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Editorial

This issue of *Sāhitya* comes after a gap of two years, due to our organisational constraints. In this issue, we present a set of exciting essays related to various aspects of Comparative Literature, which have been included alphabetically. Ayan Chatterjee's paper takes up the issues of influence and reception, core concepts of French Comparative Literature, and reads them in the context of Modern Bangla poetry. Talking about reception within the intralingual context, the paper breaks the age-old myth that comparative literature happens only when two or more languages/literatures interact. Bipasha Som's article hints at the importance of retaining the essence of ethnic identity in literature in the era of globalization in order to form a canonized national literature. She brings back the discussion of writing India in English and how this has been suspected as not appropriate enough to describe experiences that are essentially Indian. Ishani Dutta's paper is singularly important because it takes up the major concern of the disciplinary study of Comparative Literature in India today. Explaining the difference between Comparative Literature as practiced in the West and elsewhere, the paper attempts to show how the reformulation of the discipline needs to go beyond raising questions of methodology. Ragini Chakraborty's essay focuses on the well-known Komagata Maru incident, one of the enduring examples of racial exclusion practiced at one time by the Canadian state; what is remarkable about this essay is the way the author uses literary representations of the historical incident and fuses them with personal interviews to arrive at her analysis. Saswati Saha's paper takes up the topic of travel and translation, understanding translation as a contact zone in interlingual communication. The author's study of the translation of *Gulliver's Travels* into Bangla has opened up a model to bring together Translation Studies and book history to reconceptualise the reception of literary genres and themes as translational phenomena. Seram Guneswari Devi's paper transports us to the north-eastern states of India and highlights the political conflicts that have become the everyday reality of people inhabiting marginal spaces. Using the works of Temsula Ao, Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh and Yumlembam Ibomcha, the paper makes an interesting argument about violence and violation of human rights, thus forging a comparative approach towards Conflict Studies. Soma Marik takes up for her perceptive paper, Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Khwabnama* and Savitri Roy's *Trisrota* and *Swaralipi* and attempts to understand them in terms of their location on questions of gender and nation in South Asia. Sudeshna Dutta has taken up the issue of harmonious co-existence of man and nature and the ecological balance reached

therein in an adivasi society which is conflicted by ideas of development and rehabilitation. This paper deals with the environmental concerns that threaten to cripple the world today. Susmita Ghosh's article takes up two feminist texts 'Sarika Caged' by Saroj Pathak and 'Unpublished Manuscript' by Ambai to talk about the specificities of women's writing and why it is important to talk about women's writing in general to understand the laired complexities of their existence in the patriarchal world. Vandana Sharma brings in the concerns of subalternity and hegemonic historiography by comparing works of Mahasweta Devi and Ngugu wa' Thiong'o. This issue also carries a book review by Swagata Bhattacharya of Bhalchandra Nemade's *Jareela (The Castrato)*.

As this issue goes online, I remember with fondness and gratitude, Professor Vasant Sharma, former CLAI Treasurer, whom we lost some time ago. Professor Sharma was instrumental in bringing out this journal and he edited it over several issues. I dedicate this issue of *Sāhitya* to his memory.

— Jatindra Kumar Nayak

Returning of *Chaka* to a Star: Impact of Jibanananda Das in Binoy Majumdar's poetryAyan Chatterjee¹**Abstract:**

Modern Bangla poetry started its journey in the 3rd decade of the 20th century. Jibanananda Das, Buddhadev Bose, Amiya Chakraborty, Sudhindranath Dutta were some of the notable modern poets of that period. In 5th decade, Bangla poetry had some brilliant young poets again. Some of them were inspired and influenced by Jibanananda. Binoy Majumdar was one of them. The impact of Jibanananda's poetry was very prominent in his works. Though later he managed to find his own *parole*. This essay aims to do an intralingual reception study which relates these two important poets of Bangla literature, Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) and Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006). We will try to analyze the impact of Jibanananda on the poetic works of Binoy Majumdar here.

Keywords: Reception, impact, poetry, Jibanananda, Binoy

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I

Reading of a text becomes problematic mainly in two ways. Firstly, a certain text always remains the function (f)¹ of chronotope. So we should not try to analyse it as a separate, alienated one. Secondly, the idea of connecting a text with another one may appear in the 'horizon of expectation' of a reader anytime. If we try to look into the matter in the light of 'dominant-residual-emergent', then we can find that no text in true sense can be termed as 'new' because it always receives something from its predecessors either positively or negatively. It is needless to say that the concept of the *dominant-residual-emergent* (Williams, 121) is not static rather a minute differential of a continuous process which changes from time to time. We can relate this dynamicity with the dynamic nature of the systems in *Poly system* theory. Over all it can be said that reception study is one of the most significant tool of Comparative Literature even in this morning saga of Cultural Studies.

This essay aims to do an intralingual reception study which relates two important poets of Bangla literature, Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) and Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006). We are going to analyze the impact of Jibanananda- the most significant Bengali poet after Rabindranath on the poetic works of Binoy Majumdar, a notable poet of 5th decade of the previous century.

Nakhshatrer Aloy (In the light of the star) -the first book of Binoy Majumdar was published in 1958. Although, Jibanananda died four years before, i.e. in 1954, he was present in almost every inch of that book. This was not an exceptional case. Bengali poets of 3rd decade of the earlier century also face the problem to overcome the influence of Rabindranath upon themselves. Likewise, for the poets of 5th and 6th decade, it was the influence of Jibanananda. With respect to the reception of Jibanananda, we can divide the poetic works of Binoy Majumdar into three phases- out of which *Nakhshatrer Aloy* was the starting one. We can consider this book as nothing more than an imitation of Jibanananda. To be more precise, it was the imitation of the poems written by Jibanananda in his first three books i.e. *Jhara Palak (1927)*, *Dhusar pandulipi (1936)* and *Banalata Sen (1942)*. Thematically, unrequited love, sedative nature, and a pathos tune were blended in a very common Jibanananda style in this first published book of Binoy. Not only the style, Binoy also tried to do a line by line

imitation in this book. For example, we can refer to a poem 'Ar Sonayona' (don't sing the song anymore) which had a few lines copied almost word to word from a poem by Jibanananda named as 'Hai Chil' (O kite). In both of the poems, first and the last stanza were the same. We can find the essence of the same drowsy world of Jibanananda in almost each and every poem in this book. For example, we can refer to few lines from the poem named as 'Nakhshatrer Aloe',

No moon but a few stars can be seen far away.

I can see the blue star which will never

Come back to this world, I know, but

Can't it come near to the field as

The moon-star comes nearer to the earth (Majumdar, 29)²

In this poem, the word 'star' is used in three occasions. It signifies the distance- far distance between the poet and his lover. This light of star does not bear the 'glamorous lux of the moon light' but it indicates a pale sadness of a never ending distance between two lovers which remembers the fade, grey world of Jibanananda's poetry. In this occasion, it is relevant to refer the 'mental Image' stated in Iser's Reader Response' theory:

A second area that Iser explores in connection with the reading process is the image-making activity of the reader. While we read, we are continuously and unconsciously constructing images in process Iser calls "passive synthesis". Images should be distinguished from perceptions we have when encountering empirical reality; for the image "transcends" the sensory (Holub, 90)

Although these poems are nothing but a failed attempt of imitation of Jibanananda, we should remember that Binoy had not been able to learn the 'process of writing poems' at that time. In his own words-

In 1959, I spent the whole year in leisure without doing any job. During this time, I went through a lot of foreign literature. Gradually a specific process of writing poetry came into my mind. (Majumdar, 58)

The second book of Binoy was a famous one. It was edited several times. In March, 1961, it was published as *Gayatrike (To Gayatri)* which was edited and enlarged in its second edition as *Fire Eso, Chaka (Comeback, Wheel)* in September 1962. Again, in its third edition in June 1964 it was renamed as *Amar Ishwarike (To my Goddess)*. At the end, in its first Aruna

edition, it finally became *Fire Eso, Chaka (Comeback, Chaka)* again. In this book, we can find a mature and enriched Binoy who did not copy his predecessor's poetic imagery or style. Rather he tried to establish his own language of poetry here. The whole book was written in a form of a diary where he named his poems as the date of its writing. Thematically, like his first book, the poems of this book also bears the sadness of one sided love but here the uniqueness lies in the use of some brand new and splendid metaphor and long poetic metre. If we go through the poems, it will be clear that this use of metaphor or this long metrical treatment are certainly a production of Jibanananda-factory but you cannot label those features as the imitation of Jibanananda. Rather we can consider this phase of Binoy's poetry as his reception of Jibanananda. Let's have some examples-

In a poem named as '22 June 1962', Binoy, the poet, addressed his lover as 'Monoleena' which made us remember Jibanananda's famous 'Akashleena'. In the same poem, Binoy wrote, "Therefore it seems today, you are still in this world." (50) And it makes us remember the famous lines of Jibanananda- "Suranjana, you are still present in our world." (Das, 56) But we also see an attempt to overcome the impact of Jibanananda in some lines of some poems of this book. For example,

Though the trees and the branches of flower in spite of being separated at their own soil

Always dream about the breathless thought of togetherness (Majumdar, 9)

This type of line and use of this imagery of eternal separation proved Binoy's poetic calibre and established him as a unique poet of 5th decade of the previous century Bengal. Shakti Chattopadhyay, who already became famous as the literary critic at that time, also admired the above-mentioned lines. In a review of this book, Shakti wrote-

In spite of standing separated, the trees and the branches of flower dream about the breathless thought of togetherness- this astonishing and pious line is the main tune of the book named *Gayatrike*. (Chattopadhyay, 144)

Only one poem of this book did not bear the theme of love. It was '3 March 1962'. It is interesting that Jibanananda himself is the subject matter of this poem. The poems were started as-

Faded Jibanananda, on the day of your first explosion

Only a few kites said, 'Happy birthday'.

And the countless pigeons being unable to see the

Real form of cloud, thought it as the song of an impotent man (Majumdar, 10)

Probably this is the best description of the poetic career of Jibanananda Das. The poet never got an impartial, fair judgement about his poetry in his earlier career. Except a few poets like Buddhadev Bose, Achintya Kumar Sengupta, later Sanjay Bhattachaya, maximum poets and critics did not approve of his poetic elements rather they used to look down upon him. Another thing which made Binoy separated from Jibanananda in this book, was the use of sexual connotations. In most of the poems in this book, Binoy used the words like 'pale fruit', 'Inknotfruit', 'piece of pomegranate' as some metaphor for the male genital organs.

