

CONTENTS

	Page
Editors' Note	1
<u>Forgettable Homecoming: Bengali Writings on Indian Exodus from Burma</u>	2 - 21
Partha Sarathi Bhaumik	
<u>Intersecting Sexuality and Nationalism: Reading Queerness in <i>Funny Boy</i></u>	22 - 34
Rittika Dasgupta and Rohit K Dasgupta	
<u>Kindness of the White and Happiness of the Black: A Brief Analysis of the 19th Century White American Children's Literature</u>	35 - 45
Mukulika Dattagupta	
<u>Dastan-e Amir Hamza in Text and Performance</u>	46 - 65
Shaheen Saba	
<u>From <i>Gitanjali</i> to <i>Song Offerings</i>: Interrogating the Politics of Translation in the Light of Colonial Interaction</u>	66 - 83
Urmī Sengupta	
 REVIEW ESSAYS	
<u>Comparative Literature: Terms and Concepts</u>	84 - 87
Sreejit Datta	
<u>At the Crossroads of Culture and Literature</u>	88 - 91
Annapurna Palit	
<u>Palaver: Proceedings of the Forum for the Scholars of African Studies</u>	92 - 94
Mukulika Dattagupta	
 SPECIAL SECTION ON RECENT PUBLICATIONS BY SAHITYA AKADEMI	
<u>Bidhar - On the Move</u> by Bhalchandra Nemade; trans. Santosh Bhoomkar	95 - 97
Swagata Bhattacharya	
<u>Banaras and Other Poems</u> by Kedarnath Singh; ed. K. Satchidanandan	98 - 100
Ria Roy Choudhury	
<u>Signature</u> by Puviyarasu; trans. K.S. Subramanian	101 - 104
Ritika Batabyal	
<u>Carvalho</u> by K.P. Purnachandra Tejaswi; trans. D.A. Shankar	105 - 107
Rindon Kundu	
<u>Khauna Mihir's Mound</u> by Bani Basu; trans. Arunava Sinha	108 - 109
Avishek Rath	

SāHITYA

WEBJOURNAL OF THE COMPARATIVE LITERATURE ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

Numbers 6 & 7 (Double Issue: March, 2016).

Sahitya is a refereed journal (ISSN 2249-6416) (Online) published from Delhi and Kolkata by the Comparative Literature Association of India

Guidelines for Contributors:

Sāhitya, the webjournal of the Comparative Literature Association of India, publishes essays related to any aspect of Comparative Literature. In particular, we welcome contributions that enrich our understanding of the need for holistic and inclusive approach to literature and culture. Essays that respond to current developments in our field nationally or internationally are welcome. We also encourage essays that explore the network of influence, reception and impact that shapes individual literatures, but which often lies unrecognised in our literary culture.

Members may submit essays, translations and reviews of books and journals related to Comparative Literature for possible publication in the CLAI webjournal. Essays are expected to be within 6,000 words (MLA 7 format), and reviews, within 1,500 words. Please e-mail contributions to claiikolkata@gmail.com or vasantsharmadcac@gmail.com

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Note from the Editors

It is a humbling experience for us to present this double issue of *Sāhitya*. As usual, it carries a set of critical essays dealing with a wide range of areas related to Comparative Literature. The essays all seem to highlight the case for a holistic study of literature and culture in their own ways. In the range of topics and areas they cover and in their focus on interconnections, they seem to reiterate the spirit of inclusion, the respect for alterity and the quest for relevance that our discipline has come to stand for.

The (in)famous anxieties of Comparative Literature are very much with us in India today. Yet Comparative Literature in India has been making itself more and more visible as an academic discipline in recent times. We hope the essays carried in this volume will further stoke the ongoing debate about the nature, scope and current trends of Comparative Literature in India, and will at the same time encourage further explorations in the literary and cultural spaces they focus on.

The first essay focuses on a contact situation in the South Asian context and brings together Burma and Bengal. The second focuses on the writings of Shyam Selvadurai, South Asian Canadian author, and is a thought-provoking reading of his works using gender, sexuality and nationalism as its point of entry. The third essay is a study of 19th century White American Children's Literature and adequately highlights how children's literature can function as a site of contest for various ideologies. The fourth essay in this section seeks to trace the evolution of the *dastan* and examine the revival of the *dastangoi* in recent times. And finally, the fifth essay focuses on the politics of translation in the context of the transformation of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* to the English *Song Offerings*.

This issue, which goes online somewhat late, having been delayed because of various constraints, also carries an extended section on review essays. The books that have been reviewed include a most useful collection of entries on terms related to Comparative Literature, called *Comparative Literature: Terms and Concepts*. We also have a review of one of the most recent publications on Canadian Literature from India, *At the Crossroads of Culture and Literature*, published by Primus. This is followed by a review of *Palaver: Proceedings of the Forum for the Scholars of African Studies*, that reveals new trends in the study of African literatures and oratures in India.

This issue also carries a special section on recent publications by Sahitya Akademi, India's national body of letters. Indian literature has, over the last several decades, constituted a core area of Indian Comparative Literature, and publications of Indian literature in translation is particularly relevant for comparatists in India—hence, our decision to focus on this area in this special sub-section in *Sāhitya 6 & 7*. Featured here are translations from languages as diverse as Tamil, Bangla, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada; authors featured include Bhalchandra Nemade, Kedarnath Singh, Puviyarasu, K.P. Purnachandra Tejaswi and Bani Basu. We are particularly thankful to Dr K Sreenivasa Rao and Professor Malashri Lal for facilitating this collaboration with the Sahitya Akademi.

We expect the next issue to go online within the next few months and invite readers to send in their contributions following the *Sāhitya* guidelines.

Forgettable Homecoming: Bengali Writings on Indian Exodus from Burma

Parthasarathi Bhaumik¹

I

As a literary motif, ‘homecoming’ constitutes a recurrent theme in literature across cultures, usually marking a much desired telos to a narrative of journey. In fact, in many respects, ‘journey’ is often implied as some sort of homecoming, its ultimate destination. The journey of Odysseus in *Odyssey* and the journey of Rāma in *Ramayana* ('Ramayana' literally means 'the journey of Rāma') converge on this motif that, notwithstanding their heroic exploits and frantic actions elsewhere, both these ancient epics, at the end, are about homecoming. In travelogues, fairy tales, romances, biographies the theme of 'home' and a subsequent urge to find it are inextricably woven, though their manifestation may not be always explicit. In most of the cases, it is regarded as an 'achievement', a befitting cause for celebration, a marker of the protagonist's 'success', though the idea of 'home' may remain ever elusive and very difficult to pin down. In Indian subcontinent, the idea of 'home' and the possibility or impossibility of finding it took a new meaning when in India was divided in 1947, and this partition initiated one of the largest forced displacements of people across border. According to rough estimation, 14 million people lost their home either in India or in newly formed Pakistan and became refugee overnight. For overwhelming majority of these people, there was no home waiting for them on the other side of the border for which they had made their journey wading through unprecedented violence and terrible communal riots. The displacement and concomitant human tragedy of the Partition of 1947 were represented in literature, numerous films, plays; academic, political, and historical analyses of this event are still relevant and imperative as the effect of the Partition on the lives of the people of the Indian subcontinent continues to be a defining factor almost in every respect and in substantial number of cultural sites. But the enormous displacement of Indians did not start with the Partition of 1947, it had started earlier in 1942, when over 4,00,000 Indians residing in Burma permanently, became homeless apparently because of the Japanese attack on the

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country, endured one of the most difficult journey through treacherous Burmese terrains to reach India.

Though the Indian immigration to Burma was an ancient phenomenon, but the colonial rule in Burma (1886-1948) saw an unprecedented rise in Indian population all over the country. In fact the colonial enterprises encouraged Indian migration for various economic and political reasons. After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the British realized the commercial potentiality of Burma as a rice producing country whose agricultural produce could be exported to Europe. It necessitated the increase of acreage of paddy field which could not be done only with Burmese labour. So the administration decided to import Indian labour and encouraged unabated Indian migration to Burma by taking different administrative measures including subsidy in ship fares, and financial incentives to labour contractors. This policy worked as it resulted into increase in the acreage of agricultural land mostly done by Indian labours from Bengal and southern provinces.²

This colonial strategy of bringing Indian labour to Burma soon had its manifestation in the changed demography of the country where Indians emerged as one of the major contributors to Burmese population. Not only for agrarian sectors, Indians were brought for administration and commercial sectors like oil and teak industries. The following statistics would reveal increasing influx of Indians to Burma:

(INDIAN POPULATION IN BURMA)

Census	Total Population	Indian Population	Indian Percentage
1872	2,747,148	1,36,504	4.9
1881	3,736,771	2,43,123	6.5
1891	8,098,014	4,20,830	5.1

² According to the Interim Report of the Rice Enquiry Committee, Rangoon, 1938, the quantum of paddy field in Burma in the years 1852-53 was 600,000 acres, but within fifty years it turned out to be 6,712,719 acres in 1902-03. The increase was unprecedented 1,019%. (Mahajani 5)

1901	10,490,624	5,68,263	5.4
1911	12,115,217	7,43,288	6.1
1921	13,212,192	8,87,077	6.7
1931	14,667,146	1,017,825	6.9

Source: *Report on Indian Immigration*, 1941

Bengalis who had knowledge in English and experience in working with colonial administration found it relatively easy to get employment in latter two sectors. Subsequently, the Bengali population in Burma also increased in following manner.

(BENGALI POPULATION IN BURMA)³

YEAR OF CENSUS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	TOTAL POPULATION OF BURMA	PERCENTAGE OF BENGALI POPULATION
1901	N/A	N/A	2,04,973	10,490,624	1.95
1911	2,48,310	2,04,973	4,53,283	12,115,217	3.74
1921	1,95,941	1,05,098	3,01,039	13,212,192	2.27
1931	2,42,415	1,34,579	3,76,994	14,667,146	2.57

Source: Census of India, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931

The Indians began to have a substantial share in national income, and that was often achieved at the cost of Burmese economic opportunities. It aggravated Burmese discontent and bred anti-Indian feelings among the Burmese. With the rise of Burmese nationalism in

³ Bengali population is assumed from the number of people who returned ‘Bengali’ as their language. The corresponding census reports do not mention such equation.

the second decade of the twentieth century, the Burmese people began to protest against the artificially manipulated merging of Burma into India after the third Anglo-Burmese war in 1886. Gradually there grew a consensus among the Burmese people to separate Burma from India as they realized that they were subjugated not only to a British colonial authority but also to India and both these countries had different cultures and history. Though, there is no denying the fact Burma had an ancient cultural relation with India through Buddhism and especially with Bengal as Buddhism and Pali language went to Burma from Bengal. The Burmese nationalist leaders like Aung San drew inspiration from the nationalist movements in India. But the separation of Burma from India was inevitable. Desai in his book *India and Burma: A Study*, puts it rhetorically: "Although the British have drunk deeply of Hellenic and Roman culture, Britons are neither Greeks nor Romans. So likewise, though the Burmese people have India as their great source of inspiration, Burmese nationalism has always stood distinct from Indian nationalism. Burmese are not Indians. The artificial union of Burma with India did not alter this historical fact" (Desai 53-54). That separation came in 1937 when Burma was declared officially a separate country, and its administration would henceforth no longer be monitored from India. But the growing discontent among the Burmese people against the immigrant Indians culminated into a worst riot during this time and many hapless poor Indian labours were killed. This riot started exodus of Indians from Burma, and it marked the beginning of the end of Indian life in Burma.

The last decade of Indian life in Burma was marked by the World War II which spread over entire Burma, and subsequent Japanese occupation of the country brought forth a complete change in socio-political and cultural conditions that were too difficult for the Indians to negotiate. The Indian life in Burma had been becoming increasingly difficult since 1930s, and it reached its culmination during the World War II. The defeat of the Allied army at different locations of East and South-East Asia like Singapore, Malay, Siam, and Burma exposed the vulnerability of the erstwhile invincible British Empire. The British colonial systems which had so far been sustaining the Indian settlements in Burma began to crumble down. Burma was attacked on January 12, 1942, when Japanese troops struck from south-eastern Thailand and seized the Burmese seaport Tavoy, and Japan began airstrike on different cities and towns, many of which were the places of Indian habitations. The Japanese attack on Burma was sudden and beyond speculation. Both the colonial administration and

Indian civilians never anticipated that Burma might be attacked by the Japanese. Till the mid-December, 1941, Burma was held to be a safe place amidst the violence all over the world during the World War II. An old music hall song, popular among the Europeans in Burma, caught this mood of complacency:

Where was I when the war was on? I can hear a faint voice murmur

Where was I when the war was on? In the safest place-in Burma. (Leigh 7)

This ‘safest’ place started to turn into a volatile one once Japanese Lieutenant General Shojiro Iida’s XV Army crossed the Thai frontier into Burma. The Japanese war planes began to attack targets in Lower Burma from the end of December 1941, and by February 1942 the British air defence succumbed completely to the Japanese attacks. On 23 and 25 December 1941 Rangoon was heavily bombarded, and the air raids on this important city continued day after day for weeks. The effect was devastating; it not only destroyed the city but also demoralized the civilians and the government officials. Rangoon, incidentally, was the most favourite place for the Bengalis to live. Japanese bombing spread panic among the people of the city, and they started to leave the city to survive. With the Japanese at heel, the people started to move northwards as the Japanese were progressing from south. Two northern cities, Mandalay and Maymyo, were still then untouched by the Japanese bombers. A significant number of Bengalis also were living in these two cities. The evacuees from the south began to gather in these cities for safety. But the last bastions also fell on 3 April 1942 when Japanese planes bombed Mandalay, and then Maymyo. Even other small cities were not spared from Japanese air raids. The British High Command on 25 April 1942 decided to leave Burma and ordered full scale military retreat. It prompted the scared Indians to leave Burma in a desperate attempt to save themselves from Japanese bombing. The Indian exodus from Burma began, and the painful accounts of such difficult journeys became a part of Bengali memory. A number of Bangla narratives were composed by the Bengali ‘Evacuees’ who braved the most difficult terrains to reach home.

II

Along with British military debacles in this region, thousands of refugees began to leave Burma for India. Initially they took sea routes to Calcutta or Chittagong from the Port of

Rangoon. But the Port was declared closed at the end of February 1942. It forced many evacuees to take the hazardous land route via the Taungup Pass to Akyab then on to India by sea. But this route was also closed by the beginning of March 1942. There was another route to follow either by train or by riverboat up the Irrawaddy to Myitkyina. But when train and boats became unavailable, the evacuees took a treacherous route along the Chindwin Valley to Imphal and onto Dimapur (Leigh 9-10).

The majority of these evacuees were Indians, though the exact number is hard to know. Census reports might have been a great help, but unfortunately all the data for the 1941 Burma Census was destroyed completely in Japanese bombing. From different other sources, Leigh ‘guesstimates’ that about 3,66,000 civilian evacuees left Burma in 1942 and of these about 3,50,000 (96%) were Indians (Leigh 53). It is now impossible to get any number about Bengali evacuees from any sources. The *Register of Evacuees from Burma* has a record of only 25,559 Indian evacuees. Bengali names spill over across its pages, and one may come across a number of Bhattacharji, Chakravarty, Chandra, Chaudhury, Das, Dutt, Ganguly, Ghosh, Nath (Leigh 54). There were also Muslim names, and one can assume that many of them were from Bengal. Had there been the census report of 1941 available, there might have been some idea about the number of Bengali evacuees. Similarly how many evacuees died on their way to India remains unanswered as there is no authentic document available. But it is not hard to guess that all those who were forced to take land route through north Burma had to endure very hostile conditions including dangerous hill terrains and very ill-managed or non-existing evacuation plan of the administration. In 1942, the administration claimed that about a half-a-million evacuees had escaped to India in that year, and about 80,000 died on the way. But these figures are unreliable and ‘had been plucked out of the air for propaganda purpose’ (Leigh 23). The purpose of these figures were to prove that out of such a large movement only a small percentage died on the way, which, in a way, would prove efficiency of the administration. Though 80,000, by no means, a small number, but the actual number of death on the way probably much surpassed that figure.

Behind all these debates about number and elusive statistics lied an unfathomable human misery of people who were forced to leave everything they had earned over years of hard labour, and endured an inhuman journey along one of the most dangerous terrains of Asia. Between January and May 1942 Indian evacuees started to leave Burma in large groups

by road, rail, sea, and very few fortunate on air. They crowded the road and became constant irritants to the army officials as they found it difficult to make military movements through roads congested with Indian evacuees trudging along with their belongings. Leigh described Indian evacuees: ‘They slogged along congested roads, struggled with hunger, thirst and disease and slept in filthy camps. Their memories were of congestion, crowds, noise, laden ox carts, lorries and pedestrians moving slowly along in the same direction...nobody directed the Indians to depart, no organization assisted them on the way, and when they arrived at their destination, nobody wanted them to stay’ (Leigh 53). Their account of plight is still unknown, and the world knows that those who had survived this ordeal chose to remain silent. There is a significant body of writing about the mass exodus during the Partition of 1947, and this is regarded as one of the most shameful tragedies that has ever enacted in this subcontinent. But the Indian exodus from Burma remains a silent chapter in history. This has intrigued many scholars including Leigh:

Here is the mystery. Lower-class coolies, sweepers, peons and dhobis can be excused. They were illiterate and ill equipped to write or speak about their experiences. They kept no diaries, wrote no letters and left no memoirs over which historians and journalists could pore. However, this does not explain why well-educated Indian evacuees - and there were many of them - chose not to write about their experiences. Yet even today Indian survivors and their descendants are reluctant to speak about the events of 1942. Perhaps trauma begets amnesia. (Leigh 54)

Leigh’s references to wilful ‘amnesia’ and reluctance to talk about a traumatic past in relation to Indian evacuees of Burma are comparable to ‘silences’ of the Partition. Urvashi Butalia, a Partition scholar who worked with oral narratives and memories of the people who witnessed the horrific events of the Partition experienced the same difficulty: to break their silences:

One of the commonest responses I encountered when I began work was people’s (initial) reluctance to speak. What, they asked me, is the use of remembering, of excavating memories we have put behind us? Every time I was faced with this question, I came up with a question of my own: why, I wondered, were people so reluctant to remember this time? Surely this reluctance in itself pointed to

something? Was it only to do with the horrific nature of events-- sanitized into numbers and statistics in the pages of history books-- or was it to do, at least in some instances, with people's own complicity in this history? (Butalia 10-11)

The Indian exodus from Burma and the subsequent trauma are not much visible in history in the way Partition is, so the issue of the 'complicity in history' does not bear much credence here. The Partition was more spectacular in a way that lots of photographs and documents are available, historians, scholars, researchers, poets, novelists, writers, film-makers represented this event from all possible perspectives and in all possible means. It proved to be a source of great creative excitement. In comparison, the 'partition' of Burma from India in 1937 and the trauma of Indian exodus from Burma in 1942 did not attract much critical and creative attention. There might be several socio-political reasons for its under-representation, but one thing is certain that the trauma of exodus of 1942 has been overshadowed by all-pervasive tragedy of the Partition in 1947.

However, Leigh's complaint about the absolute dearth of cultural materials, texts; both written and spoken is not all true, as there exists some memoirs, stories and other writings. Leigh could not find them because they are all in Indian languages like Bangla, and they have not yet been translated in any European language. Though compared to the quantum of accounts of the European exodus, Bangla writings are less in number, but the latter represented tales of inhuman efforts for survival of faceless unprivileged mass who far exceeded the Europeans not only in number but also in the intensity of their suffering.

III

Unlike the Indian evacuees, European and Anglo-Indian evacuees were given special privileges for evacuation. For instance, while the ratio of Indians and Europeans in Burma in 1941 was probably 130:1 (Leigh 18), but the latter, for colonial reasons, were more important than the others. So they were given privileges in evacuation by air. From airport documents, we come to know that exactly 3,863 Europeans, 2,869 Anglo-Indians, 548 Anglo-Burmans (altogether 7280), 4,801 Indians and 126 Burmans were flown to India (Leigh 25). On the road too, it was alleged that comparatively less difficult paths were exclusively reserved for European and Anglo-Indian evacuees, though the colonial authority never admitted officially

this discrimination but many Bengali evacuees mentioned that they did face such discrimination.

It is clear from different documents that there was well-charted plan for European and Anglo-Indians leaving Burma for India, a privilege the other evacuees were deprived of. Though, there was no official declaration that such privileges were exclusively for certain communities, but the very nature of instructions made it clear that other common men, namely the Indian labourers, coolies were not the target of such instructions. For instance, a Government Order entitled, ‘Information & Instructions for Evacuation under the Government Civil Scheme’ released by the Civil Evacuation Office, Maymyo on 25 February 1942, among many other instructions, made it specifically clear that ‘acquit yourself of... your servants’, and there would be provisions for ‘rest camps’, and ‘medical comforts’. Evacuees were also instructed ‘to pack sandwiches’, and the ‘journeys will be made at Govt. expense to final destination in India’ (‘Information & Instructions’). Not a single narrative of any Bengali evacuee mentioned that such privileges were ever extended to Indians.

The Europeans, who lived in Burma and left it on emergency during 1941-42, were chiefly administrators and military officials. During the World War II, Americans also came to fight for the Allied Front against the Japanese. So there are accounts of American soldiers as well. The reason for their retreat was that during this time the British army faced major setback against the Japanese army, and under tremendous Japanese air and land strikes from the south, they retreated towards North Burma, and then finally to India.

The European evacuees, in numerous narratives, were portrayed often with tinge of romance and heroics. Their tragedy became a great feat of achievement and a proof of their undaunted spirit. In comparison, Indian evacuees were portrayed, according to Leigh, as ‘faceless, anonymous numbers of amorphous crowds. They rarely emerge as individuals with personalities. One newspaperman at the time described them as “unending streams of human war waste, sandwiched between armies of friends and foe.”’ (Leigh 54). The European narratives of exodus were heroic as there was some destination waiting for them at its end. There was also a sense of honour and national acclamation even in defeat. But for the Indians, it was a ‘home’- coming as one ‘defeated’, and in many of the cases, there was no ‘home’ either.

To understand this ‘representations’ of the European evacuees, let us take a diary of one Ralph Tanner, a Second Lieutenant of the Second Battalion of the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, who was commissioned in Burma on August 1941, and after series of disasters on the warfront came to India at the end of May 1942. Tanner wrote his diary within twelve months after his arrival in India. His diary was published as a book entitled *Burma 1942: Memories of Retreat*. This book has an ‘Overview’ containing two sections: ‘The British political and military position in Burma 1941’ and ‘A military biography of Capt. R.E.S. Tanner’. Its ‘Chapter 1’ (‘The Past is a Foreign Country’) is also a de-facto long introduction which not only delayed the reader’s arrival at the diary, but also creates an ambience for the reception of the diary. Such elaborate preliminaries seem to be imperative as it would set conditions for reading this account of European evacuation. In addition, there are five appendices containing ‘documents’ like the map that Tanner kept with himself during the war etcetera. Incorporating such ‘documents’ was intended to give historical credence to the narrative.

