personal memoir but as historical testimony.

Chukovskaya portrays the impact of the Terror through the evolution of one woman. And if the reader is aware of the dominant mode of Soviet novels from the 1930s, the Socialist Realist novel, they can see how that genre is subtly subverted. Written within a few months, and kept hidden, in this text we follow two characters. Sofia is a woman with purely domestic values and outlook, who even takes a job only because she needs to ensure that her son Nikolai gets a better education. But there is a transformation as she excels in her work, and finds the workplace itself a positive space. This positive transformation is what Socialist Realism insisted the goal of writers must be. However, when we move beyond the first part of the novel, we are introduced to the Stalinist terror behind the seeming socialist future. Holmgren argues that an imposed patriarchy appears a progression for Sofia, is present. Feminine traits are clearly present in Sofia. "While seeming to liberate herself from assigned gender roles, Sofia Petrovna simply has exchanged one form of subordination for a new one of accepting the masculine state and terror. Kolia endorses a single pattern of political and pragmatic action for both sexes, excluding the very possibilities of a non-public space and a differentiated self".(Chukovskaya:51) Thereby, Chukovskaya set out to subvert the canon.

The crisis that Sofia Petrovna faces begins with her son being in danger. Having developed no independent frame of thinking, she has accepted the Terror in the official terms. Within that there can exist at best mistakes. So, others are legitimate prisoners, but Kolya alone has been accidentally or mistakenly arrested.

When at the end she receives the letter from Kolya, which says he has been beaten and forced to issue a confession and finally decides to burn the letter. This act of destruction is a symbolic destruction of herself and an acceptance of the state's terror and deception. The private feelings of a mother may not even be saved in secret. So, the terror is shown through a very ordinary citizen, not through prison inmates, not through politically active figures who resist. In Ginzburg's narrative, there do appear political. Like communist women from several countries, including refugees from Nazi Germany and Chinese communists, in the chapter titled 'The Whole of the Comintern', or the torture inflicted on an Italian communist, who was being beaten and hosed down with cold water, shouting desperately, "*Comunista Italiana*".(Ginzburg1995: 151-57, 224)

The Russian literary tradition has been distinct from the West European since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Memoirs have a not merely personal but deeper philosophical significance. Mandelstam and Ginzburg followed that pattern. Memoirs of political activists were written to inform and enlighten. For women adopting an oppositional stance, this model provided some opportunities. Since the state had punished their personal experience as political, lives that might have been presented as unimportant became important, and could be presented as representative documentation of Stalinist terror at its peak. Nadezhda's books serve simultaneously as history of an era, that will serve to re-establish Mandelstam as the pre-eminent Russian figure in the world of culture for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (Holmgren: 130-38, 119-24).

If Osip Mandelstam is today considered the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century by many readers and critics alike, it is substantially due to the untiring efforts of Nadezhda Mandelstam in *Hope Against Hope*. There were times, she writes, when she had to get work in a textile factory as the only way to survive, and during the night shift, she would work and mentally recite the poems of Osip. (Brown in Mandelstam:xvii-xxv), But as Ilya Ehrenburg is quoted by Clarence Brown, it is impossible to imagine Osip without her.

Holmgren saw Mandelstam and Chukovskaya as creative writers who present mourning as a form of resistance. To be silent is, in some sense, to be complicit. Judith Robey, who talks about howling as an act of resistance, suggests that the act of writing turned personal pain into public opposition. (Holmgren: 25-26; Robey: 235-36) In this context, we should look at this passage from Nadezhda Mandelstam:

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*I decided that it is better to scream. ... Silence is the real crime against humanity. (Mandelstam: 43)*

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**Unravelling Mani Kaul's *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*:  
Reception of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh and the Role of Hindustani Classical  
Music**

**Dattatreya Ghosh<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:**

Mani Kaul's *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, when studied within the purview of Indian parallel cinema, will open up the space for a discourse that looks into the various tenets of film language. This paper will attempt a reading of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* in terms of the various tenets of forms that it explores to create a unique cinematic language of expression. It receives heavily from the works of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, but not in the form of a typical adaptation. The film also draws upon the structure of Indian classical music to create a specific form of cinema where temporality and spatiality is approached in a unique style. This paper will deal with the reception of the literary works of Muktibodh to the cinematic medium and in the process, will try to problematize the specificity and usage of source text in the reception.

**Keywords:** Muktibodh, Reception, Indian classical music, Indian parallel cinema, Mani Kaul.

Indian parallel cinema talks of a changing form that focuses more on the aesthetic aspect of cinema, thereby giving utmost importance to the medium itself. Arun Kaul and Mrinal Sen in the 'Manifesto of the New Cinema Movement' (Kaul and Sen 166) write:

New Cinema is not only a matter of finished results and effects, it also involves methods and conditions of film-making, the relationship between the creative artist and his audience, awareness of the changing grammar, expanding powers and soaring ambitions of the film medium. New Cinema offers the film-maker, above all, the indispensable freedom to realise his vision, untrammelled by all considerations except creative and aesthetic. New cinema looks upon a film as the personal expression of an individual artist.

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This paper will attempt a reading of film-maker Mani Kaul's *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* (Kaul 1980) in terms of the multifarious tenets of forms that it explores to create a unique cinematic language of expression. *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* receives heavily from eminent Hindi author and poet Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's (1917-1964) works (essays, poems and short stories), but is not a typical adaptation. The film uses a one of a kind narration with direct readings from Muktibodh's works as well as a narrative progression that runs parallel. Temporality within the film has been dealt with, again in a unique manner, drawing from the structure of Indian classical music. All of these together have, in turn, given rise to a distinct form of expression. The paper will deal with how Kaul, in *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* has attempted a reception of Muktibodh into a different medium as well as how the structure of the film resonates with that of Indian classical music.

It is imperative that the discontinuous and fragmented narrative progression that *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* follows becomes an important tool in the formation of the cinematic language that Kaul devices. The structure of the narrative is inherently related to the multiple of layers of reception of Muktibodh within the film – both the literary and the political. The narrative of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* revolves around three characters, Ramesh, Keshav and Madhav. Ramesh embodies Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, while Keshav and Madhav are his companions who participate in the dialogue that Ramesh initiates in the film. The portrayal of Ramesh is that of a lonely person who is waiting for someone who would understand him. He is torn between his idea of his inner self and his actual life as a married man. The narrative progression is fragmented as it moves to discontinuous spaces and times – Keshav and Ramesh talk about their disillusionment of the post-Independence modernity as they go to desolate places. The friends also reflect about their ideas on suicide. While exploring the lives of the three characters, the film also reflects on the life of a poet – the dilemma of what the poet wants versus what the world that the poet resides in expects of him. As the characters travel, Keshav once meets a teacher of a madrasah and talks to him about religion; this conversation finally leads to even more self-doubt. Keshav is unemployed, neither does he make any amends to change his position. It is the difference between his needs and his ideals that keep him trapped in his situation. As the fragments of stories proceed, it touches upon larger elements like politics, corruption and the compromise of values. Ramesh once tells Keshav how important Keshav is to him as Keshav is Ramesh's ideal audience. Although Ramesh is not satisfied with what he writes, Keshav admires him for not compromising in

what Ramesh writes. As the friends discuss poetry and its aesthetics, Ramesh begins to realise his own failure. At this point, Ramesh's character dissolves into Muktibodh. The narrative culminates into an exploration of the experience of dissociation that everyone who is not content with their own expectations go through. In the end, the narrative dissolves into images and texts of Muktibodh.

Before delving deeper into the film text, it is important to understand Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh's position within the domain of Hindi literature as well as Indian literature. Muktibodh stands at a juncture of Hindi literary history where the transition from *Chhayavad*<sup>2</sup> to *Pragativad*<sup>3</sup>, *Prayogvad*<sup>4</sup> and the *Nayi Kavita/Kahani*<sup>5</sup> can be clearly traced. Equally important is to understand Muktibodh's politics, his inclination toward Marxism, his understanding of modernity, all of which, in turn, shape his thought. It is only important to spare so many words on Muktibodh's politics while talking about Muktibodh's literature is because of the importance that he himself has given to politics. Muktibodh's language, his aesthetics, his philosophy is not devoid of his politics. Chanchal Chauhan in the essay titled "Ideological Content of Muktibodh's Poetry" (Chauhan 185-186) writes:

... Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh did not give up his commitment and fought a battle of ideas against Modernism which harped on man's alienation in the modern world, his loss of identity and his sense of disintegration of self and society ... The Modernists in Hindi literature attacked the ideology of the working class and propagated total autonomy of literary works and negated all social concerns and commitment.

<sup>2</sup> A movement in Hindi literature spanning through the second and third decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Often considered a parallel of Romanticism, *Chhayavad* is marked by its inclination towards the themes of nature and love.

<sup>3</sup> A post *Chhayavad* movement in Hindi literature, *Pragativad* emerged before the Independence of India and is intrinsically related to the Progressive Writers' Movement.

<sup>4</sup> *Prayogvad* emerged out of *Pragativad* with the publication of *Taar Saptak*, a journal of poetry edited by Ajneya. *Prayogvad* emphasizes on the search of an individual which had been lost in the subjective nature of *Pragativad*.

<sup>5</sup> *Nayi kavita* is a tradition in Hindi literature that marks a departure from *Pragativad* and *Prayogvad*. In this case, *nayi kavita* or new poetry tries to establish a complete new language of poetry which embraces human life in its entirety. It talks of doing away with traditions and of searching for the ultimate truth in human life itself. Poetry of *nayi kavita* has abundant use of symbols.

Muktibodh in his polemic against those writers had to expose the hollowness of the formalistic poetics based on false consciousness and a reactionary worldview.

Muktibodh is known for his innovations in the form of poetry; his use of ‘fantasy’, personal symbols and imagery in long poems is well known, and this will be spoken about with reference to *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* in a later part of this essay. Muktibodh has been explicit in terms of his political preferences and his inclination towards Marxism. Through the use of symbols and imagery, he focuses on the class reality of Indian society and speaks of the liberation of the proletarians from all forms of exploitation.

In *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999: 448), Ashish Rajadhakshya and Paul Willeman write an intriguing and important review of Mani Kaul’s *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. In this seminal work, they write:

Kaul’s film addresses the writings of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh (1917-79), one of the main representatives of the Nai Kavita (New Poetry) movement in Hindi (Tar Saptak, 1943; Chanda Ka Mooh Tedha Hain, 1954). Muktibodh also wrote several short stories, one of which (1971) provides the film with its title, and critical essays. The film integrates episodes from Muktibodh’s writings with material from other source, including a reinvented neo-realism derived from Muktibodh’s literary settings. ... Kaul has begun his studies of *Dhrupad* music, the classical North Indian music known

mainly for its extreme austerity, and derived a number of cinematic styles from this musical idiom which have continuously influenced his films since: e.g. the continuously mobile camera, the use of changing light patterns and the importance of improvisation.

Except some reviews, blogs and interviews in *Madhyam*, a Hindi magazine published from Bhopal, the above mentioned paragraph, however inferential, is the only prominent source of writing about Mani Kaul’s *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. In terms of viewing, this film is one of the rarest. Because, except some film society screenings in India, some screenings in

the festival circuit of the United States of America and a single screening at Cannes<sup>6</sup>, a single copy of the film was stored in the dark corner of the National Film Archive of India, along with some other Indian masterpieces of the same period, which have recently been restored.

*Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* interacts with the texts of Muktibodh in the sense that they provide a frame of narration for the film. The protagonist, Ramesh, plays the character of Muktibodh and also narrates Muktibodh's texts. The film uses motifs, references and of course, philosophical understanding of Muktibodh. In *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, Kaul builds the narrative with three characters – Ramesh (performed by Bharat Gopy), Madhav (performed by Vibhuti Jha) and Keshav (performed by Raina). Muktibodh's writings are spoken and enacted by Ramesh as the first person voice of the text while Madhav and Keshav are posited as his antagonists regarding their debates on modernity. Then increasingly, the fictional settings are minimized by Kaul. And the influence of *Dhrupad*<sup>7</sup> music can be observed through the continuous movement of camera, the use of changing light patterns and most importantly, improvisation. Moreover, the sensorial expression present in the inherent nomadic structure of Indian cityscapes can be experienced in Kaul's film. This sensory experience is about the affect created from an under-developed materiality that surrounds nomadic nature and the peculiarly structured hierarchy of age, caste and most importantly class that dominates them (Trivedi 2018). The film also continuously complicates the relationship between the Left and Right ideologies, which is constantly at work within the complex class structure of Indian small towns.

Opposing Eisenstein's idea of montage in creating a film (Eisenstein 1949: 72-83), in his film, Kaul emphasises on French filmmaker Robert Bresson's style of filmmaking where a film is broken into separate domains of information, sound and image (Barrett 2016). He tries to ensure that every shot of the film is discontinuous from the last. The effect that is created by this fragmented discontinuity in time which is continuous in nature is inherently governed by the logic of the writings of Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh. Most of Kaul's films are received from a literary source, in some way or other. Kaul alienates his texts from the source, its background and subjectivities. He uses the source text to produce a sketch of the

<sup>6</sup> Refers to the Cannes Film Festival. The film was screened in the *Un certain regard* section in 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Literally meaning classical, *Dhrupad* refers to a genre in Indian classical music. It is derived from the Sanskrit words *dhruva* meaning constant and *pada* meaning verse.

body of images and characters. Direct lines from the source texts are often used in monologues delivered by the characters of the films. For example, he quotes from Mohan Rakesh's short story '*Uski roti*' in his film *Uski Roti* (Kaul 1969), but in different times and spaces. The same can also be seen in his film *Ashad Ka Ek Din* (Kaul 1971) which is a reception of Mohan Rakesh's play with the same title. The voice/body of the actors are used by Kaul, governed by the logic of the text, to document a space through which a unique perception of the space can be created, which can be termed what Gilles Deleuze calls 'perception-image'<sup>8</sup> (Deleuze 2013). This phenomenon is referred to by Bresson in one of his interviews, where he talks of placing the camera in a particular place which should be found by the *metteur-en-scène*<sup>9</sup> (Bresson 2016). The subjectivity should be absent from the text and expressionism should be absent from the actor's voice as also explained by Bresson: "the pace of the words is much more important than their respective meaning". Kaul in *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* receives Muktibodh's essays, poems, short stories and even memoirs as a uniform text which is mediated by the representation of Om Puri's voiceover. This transforms Muktibodh's writings into language-utterances creating a cinema which is purely improvised.

*Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* was criticised during its premiere by a number of leftists who adored Muktibodh's writings for the representations that he used in his language, that is, a language built with motifs of extreme rhetoric. Muktibodh's structure of writing generally deals with a kind of narrative progression that tactically builds an intrinsic anger with which the readers easily identify themselves. His sentences structured typically in a cause-effect relationship where he emphasizes on the later. This intrinsic causality of Muktibodh's writing has been defied by Kaul throughout *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* and the logic of representation

<sup>8</sup> Perception-image is the way in which characters are perceived and the way in which characters perceive. It creates characters and world within a film. Deleuze categorizes perception into three types, namely, solid perception (human perception), liquid perception (where images flow together) and gaseous perception (pure vision of non-human eye achieved through foregrounding montage).

<sup>9</sup> *Metteur-en-scène* is a phrase that refers to the *mise-en-scène* of a particular [film director](#). It suggests that the director has technical competence when it comes to film directing, but does not add personal style to the aesthetic of the film. The term was coined by [André Bazin](#), and the expanded meaning of the term was introduced by the French New Wave filmmaker and film critic [François Truffaut](#) in his 1954 essay "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema". See *The Film Experience* (Corrigan and White 2018).

has also been questioned by Kaul's form of cinema. Mani Kaul confronts the process where an object is transformed into subject through representation. Instead, he tries to explore the domain of the 'unknown' while moving away from the 'known'. This contradiction between Muktibodh's and Kaul's work created a divide among the audience. While a section was overwhelmed by the extraordinary cinematographic treatment (not in the literal sense; used here in terms of Bresson's cinematography), others were continuously searching for a 'genuine' adaptation of Muktibodh's work. The style of using the source text, removing it from its specific circumstances of subjectivity, in Kaul's film form in a certain way aspires to be transcendental. But a lot of similarities can also be observed between Kaul's and Muktibodh's work. The function of art in society and the formation of space through art are questioned by Muktibodh; whereas Mani Kaul continuously searches for a cinema that 'plays like a dream'. An interest in fantasy as well as *abhivyakti*, that is, perception can be observed in the works of both. While Muktibodh tries to find a unique perception of the space created in his works through the appropriation of the characters, a creation of Deleuzian perception-image is attempted by Mani Kaul. Kaul tries to construct an image where the space that is perceived by the viewer meets the psychotic mental space of the character without trying to recognize its meaning (Trivedi 2018), which results in the formation of a sign as opposed to a signal, as discussed by Deleuze in his *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 2014). Here, 'signal' refers to a system which is diverse with dissymmetrical elements and 'sign' refers to the resultant within such a system. In *Uski Roti*, there is an attempt to record just the space present between sensory and motor perception, which can also be observed in Bresson's style of reception of Dostoevsky or Bernanos.

Paul Willeman and Ashish Rajadhakshya in the entry of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* in their *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* identify music as one of the most important and significant element of the film (Rajadhakshya and Willeman 1999:448). The reception of Muktibodh's literature into Mani Kaul's cinematic form involves the use of the form of Indian classical music. Incidentally, Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar<sup>10</sup> was Kaul's guru of *dhrupad*. Mohiuddin's younger brother, Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar's rendition of *raga*

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<sup>10</sup> Zia Mohiuddin Dagar (14929-1990) was a renowned Hindustani classical musician. He belongs to the eminent Dagar family of musicians who were patronised by the Maharana of Udaipur since generations. Mohiuddin revived the *rudraveena*, which used to be an accompanying instrument of vocalists and made it an primary instrument.

*Bilaskhani Todi*<sup>11</sup> was used in *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*. This film was the first of Kaul's work that had been structured following the form of *alaap* and *jod* of *dhrupad*. The scale is presented and laid as *alaap* and the improvisations are performed in *jod* where it is allowed to move in numerous ways while maintaining the scale, which makes the use of camera and soundtrack in a very formal approach. Kaul's works of this period generally starts with immobile camera positions which establish the camera distances, just like certain music scales in case of *ragas*. The camera, in Kaul's films, starts to move after a certain time between the designated scales. The camera is moved away from one static space and panned to a different set of static spaces. The primary set of static space indicates the point analogous to the *jod* section of the film, while, on the other hand, the later static spaces designate the rest points between the *jod*. These points are distinctly underlined by Mani Kaul using the song of the Ustad. This certain style of camera movement in the film to signify the starting points of the improvisatory phase becomes recurrent in filmmakers who later followed Kaul's style of filmmaking and termed it as 'Cinema of Prayoga'<sup>12</sup> (Butler and Mirza 2006).

*Dhrupad* is a form of music in which expressions from *Shaivite* literature<sup>13</sup>, such as 'Hari om Narayana tan tarana tum' are used as the body of a raga through the three octaves. While this phrase, which has a literal meaning that celebrates the omnipotence of Shiva, can be used as the primary text of the *raga*, each word from this phrase can also be taken, deconstructed and explored in a number of ways. Similarly, Kaul uses a certain primary text, be it a short story, a novel or essays, poems and a short story like in the case of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, to create a cinematographic form with the help of soundtrack, editing and most importantly, camera. This phenomenon can be compared to the use of the *bandish*<sup>14</sup> *Shankar Girijapati* in *dhrupad*, where an abstract scale of *raga Malkauns* having the structure of *Sa Ga Ma Dha Ni Sa* and *Sa Ni Dha Ma Ga Sa* is explored. The *raga* is divided in a three-

<sup>11</sup> *Bilaskhani Todi*, a Hindustani classical *raga* of *Todi* family, is a blend of *Asavari* and *Todi ragas*.

<sup>12</sup> *Prayoga* refers to experiment in Sanskrit. It also can mean application or representation. The term 'Cinema of Prayoga' was coined by film historian and curator Amrit Gangar that refers to a practice of filmmaking in India which dodges the art-commerce binary and emphasizes on the 'practice' or 'prayoga' of cinema.

<sup>13</sup> *Shaivism* is a tradition within the *Puranic* system of belief that considers Shiva to be the absolute power. A vast body of literature within this philosophical school has existed that were written in praise of Shiva.

<sup>14</sup> *Bandish* can be translated as something that binds together. It is a fixed melodic composition in Indian classical music. *Bandish* provides the scope for the literary text for a standard structured singing.

part structure consisting of the *alaap*, the *jod* and the *jhala*. In *alaap*, the distinct scales of the *raga* are presented and the scales are improvised to lay bare the core of the *raga*. In *jod*, the rhythm of the *raga* is established and the combinations are exhausted through improvisations and then it reaches the crescendo, which is called the *jhala*. The primary text is used by Kaul as the abstract scale and the characters (bodies) along with the dialogues and objects are the primary constituents. In *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, a specific cinematographic form is developed where the structure of *alaap*, *jod* and *jhala* is maintained.

In the beginning of the film, *raga Bilaskhani Todi* is used while the titles appear in front of a saffron background and the *alaap* of the early morning *raga* is sung by Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar. The *raga* is a part of *Todi* family which are performed at dawn and it is named after the maestro Bilas Khan, Miyan Tansen's<sup>15</sup> son. There is a myth that the notes of *Bilaskhani Todi* came out from Bilas Khan's stomach when his father died. It is said that the notes made dead Tansen cry, and these notes later came to be known as *Bilaskhani Todi*. The viewer is introduced to a psychotic space in the introductory sequences by Kaul and the paranoid actor's movements are laid over the consciously structured space simultaneously creates an effect but moves away from the cause. This psychotic effect can be read by historians as of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 but there is also a possibility of reading the psychotic state differently. The deficiency of space which is being produced by the psychotic state is fulfilled by the characters where bodies are perceived as objects whose purpose is to acquire and occupy space. Right after the titles, follows a frame showing a landscape of green fields and water bodies, followed by a sequence that focuses on the walls of a house, and then jumps to Ramesh. The camera first focuses on Ramesh's face, and then shows Ramesh moving and finally him walking down a flight of stairs. In Kaul's signatory style, the *alaap* and the sound of footsteps are overlapped together with actor Gopi's eyes moving away from the frame. The facial muscles of the actor are totally expressionless but the eyes are the only source of expression. A particular space which suggests an Indian sensorial expression is achieved here in a typical Kaul style as the actor moves down the stairs. The construction of this particular space is attained with the help of a specific location

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<sup>15</sup> Tansen (1493/1500 - 1586), a prominent figure of Indian classical music, was the court singer of the Mughal emperor Akbar.

and particular objects which signify nothing but represents the ‘deterritorialized’<sup>16</sup> spaces (Deleuze and Guattari 2014) where there is absence of matter. This sequence, followed by the tracking to the stairway, creates the signatory cinematic style of Kaul. Om Puri’s heavy voice and Muktibodh’s text is juxtaposed in the sequence when Gopi starts walking down. After the introductory sequence, the foundational shot is used by Kaul which, in a number of ways, characterizes the whole film. Houses made of stone representing materiality and the nature being used side by side can be compared to cinema, a medium where industrial celluloid is used to record the nature. The camera is zoomed out to a purely material space by Kaul to introduce a dream-like quality in the film with the help of Warli wall paintings<sup>17</sup> on battered walls. A soundtrack introducing unknown footsteps outside the frame while Gopi lies down on the floor creates a union of fear, psychosis and consciousness in him. Here the form of an uncertain style of filmmaking is clubbed with the uncertain movements of the character actor. Here recitation of lines from the poems and autobiographical writings of Muktibodh by Om Puri creates a dialectical relationship within sound and language, which is a unique style taken by Kaul to receive Muktibodh. Faiz Ahmed Faiz<sup>18</sup> once explained the poet as a person who thinks in terms of sounds and gradually comes up with words. Kaul, in one of his arrangements, uses Muktibodh’s poem to define the ambience he tries to create with the combined effect of his images and sound.