Sexuality always remains a favourite motif in Binoy's poem and this takes off from this book. Here we find this type of connotation is well covered under the poetic language but when the reader would go through from his next book *Ishwarir (For the Goddess)* to *Aghraner Anubhutimala (Series of Feeling in an late Autumn)* and at last reached *Balmikir Kabita (Poems of Balmiki)*, he surely would find that the way of expression of sexual feeling has gradually become more and more unleashed and apoetical. At the end (?!), when we reach the *Balmikir Kabita*, we would wonder how these lines can still be considered poetry! Here lies the separation between Jibanananda and Binoy. Although Jibanananda wrote a very few 'sexually controversial' poems like *Campe (at the Camp)*, his first person narrator in the poems never became eager for sexual pleasure only. His lovers would find pleasure in peace of death, in an epic grandeur of timelessness which is almost absent in Binoy's love theme. Here we have only the story of love making. In *Fire Eso, Chaka* this making was undone due to the absence of the lady whom the narrator felt to regain in the poems of *Ishwarir* and therefore the process of love making was started. This process continued in *AghranerAnubhutimala* but in spite of this, marvellous poetic language and epic style of narration and the slowest metrical rhythm made the six long poems of this book readable. But a true poetry lover stops while reading *Balmikir Kabita* because there remain no traces of poetry in the 'poems' of this book. This book can be described as A graded sexual stories written in poetic metre. This book was banned after its publication and the poet also accepted its vulgarity and obscenity.

Aghraner Anubhutimala was another example of the impact of Jibanananda in Binoy's writing. 'Aghran' is an Bangla month which fell into the part of late autumn season. This season is a very favourite season of Jibanananda. He treated this season as the season of death, season of love and also the season of losing everything. Binoy took a portion of these feeling. He considered this late autumn as the season of making love. This book contained six long poems which could be described as the series of feeling of love making in the month of *Aghran* i.e. the late autumn. This is the best and finest example of the impact of Jibanananda in Binoy's poetry. The poems do not bear any sign of imitating Jibanananda but rather there is a clear mark of the impact which always makes the later work more enriched.

II

I have already said that a poet always thinks differently. His mind is never filled with any pre occupied notions or ideologies. Even if filled anytime, emotion and the light of imagination always supersede them. Therefore it can be said that into a real poem, thoughts, decisions, questions and ideologies hide themselves as the arteries, veins and blood vessels use to conceal behind the seductive stare of a beautiful lady. They use to conceal but some special readers can feel their presence. They can understand that those thoughts and ideologies are present in a harmony -not in a forced co-existence. (Das, 78)

If we go through the following lines after this-

A reader's heart becomes overwhelmed simultaneously with the text. If these two hearts get united to dance, then it is cleared that not only the writing but also the reading of that poetry is successful. (Majumdar, 89)

Starting from two different points, both thoughts intersect at a single point and that is heart of a reader. Reader is the target of poetry. So both of these poets thought about the stability of the taste of a poetry in the reader's mind.

Obviously, Bharata and his *Rasa* theory can be remembered here. It is very interesting fact that, in spite of having a vast knowledge of western poetry and poetic theories like the other 'Modern' Bengali poets, both Binoy and Jibanananda analyze their own poetic treatment on the basis of Indian poetics. Both of them agree at a point that poetic imaginations and emotions are the heart of a poetry, ideology and rationality cannot supersede them. In this respect, we can remember those famous lines of Jibanananda-

All are not poets. Some are poets because there are imaginations in their heart and a separate concrete amount of thoughts and experience are present in their imagination, (Das, 7)

Although, it cannot be denied that Binoy was not concerned about the relationship between the *Rasa* and the *Bhabas*. He did not utter a single word about the *Bhabas*. Even he did not care about the eight or nine categories of *rasa*. Rather, in his theory, he considered *Anubhuties* (feelings) as the equivalent of *rasa* and divided it into four categories, i.e. *ujjibak*, *uttejak*, *nistejak* and *apradhan*. Among these categories, he considered *uttejak* as the mother of all the *rasas* and *uttejak* as the real *rasa*. He gave less importance to the *nistejak* categories which included sorrow, pain, etc. Although we knew that saddest thoughts produce sweetest songs. So, it can be said that Binoy received *Bharata* in his own way.

Binoy considered poetry writing as the reading of a text. The poem, which will be written by the poet, is actually ready to be read by the readers. The function of a poet is to make it delivered properly. In his own word-

Everything lies covered and simple in this world. This cover which bounds and surrounds all the present and future poems, must be removed to discover these poems. (Majumdar 2002, 12)

Binoy compared this incident with a mathematical problem. A mathematical problem is a problem when it's de touched from the outer world. As soon as it is connected, it becomes a 'solution'. Here Binoy connected poetry with mathematics. In his own word-

When a poet starts eating, his foods (writings) are well covered and ornamented. This writings are like the mathematical problems which is yet to be solved and therefore the existence of which in this real world cannot be determined. It cannot be even felt or seen. I describe this situation as the 'Connectionless situation with the world' and that's why it is called a 'problem'. Whenever a reason of its appearance to the real world arises, it is said that 'a connection is established with the outer world'. It's also said that the problem has been solved. (13)

He finds more similarities between the poetic and mathematical world when it comes to their method of solution. In mathematics, solution of a group of problems made after establishing a formula or equation. This formula or equation is created by generalization of a particular

problem. According to Binoy, the same method is also applied in case of writing a poem. Here also a poet derives an equation or formula to uncover a would be poem so that it can connect with the external world. To establish this connection, he must take the situation from the particular state to general. So the method of generalization is common for both the cases. Feeling of separation and eagerness for integrity is the mother of Binoy's poetry. If we set aside his first book *Nakshatrer Aloe* from our discussion considering it as a product of his preparatory days, we can find these feelings present very much in his most of the books like *Gayatrike* or *Fire Eso*, *Chaka* or *Amar Ishwarike*, *Ishwarir*, *Adhikintu*, *Aghraner Anubhutimala* and even in *Balmikir Kabita* also.

Primarily, *Fire Eso*, *Chaka* was a collection of unrequited love. The word 'Chaka' was derived from the Bengali surname Chakraborty. Previously, the book was named as *Gayatrike* and it was dedicated to Gayatri Chakraborty. So, it can be guessed that the poems of this book were written with a feeling of separation from a particular lady. Poems of this book bear that pain of separation-

A long ago, you left like a flood

Even after returning. I live like a dry fruit of *Shirish*

Among the fresh green leaves. For a very few occasion,

If I look at the old wall, you come out of its zigzag lines

Like a shape of woman. (20)

Or,

If you will not come back any more,

Will not be mixed with the astronaut

Vapour of boiling water,

It will also be another experience (21)

Or,

You went far away like the egg

Broken before reaching its destination

Those hands are also missing (11)

The reader must take a pause here. Will it be justified to confine these poems only at the periphery of one sided unrequited love or does it demand something more? For this purpose, we have to look at the third separate book of Binoy which was named as *Ishwarir*. The word 'Ishwari' always played an important role in Binoy's poetry. His second book *Fire eso, Chaka*, was renamed third time as *Amar Ishwarike* and in 1965, a collection was published as *Ishwarir Kabitabali*. So it can be said that sorrow for separation and joy for virtual resurrection is the driving force of his major poetic works. It is also applicable for his latter works likes *Aghraner Anubhutimala* and *Balmikir Kabita*. Now, let's have a discussion about the *Ishwari*. In Bangla, the word *ishwari* means goddess. Besides this, it can also be used as a proper noun for any Bengali female and even for the male also. In BharatChandra's *Annadamangal kavya*, we have a character named *Ishwari Patani* who is a male boat-man. Although, here we can confirm that the *Ishwari* of Binoy is not a male because the poet himself claimed that he used to think himself as her husband. In a letter to Tarun Bandhapadhyay, the editor of Binoy's Poetry Collection, the poet said-

I understand that the book *Ishwari* has compiled you to think. When I was writing that book, I really used to think that-

1. I am the husband of *Ishwari*.
2. *Ishwari* herself uttered the whole book in my mental world and from that I copied and wrote. Therefore all the poems of the book were actually written by *Ishwari* herself. I was just her copier.- All these were already written in that book.
3. There are two behind this nomenclature. The first one I have told already that 'all the poems of the book were actually written by *Ishwari* herself.' The second reason has been hidden till date but I think it's better to tell you about it in this situation. On the cover of the book, it is written-

Isharir

Binoy Majumder

You consider the two lines as a sentence like Binoy Majumder is *Ishari*'s. In an acute socio-economic and political problematic situation, I had to take the shelter of *Ishwari*. To overcome, I fully surrendered myself to *Ishwari*. (162-63)

From the above lines, it is cleared that *Ishwari* was not a goddess. If not, then was she a real life woman or only the poet's imagination. Here we can refer those famous lines from the poem 'Bodh' (the consciousness) of Jibanananda-

Whether I move in light or in dark, in my mind-

Not a dream rather a consciousness starts functioning. (Das, 78)

It is that consciousness which the poet cannot overlook. It is the reason of his alienation. Can we not consider Binoy's *Ishwari* as a different form of this consciousness?

III

Ishwarir Swarachita Nibandha (Essays written by *Ishwari herself*) the famous book of the collection of essays of Binoy Majumdar was published in a magazine named *Kolkata*, edited by Jyotirmoy Dutta, in the year 1968 and 1969. He narrated his own theory of poetry in this essay. It contains two parts- *Kavyarasa* and *Abayab O Anubhuti* (Structure and feeling). According to him, he applied this theory for writing the poems of *Aghraner Anubhutimala*- his famous book. This book contained six long poems. In his own words-

Then I wrote two essays named as *Kavyarasa* and *Abayab O Anubhuti*. After that, I planned to write a book of poems with the theories written in those essays' But the book must not include any female character. As per plan, a book was written. It consisted of seven long poems. Later, I amalgamated first two poems. So, now the number of poems became six. As these poems were written in the Bangla month of *Aghran*, I gave the name *Aghraner Anubhutimala* to that book. This book had no female character. The central theme was my loneliness in this vast world.

(Majumdar, 66)

Aghraner Anubhutimala was first published from *Aruna Prakashoni* in the year 1974. Here we can find a mature poetic language. None of its six long poems were given any name. This book was evident of his poetic philosophy which included his relationship with the nature. Although the poet claimed about the absence of female character in these poems, the fact was a little bit different. It was true that unlike the poems of his previous books like *Fire eso*, *Chaka* or *Ishwarir*, the poems of *Aghraner Anubhutimala* were not written directly for a lady-love but we cannot ignore the presence of female character in these poems. For example-

There is a lady in the shape of a *bakul* flower *Shankamala* is there.

She gets an wonderful life. Many songs she sings, dances also,

Like a fairy tale, she blushes into red and may say,

‘Do you think I am only a flower blooming in the body of

This girl? May it be true or not, in spite of that,

I am a different woman, I am a *Bakul* alone. (94)

So, it is clear that, female character was present very much in this book. Rather, here the poet was able to cover up the direct sexual connotations with the help of nature-related allegories and mathematical philosophy. Therefore it became his best book.