The long introduction endeavours to present this retreat of a European as an act of great heroism, a personal achievement which would survive in personal memory though may be forgotten in grand discourses of history. For instance, the incident of losing two of his comrades, whose names have gone into oblivion, has been described with Shakespearian expression: “Shakespeare makes the point in *Henry V*, in the famous speech before Agincourt: ‘Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot, but he’ll remember with advantages what feats he did that day.’” (Tanner, Chapter 1). Leigh argues, “Through the prism of history, European evacuees have thus portrayed as idiosyncratic, tragic, sad, noble, defeated, strong, pathetic, romantic and dashing, depending on one’s point of view. On the other hand, Indian evacuees are portrayed as faceless, anonymous members of amorphous crowds. They rarely emerge as individuals with personalities... Perhaps, Indians were victims of media presentation rather than Japanese aggression” (Leigh 54). Leigh’s argument in such comparative statement represents the western perception of the event, and by ‘media’ he, in all probability, meant the western media. From existing Bangla discourses on the evacuation and the personal memoirs, it is obvious that the Indian evacuees were not always ‘faceless, anonymous members of amorphous crowds’, and they failed to ‘emerge as individuals with personalities’, on the contrary, Bengali men, and more importantly, Bengali women wrote

accounts of their personal experiences of evacuation. Their narratives put forth amply their personal perspectives with strong individual opinion. Unlike the accounts of the European evacuees, Bengali narratives did not bear the obligation to be merged into grand nationalist discourse; they remain as small narratives of personalised experiences with individual and familial weal and woe.

The Anglo Burmese Library dedicated a page in their official website which contains, among archival documents of the Evacuation of 1942, some narratives of Europeans or Europe-origins who left Burma in that year, and the page, published in 2009, is named ‘Trek Out of Burma 1942’.⁴ In one of such personal memoirs of one Phyllis Lattimer, it seems clear that the European evacuation was comparatively a matter of lesser struggle than their Indian counterparts, and they could afford to look back at it with amusement while writing a memoir. He writes:

Now, we are able to look back on, laugh at, and enjoy many of the incidents of that hurried flight over the Burma border to India and safety. But at that time it was indeed no laughing matter. But our experiences were mild in comparison with those poor unfortunates, many of them through no fault of their own, were left to walk, as best they could, into India. For the most part of their story is a tragedy which will never be told and could certainly never be a matter for reflective laughter or enjoyment, and we have learnt to be thankful for the comparative comfort in which we travelled and to realise how lucky we were.
(Lattimer)

When the personal memoir becomes a collective memoir it is bound to take the shape that could be comprehended and accepted collectively. The use of ‘we’ in Lattimer’s narrative puts forth certain collective perspectives. In fact, any memory when reproduced or represented through certain tangible and aesthetic forms like literature (biography, memoir etc.) incorporates certain ideology, common ideas of interest. Susan Sontag commented, ‘All memory is individual, unreproducible -- it dies with each person. What is called collective

⁴ *Trek Out of Burma*. The Anglo-Burmese Library, 2009. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.
<http://www.angloburmeseibrary.com/trek-out-of-burma-1942.html>

memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened' (Sontag 85-86) Every community has its own 'stipulation' and 'selection' of significance, and on this issue the Bengali narratives of evacuation differed from those of Europeans.

The majority of Bengali narratives of evacuation, though written later, were about the events of 1942 because the largest migration/ evacuation of the Indian population from Burma took place in this year. The Indians left Burma through different routes: for example, Rangoon- Calcutta sea-route, Rangoon- Chittagong sea-route, overland route via Taungup Pass to Akiyab then on to India by sea. But when the war got intensified and Japanese forces began to take control of the situations and places, sea routes were closed and Indian refugees were being funnelled to Myitkyina, Chindwin valley to Imphal. The most difficult journey was a fifty kilometres stretch from Tamu to India where the refugees had to cross on foot the mountains which loomed high and the forest stretch which was unbroken. It was the last route, the most perilous one, which feature in most of the Bangla narratives.

Hugh Tinker called this Indian evacuation 'a forgotten long march' as it was hushed up in history and went unnoticed under much flaunted military history. Moreover, the struggle and death of Indian evacuees, on the hilly tract have gone into oblivion from collective memory and ignored in official documents. This last stretch, which could be called death tract, did claim lives, the number of which was never properly counted. All government promises were proved hollow as Indian evacuees arrived at this tract. They knew that from there they needed to make 'a supreme effort' to struggle through to safety. The situation worsened for the evacuees once the British troops arrived in this place on their retreating journey to India. They 'pushed the refugees aside, laying hands on all supplies, and utilizing all available military transport' (Tinker, 10). Hapless and wearied Indian refugees, without any medical aid, suffered heavily during their journey as epidemic diseases began to take toll on them. Use of contaminated water from common sources, and poor sanitation conditions at different camps along with anopheles mosquitos infested jungles quickly spread cholera and malaria which resulted into a substantial number of deaths. In the narratives of Bengali evacuees, there are descriptions of how they waded through the treacherous hilly tract strewn with fresh and decomposed dead bodies of their fellow compatriots. The personal struggle

became a part of greater communitarian ordeal where the line between personal and communitarian often got blurred.

Becoming refugee was always a sudden process, and there had been hardly any time for acclimatization with such violent rupture. One became refugee overnight and had to leave his/her familiar life for an uncertain one and that too through great ordeal. Writing about that ordeal long after the event, in a relatively more secured situation, would invite the memory not only of the ordeal but also of the life before the catastrophe. In most of the cases, it happened to be a life of blissful happiness, which would create a sharp contrast with the pain and uncertainty of evacuee life. Tragedy seemed unbearable when the erstwhile life made a sharper contrast with the pathetic agony of the present time. So the Bengali narratives of evacuation often put forth pre-war happy serene Bengali life in Burma.

Ujān Srote (Sailing Upstream) is a memoir of Nilima Dutta who was born in Rangoon in 1929. She spent her childhood in Memyo, the summer capital of the British administration in Burma. She had to leave Memyo, a place of extraordinary scenic beauty coupled with peaceful serene life, in 1942, when she was only 13. She recalled her life in Memyo before the War as one blessed with happiness, peace, and love:

Our childhood in Memyo was much like its uncontrollable stream on Chichang Hill, which was called Laughing Water. Our days flowed on with much ease and happiness. We were being brought up with lot of affection of our parents in the lap of a beautiful nature. ... Our father used to take us to the lake for a walk. We, two sisters, went with him wearing colourful fur coats which had fur-made squirrels in place of collars. The faces of the squirrels were nicely made of china-clay. The lake was surrounded by rows of pine, oak, beleric, and many unknown giant trees. There were small hedges at the feet of all these big trees glowing with yellow blossoms. The lake water rippled when the gentle evening wind touched it. (*Ujān Srote*, 18)

The Bengali life in this small hill station of Memyo went on unperturbed with its ‘Bengali Vernacular School’, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Saraswati Puja and other Bengali festivities. All Bengali families had enjoyed *bonhomie* among them, and participated every Bengali occasion happily. But this happiness soon ended, ‘When our childhood days were sailing by

unburdened like autumn clouds with unblemished happiness, there came the World War, and it pounced on us like a ferocious monster'. (*Ujān Srote*, 23)

Beauty and serenity of nature in Burma, which made childhood days of Nilima Dutta a blissful experience to be contrasted with imminent ordeal of sudden evacuation, also appear in the evacuation narrative of another Bengali woman writer Manasi Mukhopadhyay in her book *Bidāy Burma* (Farewell to Burma). Unlike Nilima Dutta, Manasi left Burma much at an advance age when she was the mother of two daughters. Accompanied by her husband and daughters, Manasi took the most difficult mountainous route of Tamu which claimed lives of thousands of evacuees. Amidst the horror of the journey and constant mortal fear, Manasi was mesmerized by the beauty of this lonesome part of Burma. Her book is as much about the ugly ordeal of human crisis as it is about the beautiful Burmese nature en route. Annadashankar Ray, in the 'Introduction' of *Bidāy Burma* commented, 'The beauty of nature could make one forget his ordeal only for a day or two. But she [Manasi] remained engrossed into nature days after days, nights after nights. It had sustained her though her health was failing and the journey was a perilous one. ... That nature helps man to survive is a certain truth. This book makes us forget the ugliness of life's drudgery, and we take a dip into the beauty of nature to purge ourselves of all the blemishes of life' (*Bidāy Burn*, 2). It is interesting to note that what could have been a book full of sordid details of a refugee family's perilous journey, turns out, ultimately, to be a nature book.

Climbing up a stiff mountain path was one of the most difficult parts of the journey, and for Manasi it was almost an impossible task as she was ill. But once she got an opportunity to take a little bit rest under the shade of a bamboo grove she noticed:

At our back there was a high mountain surrounded by bamboo groves, and in front of us there was a riot of green stretching towards the horizon. It seemed as if a green carpet covered the entire world. The sun was now at the mid-sky, and its bright rays falling over the mountains like a stream. The blue of the sky was so deep it often appeared dark. Nestled on this deep azure, the white clouds seemed like bouquet of flowers... We had lost everything, and we could only blame our fate for that, but we were fortunate too. Would we ever come to this place, as we did today, to see the

beauty and serenity of nature here? It was our great attainment in life though we were suffering enormously'. (*Bidāy Burma*, 126-127)

Evacuation march gave Bengali women an opportunity to undertake an ‘adventurous’ journey otherwise impossible to them. A sense of freedom, and a close physical proximity with untamed wild Burmese nature often compensated their loss of erstwhile happy and secured life at home. On an uncertain and dangerous boat journey upstream against sharp currents of Chindwin River, Nilima Dutta saw from her small *dinghy* the dark night in the wilderness:

With a great wonder I began to observe that the feeble light of our *dinghy* was trembling on the dark water of the river. I saw the jungle closing on us, and often a hint of light from some human habitat far away. The sky above us was dark studded with twinkling stars. At that moment I did not feel any fear or anxiety. Even the uncertainty of reaching a home, and our peacefully secured life that we had left behind for this uncertain journey could not sadden me. Only a sense of overwhelming awe and a silent rupture stood out to send all my fear to repose. (*Ujān Srote*, 26)⁵

The abundance of Burmese nature and its calming effect on departing desperate Bengali evacuees is one of the major features of Bangla evacuation narratives, and this feature is particularly conspicuous in women’s narratives. In comparison, Bengali men’s narratives are prosaic, more inclined to describing the difficulty of the journey and contemporary political situations.

One of the earliest written Bangla narratives of evacuation, written within two years of the event, was a memoir *Bomār Bhoye Burma Tyāg* (Leaving Burma in Fear of Bomb) by Manoranjan Chakraborty. This book is illustrated mostly with hand-drawn illustrations depicting scenes of action and violence along with a family photograph of the author. The illustrations give the book an appearance that of many contemporary Bangla thrillers, which might be a marketing strategy of the publisher/ seller (though the name of the publisher and publishing detail could not be retrieved). Nevertheless, it is a personal memoir of one who

⁵ It is worth mention here that Nilima Dutta became refugee twice in her life. She had to leave her home, for the second time in 1946 when Hindu-Muslim riot forced her to be a refugee, once again, from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and came to Calcutta. She had to leave many years of her life in a refugee colony near Calcutta.

tried to save his family of nine members including a child who was only fifteen days old. The anxiety of a husband to bring his wife and children safely to his native home at Faridpur is the theme of the book which is apparent from the dedicatory verse of the author. The verse was dedicated to his wife ‘Renu’, it recalled their struggle through all adverse situations to keep their children away from violence⁶.

This verse was, perhaps, true for all Bengali men who wanted to take their families safely to India from war-ridden Burma.

The book, notwithstanding its sentimental dedicatory verse, was illustrated, as mentioned earlier, to make it appear more as a thriller than a personal memoir. The narrative, too, was manipulated with the same objective in mind, often broken with sensational subtitles given in bold letters with glyphs (what we nowadays understand as ‘Bullets’). Besides, it has often diary-like entries with exact date of the event. For instance, the very first chapter entitled ‘Siren’ starts with bold and ‘bulleted’ subtitle ‘23 December (1941)’ which would describe a sudden blow of siren alerting people of Rangoon about a possible Japanese air raid. Along with the matter-of-factness of such ‘diary entries’, catchy and sensational subtitles, like ‘With the dead’ (মৃতের পাশে), ‘Death-Run’ (মরণ- দৌড়), ‘Roar of the Bomb’

⁶ ‘মনে পড়ে দিনগুলি দুঃস্ময়ের মত
সভয়ে শিহরি উঠি কণ্টকিত চিত।
সম্মুখে গর্জিছে শক্র- কাঁপে জল- স্থল,
পশ্চাতে লুণ্ঠন আশে লম্পটের দল।
আমরা কম্পিত দোঁহে- নীড়ে যথা পাখী
গুটিপাঁচ শাবকেরে পক্ষপুটে ঢাকি।
বৃক্ষ বাহি ওঠে সর্প, আগইয়া আসে,
মাথার উপরে বাজ উড়িছে আকাশে।
ছুটিতাম উর্দ্ধশাসে হাতে হাত ধরি
বক্ষে চাপি শিশুকণ্ঠি- বাঁচি কিম্বা মরি।
অবশেষে নাহি জানি কোন্ পুণ্যফলে
পার হনু দীর্ঘপথ কোন্ মনোবলে।
অতিক্রম নদ- নদী আর গিরি- বন,
মিলিল আশ্রয় পুনঃ আপনার জন।

(বোমার গজন), ‘Bombing Again! Near Home’ (আবার বোমা! ঘরের কাছে), ‘Strangers of Night’ (নিশিথের আগন্তক) are abundantly strewn all over the narrative.

It is not difficult to recognize that in spite of all ‘thriller-like’ appearance, *Bomār Bhoye Burma Tyāg* is a personal memoir, but it shows that an evacuation experience could also be a potential theme for a Bangla thriller. A Bengali hero making his way through dense forest, high mountains, treacherous terrains, un-navigable rivers, wild animals, vengeful, tribals, and Japanese enemies at his heel would offer an ideal motif for a thriller or adventure fiction. Sourindramohan Mukhopadhyay, who was a popular writer of Bangla thrillers, wrote *Burmāy Jakhan Bomā Pare* [When Burma was Bombed] based on adventure of three Bengali friends on their way to India leaving Rangoon. They also fled from Rangoon, but unlike other Indian evacuees, they took an uncharted route and moved alone on their launch along Ho and Brahmaputra rivers. Their journey was exciting with far too many incidents including confronting some uncivilized and hostile tribals. They escaped the hideous plot of those uncivilized people to kill them with the help of a tribal girl who eventually had fallen in love with one of the members of their group. Towards the end of their journey through dense forest they chanced upon a forest dweller who was a European but embraced an alienated forest life away from civilization. He with his long traces of locks, beard, and nails appeared like a ‘gorilla’, and the narrator immediately compared him with ‘*Kāpālik* of Bankimbabu’s novel *Kapālkundalā*’ though ‘the English can never be a *Kāpālik*’. (*Burmāy Jakhan Bomā Pare*, 68)

Bengali fictional narratives written on evacuation were not necessarily about adventure only; the human relationships in strenuous situations during the evacuation became a subject for some narratives. It was a worst time for human crisis, where an overwhelming urge to move ahead for one’s own life with very little or no resources made all human and familial relationships redundant. A short story ‘*Palātak*’ (The Fugitive) by Narayan Gangopadhyay, published in *Shanibārer Cithi*, told the story of this crisis during the time when Indians were still evacuating Burma and arriving in India as refugees. It started with ‘They were coming back. They were coming back from Rangoon to Prome, from Prome to Podang, and from there to Chittagong on foot walking 120 kilometers of perilous hill tracts’. (‘*Palātak*’ 189) The story describes how a disabled member of a group was pushed into a

deep canyon intentionally to expedite the journey of others. This evacuation and concomitant crises, according to the story, was a continuation and repetition of history which started much earlier with the story of treachery, sibling rivalry, secret assassination, and bloodshed. ‘This was the very route that the Nawab of Bengal Shah Suja took to save his life. Now these people had taken the same for their lives. Would history only go on repeating himself? Wouldn’t it ever try to find a new course?’ (*Palātak* 304). The story ends when one of the women in the group gave birth to a child on her way, possibly symbolizing a new time, a new history to begin.

The Bengali retreat from Burma during the time of the World War II marked finally the end of a very important phase of Bengali relationships with Burmese culture and history. This retreat failed to attract much sympathy and interest as it was held to be some sort of ‘home coming’ though the journey was one of the most disastrous one. Moreover, the Partition of India in 1947 and its concomitant violence and displacement which were to happen within five years of the Evacuation overshadowed the Burmese tragedy of the Indians. It is interesting to trace the trajectory of change in Bengali perception of Burma: from a place of desire and exoticism to an ominous place of death and destitution. The latter perception would become apparent in numerous Bangla thrillers and detective fictions where Burma was represented as an ominous place for crime and criminals. Besides, there was a sense of loss and defeat along with a sense of guilt. Deserting a country at the time of its crisis, particularly one which had been providing them shelter and food for so many years was morally considered nothing but an act of opportunism and cowardice. Some Bangla narratives implicitly admit blatant ‘opportunism’ of Indians in their attempts to flee this country during the time of the World War. (*Irābatī*, 193) In this sense, for Indians leaving Burma during the World War was a shameful exodus, and they could never claim that honour to be a national tragedy. But when have individual suffering and displacement ever cared for or demanded the epithet ‘national’? For these have more often than not remained confined to the individual sphere and resisted sweeping generalization.

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Intersecting Sexuality and Nationalism: Reading Queerness in *Funny Boy*

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This paper shall interrogate the interplay between sexuality and gender in the novel, *Funny Boy*. The work of Selvadurai allows readers to rethink the nation outside a patriarchal heteronormative paradigm and recognise a model of queer South Asian Nationalism. Contemporary sexual identities in South Asia are constructed out of the effects and perceptions of tradition and modernity and colonisation and globalisation (Bose and Bhattacharya, 2007). Arjun Chelvaratnam's (Arjie's) queer body and gender play in the novel dislocates the neat identity categories imposed upon the citizen by the nation. The nation state thus becomes a site of anxiety and negotiation for the dissident sexual subject. By tracing and conflating the national with the sexual, this paper shall take an intersectional focus (Dasgupta and Gokulsing, 2014, Dasgupta, 2014) and seek to locate the politics of sexualities in a specific South Asian nationalist (Dasgupta, 2007) context.

Contextualising gender play

Selvadurai's 1994 novel, *Funny Boy* is made up of six discrete episodes tracing the childhood of an upper middle class Sri Lankan in Colombo against the backdrop of the ethno-cultural conflicts between the Dravidian Tamil's and Aryan Sinhalese. These conflicts are a direct allusion to the riots of 1983. There have been numerous studies (Dasgupta, 2006; Salgado, 2004) which have traced the postcolonial dynamics of nation building, migration and the diaspora, however have often failed to address the queer body which implicitly and explicitly frames the discourse of nation and nationhood in this novel.

In the very beginning of the novel, the protagonist Arjie recalls 'the remembered innocence of childhood are now coloured in the hues of the twilight sky. It is a picture made even more sentimental by the loss of all that was associated with them.' (5) Such a phrase coming in the very beginning of the novel signals what Gopinath (2005:165) argues is a

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vantage feature of exile literature, ‘one that evokes from the vantage point of exile an idyllic, coherent pre exilic past shattered by war and displacement’. This exile is not just on the physical realm but as I shall argue also one that is catalysed by dissonant sexual/gendered identity. Selvadurai begins the novel by introducing the readers to a game of ‘bride-bride’ where Arjie is rudely disciplined for wanting to play the part of a ‘bride’. This childhood indulgence of gender transgression is first identified and chastised by his cousin, Tanuja (Her Fatness), who even at a young age is made aware of gender roles within Sri Lankan society. She says, “The groom cannot help with the cooking... Because grooms don’t do that.” Connell (1996) in her study on masculinity and gender construction in schools has argued that from a very early age practices such as curriculum division, sports and the disciplining system within the aegis of an educational establishment reinforces a gender dichotomy which Tanuja recognises and uses to chastise Arjie.

But, he’s not even girl... A bride is a girl not a boy. She looked around at the other cousins and then at me. A boy cannot be a bride, she said with deep conviction. A girl must be the bride (11).

The pleasure Arjie takes in playing the bride is a matter of grave consternation for his parents and the adults. Arjie’s uncle Cyril recognises this and warns his parents ‘looks like you have a funny one here’ (14) His father is likewise worried that ‘If he turns out funny like that Rankotwera boy, if he turns out to be the laughing stock of Colombo’ (*ibid*) it would be their fault for failing to check his gender non conformity. Similarly Arjie is also banned from watching his mother dress in her room, a source of great pleasure for him and thus in turn exiled from this carefully inscribed space of gender play and being forced to enter a much more rigid world of gender conformity. Arjie says “And then there would be loneliness. I would be caught between the boy’s and the girl’s worlds, not belonging or wanted in either.” (39)

Gopinath (2005: 170) argues:

The gendered spacialisation of the domestic sphere in the story mirrors and reiterates nationalist framings of space that posit the ‘inner’ as an atavistic space of spirituality and tradition, embodied by the figure of the woman, as

opposed to the outer male sphere of progress, politics, materiality and modernity.

Another point we would like to pick up is that whilst Tanuja, the cousin is described as large and booming with masculine traits her masculinity is not chastised, rather it is Arjie's effeminacy which becomes a point of contention. Nationalism is implicitly connected to dominance and power (Dasgupta, 2016a; Dasgupta, 2016b) which in turn is characterised through hegemonic masculinity. The patriarchal order demands masculine privilege and masculine power (Gill, 1997), thus the female body of Tanuja (with its masculine features) is relatively unproblematic within this discourse.

Moments of Arjie's cross dressing as well as his pleasure in watching his Amma dress up in her sari, a specific idea of gender performativity is introduced (Butler, 1990). According to Butler this performativity is a set of parodic practices that disrupt categories of the body, gender and sexuality. Selvadurai's gender play is transformative and whilst Arjie's queerness disrupts that gender hierarchy, Selvadurai also introduces several other facets of information to reiterate how the gender politics works within the postcolonial. Arjie's Amma (mother) for instance is described only through her motherhood, the fact that she has an agency of her own is not explored by Arjie until he meets Daryl, his mother's former lover. It is only through this introduction that he realises the engendered nature of Sri Lankan society.