In a relatively new form of Hindustani music that originated from Akbar’s court, called *Khayal*, the text is generally composed in admiration of the supreme power or to describe someone’s longing for the beloved. In this case too, the text can be improvised within the scale of a particular *raga*. This can be explained through the case of *raga Madhmad Sarang*, where the logic of emphasizing and using the text is structured within the scope of the *raga*. In such cases, “one word is either stretched for a longer period of time or a number of words are compressed into a short period of time, accompanied by a steady pulse

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<sup>16</sup> Deterritorialization is the separation of social, cultural and political practices from location and refers to weakening of connection between subjects/objects and space/time. Deleuze and Guattari uses the term to oppose colonial processes with nomadic processes.

<sup>17</sup> A style of art that originated and is practiced in north Sahyadri range in Maharashtra, India. It uses simple graphic geometrical patterns.

<sup>18</sup> Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) was an eminent Urdu author and poet associated with the Progressive Writers’ Movement.

or rhythm.” (Trivedi 2018). The speed of the phrases is sometimes slower and sometimes faster than the rhythm, which was used as a technique by Kaul in *Uski Roti*. According to Kaul (Kaul 2008):

I was first interested in the spatial aspect of cinema until I engaged with the temporal aspect of cinema i.e. two minutes can be stretched to five minutes, five minutes can be compressed to two... and I had my actors either move or speak slower or faster than the intended rhythm of the film.

The improvisation supersedes the meaning of the text in *Madhmad Sarang*, where in case of the *Khayal* ‘*Jab se man lagiyo Shyam*’, Krishna’s psycho sensorial effect on his devotees becomes more important than the description of a space which is occupied by Krishna and his *gopikas*<sup>19</sup>. The inherent logic of the primary text changes; this process of change in the inherent logic of the text has been used by Kaul while receiving Muktibodh.

In the opening sequences of *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, Gopi engages with the creative process of Muktibodh and Muktibodh’s being. These sequences become significant as they are typically designed in a certain way to be able to generate a stratified pure image obtained through cleansing. Muktibodh’s contemplation about his art that he creates as a poet is recited in the background by Om Puri. The next shot is a cut to a terrace from which a lake can be seen. Kaul elaborates in the film that the lake is situated in the heart of the city. This unique use of nature becomes prominent within these two shots exploring purely material spaces. Again, the continuous recitation of Muktibodh is heard accompanied by images of uninterrupted nature. Through this, Kaul tries to create a pattern which is mediated, organic and anticipatory in nature, which again, can be compared to the *alaap*. In *alaap*, the audience knows the coming note due to the structure of the *raga* and also anticipates the note before the recognition at the same time.

Kaul introduces Keshav (Ramesh’s friend) through sequences where nature is used along with the arguments and short story of Muktibodh debating Gandhian thought<sup>20</sup>. Kaul

<sup>19</sup> The Sanskrit word *Gopika* is used to refer to the girls who are associated with cowherding. Within [Vaishnavism](#), *Gopikas* of Vrindavan are known for their unconditional devotion (*Bhakti*) to [Krishna](#) as described in the [Bhagavata Purana](#) and other [puranic](#) literature.

<sup>20</sup> Philosophical and political thought of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

evokes the style of Ritwik Ghatak<sup>21</sup> where the use of human being and nature is structured in the logic of feminine nature being occupied by the masculine. Kaul frames eucalyptus trees or the lake along with Keshav's movements in the forest in a way which is similar to the movement of a slow machine. The camera is quickly zoomed out by Kaul from the landscape when the suicide of Tiwari's wife is mentioned by Keshav, contradicting the *alaap* structure. The camera is then panned to a truck approaching a suggestive landscape accompanied by a shrill cry of a woman, in turn suggesting, rape and the distance of the camera is maintained deliberately to retain the suggestiveness. The suggestive use of machines as a motif by Mani Kaul can be compared to the motif of trucks and fire engines in Muktibodh's writings.

In *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, we can see Kaul receiving from different sources to prepare a philosophical framework. Ramesh plays the central character of the narrator who narrates Muktibodh's writings as well as the character of Muktibodh himself. On one hand, the character himself becomes a part of the text and on the other hand, also enables the progression of events within the text. Here Kaul creates a dual function of the character through participation and distancing. He tries to differentiate the characters at three levels, levels of history, society and myth, where myth is combined with a sense of irrational which is depicted through dream. Presence is suggested by myth and absence is suggested by dream or someone's death. In the film, Kaul also uses shots an independent unit where the logic of the presence is different in every case. Sometimes this 'difference' deals with the appropriation of events and sometimes with rhythm. Primarily events, characters are represented as a critique on Muktibodh; to be specific, on the creative process of Muktibodh. Gradually Kaul uses images in a way that creates a narrative which would obstruct the appropriation. It reaches its final stage in the sequences of the factory which is climactic in nature but not the climax, thus enabling the decentring of the film. Kaul claims this decentring to be between the sacral and the profane.

Through the reception of Muktibodh, Mani Kaul in his film rigorously constructs a particular form which is materialised from thoughts of random imagination. He investigates the question of a film being a carrier of violence by questioning why, when and where the violence gets transformed from abstract to its concrete form in the process of making cinema.

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<sup>21</sup> Ritwik Kumar Ghatak (1925-1976) was a prominent Bengali filmmaker and litterateur. He influenced Mani Kaul and other Indian filmamakers.

Assemblage deals with “violence as the making of a film, its processing through light and showing to audiences is a violent act” (Trivedi 2018). Kaul’s films, and specifically *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi* has been marked as right-wing due to its political indifference. According to the critics, using Muktibodh’s text out of its context, use of sanskritized Hindi as well as the use of Hindustani classical music create confusion between the domains of public and private, and thus may fall within the domain of the political right. This has been opposed by Kaul as his characters are bodies who fail to enable a dialogue with their surroundings and solely perform the act of occupying space. In fact, numerous dialogues from his films can be interpreted in different ways as they produce different meanings in Urdu and Hindi. The process of occupying space has an inherent ignorance towards the troubled reality, resulting in a construction of a sanitized idea of India in terms of objects, subjects and even language. It can also be read as a text where hunger oppresses the characters though their experience of alienation has been explored. There is an inherent absence of freedom in each character of the film and as the narrative dissolves, Muktibodh’s writings rise to the surface.

But Kaul’s works, specifically, *Satah Se Uthata Aadmi*, can be read in relation to Muktibodh to understand the formation of the Indian parallel cinema and the influence of Indian literary movements on the cinematic ones. According to V. K. Cherian, Mani Kaul’s films were “technically innovative, and were influenced by the film-making style of the French avant-garde film-maker Robert Bresson... continuing his fascination with revolutionary themes, Kaul went to make films based on works of radical writers” (Cherian 2020).

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## Tagore in Hungary: A Retrospect of his Literary Genius

Savita Gaur<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore visited Hungary in 1926 and came in contact with several Hungariaian writers and thinkers. During his stay at Balatonfüred, he wrote many poems and letters to his friends, such as Romain Roland, the great French author and to Leonard Knight, Elmhirst, who spent the years 1921-25 with Tagore and was largely responsible for building Santiniketan. It can be said that a new era of Indian, Bengali, and Hungarian Literature dawned in Tagore's presence.

In this paper, I will explore the famous Hungarian journal *Bengali Tuz* which originated during Tagore's stay in Hungary. He met Gyula Germanus in Hungary and invited him to teach at Santiniketan. This connection initiated Rozsa Hajnoczy's journey and the beginning of *Bengali Tuz* in the realm of literature.

The paper further examines the seminal role played by Tagore's distinctive literary achievements which influenced Hungarian Literature, especially its reputed authors who shined through their literary works afterwards. Mihaly Babitas, Sandor Marai, George Lukacs, Zoltan Szasz, Ervin Baktay, and Elizabeth Brunner are a few authors who took inspiration from Tagore and really excelled in the field of literature. The Indo-Hungarian Literature also emerged with a new feature while Tagore stayed in Hungary after gaining some encouragement from his lectures. He is found within a merger of Old with New, and East with West. It also gave birth to a new medium of research and study in the field of Comparative Literature.

**Keywords:** Tagore, Hungary, *Bengali Tuz*, Comparative Lietarture, Santiniketan.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a famous Bengali polymath and a poet. In fact, he was the first non-European poet to win the Nobel Prize in the field of Literature. There is no Indian poet so well known in any European country as Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore's distinctive literary achievements influenced Hungarian literature, especially reputed authors who shined through their literary works afterwards (Baktay, 1938). A few authors took

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inspiration from Tagore and really excelled in the field of literature. The Indo-Hungarian literature also emerged with a new feature while Tagore stayed in Hungary after gaining some encouragement from his lectures. He is found within a merger of Old with New, and East with West. It also gave birth to a new medium of research and study in the field of comparative literature which ended up aiding and providing for the human race.

How much can one culture impossibly distant from the other transmit or grasp the other culture? An analysis was conducted in the light of post-colonial theories. Although Hungarians were integrated into a Christian European culture, they have always been conscious of their eastern roots. It was Rabindranath Tagore who first wrote about Hungarian literature in Bengali. The main channel of cultural interaction between Hungary and Bengal was literature. India's literature at that time was considered as a part of the colonized third world literature. Having an interest in the mysterious east, Shantiniketan brought Western and Indian Cultures together which marked a milestone in the history. Rabindranath had more invested interest in the Eastern Europe in comparison to the west as folk art from that part of the world survived the wave of industrial monotony. He stated that Hungary felt the most like home during his European tour. (Bangha,2008:53.)

Hungarians – Huns – Indian connection. Tagore was also attracted by Hungarian folk music. Prior to his visit, Rabindranath had sent the following lines to the writer Andor Tiszai: "My heart goes to you Hungary, you, who received the earliest kiss of our Eastern sun on your forehead at your throne on the border of the Western continent". (Bangha,2008:126). Tagore wrote an article known as "Glory of literature" where he stated that if anyone can give immortality to the homeland, it will be literature.

### **Reflection of Pluralism in Tagore's interaction with Hungarians.**

Hungary influenced Tagore along with Indian, Bengali, and Hungarian literature. Pluralism - a condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc., coexist. It is the practice of holding more than one ecclesiastical office at a time. Here it reflects different thoughts; inter mixing, Hungarian and Indian, compared on the same platform, in Tagore's writings and his interactions with the Hungarians. I am going to focus or illustrate the example of Hungarian literature that got motivated or changed to some extent due to Tagore's arrival in Hungary. Apart from this, a new era of Comparative literature also occurred during this era.

To Hungarians in the 1910s and 1920s, Tagore was first of all a prophet of the mysterious East. Most Hungarian versions are based on English prose translations while some are based on German translations. As stated earlier, due to the communist period, translations and their interpretations get influenced by the surroundings. We can observe that verse translations of Tagore have far stronger appeal than prose ones. This makes Tagore's verses true gems in the world of literature (Bangha, 2014.). Tagore is also described as the Eastern sage who contrasted and combined the spiritual East with the materialist West. He was visiting the world to popularize his ideas about an international university in Shantiniketan and to find material to supplement the said university.

Tagore founded Shantiniketan – an ashram (monastery) which was an institute and the very first center of Comparative Literature. Many different nationalities came together in Tagore's ashram and taught aspiring students while doing unorthodox research for the betterment of the human species. During Tagore's stay, the duration and the time he spent at the ashram portrays pluralism in three ways. First, Tagore tried to mend the conflict between the east and the west, which is why he invited teachers from a wide array of subjects. Second, using this as the main philosophical core, he established visva bharti. Lastly, he tried combining western and eastern values so both the cultures could learn valuable lessons from each other. Besides the European culture, Tagore also supported the Arabic culture, which can be supplemented by the fact that he invited a European Hungarian orientalist to visva bharti to impart (Shamsud, 2016). Arabic and Islam teachings to the students. Many Hungarian Scholars visited visva bharti like Gyula, Charles Fabri, Brunner, and Baktay. Tagore and the Hungarian scholars needed each other as Tagore was a poet of the highest order and Hungary is a country of Poets and poetry admirers. Tagore's several renowned works are translated in Hungarian like, Geetanjali, by Mihaly Babits. Apart from these translations, Tagore is also known as the 'thinker' in Hungary. He wrote letters and interacted with other renowned Hungarian literary scholars and these interactions further led to the origination of Bengali tuz, which contained anecdotes on multiculturalism, globalization, comparative cultural study, and cultural transfer. Historical and philosophical views in Bengali tuz, were portrayed and these interactions significantly influenced Hungarian literature. (Bangha, 2008.)

The first Hungarian to reach Bengal and to learn Bangla was Alexander Csoma de Koros, who had high regards in India and Hungary due to his knowledge and understanding. Mother and daughter, Brunner and Charles Fabri also visited Shantiniketan. When they went back to Hungary, they did not have good remarks regarding Tagore. But after some time the Hungarian govt. changed, which brought a change in their opinions as well. There could be chances of political factors influencing this change. (Bethenfalvy,1980). There is no Indian poet so well known in any European country as Rabindranath Tagore. His works have been extensively translated into English and then into further languages and books of criticism have also been written about him.. His connection with several countries also led to multiple publications distributing his work. In the twenties he was celebrated as poet, sage, prophet, and even a Saint from the mystic East. Later, he started losing the fame in the following decades, but gained momentum again due to the western oblivion. Hungarians heard about the only Nobel Prize winning Bengali poet that led to Hungarians recognizing his works and himself both. This fast-tracked the journey of his works reaching Hungary. Tagore majorly played four roles, a philosopher of religion, a politician, a narrator, and a lyricist(Dasgubta, 2013). Most of his works available in English were translated in Hungarian. The Hungarians also considered Tagore as a fine musician and painter as well.

### Tagore's Journey to Hungary

On his European tour during 1926, Hungary inspired him so much that the poet referred to the Hungarians as his relatives. In the initial times, Hungarians rejected him as philosopher due to his Christian catholic beliefs and Hindu sage propagates, but they later started appreciating him as a poet and an individual both.

His personal visit to Hungary which took place between 26<sup>th</sup> October 1926 and 13<sup>th</sup> November 1926 was an unforgettable event. This visit was mentioned in the contemporary newspapers and magazines like Az Est, Pesti Hirlap, Magyar Hirlap, uj Idok, Nyugat.(Wojtilla, 1983:11). The exact reason of him coming to Hungary is still unknown.

Apart from the accounts of some travellers, Sanskrit literature represented the culture of Indian subcontinent for Hungarians. Tagore's Noble Prize informed the larger public in Hungary that contemporary India possessed a dynamic literature. The first reports about the Indian poet misspelled his name, misread his age and apparently confused him with the musicologist Raja Sourindra Mohan Tagore. Mihaly Babits and Deszo kosztolanyi wrote

about him in the initial stages and after the Noble Prize, the strange sounding name of Rabindranath Tagore started to feature in Hungarian life so much so that the pronunciation of the poet's name became a way of testing drunkenness: the person who was able to pronounce it was proven not to be drunk (Bangha, 2014).

According to the report of Pesti Hirlap, the poet arrived from Vienna in Budapest on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1926. At first, meeting with newsmen, Tagore stated that he had very friendly feelings towards the Hungarian population.

On 26 October, Tagore took a train from Vienna to Budapest with his secretary, P. C. Mahalanobis, the secretary's wife Mrs. Rani Mahalanobis, a German baroness and the Hungarian scholar Ferenc Zajti. Mrs. Mahalanobis wrote about experience of Hungary in the Book: She stated "It seems that their manners are somewhat more similar to ours that is to say they are not so formal. They have a feeling of oriental kinship". After spending a few days in Budapest and attending several lectures and programmes, Rabindernath got sick due to his heart problem and had to shift to Balatonfured. When Tagore gave lectures, people applauded for minutes where he didn't used to say anything. He also used to greet them in Vizsontlatasra in Hungary. Performances, songs of Izabella Nagy, and Radics bands fascinated and pleased Rabindranath the most (Bangha, 2008:145). He liked Gypsy folk music of Bella Radics, known as the Gypsy King. After giving lectures, visiting the town, attending cultural literary programmes in Budapest, he met many Scholars on 30<sup>th</sup> October. Gyula Germanus was one of the said scholars present.<sup>2</sup> This meeting was the reason behind him extending an invitation to Gyula for teaching at Shantiniketan. (Bangha, 2008:148). He also met Charles Fabry. After his meetings and programmes, he felt a suffocating sensation, and then Professor Koranyi, a famous heart specialist paid him a visit. As per Koranyi's advice, Tagore decided to spend a few days in a sanatorium in Balatonfured, near the "Hungarian Sea" Lake Balaton, one of the largest lakes in Europe.

He stated that he was fascinated by the scenery as well as the beauty of its inhabitants, as people in Hungary were really charming and simple. Hungarians are expressive beings and portray their true feelings in their actions and speech. On 8<sup>th</sup> November 1926, he planted a linden tree and placed a commemorative tablet under the said tree. He stated: "I am planting

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<sup>2</sup> My research book based on Bengali tuz, and because of this meeting ,origin of this book occurred and Tagore invited Germanus in shantiniketan for teaching and rest is History.

this tree in resemblance of my stay here, it was more than hospitality. I have come to the land of a nation which is emotionally akin to India". (Bangha,2014)He also wrote about Hungarians having a unique aura of affection surrounding them. In Balatofured, Tagore finished 250 brief Bengali poems on 7<sup>Th</sup> November titled Lekhan (Scribblings). After the unforgettable stay in Balatonfured, Tagore returned to Budapest on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1926. On the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> November, Rabindranath had another Sightseeing tour in Budapest and on 12<sup>th</sup>; he took the train for Zagreb. On the last day of his stay, he wrote a short poem for Hungary and translated it into English( Bangha , 2008:164).

After this visit, many Hungarians like Germanus, Elizabeth Brunner, Ervin Baktay and Charles Fabry also visited Shantiniketan. Until the year of his death, he kept sending greeting cards to the Head Physician of the Sanatorium. When Indians visit Hungary, they also make a trip to the place associated in the country with Rabindranath to pay their tribute to the memory of the greatest Indian poet of the Twentieth century. In this way, the fortnight Tagore spent in Hungary became one of the most important points of references in the history of Indo- Hungarian contacts. Because of Rabindranath's stay in lake Balaton, the town became a Tagore-sight in Hungary for many Indian visitors. Darjeeling and Balaton were connected, because the tomb of Alexander Csoma de Koros was present in Darjeeling. In the hospital room where Tagore had stayed, the Hungarians kept it untouched in his memory and called it as Tagore – Szoba, which was visited by many Indian visitors. (Wojtilla,1983 ) The image of Rabindranath Tagore is very much alive in Hungary today. This image keeps changing due to his personal and literary impact on different countries. Many friends of literature and arts gained a deeper appreciation of Tagore's works, and on the other hand the criticism also became sharper. But the final result was positive and left a visible mark in the form of tree planted by the poet himself in Balatonfured . All these events triggered a new chapter of his life. Tagore, during his stay at the Sanatorium in 1926, wrote many poems and letters to his friends, such as Romain Roland, the great French author, and to Leonard Knight, Elmhirst who spent the four years from 1921 to 1925 with Tagore and was a large part of building Shantiniketan with Tagore. A new wave of Comparative Literature also came ashore after Tagore's work was introduced in Hungary. It can be said that a new merged era of Indian, Bengali, and Hungarian Literature took birth under Tagore's presence which has always inspired the authors and scholars of all times to explore beyond the standard norms in the field of literature.

### Bengali Tuz

The chain of events behind Bengali Tuz's creation was set in action due to this meeting as Tagore invited Germanus to come and teach in his unique educational abode Shantiniketan where, Germanus and his wife stayed after accepting Tagore's invitation. The subject of my thesis, 'Bengali Tuz', was created because of this interaction between Gyula with Tagore. In 1928, Tagore decided to set up a chairperson for Islamic Studies with the funds received as donations made by the Nizam of Hyderabad. He recruited Gyula Germanus, professor of Turkish and Arabic at the Royal Hungarian University for the position of the Islamic Studies Chairperson.(Wojtilla,1983). This marvelous connection initiated Rozsa Hajnoczy's journey and the beginning of the famous Hungarian travel journal 'Bengali Tuz' in the realm of literature.

Hajnoczy's husband was a well-known orientalist, and was known as the famous East explorer "Gyula Germanus" (1884-1979). He was a prime Hungarian scholar of Islam. Professor Gyula Germanus (1884- 1979) the internationally reputed scholar in Islamic studies, well-known orientalist, and was known as the famous East explorer and a distinguished authority on Arabic languages and literature was invited to India by Tagore in 1927. He was offered the chair of Islamic studies in Shantiniketan. As one of his biographers wrote: Germanus stayed in Shantiniketan for several years and produced a galaxy of scholars interested in Islam studies. While staying in Shantiniketan, Germanus was accompanied by his wife Rozsa Hajnoczy who wrote a novel called Bengali Tuz (Fire of Bengal) which has been translated in several editions. The novel depicts their daily life through the eyes of Rozsa who was a housewife at that time. Hajnoczy stayed there for three years and wrote the journal about her stay in India and her experiences. The novel depicts their daily life through the eyes of Housewife. However, one can grasp the spirit of the Shantiniketan of those days. *Bengáli Tűz* ['Fire of Bengal'] by Rózsa G. Hajnoczy (1892-1944) is a Hungarian travel journal, written in the 1930s-early 1940s and is known among readers in India and Bangladesh too. A Hungarian housewife travelled to India accompanying her husband in 1928 and stayed there for three years, all the while recording her personal experiences as journal entries which provided the 'raw material' for *Bengali Tűz*. It is a Hungarian journal and is often described as a travel journal or a novelistic voyage. It comes from the period of

early twentieth century written by Rózsa G. Hajnóczy (1892-1944) between the year 1928 and 1931, before the Independence of India from Britain (Hajnóczy, 1993) .It first got published in 1944 and has acclaimed a wide population of readers, especially Hungarian females The English translation, *Fire of Bengal* was prepared by a Hungarian female, Eva Wimmer along with her husband David Grant. The journal was finally published in 1993 in Dhaka, Bangladesh(Hajnóczy, 1993) and another translation was done by Mr. Kartik Chandra Dutt into Hindi language which got published in 2011 and was titled Agniparva – Shantiniketan (Ek Hungarian Grihvadhuki Diary, अग्निपर्व – शांतिनिकेतन (एकहंगेरियनगृहवधूकीडायरी). The book contains different aspects like Multiculturalism, Globalization, Comparative Cultural Study, and Cultural Transfer in abundance. Many historical and philosophical views came out in Bengali Tuz due to the presence of those aspects only. The journal contained all shades of different aspects coming from cultural, political, social and spiritual regions of the contemporary Indian society. The fire of Bengal, has become the most popular Hungarian book about India and ran into eleven editions between 1943 and 1985. It is mixture of novel and travelogue In Hungarian edition, the names of all characters are real , but in English edition they are different. The meeting of East and West is the central idea of Tagore’s university and in this sense the book is really about Santiniketan.

The first Bengali to read the book was Ketaki Kushari Dyson. From her opinion, the book was written from a European standpoint and sometimes Rozsa failed in understanding Shantiniketan. She states that the book is like an MGM epic movie and would indeed make a good film(Bangha, 2008:63). The book can also be compared with Mircea Eliade’s Romanian prose writings such as the novel ‘Maitreyi’.