Late autumn is one of most favourite seasons of Jibanananda. To him, this season is the symbol of love, maturity and genesis. Besides this, it brings the fear of death to the poet. A few examples are as follows-

“If I fall down some day in this bluish fog” (Das, 126)

Or,

Though *Aghran* has come today in the forests of this earth,

Long before that, in both of our minds,

The Autumn has already come. (173)

Here the *Aghran* or autumn is the symbol of love.

In a different poem-

Autumn has come- the golden wings of the kite have become grey.

The feathers of doves fell- Shalik is also in que.

He would sleep in the water of dew drops, keeping his stiff yellow legs upward (165)

Or

I have seen how green leaves became yellow in the dark of *Aghran*,

And the play of the *Bulbuli* with the light in the window of *Hijal*. (112)

Aghran became the symbol of ageing, death and void here. In this manner, the western 'autumn' was received by Jibanananda in his own way to create a new motif in modern Bangla poetry. Binoy's *Aghran*, can be described as the 'Reception of the received' (Chanda, 01) here. It indicated human physical activities with the help of some nature-based metaphors. Here are some examples-

I told her that I wished to rub my hands on the top in daylight

And wished to rub and squish at the peak.

I wish to play a whole day with those grasses and the herbs.

But the hill opposed. She said occasionally,

she could give permission for doing these,

Maximum twice or thrice in a month.

Not more than that and not in a daylight

She hates these activities in the daylight. (Majumdar, 100)

In a different poem-

The necessary buds of *Bakul* were round and white'-

Keeping my eyes closed, I told this to *Bakul*.

I also said, '*Bakul*, don't you think these buds are too small,

Shouldn't they be larger and soft? (93)

From the above examples, it is clear that Binoy's autumn is much more physical than of Jibanananda. Although, in both of the cases, the feeling of *Aghran* started its journey from nature to human life.

Balmikir Kabita, the next book of Binoy Majumdar, was published in the year 1976. According to Binoy, "Some of its poems were published in a magazine called *Balmiki*. Therefore I fixed its name as *Balmikir Kabita*." (70) This is perhaps the most controversial book of Binoy. Most of the critics tagged it as an obscene one. Even the poet himself admitted it partly-

When it comes to the discussion of *Balmikir Kabita*, I feel very much ashamed because it contains a few very indecent poems... I marked indecent only those poems which were written on the moon, cave or maize. (70)

In fact, this book was banned immediately after its publication. The poet said-

Immediately after the publisher Mr. Brajakishor Mandol started selling this book, some customers came back to him and said, ‘sir, please take this book and return our money. It is very obscene.’ Then the police from the Lalbazar also came and stopped its sale. (71)

But *Balmikir Kabita* was not fully obscene. Some poems were really ‘good’. For example,

Gradually flesh and fats were gone away from the body of the
Chronic endangered goose and left him almost unable to fly.

Like the juicy *haritaki* fruit just before its dryness. (46)

We cannot mark this poem as obscene. It is not only a ‘good’ poem but also it bears some flavour of Jibanananda’s words and world. Some more examples are as follows-

“We all together will become the grey heart of that girl” (43)

Or,

“Our all pale colours will be put off one by one.” (43)

Balmikir Kabita is the last book of Binoy where we can find the reception of Jibanananda. If we consider *Nakshatrer Aloe* as the stage of imitation then the entire period from *Gayatrike* to this *Balmikir Kabita* can be described as the period of assimilation of Jibanananda. In this time, Binoy had found his own ‘parole’. He was able to come out of the shadow of Jibanananda and created his own poetic world. Long eight years after the publication of *Balmikir Kabita*, Binoy’s next two books were published together. They were *Amader Bagane* (*In Our garden*) and *Ami Ei Sabhai* (*I am in this meeting*). The journey of a new Binoy had been started from here. Except in the book *Ek Pangtir Kabita* (*One Liner*), from this time, Binoy tried to write some peculiar poems which had no imagination, ornamentation, allegories, symbol, etc. We cannot separate these poems from any every day comments. it is a matter of debate that whether these poems were written intentionally for

experiment purpose or not. We cannot find any ‘poetic’ element in these poems. But we can see the end of Jibanananda’s impact on Binoy’s poetry from this time.

IV

The last but not the least part of the reception of Jibanananda in Binoy’s poetry is the poetic metre. Although here we have some linguistic limitation for discussing it in English, we still would make an attempt here. In Bangla poetry, there are three types of metre named as *Mishrakalabritta*, *Kalabritta* and *Dalabritta*.³ Here the word *britta* means repetition. In Bangla, ‘syllable’ is called ‘*dal*’. There are two types of *dal*- ‘*mukto*’ or open and ‘*ruddho*’ or closed. The syllable which ends with a vowel sound is called open syllable and which ends with a consonant sound is termed as the closed one. In all three Bangla metres, weightage of an open syllable is same but the difference lies in the treatment of closed syllable. In *dalabritta*, open or closed, any syllable is considered as one unit. In *kalabritta*, all open syllables are considered as one unit and all the closed syllables are given double weightage in respect of open syllable, i.e. one closed syllable is considered as double unit. In the case of *Mishrakalabritta*, although all the open syllables are considered as one unit but the attitude towards a closed syllable is *Mishra* i.e. mixed. It depends upon the positioning of that closed syllable in a particular word. If a closed syllable is positioned at the end of a word or the word itself is a monosyllabic one made of only a single closed syllable, then that syllable or *dal* is given double weightage i.e. considered as two unit. But the other closed syllables placed in any other positions of a word, i.e. either in the beginning or in the middle, it is considered as only a single unit. In this essay, our focus of interest is this last metre *mishrakalabritta*. It was not only the favourite metre of both Jibanananda and Binoy, but also be termed as the only favourite metre to both of them. In this respect, in his book *Chhander Baranda*, the famous poet Shankha Ghosh has given a statistics about Jibanananda’s poems-

Almost 350 poems of Jibanananda have been published so far. Out of these poems, if we take statistics, 275 poems were written in *Akshwarbritta* and the rest were in *Matrabritta*, *Swarabritta* or in prose-metre. (Ghosh, 69)

And in case of Binoy Majumder, the poet himself stated- “I have not written a single poem in any other metre than the *payar* after 1960”. (Majumdar, 57) Here, it has to be cleared that, the other name of the *Mishrakalabritta* is *Akshwarbritta*. Both these names were coined by the

famous Prabodh Chandra Sen. But *payar* is not a type of metre rather a metric form which can be written in all three metres. But many scholars and poets used to call *mishrakalabritta* in the name of *payar*. Binoy here also tried to refer this in the name of *payar*. Now in this respect, the interesting facts for Jibanananda and Binoy are as follows-

- Both of them wrote their maximum poems in a particular metre, i.e. in *mishrakalabritta*
- At the beginning of their career, both of them used to write in other metres also.
- In his last book named *Bela Abela Kalbela*, Jibanananda wrote some poems in *dalabritta* but its rhythm was very much alike to *mishrakalabritta*. So it is better to say that at the end, he tried to use *dalabritta* in disguise of the *mishrakalabritta*.

Now the question is why these two poets choose *mishrakalabritta* over the other two metres. The answer probably lies in the form and content of their writing. Both of them used a lot of serious and heavy words in their poems. Therefore, the rhythm of the poems was a bit slow. A famous metrical critic Amulyadhan Mukhopadhyay shows that out of the three metres, *mishrakalabritta* is the slowest and it creates a continuous monotonous tune which gives the poem a classy slow but steady form. This slowness was very much necessary and useful for the maturity of the general theme of poems for the both the poets. That's why they select this metre.

Now we will discuss about the essays written by these two poets on metre and its implications. In his book *Kabitar Katha (A Tell of Poetry)*, which is a book of critical essays on poetry and poetics, Jibanananda Das discussed about the Bangla poetic metre in an essay named "*Kabitar atma o sarir*" (The body and soul of poetry). On the other hand, Binoy wrote about his unique concept of Bangla poetic metre in an essay named "*Amar Chhanda*" (My own concept of metre). This essay was published in a magazine named *Atmabarga* edited by Ranjan Bandhopadhyay in October, 1985. Later this essay was included in his collection of Essays named *Ishwarir Swarachita Nibandha* (Essays written by *Ishwari herself*). These two essays were written in between a gap of long thirty eight years. The actual theorization of Bangla poetic metre was started by two legendary figures- Sri Amulyadhan Mukhopadhyay and Sri Prabodh Chandra Sen. *Bangla Chhander Mulsutra* the famous book of Sri Mukhopadhyay was published in the Bangla year 1339. Prabodh Chandra Sen wrote many books on the Bangla poetic metre. His one of the most discussed book *Chhanda Parikrama*

was published in the Bangla year 1372. So, it can be said that Jibananda wrote his essay on metre after the publication of *Bangla Chhander Mulsutra* but before the publication of *Chhanda Parikrama* but Binoy's essay was written in post- *Chhanda Parikrama* period. Therefore, Binoy got the opportunity to have some knowledge about the theory of Prabodh Chandra. But neither Binoy nor Jibanananda cited the name of either Prabodh Chandra or Amulyadhan in their essays. Jibanananda remained more a poet than a critic in his essay. He preferred to use similes and allegories in place of rationalities and critical deduction. His discussion of Bangla poetic metre was a *diachronic* one. On the other hand, the analysis of Binoy was more of an engineer-mathematician than a poet. Keeping aside all his poetic imaginary powers, he confined himself in the hard core practical periphery of rationales. Without considering and referring any existing theory, Binoy freely deduced his own theory of poetic metre. The most interesting thing is that, although his theory is far away from the main stream theories, it is very difficult to prove him wrong with a practical example metrical falt from his own poems. Actually, his theory is applicable only for *mishrakalabritta* metre and he always wrote his poems in that metre only. Therefore, we never find any gap between his theory and practice.

It is very much astonishing that both of the poets named *mishrakalabritta* metre as *payar*. Though we know that the *payar* is not any separate metre like the trio-*mishrakalabritta*, *kalabritta* and *dalabritta*. It is only a metrical form which can be created in all the three metres. They actually discussed more about the *mishrakalabritta* metre in the name of *payar* in their essay. Though Jibanananda in a few occasions discussed about *kalabritta* and *dalabritta*, Binoy did not spend a single word for these two metres. To him, in the name of *payar*, the *mishrakalabritta* was the one and only poetic metre in Bangla poetry.

At the end, it can be said that not only Binoy but some other poets of the 5th decade also receive Jibanananda's style and theme. A few examples are Shakti Chattopadhyay, Phanibhusan Acharya, Utpal Kumar Basu, Arabinda Guha. As a whole, in the post Rabindranath era of Bangla poetry, Jibanananda was the only poet other than Subhas Mukhopadhyay whose poetic career could be distinguished into more than two phases.