It is also interesting to point out that queerness alone does not disrupt some of the gender machinations of identity. In fact recent debate (Dutta, 2012; Dasgupta and Gokulsing, 2014; Pacoe, 2011) has shown that homonormativity (Duggan, 2002) has perpetuated racial, class and gender discrimination. There is systematic discrimination against effeminate subject positions (femmephobia). Lisa Duggan (2002: 179) writing about homonormativity suggests that it is 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption'. Shehan articulates this when he says to Arjie 'Don't be a Girl' (249) to imply Arjie's weakness, drawing a stereotype to attributes of the female identity when Arjie is forced 'to become a man' (210) and is sent to Queen Victoria Academy 'The Best School of All.'

Whilst the female/cross dressing/queer space is conflated within the perimeters of this novel we would argue that this space of transgression and gender performance is also acutely saturated with the discourse of homonormativity, an area which needs further exploration. The space of gender play also allows for Arjie's queer desires to be articulated and express. Desire here is literally transformative in the imagination of an accepted social space and a way in which Arjie can reclaim his 'home'. Arjie ponders, "I knew something had changed. But how, I didn't altogether know." (39)

Home: Between borders

Sayantan Dasgupta (2006) has argued that the travel motif in the novel implies the potential of transgression of boundaries as defined by discourses of nationhood and nationalism. Borrowing Beckett's (2004) argument of heterosexuality as a border, my argument would be that any transgression of sexual and gender codes as appropriated by social norms would then be a point of entry to examine and understand how borders are maintained within the joint purview of the national and the sexual. Arjie's childhood provides the first instance of entering this 'border crossing'. Transgression however is not just on the level of the sexual alone. As sociologist Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) pointed out, issues of race and gender need to be addressed within a composite framework. Dasgupta and Gokulsing (2014) have argued that the complexity of sexuality in interplay with other social categorisations and power differentials such as ethnicity, class and race make it a potent site for interrogating the boundaries of nationalism. Arjie's first transgression is his gender (and later sexual) identity then his second is falling in love with a Sinhalese. This cross ethnic transgression is also present in the narrative of Aunty Doris whose family have emigrated leaving her alone for marrying a Tamil (when she is a Burgher) and Radha Aunty who later falls in love with Anil who too later falls in love with Anil who is a Sinhalese. Through this narrative, Selvadurai further builds up a dialogue on how the state and society deals with transgressive and unsanctioned relationships. This exile or travel from the space of sexuality and gender shadows the other various exiles that Arjie faces in each of the other chapters when he comes to understand the constraints imposed by gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class. This project of mapping spaces of impossibility within multiple discourses necessitates an engagement with particular cultural forms and practices that are considered legitimate sites of resistance and enquiry. Gopinath (2005:199) citing Appadurai and Breckenridge says public culture is a

'zone of cultural debate... tensions and contradictions between national sites and transnational cultural processes play out.'

Borrowing Anderson's (1991) work on the imagined community, we must remember that a community only exists because it forcefully creates a 'mythic commonality' through the use of national symbols and artefacts to relate a common story even at the cost of silencing the subaltern voice (Spivak, 1988). In a recent conversation, Spivak and Butler (2010: 4-5) writing about the 'state' contends:

If a state is what binds, it is also clearly what can and does unbind. And if the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly if not powerfully then it alsounbinds, release, expels, banishes.

Queer scholarship in recent years (Beemyn, 1997) has increasingly focused on the importance and specificity of space and place in shaping the lives of queer men and women. General histories have often assumed that people across South Asia have shared many experiences. Recent studies by scholars such as Dasgupta (2007) have problematised the disjunction and fractures of such a homogenous history. He argues, 'The imperatives of nationalism in South Asia were also rendered more complex because of the diversity of population in this part of the world. The nation in Europe was built out of homogeneity... no such fusion can be discerned in the case of either India or Pakistan or Sri Lanka' (xxiv). Beemyn (1997:2) also argues that community studies highlight the distinctions between the lives of queer people in different regions, cities and neighbourhoods. In the Sri Lankan context understanding the queer experience (or the lack of) would mean focusing on the micro level community history as well as the macro level history across the region.

The interaction between feminist and postcolonial critique has enabled us to understand some of the co-implications of gendering, sexuality and post colonial nation building. Anne Mcclintock (1997: 89) argues that nations are 'are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed... nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference.' Selvadurai's attention to alternative sexualities in contemporary Sri Lanka is directed statewise, as it were, at least to the non centrality of this cultural history in Sri Lankan scholarship and the pressing need for an alternative attention to its material history. With *Funny Boy*, Selvadurai brings non

heteronormative sexuality back into the boundaries of nation, home and family, by showing how ethnicity and sexuality are connected through anxieties about class (and community) that circulate within familial, ethnic and national spaces. The novel demonstrates how at moments of intense national self scrutiny, the private world of love is called upon to symbolize public, national values. Arjie's narrative illustrates in a microcosm the power negotiations of class, gender and sexuality that marked Sri Lanka (and consequently the whole of postcolonial South Asia) in the twentieth century. Within these struggle zones of sameness and difference, the self and the other are marked out. This aspect is highlighted especially in Arjie's new school Queen Victoria Academy.

Throughout the novel Selvadurai presents identity through various spatial constructs—the children's gender marked spaces of play, Arjie's mother's dressing room and so on. Selvadurai's conceptualisation of space is both a gender and racialised terrain which mimics the territoriality of the larger space of the Sri Lankan nation state (Jayawickrama, 2005: 124).

As Bhabha (1990) has articulated in his thesis on nationalism, the boundaries of modernity are enacted within the ambivalent temporalities of the nation space. Citing Gellner he argues that homogeneity, literacy and anonymity are the key traits. Arjie's disorientation stemming from the realm of the unhomely (Bhabha, ibid) is intensified due to the hybrid nature of the nation state as well as the disjuncture caused by Arjie's own queerness. The queer figure in South Asia remains illegible and an estranged figure from the constructs of the home, family and nation. The precariousness of this border excludes and denies his existence. Whilst Arjie's constantly battles and contests the borders imposed on him, the reclamation of the queer space within Selvadurai's novel operates on some level at a loss.

Henderson (2013) states that 'recognition takes many forms, though some categories of social difference like sexuality have been more amenable to a positive politics of recognition' (71). Selvadurai explores the challenges through Arjie's own family. His older brother Diggy's apparent homophobia and recognition of Arjie's queer leanings through his friendship with Shehan.

Diggy: I can't wait for Appa to meet Soyza. Then he'll definitely know that you're..." He stopped himself but I knew he was talking about what my father seemed to fear was wrong with me.

You're talking through your hat. I said in a dismissive tone. Amma and Appa will like Shehan. Everybody likes Shehan. You know I do. Very much.

The statement had the desired effect on Diggy. He looked at me intently. What do you mean you like Shehan very much?

He shook his head and stood up. You don't. He crossed to the door but before he went out he said. You just be careful. (Selvadurai, 256)

Diggy's discomfort is made apparent when Arjie registers his queer desire for Shehan by declaring he liked Shehan very much. When further provoked, Arjie wasn't exactly sure how to articulate this strange liking he had for Shehan. But Diggy's dismissal of this queer desire (You don't) and subsequent warning to Arjie is responsive of the narrative of loss and disillusionment (de lauretis, 1991) that Selvadurai plays with throughout the novel.

Jayawickrama (2005: 127) argues that Arjie's disorienting vision provides the clearest perspective and his sense of relationship with others provides more viable connections than those offered by those around him and the nation at large. We agree with Jayawickrama's thesis, however we would like to extend it further by claiming that Selvadurai was acknowledging the violence of identity politics (religious, ethnic and gender) and through the figure of Arjie was critiquing these identity politics. The queer as Butler (1993) has contended is less an identity and more of a critique of identity. She argues that the term will be dispelled, revised and ultimately rendered obsolete yielding to the demands and resisting the exclusions through which it is mobilised. This is the ambivalent reassurance that Arjie's character creates within the postcolonial modernity of the nation.

Policing Desire

The text is saturated with the narrative of desire. This desire is both heterosexual and segregated (Amma and Daryl; Radha and Anil), an intimacy of friendship and support (Jegan's defence of Arjie) and one of queer attachment (Shehan and Arjie). Arjie is attracted to Shehan almost instantaneously. Whilst this is physical, he is also fascinated by his rebelliousness and defiance of power and authority (he wore his hair long).

That night I dreamt of Shehan. We were in Otter's Club pool, swimming and joking around. He was in a very mischievous mood, and every time I spoke to him he answered in Tamil, knowing that I did not understand. He swam away from me and I chased him until finally I caught him in the deep end. I wound my legs around his so that he couldn't escape. He splashed water in my face and tickled me, but I would not let him go. I was very aware of the feel of his legs against mine ad of the occasional moments when, in trying to prevent him from getting away, my chest would rub against his. (242)

Arjie's father took an instant dislike to him. Arjie at one point wonders if his father had sensed Shehan's 'difference' (262). Rao (1997) argues that Appa's dislike for homosexuality is unacceptable to his maleness. Homosexuality threatens to destroy his patriarchy and posed a threat to his masculinity. This is demonstrated when he forces Arjie to join the Victoris Academy where 'the Academy would force [him] to become a man' (210). However this has an opposite effect on Arjie who discovers and becomes aware of the older boys at the school 'who swagger along the railway lines or on the beach, their arms around one another' (Rao, 1997:124).

However what is also interesting to note is Arjie's own development and sense of identity. When Shehan first seduces Arjie in a garage behind his house, he feels violated although Shehan had already kissed him once before. He cannot come to terms with his sexual desire and feels repulsed by what has just happened, but as the narrative progresses Arjie realises that Shehan's act was not to degrade him but was rather his act of offering his love:

The difference within me that I sometimes felt I had, that had brought me so much confusion, whatever this difference, it was shared by Shehan. I was amazed that a normal thing like my friendship with Shehan- could have such a powerful and hidden possibilities (256)

However Arjie is also quick to reflect that this desire was something queer and needed to be hidden from the policing eyes of his family and the society at large:

Yet if my parents or anybody else discovered this love, I would be in terrible trouble. I thought of how unfair this was and I was reminded of things I had seen happen to other people, like Jegan or even Radha Aunty, who in their own way had experienced injustice. (274)

This section of the novel clearly articulates the intersectional focus of Selvadurai's queer politics. After all the queer figure ruptures traditional models not just of sexuality and gender but rather dominant systems of race, class and ethnicity. By its very nature the queer figure has an unfixed site of contestation and engagement, challenging normative structures and discourses (Butler, 1993; Dasgupta and Gokulsing, 2014)

The novel challenges the idea of belonging and the nature of queer exile that queerness brings with it. Arjie is aware that his family would not understand the nature of his relationship with Shehan and more largely his queerness. At this point he also realised unlike Radha who ultimately gave in to the family, he could never belong to it in the same way. His queerness marked his difference both from his mother (family) and to the larger ethnic/national registers.

What had happened between Shehan and me over the last few days had changed my relationship with her forever. I was no longer a part of my family in the same way. I now inhabited a world they didn't understand and into which they couldn't follow me. (284-285)

The ambivalence of queerness within the South Asian Nation State has been explored by various scholars (Bose and Bhattacharya, 2007; Gopinath, 2005 etc). The compulsory heterosexuality of the South Asian Nation state determines that queerness when explored and acted upon could only be done under the veil of secrecy³. Shehan is aware of this and at one point chastises Arjie for his seeming difficulty in coming out to himself about his identity

I know your type. You and the head prefect and others like you. Pretend that you're normal or that you're doing it because you can't get a girl. But in the end you're no different from me. (265)

³ See laundebaazi (Katyal, 2011; Khanna, 2009). Also see Seabrook (1999)

Final Note: The issue at stake

Scholars such as Vanita and Kidwai (2000) have argued that queer identities dismantle the ‘purity’ of national identities by disorienting the idea of commonality that ties up citizens together within a mythic citizenship.

Contemporary Sri Lankan identities it may be said are constructed out of the peculiar, particular multiplicitous effects and perceptions of tradition, modernity, colonisation and globalisation that are more often than not in confrontation with each other. Sexuality is today at once the most personal and private, the most public and the most political of issues that engages us both intellectually and practically in everyday life.

Textual representations of queer identities in Sri Lanka and more largely South Asia hasn’t had a linear development, it has changed over time due to societal and political change (Gopinath, 2005). Identities as Appadurai (1996) has argued exist and are contextualised within various scapes which individuals inhabit. These range from the home, nation to community. Anderson (1991) contends that a nation exists because people believe in them. Membership to this community is governed through a collective common origin, characteristics and interests. Thus the space of home, community and nation has at its foundation a shared commonality. Hall (1995:206) further argues that there are ‘people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language and inhabit more than one home’. This idea dislocates the notion of an homogenous nation with the heterogeneity of multiple identities. The idea of home (and visa a vis belonging) is in constant flux. This becomes more problematic when dissonant identities such as queer identities conflict with the national identity.

According to Vanita and Kidwai, the politically careless imputation of a schism between homosexuality and South Asian traditions only serves to nourish the hysterical and homophobic rhetoric of conservative lobbies at home, eager to perpetuate ‘the myth that same sex love is a disease imported into India from the West’ (Vanita and Kidwai, 2000: xxiv). The ongoing queer literary output from South Asia provides a compelling frame of cultural artefacts to construct a post liberalised, postcolonial Indian Queer history. By thrusting queer issues through the print/literary medium it has helped propel a greater queer consciousness and discourse. Literature works with the ‘intersubjective areas and relations between public

representations, including those of the communications media, and the lived consciousness of individual subjects' (Pickering, 1997: 63-64). Queerness is a narrative within and yet against heterosexual discourses and tries to achieve the effect of typifying the queer. We agree with Arjun Appadurai's (2001) sentiment that lives are 'inextricably linked with representations' (63-64) we thus find it extremely vital to link the contribution and representation of queerness in South Asia, 'not only as technical adjuncts but as primary material with which to construct and interrogate our own representations'. (*ibid.*)

In constituting national identities, Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* places the queer firmly within the discourse of nationalism. The novel constructs a new postcolonial queer identity that is neither uncritically western nor an unimaginative regression to traditional practices. The queer space of home is ruptured in the novel and is a challenge to the dominant ideologies of community based on ethnicity, class and nationhood. The formulation of queerness and queer identities forces the home space to be remoulded and remade by queer desire and subjectivity in non-heteronormative ways. Negotiating between different genders and sexual identities is also about negotiating various positions of power (Dasgupta and Banerjee, 2016). The novel captures this process of destabilization of identity addressing the shifting boundaries of sex, sexuality, gender and power and in the process questioning the intensely precarious borderlines of heteronormative patriarchal stereotypes and nationhood itself.

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Kindness of the White and Happiness of the Black: a Brief Analysis of the 19th Century White American Children's Literature

Mukulika Dattagupta¹

Anti-slavery feelings in the United States of America were present before and during the 1820s. However, these remained unorganized and unharnessed. There were anti-slavery societies established here and there all over the nation. The New York City Manumission Society (1785) and Pennsylvania Abolition society (1789) were some such societies. The American Colonization Society (1817) was the first national society established with the same concern. In the year 1831, William Loyd Garrison started the publication of a newspaper called 'The Liberator' from Massachusetts, to address the issue of anti-slavery. In 1832 he established the New England Anti-Slavery Society. With this the anti-slavery movement in the United States of America seems to take a concretized form. Arthur and Lewis Tappan from New York joined him to form the American Anti-Slavery Society. This organization was successful to a greater extent and strengthened the anti-slavery feelings in the nation. The above picture of the anti-slavery movement in America apparently seems to be very impressive, but it has other interesting aspects too.

We know that as per Christian doctrines all human beings are created by the God. Thus, making other human beings slaves was against the Christian ethics. So it was very important to strip the slaves of their human identity and to negate the idea of slaves as human beings with a soul. This made it possible for the white masters to remain good and faithful Christians while enjoying the liberty of owning slaves. The idea of heaven was something for a slave to look forward to. The slaves were made to believe that whatever they had failed to achieve in this life would be theirs in heaven. This bait of reward for the slaves in heaven was a very useful one. (Broderick 11)

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The American story books for white children began to add a moral flavour with slavery. In these stories the comparison between good and bad master became prominent. These story books mainly tried to establish the fact that the slave of the good master is happy whereas, the slave of the bad master is unhappy. Though these stories advocated a kind treatment of slaves by their white masters, they never spoke of the issue of freedom as such. Though there was an inherent anti-slavery note, in reality, it was all about the kind treatment of slaves. These moral lessons were obviously for the white masters and their children, so that slavery could be affirmed in the name of kindness and mercy. The norms which get affirmed among today's children will shape up the future of the society. Children learn from their books, be that in school or outside school. They also learn a lot from the adults around them. Thus children become a target audience for the literature produced by the dominant group of the society and in this case it was the white American. This source of children's literature in the United States of America was not only shaping up the white children but after the abolition of slavery it was also influencing black children. After the abolition of slavery in schools and in other sources of children's literature black children were unable to see themselves under a different light but inferior one. The books were still not about them. We will have a look into this issue too as we proceed.

Samuel Griswold Goodrich (1793-1860) was one of the American authors who tried to challenge the European aspects present in American literature and to infuse an American flavour into it. He was well known as Peter Parley, which was his pseudonym. In 1827 he published *Tales of Peter Parley about America*. It was one of the earliest texts to discuss the moral aspect of slavery. In his work he has drawn a comparison between how the Indians live in Boston and how the whites live in Boston. He had called the Indians ignorant people completely unaware of the comforts and curtsies of the white community in Boston. He had also portrayed the picture of his father as a kind white man, who thus had the friendship and loyalty of the Indians. (Parley/Goodrich 11-12). Throughout his book we encounter moral lessons for the white American children regarding their behaviour towards other races.

Many years later in 1882 Louise Clarke Pyrnelle (1850-1907) published a book entitled *Diddie Dumps and Tot*. In his work Pyrnelle, who was another 'liberal', considers blacks as a lazy lot of people. He makes it very clear in his book that though God had big plans for them (Blacks) but denied them all of that because they were a lazy lot. He reaffirms

the concept that God has appointed the white man to carry the burden of the black man. The inherent message in this book is that black man can never match the white man. The myth of getting appointed from the God easily justified the Christian doctrines. This myth also has an inherent encouragement for the white master to continue his task as the task of the God.

To establish its authority, the dominant group has to create myths about the dominated one. Myth comes into existence with only one objective and that is to overshadow the TRUTH. With a continuous practice myth establishes itself as the fact. In the world of myth there is no space for questioning. To enter into the world of myth, one has just to believe without any doubt or question. Myth uses our day-today language as its foundation. We know that it is a signifier and a signified that gives birth to a sign. This is how language functions in our day-to-day speech. In case of myth sign changes itself into a signifier to give rise to a new sign, which can be referred to as the mythic sign. It is due to the effect of this new mythic sign that we fail to identify the original signifier. Myth dilutes the density of the original signifier. (Bandyopadhyay 6) Myth is thus one of the primary tools used by the dominant authority to affirm its dominance on the dominated group. We know that society is always changing. Myth also keeps on changing its appearance to cope up with the social changes as per the requirement of the dominant authority.

Slavery did not go out of operation even when it became illegal in the United States of America. Paul DuChaillu (1831-1903) was a French American traveller. During the 1850s he travelled within the African continent for hunting adventures. He later on recorded his experiences in a book entitled *Stories of the Gorilla Country* (1868). In his work he had mentioned that he had the opportunity to watch a ship getting loaded with slaves. He records his sentiments at this point as follows, "I actually felt ashamed of being a white man!" (DuChaillu 23)

Though the title of his book sound a bit controversial, as also some of his descriptions of the continent, from the above remark it is very clear that anti-slavery feelings were becoming stronger with time. In his work he has also recorded how the African slave suppliers helped the white slave traders with the slaves. He has mentioned that community heads in Africa especially in the coastal regions were the major suppliers of slaves. They themselves had slaves for their own services. He talks about such a supplier named King

Bango. He does not portray him as a very pleasant personality. According to him there were slave depots in several territories in the area. (DuChaillu 112)

African slaves were mainly the victims of the internal warfare within the communities of the continent. The white slave traders cast the spell of the material comforts and benefits on the slave suppliers. Under this spell they never knew how the slaves and the slave suppliers were dehumanized in the United States of America, as the news from the other side of the Atlantic never reached them. We for sure have to keep this fact in mind before condemning the Africans responsible for the slavery of their fellow men and women.

It is interesting to note that in early American children's literature, the history of the origin of the slaves seemed to be completely missing. It was very much like the presence of the slaves in America from the very beginning. It was as if blacks were born on the American soil to serve the whites as their slaves. We have already discussed the aspect of morality attached with slavery, which resulted in the idea of the kind master and the happy slave. In white American children's literature this trend remained strong till the end of the century. A happy slave had a few fundamental characteristics:

"they were more than resigned to their positions; they accepted it without complaint, with good grace and enthusiasm. ...They were dumb, but loyal, grateful to their masters for providing for them, and proud to belong to a man of quality." (Broderick 27)

We get one such image in Thomson Nelson Page's (1853-1922) *Two Little Confederates*, published in 1888. Though the slave, Old Balla does not appear to be a fool. Books like this portray the pride of the slave in the financial worth of his/her respective master. For the white readers this was a funny and foolish aspect of the slave. We get another such foolish but happy slave in the portrayal of Aunt Chloe in *Elsie Dinsmore* (1867) by Martha Finley (1828-1909). How far this loyalty and happiness of the slave towards the white master was due to the kindness of the white master, and how far, due to the fear of the Ku Klax Klan could be a matter of further debate.

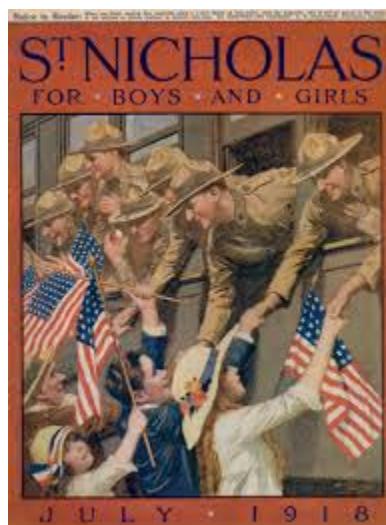
John Townsend Trowbridge (1827-1916) was a popular American author. His first novel was *Neighbor Jackwood* (1857). Then he published *Cudjo's Cave* in 1864. This work

talks about a runaway slave named Cudjo. No doubt that Cudjo's white master was not at all a kind master. On the other hand we also get another black slave with a happy master. He is called Pomp. Pomp was happy because his white master was kind. Trowbridge was a northerner and was well known as a 'liberal', but in his work too there is very little about the freedom of the slave. He seems to harp more on the moral issue of the white masters. He urges them strongly to show mercy and have kindness towards their black slaves.