### **Impact of Tagore in Hungarian Literature**

The Indo-Hungarian literature also emerged with a new feature while Tagore stayed in Hungary after gaining some encouragement from his lectures. Here I am going to focus and illustrate the examples of Hungarian Literature inspire or motivated due to arrival and introduction of Tagore in Hungary.

Hungary is a country of poets and lovers of poetry and Tagore was a poet of the highest order. Tagore’s several renowned works are translated in the Hungarian language.

Apart from his translations, he is also remembered as a thinker in Hungary. Poets help to form public opinion, and are initiators of social development which is expected out of them by the public. Poetry – Hungarian or foreign – is a sacred thing. Books of poetry sell so easily because of the large number of followers and admirers of poetry. The Hungarian language is spoken roughly by 15 million people in the world; therefore Hungarians opened the door to foreign culture including literature. This led to many of Tagore's works that were translated in English to get again translated in Hungarian by several Hungarian poets. Moreover, the translated literary work has its own limitation. Although it's not 100% accurate, but give readers do get a glimpse of the translated work (Wojtilla, 1983).

The first translation of *Gitanjali* was made by Mihaly Babits. This translation contains only few stanzas but the charm of poetry is very evident. The full translation of *Gitanjali* was done by G. Szentirmay in 1920. There is a long list of translations done of Tagore's poetry but only two of his plays have gotten translated even though he wrote over forty plays. The 'King of the Dark Chamber' was translated by O. Wildner in 1920 and second play that got translated was 'The Post Office' by Zoltan Bartos in 1922. In the case of novel writing or prose writings, 'At Home and Outside' (in the original: *Ghare Bahire*) was translated to Hungarian by Ferenc Kelen under the title *Bimala* (inspired by the female lead of the story) in 1924 (Bangha, 2008:34). Some short stories of Tagore's have also been translated in Hungarian in 1922 by Zoltan Bartos. Tagore's autobiography i.e., 'My Reminiscences' was translated by G. Hasongardy in 1922 and won the heart of many Hungarian readers who were fans of Tagore. Besides these, there are other writers like Sandor Weores who translated 'Gita Govinda'; in fact some of these writers are known as Tagore translators. Generally Tagore used to write in Bangla and then used to translate them into rhythmic English prose (Wojtilla, 1983:40). As the time progressed, he also gave other writers to translate his works into English. The Hungarian translations were mostly done without adequate experience and skill, without the knowledge of oriental worldview which is why they were never able to truly interpret Tagore's value. He created profound symbolic dramas like 'The King of the Dark Chamber and short stories which depicted the Indian life in a realistic manner. (Gora and Mashi), Jozsef Vekerdi, the outstanding Sanskritist and an expert in Indian literature, wrote about Tagore in his Bengali Literature article named 'Vilagirodalmi Lexikon.' He stated – "Tagore is the consistent representative of the leading ideas of the age: the consciousness of national dignity and social reforms" (Bangha, 2014).

Tagore is a multifaceted writer, he wrote philosophical meditation book 'Sadhana' where he expressed Hindi poems like Gitanjali, Crescent Moon, The Gardener etc. Tagore is also remembered as a philosopher, a teacher of Indian philosophy and an apostle of a message of India. His philosophical prose writing 'Sadhana' is available in Hungarian translation, in which Tagore offered a fresh interpretation of 'Upanishads' or even a substitute for the original sources. Ervin Bakaty compiled a book devoted to Hindu worldview under the title 'Szanatana Dharma' – Az orok torveny (Eternal law) in 1936, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition: India bolcsessege (the wisdom of India) in 1943 in Budapest (Wojtilla, 1983:48). 'Sadhana' was a great success in Hungary and also attracted criticism from different directions. The most intensive Tagore criticism came from the Catholic Church. This elaborates the special relation between the 'human soul' and 'absolute being'. Man is a creature and God is the Creator. Man is finite and God is infinite (Wojtilla, 1983:53). He defends the rightness of the Hindu worldview against the West. Tagore, a poet and prophet was a representative of the intellectual awakening in India. According to him, Man is not a slave of the world; he must be a lover of it.

Nobody today challenges Tagore's greatness. It is remarkable that Tagore was always popular with various different groups. They shared a common admiration of Tagore and liked to quote him. But sometimes Eastern poets can be impossible to read for a western reader (Wojtilla, 1983:63). When social circumstances change, people's outlook also changes. So, thanks to socialist culture policy, the Hungarian reader is becoming acquainted with the real Tagore through better translation. (Wojtilla, 1983:66). From the ocean of controversy and misunderstanding, a fresh and purified image of Tagore is emerging. Tagore borrowed from folk poetry reciprocally, which is why, today a common man, may recite or sing his poems even though he may be illiterate. This kind of popularity is only one of the characteristics of the greatest poet of every nation. In Hungary, Sandor Petofi can claim this glory. Tagore's oeuvre is alive in the new editions of his works in Hungary. His name is inseparable from the Indian Renaissance and the progress of mankind.

Publishing Tagore's books in the early 1920s was deemed as a good business. Mihaly Foldi who translated Tagore's volumes said that Tagore's teaching about love and harmony of man and nature was not a new idea but rather something that is forgotten again and again and the public needs to get a reminder of it every now and then. Other translations were done

by Mihaly Baits, Deszo Kosztolanyi, Sandor weorse etc. Rabindranath received the strongest criticism from a person who was far from sharing the same ideas as Tagore, that is Georg Lukacs. Georg stated that Tagore's international fame was politically motivated. Others poets also criticized Tagore but they also consider his human values and his poetic achievements. Jenő Dsida's poem is an example of Hungary's disappointment with the West and its turn towards the East. Antal Szerb who wrote Hungarian History of World Literature, made statements on Tagore which were not based on proper study and were filled with surprising mistakes (Bangha, 2014). When Tagore arrived in Hungary, he was received by the Regent Miklos Horthy. His days spent in Balatonfüred created a deep impression on him. Tagore had an outstanding career again in Hungary in the 1920s but that later started to diminish.

The paper further examines the seminal role played by Tagore's distinctive literary achievements which influenced Hungarian literature, especially reputed authors who shined through their literary works afterwards. Mihaly Babits, Sandor Marai, Gyorgy Lukacs, Zoltan Szasz, Ervin Baktay, and Erzsébet Brunner are a few authors who took inspiration from Tagore and really excelled in the field of literature.

Mihaly Babits – One of the first Hungarians to present Tagore to the public. He translated four poems from English and wrote an article about the Bengali poet, in which he elaborated Yeats's idea of comparing Tagore with Saint Francis of Assisi. He is one of the leading poets of the twentieth century who took up translation too as an integral part of his poetic career. In his article named as Two Saints, he wrote this saint is naïve as a thirteenth century Italian Saint. But in his youth he wrote love poetry and dramas as well. Tagore's poems are conscious searches of the soul for its own sentiments, for God found in the soul's depths (Bangha, 2008:201-206)

Georg Lukacs – The outstanding communist aesthetician, published a short article in German about Tagore's novel 'The Home and The World' in 1922 in the magazine Die Rote Fahne. The intellectual conflict in the novel is concerned with the question of the use of violence. It also depicts the ideology of the eternal subjection of India. More or less it is about the conflict of Gandhi and Rabindernath about the struggle of freedom of India (Bangha, 2008:212-216).

Aladar Kuncz – He is inspired by Tagore's thoughts and wrote a short story named 'Tagore's Melody'. The story is one of the most beautiful examples of how Central

Europeans in the early twenties appreciated the Indian Prophet. The article written by him, entitled as – The Tree that set Forth, - To Tagore’s melody. According to him Tagore was a man from the distant East who brought us the philosophy of the trees. Through this, he tried to narrate Tagore’s love for nature and illustrates the merits of his poems(Bangha , 2008:217-222).

Dezso Kosztolanyi – His wide poetic horizon and aesthetic refinement produced three verse translations of Rabindranath. Initially, he criticized Tagore very heavily. He found Tagore’s effort to change the world a bit childish and unrealistic but later on started understanding appreciating Tagore as well. He was another leading poet of the twenties belonging to the same circle of writers from the magazine Nyugat as Babits. In his article, he wrote that all of us know that real culture and spiritual excellence is not quantitative but a qualitative concept. His poem first pleases us and then only appeals to our emotions. It already pleases me, though I cannot conceive the meaning yet. Anticipation arises in me, which is more than knowing. How great a person and a poet he must have bent(Bangha , 2008:225-229).

Istvan Zaborszky – He wrote about – The worldview of Rabindranath Tagore in regards with modern and spiritual view and Christianity. His book about Rabindernath examines Tagore’s philosophy and compares it with Catholic theology. It tries to establish the superiority of Catholic theology over the poet’s ideas. It appeared precisely at the time of Tagore’s visit to Hungary. Author compares Tagore’s worldview first with the modern spiritual culture and then with Christianity. Deussen, the famous Indologist thought that ‘one, who wants to develop Christian consciousness in a consistent way, has to turn to the Upanishads’. His central truth is the unity of the self with the universe, the spiritual realization in the world. This is real enlightenment. and with this, he wants to show that the Hindu worldview is the primary source of truth and everything that is good in the western worldview which can be found in Hinduism(Bangha , 2008:234-240)

Ervin Baktay – He was a maternal uncle of Amrita Sher Gill. He published two small deeply appreciative monographs on Rabindranath Tagore in 1921 and 1922 on the basis of literature available in English and German. He translated some of Tagore’s poems as well. He was the most popular Indologist of the twentieth century. He wrote about his visit and stay in Rabindernath Tagore’s Shantiniketan. In his books India – I, II, he wrote a chapter named as

Visit to Rabindranath Tagore. He wrote Tagore, is not an ascetic like Gandhi but an aesthete poet and artist. He wrote that it's beyond doubt that Tagore is one of the greatest spirits of today. His work holds an international value. His poetry and philosophy is a high and distinctive interpretation of India's most excellent thoughts and of the inspired visions of a genius. The poet is an intellectual aristocrat. He wrote about the description of Shantiniketan- The abode of Peace (Bangha, 2008:250-260).

Erzsébet Brunner – She was the painter who initially visited Shantiniketan and finally settled down in India. She wrote a biography on it and was awarded Padma Shri by the Indian Government. She was also given an honorary doctorate of Visva – Bharti. In her autobiography she mentioned about her stay in Shantiniketan and about Rabindranath Tagore as well. Initially when she came to India in 1930, she stayed in Shantiniketan for about two years as guests of the poet. Later she settled down in India. The following excerpts are taken from Brunner's unpublished English autobiography. She spent time with her mother in Shantiniketan in rest and in peace by using the language of the soul and of art as she didn't even speak English in the initial days. They also painted Tagore's portrait as well as other parts of India. Tagore gave them the initial base to settle down India and flourish their art of Painting (Bangha, 2008:273-290).

Sandor Marai – He was one of the few Hungarian novelists who achieved international fame. In 1921, he published a short piece on Tagore. In this article he expressed his appreciation for a poet full of deep knowledge and also illustrated that people made a business out of him. His article was titled 'Tagore' (Bangha, 2008:207-210).

Jeno Dsida – He wrote the poem 'Towards the Eastern Sunrise'. This poem was published on the Front page of the magazine Pasztortuz. In the poem, he tried to connect Tagore's poem fame in the western world with the benefits of the mankind of Humanity in the western world (Bangha, 2008:223-225).

Zoltan Szasz – In communism regime he attacked Tagore by accusing him of being peculiar. He considered Tagore as a part of the strange phenomenon of his era. He was a travelling sage of bizarre ideologies. After Tagore's lecture, he accused Tagore's irony as irrationalism and presented him as a mediocre writer. He wrote an article named as Tagur. One cannot deny that his poems radiate charm, freshness, and gracious primitiveness. Still, he didn't want to give out his final verdict on Tagore as he felt that he was yet to read Tagore's

best work. It frequently produces the idea that civilization is worthless but culture is everything. Let us also love and celebrate Tagore but do not see in him a sort of superior miracle (Bangha, 2008:230-233).

Istvan Soter – Istvan Soter- He celebrated Indian poet as a representative of the literature of the third world just emerging from the fetters of colonialism. He was the initiator of the studies of comparative literature in Hungary. He examined from a Marxist point of view the cause of the rise and the fall of early enthusiasm for Rabindranath and celebrated the Indian poet as a representative of the literature of the third world just emerging from the fetters of colonialism. Apart from this, he emphasized the unique importance of the Bengali poetic forms used by Rabindranath (Bangha, 2008:266-270).

The Europe of the 1910s on the eve of the World War discovered Tagore, the poet and thinker of India, with enthusiastic wonder. The fact that this discovery was quickly followed by the glamour of a Noble Prize was due to the increasing influence of a book of poems, a mature lyric poet presented itself to Europe with the help of the English translation. Many considered Tagore's writings the authentic voice of the 'mysterious' and 'romantic' East. Tagore wanted to enrich this world's culture with the spirit and approach of India. It is true that Tagore himself believed in the necessity of blending the cultures of India and Europe, that of the East and West. Europe celebrated the poet and the philosopher in him. We feel Tagore's poetry is unique, novel and inimitable. Tagore does not teach us to emigrate from the world but to acquire a happy and responsible position in it. It is not disgust with one's own culture but the thirst for other cultures that now motivates the response of our times for the humanism and gentle poetry of Tagore.

Tagore founded Shantiniketan – an ashram (monastery) which was an institute and the very first center of Comparative Literature. This shows how Tagore and the Hungarians both needed each other for different purposes. It can be said that a new merged era of Indian, Bengali, and Hungarian Literature took birth under Tagore's presence which has always inspired the authors and scholars of all times to explore beyond the standard norms in the field of literature.

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**The imagination of Southeast Asia in Post-independent Bengali Travel  
Writings: A Study of Nimai Bhattacharya's *Ekchakkar Dakkhin Purba Asia***

**Pratim Das<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:**

In the post-independence period, Bengali travel writings about Southeast Asia created a new imagination of Southeast Asia for Bengalis. This imagination involves an insightful understanding of the various politics and relations between Bengal and Southeast Asia. Both the regions have a long history of exchanges. Their connection became more visible when people travelled from Bengal to Southeast Asia for regular economic, political, and cultural reasons after independence. During colonial rule, interest in Southeast Asia began to grow among the Bengalis. Nationalist historians and Bengali intellectuals have repeatedly sought to present the region as part of "Greater India". However, this relationship between Bengal and Southeast Asia changed radically after independence. Nehru's enthusiasm for this part of Asia has been palpable since independence and it was followed by an increase in travels to Southeast Asia by Indian politicians and bureaucrats. This re-imagination of Southeast Asia through travel writing in a post-independence context constitutes a major topic of discussion in this paper. In addition, this paper undertakes a comparative study of the approach taken by the Bengalis towards Southeast Asia at two different times. Through a study of Nimai Bhattacharya's *Ekchakkar Dakkhin Purba Asia* (1993), it tries to initiate a new South-South dialogue between Bengal and Southeast Asia and explores the changed dimensions of their relation.

**Keywords:** Travel Writing, Southeast Asia, Greater India, ASEAN, Look East Policy

Travel and travel writing have occupied an important place since the beginning of human history and have always fascinated people. Although travel writing as a literary genre existed in literature for a long time, it was initially regarded as a popular pastime subject by the readers and not as a subject of serious discussion. However, this attitude towards travel literature has changed in the past few centuries with the advent of new approaches, such as - such as –colonial discourse, postcolonial writing etc. This marginalized position of travel

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literature within the Indian literary discourse began to change from the nineteenth century onwards. Satchidananda Mohanty in his introduction of the book *Travel Writing and the Empire* has aptly said that such approaches in literature brought a new dimension and a new way of understanding of the literary texts and the politics of representation has also changed (Mohanty 1). It is noteworthy, that the advent of large empires, in the early nineteenth century in various parts of the world made travel popular. Travelling to new colonies was a major means of gaining a better understanding of the inhabitants of that land. Consequently, travel literature played a significant role in the dissemination of knowledge about other people and their culture. Mohanty further added:

With the advent of colonial modernity in the nineteenth century in India, we see a form of colonial travel within India as a geographical space. The element of keenness and curiosity evidenced by those who took the early Indian railways, for instance, can be seen in early travelogues in the various Indian languages. There is much of local colour here, aside from the discovery of new lands and regions. But there is also the self's encounter with the mighty power of the British Empire. (Mohanty 2)

Travel Accounts occupy a special place in Indian History. In the twentieth century, travel took place in various ways such as migration, exile, and exodus etc. and many travel writings have been written in Bengali and these travel writings were not just geographical descriptions, local colours, depictions of place or manners and ethics. These travel accounts may be made for religious / pilgrimage or commercial purposes but they are full of the descriptions of the new lands and cultures they encountered. Historians have heavily relied on these travelogues to compose ancient histories of India. How the history of India has been written, especially with the help of the travelogues, proves the reliability of travelogues as a source for writing history. Through these travelogues, Bengalis sought to discover the antiquity of Indian civilization and raised questions about the idea of the orient in the writings of European scholars. But this was a little different when it came to writing history for Southeast Asia. From the 19th century onwards, the Bengali public had a special interest in Southeast Asia. With the emergence of nationalist thinking, acquiring knowledge and promulgating information about the others became an integral part of the agenda of Bengali nationalists. In addition to being educated in English, reading and practising various subjects in leisure became a special pastime habit for the Bengalis. As a result, along with the study of

various subjects, the formation of a comprehensive idea about one's own country and at the same time determining the position of one's neighbour became a special topic of discussion for the Bengalis.

In the wake of rising anti-imperialist consciousness in the Indian sphere, a more influential Asia-discourse emerged in the 1920s, imagining India as a colonial power and Southeast Asia as their colony. Part of this Asia discourse project was to get to know and understand the long-standing traditions of the East and to propagate the vastness of Indian civilization. In this context, Gandhi's remark in the concluding session of the *Inter-Asian Relations Conference* is particularly relevant. As Gandhi aptly puts it:

What I want you to understand is the message of Asia. It is not to be learned through the Western spectacles or by imitating the atom bomb. If you want to give a message to the West, it must be the message of love and the message of truth... I am certain that if all of you put your hearts together - not merely heads - to understand the secret of the message these wise men of the East have left to us, and if we become worthy of that great message, the conquest of the West will be completed. This conquest will be loved by the West... It is up to you to tell the world of its wickedness and sin - that is the heritage of your teachers and my teachers have taught Asia. (Gandhi 116)

The same words that Mahatma Gandhi spoke about the role of Asia and the message that he tried to convey, were echoed in the works of Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore asserts the same concept of Asia in his various writings and speeches. As Tagore wrote in his essay *Brihattara Bharat*, "it should be the historical mission of all Indians to project the greatness of the nation to the world and to discover the soul of the country in a wider arena because limited aspirations bring limited gains" (Tagore 301).

At the same time, nationalist thinkers were particularly interested in proving the antiquity of Indian civilization beyond the confines of European thought. Even Acharya Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, in his essay *Hindu Sabhyatar Pattan*, spoke in favour of the antiquity of Hindu civilization. He mentioned in his essay that the Hindu civilization of India is the oldest and the Aryans founded this civilization (Chatterjee 1). In another essay in the book *Bharat Sasngskriti(1944)*, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee mentioned that India's imagination of Southeast has remained incomplete without realizing the extent of India's cultural conquest throughout Southeast Asia since ancient times (Chatterjee 88). Bengali nationalist historians

worked hard to establish this antiquity of Indian civilization and they engaged themselves in writing a new history of India. In this context, the concept of *Greater India* should be mentioned here.

The members of the *Greater India Society* were undoubtedly inspired by Tagore's idea of Asia. *Greater India* arose from within the framework of an Orientalist scholarship dealing with the question of Hindu and Buddhist influence in Southeast Asia. It originated from the idea of some Western researchers and historians at the beginning of the last century and was later chosen by Indian scholars. With this idea of a Greater India in mind, they later formed a separate society called *Greater India* which was established in 1926. Talking about where this idea of Greater India first originated, Jolita Zebarskaite said in her article that the term first originated from a conference in Paris. She commented that Hemendranath Ghosh was the first to mention this idea while writing in *The Modern Review* about the proceedings of the reunion party of the Hindustani Association of Paris (Zebarskaite 265). Although, *Greater India* began its organizational and institutional triumph in Calcutta in the 1920s, long before that the Bengalis began to write about it in various periodicals. Satish Chandra Mukherjee, leading Bengali educators of 1890s, was the first to speak out on the subject. He started publishing an English monthly magazine from 1897, where he started criticizing the colonial education system as well as promoting the superiority of Indian religion and philosophy. The magazine sought to awaken nationalist consciousness and to build a sense of unity among Indians in different provinces. Thus, from the middle of the nineteenth century, references to other Asian states and regions took place in the Bengali public sphere. Along with the concept of Greater India, the issue of constructing an Indian identity, devoid of contemporary colonial hegemony, rose to prominence.

The promotion of the antiquity of Hindu Civilisation helped the nationalist thinkers to form a movement against the one-sided prejudices of European Scholar. One thing of note here is, the Bengali scholars who promoted the idea of a Greater India were themselves educated by European Scholars. As a result, Bengali historians under the tutelage of European ideas sought to present Southeast Asia as a colony of India. This is how Bengali historians of the time like Ramesh Chandra Majumdar or Radhakumud Mukherjee imagined Southeast Asia in their respective books. In their books they sort of advocated for the *Indianization* of Southeast Asia and this idea of *Indianization*<sup>1</sup> was further developed by the members of Bengal National College and National council for education. These 20<sup>th</sup>-century

history books asserted clearly that Southeast Asia was largely under the Hindu kings of India and had no separate culture of its own. According to these nationalist historians, Indian culture had a major influence over Southeast Asian culture. In *Greater India Society*, historians and philologists sought to popularize the idea of a Greater India. Even, in the twentieth century, an educational mission was conducted through Bengali periodicals for creating awareness among the conscious Bengalis about the diversity and generality of Asia which could bind them together against colonialism. A detailed discussion of the different countries of Asia, their cultures, people and cities, etc., were presented in these periodicals through travel narratives. Images of places of tourist and religious interest, architectural monuments were used to attract readers of all ages, compared to serious academic journals in English. In this context, Sarvani Gooptu reminds:

In all the writing a similarity or dissimilarity with Indian culture and history was defined to retain the interest of the reader. Another important and common idiom in all the writing was the expression of commonality of history and culture of the Asian country and the outright difference with western countries. This thread of nationalistic and patriotic sentiment was more Asian than Indian and that is what made these writings unique at a time when Indian nationalism itself was in its formative stage. (Gooptu 401)

The main objective of the intellectuals of that time was to explore cultural pre-eminence, which India established over other Asian countries. They opined for the replication of this cultural pre-eminence at present where the political scenario of the twentieth century will be disregarded and colonialism will be replaced by the active exchanges between India and other Asian countries. For this exchange and to discover the spirit of India beyond the regional boundaries, Bengalis started travelling to different countries from the twentieth century. In this context, Rabindranath Tagore can be particularly remembered. Tagore travelled to almost all parts of the world and talked to people about their culture and in his writings, he discussed those experiences to educate his countrymen. Various letters written by Rabindranath can be mentioned in this context. Rabindranath also wrote extensively on Southeast Asia. However, the complete account of Rabindranath's trip to Southeast Asia was recorded by Acharya Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay. In *Rabindrasangame Dwipamay Bharat O Shyamdesh*(1960) Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay presented to the reader a diary of Rabindranath's travels to

various countries throughout Southeast Asia. Apart from Rabindranath and Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay, several Bengalis at that time wrote travelogues about Southeast Asia. Notable among these travelogues were – Bimal Mukherjee's *Du Chakay Duniya* (1986), Ramnath Biswas's *Sarba Swadhin Shyam* (1949), Kalachand Dalal's *Brahmaprabasir Patra* (1909), Ramnath Biswas's *Malayasia Bhraman*(1949), Sudhangshu Bimal Mukhopadhyay's *Mandalayer Katha* (1951) etc. Apart from it, many travel writings on Southeast Asia can be found in various periodicals of that time such as *Prabasi*, *Manasi*, *Bhratabarsa*, *Basumati*, *Navya Bharat* and others. These travelogues cover a wide range of topics. Some have described interesting places as well as customs, dress and culture have also been described, which the authors think may be of interest to their readers. Most travel writings are general travel writings where the author aims to bring knowledge to readers from different lands that may not be accessible to many. Another reason for the enthusiasm among Bengalis to travel to Southeast Asia was, crossing the sea here would not have earned them the so-called untouchable tag. A closer look at the travelogues in Bengali periodicals reveals another interesting trend. When various countries in Southeast Asia are described, especially when cultural patterns or styles are praised, it is mainly highlighted as a contribution to Indian civilization. Sometimes there are free comparisons to show the difference and at other times the similarities are highlighted to differentiate Asians from Europeans. In this context Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta wrote quite evocatively:

Travel writing has quite often been linked with the colonising imperialist gaze but that I think is just one kind of travel writing. In the context of Bangla travelogues there is often a point of view on the part of the traveller that is superior, sometimes assimilative, as in the case of Southeast Asia, and sometimes distancing, in case of communities in the mountainous regions of the Himalayas or the Far East. (Dasgupta 10)

However, it is not difficult to understand that during the colonial period and the nationalist movement, the Bengali imagination about Southeast Asia was a conscious effort of nationalist historians and scholars. Imagining Southeast Asia through travel writings was part of their project to map the Greater India. However, there was a detrimental aspect to imagining Southeast Asia as a part of the Greater India. This idea of Greater India denied the distinct rich history of Southeast Asia and sought to present Southeast as a colony. This nationalist historiography of India had a deep purpose. They incorporated Southeast Asia into

national history as part of India, intending to prove themselves older than Western civilization. The Bengali travel writings on Southeast Asia in the pre-independence period mainly aided the project of the Bengali nationalist scholars. After India's independence in 1947, the situation changed completely. India's relations with Southeast Asia achieved a new dimension. It was during this time that various countries in Southeast Asia gained independence from long-standing colonial rule.