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¹ In Calculus, if the change of value of a variable 'y' is depends upon the change of value of another variable 'x' then, it is said that "The 'y' is a function of 'x' and it is written as $y=f(x)$

² All the poems and proses of both Jibanananda Das and Binoy Majumdar were translated from Bangla by the essayist himself.

³ Prabodh Chandra Sen gave these three names in 1965 after changing the names *Akhsarbritta*, *mattrabritta* and *Swarabritta* which were also given by him in the year 1922.

Canonization and 'Horizontal comradeship': the narratives of Indian literatureBipasha Som¹**Abstract:**

Literature of any nation has a sense of national identity spontaneously connected to it. However, the process of connecting the literary narrative with the national narrative of a country takes a fixation of literary tradition or in other words, establishment of its own literary canon. Canonizing Indian literature, by situating the literary practices into modern Indian consciousness, along with its regional counterpart is necessary, as it will refute attempts at its re-colonization with the first-worldist world-view or Universalist paradigm that is part and parcel of globalization. Yet, Indian literature today with its divide between IWE and Indian *Bhasa* writings on the one hand and a problematic definition of nation to represent on the other, is face-to-face with no less than a challenge in this regard. Nevertheless, it's a challenge that it has to take up in order to preserve its relevance in today's milieu.

Keywords: nation, literary canon, IWE, Bhasa writing

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For ages, we have been debating whether literature only gives us an expanded perspective of life or it also has the potential to transform us by reflecting on that life. Without going into the debate of art for art's sake vs. art for social purpose, it can be safely said that literature holds an important role in any society. Rationalization about relevance of something as elusive as literature, is a hazardous job. Still it's important we do it, and focus on the potentiality of literary works beyond being the source of aesthetic pleasure, primarily to explore the innate power of it to impact human mind and reasoning, both individually and collectively. In today's time, if we re-phrase Plato's doubts and cynicism about poetry and ask on a serious note, '*is it really relevant?*' It bounces back with the inevitable counter question '*relevant to whom? or in which context?*'. Literature, like any other product of human knowledge and aesthetics has various aspects and benchmarks of judgement. This paper is going to deal with the particular framework of the dialectics of nation-formation approaches and literary narratives in the Indian context, and the challenges faced in this regard.

In the outline of a globalized world as well as multi-cultural societies, where question of identity is often a pressing concern, literature, is known for being deployed for purposes of identity formation. Various forms of social identity, including national or ethnic ones are often discoursed through its literature. If considered from this perspective, in nations like India where nation-building processes are still on or in-fact are already in the course of being contested even before they are complete, the relevance of literature can hardly be overestimated. Literature of a nation, does not only represent the land in it, it also takes active part in discoursing the milieu, creating its image in the imagination of its citizens as well as others. A connection between construction of national or other collective identities and literature or culture in general, is harped upon by many thinkers, philosophers and writers themselves. In fact, cultural practices and languages as well as literatures are some of the earliest things to be nationalized specially in a post-colonial context. However, this process of connecting the literary narrative with the national narrative of a country often takes a fixation of literary tradition or in other words, establishment of its own literary canon. The processes of developing national consciousness and formation of national literary canon have always been associated to each other.

The concept of a literary canon, with all its parallel associations, is one that defies simplification. However, for the sake of discussion, it can be streamlined as having broadly three general meanings. First, as an approved or traditional collection of literary works; secondly, as writings of an author that scholars generally accept as genuine products of the said author, such as the 'Chaucer canon' or the 'Shakespeare canon'; and thirdly, as an entire body of literature that is traditionally thought to be not only suitable for admiration and study but also are situated in a context and tradition and meet a standard of judgment (Abrams 28-31). There can be a canon composed of works from a particular country, or works written within a specific set of years, or within a certain region. In this way, a literary canon establishes a collection of similar or related literary works. This article attempts to address the need to canonize Indian English writing in general and Indian English novel in particular, in the context of postcolonial identity formation and preservation. While doing so, I take the word canon in the third sense of tradition with a benchmark, and with some situated-ness. And by canonization of Indian English novel, I mean achieving both these things by situating Indian English fiction within a context or tradition, primarily one rooted in Indian sensibility. In other words, one needs to locate, position, and therefore define Indian English novel. And the best way to achieve that is by positioning it in the continuum of Indian literature as a whole written in all its regional languages, or the *bhasa* writings as they are often called, as part of an Indian literary tradition. Within that tradition both IWE and *bhasa* writings are to be studied and understood in the yardstick of each other. To put it differently comparative literary study holds a key to the realization of an all-inclusive body of Indian literature. This entire body of writing would meet one standard of judgement. The terms by which they are studied, would be defined too. I would hurry to add here that by virtue of IWE's lineage as English literature, it surely belongs to the world as well. But that cannot be at the cost of its own cultural origin, because on the one hand it is the cultural or national origin that, to a large extent, shapes a literary body and assigns identity to it and on the other hand, a sense of national identity of a nation is also meaningfully connected to the canonized popular literature of that nation. A particular socio-cultural milieu and its literary output are not only connected, but also are complementary to each other's identity and nurture and fulfill each other.

However, this process of connecting often requires making use of various arguably indigenous tools. Though it is difficult to pin down those tools, it can be safely said that

through the use of local legends, myths, histories and folklore, as well as a subjective ideas of collectivity and identity, a framework or pattern can be and often is created by literary writers. And it is such frameworks that create a canon of literature and it is the same framework that enables cultural values, that eventually solidifies as national ideals, to take shape and grow. When a nation state is formed within and on the basis of ex colonial boundaries, like in India, such contextualizing of the issues of identity assumes more urgency. Canonizing Indian literature is thereby a phenomenon of understandably vast importance. And canonization of Indian literature is achievable by situating its literary practices into modern Indian consciousness, without making them national allegories though. It will, on the one hand, aid the process of postcolonial identity formation of the nation, and on the other, refute attempts at its re-colonization with the first-world world view or Universalist paradigm that is part and parcel of modern day phenomenon of globalization. And this is where Indian literature in general and Indian English literature in particular seems to apparently lack, though for different reason. For Indian *bhasa* writings their linguistic difference can be a potential reason, for IWE its alleged lack of 'Indianness' can be termed as a reason. Having said that, the very concept of 'Indian-ness' needs to be thoroughly problematized too before one can go on to either justify or refute that allegation.

However, David McCutcheon once remarked about early Indian English poetry, "There is little that is specifically Indian in the background and imagery; the rivers and mountains are all generalized, and the 'international' flowers are preferred" (Chindhade 14). His opinion was, unless Indian poetry in English fills up the void of tradition of its own, it's bound to be imitative and insignificant. Though the charges laid by McCutcheon find their fitting rejoinders in poets like A. K Ramanujan's works, the fact remains for a considerable portion of Indian writings that, they are yet to form a tradition of their own. And tradition of any body of literary works is inexorably connected to the soil of the land of its production. Absence of something like an Indian thoughts in the writings of India, particularly those written in English may seem liberating to a globalized cognizance. But that points towards one of the many issues that, taken together, contribute to the lack of a national canon of writing here.

Like any other body of writing, Indian writings in English too should have an identity of its own and that identity cannot be thought of sans the identity of the nation of their origin.

As extremist nationalism, manifested in many postcolonial writers glorifying a common past or heritage, does not help in the long run; having a sense of rootedness cannot be done without either. I must add here that for coming across as a body of writing that can be called Indian, it does not take an extremist nationalism on part of the author. Even authors like Tagore, whose rejection of an intense consciousness of the separateness of Indians from others in the world is well-known, has written works that are inevitably Indian in spirit. So, it is actually a reflection of the soil that can make a work be rooted in its milieu. Not only in the field of literary creativity, in the realm of criticism as well, India, as prominent thinkers like C. D. Narasimhaiah, U.R Ananthamurthy, and Rabindranath Tagore said, would benefit more from a balanced blending of the best of Eastern and Western theories rather than being uncritical receivers and applicators of Western ideas. Intellectual subordination is one of the many impediments in the way of canon formation. James H. Cousins in 1918 said, "...If they (Indians) are compelled to an alternative to writing in their own mother tongue, let it be not Anglo-Indian, but Indo-Anglian, Indian in spirit, Indian in thought, Indian in emotion, Indian in imagery and English only in words ... let their ideals be the expression of themselves, but they must be quite sure that it is their self" (179).

Cousins's dictate was allegedly one-sided and sweeping. Also the very term 'Indian' is too problematic and multidimensional to be dealt with in an unqualified way. Nonetheless, it makes a signal towards the fact that positioning one's writing in one's *self* is required in order to maintain the identity of that writing intact and that is needed because identity of a literature is associated to the identity of the nation of its origin. It is especially true for our nation, India. India, its culture as well as literature, are yet to fully recover from the onslaughts of colonization. We can't help mentioning globalization here, though that has by now become much of a clichéd term.

Globalization, as we all know, is an umbrella term for a huge number of things happening simultaneously in the world. Among multitude of other things it hastens or increases the already in-process flows of people, ideas, cultural habits etc across national borders—mostly to the land of former colonizers. Consequent issues are like hybridity, loss of identity, multiculturalism and disappearance of rigid national identity. Today's writers with multinational citizenship in a globalized world are cosmopolitan in outlook and even celebrate it in their writing. They celebrate the fluid condition of their individuality

possessing multiple identities transcending national barriers. Now is it a matter of concern? Isn't it good in one sense because globalization has an identity of its own? It's the fulfillment of the dream of humanity to integrate itself breaking the unnatural barriers of nationality, race etc. created by ignorant human mind. Yes, it is so to a great extent. But for postcolonial nations like India where processes of nation building projects away from the clutches of imperial cultural domination is yet to be complete and is already plagued by fragmentary powers, from within as well as without. The scenario is a little different, a little more problematic. In countries like ours it becomes a question of legitimate national cultural or even geopolitical identity. That is why there are Indian critics and writers who opine that the local and the culturally specific are also significant. They should at least co-exist with the trans-local and the transnational. Cultural nativism, local traditions that battle globalization, as well as philosophies of specific national distinctiveness need to be kept active because it is they who will create a postcolonial space for our nation and its literature that won't be subjugated by globalized and largely notional cyberspace. And as postcolonial literature, particularly novel, plays a major role in the process of what we call nation building, that is creating and expressing a national consciousness by providing particular images of national life, such a space is very much required for Indian writing in English in general and Indian English novels in particular. It is difficult to ignore the fact that, there is an attempt at recolonizing Indian literature with the first-worldist world-view or the Universalist prototype that is part and parcel of the method of globalization. Western approach in criticism of so-called third world literature seems, to many Indian thinkers, to be similar to colonial mission of 'civilizing the savages', one of the many strategies for discoursing an Orient as uncivilized, barbaric and backward 'other'. In order to resist such attempts, a self-canonization of Indian English literature is very necessary. In fact it is the need of the hour to situate Indian English literary practices and traditions into the modern Indian consciousness and culture as an expression of 'nationness', or in other words creating an Indian canon. As Makarand Paranjpe has put it, "Indian novel cannot be seen as a purely aesthetic product in the Western sense, nor as a pure commodity in contemporary capitalist sense, but a work that reflects and interrogates the larger civilizational and national enterprise of the community in which it is produced"(11).