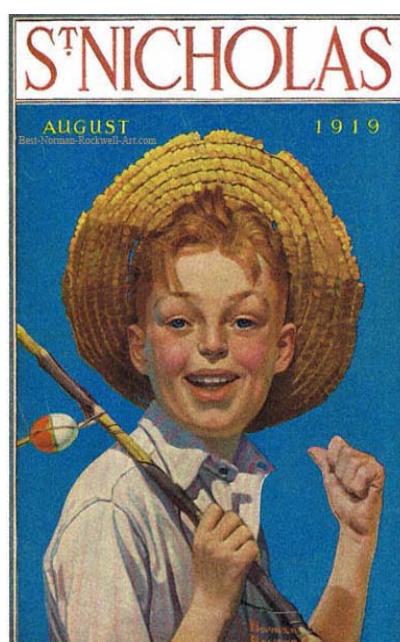
When the issue of abolition of slavery in the United States of America was at its peak it was necessary for the dominating white community to create the mythic sign of the happy slave. The slave who needed the supervision of the white man for his/ her salvation during the early stages of slavery in the United States of America were now projected as happy under the supervision of a kind white master. So the myth was that if the white master is kind his slaves are ought to be happy. Even in the texts which were published after the abolition, the dominant white America constructed the myth that the African Americans need the mercy and kindness of their white counter parts to lead their lives happily. To answer the question why African Americans need the kindness of their white counterparts even after the abolition of slavery, the dominant white created the myth of African American being innocent and stupid. For the dominating white America blacks were like children, who were unable to take care of themselves, unable to protect themselves and also were unable to make their own decisions. That was the reason there were images where white children were depicted to be more mature than a black adult. In all its forms the myth of the white dominant has functioned to affirm its dominance over the dominated black. Myth keeps on harping on the superiority of the dominant group and the inferiority of the dominated one. In the world of myth the belief of the dominant authority poses itself as the social belief. It negates the existence of any other ideology or belief of any other group.

Scribner's magazine *St. Nicholas* began its journey under the editorship of Mary Mapes Dodge (1831-1905). It was a very popular American children's magazine. Well-known authors like Joel Harris Chandler, Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling and many others have written for this magazine. This magazine too maintained the rift between the black and the white by retaining the stereotypicalities attached with the people of two colours. Throughout the magazine, whenever a black person has appeared, he/she has always appeared as a stupid, dumb, foolish and thus, incapable of taking care of themselves. In this

way their slavery gets justified. In some of its stories, white children are shown to be kind enough to take care of an old black slave. Also, the blacks in the stories published here seemed to be very happy and satisfied with their good luck for getting a kind white master. Not only in its language but also in its illustrations, it made very clear that America is the land of the whites. In many cases the magazine even considered blacks as uneducable people. Even long after the abolition of slavery the magazine continued to retain the stereotypical aspect of the two races.



Above us we can see the cover page of the issue of July, 1918 of the same magazine. It has only white faces. Children waving the soldiers are white and also the soldiers. The inherent message of this illustration is that all the American nationals are whites and the protector of the nation are also whites. So, there is no place for people of any other colour.





Above are the cover pages of the issues of August 1919 and May 1918 of the same magazine and we can see the portrayal of a young white boy and girl. Black children can never see themselves on the pages of this magazine. Children always want to see their own images within the books they read. In case of this magazine only white children of America are able to identify themselves on its pages. At the same time they get the message that it is an all-white world. Also it tells the white child that it is the kingfish in the pond. In reality this reduces all the chances of developing humanity to respect the diversity among children. These contains gentle doses of racism for the white children of America. (Lerrick 1)



Again, on the cover page of the issue of January, 1910, we see a white Santa Claus with only white children. Though at the very beginning of the first issue of this magazine, the editor refers to St. Nicholas as the own dear saint of all the children, the cover page of this particular issue does not support that. We can see very clearly that there are only white children portrayed here. This again affirms the idea that America and Americans mean whites and only whites.

The above discussion depicts a very clear picture of the power equation that functions in between the dominant and the dominated group of people. It is the dominating authority, which imposes its own ideology on the society and gives it the name of the social ideology. This imposed ideology showcases the cultural practices and the moral values of the dominating group as the right one to be followed. Thus, not only the culture but also the language of the dominant emerges as the one and only refuge of the dominated group.

There is a power equation between the relation of a child and an adult. It is the same power equation which is present in between the dominated group and the dominant group. The adult always seem to enjoy a dominant position and poses as the superior one. Thus in this case the adult creates the image of the child as the inferior one and promotes it in its ideology. As the child is unable to protect itself so the adult always takes the responsibility to protect the child. The adult trains the child not to question but just to obey the authority. An obedient child gets the reward of recognition from the adult whereas, a child who dares to differ and question gets punishment which may amount to rejection also. Adult punishes the child posing as the well-wisher of it and showcases its responsibility towards the child as its guiding light.

The dominant white man in the United States of America has always acted as this adult who has to take care every responsibility of the black man. Though this attitude of white superiority was not only limited within the boundaries of the United States of America, but for the convenience of our analysis we have restricted ourselves up to it. Black is the child here who needs protection and guidance of the white man.

It is a very effective way to make people think how happy and lucky they are – and this is by making them look down upon others who are not happy or lucky to that extent. This makes us forget our miserable situation and delivers a sense of satisfaction within, which in turn soothes the grudge one holds against authority and against the present situation. Behind the happiness of these slaves was the hint of security provided by the ‘kind’ master, which can never be an alternative to freedom. The kindness of the white master can make the rebel runaway slave forget his/her urge to become free.

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Dastan-e Amir Hamza in Text and Performance**Shaheen Saba¹**

“Once upon a time and a very good time it was...”

--- James Joyce, *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*²

The basic meaning of *dastan* or *qissa* is a story.³ *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* is an epic romance which is an amalgam of fantastic adventures, wars, conquests, love and heroic deeds of valour. The supernatural, magic and enchantment are abound. *Dastans* were narrated by *dastangos*⁴ in courts, coffee houses⁵ and market places. Frances Pritchett asserts that “it was a widely popular form of story-telling: *dastan*-narrators practiced their art not merely in coffee houses, but in royal palaces as well.” *Dastangoi* is a form of storytelling and also a performative art that was practiced for centuries by practitioners. This paper is an attempt to trace the evolution of *dastan* and the revival of *dastangoi* in contemporary times.

Dastans were usually orally narrated to audiences in public gatherings or in the royal courts and contributed to be a major form of art and entertainment in medieval and modern India. Similar kinds of performances exist in Arab and Iran (in Iran oral performances called *naqqali* are done mostly from Ferdowsi’s *Shahnamah*). It can be traced back to centuries, as early as seventh century when oral narratives of the valour and deeds of Prophet Muhammad’s uncle Amir Hamza travelled through Arabia, Persia and the Indian subcontinent; the expansion of the stories culminated into a marvellous chronicle.

There is a difficulty in chronicling the Hamza cycles as also the Arab ones due to its transposition and metamorphosis through time. Malcolm Lyons postulates:

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² Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. New York: Viking Press, 1994. Print.

³ Basically the words mean a story. They are often used interchangeably. Frances Pritchett draws a differentiation among them by using *qissas* for the short narratives and *dastans* for the longer narrative.

⁴ Basically the words mean a story. They are often used interchangeably. Frances Pritchett draws a differentiation among them by using *qissas* for the short narratives and *dastans* for the longer narrative.

⁵ In Tehran it was performed in coffee houses which had a gathering, in Delhi it was performed at the footsteps of Jama Masjid.

As an additional difficulty, whatever the processes of development may have been, there is a clear difference in background between desert cycles, such as those of ‘Antar, and the predominantly urban narrative of ‘Ali al-Zaibaq, as well as between the romance of Saif al-Tijan and the tribal saga of the Banu Hilal. The degree of assimilation varies to the extent that it may not be clear whether the common denominators are of greater importance than the differences.

Such questions are complicated by diffusion. Chauvin noted that in Muslim India ...Hamza here is the Prophet’s uncle, killed at the battle of Badr, whose story belongs to the myth-history centered on ‘Ali b. Abi Talib and other heroes of early Islam. From India this legend passed through Malaya to reach Java, by which time, as is noted in the Comparative Index, it had become confused, in character and detail, with the entirely different *Sirat Hamza* covered in this study. (6)⁶

This excerpt from a letter written by Mirza Asadullah Ghalib to the nawab of Rampur also sheds some light on the roots of dastan. He too traces the origin of *dastan* to be Iran:

On August 21, 1865, he writes to the nawab of Rampur:

‘*The Tale of Hamza* is a work of fiction, written by talented men of Iran in the days of Shah Abbas II [1642-1666]. In India they call it *The Tale of Amir Hamza*, and in Persia *the secrets of Hamza*. It was written something over two hundred years ago, but it is still famous and always will be.

He goes on to say that he has written an ode in the Nawab’s praise, which he encloses, incorporating characters and incidents from the Hamza story. He hopes the nawab will like it. (321)⁷

William L. Hanaway⁸ who has studied classical Persian literature closely, describes the Persian *dastans* as “popular romances” which were “created, elaborated and transmitted” by

⁶ Lyons, Malcom. *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and oral story-telling*. Vol 1. New York: Cambridge university press, 1995.

⁷ Russell, Ralph and Khurshidul Islam. Trans and Ed. *Ghalib, 1797-1869. Vol 1: Life and letters*. London: George Allen and Unwin ltd, 1969. Print.

professional storytellers. He lists the five prominent ones surviving from the pre-Safavid period, (a) stories that grew concerning Alexander the great, (b) Darius- the mighty Persian king, (c) Hamzah- Prophet Muhammad's uncle, (d) Emperor Firoz Shah and (e) Samak the Ayyar. The Hamzah romance turns out to be the most popular one.

It might appear surprising that even the elementary facts of the *dastangos* of the nineteenth century are not available because they have never been chronicled. The uniqueness of *dastan* lies in its oral nature which was brought to print in the nineteenth century. Talking about the genres of narrative in India Dhananjay Singh postulates that, 'broadly speaking, the Indian theoreticians have described three genres of narrative: (a) *Katha* (b) *Akhyayika* and (c) *Akhyana*, which together make up the Akhyana-jati (class of narratives).'⁹ (*Dastan-e Amir Hamza* would fall under the category of (b) and (c) if we try to place it on this classification as it is a long prose narrative concerning a legendary hero but yet it would escape the label of genre as *dastan* is a unique entity in itself. Unlike any avant-garde movements or periods in literature, *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* is singularly exclusive mode of narration.

Hamid Dabashi in the introduction to the English translation of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* titled as *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* postulates:

As soon as you want to nail the fact of a fiction it dodges, evades, and eludes you. Not just the honoured name of the Prophet's uncle but the common name of a Muslim revolutionary of Iranian origin, Hamza ibn Abdullah, a member of the radical sect of the Kharijites, has also been mentioned as the probable origin of *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*. So for Hamza either the Prophet's

⁸ Hanaway, William L. *Classical Persian Literature*. Iranian studies: Vol 31(1998). 3-4. Google Book Search. Web 16 Sep, 2014.

⁹ 'The first conceptual term, *katha*, encapsulates a thoroughly imagined narrative (Prabandha-kalpana), either in prose or verse, and is limited in its length and reach. *Akhyayika* is a narrative in prose, and uses, for its content, materials from the tradition or history, and it could either be narrated in first person, or let a narrator relate someone else's story. *Akhyana* is a narrative based on legends or myths, for example, the narratives in the Vedas that form the context of the hymns, like the narrative of Yama and Yami, Agastya and Lopamudra, and Jabali Satyakama. The *Ramayana* is classed as an *Akhyana*, based as it is on the legendary lore of the Rama as the scion of the Raghu race.' Quoted from Singh, Dhananjay. *Fables in the Indian Narrative Tradition: an analytical study*. New Delhi, 2011. p.2.

paternal uncle and the great warrior of Islam, or else the Kharijite revolutionary (take your pick) – either way, the valiant adventures of the fictive Hamza in the visible and the invisible worlds have traces of a Muslim revolutionary fighting for the noble cause of justice. That these bare historical facts have subsequently assumed phantasmagoric and fictive dimensions has to do with the popular sentiments and romantic appeal of these characters for subsequent Muslim generations. (xii)¹⁰

Most of the sources claim Hamza to be the prophet's uncle. The origin of Amir Hamza is also mentioned in an article by Shahnaz Aijazuddin:

The *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* is ostensibly the life of Hazrat Hamza bin Abdu l Muttalib, the paternal uncle of the Holy Prophet Mohammad. Hamza had the reputation of being the strongest man of the tribe of Banu Hashim and fiercely protected his nephew against his enemies from the tribe of Quraish. He followed the Holy Prophet after he migrated to Medina from Mecca. Hamza was killed in the battle of Uhud by a slave Sufiyan. The romance of Hamza may have originated from the story of another Hamza- Hamza bin Abdullah, a Persian rebel opposed to Khalifa Haroon-ur-Rashid. His equally exciting exploits and adventures were the source of many stories that could have been grafted onto the Arab Hamza, thus creating a super-hero who for being the uncle of the Holy Prophet was more acceptable.¹¹

The stories that celebrated the heroism of tribal war lords got a transformation at the advent of Islam, and began celebrating the valiant warriors who were famous before Islam and who upon the advent of Islam, embraced the new religion. Among such figures were 'Antara, Hamza Ibn Abd Al Muttalib and Hatim at Tai. Hamza Ibn Abd Al Muttalib was a member of tribe Quraish in Mecca. He embraced Islam two years after the first revelation. He was famous as a brave warrior and was awarded the title of 'Lion of God'. Hamza's origins are filled with as many probabilities as the text itself. But this has not prevented writers from writing it down, or storytellers from devising proud narrations. *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* is also

¹⁰ Dabashi, Hamid. 'Introduction'. Lakhnavi, Ghalib Abdullah, et al. *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*. Trans Musharraf Ali Farooqi. India: Random House, 2008. xii. Print.

¹¹ Aijazuddin, Shahnaz. "The Rediscovered Art of Dastan-goi". *Tehelka*. 17 Feb, 2006. Web. 23July, 2013.

a stark example of ‘competition narrative’. These narratives have long existed in the Islamic world.¹² It has in fact vested the text with a halo of ancientness and legendary myth by constant redrafting and grafting.

Parallels of *dastan* and *dastangoi*

A parallel of *dastangoi* is found in the Persian literary tradition. *Shahnamah* found expression as an oral narrative which is narrated and performed by a storyteller or a *Naqqal* (*Naqqal* tells as well as performs the story). The Persian oral tradition is different from Arabic oral tradition as the story is also performed apart from being told. Yamamoto describes the Persian storytelling tradition known as “*Naqqali* is a form of storytelling which includes both spoken and written words as well as performance. By including different versions of the story it provides an invaluable example of how the story is transformed according to different modes of delivery”.¹³ The oral narration of heroic stories mixed with religious and nonreligious content was popular among the common people.

There is a parallel cycle of the nature of Amir Hamza in Arab with similarities of names and places like Anushirwan that corresponds to Nausheravan, the vizier Buzurjmihr who is synonymous to Buzurjmehr, the Persian capital Midan and also jinn of Jabal Qaf. But it will be difficult to prove who has borrowed from whom. In his study of the Arabian epic Malcolm Lyons discusses *Sirat Hamzat al-Pahlawan*¹⁴ as one of the narratives of Arab but does not mention its source or writer; here is a glimpse:

¹² Nile Green in an article titled “Oral Competition Narratives of Muslim and Hindu Saints in the Deccan” observes that-‘In such narratives the Muslim holy man (generally though not exclusively cast as a Sufi) variously competes in the performance of miracles with the figure of a Hindu, Buddhist, shamanic, or Christian holy man. In other narratives, Muslim saints have been seen to compete between themselves, a tradition in which challengers (murndzi') competed in terms of engaging in miraculous or more simply pious acts. The theme of the contest, often involving a degree of trickery, is of course one of the oldest and most widely found of all folktale motifs and one that is also known throughout the Arab world’. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030336>>. Web. 23 April, 2013

¹³ Yamoto, Kumiko. *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry*. Brill, 2003. Print.

¹⁴ Historically, before grounding itself in Urdu, romance’s roots lie in Arabic and Persian literature per se. The popular Arabic romance -the Romance of Antar also called *Sira Antar* heralded the romance tradition besides *Sirat Hamzat al-Pahlawan*. In Arabic literary tradition, the genre of storytelling and romance is popularly known as *sira* or *qissa* in which the pre-Islamic Arab poets and narrators commemorated the heroism and bravery of tribal chiefs. *Sira* was marked with biographical details to

Another apparent confusion between the Persian Chosroes marks the *Sirat Hamzat al-Pahlawan*. This introduces Anushirwan and his vizier Buzurjmihr, to whom it adds Numan of Hira, ...Internal dating makes Hamza about twenty years old at the start of his adventures, which are extended for at least another fifty years.

For the compilers of this cycle, the historical existence of the Persian Empire was of importance...The Persian emperor is advised to get help from Mecca, and from then on the cycle concerns itself with the eclipse of Persian power and the rise of that of the Arabs.

For an audience who enjoyed the battle of Tangier, it was doubtless not much more difficult to accept that Hamza reaches Abyssinia through the barrier of darkness separating it from the jinn of Jabal Qaf....Land of Wonders and from the City of Sunrise...to condition the audience, by juxtaposing or superimposing fact and fancy, to accept the creative ‘reality’ of the narrative. (18)¹⁵

Dastan-e Amir Hamza arrives in Akbar's court:

Dastan-e Amir Hamza thrived at the court of Emperor Akbar who was so fascinated by the stories that he commissioned illustrations for it. The version from which the remarkable paintings were made during this period remains unavailable. They are representative of the Mughal School of painting. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi comments in a review:

The Persian *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* arrived in South India from Iran during the last quarter of the 16th century. It reached the court of Emperor Akbar, far into the North, by 1590. Akbar was so enamoured of the tale that he commissioned 1400 paintings to illustrate its high points.¹⁶

glorify the heroics of tribal warriors. The advent of Islam revolutionized the genre and tradition of *sira* which mushroomed into a significant literary form and acquired status of a genre for religious writings employed by Muslim writers and scholars to articulate the biography of Prophet Muhammad. Even though *sira* ceased to be used as a genre for oral storytelling the tradition of storytelling sustained itself and thrived throughout the history of Arab tribal era as well as after the advent of Islam.

¹⁵ Lyons, Malcom. *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and oral story-telling*. Vol 1. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.

¹⁶ Faruqi, Shamsur Rahman. Rev. of *Tilism-e Hoshruba*. *Middle Eastern Literatures*. 15.2 (2012). Web. 5 June, 2014. <<http://www.mafaroofi.com/reviews-hoshruba-I.htm>>

Percy Brown in his book *Indian Paintings* briefs us in this regard and says that the painting's anecdote dates back to the time when Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah and was in refuge in Kabul. Two painters called Syed Ali Judai and Khwaja Abdul Samaad Sherazi arrived at his service in 1550 AD. Humayun ordered them to compose *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* in paintings. This work spreads over hundred pages in twelve books. They returned to India with Humayun after he defeated his enemies. After Humayun, Akbar continued this work in his tenure. In the end Syed Ali Judai departed for Haj and in some years Abdul Samad completed the work. Many have mistakenly accredited Faizi as the author. Brown also remarks that Faizi can be dismissed as the writer of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* because he was born in 954 hijri. During Humayun's stay in Kabul there was nobody called Faizi.

Abul Fazal in *Ain-I Akbari* mentions *Amir Hamza* to be in twelve books. Abdul Qadir Badauni in his book *Muntakh-e But Tawarikh* and Mirza Allaudaullah Qozaini's *Nafa-e SulMaasir* also hold a record *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. According to Badauni, the story of Amir Hamza was in seventeen volumes illustrated over a period of fifteen years. Fazal comments that from his early youth, Akbar had shown great predilection for painting, he encourages such activities and upholds them as a means of study as well as amusement.

Sheik Sajjad Hosain in the preface to his translation of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* also briefs us about the origins of the text:

This book, it is said, was composed during the time of Akber-the-Great by his minister Amir Khusro to divert the Emperor's attention from the *Mahabharat*, the exploits in which had created an impression on his mind. It describes the chivalries of Amir Hamzah, the uncle of our prophet Mahomed, and the practical tricks of his friend Amar. Amir Hamzah was the son of Khajeh Abdul Motulleb, the chief of the Bani Hashim family, and was born in Arabia in the city of Mecca. Before the birth of our Prophet, he followed the religion of Abraham, and extended his arms and brought the idolatrous tribes to a sense of the True God. When Mahomed was born, he assumed *Islamism* and fought for the cause of *Islam*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hosain, Sheik Sajjad trans. *Dastan-e Amir Hamza: An Oriental Novel*. Patna: Khuda Baksh Library, 1992.

It was definitely not composed during Akbar's time. What Sajjad Hosain is trying to say here has always been said by practicing *dastangos* repeatedly. They often attribute the *dastans* to some big names in order to make it more established as a literature or they claim to have discovered it in an old trunk belonging to their ancestors and the source remains unknown. But the very fact of lending it an ancient halo marks it as special.

***Dastan-e Amir Hamza* in nineteenth century**

The most widely circulated among the *dastans* in nineteenth century India was *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza* contributed by *Abdullah Bilgrami* and *Ghalib Lakhnavi* published by the endeavours of Munshi Naval Kishore in 1871 with which I am concerned. Lakhnavi claimed the Urdu version to be a translation from a Persian one, but the Persian version has never been discovered. But the presence of Indian social life and culture hints us to believe that it was done from a South Asian version of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. This version was already in print for sixteen years when Munshi Naval Kishore thought of printing it with amendments by Abdullah Bilgrami who added ornate passages and verses to it in Persian. I call it as contribution because none of them wrote the text to its entirety but narrated it to the scribes at Naval Kishore Press. Ghalib Lakhnavi translated it to Urdu and Sheikh Sajjad Hosain reproduced and translated it to English as an "oriental novel". It was disseminated by folk storytellers and assimilated by individual authors and *dastangos* like Mahmud Jah, Amba Prasad Raza, Ghalib Lakhnavi etc in north India, particularly Lucknow, only to make them more popular and mesmerizing.