In the post-independence scenario, India attached the utmost importance in rekindling relations with Southeast Asia. Despite its longstanding ties, India attached special importance to strengthening diplomatic relations with Southeast Asia. India's foreign policy has been directed to respect its legitimate aspirations to emerge as a major player in South Asia and the world. History reveals that India and Southeast Asia have a long account of mutual exchanges and it also reveals that India's cultural ties with Southeast Asia developed mainly through trade and financial exchange. Numerous traces are found all over Southeast Asia of this ancient relationship. Indian philosophy, culture, religion, Buddhism, art and architecture, language, had a lasting impact on countries of Southeast Asia. As a result of the emergence of these countries as modern countries, these ancient relations came alive and became stronger. From the very beginning, India felt the need to establish closer ties with Southeast Asia and prevent the domination of the region by Western powers. Whether it is combat against colonial power or active support for India's independence movement, Southeast Asia has always played an active role as its closest neighbors.

In the post-independence period, India was the first to give special importance to Southeast Asia in determining its foreign policy. The question of sovereignty and security of the newly formed India was directly related to Southeast Asia. As Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, said, India was the gateway between West and Southeast Asia and so inevitably the independence and security of Southeast Asia helped strengthen India's independence and security. Any sort of political upheavals in Southeast Asia was a potential threat to India. It was through this understanding, that India played an active role in the fight against various political movements in Southeast Asia such as Dutch and Indonesia conflict. The post-cold war realities have prompted India and the Southeast to strengthen strong economic and security ties. Various policies and initiatives such as ASEAN<sup>2</sup> and Look East Policy<sup>3</sup> by the government of India was taken to maintain good relations with various countries in Southeast Asia. But not only this, the large number of Indian migrant workers

working in Southeast Asia and their interest led the government to develop relations with Southeast Asia. This undoubtedly had an impact on India's relations with these countries. To further this argument on why Southeast Asia holds an important place in India's foreign policy, scholars have pointed out some reasons. P Tepekrovi Kiso in his thesis has pointed out that the nationalist leadership and the first generation of post-independence leaders in India took special initiatives and plans for Southeast Asia even before independence. Even before the formal declaration of independence, the interim government convened the first Asian Relations Conference<sup>4</sup> in March 1947 and took steps to forging a strategic relationship with Southeast Asia. Even within two years of independence, the Indian government convened an international conference in Indonesia in 1949 to expand political ties with Southeast Asia (Kiso 75). Even Nehru himself, speaking at the Asian Relations Conference on Southeast Asia in Delhi, explained exactly how India would approach its neighbours in the future. He said in his speech that in the past, Indian culture flowed to all the countries of Southeast Asia and Central Asia and the relationship between them developed in different ways. He further emphasized in rekindling of closer organization among these countries in near future.

However, the strategic importance of Southeast Asia in India was evident even before the transfer of power from the British to India. The events of World War II and Japanese invasions through Southeast Asia led India to secure its borders on the east. Furthermore, India also took a policy to ally with Southeast Asia. The rise of China as a new power in Asia also forced India to adopt a new foreign policy in Southeast Asia. India realized long ago that the Sino-India relationship would not be the same shortly. Even in 1950, during the heyday of India-China relations, India was aware of the fact that diplomatic relations with China would not last long. Besides, due to the dominance of communist power in China, India had shown special interest in Southeast Asia at that time. Also, the presence of people of Indian descent in Southeast Asian countries, mainly Burma, Malaysia and Singapore, played a significant role in India's policy towards Southeast Asia. However, the success of Indian foreign policy in Southeast Asia in the mid-1950s led to a reluctance on the part of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in the region. A sense of neglect aroused from the part of India about Southeast Asia. It was on this occasion that China strengthened its diplomatic and trade relations with Southeast Asia. However, at the first Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, India strongly urged China to integrate with the international community

in the interest of Asian integration and requested that China be considered more of a nationalist country than a communist revolutionary power (Muni 5).

In the 1950s, India focused on developing its internal infrastructure, so from the outset, India wanted to maintain peace and good relations with its neighbours, instead of going into conflict with them. Even India signed *Panchsheel Agreement*<sup>5</sup> with China in 1955. But India's peace efforts did not succeed, as clashes with Pakistan and China pushed India away from Southeast Asia. Speaking in this context Sreya Maitra Roychoudhury in her article has pointed out that-

.....the end of 1950s saw the brewing of troubles with Pakistan and China. The monumental defeat at the hands of the Chinese Army in 1962 and military stalemate with Pakistan in 1965 unsettled India's security calculations. Moreover, at the domestic level, India veered to a policy of 'import-substituting industrialization' and the state-controlled the 'commanding heights of the economy'. Thus, the exigencies of the international and internal environment were such that India did not Come much in contact with Southeast Asia. (Roychoudhury 26)

Harping on the issues of conflict with Pakistan and China, created a certain kind of distance was created between India and Southeast Asia. However, post-independent diplomatic relations or exchanges between India and Southeast Asia have never been completely disrupted. Numerous travel writings about Southeast Asia written at that time bear witness of this exchange. In the post-independence period, the Bengalis in particular re-imagined Southeast Asia in a new form. Post-independent Bengali Travel writings on Southeast problematizes this imagination of Southeast Asia. The study of post-independence Bengali travel writing on Southeast Asia claimed an important place and highlighted the contribution of Indian foreign policy in shaping this imagination. The political ups and downs that began in the whole of South and Southeast Asia after the Second World War had a profound effect on the Bengali people. Impressions from the colonial past formed a revisionist investigation of imperialist enterprise which creates the structure of survival. Tutun Mukherjee has aptly pointed out:

Though the era of high nineteenth-century imperialism ended after the Second World War, the reality of the imperial past and the historical experience of colonialism

remain vivid as the shared memory of the ruler and the ruled and colour their expression and perception of culture, ideology and politics. The appeal to the colonial past to interpret the postcolonial present is not just an expedient strategy. It constitutes a revisionist inquiry into the enterprise of the empire that created structures and institutions to perpetuate colonialism. (Mukherjee 63)

Whatever it is, the colonial mentality of India towards Southeast Asia is very much evident. Just like the British, India used to think of Southeast Asia as its colony, which reflected in the various travel writings of that time. But the post-independent situation was completely different. When India emerged as a new power, it raised security concerns among countries in the Southeast Asian region. This is mainly due to its geographical location and its population which has become a threat to the countries of Southeast Asia. Speaking about India's troubled relations with Southeast Asia, Mohamad Nasir Saludin cited the example of India's relations with Malaysia and Indonesia. He showed how India supported Malaysia in the conflict between Malaysia and Indonesia during the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Even then, Malaysia repaid its support to India on behalf of the federation by strongly supporting New Delhi on the China border. (Saludin 5) In the aftermath of the Cold War, India moved towards Southeast Asian countries to create a new equation in South Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the simultaneous economic crisis forced India to think differently. India adopted a two-pronged strategy to gain a foothold in Southeast Asia. This led to closer contacts with ASEAN as well as it improved India's bilateral relations with Southeast Asia. India intended to develop a prosperous trade relationship with the Southeast Asian region. This new equation of relations with Southeast Asia later helped India formulate the Look East policy.

In the post-cold-war situation, it soon became necessary to enable a multilateral approach to establish strategic and closer political ties with ASEAN and to develop stronger economic ties with the region. India's *Look East Policy (1991)* was an attempt to carve out a place for India in the greater Asia-Pacific region. A close reading of India's diplomatic relations with Southeast Asia makes it clear that in the post-independence period, bilateral relations became more intense than ever. As a result, Indian travel to Southeast Asia was increased at that time. From the nationalization of Burma to the strengthening of diplomatic relations with Indonesia, many Indian diplomats travelled to Southeast Asia at that time.

Along with them, journalists can be mentioned here who went to Southeast Asia to cover this constantly changing political news. Many of these leaders, diplomats or journalists who were Bengalis wrote several travel writings about Southeast Asia that helped the Bengali mind to imagine Southeast Asia in post-independence context. In addition to political reasons, tourism from Southeast Asia, in particular, attracted Indians to travel to Southeast Asia. Due to which, numerous travel writings about Southeast Asia were published in various newspapers and magazines at that time. Nimai Bhattacharya's travel writing *Ekchakkar Dakkhin Purba Asia* (1993) is one such travel story that helped Bengalis to understand Southeast Asia in the post-independence period. Nimai Bhattacharya was a prominent journalist and writer. He was a brilliant name in the world of Delhi at that time. In his career, he came in contact with many political personalities and travelled around the country to cover the news. Nimai Bhattacharya's travel writing *Ekchakkar Dakkhin Purba Asia* (1993) discusses three regions in Southeast Asia, namely Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. The reason why Bengalis re-imagined Southeast Asia in the post-independence period can be understood by reading the preface of Nimai Bhattacharya's *Ekchakkar Dakkhin Purba Asia* (1993). In the introduction to the book, he explains how his vision remained westward as a result of colonialism, and the rise of Asian powers like China and Japan did not change his view during World War II. He further added that despite his interest in Southeast Asia, there was always a lack of enthusiasm, which created an ignorance in him about this region of Southeast Asia (Bhattacharya 11).

The importance of Southeast Asia in the post-independence period can be traced here in the words of Nimai Bhattacharya. An echo of this same concern can be heard in the words of a friend of the author, where he spoke of a change in the direction of travel from west to east. In his travelogue, Nimai Bhattacharya talks about the traditions and culture of Southeast Asia and their efforts to preserve them. At the same time, he reminded the history of the connection of Bengalis with South East Asia. In the Singapore chapter of his travel story, he repeatedly reminisced about the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Azad Hind Army. In this way, he wanted to remind the Bengalis who have forgotten their history. His travel account reveals how the Ramakrishna Mission in Singapore has been actively working and their contribution in organizing the Bengalis there. Regarding the Bengali population in Singapore, Bhattacharya talks about his conversation with Bengalis at the Ramakrishna Mission and how

he met a Bengali woman named Mira Chatterjee who was actively associated with the Azad Hind Army (Bhattacharya 30).

In this way, he sought to restore by reminding them of their ancient connection with Southeast, which had been quite stagnant since independence. It should be noted that India was formerly not welcomed by Southeast Asia in the post-independence period, but was viewed with suspicion and fear. Nimai Bhattacharya travelled to Southeast Asia on the eve of India's Look East policy. His informative travelogue about Southeast Asia was, in fact, an attempt to turn the Bengalis' sights from west to east. It should be noted that in this context, India was not first welcomed by Southeast Asia in the post-independence period, but was viewed with suspicion and fear. Speaking of Malaysia, the author again praised the way of life there, as well as the comparison of Kolkata with the cities there to explain exactly why we should follow Southeast Asia. He goes on to discuss in the Malaysia chapter how Indian merchants have been associated with Southeast Asia since ancient times due to trade. He also mentions how the Portuguese, Dutch and British later established their colonies in the Southeast and the internal exchanges that took place between these colonies during the colonial period are also discussed in Bhattacharya's travelogue. In his travelogue, Bhattacharya acknowledges the antiquity of Thai civilization. The pre-independence Bengali travelogues and writings of Bengali nationalist historians presented Thai civilization and culture as an extension of Indian civilization. But Bhattacharya claims in his travelogue that Thai civilization is about five lakh years old and that the inhabitants of the Saw Valley of Thailand lived long before the birth of Christ. The fertile land of this country was particularly favourable for habitation and attracted the people of the neighbouring country. Thus the kingdom of Subarnabhumi was established there (Bhattacharya 63).

He said more specifically that through Buddhism, Indians became acquainted with Thailand and their exchanges began. Drawing upon this argument, Nimai Bhattacharya, in his writings, refuted the nationalist narrative about Southeast Asia which have its root in colonial time. He further said that Indian culture has a lot in common with Thailand, but while acknowledging the contribution of Indian culture, he did not deny Thailand's own culture like his predecessors. On the contrary, they have strengthened the relationship by mentioning the regular cultural exchanges between them even after independence. In this way, *Ekchakkar Dakkhin Purba Asia* (1993) written by Nimai Bhattacharya presented a completely new

narrative about Southeast Asia to the Bengali readers and made a special contribution to the imagination of Southeast Asia in the post-independence period.

I would like to say in conclusion that the imagination of Southeast Asia in post-independence context was completely different from the representations of that region in the writings of Bengali nationalist historians and travel writings. The post-independence Bengali travel writings about Southeast Asia were an attempt by the Bengalis to create a new South-south dialogue with that region, which went on for a while in the two decades after independence. This idea of the Bengalis about Southeast Asia was an attempt to look at the region in a new direction by discarding all previous ideas. This is exactly what Nimai Bhattacharya's travel writing did, and the text has considerable relevance in post-independence Bengali imagination of Southeast Asia.

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<sup>1</sup> Indianization of Southeast Asia was propagated by Brahmin Scholars and it was widely accepted theory about Southeast Asia.

<sup>2</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is an organization consisting of ten countries in Southeast Asia, which promotes cooperation and supports socio-economic integration between its members and other Asian countries.

<sup>3</sup> Look East Policy is an attempt by the Indian Government to build greater economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asian countries to strengthen its position in this region.

<sup>4</sup> The first Asian Relations conference was held in 1947. The objectives of the conference were to encourage mutual communication and understanding between Asian countries.

<sup>5</sup> Panchasheel agreement was signed between Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the first Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-Lai. The agreement was signed for the purpose of peaceful coexistence.

## Understanding the conditions of coal coolies as represented in Bengali literature: A study of selected Bangla short stories

Aratrika Ganguly<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract:**

In colloquial Bangla, *coolie/kamin* refers to any labourer who carries 'baggage'. However, in the colonial period it was used in a derogatory manner by the British to refer to any indentured labourer. The coolie system emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later the coolies were exploited in every possible way as substitutes of African slaves. Tea, coal, and jute were the three primary industries that employed the maximum number of coolies. Coal mines in the Eastern India employed many indentured labourers. This paper takes into consideration the literary depiction of coal coolie in the colonial and postcolonial period in selected Bangla short stories by Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Ghanashyam Choudhury and Anish Deb in order to construct an Indian historical narrative from the perspective of the coolies—the labourers—the main work force of the mines. Coal mines used to employ a large number of labourers from various parts of India; they would migrate from various locations to the colliery areas and when settled there would create a multicultural space there. This labour force consisted of mainly Adivasis and people belonging to the lower castes and they were oppressed not only by the colonizers, but by the upper caste/class Indians as well. This paper analyses the socio-politico-cultural conditions of the coolies and others associated with the coal mines as well as the general social conditions of the towns and cities surrounding the mines as depicted in the stories. It also seeks to understand how the category of coolie literature gets intertwined with the genre of Bangla short stories to create a genre of literature that is essentially a product of the collieries.

**Keywords:** Coolie, Coal mine, Bangla literature, Short story, Migration, Colonial period.

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“I am black because I come from the earth's inside

Take my word for jewel in your open light.” (Lorde)

These lines from American poet, Audrey Lorde’s poem “Coal” depicts the beauty behind the world’s ultimate energy source that runs the modern civilization. We cannot live without coal, yet we do not try or rather do not know how to improve the conditions of the people who has kept this industry alive. The merchants, businessmen, politicians, mile-men, officers etc. are important, but the engineers and workers and other labourers who goes inside the womb of mother earth to provide better life for earth’s other children are the most neglected lot of all.

The coal industry has been of uttermost significance in the development of Indian economy starting from the British Raj until this period. It has generated revenues, created remarkable changes in the socio-politico history of India and has helped India in becoming a developing nation. However, all these achievements are attributed to the imperial rulers, wealthy businessmen, powerful politicians, or others, but what about the coolies; the indentured labourers and other forms of labourers working inside the dark navel of the earth. Not only they are not acknowledged, but they are ignored in every possible manner. The backbone of the coal industry has been the coal coolies/ kamins<sup>1</sup> and their life has been steeped into the darkness of the coal whereas the spotlight is snatched from them by powerful ministers and businessmen like Dwarakanath Tagore or the Adani’s.

The term coolie was used in a derogatory manner, and the indentured labourers were referred to as coolies. These coolies were an alternative to the system of slavery that was abolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (starting from the 1830s). The women coolies were referred to as kamins (especially in the coal mine context, however I have used the term coolie as a gender-neutral term in this paper while referring to labourers pertaining to both genders). Coal along with other commodities like tea and jute employed most of the indentured labourers in the British period. Therefore, the literary representation of coal coolie becomes very important in the context of the literatures of India. As the coal mines situated in the Eastern part of India mainly employed the coolies, therefore, this paper seeks to explore the

way the coal mining industry developed in India and specifically in Bengal of undivided British India. This paper will address this literary representation of coal coolie in the colonial and post-colonial period by analysing these following Bangla short stories- “Koila Kuthi” by Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay; “Sobuj Ruidas”, and “Marad” from the volume *Khadan Samagra* by Ghanshyam Choudhury; and “Bonboniya” by Anish Deb. This paper will deal with the condition of coal mine labourers -the coolies as represented in various short stories in Bangla literature as in Bengal the first colliery of South Asia was opened, and mining was born inside the womb of Bengal’s coal pits. Nineteenth century saw the development of coal industry in India and its underlying causations.

The timeline of the history of India’s energy politics can be almost neatly divided into two halves. The first half began when coal deposits were discovered by British geologists along the right bank of Damodar River in Bengal almost at the same time as similar discoveries were made elsewhere in Europe at the crack of the Industrial Revolution. It would be another fifty years when the mineral would begin to be heavily exploited in India and a lively flourishing history of entrepreneurship would grow up around Damodar and the river it fed its water to, the Hooghly near Calcutta, the second city of the British Empire.

The entrepreneurship was led by Dwarakanath Tagore, the grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore. The elder Tagore positioned himself neatly in the East Asian opium triangle that the British built. The opium was manufactured at Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh, transported by Ganga to the ships from Calcutta from where it was shipped to China. The cargo was opium, the fuel was coal and Tagore ran the largest coal business in the country. It came asunder as the company fell through the crack of insufficient finance and interests of the adventurers in the East India Company who were keen to cut themselves a share of the lucrative trade. As the opium trade fizzled out, the demand for coal slumped.

Decades later, as the theatre turned to West Asia, interest in coal revived. In the late nineteenth century, Britain and Russia began a fight to control the oil wells of Asia, including Persia. The Indian colony of Britain stepped in to play a crucial supporting hand in this game. The viceroy in India, Lord Curzon, raced to build a pan-Indian

network of railways to transport troops and supplies to the possible war fields of Asia. The railways of needed coal to run and so begun the second phase of interest in India's energy game. (Bhattacharjee 4-5)

This is the concise history of coal mining in India. Subhomoy Bhattacharjee's pathbreaking book, *India's Coal Story*, provide behind the scenes facts of one of India's biggest industry that not only employed millions and caused them ultimate destruction, but also, coal, being one of the largest economically profitable industry, caused migrations of thousands and their displacement from various parts of India (mainly the central Indian provinces) to the Eastern India coal fields. Even in post-independent India, the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru believed that India would gain prosperity by producing steel that "would be smelted by domestically sourced coal mined in government-run coal mines" (Bhattacharjee 5). Nevertheless, both in pre-independent and post-independent India, coal has been linked to power and profit. The most important part of this industry- its miners were however, neglected then and are neglected now. Their life has been the same- for them only the rulers changed, the rule did not.

During the colonial period, there was a great influx of migrant labourers in the colliery areas of Eastern India. Most of these migrants came in search for better future opportunities and the migrants were mainly the Adivasis and the people from the suppressed castes and they would migrate to reduce their oppression. In reality, their oppression would increase a thousand-fold when they would come to work for in the collieries. As mentioned earlier, to have cheap labourers and basically a substitute for slavery, the British introduced indentureship and this system of bonded labour paved the way for capitalism to thrive in the British Empire. In the beginning, the British bought experienced coal miners from Europe. Later,

Rupert William Jones, one of the early British entrepreneurs to invest in coal mining in Bengal, was the first to employ local adivasi and lower caste labour around the middle of nineteenth century. Peterson reported in his District Gazetteer of Burdwan in 1910, that two-thirds of the total workforce in the mining industry was „locally born“. Of the different local adivasi and lower caste groups, the Bauris were the first to bring their women into the collieries. Their contribution to the early development

of Bengal coal mining industry was quite significant. The Bauris henceforth, came to be known as “traditional coal cutters” though their traditional occupation had been agriculture related. The Santhals, Kols, Koras and Bhuiyas also joined the mining workforce along with their women. Other low caste categories such as Beldars, Mullahs and Jolahas worked in mines with their women. Upper caste women usually stayed away from the dirty, heavy work in the collieries. Women of different local castes and communities worked in varying proportion in the collieries. By the 1930s, women miners were employed in a variety of operations in collieries. (Banerjee 3-4)

The Adivasis were exploited by both the British as well as the Indian coal mine owners. They were paid very lower wages of five to seven rupees. It was cheap labour for the miners. The labourers even did not know they could protest, and the concept of collective awareness was missing among them. This was taken as a huge opportunity for the coal mine owners to exploit them further.