Those who decide whether and how a work will be canonized include influential literary critics, scholars, teachers, and anyone whose opinions and judgments regarding a

literary work are widely respected. For this reason, there are no rigid qualifications for canonization, and how a work or a body of works will be canonized remains a subjective choice of all concerned. Still for the sake of argumentation, we can say that canonization can be done by placing or situating a body of writing in the continuum of some literary, theoretical as well as cultural or political tradition. And as I mentioned earlier in this paper, the best way to situate Indian English novel is by defining it as a construct situated in the collectivity called Indian literature. And it is best understood in the wider context of literary creativity in all Indian languages. By doing so, we can situate it in larger Indian social economic and cultural background which produces it. One needs to judge Indian English novel from the perspective of its representation of nation and while doing so one cannot afford to forget that Indian English literature is only a part of a huge frame of Indian literature as a whole in different Indian languages.

However, there are many challenges to the process of a probable formation of Indian literary canon. I would like to focus on two major challenges in this paper. First is the deep gulf between Indian writing in English and Indian writing in different regional languages called as Indian *bhasas*. The second and perhaps the more important of the two is the problematic concept of nation itself in India. Let me discuss the issues one by one.

There is a sense of rigid opposition between Indian writing in English and *bhasa* writing. Not only that the *bhasa* writings often occupy a position low down the ladder of popularity compared to Indian English writings, there is acrimony between the two groups based on their authenticity of representation or so called 'Indianness' of expression. Though generalization is a perilous job, these two groups of writing seem to be poles apart regarding their involvement in the milieu they represent. Tabish Khair marks this in his *Babu Fiction* while contesting the proposition that there was "reciprocal influences between the novel in English and the novel in regional languages"(47-48) and states that "until the 1930s and 40s there was effectively no reciprocal influence between Indian English literature and regional literature in general"(48). Indian English fiction and Indian *Bhasa* fictions rarely draw much from each-other. In-Fact, barring some outstanding ones, their works are rarely read by each-other. Khair points out two reasons for which the IWE writers were not being so much influenced by the *Bhasa* writers. Firstly the obvious linguistic reason and secondly, to quote him, "IWE writers were automatically inclined (trained?) to look Westward"(50) for their

models and inspiration. Richard Cronin observes that: "English Indian novels have more in common with each-other (also across the racial divide) than with novels set in India written in any of India's native languages. Salman Rushdie has much in common with Rudyard Kipling than with Premchand"(5). Successful formation of a national literary canon will require addressing this issue seriously. The divide between the two territories needs to be at least problematized by locating the overlaps and points of convergence between them. While translation of *bhasa* texts into English and vice versa as well as translation of one *bhasa* text into another in wide scale have the potential to help in removing a sense of division and work towards creating a continuum, inclusion of translated texts in different university curriculums will also help in bringing them in discursive contact with each-other. Sahitya Akademy's role is commendable in the first context. To put it in simple terms, in a multilingual and multicultural nation like India, massive translation projects are the only thing that can create a body of 'Indian literature' out of the comparatively little bodies of Hindi, Tmil, Marathi, Bengali or Gujrati literatue. It will create a knowledge and more importantly a holistic sensitivity about each other's language and literature. After the creation of such a body of writing it would be comparatively more feasible to situate Indian English novel in the same continuum as part of the Indian canon. As academics play a vital role in the creation of a literary canon in any nation, translation as serious academic engagement as well as re-designing of university literature curriculum is essential in this regard. University comparative literature departments are doing a vital job in this direction already. Different departments dedicated to literatures in different Indian languages, should also have translated works of major authors of each-other as well as Indian English ones in their curriculum. As far as English literature departments are concerned, inclusion of translated Indian *bhasa* texts in the syllabus can be another hugely important step towards creation of an Indian sensibility. When it comes to sensitize a student towards positioning IWE in the continuum of world literature in English, such a step has already been taken by including other bodies of English writings like Australian, Caribbean, African, Canadian as well as Indian English texts in the syllabus of typical (British) English literature courses in India. We only need to replicate the same pattern in Indian context too. Also While we are fully aware of the hazards of translation and the possibility of loss of some essence in the process, we cannot deny the fact that with the give and take of such sensibilities, an overall Indian sensibility will emerge, because ours is not a homogenous nation based on the erasures of fissures but an

incorporative one standing on the basis of shared pluralities. In other words, the horizontal comradeship required for the canonization of Indian literature in general and Indian English literature in particular is potentially achievable with large scale translation of various Indian language-literatures into each other and also with incorporation of translated texts in the university syllabi of English as well as other literature departments.

Now, having talked at some length about what I consider the first issue, let me come to the second one. A national literary canon can be made by locating the representation of national consciousness in its works. So, a clear perception of what national consciousness is, or simply what nation as a construct means, is the pre-conditional of formation of a national literary canon. And here is a prominent stumbling block that any writer, thinker or even an ordinary individual can rarely avoid. According to the definition given in various dictionaries, it refers, more or less, to an ethnic group, sharing a common history, culture and language. Going by this traditional definition of nation as an ethnic group based on commonality or homogeneity, India often fails as a nation because of its inherent and deep rooted internal diversity. This is clearly pointed out by critics like Montserrat Guibernau who floated the idea of ‘state without nation’, for the third-world nations such as India and Japan where “there was no sense in which a nation preceded the emergence of the state” (Guibernau 116). His contention points towards a political country without the basic qualities of nation within. And he says this because of the variety of cultural, religious and linguistic identities of the groups falling within its boundaries. In fact, for him nationality or nationhood within the context of these postcolonial nations were artificial and imposed (4). Theorists like Benedict Anderson propagate the concept that nation as an idea was invented in the West and the rest of the world has largely borrowed the idea and has tried to fit in. The notion of a horizontal comradeship based on shared commonality as the basis of a nation-state is stressed by him too. Undoubtedly it is such pieces of Western hegemonic conclusion that lead many to assume that a sense of nation and belongingness can only be achieved by silencing the differences within a territory and acquiring homogeneity at the cost of the identity of various marginal or not-so marginal groups. While on the one hand the malevolent face of such nationalism is only too prominent for any sensitive thinker to ignore, on the other hand the postmodern tendencies of disbelief towards meta-narratives have their impact on them as well. Together they prompt many modern Indian writers in English to dismantle the very concept of ‘Indianness’ in their texts instead of trying to discourse it. Fiction being a

comparatively 'realistic' genre, tend to display more of this trend. Novels pointing at the porosity of national boundaries and celebrating rootlessness and floating identity of individuals like Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* or Salman Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children* set the trend today. Such a trend is a major impediment not only in the way of national canon formation, but also in the way of politico-cultural identity formation of a post-colonial state. *Bhasa* writers, on the other side of the story are often said to be too rooted in their regional soil to have a pan-Indian appeal. Ashokamitran or Arupa Patangia Kalita are more Tamil and Assamese writers respectively than 'Indian' in the eyes of majority of Indians. This notion also owes its origin to the basic misconception discussed above, namely 'regional is less than national'.

Under this situation, the perception of nation is something that needs urgent attention of intelligentsia in India. India is blessed with thinkers and theorists like M.K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and more recently like Partha Chatterjee, K. Sachidanandan among others who have endlessly insisted on the basic difference from West in the concept of nation in Indian context. Partha Chatterjee, in his book has provided apt rejoinder to the concept of nationless state with his idea of an "inner domain", or a soul to the body of nation (6) as the centre that can hold without exploitation. Gandhi's idea of spiritual nationalism is also perfectly in harmony with the internal diversity of postcolonial nations. These thinkers and many other like them have brought about a significant rupture with the existing knowledge about nation with their original ideas about the collectivity called nation. Sachidanandan has insisted on maintaining a balance between an inherent pluralism that resists homogenising process from within and a sense of belonging that keeps us from falling apart. Such indigenous concepts of nation refuse to give into the post-modernization of knowledge about it, which makes nation a meta-narrative and the concept of unity a fall out of oppression. Indian thinkers have often refused to see the pre-colonial past of their nation as un-historic, as is claimed by the proponents of colonial hegemony. In fact, it was our belief in the historicity of the pre-colonial past and its potency to deliver the modern India, which made Nehru and Gandhiji downplay the role of colonial agency, locating the existence of India before the arrival of the colonizers:

The English have taught us that we were not one nation before and that it will require centuries before we become one nation. This is without foundation. We were one

nation before they came to India. One thought inspired us. Our mode of life was the same. It was because we were one nation that they were able to establish one kingdom and subsequently divided us. (Aikant 172)

But after all said and done, the fact remains that India as a nation is still yet to theorize its own concept of nation and nationality properly. It's ironical that these indigenous ideas are still merely talked about abstraction; yet to be properly theorized and inculcated in the academic circle. Indian thinkers have not seriously attempted to negate the Western epistemic claims, though they had always wished to reclaim their pure indigenous selves. Till today a common man, steeped in the Western idea of multiplicity as a problem to deal with, finds it hard to inculcate the idea of oneness in a multicultural context of India without oppressing the multiple mini narratives within its territory. Till today an average dictionary or even a political science book describes state and nation with the definition of it as one single community, leading to the idea that political and cultural marginalization of the minorities is the only way of having a unified and collective nation. And that in turn leads to more separatist tendencies on part of the marginalized ones. The need of the hour in this case is to develop these concepts of collectivity into a fully-fledged definition of modern nation state, a definition that will be able to define and defend the unique condition of India as nation defying the likes of Gubernau and many other Western critics who simply deny the existence of an Indian nationhood because India does not fit in the idea of the universal definition.

Mahashweta Devi's famous novella *Mother of 1084* can be referred to in this context. Devi addresses the issue of identity in multiple layers and has reflected in her text the multi-layered strands that constitute its heterogeneity in a subtle and rather uncommon way. She has pitted the apparently flawless institute of united and homogenous nation against those who had a 'burning faith in faithlessness' (Devi 20) and has documented their attempt at resistance to state oppression. She has considered re-inscribing the boundaries of nation with their inclusive representation. Probably it is high time for India to get this re-inscription done, to get rid of its colonial shackles in the form of borrowed terms of discoursing and understanding the concept of nation and nationalism and assert itself with its own discourse that will suit its nature the best.