It passed on from one generation to other orally by *dastangos* who freely added (mostly added, rarely shortened) to the existing corpus of narrative. In the absence of manuscripts and records we do not have many dates. Initially it existed in the form of *rivayat*.¹⁸ Ali Jawad Zaidi writes about the tradition of *hikayat* in Urdu which is akin to fables

¹⁸Popular knowledge of Islam is transmitted in narratives of the lives of saints, extraordinary adventures, pious deeds, and attributes to prophets and saints. In Afghanistan this kind of short prose story recounting more or less concrete historical events is called *riwayat* which means both 'metaphorical short story' on the one hand and 'tradition' and 'transmission' on the other. In Persian (Dari) and Pashto, the words *hikayat* and *qissa* may also be used to describe stories of this kind which are not about specified historical events. The same can be said about stories in Baluchi called *nakl*.

and mythical stories. These forms existed before the short story and the novel sprang up in Urdu in the nineteenth century:

Much before the advent of short stories and novels we come across the voluminous literature of *dastans* and *hikayats* in Urdu. *Hikayat* is a generic term that includes what the western writers have identified as fable, myth and legend, while *dastan* is synonymous with the western concept of early romance. South's major contribution is Wajhi's *Sab Ras*, a metaphysical allegorical *dastan*, but Waqar 'Azim does not count it as a *dastan* because the author had not intended to tell a story. (122) ¹⁹

There are variations of the *dastan* such as *Bagh-o-Bahar*²⁰ or *Sab Ras*.²¹ But *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* is unique because of its volume and language. *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* also has a strong mythical backing which other new epics lacked. They were framed on *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* and older Persian epics and myths. Talking in the Indian context Indra Nath Choudhuri holds myth to be associated with *puranas*:

The word for myth in Indian context is *purana* and they are episodical. Here history changes into *purana*, so one cannot find the unity which one derives out of a cause and effect relationship. The *purana* keeps up its subterranean historical origin, but goes on adding, multiplying and expanding its body, aiming to bring home the archetypal meaning of the enduring totality.²²

Dastans also add and multiply like the *puranas*. A famous Chinese proverb says "A story expands by telling". This has been the case with *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. Faruqi ascertains the

¹⁹ Zaidi, Ali Jawad. *A History of Urdu Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993.

²⁰ A collection of allegorical stories in four books written by Amir Khusro, the pupil of Nizamuddin Auliya. It is patterned on *Thousand and One Nights*. Akin to *dastans* it belongs to the oral Persian literary tradition. Mir Amman translated it from Persian into everyday Urdu, under the title *Bagh o Bahar (The Garden and the Spring Season)*. Later, in 1857, Duncan Forbes retranslated it into English. The first Urdu book printed by a printing press in India was *Bagh-o-bahar* by Mir Amman, published in 1801.

²¹ The first book in Urdu is known to be *Sabras*, written in 1635-36 by Mullah Asadullah Wajhi. It's an allegorical mystical romance translated from the Persian Masnavi *Dastur-e-Ushshaq* and *Husn-o-dil* by Mohammad Yahya Ibn-e-Saibak, written about two centuries earlier. The copies of *Sabras* were handwritten as the printing press had not yet reached India at that time. <https://urduwallahs.wordpress.com/2013/04/12/the-beginnings-of-urdu-writings/>. Web. 21 June, 2016.

²² Vandana Sharma, ed. *Studies in Myth, Orality and Folklore in World Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2013. Print.

birth of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* to be unknown as it is surrounded by myths and probabilities. It travels from Persian to Arabic and then to other languages. This particular *dastan* has three to four versions of Hamza's death. This variation is a symbolic representation of the brief life in this world, it also shows the fact that people die different deaths. The multiple variations like the *sthala puranas* went through various issues narrated and compiled by many *dastangois* and authors with the onset of printing in India.

It has been translated into English as *The Adventures of Amir Hamza: Lord of the Auspicious Planetary Conjunction* (2008) by Musharraf Ali Farooqi. He took seven years to translate this thousand page adventure. Farooqi has done this translation from the 1871, Ghalib Lakhnavi and Abdullah Bilgrami version published by Munshi Naval Kishore press. This volume comprises of four books. Farooqi has done a very close translation of the text without disturbing the ornate passages as I have observed while comparing the original with the translation. One of the remarkable features of *dastangoi* was the opening lines that had to be very poetic and beautiful so that they arrest the listeners at once. Farooqi has retained them very well in his translation. This is evident from such openings in the text as quoted from the translation below:

The fingers of ancient scribes straddle the provident dark reed, galloping their mount in the sphere of rhetoric, and in this enchanting wise, speed the fleet gray steed of the pen in the domains of the page. (87)

Or

The imperious pen departs to conquer the dominions of rhetoric, girding itself to trek the blank stretches of paper, and delivers the account of Amir's journey, painting a host of new episodes and choice encounters before the mind's eye. (311)

It influenced Munshi Premchand (original name- Dhanpat Rai Srivastav, 1880-1936) and Devki Nandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* (1888) - the first prose in modern Hindi. In his childhood days Premchand was fascinated and later on inspired by the stories of *Tilism-e Hoshrubā* that he heard at the tobacconist shop. *Tilism-e Hoshrubā* is the most popular amongst the *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* series and comprises the fifth book. It is considered to be highly fascinating as it is filled with magic and enchantment in comparison to the earlier four

books and *dastangoi* narration is mostly done from this book. *Chandrakanta* bears the direct influence of *dastans* as witnessed in the case of eponymous protagonist Chandrakanta who is trapped in a *tilism* and the presence of notable *ayyars*.

Literary roots of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*

Historical backing of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* pales in front of the grandeur of the text. The real Hamzah was a hero fighting for a just cause but the volumes of fictional narratives that have sprung from it bear testimony to its sheer fantasy and splendid passages. Like many other adventures and stories this text also draws upon Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. As it has literary roots as well besides the legend it picks from, it is not purely mythological. It is man's tendency to assume literature to be a reflection of life or if not so associating it with some real events or characters to give it firm roots. *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* bears traces of the legendary Sassanid court of Iran, particularly the reign of Emperor Khusrau I (531-79 AD) popular as Khusrau Nausheravan the Just, and his wise minister Buzurjmehr. And as Hamid Dabashi remarks in the introduction to *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* that this royal background is fissured by intervening factors such as the tribal and rebellious origins of Hamza is balanced by the royal and sedentary court of Sassanids. But it does slice through bygone ages presenting a full size mirror of tradition, culture and language. We have many books in Urdu beginning with the word *dastan* (as it means a story) in their title, but that does not make them *dastan* in the compositional manner and matter.

Talking about the various heroic cycles and their circulation and narration Malcom Lyon remarks:

From the time of the Homerde, the ‘singers of embroidered words’, such reciters, together with their techniques of performance as well as of composition or adaptation, have been familiar to students of literature ...*The Ozidi Saga* from Africa is introduced as having no fixed text. All that each

teller of the story has is the plot, a grand design to which, like a master builder, he proceeds to give body and full expression. (2-3)²³

Musharraf Ali Farooqi shares an experience of discovering a travelogue at a Pakistani book shop. Titled as *Safarnama-e Makhdoom Jahanian Jahangasht*, it is the travelogue of a 14th century Hindustani Sufi saint Syed Jalaluddin (1307–1384 AD) of the Suharwardiya order. It was translated into Urdu as *Safarnama-e Makhdoom Jahanian Jahangasht* by Muhammad Abbas Chishti Dehlavi (Kanpur: Matba-e Waheedi, 1937). Two earlier editions, probably by other translators, were published from Matba-e Nami, Lucknow, in 1898, and another from Matba-e Ahmed, Delhi, in 1899. It is the “earliest known travelogue of Europe by a South Asian, and the earliest known literary reference to *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* tradition in South Asia”.²⁴ This gives concrete evidence of the existence of Hamza tradition in the fourteenth century. It is one of the earliest references of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. He has translated it as *A Journey to Europe via the Sun and Mount Qaf* (2009) from the Urdu version of this travelogue. The book is divided into four chapters. It is the third chapter “An Account of Mount Qaf’s Two Thrones” that rubs with the Qaf episode in *Dastan-e Amir Hamza*. Hamza has an eighteen year stay in Qaf while in this book it is twelve years.

Dastangoi

Dastangoi is the performative narration of *dastans*. It is usually performed orally by a pair of storytellers or *dastangos* but it could be solo as well before an audience. The role of the audience is to listen and relish these stories with Wah! Wah!. The popularity of *dastan* has been through oral narration primarily. Story telling thrived as a tradition in India. Vishnu Sharma’s *Panchatantra*²⁵, the *Jataka*,²⁶ the *slokas* from the Upanishads, the Vedas were

²³ Lyons, Malcom. *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and oral story-telling*. Vol 1. New York: Cambridge university press, 1995. Print.

²⁴ <<https://randomhouseindia.wordpress.com/2009/10/06/musharraf-ali-farooqi-a-journey-to-europe-via-the-sun-and-mount-qaf/>> Web. Feb 13, 2015.

²⁵ In *Panchtantra* the narrator narrates the rest of the work to the princes. It comprises of five sections. Each section contains a main story, called the frame story which in turn contains several stories emboxed in it, as one character narrates a story to another. It is like a story within a story and the series goes on. Besides the stories, the characters also quote various epigrammatic verses to make their point.

²⁶ These moral fables pertain to Budhism, it was oral but put to writing so that it might not be lost in the oral tradition.

meant to be orally narrated and memorized, not to forget the *sthalapuranas* that Raja Rao employs in *Kanthalapura* (1938). *Kathavachan* (story telling) has been inbuilt in our tradition. However, one must not conflate oral and folk tradition.²⁷ Folklore, are recited, dramatized and sung but orality is not confined to folk traditions only.²⁸ Historical characters are combined with legends and folk traditions to give birth to the popular romance *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* which continued thriving in different parts of the Islamic world and which absorbed different stories and legends with the passage of time. Arthur Compton Rickett asserts that the western epic poem *Beowulf*²⁹ too was recited orally by the minstrels to the soldiers who returned from a hard day and relaxed after dinner besides fire.

In an interview³⁰ with Mahmood Faruqui³¹, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi asserts that in *dastan* the audience and narrator are same. It is not so because of the absence of print media in old days, but because the human mind is attuned to listening story of all kinds- the pair

²⁷ The relationship between folklore studies and oral history has varied in different parts of the world. In England, despite initial links, oral history and folklore studies tended to travel different paths; Paul Thompson argues that English folklore studies “never escaped from the stigma of amateurism”. A shared interest in aurality-fuelled by digital technologies, may be bringing the two fields closer again. The nationalist politics of Britain’s Celtic nations- Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland-have forged closer relationships between folklore studies and oral history, and in Scandinavia folklore studies has had a profound impact upon the development of oral history. Studies of memory and ‘oral tradition’ in non-Western societies and indigenous cultures have also made important contributions to our understanding of the nature and meaning of oral history accounts. See: Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Joseph Calder Miller, ed., The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980); Ruth Finnegan, Oral Tradition and the VerbalArts (London: Routledge, 1991). Quoted in Thomson, Alistair. “Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History” The Oral History Review, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter - Spring, 2007), Oxford University Press. 49-70.<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4495417>>.Web. April 12, 2013.

²⁸ Malik, Aditya. *Oral Traditions and Folklore*. Koninklijke Brill NY: Leiden, 2010. Google Book Search. Web 18 Sep, 2014.

²⁹ The question of whether *Beowulf* was passed down through oral tradition prior to its present manuscript form has been the subject of much debate, and involves more than simply the issue of its composition. Rather, given the implications of the theory of oral-formulaic composition and oral tradition, the question concerns how the poem is to be understood, and what sorts of interpretations are legitimate. However, scholars such as D.K. Crowne have proposed the idea that the poem was passed down from reciter to reciter under the theory of oral-formulaic composition, which hypothesises that epic poems were (at least to some extent) improvised by whoever was reciting them, and only much later written down. In his landmark work, *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Lord refers to the work of Francis P. Magoun and others, saying “the documentation is complete, thorough, and accurate. This exhaustive analysis is in itself sufficient to prove that Beowulf was composed orally.”<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf>. Web.12 August, 2014.

³⁰ <https://youtu.be/Pux5mqbZbeg>

³¹ A *dastango* and a scholar who along with Danish Hasan has helped to revive the lost art by introducing it to the twenty first century.

could be mother-child or politician-audience or any form of narration and listening. One of the wheels of *dastans* was to leave it incomplete so that the audience will be curious to know the next episode- “Then what happened?”, and the cycle would go on. At times if the *dastango* wanted to keep the *dastan* going, he would drag a scene to unfathomable limits, for instance, at a crucial turn in the plot, the lover and beloved are merely separated by a curtain and have not yet seen each other, this intense scene is paused and other narratives around it are narrated while the curtain remains to maintain the brevity of the narration.

Musharraf Ali Farooqi comments on the tradition of orality in his Simurgh guide:

The daastaan was a genre of oral narration. Therefore it manifested itself fully in the daastaan-go'i tradition. After the end of this tradition, a critique of the daastaan must distinguish between daastaan as a genre and the written text as a record of its content. And as today we only have access to the text; any critique must begin from it. (163)³²

Ali Jawad Zaidi presents a very comprehensive view on the art of storytelling and oral narration in respect to *dastan*:

The age-old tradition of story-telling has enjoyed royal patronage but no effort was made to commit the stories to writing. These survived only through oral tradition, which makes it difficult to determine their age or even the original form. This phenomenon explains how most of the earlier *dastan* became extinct and all that has been passed on to us through the written word in Urdu are translations of stories from other language, with interpolations, variations and enlargements. The oldest extant original *dastan* in the north is *Qissah-e-Mehr-Afroz-o-Dilbar* by Isawi Khan written in 1709 Vikrami era which would correspond to 1647. Isawi Khan was well versed in Sanskrit and Braj Bhasha and is known for his commentary on Bihari's *Sat Sai* both in Hindi and Urdu. The story, spread over 241 pages, followed by 139 pages of *Nishat Namah*, is

³² Farooqi, Musharraf Ali. “The Simurgh-Feather Guide to the Poetics of Dastan-e Amir Hamza Sahibqiran”, V. 15, *Annual of Urdu Studies*(2000).119–167.

a major work in prose fiction and its non-publication has prevented its literary assessment. (122-23)³³

Although oral narratives have existed both in East and West, the primary difference between them is that the tradition of oral learning or by hearting is more prevalent in Hindu and Arabic cultures than in the West. As Musharraf Ali Farooqi says “The Oral tradition of the pre-Islamic Arabs was manifested in the popular saying: “*ash-shi‘ru divanu l-Arab*” (Poetry is the register/record of the days/battles of the Arabs)”. They have the tradition of memorizing the *Quran*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagvad Gita*. As Indra Nath Choudhuri affirms:

All the important Indian texts whether *Vedas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and others were initially narrated in the oral tradition and still orally narrated by the story tellers and *dastangoi* of India in the folk form. *Mahabharata* was narrated first by *Vaishampayana*, then *Ugrashrava Lomaharshini*, then *Sanjaya* was *Vyasa*.³⁴

However Indra Nath Choudhuri’s clubbing of *dastangoi* narration in the folk form can be contested as “folk” has its own history. Oral narration is a seminal part of folk form but any oral narration cannot be accorded the status of ‘folk’ as it does not have its root in the tradition and culture of any particular place. ‘The dissemination of the stories among the people was helped by the fact that they were a part of the oral tradition, and hence, the composed narratives either used the elements from the folktales or became absorbed in the folktale.’³⁵ Alok Bhalla in a paper on folklore attempts to investigate the structure of a folktale and to vests each of the three structural sites that are primary constituents of its narrative - emotional, moral and social qualities. He arranges the three structural spaces chronologically. He calls the first term spatial and temporal order that exists “somewhere in the country beyond the river...” and “once upon a time, and calls it “the site of sorrow or the structure of curse”. Human beings are paralyzed accompanied by frozen time. He phrases the second structural element which is central to every folktale as “the artifice of enchantment”.

³³ Zaidi, Ali Jawad. *A History of Urdu Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1993. Print.

³⁴ For more details see Vandana Sharma ed. “Myth, Orality and Folklore in World Literature with Special Reference to Tagore”. *Studies in Myth, Orality and Folklore in World Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2013.8. Print.

³⁵ Singh, Dhananjay. *Fables in the Indian Narrative Tradition: an analytical study*. New Delhi, 2011. 55. D K Print World Ltd, 2011. 55. Web. 14 Oct, 2015.
<http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/17586/7/07_introduction.pdf>

It is uncertain and unmapped. It is a play of time which may be “a succession of instances or an eternity depending on who is recording or who is suffering”. He calls the third structural element of the folktale as “the site of renewal of energies or the structure of communitas. It emerges from the realm of enchantment and restores human community. People begin to participate in historical and secular time again but live as if their moments of recovered joy are at one with eternity”.³⁶

Dastangoi narration involves an illusionist’s skill i.e., they deceive our perception of the real and delights at the same time in the presence of active listeners. Tehran coffee-houses held the performances of Hamza story till the twentieth century. It is a two way performance which involves the narrator as well as the audience. Richard Bauman in his seminal article “Verbal Art as Performance”³⁷ states that in performance which is primarily a mode of spoken verbal communication the communicative ability of the narrator becomes important and its competence lies on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. The storyteller is marked as a subject who is evaluated according to his method and grip on audience. Thus *The Adventures of Amir Hamza* is marked by the interface between the written and the oral. Currently it is narrated orally by *dastangos* like Mahmud Faruqui and Danish Hasan fascinating us every time. They performed a *dastangoi* on Sadat Hasan Manto and *Dastan-e Sedition* to campaign for Dr. Binayak Sen.

The contemporary *dastangos* have revived an art and a literature which was inevitably sinking. They have refashioned it to suit the tastes of today’s audience which is non-Urdu. But yet they have not done away with the ornate passages as they are the soul of *dastans* but rather tried to explain those words in the narration itself:

The *dastangos* began their performances at an interesting point of time in Delhi’s history: the *mushairas* and *sawal-jawab* oral poetry *baithaks* had died out, replaced by the often grimly ritualistic evening of book readings. Few of the readings that were attended by growing numbers of aspiring writers and curious readers in the 2000s ever migrated out of the comfortably narrow

³⁶ Bhalla, Alok. “Lost in a Forest of Symbols: Can Some Animal, Bird, Tree or Djinn help us Understand Myth and Folklore?” *Indian Folklore Research Journal*. vol 10: (2010) <<http://www.indianfolklore.org/journals/index.php/ifrj/>> Web. 13 April, 2014.

³⁷ www.jstor.org/stable/674535. Web. 15 September, 2015.

confines of South Delhi. A handful of events were in Hindi or Urdu and the Sahitya Akademi did its best to bring in writers from across India.

But by the end of the decade, the Delhi book reading was like a *burra khana* for Indian English writers; an evening of chiefly ceremonial significance, as the writer Mukul Kesavan has remarked. Through *dastangoi*, the two performers brought back a much older tradition of storytelling.³⁸

Gyan Chand Jain postulates in *Urdu ki Nasri Dastane* that *dastangoi* tradition dates back to Arab where it thrived as an art. On a full moon night people gathered on the sand after dinner to listen to these stories. Dates were distributed in the end. It was also performed at *chauks* in India and at the steps of Jama Masjid where *dastangos* gathered. We come to know through the anecdotes of Mir Baqar Ali, the last *dastango* of Delhi that their profession demanded a command over rhetoric, delivery, mimicry, ventriloquism and spontaneous composition. *Dastangoi* is the marker of oral narration. Oral narration of *Dastan-e Amir Hamza* was also a popular recreation in central and western South Asia and North Africa since medieval times. Mahmood Farooqui and Danish Hasan, the popular *dastangos* in contemporary times talk about the *dastangoi* performances:

The performances have come about as a result of collaboration between S.R. Faruqi, the foremost living authority on these *Dastans* and the only person to possess a full set of all the 46 volumes, and the performers. Faced with neglect and systematic devaluation we now have very scanty evidence for the way in which these *Dastans* were compiled and performed. Even basic things such as movements, gesticulation, and stage setting are wholly unknown. The current performance is therefore merely an exploration of an Art form which, astonishingly in a culture where poetry was regarded as the supreme art, was considered by some to be of a higher order than poetry itself. *Dastangos* were supposed to be a repository not just of language, common speech as well as

³⁸ <http://urdutoenglish2020.blogspot.in/2012_02_01_archive.html> Web. 12 Sep, 2015.

literary, but also of social mores, craftsmanship, and all other forms of knowledge.³⁹

Hence, today we have an art form which has attuned itself to the modern needs, retaining the aroma of adventure and love splashed pages of *dastan*. The *dastans* remain unchanged, only the mode of delivery has been improvised upon. Several other such literature and performances have been overshadowed today due to lack of awareness among readers and improper archiving. But one can thank the digital world that has helped in organizing and archiving many works of literary treasure which otherwise would have been lost in the labyrinths of time.

³⁹ As explained by Mahmood Farooqui (Director-Actor) in an introduction: “The Sea of Eloquence” – An Evening of *Dastan-e-Amir Hamza*. <<https://bazaarkissakahani.wordpress.com/>>. Web. 20 Dec, 2014.

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From *Gitanjali* to *Song Offerings*: Interrogating the Politics of Translation in the Light of Colonial Interaction

Urmi Sengupta¹

In English prose there is a magic which seems to transmute my Bengali verses into something which is original again in a different manner. Therefore, it not only satisfies me but gives me delight to assist my poems in their English birth....Fundamental idea is the same, but the vision changes. A poem can only be relived in a different atmosphere (Mitra 390)

The above mentioned lines quoted from a letter of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) addressed to D. J. Anderson spell out beautifully the nuances of the role played by Tagore as a translator of his collection of Bangla *geeti-kavita* titled *Gitanjali* (1910) into English prose. *Song Offerings* (also containing a few selected poems from nine of his earlier collections of poetry *Gitimalya*, *Kalpana*, *Chaitali*, *Kheya*, *Naivedya*, *Shishu*, *Achalayatan* , *Utsarga* and *Swaran*) which was first published by Indian Society, London in November, 1912 and later by Macmillan and Company, London in March, 1913 received unprecedented appreciation in the West and had already been reprinted ten times within a span of a few months before it was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in November, 1913. Of the two main standpoints that strive to explain this high acclaim for *Song Offerings* in the target language-culture , one is enunciated clearly by the Nobel Committee of 1913 in their citation which declares “Because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, *a part of the*

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literature of the West" (Tagore 301), a statement that postulates that the target-language readers were able to identify with it to such an extent that it was almost considered to be a part of their own literary tradition. The other view put forward by certain contemporary English poets and scholars like W.B. Yeats, Mary Sinclair, Mary Lago and Rothenstein is that its popularity lay in upholding a worldview different from that of the West- thereby being "solicitous of the orientalist expectations of the English reader" (Thompson 321). Caught between his attempt to remain loyal to the original Bangla text by retaining its "fundamental idea" and his desire to make it more readable for the English reader by changing its "vision", *Song Offerings* emerges as an exemplary of Tagore's personal approach towards translation, and particularly literary translation, as a practice. What prompted Tagore to take certain liberties with the translation of his own work that transforms it into something which is "original again in a different way", in terms of form as well as content? Were some of the culture specific nuances and poetic intricacies of *Gitanjali* lost in the process? To what extent was this approach adopted by the poet/translator Tagore, governed by the dynamics of power that existed between the source-language (Bangla) culture of the colonized and the target-language (English) culture of the colonizer in the early twentieth century British India? These are some of the issues that I would like to address in this paper.