It was in the 1890s that the government for the first time, set up a committee to look into the various problems of the coal industry in India. Accordingly, an Inspector of Mines on the line of the English collieries was appointed, for the first time. The turn of the century however, saw some government initiative that led to the passing of a number of mining legislations starting with the Indian Mines Act 1901. (Banerjee 6)

Moreover, all these changes did not improve the living or working conditions of the labourers. In turn they were torn between a penchant for their homeland, their roots, their culture, and their eagerness to earn a better living for themselves and their family. A multicultural space was formed when the migrant labourers interacted with the locals. Their language was a result of transactions among various communities and a common language was born among the colliery people to communicate among themselves.

Coal mining was essentially a colonial institution and the lack of proper infrastructure and economic development caused hindrance in the growth of development of coal mining and the labour conditions were terrible. The short stories “Koila Kuthi” by Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay; “Sobuj Ruidas” and “Marad” from the volume *Khadan Samagra* by Ghanshyam Choudhury; and “Bonboniya” by Anish Deb will further bring out the life of the coal coolies from the colonial period till the post-independent period of India. These stories

are set in both colonial and post-colonial India and essentially reflects the reality of the labourer's life. Their portrayal in the genre of short stories; a genre that portrays realism and in the Indian context it was adapted from the west in its modern form and reflects the Indian sensibilities in a way that leaves the reader question more. Furthermore, it is a genre that is very much in a dialogue with the readers. Hence, rendering the lives of coal coolies in short stories in Bangla literature helps to reach not only a wider audience of people, but it also essentially targets the intended audience for the short story-the educated, urban intelligentsia. Even in the contemporary times when the genre has a more wide and diverse reach, it is important for people not related to the collieries to understand and comprehend the condition of the mines and its labourers. Even the people who are in a way related to the colliery in a hierarchical position than the labourers and engineers who faces death and destruction every day, these stories can act as their conscience. In the context of Bangla literature, the genre of short story was present embedded in charit<sup>2</sup>, jatakas<sup>3</sup>, fairy tales etc. Nevertheless, in this paper we will deal with stories that very much took their form from the modern European short story genre. Furthermore, this paper will also explore the presence of indigenous elements in these stories, if not in form, then maybe in content.

There has been no process of evolution in the history of short story in Bengali literature. It would be valid to say instead that short story made its appearance rather suddenly in the literary firmament of Bengal. However, the magazines of Bengal (weekly, fortnightly and monthly) played an eminent role in the promotion and encouragement of short stories. . .The magazines encouraged (and do encourage today also) short stories mainly because of space economy, and for the sake of introducing a variety in the content. Interestingly, except for Bankim Chandra, all the well known authors and writers of Bengali novels and fictions have also written short stories. And the magazines (Patrika) have been their vehicles of expression initially. (Bose 49)

Even Sailajanada's renowned short story "Koilkuthi" was initially published in the famous periodical, *Basumati* in the year 1922. This immortal short story efficiently depicted the life struggles of the coal coolies in literature. In the history of Bangla literature, this story will always be present as a gem that depicted the struggles of the coal coolies.

Sailajananda was one of the stalwarts of Bangla literature in the post Rabindranath Tagore period. He was a contemporary of the eminent poet, Kazi Nazrul Islam. Sadly, a gem like Sailajananda is not given the status due to him. We remember his contemporaries more than we celebrate this writer who was able to write about the subaltern coolies from below; he was able to live among them and reflect this stance in his writings not from a hierarchical stance, but from their perspective; the perspective of the coal coolies.

Kallol era was a period in Bangla literature of the 1930's that deconstructed the Tagorean notions of literature. This modernist movement in literature wanted to break the shackles of stagnancy in Bangla and wanted to be more inclusive in content and form. Political consciousness and a form of progressivism was embedded among the Kallol writers and this literary movement/period started with the journal by the same name, *Kallol* that was founded by Gokulchandra Nag in 1923. The most prominent writers of this period were- Budhhadev Bose, Premendra Mitra, Jibanananda Das, Sudhindranath Dutta, Manish Ghatak, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, etc. Initially Sailajananda was a part of *Kallol*, but he went on later to open another journal named *Kali Kalam*. However, after few years he again joined the *Kallol* group. The Kallol writers wanted to reflect the harsh realities of life in their texts and this was also a reaction to the disappointment people faced post World War I. Sailajananda's texts first took the Bangla readers to the coal mine areas of Asansol, Raniganj etc. and made the readers look at how life is lived by the coal coolies. In his writings we see how he moves away from cultural chauvinism and revealed that even the nameless, faceless coolies can be their own protagonist of their own story. Sailajananda himself had to face a very tough poverty-stricken life after he faced some setbacks. Therefore, he could understand a life without money or luxury and a life where the necessities are met seldom. After his marriage, with the help of his father-in-law, Sailajananda himself opened a coal depot in the Jorjonaki colliery area. That is how he came in touch with the coolies and the coolies were portrayed both in his first and last texts- "Koilkuthi" and *Koilkuthir Desh*.

"Koila Kuthi" is essentially about the essential workers who are working day and night for us. This short story was republished in the volume dedicated to labourers- *Sromojibi Manusher Golpo*. It is indeed a short story about the labourers -labourers of the coal mines. One of the first of its kind, this pioneering text first brought to the Bangla readers the real, horrific situation of life of the coal coolies. Sailajananda was not yet involved with the

Bangla film industry when this short story was published yet his cinematic qualities of capturing details and close ups unmask here as well. The story is about the couple- Bilasi and Nanku, yet it is more about the lives of the coolies. These couple and their turmoil represent the troubles of the coolies in a whole. They work in the Jorjonaki colliery and this short story is a result of Sailajananda's witnessing of the way the coolies lived, laughed, and loved. The small domestic quarrels between Nanku and Bilasi, their jealousy when the either of them interacted to any other person of the opposite gender or their romantic liaisons are beautifully painted against the harsh reality of the coal mines. Bilasi is a Bauri, whereas Nanku, a Santhal. These two people from two different Adivasi communities had a happy conjugal life. They came from Jharia and was living in Raniganj and later shifted to Jorjonaki. This is a pattern of migration that was very common among coolies of the coal mines. Moving from one coal mines to another, they would come far away from their roots. Their problems started when they moved to Jorjonaki when Nanku started getting close to another coolie woman named Mainu and this gradually created rift in the life of this happily married couple. This short story also reveals the drinking culture of the coolies. The coolies used to get drunk mostly on cheap, country liquor to gain mental as well as physical strength to carry on their daily herculean tasks. This problem further destroyed many relationships among the coolies. The day Nanku betrayed his wife Bilasi, he initially went to drink tari, a type of country liquor, with his friends, but he never came back to his wife. Bilasi waited for the whole night all alone in her hut. The news she got the next day shocked her beyond her imagination; she could not believe her own ears when people told her how her beloved had run away with another woman. A woman faces multiple layers of oppression in her life and when she is a coolie, her layers of oppression just increase. When Nanku left Bilasi for another woman and in disguise, it not only broke her heart but her pride as well. He took away her identity with him. She was left with no choice but to live with Romona who have always been one of her admirers. Romona proposed her marriage, but she refused to marry him. Marriage has hurt her once and in vengeance she started living with Romona while her heart yearned only for her Nanku. Marrying more than one person was common among the coolies and especially if one's partner has left them. There was no official documentation of marriage, hence, it was easy for a coolie to leave his/her partner and neglect their responsibilities.

Later, when Bilasi got the news of Nanku's arrival in their colliery and his death inside one of the coal pits, it made her run towards the coal pit. She took Romona with her by giving excuses and pretending to marry him if he helps her this last time. Her heart was craving for Nanku and in hurry she jumped off the lift and fell on her husband and he died instantly. He was taking his last breath and Bilasi's fatal jump ended his life. Guilt, regret, pain, love and many more emotions enveloped Bilasi's heart and the eagerness for dying along with her lover inside the dark, coal pit made her furious. She started behaving crazily and instead of coming up with her husband's body, she went around with Nanku's body from one side of the mine to another. Her frenzied and maniacal behaviour has been compared with the god of Sanatan Dharma's i.e., Shiva's<sup>4</sup> behaviour after his beloved wife Sati<sup>5</sup> died. Like grief-stricken and angry Mahadeva<sup>6</sup>, Bilasi too in a rage wanted to die in any way possible and lastly her wish came true when she saw a place in the faint moonlight coming through one of the holes. There she went with her husband's body and intentionally started pulling chunks of coal that finally took away her life. Here, there is another reference to the custom of Sati that many Indian women went through. Like a Sati woman, Bilasi too died on her husband's funeral pyre; here the funeral pyre is the coal pit. On the other hand, analysing it from a rational viewpoint, it becomes apparent how hazardous the circumstances of the mines were and death could easily come inside the mines. Loose coal chunks, hot water, fire etc. were enough to kill human beings. Nanku also died due to one of these reasons. Death inside the coal mines were common happenings and nobody really cared about the death of the coolies; they were simply treated as collateral damage. There were no precautions or measures taken to ensure the safety of people working underground and years of unplanned mining created major faults inside the coal mines. The Bagdigi mine disaster, the Chasnala mine disaster of the recent times are proof of improper mining that is still happening in various parts of the country.

In this short story, Sailajananda has also mentioned and described the cultural life of the Adivasis working as coolies. From describing about the Santhali songs Bilasi sings to the instruments they use and the type of dance they performed are described in detail. We get a glimpse inside the coolie's life. Consequently, when Bilasi sings about her beloved living her for another woman. Her pain can be felt through these words- "Kon sanjhe tui gechis chole amar piyari/ami je tar kichui jani nalo/kichui jani na"- In which evening did you leave my

lover/ I do not know anything/ I do not know (Mukhopadhyay 119). These words reflect Bilasi's pain and throw light on the use of the fusion language by the coolies. It is not the modern standardized languages of India, but a language very special to the coal mine area. Through these songs and performances, the coolies cease to exist just as hardworking labourers, but their aesthetics, their way of loving and living comes to the forefront. In this way the readers can relate with these characters because even these coolies cry when their lovers leave them, or sing and dance when they are thrilled, or buy something when they get their wages. They are not much different from the readers living outside the world of the colliery; they too are humans.

Ghanashyam Choudhury was born in Kolkata, but he grew up in Guptipara of Hooghly district. Like Sailajananda, even Ghanashyam started his writing career with working for periodicals. Along with writing novels and short stories, he also worked as an editor of *Udit*. As a journalist, he wrote for children as well. He wrote various genres like science fiction, detective stories and so on. His famous novel *Abogahon* won the Mollobhum award and it was an outright political novel. His two volume of stories, *Khadan* and *Khadaner Pore*, depicts the life of the coal miners and others related to the coal mines. His stories revolve around life in the colliery areas of West Bengal and minutely depicts the reality behind life inside and around the coal mines. Ghanashyam himself wrote in the introduction of *Khadan Samagra* that he went over and over to collieries and stayed with people of that area to feel their pain and happiness; to know what their life was really like. He lived with the labourers and went deep inside the dark earth to get a taste of what it was really to be a part of the coal mining community. Both Sailajananda and Ghanashyam were not coal mine labourers themselves, but then they lived within the community and got a first-hand experience of the lives of the coal miners. Apparently belonging from a different 'class' they could move away from cultural prejudice and portray the coal miners in literature; it has been rarely done in Bangla literature. *Khadan Samagra* contains stories from both the volumes *Khadan* and *Khadaner Pore* and some other stories related to coal mines. The stories in this aforementioned volume are mostly based on real life incidents. *Khadan Samagra* stands out as it is entirely dedicated to the people of the coal mines, the coolies of coal. All the stories of this book are not of the colonial period, but the common thread that binds them is the condition of people related to the coal mines and their depiction of the plight of the coal

coolies. Ghanashyam even mentions Sailajananda's work as not only the first texts in Bangla to deal with coal mines and the miners, but also as the first milestone in Bangla literature to deal with the marginalized people of the collieries. According to Ghanashyam, the coal mining communities represents in microcosm the macrocosmic pluricultural diversity of India. The multilingual, multicultural India can be seen here, and this little slice of the nation can help us in understanding the diversity of the country.

Ghanashyam has been a journalist and his journalistic research and writing skills are reflected in his stories like "Shefalider Kotha", "Sobuj Ruidas", "Marad", and "Roti Bauri" from the volume *Khadan Samagra*. His language is simple and through a lucid writing he has tried to portray realistically what life is for the coolies working down inside the coal pits. The oppressed and discriminated labourers working in the coal mines are the protagonists of his stories. The short story "Sobuj Ruidas" starts with a splendid description of the Eastern Indian plateau regions and the variety of flora encompassing the region. Sobuj Ruidas, the protagonist, is a coal mine labourer. Like his father, he too has been following the tradition of working in coal mines. Mostly, the coal mine labourers would stick in working on the coal mines for generations due to lack of educational opportunities. Sobuj Ruidas is one example among thousands of coolies who have been facing oppression since decades. The simple songs of the coal mine areas are mentioned in this short story. There is the mention of the main river Damodar that flows through the colliery regions of Asansol, Raniganj etc. Damodar provides impetus to the coolies of the region and the culture of the place has grown around it. Ruidas sings, "Tui munshya dube mor ga/ Damudorer jole re bhai/ damudorer jole"-You mister drown and die in Damodar's water/ Hey in Damodar's water/ In Damodar's water (Choudhury 28). These lines refer to a woman asking her husband to drown himself in the Damodar when he refused to feed her. The pain of the woman comes out in her harsh words. The language is very much distinct from any contemporary standard modern India language. Even in the short story, "Bonboniya", discussed later in this paper, the language hybridity and difference remain same. The central character Bonboniya speaks a very different language that is neither Hindi nor Bangla, but a language that has the essence of both and culture of the Adivasis and in short it is a language that belongs essentially to the coal mines.

Sobuj Ruidas and his acquaintances talk about the closing down of several coal mines in the Raniganj area. This story is set in post-independent India and refers to the closing down of operations in many government-based coal mines. This led to loss in jobs and that followed more deterioration along with poverty in the life of the already grief-stricken coolies. The closing down of Eastern Coalfield Limited's<sup>10</sup> coal mines destroyed many families. Closing of coal mines due to underground mine fires have become very common in India. Even now places like Jharia coal mines are burning day and night and evacuation of people have been going on for years. Years of implementing unscientific mining processes along with natural disasters have increased this problem. Coming back to the short story, one such fire took away Ruidas's job. However, his sensible wife, Sarathi, made him realise that they could earn money by singing tusu, bhadu or baul songs. The genres of various forms of Bangla folk music well-suited Ruidas's voice that he inherited from his father. The short story ends with the husband-wife duo singing together one such folk songs. Choudhury's story ends with a positive tone that there is still hope left for the coolies and this short story makes us believe as well that there is a life beyond the coal mines for these sufferers.

In another story, named, "Marad", the story starts in the same tone as "Sobuj Ruidas". The mention of the landscape along with the dancing and singing of the coolies are mentioned in the beginning. Their simple way of life includes a lot of drinking, singing, and dancing. These are the simple pleasures of their life that helps them survive in the rough environment of coal mines. The protagonist of this short story, Dilip Bauri, is a dumper operator of the Gourangdi open cast coal mine. His happy conjugal life is mentioned with his new bride, Sandhya. However, their happiness is short lived when Dilip dies of a terrible accident that happened when the dumper was not working properly and he was unable to drive the dumper from the lower level of the open cast coal mine to the upper level of the colliery. To save other labourers from a terrible accident, Dilip, turned his vehicle towards the steep slope and was crushed under forty-five tonnes of coal. That day the weather also turned very wild and as if it was saying, "Na na na !amonti hobar na"-No No No! This is not supposed to happen (Choudhury 108). The death of an innocent soul like Dilip Bauri has made the weather gone crazy and it blew the dust of black diamond all over the place. The news of Dilip's death shocked his young bride, Sandhya, and she ran wildly like Bilasi ran for her Nanku (in Sailajananda's "Koilakuthi"). Nonetheless, the other coolies and their

families tried to console this young woman by saying how she should be proud of her husband for saving so many lives. They called him, *marad*, a man; the very masculine sense of a patriarchal term that has been used to glorify his death. An innocent man lost his life while saving hundreds, but for the other coolies it became a celebration of masculinity.

Our third writer, Anish Deb, is a versatile writer and he has written books on ghost stories, detective stories and many other genres as well. A gold medallist of the University of Calcutta, Anish is also working as a professor at the same university. Some of his famous books are- *Agun Ronger Bullet*, *Bhootnather Diary*, *Panchti Rohosyo Uponyas*, and he has edited pathbreaking series like *Sotoborsher Sera Rohosyo Uponyas (Volume 1,2,3)*, *Rokto Fota Fota* etc. The story “Sob Bhuture” by Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay has been taken from Anish Deb’s edited volume named- *Anish Deb: Shera 101 Bhoutik Aloukik*. “Sob Bhuture” is not just a short story that falls into the horror genre but then again reveals the hardcore reality of coal mine labourers. Furthermore, it is a short story that employs the trope of the ghost to reveal the stark realism of the coal mines and the labour conditions that have not changed even now. Anish started his career by writing short stories for the pulp magazine *Masik Rohosyo Potrika*. Anish has a penchant for the horror story genre and after writing over hundreds of horror stories himself, he started editing this volume and it contains some of the greatest horror stories of Bangla literature like already mentioned above- Sailajananda’s “Sob Bhuture”, and other stories like, Rabindranath Tagore’s “Nishithe”, Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay’s “Hashi”, Jogodishchandra Gupta’s “Sobar Seshe Gaya”, Satyajit Ray’s “Khogom”, Sayyad Mustafa Siraj’s “Chhkkamiyar Tomtom”, Premendra Mitra’s “Jongolbarir Bourani” and many more. There are one hundred and one short stories in this volume and among them eighteen stories were unpublished before. This astonishing volume reveals Anish’s extraordinary abilities in compiling the best of best short stories.

The short story “Bonboniya” has been taken from Anish Deb’s *Anish Deb: Anisher Shera 101*, an anthology containing the best short stories by Anish. First published in 2015, this anthology has been re-published two more times. Other than short stories, there are thirteen novelettes in this collection. This anthology contains short stories and novelettes that span forty years of Anish’s writing career and hence his growth as a writer is revealed in this anthology. The story “Bonboniya” is not about coal mine labourers. This story is not about the coolies themselves, but about the social condition of the colliery area; the plight and

troubles even the officers as well the coolies face; it is about the criminal activities that goes on in the colliery area. The narrator of this short story belongs to a middle-class family; his father works in the accounts department of Coal India. Their troubles started when they changed residence closer to his father's workplace and local goons forced his father to pay money to them and they called it the purchase tax. These goons made their life miserable when the family settled in sahebpara, named after the saheb or the Englishman who used to live there. Clearly this is a post-independent short story and this story meticulously describes the torture of goons and mafias faced by the people living or working for the coal mines. Both the upper class/caste and the labourers belonging to the lower caste/class or Adivasi labourers used to face the torture incriminated upon them by a rising class of goons who would commit any kind of crime to have their own way. However, with the coming of one small boy of ten to twelve-year-old, named Bonboniya, the lives of these people started changing. Bonboniya lived in the slums where the coolies of the coal mines used to live. Being an orphan, he was staying with a coolie who used to beat him a lot. The narrator's father brought him at their house as a young servant and Bonboniya proved to be a good one. Apparently, it seems that Bonboniya's fate was going on in the right direction, but it is unfortunate that for a human being the best he/she can get is being someone's servant. The life of the coolies and their children and everyone associated with them did not change with independence. Even now they live a life devoid of proper meals, education, and all other necessities.

Bonboniya's plastic flute and headband made him look like the god of the Sanatan Dharma, Krishna. Krishna's image as a flute playing teenager has been compared with Bonboniya. At one instance, when the goons attacked the narrator's family, Bonboniya used his power and started moving round in circles and made the goons leave the narrator's house premises. Like Krishna he was swirling with a mysterious force. Bonboniya even did not understand where his powers came from. His extraordinary powers have been compared with Krishna and this reflects the writer's perspective that even an Adivasi boy can be Krishna, the god. One does not need to confirm to a particular religion or community but must have qualities that makes them a god. The image of Bonboniya playing his flute on a full moon night inside the narrator's garden confirms the latter's perspective. The last time the narrator saw Bonboniya, he punished the six goons who used to harass everyone and without lifting a

finger, in a miraculous and supernatural way, this young lad was able to make the others bleed or scared or get hit by a bullet. When the men tried to fire bullet or cut Bonboniya's head with a sword; nothing happened; Bonboniya stood there playing his flute like Krishna. After this chaotic and miraculous experiences, Bonboniya took leave of the narrator in the open marketplace with bewildered people watching the happenings and examined how Krishna comes in a human form when sins fill our earth, and he comes to save humans from troubles. Just like Krishna<sup>7</sup> says in the Itihasa *Mahabharata*,

Paritranya Sadhunam

Vinasaya Ca Duskrtam

Dharma-Samsthapanarthaya

Sambhavami Yuge Yuge (Mukundananda).

Similarly, the name Bonboniya refers to Krishna and his disk-shaped weapon, the Sudarshan Chakra. Apparently, when something moves in a circle with a force it is referred with the adjective 'bon-bon'. The name Bonboniya comes from this word. This short story echoes Anish's belief of the holy and evil dichotomy among human beings and how humans are punished if they have committed deed, by the omnipotent and omnipresent power. The trope of Krishna has been used by Anish to ponder upon the evils that goes on in the colliery towns and villages, Nonetheless, the turning point in this short story is the fact that this god is none other than a coolie boy- not an upper caste/class older male figure. This deconstruction makes this short story a remarkable piece of Bangla literature.

Colonization displaced the Adivasis and other communities from their rural settlement and tossed them into the dark naval of the earth. The social fabric of the coal mining areas changed with the newer forms of settlements and created an entirely different community of the coolies. These coolies and the literature written about them forms an entire genre of coolie literature. In Bangla, there have been many genres that have intertwined with this coolie genre to create an entirely different category called coolie literature. This paper only focused on the four short stories by three different writers to bring out the primary issues that can be found in coolie literature. There are innumerable number of short stories on the coal coolies and they bring out similar issues through different characters, settings, and situations.

These stories are similar, yet they are different in many ways. This paper has tried to analyse each short story to reveal the innermost reality that the writer has portrayed. This paper also reveals how the upper caste/class writer viewed the coolies and their perspective can be well-understood from these abovementioned short stories. As Rabindranath Tagore said about Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, that the latter was able to write about the coolies because he has been one with them unlike Tagore himself who have just looked at them from above. This is true in case of both Ghanashyam Chowdhury and Anish Deb. These three have tried to write the literature of the coolies from below, from the margin. They have tried to blend in with the coolies to create these masterpieces. Hence, these stories give us an overview of the genre of coal coolie literature. The inclusion of coolies in literature by these writers paves the way for the coolie genre to thrive in a society where literary chauvinism is the order of the day. Mining is not just a huge industry that makes money for the capitalists like Adani or as it used to do in the olden days for businessman like Dwarakanath Tagore, but it is more about these coolies-the backbone and pillars of the mining industry. And short stories are a great medium to reflect these people and reveal to the world their reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Coolie/ Kamin: The term coolie means someone who carries baggage; a slave or a labourer who is equivalent to a slave. The indentured labourers were bonded labourers and the system was created by the colonizers to replace slavery. They needed cheap labour and a skilled workforce. The women coolies were termed as kamins.

<sup>2</sup> Charit- A narrative genre of India. Mostly it is about a character's life story.

<sup>3</sup> Jataka- A body of literary texts that deals with the many births of Gautam Buddha.