Actually the aforementioned two challenges are interconnected. As Gayatri Spivak has pointed out "The relationship between the writer of vernacular and Indo Anglian

literature is a site of class cultural struggle. By class cultural struggle is meant a struggle in the production of cultural or cultural political identity” (Spivak 126-27). Among many other points of difference, the major one is about their representation of nation and therefore creation of ‘nationness’ in their respective texts. Meenakshi Mukherjee too once stated that it is the IWE’s use of India as a global discursive space and its engagement with different theoretical experimentations of Western idea that alienates it from the *Bhasa* writers’ down-to-earth representation of nation:

India may be a ‘discursive space’ for the writer of Indian origin living elsewhere, but those living and writing here, particularly the *Bhasa* novelists, would seldom make figurative use of something as amorphous as the idea of India because s/he has a multitude of specific and local experiences to turn into tropes and play with. (Mukherjee 2000:181)

While the IWE authors often allegedly seek to dismantle the grand narrative of nation in their attempt to give voice to multitude of mini narratives in the boundaries of it, *bhasa* writers on the other hand go on to re-draw the boundaries of the nation with representation of these sub-nations. Here in, question may be raised as to does it really take the dismantling of the whole idea of nation to give voice to the margin? Or does it actually depend on how we define terms like ‘nation’ and ‘representation’? As Meenakshi Mukherjee has rightly pointed out these dilemmas along with the problematic relation of language with national identity have thrown almost all literary creations into a sphere of the ‘anxiety of Indian ness’ in this country, most of all the IWE, whose association with the language of the former colonial masters has made it especially vulnerable to nationalist critics and nativists. This interconnectedness of the problems calls for potential keys that are multidimensional as well, and a few of those potential keys are briefly discussed in this article. However, one has to remember that as literature is a reflection as well as creator of its milieu with its political, economic and cultural background, literary canon and formation of it, is also not a process devoid of many extra literary factors around it. It is almost impossible to draw the outlines of a literary canon in one article especially in case of Indian literature with all its internal diversity.

In conclusion I would like to say that English writings of India have two lineages. One as English literature, by virtue of that it surely belongs to the world and deserves to be understood in the context of world literature in English. But another lineage of it, is as Indian

writing as well and that aspect stresses the fact that it has to be accepted in and understood in connection with its soil and fellow literary products of that soil. It should consistently evoke a sense of place and time in it, something that literature of any place has the potential to evoke almost spontaneously and impulsively unless the flow is consciously stopped by any theoretical baggage. In short, Indian Writing in English is naturally a part of Indian literature and should be perceived as such. If it wants to have a voice and an identity that is distinct, it should be meaningfully integrated to its milieu. That identity will be inescapably Indian. That surely does not mean homogenization and exoticization of national culture or glorification of its history. Rather it means a spontaneous profoundness of representation that will incorporate national identity within the global, cultural, or even individual identity and will encompass multitude in it. In the formation of both a literary canon and a national sensibility, such perceptiveness of representation is most needed.

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The 'Unity and Diversity' Problematic: A Critique of Comparative Literature in India¹

Ishani Dutta²

Abstract:

Amiya Dev's assertion that, "there is a major distinction between Comparative Indian Literature and Comparative Western Literature... one is comparative as such, the other has to work out the comparisons" (Dev, 1984, 15); not only requires to be deliberated upon, but also needs to be elaborated upon. In this regard, his claim that Comparative Indian Literature is "Comparative Literature in a diverse world of many languages", (Dev, 1984, 15) becomes significant and points to the fact that the 'Unity and Diversity' syndrome has been a major concern (over time) in the development of Comparative Literature in India; since it has brought forth the numerous multifaceted differences that mark the development of the discipline and its methodology in the country. If examined carefully, one will realize that it is only due to the presence of such complex differences in India, that it will be erroneous to push such a dynamic discipline into becoming a mere concept. Thus, in order to prevent the discipline from being driven into a state of stasis, (which inevitably brings up questions regarding whether Comparative Literature in India is a mere concept or a mere methodology, or an entire discipline), one needs to go back to the very basis of the 'Unity and Diversity' problematic, which will inevitably point towards 'Translation' and the issue of 'Untranslatibility' in the different languages and literatures of India.

Keywords: Comparative Literature in India, 'Unity and Diversity', multifaceted differences, Translation, 'Untranslatibility'

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I

Treating Comparative Literature as a mere concept at a moment in the evolution of the discipline in India, when a number of fledgling Comparative Literature departments and centres are coming up across different states every year, will inevitably push both the discipline and the methodology (that this discipline develops and follows) into a state of perpetual stasis. Furthermore, such a supposition tends to negate the dynamism arising out of the necessity to make sense of, and deal with the numerous differences that are characteristic of the discipline. As has been exhibited over time, in the Indian context, such differences (based on location, caste, class, gender, religion, language, etc.) are as multifaceted as they are complex because of which they cannot be understood independently under any circumstances. Therefore the question: “Is Indian literature one or many, a single whole or a mosaic?; has been asked again and again, [because it cannot be denied] that there is a deep social, cultural and spiritual unity in the whole of the subcontinent that is amply evident in its literature... Though written in several languages in different ages under diverse social conditions, one can see a unique quality permeating the whole of Indian literature – what we may call the ‘soul’ of India” (Sharma, 2000, 7).

Having realized the above, Amiya Dev pointed out to the fact that, “India’s twenty-two principal literary languages themselves form a plenum comparable to that of European literature, and the different Indian literatures are always strongly coloured by the other languages in use around them. As a result, no Indian literature is ever itself alone: Bengali will be Bengali +, Panjabi Panjabi +, Tamil Tamil. [Hence] in a multilingual situation [such as in the case of India], there cannot be a true appreciation of a single literature in absolute isolation”¹ (Damrosh, 2003, 27). T R S Sharma further explains this by stating that though in India, “each language displays a seemingly different literature, each literature works within a system of references common to other Indian literatures despite its internal configuration based on specific socio-historical conditions. [This] notion focuses on certain recurring paradigms and patterns of concern and sensibility. It also points to certain common sources” (Sharma, 2000, 19). Keeping all these points in mind, the very basis of Comparative Literature in India can be rightfully summed up in the words of Sisir Kumar Das: “The very

structure of Indian Literature is comparative; its framework is comparative and its texts and contexts Indian.”² (Damrosh, 2003, 27)

Moving on, Amiya Dev in his essay titled “Comparative Literature in India” (1984), goes on to claim that it is equally problematic to speak of Indian literature both in the singular and the plural (if we keep all the above positions in mind at all times), because while the former approximation excludes all diversity, the latter tends to obscure diversity by overlooking “manifest interrelations” (Dev, 2000, 1). The issue raised by Amiya Dev contributes to the already existent anxiety that Rene Wellek had earlier talked about in his essay ‘The Crisis of Comparative Literature’ (first published in 1959). While criticizing the methodology forced upon the discipline by Baldensperger, Van Tieghem, Carre and Guyard; Wellek talks about how the growth of Comparative Literature depends on combating narrow nationalism by taking into account the “network of innumerable interrelations” (Wellek, 1973, 283). However, the question that arises regarding the present scenario of the newly emerging centres and departments of Comparative Literature in India relates to all that is at the very basis of their formation – which tends to forget the anxiety that Amiya Dev had been referring to.

The aim of this paper is to go deeper into the nuances of the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis by examining the extent to which it is addressed by the discipline of Comparative Literature and its methodology in India over time. At the same time, attempts will be made to come up with a possible solution by looking at ‘Translation’ (by going back to its very basis) of different languages and their literatures in India as a probable answer to the ‘Unity and Diversity’ syndrome. In respect to this, it will be inevitable for us to examine the issue of ‘Untranslatability’ of one Indian language and its literature into another.

II

Some years ago I was struck by how many false things I had believed, and by how doubtful was the structure of beliefs that I had based on them. I realized that if I wanted to establish anything in the sciences that was stable and likely to last, I needed – just once in my life – to demolish everything completely and start again from the foundations... I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself, sincerely and without holding back, to demolish my opinions (Descartes, 1969, 1).

The above lines from the “First Meditation” (translated from Latin) of Rene Descartes’ philosophical treatise, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (first published in 1641), begin by exhibiting a sense of profound anxiety about the structure of beliefs and its basis. They consequently go on to reveal Descartes’ conviction to deconstruct such a structure in order to transform it into a permanent foundation. The question, regarding whether Descartes can help in carrying forward a discussion about Comparative Literature in India might arise in one’s mind. However, there can be no better way, than to reminisce on Descartes’ assertion to describe the present situation of the discipline in the country – that involving immense anxiety on multiple grounds regarding its very basis, and which if not done away with, has an immense potential of turning into a crisis.

Equating the words ‘crisis’ and ‘Comparative Literature’ is however not new and was for the first time done at such a moment in the evolution of the discipline when the world was itself in a state of crisis, as can be known from Rene Wellek’s essay, “The Crisis of Comparative Literature”, wherein after realizing how Comparative Literature could neither establish a distinct subject matter nor a specific methodology, he called for a thorough re-examination as well as for “a thorough reorientation” of its aims and methods (Wellek, 1973, 290). This brought into light certain fundamental questions such as – what is Comparative Literature, what is its focus, what comes under its scope, and how does one do it. Susan Bassnett explains this in further details in the “Introduction” to her book, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993) by quoting Rene Wellek and by stating that Comparative Literature is still wrestling with the questions – “What is the object of study in comparative literature? How can comparison be the object of anything? If individual literatures have a canon, what might a comparative canon be? How does the comparatist select what to compare? [And finally] is comparative literature a discipline? Or is it simply a field of study?” (Bassnett, 1998, 2)

In order to find answers for the questions raised above, Rene Wellek heavily opposed Van Tieghem’s approach and went back to the age-old debate about Comparative and General Literature to prove that the basis for the former to qualify as a discipline or to get reduced to the position of a sub-discipline completely depends on how one defines it. Only if defined in the broader sense can Comparative Literature become an all encompassing discipline in itself as opposed to being defined in the narrow sense, i.e., merely by examining

the sources, influences, causes and effects of a single work of art (or several works) without investigating in its totality, which reduces Comparative Literature to the level of a sub discipline. Doing a thorough assessment of Wellek's claims reveal how perhaps the primary concern of the discipline has perpetually been the same – whether to be considered a discipline or not. And, clearly even today at a moment in its development in India when a number of fledgling Comparative Literature departments and centres are coming up across different states every year, the discipline is battling with the fear of being reduced to the position of a mere concept. Though every such department and centre of Comparative Literature in the country has fixed a methodology regarding how to approach works of art; there still remains immense anxiety regarding fixing a definition, which brings back the issues of the 'unity in diversity' thesis with an intensified immensity.