In order to look into these questions, it is necessary to understand the act of translation as "a complex negotiation between two cultures" (Trivedi, "Translating Culture vs Cultural Translation" 191), a realization that was first articulated as "The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies" by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere in *Translation, History and Culture* (1990). Moreover, language itself is not a mere combination of lexical entities (words). It embodies the values, beliefs, morals and practices of an entire cultural community at a particular

historical juncture. Therefore, the translation of *Gitanjali* into *Song Offerings* needs to be understood and analyzed in the light of a complex maze of relationships governed by colonial interactions between the target readership and the source language culture, the translator and the source language culture, the translator and the target language culture and finally that between the writer of the original text and the translator, who in this case (to complicate matters further) is one and the same person.

It is interesting to note that in the early years of his literary career, Tagore was apprehensive about translating his works into a foreign language. He feared that translation might distort and thereby “betray” the original text and fail to capture its underlying *rasa*. Translation, he felt, was nothing but a “tiresome business of cold-blooded literary craftsmanship” (Lago, Imperfect Encounter 119), as he says in a letter to his friend William Rothenstein as late as 1911. He was somewhat weary of the initiatives taken by the ardent admirers and connoisseurs of his works like Ananda Kumar Swami, Ajay Kumar Chakraborty and Loken Palit to translate them into English. In fact, the only work that he is known to have translated into English all by himself before *Gitanjali* is the poem “Nishphal Kamona” from his collection of poetry *Manasi*, in 1888. Repeated requests from Jagadish Chandra Bose (who himself took initiative to translate Tagore’s short stories into English for the journal *The Modern Review* as early as 1900) for more such translations had been of no avail. So, what had finally prompted Tagore to take up the magnanimous project in question?

In his Nobel Acceptance Speech, Tagore posits *Song Offerings* as a response to the culture of deafness of the British colonizers, one that subscribed to the hierarchical binary construct of the Western worldview which extolled the culture and civilization of the colonizer for being “superior” to that of the colonized. This was one of the strategies that highlighted the “civilizing mission” of the British to be one of the chief justifications of

colonization. Taking a cue from T.B. Macaulay's infamous statement about "a single shelf of a good English library" being worth "the entire body of Persian and Arabic literature" (Minute on Education, 1835), that had somewhat institutionalized this cultural hegemony, Western scholars/translators like Edward Fitzgerald had been taking complacent liberties while translating the literary works of the colonized, since the mid nineteenth century². This cultural hegemony continued to govern the approach towards the translation of Indian literatures into English (facilitated by the likes of T.W. Clarke, Edward Thompson and other translators who hailed from the "superior" culture) well into the twentieth century. For Tagore translation of *Gitanjali* was an act of patriotism, which would uphold the merits of his own language-literature in front of the colonizers and restore the faith of his countrymen in their own culture and civilization:

We lost our confidence on our own civilization for over a century .Thus we did not only lose touch of the great which lay hidden in our own inheritance, but also the great honour of giving what we have and not merely begging from others, not merely borrowing culture and living like eternal school boys....That welcome (the Nobel Prize) has its own meaning, that the West has need of the East, as the East has need of the West, and so the time has come when they should meet.(Tagore 296-297)

But even within this apparent spirit of cultural-nationalism, lay the signs of the internalization of the dominant colonial discourse of the West that posits the East or the "Orient" as "the mother of spiritual Humanity" (Tagore 295) as opposed to the materialistic "Occident". He openly declared to have "represented the East" by evoking "deeper feeling of

² Edward Fitzgerald , had justified the act of taking liberties with the translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* as early as 1859, by stating (in the context of the poetry of Attar) that Persian poets were "not poets enough for his taste until he made them so" (Bassnett 3)

rest, serenity and love for the eternal” (Tagore 294) Thus, we see that he preferred not to disturb or disrupt the popular image of the “Orient” that colours the minds of the contemporary Western readership, an image that finds voice in W. B. Yeats’ Introduction to *Song Offerings*. He lauds Tagore precisely because “like the Indian civilization itself, [he] has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity” (Tagore 266). Moreover, the fact that he posited a literary product of the Bangla language-culture as the representative of the ‘East’ harps upon his reluctance to force the target readership to look beyond the East/ West binary paradigm and go deeper into the specific nuances of the heterogeneous language-cultures that the colonizers had coercively subsumed under the broad category of ‘East’.

Though Tagore took serious pride in having been “an instrument to unite the hearts of the East and the West” (Tagore 298), one cannot deny his awareness about the unequal distribution of political and cultural power between the two. As a colonial subject belonging to the upper class Bengali intelligentsia who was not only well versed in his own (and several other) *bhasha-sahitya* and deeply rooted in Indian philosophy but also had had a wide exposure to Western literature, philosophy and civilization through his (mostly informal) education, self-study and travels , he had genuine respect and appreciation for the colonizers’ literature and culture (a feeling that by no means would be extended to the context of their political domination and exploitation of his country). By 1911, Rabindra Sahitya had already reached a section of the international readership through the publication of the English translation of some of Tagore’s short stories in the literary journal *The Modern Review*. In fact, it was one such story, “The Postmaster”, that first evoked Rothenstein’s interest in the literary creations of Tagore. It was he, who not only got in touch with Indian Society and later Macmillan to get *Song Offerings* published, but also introduced him to eminent Western

scholars and literary personalities like W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Sturge Moore, Evelyn Underhill and Robert Bridges whose association took his already existing appreciation for Western civilization a notch higher. The encouragement and assurances of cooperation and collaboration from these friends during his visit to London in March, 1912, where he was welcomed as the esteemed guest of Rothenstein , proved to be a path-breaking experience for him:

I felt a great desire to come out and come in touch with the Humanity of the West, for I was conscious that the present age belongs to the Western man with his superabundance of energy. He has got the power of the whole world, and his life is overflowing all boundaries and is sending out its message to the great future.... And so I came out (Tagore 294)

Thus the project of translating *Gitanjali* seems not only to have been undertaken by a colonial subject as an act of patriotism towards his own language-culture, but also driven to some extent by a desire to be accepted, lauded and recognized by his target-readership, who represented the colonizers' culture. The fact that he took unmistakable pride and pleasure in being “accepted by the West as one of their own poets” (Tagore 294), considering it nothing short of a “miracle” (Tagore 294), seems to have coloured the *anuvad-bhavna* (approach towards translation) that has shaped *Song Offerings* for what it is . As Harish Trivedi puts it in “The Politics of Postcolonial Translation”: “If it was not a direct affair of imperialism, it was at least a high degree of voluntary assimilation, facilitated by that notably anglophilic and anglicized dimension of Tagore’s personality” (47)

While translating *Gitanjali*, Tagore seems to have given up much of his initial apprehensions about “betraying” the original text. He openly admits in a letter written to

Hariette Moody, dated March 6, 1913 that he would not like to call *Song Offerings* a “translation”, because while translating his own Bangla *geeti-kavita* into English prose he almost had to write it afresh; or else “the poet-composer would come to haunt the poet-translator, thereby hindering his activity” (Pal 371). A poet/translator, according to him, should only aim at capturing the inherent “idea” within the original text and then use “some new quality inherent in the new vehicle of expression (English)” (Sarkar 81) to articulate it. In order to achieve this, he should feel free to introduce some changes within the translated text and edit some portions from the original one. He goes as far to say that presenting the original text in a new way to the target-language reader provides the poet/translator with an opportunity to relive “the first fine careless rapture” (Sarkar 73) experienced while composing the original text. This turns the activity of translation from a stringent exercise to a pleasurable one for him and enriches the “reborn” or “recreated” text with a literary merit independent of that of the original. This *anuvad-bhavna* of Tagore has been instrumental in shaping *Song Offerings* not as a mere paraphrase of *Gitanjali* (and the selection of poems taken from his other collections of poetry mentioned above), but perhaps as something which comes closest to the Indian poet, publisher and translator P. Lal’s concept of “transcreation” defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (5th ed. 1996) as “creative translation seen as producing a new version of the original work”. Tagore deals with the question of “translatability” of certain culture specific concepts and language specific poetic styles in such a manner that the contemporary English readership does not consider it to be a “translation” but a part of their own literature.

“The term ‘translatability’ refers to the scope and possibility of reproducing the source text in another language, keeping as far as possible, its content and context, its formal features and functional roles intact.”(Dutta 106) The very fact that the source-language and

the target language represent societies that have a starkly different historical background, cultural heritage and worldview, complicates the issue of “translatability” of *Gitanjali* into English even further. Tagore is plagued by the problem of finding suitable cultural equivalents for certain terms and concepts that are firmly grounded in the source language culture experiences. But whether he chooses to use those equivalents (if at all available) in his translation, or whether he prefers changing them into something more familiar to the target-readership, is an issue which is mainly governed by his *anuvad-bhavna* and the historical and personal conditions that has shaped it. He takes the issue of “cultural palatability” (Talgeri 30) of the target readership very seriously, often resorting to an act of “domestication” that according to Friedrich Schleiermacher (as he defines it in the essay “On the Different Methods of Translating” first published in 1813) “leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him” (Lefevere 67) making the translation text extremely readable as the cost of its fidelity to the original work and the source-language culture. One cannot but deny that such an approach was liable to hinder the cause of upholding the source language culture in its true light in front of the target readership, something that Tagore aimed to achieve (as discussed earlier) by positing his translation as an act of patriotism.

One of the major culture specific concepts which undergo a transformation in the English translation is that of nature of the divine entity that the poems are addressed to. Much of the poetry of the pre-Balaka period (that begins with the publication of *Naivedya* in 1902 and ends with the publication of *Balaka* in 1914) of Tagore’s poetic career has been devoted to an exploration of his relationship with the divine .In *Naivedya* this divine entity is a *nirakar* (formless) omnipotent omniscient Supreme-being, the Brahman of the Upanishads, who had become an integral part of Tagore’s spiritual psyche through his early exposure to

the vision of the Brahma-Samaj. But *Gitanjali* (also *Gitali* and *Gitimalya*) gives expression to his love for his *jivan-devata* (Lord of Life), a personal god whom the poet has “realized within his intimate self” (Ayyub 60). In *Modernism and Tagore*, Ayyub describes the *Gitanjali* to be “nothing but a conversation between the poet and his Lord of Life” (60). *Jivan-devata* is not a distant entity like the Upanishadic Brahman; but a lover, a friend who reciprocates the love of the *bhakta*. This relationship has its roots in the rich legacy of bhakti-poetry in India that dates back to 5th century AD. Tagore himself acknowledges the influence of Kabir’s philosophy of *bhakti* in shaping his relationship with his Lord of Life. But such sentiments of *bhakti* have no equivalence within the Western paradigm of “devotional poetry” of Dante, Newman and Walt Whitman where “there is a gulf fixed between a common human heart and the Transcendental Being” (Sinclair 662). The Christian God is an authoritative entity. Other than the few poems included from *Naivedya* and *Kheya*, the use of the second person singular number pronoun “thou” of old (Elizabethan) English to address the divine entity in *Song Offerings*, introduces an element of lofty grandeur that destroys the tone of intimacy encapsulated within the Bangla pronoun “*tumi*” that has been used to refer to the personal god in the Bangla poems. An ideal example would be poem 23, where the lines: “(Aji) *jhorer raate tomor abhisar / paransokha, bondhu he amar*” has been translated as “Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy / journey of love, my friend?” (Tagore 46-47)

The decision of not translating “*abhisar*” as tryst, seems to be a conscious one. Though that word would have been the closest English equivalent of “*abhisar*”, it would not have been able to convey the full implication of a word replete with culture-specific connotations of Radha-Krishna love as found in the *Vaishnava Padabali*. The phrase “journey of love” somewhat sublimates the passionate desperation of the lover (divine

entity) to meet his beloved in secret in spite of the unfavourable climatic conditions, for this is possible only in the case of a reciprocal and equitable relationship between the *bhakta* and his personal god. Such a display of passion would bring the Christian God down from his high pedestal. Thus the confidence of the *bhakta* about his own power over his Lord of Life loses its vigour in translation. Repeated use of the word “master” further highlights the hierarchical “lord-slave-dependent-relation-syndrome” (Ayyub 77) of Christian piety that goes completely against the spirit of *bhakti* poetry: As we seen in Poem 3: “*Tumi kemon kore gaan koro he guni / ami obak hoye shuni*” which is translated as “I know not how thou singest, my master! / I ever listen in silent amazement” (Tagore 6-7)

The replacement of the word “*guni*” (which means “the talented one”) by the word “master” almost turns the spontaneous appreciation for the singer into an act of obligatory adulation. Tagore also has a tendency to underplay the intensity of the devotee’s passionate love which often borders on intoxication and madness. The line “O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet” of poem 7, can never express the passion of offering oneself completely and unconditionally to the *Jivan-devata* that is present in the Bangla original, “*Mohakobi, tomor pa e dite chai je dhora*” (Tagore 14-15) No doubt Mary Sinclair lauds Tagore for his restraint and subtlety, for the translation is hardly able to capture the intensity of the emotions of the original verses:

His simplicity, restraint and austerity will be a little disconcerting to those who are accustomed to think of Oriental poetry as a thing of ungovernable efflorescence....But as the East is subtler than the West, and as of all Eastern races, the Bengali is the subtlest, so an extreme subtlety of feelingis the finest quality that strikes you in the songs of this Bengali poet. (Sinclair 662)

The Bangla third person singular number pronoun “*se*” does not denote a particular gender – thus the identity of the person referred to as “*se*” remains shrouded in mystery – this chiaroscuro nature of “*se*” is an important and integral aspect of Rabindra-Sahitya. English as a language calls for the end of this obscurity, for it necessitates the specification of the gender of the person being referred to by the third person singular number pronoun as he/she. When “*se*” refers to the divine being Tagore generally translates it as “He”. This practice has its root in the notion of god/God present in the religious faiths Tagore has been exposed to. Though the Upanishadic Brahman is beyond any gender specification, the holy trinity who occupy the position of authority within the Hindu pantheon are male, and so is the Christian God. Therefore Tagore automatically refers to the divine entity as “He” in translation. The use of words like “Lord” and “master” further substantiates this point. Only when he is referring to some “idea” within himself which is difficult to grasp does he bring in the pronoun “*se*” as we see in Poem 66 where: “*Jibone ja chirodin roye gache abhashe / probhater aloke ja phote nai prokashe*” has been translated as “She who had remained in the depth of my being, / in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses”. (Tagore 174-175)

This “idea” which is referred to as “*Sokha*” (male friend) in the original poem becomes a female entity in translation. This “she” is an integral part of the poet’s self that is waiting for recognition from God. Here again we encounter the culture specific nuances of the Sufi metaphor of “*nazar*” in the words “*ki mohon rup e nikhil noyon hote dhaka chilo*” which is quite naturally not communicated properly through the words “There was none in the world who ever saw her face”. (Tagore 174-175)

It is interesting to note that at times Tagore also changes in his translation, words and concepts that are by no means culture specific and therefore eminently “translatable” in the target language. Such attempts bring out all too clearly his conscious and deliberate attempts

to contextualize his *Song Offerings* within the colonizer's literary and cultural paradigm, through "domestication". Needless to say, this could not be possible unless if the translator had a sound understanding of the target-language culture. An ideal example would be the way in which the lines from Poem 29, "*Amar naam ta diye dheke rakhi jare /morche se ei naam er karagare*" are translated as "He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon". (Tagore 60-61) While the word "*karagar*" could have easily been translated as prison, the use of the word "dungeon", with its cultural associations of medieval European feudal castles, is a deliberate attempt to place the poem within the Western cultural paradigm. It is this practice of "domestication" that is instrumental in turning the translated work, into something that is "original in a different way". In fact, the very use archaic (Elizabethan) English invests it with certain nuances and legacy associated with the same. One of the most prominent sites for "domestication" in the *Song Offerings* is the celebration of the beauty of nature, more specifically the description of seasons and landscapes, which draws heavily from the tradition of English Romantic poetry. An ideal example would be Poem 23, where the description of nature and landscape in the following lines:

"Sudur kon nodir pare

gohon kon boner dhare

Gobhir kon ondhokare

hotecho tumi par" (Tagore 46)

transforms (in the English translation) into one which is akin to that found in the Romantic imagery that invests the poetry of Wordsworth or Shelly:

"By what dim shore of the ink black river,

By what far edge of the frowning forest,

through what mazy depth of gloom art thou
treading thy course to come to me my friend?" (Tagore 47)

This is a description of nature that the English reader can readily identify with. It also adds an element of lyrical cadence to the poem that is typical of English Romantic poetry. Such deliberate cultural re-contextualization at times almost renders the translator "invisible", as Lawrence Venuti would put it, creating an illusion of transparency by looking at the source culture through the target culture. As Edward Thompson himself writes to Tagore in a letter dated April 28, 1935 - "The publication of *Song Offerings* is an event in the history of English poetry and world poetry. It is... a new book and not a translation, and a permanently lovely one. (Thompson 321).

And this induces us to look more closely into Tagore's decision of choosing to translate his *geeti-kavita* into English prose. Why does he prefer prose over verse? Tagore believes that it is not possible to reproduce the rhythm and the *alankara* of his *geeti-kavita* in English verse. An attempt to do so would only hinder the proper articulation of the inherent "idea" or essence of the original poem in the target language, something which according to Tagore (as mentioned earlier), should be the main aim of the translator. Therefore, simple lucid English prose which is not overburdened by ornamentation (Pal 302) is considered by him to be the most suitable mode of expression to recreate the *rasa* of the original poems. But how does this formal innovation affect his translation? Most of the *geeti-kavita* lost much of their "lyrical suggestiveness" (Sarkar 81) in their prose translation. I would like to quote Poem 16 as an example:

<i>Jogot er anando yag e</i>	I have had my invitation to this world's festival,
<i>amar nimantran.</i>	and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen

Dhonyo holo dhonyo holo

and my ears have heard. (Tagore 33)

manav janam.

Nayan amar ruper pure

Sadh mitae berae ghure

Srobon amar gobhir shure

hoyeche magan. (Tagore 32)

The translation almost degenerates into a summary of the original lines – one that articulates the inherent “idea” accurately but fails to recreate its appeal. The depth of emotions that is encapsulated within the rhyme scheme, rhythm and the lyrical expressions of the *geei-kavita* loses its poignancy in the translation. It is interesting to note that very few among Tagore’s target readership (most have no access to the source language or the source text) come to realize or lament this loss of *geeti-moyota* (lyrical quality) of the original poetry, in translation. One of these selective few is Mary Sinclair who had met Tagore personally in Rothenstein’s’ residence during his visit to England in 1912:

I am told by those who know these poems in the original that this prose rendering, apparently so unerring in its sense of phrasing, of sound values and vibrations, fails to give the slenderest, most shadowy idea of the beauty of Bengali.....its glamour and musical quality, the plasticity, subtlety and the variety of rhythms. I have heard some of the songs of *Gitanjali* being sung and recited by the poet himself and others. At the first hearing the rhythms were strange, almost unseizable to the Western ears....On the second and third hearings their music and magic was apparent (Sinclair 663)

But one cannot deny that some poems of the *Song Offerings* are characterized by the “clearness, strength and the suggestive music of well balanced sentences” (Sarkar 81) of English Prose. They have a lyrical quality- much of it being a contribution of the Romantic poets- which is manifest especially in the description of nature’s beauty and the emotions for the Divine being that it evokes within the lyrical “I”, as has been seen in the case of Poem 23. This “lyrical cadence” enriches these poems lending them not only a musicality but also a picturesque quality.

Before I conclude the paper, I should take cognition of the fact that though Tagore has been credited with the English translation of *Gitanjali*, *Song Offerings* was published only after being scrutinized and edited by his advisors and collaborators, the most notable ones among them being Yeats and Robert Bridges (who had reportedly translated poems 31, 67 and 91). This testifies to the presence of certain other nuances of translation which is beyond the scope of my discussion.

Tagore’s *anuvad-bhavna* shaped by his subject position vis-a-vis the power-equation existing between his mother tongue Bangla and the language of the British colonizer led him to translate his *geeti-kavita* in such a way that *Song Offerings* emerged as a work having literary merits independent of the original text. Though *Gitanjali* loses much of its culture-specificity (including the intricacies of the *bhakta* – personal god relationship) in translation, the self-realization and self-discovery of the lyrical “I” facilitated through the changing dynamics of his relationship with the Supreme Being strikes a chord with the Western readership. Though as a translator of his own work, Tagore often succumbs to the cultural hegemony perpetuated by the contemporary colonial discourse, his attempt to reach out to the Western readership through his *Song Offerings* remains an event of paramount significance as

it creates a much needed platform for cross cultural exchanges and interactions between the colonizers and the colonized in a crucial juncture of Indian history:

The ideal of unity never rejects anything, any race, or any culture. Now, when in the present time of political unrest the children of India cry for the rejection of the West, I feel that it is a lesson which they have received from the West. The feeling of resentment between the East and the West must be pacified. I must do all that I can. (Tagore 298-299)

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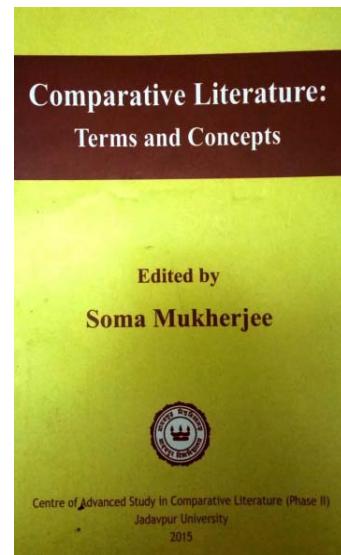
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Comparative Literature – Terms and Conceptsby Sreejit Datta¹

Comparative Literature: Terms and Concepts
Ed. Soma Mukherjee.