<sup>4</sup> Shiva- The god of destruction in Sanatan Dharma.

<sup>5</sup> Sati- First wife of shiva who was later reborn as the goddess Parvati. Sati as a custom refers to the inhuman custom of women burning themselves in the funeral pyre of their husbands.

<sup>6</sup> Mahadev- Another name of the god Shiva.

<sup>7</sup> Krishna- One of the most important characters of Mahabharata, the composer of the Sanatan Dharma's major text, Gita and a major god in the Sanatan Dharma.

**From Folktales to ‘Digitales’:****A Comparative Analysis of Folktales and Indian Animated Series in the  
21st century****Tanvi Sharma<sup>1</sup>****Abstract:**

The rapid transformations taking place in the contemporary India have changed the lifestyles of people in such a manner that technology has become an integral part of our day-to-day activities. In this paper I study how animation series and films produced in India have become an important medium that help reconstruct the older cultural and narrative forms by assimilating their contents into a new register. I explore how recently produced animated series transmit, transform and reinvent ancient Indian mythological and folk stories and characters. Through an in depth analysis of televisual series such as *Chhota Bheem*, *Roll No. 21*, *Kisna* and others I argue that a steady movement towards more folkloristic forms of narration, plot structures and character types become discernible as the storylines develop and become more diverse to encompass contemporary concerns into the fold of animation. It may be claimed that owing to multiple lines of continuities that can be discerned between the two forms, modern day animations can be considered as modern avatars of folktales and may be termed as ‘digitales.’

**Keywords:** folktales, folklore, mythology, animation, digitales

**Introduction:**

The folk tradition in India has long been characterised by telling of tales. These stories would encompass the common beliefs of the community and each subgroup within the society had their own tales to narrate. In big households within a joint family set up, these tales would be orally transmitted from one generation to another usually by the figure of the grandmother or other domestic tale-tellers. With rapid urbanization, changes in social setup and the emergence of the nuclear family system, this practice got disrupted. The link between the past and the present was however not to be entirely lost. The void that had been created by these fading practices, I argue, was soon to be filled up, at least in some ways, by the ushering in of a new

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media. The rapid transformations in the contemporary socio-cultural milieu of India have changed the lifestyles of ordinary people in such a manner that technology has become an integral and crucial part of our day-to-day activities. With increased sophistication of technology and a steady movement towards the era of digitization, the virtual world has increasingly started to shape and condition the minds of today. In this paper I study how at this juncture, the animation series and films produced in India have become an important medium that help reconstruct the older cultural and narrative forms by assimilating their contents into a new register.

In the last two decades, the Indian animation industry has seen an unprecedented spurt of growth and development. Although animation is by no means new to India, it has now become an integral part of our popular culture and collective imagination. In this paper I explore how recently produced animated series transmit, transform and reinvent ancient Indian mythological and folk stories and characters. Through an in depth analysis of televisual series such as *Chhota Bheem*, *Roll No. 21*, *Kisna* and others I argue that one can observe in them a steady movement towards more folkloristic forms of narration, plot structures and character types as the storylines develop and become more divergent to encompass contemporary concerns into the fold of animation. It is my assertion that owing to the multiple lines of continuities that can be delineated between the two forms, modern day animations can be considered as modern avatar of folktales. Therefore, I believe it would be apposite to call this highly popular and entrancing culture of telling tales in digital form through animation for the contemporary times as ‘digitales.’ That such a negotiation should be possible and successful in a subcontinent like ours also has definite reasons. Deva elaborates upon the peculiar form of ‘modernity’ experienced by developing countries such as India where development has been so rapid that the “overlapping of different cultural-eras, has brought vigorous folk traditions in close proximity to modern forces;” (Deva 4). The recently produced animated series are possibly the finest expressions of the forms newly synthesised in such an environment.

As these animations draw heavily on mythologies that deal with the formative myths of the Indian culture, an interrogation of their adaptations into the modern times helps one understand the changes that have occurred in the fundamental beliefs of the community. A change in the people’s conception of divine/heroic can be delineated in the new ways in

which they seek to portray their gods/legends during the present times. Moreover, not only are these animations an experiment in divergent ways of story making and storytelling but also an exercise in identity formation. As Indian animation industry seeks to create for itself a distinct identity in the global market, these narratives become a rich site for cultural exchanges between the past and the present, the local and the global and the old and new, and these intersections form another point of enquiry in this paper.

### **Folktales Then, Digitales Now:**

Folktales are variously characterised as simple stories, often handed down orally, embodying the cultural beliefs of the community they are a part of. They form a large section of the traditional mass media alongside folk songs, riddles and proverbs that together reflect on the collective aspirations, anxieties and concerns of all sections of the community. Though the ancient epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, are the bedrock from which all of India's literature and art forms emerge, they can themselves be seen as a collection of tales coalesced together with an overarching framework. The multiple versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* attest to the fluidity and adaptability of these centuries old epics. The tales that form a part of the epics often in turn become sources of new legends and stories. "In all stages before and after the one in which it was given an epic form" the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* have "belonged to the folk tradition" after all, asserts Nanavati (Nanavati 7). Therefore, even though the influence of the epics can be clearly delineated in contemporary animations, they are also in constant dialogue with the folk traditions that have always surrounded/accompanied these epics. Moreover, "classical and folk," argues Ramanujan, should not be understood as "terms in simple opposition, but instead they should be seen as parts of a line, a continuum of forms, the endpoints of which may look like two terms in opposition" (Ramanujan 429). Keeping this in mind, in the following section I go on to explore how Indian animation looks back towards folktales as a source of inspiration for multiple aspects of its current form.

The authoritative Sanskrit texts of the epics like Valmiki's *Ramayana* are marked by a certain rigidity of characterisation and codification of the narratives. In contrast the folktales that surround them are much more fluid in nature and ever growing in number. "The Indian epics, for instance, are known to most Indians not through Sanskrit originals but through

regional retellings and oral versions often sung and enacted by the lowest castes...with characters, incidents not found in the Sanskrit texts,” points out Ramanujan (Ramanujan 465). With the need to produce fresh episodes for the televised series and find new stories to cater to an expanding audience, it is natural that a strict adherence to the Sanskrit texts would prove to be a limitation for the animators. Consequently a move towards folkloristic elements is much preferred as it affords space for adaptation and innovation, which is the hallmark of all folk narratives. Folk tales adapt and change with the changing ideas and conceptions of the community. Contemporaneity is an essential part of their makeup. I argue that Indian animation series could be regarded as a digital avatar of the traditional folktales. One can observe in them a constant criss-cross of characters, motifs and tropes, global and inter-medial references and allusions in order to remain relevant to the current generation. As a result, in them, Ganesha and Krishna can freely enter the narratives of Bheem and Hanuman and their adversaries can range from mythical Danavas/Rakshasas or wild beasts to evil scientists or aliens.

As most of the characters that we see in these animations are already invested with a host of popular narratives, cults and rituals, by borrowing these associations the representation of the characters in the animations remains folkloristic. The animations exploit the pre-existing narratives and create new meanings thereby modifying the manner in which the younger generation perceives these mythical heroes/characters. Kris from *Roll No 21*<sup>2</sup> though implicitly connected with lord Krishna borrows little else from him than a magical peacock feather, a blue skin tone and an adversary whose name is inspired by Kansa. Yet the image of the mischief-maker attached to Krishna is alluded to time and again in the characterisation of the new hero. *Chhota Bheem*<sup>3</sup> inspired by the Pandava prince in the

<sup>2</sup> *Roll No 21* is animated television series produced by Cosmos Entertainment that aired on Cartoon Network in 2010. The show is available in [English](#), [Hindi](#), [Telugu](#) and [Tamil](#). The series consists of 6 seasons with 142 episodes as well as some movies. The series centres on a little boy name Kris who lives in a modern day orphanage/boarding school named Mathura Anaath Ashram, which is headed by Kanishka, an Asura in disguise who plans to destroy the whole world with the help of his minions. Gifted with a magical flute and a feather blessed by Lord Krishna, Kris protects his classmates from the evil plans of Kanishka. The series is a modern take on the Krishna- Kansa rivalry.

<sup>3</sup> *Chhota Bheem* created by Green Gold Animations aired on Pogo TV in 2008. It is a series about an adventurous and fun-loving nine-year-old boy called Bheem, who is gifted with extraordinary strength. This power is a boon for Dholakpur, Bheem's village, which is constantly under threat. Bheem loves food and has a special weakness for laddoos, which in fact, give him a surge of energy and make him even stronger than he is. Along with his group of friends, Bheem always sets out on new adventures setting things right, helping the poor and punishing evildoers wherever he goes. Available in multiple Indian languages, it has risen to fame and become a pan Indian character.

*Mahabharata*, is also mighty like his precursor but has a distinct character of his own which is not hampered by the experiences of the prince from the epic.

As has been the case with the ever evolving folk tales “the signifiers, whether they are images or characters or episodes or even so called structures and archetypes, may be the same in different periods and regions, but the signification keeps on changing”(Ramanujan 493). Similarly, even though animations use the names and make allusions to the mythic heroes, the narratives they create around them project vastly different sets of beliefs from what the older variety of folktales wished to communicate. The folktales were comments upon a society very different from ours and were propagated through word of mouth. On the other hand, the animations under review are supposed to comment on modern society, and intervene in an understanding of the contemporary world. Moreover, since they are communicated via the Television, they interact with other popular visual mediums and are constantly influenced by them in return. Added to that are allusions to global trends that the medium of animation is saturated with, for instance, the trope of the superhero often has immense influence on the way the mythic heroes in Indian series are reconceptualised. The animated texts that I look at in this paper strive to create new stories and through their contemporising impulse they try to participate in the world of today. More importantly, they hope to create a distinct Indian identity on the global stage and compete against western cultural products with something they hope to identify as authentically Indian, even though one must point out that the formulation of this national identity is fraught with communal and religious bias.

Just as folklore is known to grow and change with the times, these animations keep alive the concern with contemporaneity and try to maintain their relevance by including into the narratives references, allusions and incidents that the modern audiences can relate to. These references range from discussions about current affairs (like the successful launch of the Mangalyaan), a dialogue with contemporary popular cinema or the all too real concern for environment conservation. The heroes in these tales do not only fight against supernatural demons of the past but also against the current crises of pollution and try to find solutions for the problems that the world faces today. Bheem, for instance, has malfunctioning technological inventions, aliens and wild beasts to combat with whereas Kris shows a brave front to evil scientists, wicked teachers, school bullies and kidnapers. Unlike western

popular animation films such as those produced by Disney and Pixar which chart out coming-of-age journeys of the main protagonists, wherein the characters grow and evolve; the characters to be found in Indian series are much more static in nature.<sup>4</sup> That however is not because of lack of imagination of the producers but because of the structure that these narratives follow. Propp comments how in folktales providing external motivations is completely, “non-obligatory” (Propp 15). The animated series replicate this principle of narration and avoid giving too many explanations for particular actions of the characters involved. Since all characters can be easily identified as black or white, good or evil, the need to offer comprehensive motivations for each action is done away with to serve the purpose of an action-oriented plot line.

In folk tales, as characterised by Propp, there is always “one character (that) is central, and around him and his actions are grouped other people, his opponents, helpers, or those whom he saves” (Propp 22). In children’s tales especially, this principle becomes critical and can be seen at work in the fables and parables that make up collections like the Panchatantra, Jaataka and so on. The simplicity of the tale lets the creators focus on the theme/messages and moral values that they wish to instil their young readers/ listeners with. The creators of the contemporary series have been quick to understand the usefulness of such an emphasis and follow it reverentially in most of their productions. Singularity of emphasis and pronouncement of clear moral messages at the conclusion not only makes the stories easy for the children to understand but also makes it far easier to acquire parental approval and wider acceptance for the content being pitched which gets translated as infotainment rather than mere entertainment and therefore of greater value for the younger audiences. In contrast to the complex plot-structures of the epics or classical literature, therefore, most of the animated tales offer simple, but interesting storylines. For instance, each episode of *Chhota Bheem* focuses on a single crisis and unfolds the hero’s attempts to resolve it.

Propp further points out that characterised by an “exceptional dynamic quality of action” folktales only focus “on those persons who contribute to the development of the plot” (Propp 22). Following this custom, in *Roll No 21* we do not meet any of the other teachers of Mathura Anaath Ashram School apart from the two reincarnated demons Putana and

<sup>4</sup> For instance, *Tangled* produced by Disney in 2010 is based on the story of Rapunzel published by Brothers Grimm. The film however adds to the simplistic tale new characters such as Flynn Rider and complicates the narrative by providing each character, whether old or new, with a well furnished backstory, fresh associations and idiosyncrasies and newer challenges that they have to face and overcome.

Tarkasur from Krishna legends who are constantly colluding with Kanishka to find new ways to trouble the children. Similarly, the only children we meet in Dholakpur are Bheem and his friends. Akin to folktales, then, these animated-texts do not “deal with personages who are introduced for the sake of a milieu or society” (Propp 22). In fact even the visual register attests to this paradigm, as whenever crowds have to be portrayed, they are only shown in the background painted in black and white, many with identical faces revealing their subordinate and superfluous status. Furthermore, the emphasis on action, time and space are also managed in these animations in the same way as prevalent and practiced in folktales. In folktales action dominates the plot, and the space where the hero functions and performs is important for the narrative. Propp observes that folktales follow a narrative pattern wherein “unity of space is inseparable from unity of time. Like space, time in folklore cannot admit interruptions. Pauses do not exist. If the hero’s action is stopped, another personage swiftly takes it up. Once begun, the action will rapidly develop to its conclusion”(Propp 24-5). Taking cue from these principles, hardly are the animated tales ever divided into parts to be followed up in subsequent episodes. Although gods and the supernatural beings do intervene directly in the human affairs in the series like *New Adventures of Hanuman*<sup>5</sup> and *Roll No. 21*, the focus is completely on action, not on philosophical dictates abided by or cosmological significance of the personages in question. Moreover, akin to folktales that rarely speak of “lives before birth and after death”, the opening episode of *Chhota Bheem* for instance does not provide an originary tale related to the birth of Bheem or any explanation for the attainment of his superhuman strength (Propp 14). He is just there, so also the space and time in which he exists as a given fact, to be accepted without questions.

It is the character of mythologies to be “imbued with philosophies and metaphysics, while folktales present deep yet homely paradigms, psychological problems and resolutions, childhood fears and consolations”(Ramanujan xix). The animators keep this in mind when they weave simple stories wherein the children solve mysteries and catch thieves successfully at the conclusion, but deeper psychological questions that probe into the psyche of these evildoers are never raised or pondered upon. Things are kept simple and “action is always

<sup>5</sup> *New Adventures of Hanuman* produced by Percept Pictures was released in 2010 on POGO. A spin off on their successful movie, *Hanuman Returns*, the series tells the story of a little boy called Maruti who lives in the village of Pawanpur. Lord Hanuman has gifted to Maruti a divine mace locket, which helps him turn into Bal Hanuman whenever the village is in danger. He has been charged with the duty of protecting the innocent against all kinds of evil forces by the gods themselves and performs his duty with utmost care.

performed physically, in space. Psychological novels based on the complexity of human interrelations, with dialogues, explanations, and so on, do not occur in folklore” or in the animated tales inspired by them (Propp 22). A change of heart is thus rarely observed as characters, reduced to types, fail to be introspective or self-reflexive in nature. “Folklore possesses not only artistic perfection but also a profound message” and the animations continue this tradition by swiftly drawing to a close with a moral to be handed down (Propp 14). Each episode is therefore imbued with poetic justice with the evil characters being rightly punished, humiliated and defeated. Lessons in ethical justice, civic responsibilities and moral dictates are clearly enunciated as the story ties up. Every time Bheem performs a noble task or exhibits a desired trait, the moral to be learnt from his behaviour is made explicit by way of a laudatory speech delivered by King Indraverma, (the reigning monarch of Dholakpur village) in front of the entire kingdom and Bheem is set up as an ideal to be admired and imitated. Similarly, Kisna’s good deeds and exemplary behaviour is also recounted by choric figures at the end of each episode to drive home the moral lesson outlined in the tale. Explanations are offered to make things clearer wherever the need is felt. In *Ballu and Bhalu* episode of *Kisna*<sup>6</sup>, for instance, the two brothers, Balram and Kisna, get into trouble with a wild bear. Instead of beating him away, Kisna tickles the bear and teases him, with help of Toto, his talking parrot, and redirects it to the part of the jungle that is full of beehives where he would survive. At the conclusion Toto curiously asks the significance of Kisna’s efforts to take the bear away when he could have easily beaten it up. This becomes an opportunity for Kisna to gently explain to all his friends who play the role of the surrogate audience, about the importance of treating animals with care and the need for protecting our environment. The “emotional and ideological content” of the animations thus echoes the wisdom of folktales on which they are fashioned (Propp 14).

Unlike folktales, the characters in the animated tales like *Chhota Bheem* and *Kisna* do have proper names, yet they are not characters with psychological depth and ability for growth but depict types taken over from the folktales themselves. Raju is the trickster figure,

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<sup>6</sup> *Kisna*, an animation series that originally aired on Discovery Kids was launched in October 2014 and is produced by Ketan Mehta’s Maya Movies Pvt. Ltd. It follows the story of a young boy Kisna who shares associations with Lord Krishna in terms of the way he is costumed and portrayed. Kisna is endowed with many super powers that help him fight against Raja Durjan, his arch rival and the wicked king of Anandhnagri, the rural village in which Kisna resides along with his parents, elder brother Balu (inspired by Balaram) and a host of friends with whom he shares several adventures and fights against evil forces and wrongdoers. In terms of its setting and language, the series tries to create a sense of antiquity

naughty and always winning more by virtue of his good luck than actual merit, Chutki and Radhika typify the weakling figures who makes do with her superior intellect when adversity strikes, Jaggu and Toto are anthropomorphised animals inspired by tales like the Panchatantra and Indumati is the archetypal beautiful princess enamoured by the hero, the damsel in distress, waiting to be rescued by Bheem in every episode.

Ramanujan observes that folk tales “do not always follow an opening formula like ‘Once upon a time’ yet special phrases found only in folktales, like ‘...in a certain town’ (Tamil) often mark the opening of the tales. These turn the key for our entry into a tale-world and a tale-time, and let us cross a threshold into another kind of space” (Ramanujan 461). This function is carried out by the locale in which animations are set, which marks a conscious break from everyday reality and makes the transition into the fantasy world extremely palpable. For instance, each story of *Chhota Bheem* is set in the fictional other-world of Dholakpur. The environment of Dholakpur is flexible enough to flaunt a rural agrarian society headed by a monarch but lest we imagine it to be a pristine village, it also allows for contrasting figures of sadhus and scientists, daanavs and aliens to rub shoulders with each other within its radius. Ancient magical potions and futuristic gadgets vie with each other, and legendary weapons from the past reappear to compete with tools backed by futuristic science as boundaries between the past and the future, the local and the global and the urban and the rural are constantly renegotiated. Though Dholakpur is self-enclosed it is by no means isolated. The interaction between the local and global is extremely palpable and characters belonging to distant legends from foreign lands make frequent appearances in the narratives. Bheem often faces rivals such as Hercules in varied contests, and waves the Indian flag after winning against them. Such iterations highlight the strong affinities that the animators maintain with their national identity. Giving them added visibility, they wish to make the symbols of the Indian state recognizable features in the global animation industry. What is problematic however is that they tend to selectively supplant the Hindu identity as Indian and vice versa without making concessions for the multi religious and multi ethnic nature of the Indian populace.

This Hinduisation of the Indian identity extends to all aspects of the animations as although the geographical specificities of Bheem’s Dholakpur, Kisna’s Anandnagri or Maruti’s Pawanpur are not provided, there is no doubt about them being located somewhere

in India owing to how their inhabitants dress, eat, or speak; the festivals they observe and the games they engage in all borrow from Indian ethos generally and Hindu culture specifically. Bull races, horse races and kite flying competitions, people dressed in dhotis and sarees, prevalence of belief in concepts such as *tapasya*, *tantrikvidya* and *yoga* all stress the Indianness of the community portrayed in the series. The intense patriotic fervour demonstrated by the protagonists in face of any competition from the outside serves to converge and conjoin their religious and national identity erroneously making Indian synonymous with Hindu. While the folktales of yore were rich expressions of the regional character of where they were born, these animations by contrast seem to be engaged in the manufacturing of a national character, on definite ideological and political lines that highlights the cultures of specific communities over the others.

With the focus on the figure of the child in these animated stories, the reversal of hierarchies is only to be expected. Figures of power within the family and in society at large are shown to be gullible and dependent on the children in a carnivalesque manner. Authority figures, like the king of Dholakpur, seldom achieve success without the help of Bheem and his friends, just as the evil Principal Kanishk (Kans) is never able to match up to the strength and wisdom of Kris and his band. Children become the saviours at the end of each tale, bullies always get defeated and kidnappers always lose. Following the logic of folktales “fears are faced and resolved, anxieties roused and relieved” (Ramaujan 469). The animations therefore continue the task of entertaining as well as teaching life lessons through the use of metaphors. But beneath simplistic life lessons regarding honesty, courage, and righteousness are also encoded the norms that control and regiment people’s behaviour in the society at large. These include not only a selective understanding of religious and national identity as pointed out above, but also specific formulations about gender roles. Most of these series, for instance, have male protagonists at their centre often relegating the subordinate roles of helper or dependents to the female characters present, cementing the patriarchal notions regarding power and hierarchy in this fictional world as well.

Using the form of the folktale can prove to be a tricky business also because while the modern day tales for children are moralistic and aim to teach them lessons in ethics, folktales are known to be irreverent towards gods and other authority figures at the same time. “In India, for instance, every official idea, however philosophic, like karma or maya or the

sacredness of gurus, has its critique in oral satires. Gods, kings Brahmins -- doctors and officials, along with mothers-in-law, demons, robbers and other such terrifying beings, are all ridiculed” (Ramanujan 467). The balance between humour and moralistic tendencies required of children’s literature and the irreverence embedded in folktales is established in a studied and precocious manner in the animation tales. The most intimate figure of authority for the child represented by the parents is undercut, as they are conspicuous by their absence in most of these series. The debate between listening to them and retaliating against them is evaded entirely by placing the child protagonists outside the structure of the family. At times parents are conveniently removed from the set up all together (*Roll No. 21*) or brought into the picture very rarely (*Chhota Bheem*). The absence of parental control enables the child protagonists to explore their surroundings fully and reach conclusions independently. But while the children are located in a self-enclosed imaginary realm, it does not free them from the burden of expectations or the influence of ideologies subscribed to by the adults belonging to the real world.

Influence of this reality is however reflected in a much more subtle and nuanced manner in their world of fiction. Ramanujan observes, “Folklore, contrary to romantic notions of its spontaneity or naturalness, is formal. It makes its forms visible. Identification and disidentification (of the listeners with the characters) have their triggers in the tales and happen at different stages of a tale” (Ramanujan 462). In the animation narratives the relatability of the audience and the child protagonists is similarly manipulated. The child is rewarded and punished according to the normative rules practiced by the society whereupon s/he is expected to follow the codes of conduct and moral dictates that are accepted by the majority.