Going back to Descartes' "First Meditation", he further goes on to remark: "I can do this without showing that all my beliefs are false... My reason tells me that as well as withholding assent from propositions that are obviously false, I should also withhold it from ones that are not completely certain." (Descartes, 1969, 1) Such an assertion can well be connected to our previous discussion regarding the current position of the discipline in the country, which not only demonstrates how not all beliefs regarding the methodology of Comparative Literature are false, but also shows that to still struggle with the very basis of the discipline can hinder its progress in every way.

A 'concept' is a mere idea, thought or notion and cannot keep up the dynamic stance of an all-encompassing discipline. In this context, Jacques Derrida in his essay, "Who or What Is Compared? The Concept of Comparative Literature and the Theoretical Problems of Translation" (2008) states that "an institution has a living and authentic origin, its living source of legitimacy, its intentional purpose, its grand design, its project, its *telos*, or its soul, and when this living purpose ceases to animate the community of subjects (here, researchers, professors, students), then there only remains, and not for long, a facade, a desiccated body, a sterile and mechanical reproduction." (Derrida, 2008, 23) At this stage in the evolution of the discipline of Comparative Literature in India, one must remember that we cannot merely do with a 'facade' or 'a desiccated body' because such an existence would further problematize the already existing problematic of 'unity in diversity' and its perspectives – which Amiya

Dev in the essay “Comparative Literature in India” declares as “the bases of Comparative Literature as a discipline in India” (Dev, 2000, 3).

In brief, the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis tries to deal with the immense linguistic diversity that exists in India, and which consequently gives rise to literatures written in these diverse languages; all of which are as much Indian. In this sense, the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis brings into the forefront the problems about the existence of Indian literature vis-a-vis Indian literatures and goes on to address the significant question regarding whether (and/or how far) such a nomenclature is appropriate. In doing so, Amiya Dev admires Gurbhagat Singh’s stance of deciding to use “literatures produced in India” as “an exercise in differential multilogue” (Dev, 2000, 3) instead of the terms, ‘Indian literature’ or ‘Indian literatures’. Amiya Dev also brings up the “notion of the inter-literary process and [the] dialectical view of literary interaction” (Dev, 2000, 6), without which there can be no discussion about the existence of the discipline of Comparative Literature in India. At this point, something which yet again arises is the fact that despite having found a certain direction from such stalwarts as Amiya Dev and Gurbhagat Singh on what approach should one take towards the discipline of Comparative Literature in India, we are still struggling not only with the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis, i.e., with “scholars of literature arguing either for a unity of Indian literature or for a diversity of distinctness of the literatures of India”, but also with what Amiya Dev calls “hegemonic apprehensions”. According to him, this means that “the designation Indian literature [is] eventually equated with one of the major literatures of India.” (Dev, 2000, 2)

What needs to be noted at this point yet again is how it is just as challenging to refer to Indian literature in the singular as in the plural. Like it has been stated above, this is because it is as problematic to exclude all diversity; as it is to blend together such diversity, subsequently obscuring it. However, the existing anxiety about the hegemonization of a literature (of what is perceived as a ‘major’ literature) now seems to have materialized to a great extent. This has happened despite numerous attempts by the Indian Constitution which has officially recognized twenty two languages in its eighth schedule, and by the Sahitya Akademi (established in 1954) which supports and publishes in twenty four Indian languages. However, this hegemonization is not merely a notion free of nuances or simply a general belief any longer. It is something very specific if one considers the ‘situs’ or in other words, what may be defined as the ‘site’ or ‘location’ of the concerned theory, (Dev, 2000, 4)

department or centre of Comparative Literature. What needs further mention is how certain Indian languages and literatures get more attention than others only due to the location of a specific Comparative Literature department. In most cases, this happens because of the presence of experts in that specific language and literature (or languages and literatures) who go on to address issues specific only to that language and literature.

What also needs to be noted apart from such factors as mentioned above) is – with the passage of time and with the development of Comparative Literature in India, the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis took a certain turn. This was evidently more of a bend towards ‘diversity’ as seen through the retort – “Indian literature is one because it is written in many languages”; to the Sahitya Akademi’s motto, “Indian literature is one though written in many languages.” (Dev, 2000, 3)

III

The concern of this paper is to however, present a critique of, and consequently re-think the situation of Comparative Literature in India. Even though one cannot negate the problems of nomenclature put forth by the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis, as well as the “hegemonic apprehensions” cut across by cultural relativists; we still have not been able to arrive at a single solution of dealing with this diversity. By learning how to move away from a father figure (in relation to specific departments as well theories) and by legitimizing a literary creation by doing so, will help to provide a certain direction by causing a shift in the existing sensibilities.

On the other hand, a discussion about languages (and in this case, a field of study) can never be complete without deliberating upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “heteroglossia” which describes the twin forces that are at work in all languages – “centripetal (centralizing) and “centrifugal” (de-centralizing). Bakhtin claims that it is only the dialectic between these two forces which ensures that a language remains in constant flux (Bakhtin, 1981). A.K. Ramanujan also talks about the dialogic and the self-reflexive variants of reality in a frame, i.e., the “*desi*”, the “*marga*” and the “*videshi*”; as well as about the concepts such as, “context-free” and “context-bound” – which directly relate to the question of exchange between languages (Akshaya, 2004). In this sense, the search is for a field of study that will move away from the centre, but will still be more than a mere concept. Numerous theorists and comparativists have regarded ‘Translation’ as a possible solution, though no holistic

approach towards the same has yet been taken. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that the Sahitya Akademi was formulated for a specific purpose, i.e., by keeping the dissemination of different Indian literatures by translating them in various Indian languages, at its very basis.

Salman Rushdie asserts that “the word ‘translation’ etymologically comes from the Latin for ‘bearing across’. [He further goes on to say that for] having been borne across the world, we are translated men. [And, even though] it is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; [he] clings obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained” (Rushdie, 1991). Rushdie’s impression has become extremely important for our times, and if we bear this in mind, we will come to realize that the relationship of literatures produced in India and ‘Translation’ is not new; though for the purpose of this paper, the foundation of the Sahitya Akademi will be considered as the beginning of a formal attempt towards the translation of literatures produced in India into other Indian languages.

However, the question that concerns us is not merely that of translation for the purpose of larger dissemination, but that of looking into the very problematic and politics of ‘Translation’ itself. In this regard, what needs to be mentioned is the fact that, ‘Translation’ has the ability to renew literary domains. This is because a literature re-invents itself through translation (a large socio-political reception takes place through the means of translation) in a larger socio-political context by providing the literature with both a new tone and a new vocabulary of experience. At the same time, through the means of translation, one is able to search for, as well as look at an absent language. Thus, in order to examine the very basis of ‘Translation’, one would need to look at it as a ‘mode’ and realize the fact that ‘Translation’ is not merely what we do with ‘other’ (both literal and the perceived ‘other’) languages but more importantly, what we also do with our language. This will establish the fact that ‘Translation’ is not merely a conventional transfer but a cognitive mode to know the ‘other’.

With the emergence of what Amiya Dev regards as Indian post-structuralism, almost all differences are homogenized – a major issue that has the potential to seep into the already existing politics of translation. To avoid this, what literatures produced in India need at this point is to go back to the very basis of translation itself and address the notion of ‘Untranslatibility’. For a student in any existing department of Comparative Literature in India, the first crisis that should and must have already aroused is – why has

‘Untranslatibility’ still not been theorized? If examined closely, the phenomenon of ‘Untranslatibility’ not only looks at similarities or differences, but as much at cultural specificities and the need to retain those. Owing to the homogeneity of taxonomic structures, translating one literature produced in India into another, becomes such an exercise that automatically helps retain, and at the same time transfer cultural specific markers in another Indian language – an exercise that automatically in turn tries to deal with the ‘unity in diversity’ thesis.

Amiya Dev had mentioned how the motto of the Sahitya Akademi could be easily contested, and this becomes equally true for the proposed theory of ‘Untranslatibility’. Indian languages are many, though owing to the homogeneity of taxonomic structures, literatures produced in India have the potential to become one. In this regard, we can go back to Sujit Mukherjee’s claim in *Translation as Discovery* (1994) where, in his final word to George Steiner, he asserts how translation “creates the impression of a ‘third language’”. In doing so he makes a clear distinction between “a poem” and “its translation into another poem”, while the “third language” in this regard is that which “somehow reconciles” both the languages of the source text and its translation “in a tongue deeper, more comprehensive than either”³ (Holmström, Dasgupta and Dasgupta, 1981, 4). On the contrary, as stated earlier, unless we look into both the problematic and the politics of translation by returning back to Hilaire Belloc’s summing up in his Taylorian Lecture in 1931, regarding how translation has, and perhaps never will be “granted the dignity of original work” (Bassnett, 1998, 139), we will never be able to holistically deal with the proposed theory of ‘Untranslatibility’ – which as has been realized throughout the length of this paper, has an instinctive capacity to if not fully solve but atleast address the ‘Unity and Diversity’ problematic to a great extent. This it does by looking at a language and a text in its entirety or in all its manifestations.

Thus, in this journey of Comparative Literature in India, which is yet to reach a specific destination, beginning our enquiry with these questions has the potentiality to solve its perpetual crisis by urging on its need to be looked upon as both a valid concept and a valid discipline.

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The Komagata Maru Incident

Ragini Chakraborty¹

Abstract:

Komagata Maru was a Japanese ship carrying hundreds of aspiring South Asian immigrants to the Canadian shores in 1914. It was stopped at the Burrard Inlet, Vancouver by the Canadian officials on the grounds of the Continuous Journey Act of 1908 that prevented ships from entering into Canada if they were not on a continuous journey from their country of origin. Even the sale of tickets between India and Canada had been restricted. This, along with the 1908 policy made it impossible for Indians to sail from their motherland to Canada. Thus, the Komagata Maru set sail from Hong Kong. These aspiring immigrants who travelled by the Komagata Maru ship were all British subjects under the British Raj in India, yet they were not allowed entry because of the deep rooted racial bias that permeated the psyche of the Euro-Canadian settlers.

This racially exclusionist policy towards the South Asian diaspora stands as proof of their subsequent treatment of other later immigrant communities. This paper looks into the history of the Komagata Maru through its literary representations and presents three interviews by an author/filmmaker, a playwright and a poet respectively. These interviews are by scholars- people for whom the Komagata Maru was a lived reality as second or third generation South Asian-Canadians and their works question the logic of colonisation and resistance of the white Canadians against settlement of brown immigrants.

Keywords: Komagata Maru, Canada, Resistance, Continuous Journey, Policy

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The mosaic of Canada is made up of the different cultural, religious, racial and language communities that have inhabited the land since long. The original inhabitants of the land - the First Nations people, the Inuit and the Métis had been forcefully uprooted from their habitable lands by the early immigrants to Canada, i.e. the French and the English. With the passage of time, immigrants from different parts of the world started to arrive, some looking for more lucrative jobs, some as unskilled and cheap labourers, and again some escaping from their original homelands (which were politically troubled) in pursuit of a better life. Thus, the modern Canadian nation is an ensemble of various diasporic communities like the Chinese, Japanese, South Asians to name a few of the more prominent communities.