Kolkata: Centre for Advanced Study in
Comparative Literature (Phase II),
Department of Comparative Literature,
Jadavpur University. 2015. Print.
ISBN: 978-93-83660-10-0. 114 pp. ₹ 100.



Comparative Literature: Terms and Concepts is a key work of reference in the varied and complex field of comparative literary studies, edited by Dr Soma Mukherjee, who is an assistant professor at the Centre for Comparative Literature, Visva Bharati. The editor, the contributors, the Centre for Advanced Study in Comparative Literature (Phase II) and the Department all deserve to be greatly applauded for bringing this project to fruition. Such a handbook or glossary of annotated terms and key concepts dealing with the discipline of Comparative Literature has been long overdue. Its publication will no doubt be hailed by researchers, teachers and students of all levels from within and without the discipline; virtually anybody dealing with literary studies will be hugely benefited by this volume. It is a compact paperback, providing meticulous explanations for each of nearly sixty entries, familiarity with which is critical for a working knowledge of the discipline of Comparative Literature. Also, a researcher who wishes to work with any literary and/or cultural text, not necessarily taking the comparatist's approach, shall invariably find this handbook of terms and concepts related to literary studies in general and comparative literary studies in particular quite useful.

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The editor deserves a special round of applause for maintaining a pleasant and practical homogeneity of register used in the explanatory language, especially because a large number of contributors (a list of the contributors with their professional affiliations at the time of publication of the volume is provided at the very end of the book) have worked for bringing out this volume, and each of them have provided varying number of entries to it. The editing and proofing is almost flawless, there is hardly any typo that disturbs the flow of reading in any of the explanations. Each and every explanation has been very wisely followed up by a detailed list of reference works that would augment the reading of the user and enrich her understanding of the particular term or concept.

Coming to the introduction written by Dr. Mukherjee, it can be said that she has re-emphasized the necessity of taking up a comparative approach in ‘doing’ literary studies in the Indian context, a case that has been made time and again by Indian comparatists. That emphasis itself has been used by the editor as the justification for bringing out a glossary of terms and concepts from the discipline of Comparative Literature like the present one, and the sudden increase in the number of Comparative Literature departments across the country (especially in the central universities) greatly corroborates the idea. This project that has been described by the editor as “preliminary work” has no doubt been carried out with utmost care for the rationale and a logically composed structure that should go behind the creation of a work such as this. In the editor’s own words:

“This glossary attempts to explicate the terms used in the method of comparative literature and the concepts that define its field of inquiry. We have attempted to illustrate the processes, the applications of the method and the use of the tools so that the scholar of comparative Literature, as well as the scholar of literature in general may use it with profit.”
(p 6)

The practice of explaining the terms with illustrations from actual texts is maintained throughout the book in its many entries, and for that reason this effort is highly laudable. For example, it presents a sufficiently satisfactory explanation for ‘polygenesis’ (p 61), one of the essential concepts of Comparative Literature, using the two texts, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *Uttararamacharitam*. Polygenesis is a term for the phenomenon of occurrence of literary affinities in terms of themes and motifs between texts from such literary systems where one

cannot establish a direct contact or influence of cultures. The entry for this term in the present volume takes up the case of these two plays which are far removed from one another in terms of both time and space; and where a direct contact between cultures or influences upon each other can be ruled out with confidence. This particular entry explains the term while noticing the similarities: both Leontes and Rama abandon their wives; and in both cases the recognition of the wives by their respective husbands is preceded by the recognition and acceptance of their children. Such a practice of illustrating with actual texts leave hardly any doubt in the mind of the reader regarding the explanation of terms and concepts, especially the rather difficult and new ones. Such examples abound throughout the length of this volume. They add a holistic approach to its designated task of explicating terms and concepts in a glossary.

The editor expresses her hope that this volume will be of help to those scholars who set out to “understand and apply Comparative Literature methodology in order to look holistically at Indian literature,” (p 6) but we think that this will do great as a companion volume for those undergraduate and postgraduate students alike who have comparative literature as part of their university curricula. The lack of such a ready reference has been one of the reasons that created a baseless suspicion and anxiety in the minds of the younger Indian students of literary studies and liberal arts in general. This volume will serve the purpose of a ‘primer’ on comparative literature as well, since one gets to look at almost all the major concepts and tools of comparative literature at one go here. It can be hoped that this volume will, among the Indian students and general readership, help in the proliferation of awareness regarding what comparative literature is. It is highly important as the level of that awareness is pitifully low in the mentioned communities.

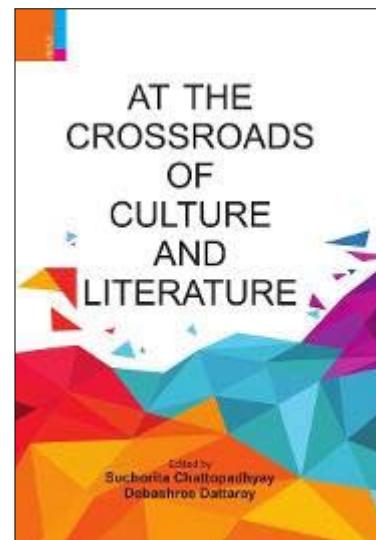
One of the very few cons of this immensely useful volume is the absence of a content page, which would have not been totally out of context since the number of entries is not too large to be put into a list and the explanations provided for them are adequately long and detailed. So the reader could go directly to the page number of a particular entry and that way locating one would have been easier. Other glossaries with alphabetically arranged terms and concepts related to any field of knowledge can afford to do away with a content page because they are usually huge in terms of sheer volume; even though entries of each letter of the alphabet could be easily provided side by side with the range of page numbers that they take

up. It will probably not be too much to expect that either the latter approach of content arrangement or a detailed list of all the entries and their respective locations in the volume in terms of page number would be appended at the beginning of this glossary in its next edition. Also, the aesthetic side of publishing has not been adequately taken care of in this volume, for there should have been adequate spacing between explanations/discussion on each entry and between different sections of the book, such as the introduction, the glossary and the bibliography. And last but not the least; we do expect more exciting, colourful and interesting cover design for a volume dealing with such an exciting discipline as Comparative Literature.

Canadian Literature and Cultureby Annapurna Palit¹

At the Crossroads of Culture and Literature,
Eds. Suchorita Chattopadhyay and Debashree Dattaray.

Kolkata: Primus Books. 2016. Print.
ISBN: 978-93-84082-71-0.
202 pp. ₹ 1495.



At the Crossroads of Culture and Literature published by Primus Books can be a great boon to scholars of Canada Studies as well as Diaspora Studies. Covering a wide range of subjects, the book is dedicated to Barbara Godard, a renowned Canadian scholar and intellectual. The essays offer carefully researched, and in depth analyses of the socio-cultural and literary aspects of the South Asian diaspora in Canada and India. The Volume comprises of essays highly relevant to the study of Literature, Language, Comparative Literature, History, Philosophy, Life Writing, Sociology, as also to the study of International Relations. In short it addresses multiple issues that are pertinent to the study and research of several subjects. It also provides a significant base to important perspectives on Canada Studies in particular and Diaspora Study in general.

Though the Volume concentrates on many different aspects, the editors have been mindful of selecting two particular areas of Canadian life --- its aboriginal or native and its immigrant community. As a nation, Canada receives a huge number of immigrants every year and is considered to be the second highest immigrant receiving country in the world today. To gain a clear understanding of Canada it is imperative to look into the life and works of her diaspora communities. Similarly, her Native people have had a history of marginalisation, but have a rich body of literature and have been invaluable contributors to her development and establishment as an important nation today. The essays by Swagata Bhattacharya, Sayantan

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Dasgupta, Jennifer Gustar, Saikat Maitra and Sraboni Maitra and Soma Mukherjee give substantial and diverse accounts of the life of the Canadian immigrant, particularly the South Asian immigrant who comprise a large chunk of her immigrant population.

Swagata Bhattacharya's essay titled, 'Neither Here nor There': Fractured Identities and Hybrid Canadians', gives a glimpse of the problems of identity faced by the Asian Diaspora in Canada that has to grapple with many difficulties despite Canada's official policy of Multiculturalism. Sayantan Dasgupta's essay titled, 'Cricket, Colonialism, Racism: Reading Krisantha Sri Bhaggyadatta' gives a Ceylonese perspective to the 'immigrant' issue and the many meanings of 'home' for a displaced community. He also probes the issue of Sri Lankan identity politics vis a vis Canadian Multiculturalism. Jennifer Gustar's essay 'Haunting Legacies: The Imbrications of Canadian and Indian History in Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call ?*' also deals with the complex ideas related to 'home' and states how Badami suggests that the concept of nationhood goes beyond historical confines. Soma Mukherjee too gives a vivid and realistic account of the interplay between home, displacement, migration and other matters related to immigration in the works of Vassanji in her essay, ' "A Historical Odyssey across Continents" : An Analysis of M.G.Vassanji's Writings'.

Saikat Maitra and Sraboni Maitra's highly absorbing and informative essay, 'South Asian Immigrants and the Racial Politics of the Canadian Nation: A History of the Contemporary Moment' throws light on the experiences of South Asian immigrant women in Toronto and analyses the dynamics of race, gender, class and migrant status against the larger framework of the State, its policies and institutions as well as the real life experiences of the immigrant women. The essay is a laudable effort in bringing to the forefront several bitter truths about women and immigration. Maitra and Maitra write, 'Despite possessing university education and several years of professional experiences, they experience difficulties translating their skills into opportunities in the new country' (p 127). The essay traces the history of Canada's policies of immigration in what may be called a crisp and sound account.

Though the Volume has no essay on the internment experience of the Japanese diaspora in Canada, the essays touch upon multiple aspects in the life of the South Asian community in Canada and succeeds in providing a varied and gripping read. The diversity of

subjects together with the lucidity of style and powerful research behind each essay endows the collection with authenticity and makes it a significant link in the dialogue between the Culture Studies and Literature.

The other essays in the Volume devoted to Native Canadian writing are equally absorbing and are an invaluable contribution to understanding the Canadian experience as they lie at the other end of the spectrum, representing the original inhabitants of the land. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm puts it beautifully in her essay, ‘First Peoples’ Literature in Canada’, ‘As Indigenous Peoples we belong to this land... In return it is our responsibility to care for and protect the land (p 53)’. Her essay gives an impressive detailing of the cultural ethos of the First Nation People and the fascinating appeal of their writing. She also succeeds in asserting how indigenous literature has reshaped and redefined Canadian Literature. Debashree Dattaray has given a hard hitting reflection of the works of Okanagan writer and activist Jeannette Armstrong in her essay, ‘ “Soft Power” : Marginalized Aesthetics in Jeannette Armstrong’s Fiction’. Dattaray has succeeded in showing how relevant Armstrong’s writing has been to contemporary society. Nilanjana Deb’s essay, ‘Land, Community, Text: An Examination of Three Ojibwe Women’s Texts’ also gives valuable and interesting insight into the consciousness of the writings of Native writers, particularly the role played by women in helping Native Canadian culture to survive. Dheeman Bhattacharyya’s essay ‘Which Canada, Whose Canada? : Situating ‘Canadian’ Studies as Area Studies within the ‘Indian’ Academic Discourse’ deals with Aboriginal people in both India and Canada. He gives credit to Comparative Methodology in understanding and accessing the history of Canada.

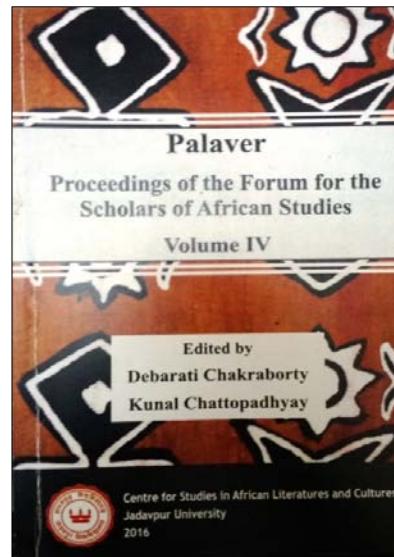
The essays in the volume also address issues related to alternative identity and Canada’s multicultural success as a society. Anway Mukhopadhyay’s essay, ‘Aphrodite of ‘amor oscuro’: The “Queer” Dialectic of Strangerhood and Familiarity in Urban Spaces in Contemporary English Novels from India and Canada’, discusses alternative identities. He also raises the issue of ‘home’ in his work. The last essay in the volume, titled, ‘Eurocentrism and the Limits of Symbolic Recognition’ by Sonia Sikka discusses different aspects of Canada’s Multiculturalism and the extent to which it may be called a success.

Special mention needs to be made of the first essay by Himani Bannerji, to whom Barbara Godard was a personal friend. In an essay that is emotional as well as factual, she talks about her long association with Barbara as ‘friends, colleagues and mothers’ (p 9). She gives interesting glimpses of Barbara’s life and how the latter tried to fill the gap between Quebec and Anglophone Canada with the help of translation. She praises Barbara’s attitude towards translation and says that it was relevant for India as India too is a country with many rich languages. She also contends that Godard tried to assert that Canadian society could provide ‘a space of convergence of multiple others’ (p 17). As Sikka writes, indeed in many ways, Canada is a success story in multiculturalism, Barbara Godard probably sought that possible space where multiple cultures could thrive and prosper.

It is indeed fitting that the editors of the book have dedicated the book to her.

African Studies in India
by Mukulika Dattagupta¹

*Palaver: Proceedings of the Forum
for the Scholars of African Studies (Vol. IV),*
Eds. Debarati Chakraborty and Kunal Chattopadhyay.
Kolkata: Jadavpur University Press.
2016. Print. ISBN: 978-93-83660-11-7.
158 pp. ₹ 100.



Palaver: Proceedings of the Forum for the Scholars of African Studies Volume IV is a mixed volume as it has a collection of several selected papers. The authors of these papers participated from both India and abroad in at least one of the annual seminars of the Forum for the Scholars of African Studies which were held during the last few years. These papers encompass a vast range in their foci. Each paper offers a unique perception of the identification of a continent and its people in terms of culture, literature, language and politics.

The collection begins with the key-note address which was delivered by Professor Tony E. Afejuku. He deals with literature and language politics of his own country, Nigeria, which was colonized and now has English as its dominant language. He makes an insightful comparative study between the language politics accruing in India and that of Nigeria. He advocates the need for a democratic literature to address the present. His essay also highlights the need of intense love and laws of equality in literature. His ideas seem to be so very apt for the present time and situation. On many occasions, he comments on the imposition of a language as part of the imperialist process within the African continent and also in India.

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Sanchari Bhattacharyya also talks about imposition in terms of traditional and modern. She focuses on a very important aspect of imposition by first questioning the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ and then bringing us all to a sudden but obvious realization that the definition of these two terms are culture- and time- specific. She also tries to trace the definition of these two terms in the context of the African continent. S. Satish Kumar tries to understand the power game underneath the definition of any term or concept. His paper tries to trace the emergence of a huge range of prison literature across Africa. He has questioned and has given a different understanding of some very common terms like ‘prison’, ‘justice’ and ‘crime’. His questioning of the concept of the ‘criminal’ seems to be quite relevant. On the other hand, the paper by Oyedola Dvid A and Oyedola Olaoluwa A provides a new perception of the making of a new Africa. They have tried to give new dimensions to terms like ‘development’, ‘freedom’ and ‘individualism’ in the African context.

Africa is a continent which was very intensively victimized by various weapons of colonization. Apartheid was one such weapon. In their contributions, Kaninika Banerjee, Ritam Sen and Chandrayee Dey try to look into the institutionalized racism in South Africa and answer a few questions related to it. Both the papers undertake a close analysis of the protest theatres of South Africa. While discussing South Africa, one cannot ignore the paper by Professor Isabel Hofmeyr. Her paper does an intensive comparative analysis of caste oppression in India and racial oppression in South Africa. She also mentions Gandhi’s engagement in both the contexts, which adds an interesting dimension to her paper. It also makes her paper interesting for the readers of any continent as Gandhi is a well-known figure and has remained a very popular subject of study throughout. She also provides examples from the print media in support of her arguments, which adds a tinge of authenticity to her arguments. Her work will provide not only food for thought but will inspire upcoming scholars for further research in this field. Such an effort deserves appreciation. On the other hand, Suchetna Bandyopadhyay has traced the history of Africa and its status in African history. The paper reflects her diligence in this work.

The old and huge continent of Africa too has a very fascinating history. Its history of struggle for the establishment of its true identity is still going on. Just like the protest theatres several movements against the oppressive ruling authority have come up from time to time. India too has a long history of struggle against oppression. In that sense, it identifies with the

African continent in various ways. The essays contributed by Paushali Chakraborti and Ayan Chatterjee present fascinating comparative studies of such movements. Chakraborti does a wonderful comparative study of the Mau Mau movement and the Tebhaga movement and tries to understand the emergence of land as a catalyst and a driving force behind both the movements. At the same time the paper also tries to trace a detailed trajectory of all the political and social complexities of these movements. Similarly, Chatterjee reminds us of the Afejuku's keynote address. Language politics emerges as an issue again in this essay. It focuses on a comparative analysis of the Bhasha Movement and the Soweto Uprising of South Africa. Both these movements were student uprisings. Chatterjee's paper tries to trace the journey of the language in becoming a crucial determinant of the mass expression.

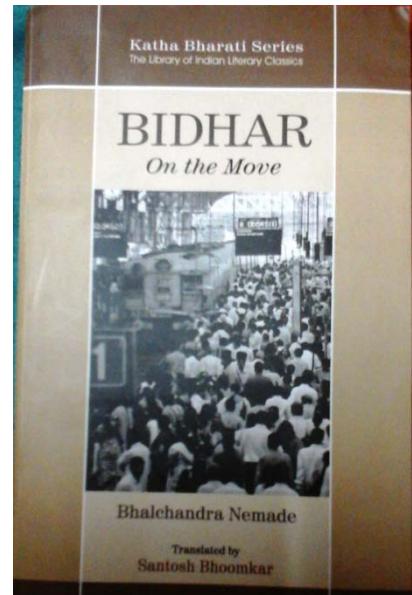
Apart from all these, Sayantan Dasgupta has given us a little glimpse of the status of the continent in European literatures. He has chosen a very interesting text to address the purpose of his paper. Tintin is one of the most popular comic-book characters and therefore draws the attention of every reader easily. In this paper Dasgupta has identified several knots of language politics and racism which remain underneath the intense adventures which Tintin undertakes in Congo. This paper not only identifies the hidden racism in the Tintin comicbook but also locates the areas of miscommunication which result in misconceptions, and thus increases the gaps and fractures that lie between the two continents and their people.

Debashree Dattaray and Riti Sharma have addressed the issue of slavery as an important aspect of the history of Africa and the United States of America. In her paper Dattaray has reflected on the concept of regionalized spaces and boundaries and their impact on the formation of indigeneity and race. Sharma, on the other hand, analyzes the slave narratives and their role in the revitalization of African American history. She has also reflected on the journey of these narratives becoming the representation of a collective memory from an individual one. Both these papers open up new dimensions of American historiography.

This collection of papers will prove to be very helpful for the scholars who work on different aspects of Africa. The papers here are very inspiring and are capable of opening up new windows for further research.

Marathi Novel in Translationby Swagata Bhattacharya¹***Bidhar – On the Move* by Bhalchandra Nemade.****Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar.**

Mysore: Katha Bharati Series,
Sahitya Akademi & CIIL. 2016.
Print. ISBN 978-81-260-2845-0. 254 pp. ₹ 130.



Marathi novelist Bhalchandra Nemade's *Bidhar* is the first of his tetralogy with Changdeo Patil as the protagonist. Published in 1967, *Bidhar* was followed by *Hool*, *Jarila* and *Jhool* which presented before his readers a 'hero' forever engaged in both simultaneously rejecting and accepting the world. Patil's confrontation with the world at large and his inclination to be a part of it begins with *Bidhar* where he comes forward as the quintessential protagonist coping with an existentialist crisis. In fact, Nemade's concept of 'Deshvad', as opposed to nationalism, found its roots in *Bidhar*.

Changdeo Patil, the son of a family that owned a substantial amount of landed property in the village of Udali surrounded by the hills of Satpura, goes to Mumbai for higher studies. His ambition and his desperation to become a citizen of the new world make him oblivious of the family's financial condition. In an attempt to sharpen his intellect and satisfy his cultural tastes, Changdeo, Changya to his friends, wastes all his family's money and even decides to bunk his exams. As the gulf between him and his family widens, Changdeo immerses himself more and more into political debates and is deeply intrigued by the question of death. His obsession with disease and death haunts him throughout the novel. His eternal anxiety is a direct manifestation of the crisis—what does his existence actually signify? Educated in Western philosophy and immersed in the Western notions of politics and idealism, Changdeo Patil is the prototype of one far removed from the society in which

¹ Holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University.

he happens to live. Yet he dreams of changing this society and in his desire he only suffers, both physically as well as psychologically. In fact, his physical suffering is a metaphor for his internal turmoil and anguish. Fatal questions of life and death were vexing him. He had never come across such questions in native or western plays. That was why everything new and amazing was like hell to him (p 8)

The story moves back and forth in time with Patil reminiscing his childhood back in his ancestral home and his adulthood in the busy streets of Mumbai. He also travels in and out of consciousness and his reveries. Threatened with the possibility of tuberculosis, Changdeo feels he must never get married. He also feels he has lost all interest in women. Nevertheless, his inability to marry frustrates him. He emerges as an eternally frustrated human being who considers himself superior to others and yet does not know where and how to manifest his superiority. He found himself in the midst of many other young men equally frustrated with the system and looking for a way-out. His nights were plagued by anxiety followed by a tremendous urge to sleep. In an attempt to rid himself of the pain, Patil took to pursuing higher studies without the knowledge of his family and sustained himself by writing articles for newspapers and journals. Even then, the medium of writing became a matter of debate. It was a time when English was fast overtaking the market of the native tongue. *Bidhar* ends with the rise of Narayan who was once an idealist and used to write in Marathi. Towards the end of *Bidhar*, it is this Narayan who says, “Writers in Marathi are bloody fool...Marathi literature is a big hoax.” (p 241) Through the character of Narayan Nemade critiques the urge to find quick money and fame by choosing English as the only language for communication. Nemade’s concept of ‘Deshvad’ is all for reviving the native tongue and enriching it with the help of indigenous resources. Patil leaves Narayan’s house in search of another journey. As he leaves he says to himself, “At this moment I have no house, but everything is going to be sorted out soon”. (p 248) The title ‘Bidhar’ has been translated into English as ‘on the move’. Changdeo Patil’s eternal quest for the meaning of life and existence keeps him forever on the move. *Bidhar* is indeed a tale of movement, of life in flux. Published two years after the publication of U.R. Ananthamurthy’s existentialist novel *Samskara* (1965), *Bidhar* is an open-ended novel which refuses to reach any conclusion as the protagonist refuses to overcome his existentialist crisis. Instead, Nemade prolongs Patil’s search by making him continue as the central character in *Hool*.