Just as the folk stories appear to be casual entertainment on the surface, the narratives of these animations are also simplistic in nature but on a deeper level extremely stratified and satiated with value judgements about defining and distinguishing the right from the wrong. The manner in which these judgements are pronounced range from plain humour (making fun of characters like Kalia-the bully) to strict punishments (villains being beaten up by the hero/Bheem). The larger structures of authority and networks of power, moreover, remain unquestioned. For instance, the king might be gullible and in constant need of Bheem’s help,

yet Bheem and his friends who always step forward to correct king's mistakes never question the authority he exercises. Despite his obvious ineptitude no one dreams of disposing of him. Though at times making fun of the king adds humour to the tales, his position is never threatened nor does his incapability to rule the kingdom become an impediment to the love and respect that the character commands. The children never wonder why everyone should be at the beck and call of a single person, a monarch, especially one who is often mistaken in his judgements and leads them into life threatening situations. On the contrary, they replicate the social hierarchy in their own relationships as well. The differential manner in which they treat the young princess Indumati who is the same age as them and the humility she commands on their behalf is baffling as children are ideally meant to be free of social and class-consciousness. The status quo and power hierarchies relating to class structures are thus reproduced at multiple levels within the series.

### **Divinising the Human, Humanising the Divine:**

Ramanujan comments that myths "by and large divinize the human " and folktales "humanize the divine " to bring the mythic characters closer to the audience. Animated tales with god-inspired heroes exhibit similar tendencies. Unlike Bheem and Arjun who are not graced with the status of gods in popular folklore, both Krishna and Hanuman are divine figures, and have a vast amount of literature and rituals surrounding them and are earnestly worshipped by their followers. The animations that turn them into modern day characters find a way out for balancing the divine and human aspects often by functioning on two levels simultaneously using the trope of forgotten identity. The gods leave behind their divine identities and all the memories associated with it as they step down to earth. Only in extreme moments of crisis can they revert to their divine selves but at all other times they are liable to make mistakes and be laughed at like all the other mortal characters that surround them.

The little blue boy in *Roll No 21* though ostensibly a reincarnation of Krishna never demands authority or reverence from his friends. Set in the contemporary times, Kris is pictured as a resident of the Mathura Anaath Ashram that is headed by an evil school Principal/Administrator Kanishk (a reincarnation of Kansa), an Asura in disguise who is always trying to bring the children to some harm. Kris has been sent to earth to protect these children but in his new avatar he is neither omniscient nor omnipresent like the deity and

needs help from other characters such as Sukhi (a reincarnation of Naarad), the caretaker to spy on Kanishk on his behalf. To the other children Kris is just another classmate. While some like him, others decidedly disregard him and even try to bully him. All his concerns are modern and contemporary as we watch him struggle with classes and homework like any regular kid. In the series therefore, Krishna, in the form of Kris, is humanised in order to make it easier for the audience to relate with him.

The tales about this boy who is sometimes identified as the eleventh avatar of Vishnu and goes on to combat aliens and undertakes time travel display innovations and creativity that only folktale narratives can afford.<sup>7</sup> While the universal battle between good and evil represented by Kris and Kanishk is extended from mythology, he harnesses the fantasies and fears of the modern audiences as well. The series therefore adds new threads to the *leela* of Krishna and the animated tales add to the repository of oral tales about the deity in turn affecting the viewer's perceptions about the god.

Significant is the way in which the concept of superhero intervenes in the very first episode of *Roll No. 21*. The first scene does not centre on the gods or their heavenly abode, but focuses on the immediate setting of the school where the children happen to be enjoying a TV show about a superhero called Agent Veer. Some of them are even dressed up like their favourite defender and all seem to enjoy imitating him. The episode begins with the children worshipping the superhero and ends with Kris helping out Agent Veer to save his friends who have been transposed inside the world of the television by evil Kanishka who wishes to trap them there for eternity. The superhero thanks Kris for all his assistance during the rescue and states, "you are a better superhero than I am." This shift does not come easily though. Since Kris has left the authoritative world of the epics behind his adversaries are no longer afraid of him. He gets beaten up and electrocuted by his rivals. If "in Hindu mythology the gods do not sweat or blink nor do their feet touch the ground," the animation narratives definitely side with the folk tales in which "the gods have bodies. They smell pee and shit" (Ramanujan). Kris is not unbeatable and all-powerful and gets tired at times, and occasionally expresses fear as well. But he eventually does bounce back to fight the villains

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<sup>7</sup> Lord Vishnu is generally understood to have taken on ten primary avatars or incarnations in which he has descended from the heaven to restore cosmic order according to the Puranas. Kris is here pitched as an extension of this tradition and a modern avatar of the deity.

with laser guns and other modern weapons rather than any identifiable superpowers. Only then does he receive the compliment of being a better superhero than Agent Veer. The show announces Kris as the new and a different kind of a hero, who is both divine and human, magical and common, ancient and contemporary, all at the same time. The attempt is to pitch this new character into the mould of the superhero with his mythic associations setting him apart from his western counterparts.

With the character of *Chhota Bheem* however, even this limited connection with the divine is decisively broken off. The creators of Bheem were well aware that with this character, they were marking a big shift in the narrative pertaining to the existing animated series. “Characters from mythology had enormous pull but they were available to everybody else” remarks Chilaka, the creator of Bheem. “I decided to pick the character and put him in a different set-up, era, time zone . . . with different friends, thereby making him more fun” (Khandekar). Unlike Kris, for whom allusions to divinity remain alive to some extent, Bheem uses only the name of the mythic character and no backstory is offered to explain away his superhuman strength. He enters the stage as a secular agency and continues to function in that capacity never being raised in stature to match up to the divine. The allusions to the epic are ample; Bheem is fond of eating, his favourite food being ladoos, his strength is comparable to the mythological prototype despite his being only a small child and his rival from the neighbouring village is called Kichak, drawing on the Kichak-vadh episode from the *Mahabharata*. Yet, in the fictional village of Dholakpur, along with a new set of friends, the status of Bheem is greatly altered. While in the *Mahabharata* he is just one of the Panadavas, secondary in importance to his other brothers, in the series he always emerges the sole saviour of Dholakpur. His tales are entirely new and he is a secular character devoid of any godly markings or royal lineage.

The episodes or films where the gods make their appearance such as *Chhota Bheem and Ganesha*, *Chhota Bheem and Hanuman* and *Chhota Bheem and Krishna* to name a few, are the most pertinent examples of folkloristic tendencies of *Chhota Bheem*. Gods are not imagined/treated as higher beings who command reverence, but fulfil the roles of allies or competitors. They participate in the struggles faced by Bheem and Bheem’s agency is not diminished by their presence. They are brought down to the human scale by their engagement in activities that affect the mortals whereas Bheem is raised in status as he emerges as the

mortal who is capable of putting an end to all evil. He does not depend on Ganesha or Kanha or the host of other deities who appear to fight beside him and even in their presence he emerges as the sole hero. The power of the gods does not take away from the importance accorded to the secular character of Bheem who exercises equal freedom to act independently in these narratives. Bheem's behaviour towards the gods is not always reverential or even friendly and throwing them a challenge to test their mettle is neither out of the ordinary nor considered hubristic. For instance, when Kanha makes an appearance, he has a constant tussle with Bheem and has to repeatedly prove himself to be accepted and permitted to become a part of Bheem's adventures.

Since Hanuman, Krishna and Ganesha appear as divinities in these telefilms and not simply as fictional characters that have associations with the gods, the particular narratives where Bheem interacts with them thus serve to add new stories to the already existing folklore surrounding these deities and enhance the child narratives surrounding them that occupy an important place in public culture. In this manner, these films create new myths while challenging, altering and moulding existing myths as well as reorient the young viewers' understanding about these divine figures.

While portraying the gods, folk narratives associated with them are continually invoked in these telefilms. For instance, in *Chhota Bheem and Kanha* everywhere Kanha travels with Bheem, the evil soldiers that pose a threat to the duo involuntarily fall into a stupor in keeping with the legend about the deity's birth that recounts a story about the guards losing consciousness in order to afford Kanha's father the opportunity to move him to safety away from his evil uncle. Similarly, the portrayal of Ganesha also takes us further into the world of folklore as his immense love for laddus is given prominence in the film in keeping with the folk beliefs and child narratives associated with the deity. The divide between the world of oral folklore and fictional digitale is thus blurred and made permeable making the former interact and come together with the latter to create new folklore.

Lately a significant tendency which is taking shape is that more than just establishing these animated texts in the Indian popular domain, international locales are also being exploited as the heroes like Bheem and Kris travel to various countries all over the world in their narratives. Since Indian animation is trying to establish itself in the global market, to

widen the scope of the series and extend its engagement with folklore of origins other than India, multiple narratives surrounding Bheem's travels to different parts of the globe have been recounted especially in feature length episodes of the series. The adventures of Bheem take him to a myriad of destinations ranging from Japan, Africa, Egypt, Nepal, Bali, and Iran to name just a few. These international ventures undoubtedly help the creators connect and interact with a huge diasporic audience. These narratives become a pretext to experiment with not only a new visual register encoded in a distinctive architectural background or unique clothing styles that characterise these communities; but also to allow Bheem to dabble into the legendary pasts associated with these places. In keeping with his own timeline, Bheem does not explore these destinations as they exist in the modern day but only as they might have existed in the mythic past, and encounters many legendary heroes whose adventures he partakes of. For Indians living abroad, these series provide tales of hybridization wherein they can witness an interaction between the culture of the homeland and the culture that they now inhabit.

While these tales create a cultural hybridity by bringing diverse sources together, “Nederveen Pieterse (1995: 57) observes, ‘hybridity raises the question of the terms of mixture, the conditions of mixing and *mélange*’” (Storey 117-8). In *Chhota Bheem and the Throne of Bali*, the most ambitious venture of Green Gold animations till date, Bheem’s vacation to Bali turns adventurous as Bali comes under attack by the evil spirit Rangra. The conflict between Rangra and Barong is one of the most popular legends of Bali. The film exploits the traditional symbols that are used to portray these characters and the plot enables Bheem to become a part of this mythic tale. While elements of the legend are deftly adapted to the animation mode with appropriate visual symbols, the prominence accorded to Bheem in the narrative framework invokes a subtle hierarchy placing the host communities in subordinate positions by highlighting their dependence on Bheem. The subtle implication of the superiority of Indian/Hindu culture and Indian hero is not lost to the Indian audience who are expected to root for Bheem and identify with him. In the guise of multicultural and eclectic explorations, the series thus tries to push forth in a thinly veiled manner, a particular cultural hegemony glorifying Hindu culture. These tales thus become “articulations of local cultures in global environment leading to invigoration of local cultures” (Ranganathan 18).

Another feature, which sets narratives like Bheem aside, is the manner in which they bring in modern day myths into the fold of the fictional worlds created in them. In one of the episodes, titled *Einstein Bheem* the story of Einstein's formulation of his famous equations becomes a fantasy of time travel as Einstein reaches Dholakpur by feeding the wrong equation into his watch. It is with the help of Bheem and his friends that he is able to protect the gadget from being misused by a rather greedy Kalia and go back to the future. Bheem and the children of Dholakpur thus share the credit of his discoveries. Even in the absence of such visits from the future, Dholakpur is not to be understood as divorced from scientific advancements. The figure of Professor Dhoom Ketoo, who is a brilliant scientist and invents fabulous gadgets, along with the visitations from the other worlds (in episodes like *Chhota Bheem vs Aliens*) take the series towards the realm of science fiction at times.

The relationship between the world of Dholakpur and science is however a little strained. Contrary to expectation, the scientist is not the innovator who explores fresh avenues and realizes new potential in the things that surround us. Dhoom Ketoo is a case in point. Though his inventions are astounding they often malfunction or get manipulated in the hands of the mischief makers till Bheem and his group intervene to make things right. Resultantly, a far cry from being the saviour, the scientist is not a visionary but a vulnerable and weak persona and the darker side of his scientific experimentation is never too far from sight. The initial charm and awe that scientifically invented gadgets generate in children is thus undercut by emphasising the dangerous and harmful uses that they can be put to. On the other hand, the Sadhoos and other religious heads, even kind witches and fairy godmothers are the figures whose advice are sought and often prove helpful. The children routinely seek help from characters such as Dhooni Baba, who assists them through his higher wisdom and supreme knowledge each time they are unable to solve a problem and find themselves ignorant about the past, the awareness of which usually holds the key to defeating their rivals. With each such encounter, mythopoesis is initiated and another legend is added to the annals of the fictional Dholakpur that eventually evolves as a place with an expansive history, umpteen legends and distinct geographical features. Gods from the Hindu pantheon mingle with fictional kings of Dholakpur in these stories of the past. Propp observes, "folklore is a living art that is "incongruous with new attitudes, tastes, and ideology." It enters "into contradiction with itself, and such contradictions are always present" (Propp 8).

The competing knowledge systems that are pronounced in the animation narratives are characteristic of this trait of folklore where contradictions and multiple versions are allowed to co-exist. Though a hierarchy between these alternate systems of knowledge is implied, a clash between the two paradigms is always avoided and Bheem is never asked to pick one over the other exclusively and overtly.

### Conclusion:

The revival of folktale in its pristine form is neither possible nor desired. Handu argues, “Modernization, new technology and innovations are giving rise to new folklore and new traditions. Mass media was at first seen as destroying the purity of folklore and oral traditions but it soon turned out that mass media is in fact becoming a new carrier of folklore and the retellings of films, and soap operas, and other genres are changing the temporal boundaries of folklore rather than destroying its content or purity” (Handoo 7). Folklore is characterised by growth and the animations that have been analysed in this paper provide a niche for certain forms of folklore to prosper in a new environment. The animations are thus creating what Ramanujan calls “secondary orality” where oral presentations are possible “without face-to-face communication” (465). With 24 hour transmission on various channels through the television sets in every home, animation is successfully filling the gap that the modern set up had engendered by churning out new stories for the children. The kind of texts produced using the medium of animation imbibe the spirit of folktales and perform the function of humanizing machines in this period of increased mechanisation and it is for this reason it would be both pertinent and useful to refer to these animated tales as “digitales.”

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## Representation of Colonialism in Australia in Shaun Tan's Select Graphic Narratives

Nazneen Hoque<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract:**

My paper deals with Shaun Tan's two illustrated short stories "The Rabbits" and "Stick Figures". The genre of comics becomes a highly useful platform to study the history of colonialism in Australia by the British. Tan draws a narrative of colonialism not only of Australia but also of the history of colonialism around the world. "Stick Figures", like "The Rabbits" also deals with the impact of White Western immigration on the aboriginals. The 'Stick Figures' are of Finnish people who died during the brutal attack by the Soviet Union in the Winter War (1939-1940). This historical reference has been used by Tan to represent the history of ancient Australia. The objective of my paper is to analyse how Tan's detailed research and use of surrealism have helped him avoid a direct reference to the history of colonialism in Australia and transforms the stories into a broader and universal story of colonial supremacy.

**Keywords:** Graphic narratives, illustrations, colonialism, dislocation

Represented by a combination of image and text, the genre of comics becomes a highly useful platform to study the history of colonialism in Australia. Originally taken from John Marsden's<sup>2</sup> *The Rabbits* (1998), Shaun Tan<sup>3</sup> with his interaction of illustrations in *The Rabbits*<sup>4</sup> presents a narrative of colonialism not only in Australia but also of the history of colonialism around the world, the representation of collision of two cultures, one driven by technology which transcends nature while the other rooted in ancient ecology. "The Rabbits" concerns more than a historical issue of race and politics and becomes a story of ecological crisis, failure of communication and crisis of conscience.

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<sup>2</sup> John Marsden is an Australian writer for children and a school teacher.

<sup>3</sup> Shaun tan is an Australian writer, artist and a film-maker.

<sup>4</sup> "The Rabbits" is a story taken originally from Marsden's *The Rabbits* and illustrated by Shaun Tan, published in the omnibus *Lost and Found* in 2011.



“The Rabbits” is the third story in the omnibus *Lost and Found*. The story is written by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan. An unseen narrator describes in minimal details the encounter between the visitors and the natives which seemed friendly and curious in the beginning but soon turned darker and it becomes evident that they were actually invaders. The story is partly allegorical fable about colonization narrated from the perspective of a colonized (Tan). Shaun Tan also comments on the blurb of the book about “The Rabbits” that,

The conflict between the two is, I think, a central concern of our age, one that exists far beyond the Australian landscape of deserts and billabongs that inspired my paintings and John’s words. Aside from historical issues of race or politics, “The Rabbits” is about a deep environmental crisis, a crisis of conscience, and a costly failure of communication. At the end, the question of reconciliation is left open to the reader as it is in the real world: The future, as always, remains undecided (Tan, 2011).

Illustrations in picture books play powerful, analytical and interpretative functions. The images and texts not only complement each other, but they also perform important roles in the process storytelling. The images not only complement each other but they have more important parts to play in the story. The story depends on the illustrations to complete the narrative. The images provide vital clues that inform the readers/viewers of significant meanings in the story.

Shaun Tan has used detailed research and surrealism to avoid any direct reference to draw a parallel with the real history of colonialism in Australia and around the world. The images and the illustrations represent codes that enable readers to recognise, and build knowledge about, the world that the narrative portrays. John Marsden’s “The Rabbits” was inspired by *A Sorrow in Our Heart* (1992) by Allan W. Eckert that depicts a biographical tale of the great North American Indian warrior Tecumseh. Marsden also observes,

The Europeans brought with them pests and diseases, including rabbits. The conquerors cleared forests, fenced the land, and planted crops. The rabbits spread as fast as or faster than the people. They ate the crops, and everything else as well. There was an obvious similarity between the humans and the

animals, and it seemed to me that telling the story of the rabbits – rather than the people – would be a better way of illustrating the damage done by invaders and colonists.

Shaun Tan's "The Rabbits" is a graphic adaptation of Marsden's short story of the same name. My paper is an attempt towards a visual and textual interpretation of Shaun Tan's "The Rabbits" and "Stick Figures" in the perspective of Diasporic Studies to show how there has been a geographical, cultural and historical dislocation of Australian natives by the colonisers and the natives' search for a home space of their own on the same land. Giving the animals (the rabbits and the numbat-like creatures, possibly bandicoots) anthropomorphic features has not only attributed to them human emotions and traits, but has also allowed space for both the author and the illustrator to universalize a very personal and subjective narrative. Representing through images of animals and things, the story serves as a window for multiple interpretations. It does not remain confined to the colonial history of Australia; it becomes a universal narrative of colonial supremacy, control and oppression.

The history of migration to Australia gives another symbolic dimension to the story of "The Rabbits." Australia's geographical location in the southern hemisphere accounts for its foreshortened history. The colonization and the settlement of the British in Australia in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries have shaped the history of the continent. The Age of Enlightenment and the Revolution stimulated a desire for knowledge and encouraged such explorations. It was further accelerated by industrial and agricultural developments. The history of newcomers in Australia can be traced back to the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch ships arrived irregularly and for short periods of time. Although there were seafarers and fishermen who often visited the island before these explorers, they remain unrecorded. With the arrival of the first British fleet in 1788 on the shores of Botany Bay, modern Australian history begins. Europeans maintained detailed records of their encounters with the native people in this island. Between the early seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries Europeans, including French, British explorers, merchants and privateers, witnessed the arrival of the Macassan fishermen from the Indonesian archipelago (Konishi and Nugent, 43-44). Britain began transporting its convicts to Australia from 1788 to 1866. The later part of the eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century (1793-1850) saw the immigration of free settlers who came to Australia to

start their new lives.<sup>5</sup> Chinese immigrants began to come to Australia as labourers during the Gold Rush in the 1850s. Their numbers increased so much that by 1901, they became the third largest population in Australia (“Immigration Australia Timeline”). The labourers in the Queensland sugar plantations were immigrants from South Sea Islanders. Afghan cameleers assisted the Europeans in expeditions into the arid interiors of the continent. The Malay, Japanese came to Australia to work as divers or mariners in the pearl harvesting industry in Australia. In 1901, the Immigration Restriction Act was implemented by the Federal Government in Australia, which formed the basis of the White Australian policy.<sup>6</sup> In the later part of the 1970s, the Boat people from Vietnam and certain seaborne refugees from Indochina and East Timor appeared in the northern territory of Australia to avoid social upheavals in their own countries. The asylum seekers from the Middle East and Sri Lanka kept pouring in from the 1990s. Thus, there had been waves of immigrants from different corners of the world to Australia since the seventeenth century. They played a vital role in shaping the history of Australia. But it was the British colonisers who emerged as the most powerful group in the continent. “While the British interest in Australian settlement was motivated primarily by economic and political objectives; these were linked with the desire to know the land in scientific terms. Such scientific enquiry gave British imperial claims greater legitimacy and also raised the possibility of more effective utilization of land through the techniques of scientifically based developments” (Gascoigne and Maroske, 442).

Similar kinds of power conflicts are found in the story “The Rabbits.” The title of the story “The Rabbits” originally given by Marsden is rather significant in multiple ways. Firstly, choosing an animal in place of a person or a race would suggest the scope of wider application so far as oppression and destruction are concerned. Besides, the rabbits dressed up in traditional colonial attire, may also symbolise the British people who in fact introduced rabbits in the Australian island. These rabbits multiplied in huge numbers just like the British invaders. The native Aboriginals are being represented by the numbat-like creatures, possibly bandicoots (a kind of marsupial) which are native to Australia. The rabbits are given human forms but the natives are represented as animals. The parallel of marginality is drawn at the

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<sup>5</sup> Most of them who could make the long journey received financial assistance from the British government, which had the motive of setting up a colony in Australia. There were also a number of Irish and Scottish free immigrants who escaped the social and political turmoil in their native lands.

<sup>6</sup> The law restricted the non-White, rather non-European immigrants, particularly the Chinese and South Sea Islanders to enter the country. This was purely based on racial discrimination.

very beginning of the story. Besides, unlike the rabbits, which are specified, the natives are represented as a certain kind of creatures. They have not been specified but left ambiguous. Even the title of the story is “The Rabbits” and throughout the book, the creatures are graphically placed in the margins, far away in corners of the picture while the rabbits dominate with prominence.

The introduction of foreign species changed the balance of Australia’s ecologies. Some introductions created economic opportunities – for example, the cultivation of exotic fruits such as bananas and avocado – but other flora and fauna destroyed crops and indigenous species. Australia’s history of foreign plant, pest and animal invasion fits into a larger transnational history of settler societies, particularly in North America, Argentina, South Africa and New Zealand. European migrants introduced to Australia many of the twentieth century’s most invasive species, including cane toads, rabbits, camels, foxes, myna birds, carp, and numerous species of grass and trees. Altered ecologies also meant that native species (including sulphur-crested cockatoos, rainbow lorikeets, galahs and noisy miners) expanded aggressively throughout Australia...European settlers brought in hardy grasses, shrubs and trees as fodder for cattle and sheep in the marginal hinterlands; trees were selected for accelerated growth; and animals were introduced that bred rapidly and tolerated varied environmental conditions. Certain species, such as rabbits, were protected even after it was widely known that they had become invasive (Barton and Bennett).

Australia has always been about land. The first three pages<sup>7</sup> of the text, including the title page, take a wide shot view of the landscape. From visibly clear night sky to the lake “alive with long-legged birds,” (Tan) the nature is shown unaltered by anything man-made or rather rabbit-made. The natives, represented by the “numbat-like creatures” exist in mutual harmony with nature. The scene then proceeds to the arrival of invaders. The encounter

<sup>7</sup> It is intriguing to note that there are no page numbers in the text. The three individual stories, namely “The Red Tree,” “The Lost Thing” and “The Rabbits” are separated by their respective title pages. It is unclear why the author did not use the page numbers. In my opinion, it might be that the author wanted the readers to associate the essence and the sentiments attached to each shot (image and illustration) and avoid any mechanical inclusion. The sequence of page numbers may sometimes refer to the sequence of events that happened historically, the direct reference to which the author tried to avoid.

between the natives and the invaders is filled with strangeness. At first, the natives are bewildered both at their similarity and strangeness. They did not know how to react. “At first we did not know what to think. They looked a bit like us. There were many of them. Some were friendly.” But they were apprehensive about the miscommunications that would ultimately lead to between the two groups. The image associated with the line “They came by water” (vide Appendix Illustration no.1) resonates to *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* drawn by E. Phillip Fox in 1902 (vide Appendix Illustration no.2). Cook is shown gesturing to his sailors not to fire at the Aborigines.