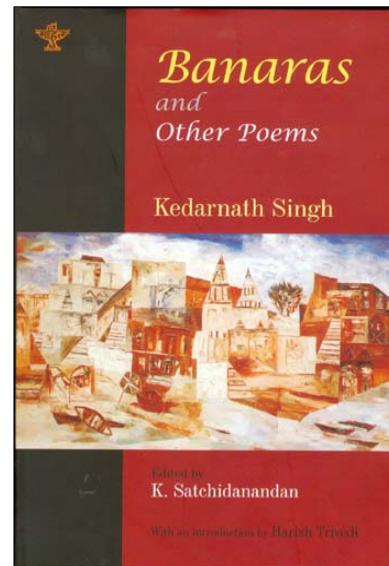
Bidhar is a reflection of its era. It describes the Mumbai of 1960s (Bombay to the rest of India but Mumbai to Maharashtrians,), the city of dreams, of opportunities, of exploitations and of disillusionments. It also portrays side-by-side the gradual disintegration of joint-families and the demise of feudal structures in the rural areas. The rise of communist ideals and emergence of trade unions were characteristic markers of 1960s India. , Radical views on politics and religion were being propagated by Western-educated young men like Changdeo Patil who were in favour of a radical reformation of the society through Western idealism. Sahitya Akademi's initiative to publish translations of works written in regional Indian languages is highly commendable since it gives access to a wider audience who would have been otherwise unaware of the works existing in the various Indian languages. Jnanpit winner Bhalchandra Nemade's *Bidhar* may not be his greatest work, yet it is a significant one. Its translated version gives us the opportunity to access and study the world of the lost and confused Changdeo Patils of 1960s India who were caught between ideas and ideals and did not know how to react.

The translation is replete with indigenous words and references to ancient texts like *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Kathasaritsagar*. Culture-specific words such as 'babu', 'bhau-ji', 'bhang', 'Dasera', 'dholki', etc. Have been retained within the text and have been listed in the glossary at the end. There are references to eminent figures of the time such as Kishore Kumar, 'Burman dada' and Waheeda Rahman, who have also been listed in the glossary which shall help foreign readers gain interest in the text.

Hindi Poetry in Translationby Ria Roy Choudhury¹***Banaras and Other Poems:***

Anthology of selected poems of eminent Hindi poet Kedarnath Singh,
Ed. K. Satchidanandan.

New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 2015. Print.
ISBN: 978-81-260-4744-4.
133 pp. ₹ 150.



The book is a valuable addition to the existing translations of Kedarnath Singh's poetry. It covers a wide range of his poems from '*Hastakshar kar deta hun*' and '*San 1947 ko yaad karte huye*' to '*Kaali mitti*', '*Maajhi ka pul*' and '*Kavita*'. The introduction by Harish Trivedi provides an insight into Singh's rustic origins. The Ganga, which flows three kilometres to the south of his village, appears in many of his poems in both its familiar and unfamiliar aspects. Trivedi holds a mirror to his childhood and elucidates how his poetic afflatus was influenced by "the songs in praise of Mother Ganga which the village women sang". The first string of his life was attached to Banaras when he went there for senior school and like William Wordsworth, Singh keeps 'recollecting' it in 'tranquillity'. Kedarnath Singh, even at the peak of his career, always remains attached to his roots. Trivedi explains how the poet's excursions to New York, Trinidad, Berlin and Paris, whose reflections are evident in his poetry, "do not fill emptiness but serve rather to deepen it."

In the book *Banaras and Other Poems*, contributions have been made by Vinay Dharwadker, Anamika, Christi Merrill, E.V. Ramakrishnan, K. Satchidanandan and Harish Trivedi. Vinay Dharwadker's translations of Kedarnath Singh's poems have been a brilliant attempt of what may be called (in the words of Dryden) 'paraphrasing' of the source

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language text. That is to say that Dharwadker has taken the liberty of altering the sequence of words and lines and often as a consequence, the total number of lines exceeds the actual number of the Hindi poems. However, he has not altered the meaning of the original poems and has placed special attention in keeping intact Singh's unique style of punctuating, that is to say that the lines have all been kept unpunctuated. This has been a concern not only for Dharwadker but also for all the translators who have contributed in the book of poetry.

The translations concretize Kedarnath Singh's attempt to amalgamate motifs that are not generally compatible with each other. For instance, 'love poem' and 'ducks' in '*On Reading a Love Poem*', 'mother' 'squeezed between needle and thread' in '*Between Needle and Thread*', 'nests' and the 'Taj Mahal' in '*The History of Nests*', 'word' and 'snake' in '*Words Don't Die of Cold*' and so on. Such confluence of themes that are poles apart, often reminds of the syllogism of Metaphysical poetry. Time and again through his poetry, Singh has returned back to his village, to Banaras, to Delhi and J.N.U. He returns to his 'mother-tongue', to his 'home and country' and personifies water in several of his poems. On pages xxv and xxvi, Harish Trivedi talks about the humans who have existed in Kedarnath Singh's poems including Buddha, who had once walked the same grounds of Uttar Pradesh as Singh himself, an old Buddhist monk whom he knew, some of the Muslim residents of his village like Ibrahim Miyaan and so on.

Images form a crucial part of the poems and they keep shifting from the romantic to the post-modern, from the surreal to the trivialities of existence. One such instance is found in the poem 'Law and Custom' as follows-

"The moon borrows from the sun
Oceans borrow from rivers
India borrows from the World Bank"

In 'Broken Down Truck', the poet moves from a subjective to a universal realm as he goes on to explain how the broken-down truck was actually a representation of his city without which, it would have been difficult for the city to be recognised. According to Singh, the ploughing of a tractor is a melody to the ears of oxen, as found in 'The Oxen's Love of Music'. Thus, that which is generally considered to be a cacophony by humans is a symphony for oxen. In 'Home and Country', the poet considers Hindi to be his 'country' and

Bhojpuri to be his ‘home’. In Appendix-I, K. Satchidanandan discusses the continuous interplay of the rural and the urban in Kedarnath Singh’s poetry. While the country represents innocence and tranquillity, the city is an emblem of ambition, din and bustle and materialism. The ox in ‘Zameen Pak Rahi Hain’ is a symbol of the cruelty undergone in a rural milieu along with its engrossing and meditative aspect. Buddha reminds him of over-utilization of water on earth while in ‘The Carpenter and the Bird’, the brutal strokes of the axe not only uproots a tree but also snatches away a home from a bird and perhaps even its life.

Taking Singh’s original poems into consideration, no rhyme scheme or metre in particular, has been followed in the translations which are wrought with enjambments. Metaphors and occasional use of alliterations are common. Overall, the book is a valuable contribution in the arena of Indian Literature in Translation and provides valuable insight into the world of ennui and decadence, the city of myth, religion and history and the picture of the world around us, which Kedarnath Singh has painted with his own perspective.

Tamil poetry in Translationby Ritika Batabyal¹***Signature* by Puviyarasu,****Trans. K.S. Subramanian.**

New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 2016.
Print. ISBN: 978-81-260-4875-5.
153 pp, ₹ 135.

Signature, published from Sahitya Akademi, is the English translation of the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Tamil Poetry Collection, *Kaiyoppam* written by the poet Puviyarasu. The translation has been done by K.S. Subramanian who has extensively translated literary works from Tamil to English language over the past few years. *Signature* comprises a translation of approximately seventy nine poems. A reading of the poems clearly displays the unfolding of a medley of ideas encompassing philosophical moorings, ecstasy about nature's beauty, the alluring charm of a child and social insights. The beauty of the poems lies in the fact they engage the readers and rake their minds with issues dealing with contemporary society and human life. The two short poems under the rubric "Untitled" explicitly brings forth philosophical vignettes – "The dot not moving /becomes not a line. / Stagnate not!" (2) The poem exquisitely draws the picture of life itself and emphasises upon the vitality of life. Life implies action hence without movement the line of life becomes inactive. Another poem within this rubric beautifully brings out the authenticity and importance of memories preserved within the heart. The address is not important if the face is secured in the heart. In another short poem the poet asks human beings to be a "sacrifice at the altar" (2) because this is the way to achieve immortality after death and also the way to serve humanity. These short poems with gentle strokes of the brush paint the picture directly and hit the point. They are shorn off embellishments and are direct in their articulation. The

¹ Resource Person, School of Languages and Culture, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata.

poem “The Weapon” is apparently very simple and talks about umbrellas and how the poet considers using umbrellas as weapons. But a deeper reading reveals that the umbrellas are symbols for the common man. Just like umbrellas are forgotten and discarded yet their presence is “unavoidable” and they can act as “protective shields” (12). Similarly the common people though considered to be unimportant can wield much power and fight against all odds. The poem tries to corroborate that forgotten things can become important and it depends on the perception of the user.

Many of the poems in this collection discuss issues which are part and parcel of the contemporary society. Sometimes the poems discuss socio political issues that plague the life of the people in the ‘modern’ world and sometimes they present the predicament of the ‘modern’ individual and his responses to these problems. The poem “Inauguration” is reminiscent of the lacuna within our government where we see many bridges, railway tracks and subways being constructed in the city but hardly these works are completed and if completed they wait eternally to be officially inaugurated by the ministers. The poem describes a bridge building process which still awaits formal inauguration. The poem unabashedly says that birds, wind, animals walk across it yet until a minister or the governor opens it the bridge is not inaugurated. The poem subtly mocks both at the system and the ministers who do not have time for the common people although they come to power with the people’s mandate. Poems like “A Picture with Life” draw beautifully the portrait of the monotony of mundane life which is occasionally broken by a furl of activity. There are poems which bring out the despair and dissatisfaction of the individual at not being able to afford costly things. “Weight” is one such poem revealing despair at not being able to afford the weight of costly crystal vase. “Tangle” is another interesting poem which contrasts an easy, free flowing life to that of a stagnant one with the figures of a circle and a square. “The Thorn” beautifully reveals the ignorance of people who considers time to be bound within the limits of the clock. The poet says the clock unmindful of time only ticks on while human beings are pricked by the thorny hands of time. The poem “Load-bearer” is a description of the Sumai Thaangi culture in Tamil Nadu which is disappearing fast. The poet thus feels disturbed and grieves at the disappearance of the load-bearers. “The Continuum” is another mind-boggling poem which reveals how external forces can create havoc and at the end only memory remains. The poem beautifully uses the image of a lighted candle and a dark room to

drive home the point. “No Waiting” is another poem with philosophical musing. It subtly hints at the importance of existence which is the ultimate truth, there is neither any coming nor going. The poem “Loyalty” evinces the desire of a loyal devotee who is trying to alter the relation between god and the devotee by trying to solve the problems of the godhead. The devotee out of love and their long standing relationship desires to know and fix the problems of the god. “Signature” is another important poem revealing how a signature is considered to be all important sometimes even at the cost of the individual. The poet announces that for him poetry is his heartbeat as it could take varied forms unlike a signature. The poem thus criticises ‘modern’ society which meaninglessly has put all importance to mere signatures. “Oh! God!” is another important take on the socio political situation of the country. The poet is shocked to read the newspaper which reports innumerable corruption enveloping the country. The poem “The Clock Tower” draws another picture of the corrupt socio political system which throttles and suffocates the life of the people. “The Royal Court” evinces the condition of people under servility just like the chess pieces locked in a box are moved by the whims of any one playing with them. Their desire to rise above their condition slowly dies down and is synonymous with people who lack the vigour and courage to revolt. “Be Awake” is another poem critiquing the ‘modern’ society where load-shedding and power cuts are common things hence even in the twenty first century candles and match sticks are to be kept in handy. The last poem “Confusion” is a fitting finale, drawing the curtain for this collection. On one hand the poem reveals that confusion is a sign of life and action, otherwise one is benumbed or dead. The last section of the poem on the other hand announces vociferously the blossoming of new poems which will continue until the confusion of the poet ceases. Thus the poet creates a continuum between this collection of poems and his future poems. It is important to reiterate that the poems in this collection encompass myriad emotions and moods. The poems reflecting philosophical introspection are crisp and direct revealing the skill of the poet in driving home philosophical thoughts. Further the poems critiquing important social and political issues evince the deep understanding of the social situation and the poet’s anger and anguish over the corrupt socio political system of contemporary society. Poems like “Erasure” (16) display the charm and innocence of a child who knows that his foot-prints on the sand will get washed away by the waves. Thus the child claps with joy unlike adults who crave for material things and tries to cling to them forgetting that nothing is permanent on earth. Again the poem “Salvation” (82) displays the greater truths hidden in

Nature. A flower knows its duty is to bloom and then fall down on the earth and it never complains for its fate. Human beings on the other hand are always complaining and are never satisfied with their lot.

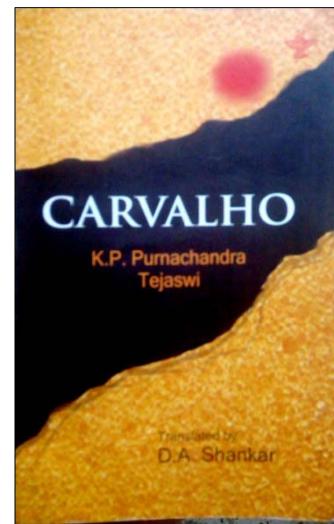
It would be unfair to overlook the skill of the translator who beautifully and with poetic sensitivity has translated these poems from Tamil to English. The translator needs to be applauded with open arm. In the Foreword to this collection Puviyarasu has said that the translations read like the original poems. The translation is free flowing and lucid therefore commendable.

Kannada Novella in Translationby Rindon Kundu¹***Carvalho* by K.P. Purnachandra Tejaswi.**

Trans. D.A. Shankar.

New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. 2014. Print.

ISBN: 978-81-260-4249-4. 98pp. ₹ 80.



Before starting my pilgrimage through the world of the dense rainy forests of Western Ghats as pictured in the novella titled *Carvalho* (1980), written by distinguished Sahitya Akademi awardee Kannada novelist and short story-writer K.P. Purnachandra Tejaswi, let me express my sincere apology that I am not familiar with the Kannada language and therefore will solely rely on the English translation (2014) of the aforementioned novella. The English translation is by the noted poet, playwright, educationist and translator, D.A. Shankar.

In the introductory note, the translator rightly points out that, “*Carvalho* presents many worlds: the dream world, the world of science and mystery and the workaday world of normal simple human beings” (Tejaswi viii). It takes me back to the age of Darwinian Theory of Evolution as, like Charles Darwin, Carvalho, the eponymous character of the book, undertakes a journey in search of the Truth of human existence. This evocative novel is set in a faraway village in the Moodigere district which is situated in the foothills of the Western Ghats. The story starts with the narrator, a well-educated farmer, who came to Moodigere Bee-Keepers’ Society in search of authentic honey for his ailing father and in due course met Mandanna, who, to the narrator, was nothing but a rural truant, whimsical in nature. Later, the narrator encountered Carvalho who is ‘an Officer at the Paddy Research Centre’ (p 11) and ‘a great botanist, an entomologist of great renown’ (p 11) and most importantly the Guru

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of Mandanna. Though Mandanna, bee-keeper by profession, has been considered as a ne'er-do-well vagabond by the local commoners and friends, the narrator was surprised to see that Carvalho, a scientist with an international reputation, was describing Mandanna as 'a born naturalist' (p 57), a man with the keen 'art of observation' (p 57) and 'an extraordinary natural scientist' (p 58). The author brilliantly juxtaposes the popular notion about Mandanna which is derived by the explicit depiction of his personal life, hilarious wedding and his relationship with his new wife and in-laws with the impression he creates on a man of science like Carvalho who seems to understand Mandanna in a completely new light. For Carvalho, Mandanna's vagabondish nature has a different meaning altogether. It is nothing less than scientific research. Later on, we, the readers, also come across other important characters of the novella such as cook-cum-expert-tree-climber, bird catcher, bow-legged, bent and curved Biryani Kariappa (p 65); Prabhakara, the official movie cameraman; Yenka, the snake-catcher; Kiwi, the narrator's dog and others. As the story progresses, we come to know that the scientist Carvalho was engaged in a quest tracing the endangered flying lizard, which his 'disciple' Mandanna had seen in the jungle of Norvey. The rest of the story revolves around this mystical search for this extinct species as Carvalho tries to perceive and record a new evolutionary order in nature. As a few important characters of the novel along with Carvalho, Mandanna and the narrator begins the journey into the thick forest of Norvey, the book grips the readers' minds with intense suspense and alacrity and they keep pondering on the success of the expedition which began in search of an ancient creature which no human eyes has ever beheld. At the end of the story, the readers find out that the larger issue does not lie in the materiality of finding the flying lizard rather it was a quest for experiential Truth about the ceaseless evolutionary process.

Simply written, unpretentious, *Carvalho* weaves a web of curiosity around the readers as all enticing stories do. Throughout the book, the author tries to re-establish the superiority of Nature over human control and tries to question the anthropocentric nature of the world. There is an attempt on the part of the writer to fuse the evolutionary history of human civilisation with the contemporary socio-political power structure by drawing extensively from the knowledge created by modern science as well as close observation of rural characters. The meticulous detail with which the novella re-creates the flora and fauna of the Western Ghats is remarkable. Over the past decade and more, a new interdisciplinary area of

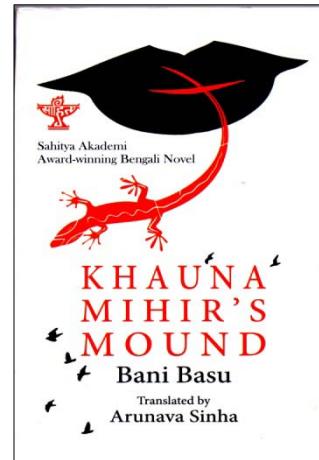
research, named Environmental Humanities or Ecological Humanities, has been emerging in the realm of humanities and social science disciplines and Tejaswi's novella has an intimate connection with this newfound genre. This widely read novella also shows the link between 'ecology' and 'language' by depicting, as the translator describes, the 'interrelatedness ... among man, society, beliefs and superstitions and natural and manmade environmental aspects' (p vii) which in a way shape our language and in turn are shaped through language. In the last quarter of the 20th century the world has seen the increasingly rapid destruction of the ecological systems that support life in the name of development, a very few writers like Tejaswi have immersed themselves into the deeper intellectual pursuit, into the philosophy of Nature and in this respect Carvalho and Tejaswi become the single entity whose 'words reach us with the power of the sayings of our ancient Upanishadic sages' (p 84). On the whole, K.P. Tejaswi's *Carvalho* engages with the ontological quest regarding metaphysical self knowledge – who we are, where from we come and where will we go.

Bangla Novel in Translationby Avishek Rath¹*Khauna Mihirer Dhipi* by *Bani Basu*.Trans. Arunava Sinha's. *Khauna Mihir's Mound*

New Delhi: Sahitya

Akademi, 2016. Print.

ISBN: 978-81-260-4757-4. 227 pp. ₹ 160.



This novel by Bani Basu has two plots which run side by side. One is situated in the ancient past which opens with characters like Ranka, Matangi, Nimesh, Bhaga, and Aryama. The ideal leadership of liberal chieftain Matangi is destroyed by the attack of another group which was led by another female chieftain as well. The intermingling of the two groups opens up hopes of a bright future. But it was destroyed by one of the male members of the group who was earlier expelled for his atrocities. The liberal ones were killed in war and the domination of man-made one-sided rule began. On the other side, a parallel plot runs in the text which has modern day society as its context. But in this society as well, those same attitudes of the past could be found albeit in cloaked avatars. The only positive point is while in the other plot the end comes in a tragic way, in the plot with modern civilization as its context we encounter rays of hope at the end.

“The novel speaks in several voices. There are the internal monologues of a mother and a daughter, telling the stories of five generations of women in a family. These are interleaved with a recreation of the transition of power from women to men in a prehistoric society, as imagined by an archaeologist. Capturing the different registers of narration as well as the cadences of thought was a formidable challenge.”

This was Arunava Sinha's reply while answering a question regarding the “particular interests and challenges” of translating *Khauna Mihirer Dhipi* from Bengali into English.

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While going through the English translation of the Bengali novel which examines the passing of the rein of the civilization from women to men, it is found that the translation is a smooth one with a few expressions in italics bearing the mark of its tag as a “translation”. The text is translated almost word by word in many cases and in some cases even the intonation pattern of the Bengali is sought to be captured in the translation by dividing phonemes in exactly the same places as in the original. Onomatopoeic words are translated through different techniques in different places. Sometimes they are simply transliterated and sometimes they are replaced by cultural equivalents. In the original text, there are characters from the ancient past and there are words in the speeches of some characters which stand for the historical context of their speakers. For example, the text has many words that are no longer in currency. They have been replaced by other words. But in the translation, these markers seem to be absent. However, that is perhaps inevitable while translating a work such as this one. There are arguments, and in many cases justified, in favour of translating ancient classics employing contemporary usage. While translating quotations from songs, the author translated the text first and then presented a paraphrase of it. It is also a common practice as in many translations published by several international publication houses, we often find that even in cover designs of the translations of Indian titles, the titles of the original books are first transliterated and then a catchy paraphrase-like expression follow. In some cases, the problematic cultural terms are simplified and replaced by cultural part-equivalents. But the positive impact is that the reader of the translation can somehow feel the essence of the original expressions. The absence of any footnote or endnote in the translation may be thought of as a bold step towards the post-colonial stance of translation theorists. It is perhaps to attract the mindset of the readers of Indian classics who may feel the smooth text as a “text” in itself and not a “translation”. It is possible to surmise from the translation that the translator perhaps has in mind the pan-Indian readership along with the international readership as well. As a translator of so many Bengali classics, Sinha is well acquainted with the different dimensions of problems which a translator has to face while translating from Bengali into English. His experience comes through in the way he deals with the challenges of translating a complex text like the one under review. The result is an enriching and pleasurable reading.