Between 1770 and 1803 more than 20 European expeditions landed on the continent, then still known as New Holland, but only a handful have had an enduring legacy on the history of culture contact. Prominent among them is James Cook’s *Endeavour* voyage along the east coast in 1770, which included interactions with Indigenous people at Botany Bay (near present-day Sydney) and Endeavour River (near present-day Cooktown) on the far north coast. During his second voyage, Cook’s companion ship, the *Adventure*, visited Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) and Cook himself landed there briefly on his thirds and final voyage. Despite these later contacts, it is his first voyage on the *Endeavour* that was long considered to have inaugurated British history in Australia (Konishi and Nugent, 55-56).

The invaders began to introduce science and technology on to the land and soon started to convert the land into an industrial region. They exploited the nature, killed and experimented with the animals (lizard being killed in the picture) as scientific projects, tested and scrutinised the land for their own development and inventory purposes (vide Appendix Illustration no.3). Unlike the natives, who preferred the primitive ways of living on trees, the colonisers made their own houses. The numbat-like creatures’ sleeping on the trees refers to the dehumanising section 127 of the Australian Constitution of pre-1967 where Australian Aborigines are considered not as humans but an extension of the flora and fauna.

The picture that the houses have legs, suggests that the invaders were so nostalgic about their own country that they ported their houses by ship. The legs on their houses may also reflect on how unattached these colonisers were to the Australian land and the nature.

The large framed photo of a city in Britain, which is carried carefully by couple of rabbits, shows how they valued and missed their own country. The presence of an “unseen queen rabbit”, the Imperial Head, is felt throughout.

English migrants – forced or free – were understandably nostalgic for home, and with imported technologies, seeds and animals they set about re-making England in the antipodes. By 1827 one visitor to Sydney found himself ‘scarcely to be sensible that I was out of England.’ Gardens were an important symbol of transformation, marking possession as well as providing food and evoking memories of home. But in the gardens of Sydney’s Government House, visitors’ encountered native banksias, tea-trees and eucalypts alongside cherry, pear and apricot trees. Although the growing towns, in particular, were filled with sights and sounds familiar to the English visitor, the landscape would inevitably be a hybrid: ‘a foreign place made English, and England turned exotic (Gaynor, 274).

These rabbits which stand for British colonisers in the text seemed to have labels for everything and even for themselves. The role of power is significant in this respect. This suggests that these people lacked their individual identities. They were all the same under their administrative head and they could be identified by certain numbers and codes. The things they carried like their glasses, their books, the roads, the vehicles also had labels for identifications. They also wanted things to be perfect and systematic. The optical devices, the glasses and monocles symbolise the invaders’ incapacity to visualise the future of the world, their craze for scrutiny, their preoccupation with the details. The invaders killed many native animals during their settlement. The lizard, for example, was killed under the wheel of the cart. This is a visual representation of how the invaders displaced the native flora and fauna of the land for their own development projects. They built houses and constructed roads. The natives encountered strangeness in their manners and ways of living. The rabbits brought new food with them and introduced many new animals into the aboriginal land. Some food were liked by the natives like the beef cattle, sheep, wheat, etc, while some food such as alcoholic beverages like wine, rum, beer made the natives sick. Some of the animals were accepted by the natives while some animals like horses, dogs and foxes scared away many indigenous communities and native animals like kangaroos which never knew them

before. Overgrazing the cattle and sheep exploited the pastoral land and the native animals and people were pushed to the remote areas. They spread all over the island and cut down their trees, their mountains, to serve their needs, construct roads and set up industries. “The rabbits spread across the country. No mountains could stop them; no desert, no river.” Plans for future development and settlement of the rabbits were being implemented at the cost of aboriginal Australians and the ecological balance.

The image that follows, show a war-like encounter between the native numbat-like creatures and the rabbits. The rabbits came in large numbers. They were too many and there was no end of them. The image turns dark and blood stained. The weapons used by the rabbits shown in the pictures are technologically advanced, and the rabbits exhibited order and discipline. All the objects that belong to the rabbits had “MIGHT=RIGHT” written over them. This is an implied suggestion of how unethically the British colonisers used their brutal force over the natives to make accomplish their missions. We find them on their weapons and also on the high rise buildings few pages later. The natives lost the war. They lost their lives, their land and their identities. The victory of the rabbits/ the colonisers is visible through the images of red flags with “vector lines” (Tan) which implicitly hinted at the British flag dominating above the creatures who ‘curled themselves up’ into the darkness under the ground like fossils. The image in the page that says, “They ate our grass. They chopped down our trees and scared away our friends,” shows huge giant “industrial fish-head machines” (vide Appendix Illustration no. 4) stripping the landscape. These robotic machines represent the rabbits’ lack of emotion and considerations towards nature. Tan comments, “The reader can’t make the connection through the most obvious picture recognition (i.e. bunnies eating grass), but have to go off-course a bit, which hopefully fires off some otherwise dormant neurons. Then you get a certain strange chemistry between words and pictures, an interesting tension which the word ‘illustration’ doesn’t adequately define.” The picture resonate the exploitations that the invaders carried on in the name of development. They exploited the water bodies (seas, rivers and lakes), killing the fish, whales and other aquatic creatures. The land was exploited through overgrazing (by sheep and cattle), industrial activities, industrial and sewage wastes that displaced a greater part of native flora and fauna, thus collapsing the whole ecology of the continent. After the white invaders came in contact with the Aboriginals, there had been also been a catastrophic decline in the latter’s population.

Then another important issue is introduced through the image that is associated with “And stole our children” (vide Appendix Illustration no. 5). This brings back the issue of the “stolen generation.” The next image that follows symbolizes the innumerable rabbits that came into Australia, settled there and turned her into an industrial city. The use of colours by Shaun Tan, limits to darker brown, grey, black and white. The grassland, the natural landscapes, the lakes are slowly replaced by cities with busy streets full of rabbits, high rise apartments, offices with large clocks hanging on their walls, industries, pipelines, smokes. The image of an administrative building in the form of a crowned queen is noticed at the centre of the city. The “MIGHT=RIGHT” represents the centre of the imperial power. The human and natural resources that get drained into the queen shaped building through the overhead pipe contribute to the overall might of the imperialism (vide Appendix Illustration no.6). The sequences of images portray the transforming landscape – overwhelming in the presence of gloomy wasteful lands, with barely any native creatures or vegetation (vide Appendix Illustration no.7). The land is covered with wastes draining from long pipes. Tan’s use of imagery becomes symbolic representation of the loss of the natural ecology. He uses contrasting colours in the beginning and the end of the story. The last couple of pages are complete black with a rabbit and the numbat-like creatures reduced to the size of postal stamps. Even though they exist on the same picture or land, they are positioned opposite to one another.<sup>8</sup> The story ends with a sad note displaying the words “who will save us from the rabbits?” This metaphorically suggests that the Aboriginals are still in a marginalised state under the control of the Western imperialist rule. They have no power and control over their own future and they are waiting for a saviour to rescue them.

Like “The Rabbits,” the story “Stick Figures”<sup>9</sup> also deals with the impact of White Western immigration on the aboriginals. “Stick Figures” is a heart-wrenching tale about how the invaders from unknown nations have captured and displaced the natives from their own habitats. The theme of dislocation and home space run as an undertone in both the stories. The dynamics between the image and text create a narration that is historically relevant to the history of Australia. As described later in the chapter, they have ‘passively upright body’

<sup>8</sup> Both the rabbits and the numbat-like creatures are on the verge of extinction. The creatures (natives) are endangered while the rabbit (colonisers) in the picture foreshadow their inevitable extinction in future as a result of natural exploitation.

<sup>9</sup> “Stick Figures” is an illustrated short story from Shaun Tan’s *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, published in 2008.



(Tan, 66) with a head like the ‘faceless clod of earth.’ As can be derived from the text, they are not being liked in the suburban society residents. They are matters of great hate, disgust and irritation. The people around usually do not like their (the Stick Figures’) presence around their homes. So they try to keep them off with loud music and smoke from barbecues. The adults avoid them by paying no attention but the young children try to have fun with them by dressing them up in old cloths and hats “as if they are dolls or scarecrows.” There is a hint that these figures are treated as objects or derogatory creatures. Some older boys try to hurt them with baseball bats, golf clubs or whatever they can lay their hands on or even smashing them under their feet. They go on doing this for hours until their amusement turns into boredom as these figures just stand and bear this. The reason for this is unknown. Nor do the people know what they are or what they wanted.

The ‘Stick figures’ are of Finnish origin. They are, Tan comments too in “Comments on ‘Stick Figures’”, Lappish ‘the Silent People.’ It is a crowd of several hundred scarecrow-like figures in a field on Highway Five, outside of Soumussalmi, Finland. They are made up of wood, and they are being dressed in colourful old clothing, with a clod of grassy earth for a head stuck on top. “The effect is both amusing and eerie, like whimsical ancestral beings or puppets.” These figures are installed by artist Reijo Kela. The reason behind their installation is not clear but they do evoke the long lost, forgotten people who died at the brutal attack of the Winter War of 1939-1940 between the Finns and Soviet Russia. The Lappish ‘Silent people’ represent the ancestral people of the Finland who occupied the land before the Russian army illegally attacked and captured the people in order to invade the Finnish territory. This historical reference has been used by Tan to represent the history of the Ancient Australia. The image of the stick like figures that belonged to Finland is seen roaming around the Suburban areas of Northern Perth. The stick figures here refer to the Aboriginal people who lived here before the colonisers displaced them and built up their own residence.

The growth of the residential areas in the Suburban regions, the cities, the tracks and roads for transport which were increasing at the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century resulted in the depletion of natural inhabitants of the region. The Aboriginals were not considered any better than “piece[s] of card-board or dead cat[s]’ (Tan, 65). Thus, the stick figures, which represented the aboriginals of the Australia, the ancient

people of the land, were seen roaming around those houses and front lawns. These people were homeless in their own home country. (vide Appendix Illustration no.8) The story can be read as a projection of Tan's *The Rabbits*. "They are not a problem, just another part of the suburban landscape, their brittle legs moving as slowly as clouds. They have always been here, since before anyone remembers, since before the bush was cleared and all the houses were built." This narrates the whole history of Australia. These people were close to nature. But the invaders have dehumanised them in the sense that they are reduced to inanimate objects of nature like wood. These lines also suggest that the settlers somewhere at the back of their conscience have a suppressed feeling of guilt for taking away the natives' land and building their own. Tan comments,

'Stick figures' is a combination of these two ideas, crow and Lappish 'silent people', but moreover relates to my feelings about the rapid, large-scale clearing of bush-land to make way for fresh roads, homes and shopping malls. Too often things seem to be built without a proper acknowledgement or empathy with the natural landscape – it is simply swept aside as if it never existed, replaced by an amnesiac culture. One of the few remnants of the original forests are big tuart trees in parks, ancient sentinels that tend to drop long, angular sticks from time to time. If you stand them up, they sometimes look like human figures ("Comments on "Stick Figures"").

That's where the stick figures came from. They are visual amalgamation of Australian past and the concept of the Lappish 'silent people.' The stick figures were silent too. They never protested but bore every humiliation and torture; simply because they had no power to strike back. They were made voiceless, or they were never heard. The story can be read as a critique of Australian ecological exploitation and the role of economic development and legislative inactivity. A tension between the historical and social issue is created in this story. The narrator is a voice speaking from the perspective of a settler whose questions at the end of the story suggest that they very well knew who those stick figures were, why they were there and what they wanted. The text and the illustrations complimented each other to create a complete story. The old vive of an ancient history is accompanied by Tan's use of old photographic painting of the suburban landscape and the stick figures were surrealistically added the background.

The English believed that the island was *terra nullius* (no man's land) and they occupied Australia as their own with the arrival of James Cook in 1770. The seventeenth and the eighteenth-century encounters between the invaders and the aboriginals which have been recorded by European voyagers like Captain James Cook, William Dampier, Flanders and other historians and botanists, only give us accounts of how difficult it was for these invaders to adapt themselves to such an unproductive, barren, strange land that completely lacked material resources. They have represented the Aboriginals as savage, primitive, dark-skinned and uncivilised creatures. They recorded how they suffered and faced difficulties in a strange land, among strange people. History has remained silent on the subject of the experiences of the aboriginal people. There are no written records by the aboriginal people of these encounters as these people remained rooted in an oral tradition. But in the twentieth century, many aboriginal literatures in English, Australian Children's Literature, autobiographies and films have rewritten the history of Australian aboriginality, their ecology, and their history of land and struggle for survival from their own perspectives. Alexis Wright in his novel *Carpentaria* (2007) has represented the history of Australia's aboriginal culture and the conflicts which arose with the arrival of the invaders. John Marsden has richly contributed to Australian Children's Literature in which ancient Australian history was rewritten. Marsden's spare use of text and Tan's surreal images have combined to produce a tension that arises from the dichotomies of self and other, of ancient and modern, of the powerful and the weak through a fabular representation of the destructive powers of colonization.

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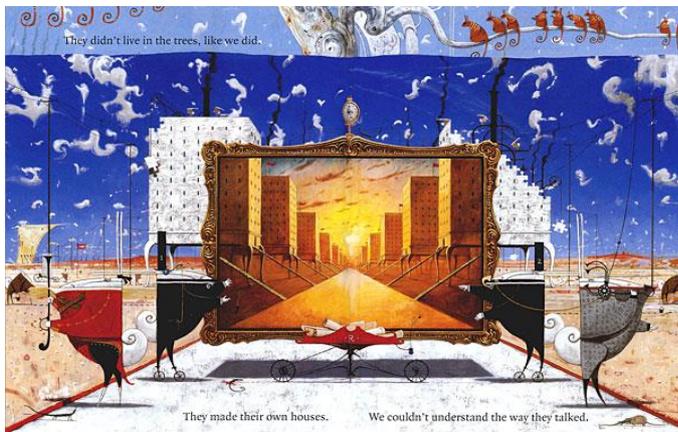
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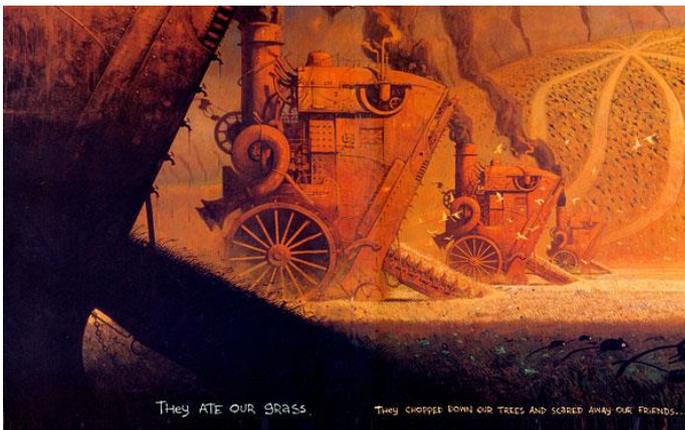
**Illustration 1:** They came by water



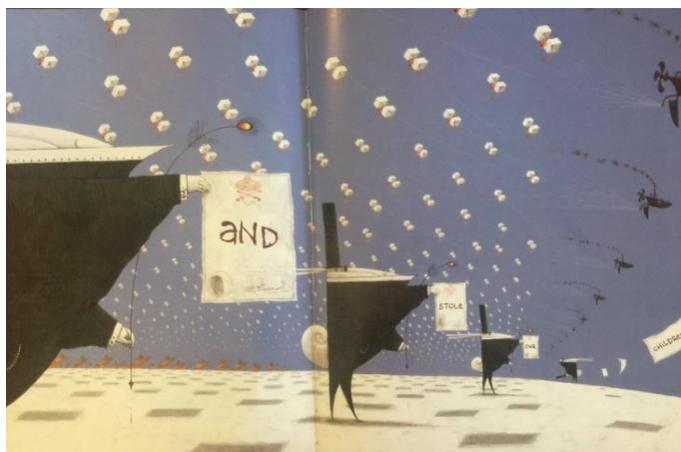
**Illustration 2:** *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* drawn by E. Phillip Fox in 1902



**Illustration 3:** A lizard being killed



**Illustration 4:** “industrial fish-head machines”



**Illustration 5:** “They stole our children”

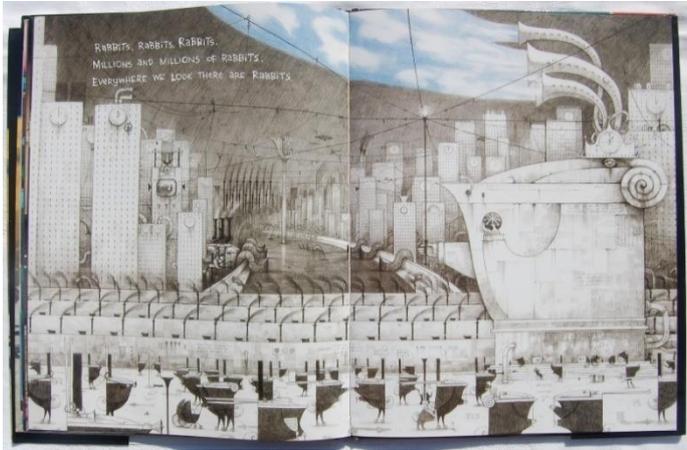


Illustration 6: "MIGHT=RIGHT"



Illustration 7: Transforming Landscapes

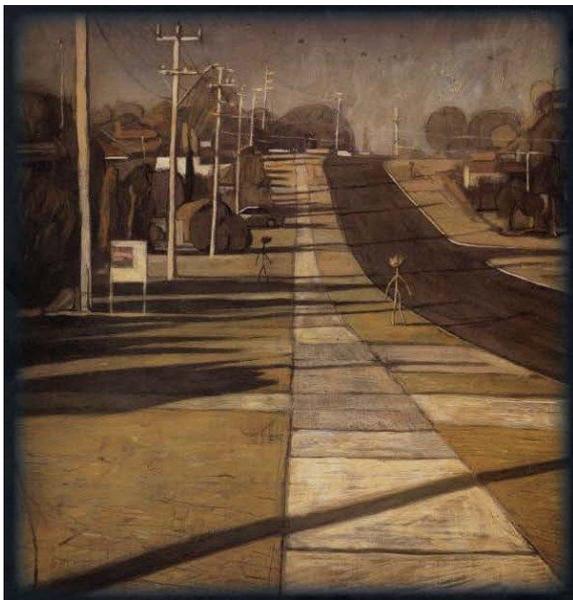


Illustration 8: Homeless in their own country



**Book Review**

by

**Malashri Lal<sup>1</sup>*****Dusk to Dawn: Poetic Voices on the Current Times, South Asia and Beyond.*****Edited by Chandra Mohan, Rita Malhotra, Anamika. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 2021. Pages 391. Rs. 695/-**

True to its title, *Dusk to Dawn* started at the time of impending darkness and gloom in the month of March 2020 when the corona virus hit India and the world with its tenacious tentacles. It was published in mid-2021 when hope became viable. The book's genesis in a chain mail plugs it to the unusual circumstances of the pandemic. Dr Chandra Mohan had written to friends and litterateurs asking for "Beautiful Lines on Changing Times". The response was overwhelming as several writers were looking for the metaphorical ferry over the stormy waters of anxiety. Poetry started arriving in plenty—moving, thoughtful, emotional, imagistic, capturing the dismay of the times yet stretching towards glimmers of hope. In the words of Robert Browning, "Man's reach should exceed his grasp/Or what's a heaven for?" Some writers started little 'jugalbandis' responding to each other's work, e.g., Keki Daruwalla and Rupin Desai, others offered photos with poems, several introduced Hindi and Urdu material to localise the scenario. The breakthrough occurred with Dr. HK Kaul's idea of the poetic emails being converted into a book. Tragically, Dr. Kaul succumbed to Corona. His faithful friends, the editorial team of *Dusk to Dawn* decided to create the volume in his honour, a tribute from across the world from one hundred writers who believed in poetry as an instrument of healing.

How does the healing happen?

First, through confronting the ominous threat of the cannibalistic virus that invades the body and destroys the innards. Isolation in home and hospitals, a death without handholding, a

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cremation of anonymity. Gulzar saab sees kites hovering over corpses in a deserted city, Cyril Dabydeen notices the empty home of his neighbour now dead, K. Satchidanandan observes one child in the garden whereas there used to be a sibling, now departed. These are emblems of loss too deep for tears, too heart wrenching for a description. Stark images, broken words stand in for the families and communities reduced to shards.

Until March 2020, the worries used to be about pollution, climate change and water famine. Worries have today become focussed on death with Sudeep Sen's poem "Obituaries" noting that the passage is not about others but possibly about ourselves. Haadaa Sendoo of Mongolia writes a "Message from the ICU", Ozge Cengiz from Turkey unravels the sorrows "Behind the Curtains," Peter Thabit Jones from Wales recalls the "disarming emptiness" of "Pandemic 2020". Globally, and this is the message of *Dusk to Dawn*, ethnic, regional, and other differences have been flattened by the uniformity of suffering. "Death the Leveller", James Shirley's poem of the seventeenth century rings true in our milieu, one may say.

Second, suggests the book, one may attempt to heal by tugging at the threads of hope - the doctors and the caregivers. Covid saw us inventing new collocations: front line workers, social distancing, contact-less delivery and many more: words borrowed from the war zone, words of aggression; a wilful separation among family and beloved friends, this has become "Covid appropriate behaviour". How has the natural garrulity of Indians accepted this situation? Sanjukta Dasgupta's poem "The Healing Touch" is an address to a doctor with the refrain "we are not well, not well at all" repeated plaintively, Sukrita Paul Kumar imagines Christ with a stethoscope, Anukruti Upadhyay sees women, the nurture givers, protectively watching over their children. Perhaps the migrants' story has been particular to India and several poets track those grievous tales and agonising images that remain to haunt our memory: children at railway platforms, women trudging onwards to a village home, men in a cluster lugging provisions for sustenance, bedraggled tents by the wayside, a stack of abandoned cycles carrying tales of grief. Sanjeev Kaushal and Alka Tyagi turn to nature for some images of succour, Rita Malhotra addresses the doctors with the "congruent hope" of defeating the common enemy. However, Ashok Vajpeyi claims, "No we will not be able to write our times".

*Dusk to Dawn* carries two Introductory essays, highly useful for contextualising the poetry. Chandra Mohan notes how "poets play their role of therapists", words being expressions of their hurting self but equally containing regenerative power. He also

enumerates the sub-themes covered in the poems which amount to numerous aspects of the covid experience. He and Rita Malhotra are to be credited for the international coverage and selection of the English section. Poet and feminist scholar Anamika writes a thoughtful introduction to the Hindi section moving between theories of poetics, ethics and aesthetics and offering literary illustrations. Her surmise that “poetry has emerged as the only sacred space” is worthy of regard as the ongoing pandemic has left us groping for answers in the “knowable” world. The culminating value of this unusual book of poems lies in the “Soulful Prayer” penned by Dr. Karan Singh, poet, philosopher and distinguished authority on ancient texts:

Darkness threatens to engulf me on all sides  
Light the candle of faith in my heart, O Lord  
And grant me a vision of Your form today...

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