The modern Canadian nation promises to be a space where cultural harmony and equality are to be maintained at any cost. It has cabinet ministers and other higher officials hailing from other cultural communities. However, Canada has a long history of racial bigotry and has practiced selective assimilation, mainly on the basis of skin colour. Their careful crafting of rules and strategic policy making bears testimony to the prejudice, especially towards the South Asian immigrants in Canada. There have been two infamous incidents that tell us about the injustice and humiliation that had been meted out towards the South Asians in Canada. These two incidents separated by a gap of seventy long years, punctuate the body politic of a neo-liberal, non-racist, multicultural Canada. While the Air India bombing of 1985 has been a more recent disaster, the other incident that had long been kept away from public memory was the Komagata Maru incident of 1914. In 2015, after the hundred years commemorating the Komagata Maru's journey, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized to the people of Canada, especially the present generation of South Asian Canadians for the sufferings that had been caused to the 376 aspiring South Asian immigrants on board the Komagata Maru, on that fateful day, by the then Canadian government.

In the year 1914, on the 4th of April, Canada witnessed on its shores, the arrival of a ship full of South Asian immigrants. The Komagata Maru was a Japanese ship that started from Hong Kong and arrived at Vancouver, British Columbia via Japan carrying a ship full of aspiring immigrants from an undivided India. These people had set off for a new land with the dream of building up a new life. In the process, many of them had even sold off their land, their properties to gather funds for their journey. Many of the passengers, mostly

comprising of Sikhs, had served under the British army and were as such British subjects. Consequently they expected a warm welcome in Canada, which was then being ruled by the same British government. However, the harsh reality dawned on them when the ship led by Gurdit Singh, a wealthy Sikh contractor based in Hong Kong, was stopped at the Vancouver port on its arrival on May 23, 1914.

Sikh migration in Canada mainly began in the year 1903. Before that, no significant numbers of South Asian immigration can be recorded in Canada. Although no particular moment of migration can be marked as the starting point, 1903 onwards the Sikh settlement started to take place in quite large numbers and over the years it increased. It increased at such a rate that from the year 1905 to 1908, the numbers became 2623 from 45 (Buchignani, Indra, and Srivastava, 1985, p.7)¹. However, with the alarming rise of the South Asian immigration, the Euro-Canadians suspected it to be a potential threat to their job market and subsequently the economic condition. Also, their racial bias and fear of inter racial associations made them rise up against the immigration of the South Asians in Canada. All of these had made the Canada government pass the Continuous Journey Act in the year 1908. The Komagata Maru sailing to Vancouver in 1914, had been stopped on the basis of the Continuous Journey Act. Canada's strategic policy making and thus, the ban on the entry of the Komagata Maru, stands as one of the glaring examples of racial prejudice and selective acceptance and assimilation till today.

The Komagata Maru carrying 376 passengers, with women and children on board was left stranded on the Burrard Inlet of Vancouver without proper food and water supplies for two whole months. It is a tale of pain, horror and ignominy and remains as one of the most infamous chapters in the history of modern Canada.

The Komagata Maru incident and its narrative of pain, struggle and loss finds expression in many literary and artistic productions of poets, authors, playwrights, musicians and other cultural producers. Each of these works have carefully crafted the real stories of those prospective immigrants who were ultimately to become the victims of racialized politics and discrimination. Different productions have shown how their skin colour became the determining factor for their lives and subsequent fate.

The ship carrying Indians and mostly Sikhs to Canada was to face unforeseen consequences. The painful stories of the victims of the Komagata Maru incident became one

of the most 'infamous' chapters in the history of Canada. For years, efforts had been made to sweep the facts under the carpet. However there were many sensible Canadian citizens of the diaspora who were not ready to forget it or allow it to fade away into oblivion. They felt it necessary for the issue to be brought to light. These people, authors, scholars and artists chose different media that they were comfortable in, to express their grief and concern regarding the incident. The different versions of this history have been projected through poems, stories, plays, films, art and other forms. These different forms of expressions have captured the nuances of the range of emotions that have been prevalent through the events. Some of these works have focused on particular characters and the role they have played in the whole course, some have shown in details, the socio-political background. There have been fictional accounts where stories of other diasporic women or children have been narrated with the Komagata Maru incident as the background and these have essentially been stories of marginalization, discrimination, pain and misery. However, what all the versions have unanimously brought to light is the brutal, contested, vexed and fragmented history of the South Asians, especially the Sikhs, which is an ongoing saga of conflict (Kazimi, 2012)².

The motive of this piece is to bring to attention, the horrible incident that traumatized and exploited the people on board. It aims to discuss how, in spite of the numerous efforts made by the Canadian authorities to erase the incident from the account of the nation's past, there have been renewed efforts to remember and discuss the issue over and again. 2014, the centenary year of the incident has also led to newer discussions, debates and even the Canadian government's public apology expressing grief and neglect.

The next section includes certain interviews by authors and critics who have worked closely on the Komagata Maru incident. Their discussions are integral to understand the importance of the incident even to this day, and see how it has played a major role in shaping the South Asian diasporic settlement and sentiments in Canada.

Interviews:

Interview I- Ali Kazimi, date: 26.06.2018 (interview over email)

I met Professor Ali Kazimi at the University of British Columbia, after a screening and discussion of his film "*Random Acts of Legacy*" (2016): *Asian Canadian History and Film* on 7th February, 2018. The following day, I had a long discussion with him

regarding the Komagata Maru incident and its history. He discussed his personal journey while making his documentary film on the incident. Also, he gifted me his latest illustrated narration of the Komagata Maru. The access to the film, the book, helped me to look at the Komagata Maru incident from different perspectives. I got to listen to Professor Kazimi's readings and discussions further at the relaunch of the *Rung* magazine in Downtown, Vancouver. Ali Kazimi's documentary film is the first full length visual account available on the Komagata Maru. His work was path breaking at a point when only a handful of people were aware of the history of the incident, both in Canada and India. His film opened avenues for discussions and questions and his personal journey along with the film makes it even more interesting.

The interview with Ali Kazimi has been presented below. I will be using the following abbreviations: R.C for Ragini Chakraborty and A.K for Ali Kazimi.

R.C: I have read your book, listened to your readings on the Komagata Maru incident, as well as watched the film on the same. I have also come across young scholars who are making films on the incident, or creating awareness about the incident. Hundred years after the incident, how much importance, do you think, the incident holds for the present generation of Canadians? Did your 'location' (as you discuss in the beginning of both your film and your book) enable you to look at it from a different perspective?

A.K: Before the so-called incident can hold any meaning for the present generation of Canadians it has to be known, and I'm afraid, that to this day the vast majority of Canadians are completely ignorant of this history. I have given many talks and presentations across the country any time I start by asking the audience how many of them know about the Komagata Maru; invariably there are only a handful who know the gist of the story, no one knows what this story reveals about Canadian immigration policy let alone how it challenges the official nation building narrative.

Allow me to make a small digression here and refer to the title of recent federal commission that spent years looking into the impact of the Canadian government policy of forcibly taking indigenous (historically referred to as Indians) children from their families and putting them in church run residential schools. The intent to "Kill the Indian, save the child", to put it in contemporary terms it was cultural genocide. The inquiry was led by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a term and process borrowed from post-apartheid South Africa.

It is important to note here that “Truth” comes before “Reconciliation”, and the commissioners firmly believed that before Canadians could begin to reconcile with the indigenous communities they must know what happened.

I too am a firm believer in this process, but it is not an easy one; it requires the willingness and the courage to face up to very difficult truths. The history of the Komagata Maru reveals Canada’s strategies of having a hidden “whites only” immigration policy. Some Canadian politicians during the 1900’s had wanted Canada to emulate the White Australia policy, however British Imperial authorities who had warned Canada not to be so overt. They recognised that Canada had to remain a “white man’s country on political and moral grounds” but it had to be seen as not being overtly discriminatory. I argue that Canadians follow this advice so well that most Canadian historians of record see what happened to the Komagata Maru as incidental, hence it was simply a “dark chapter”. This kind of qualified acknowledgement shies away from actually examining the intent of Canadian immigration laws 1867 to 1967 and its continued resonances to this day.

Consequently, as generations of Canadians are only marginally better informed than their parent's generation.

R.C: You have named your most recent publication, the illustrated narrative on the Komagata Maru incident, the *Undesirables*. Would you like to explain the title?

A.K: The choice of the title was very deliberate. The book was funded through a grant from a federal program community historical recognition program (CHRP). The program was initiated under a Conservative government led by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper. This is the very government that rolled back many immigration initiatives and made it harder for those seeking asylum in Canada. The Harperites had among them a number of white supremacist, Stephen Harper himself had belonged to approve apartheid group called the Northern Foundation. It was this very party that was now trying to literally buy votes in various communities among them the South Asian communities - specifically the Punjabi Sikh community. Many of the initiatives that emerge from this program did little if anything to challenge the government's idea of what these historical wrongs were. I was deeply disturbed by this not so obvious attempts to buy votes. I was happy and surprised to get the green light to do the book, but I wanted to make it absolutely clear that the government could not have editorial control. My wife Heidi McKenzie, was the project manager and she

negotiated a very clear clause which allowed bureaucrats the right to respond to the book and their response would be considered but underscored the fact that they could not demand editorial changes.

My point of view had to start with the title. Undesirables was a word that often appears in the Canadian context when referring to non-white immigrants however I did not want to stop there, hence the subtitle makes it more explicit with White Canada and the Komagata Maru. So from the title on the readers have to start confronting very uncomfortable truths. When the book came out a white colleague described it as “a beautiful coffee table book that would destabilize any coffee table”

R.C: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for the Komagata Maru incident in 2016. Canada has been celebrating its 150 years since the Confederation and it has initiated different reconciliatory programs as a part of it. Do you feel the apology comes as a part of this initiative? Do you see this as a change, which might renew broken ties and help to evolve India-Canada relations?

A.K: The apology occurred months before the Canada 150 initiatives started, I would say that Trudeau would have wanted apologies out of the way before starting this year long nation building/boosting exercise.

It also had nothing to do with India-Canada relations; it had everything to do with domestic Canadian politics and the electoral ridings with large Sikh populations that are key to any federal party not to forget the fact that there are a record number of Sikhs in the Canadian cabinet.

R.C: As a South Asian- Canadian, do you feel the existence of hyphenated identities is a problem? The questions of ‘belongingness’ or ‘fitting-in’, do they still apply for a ‘multicultural’ Canada? Or, do you feel it is changing with time, in an era of globalization, where global communities are emerging all over the world.

A.K: The question of hyphenated identities is complex in your response to it is necessarily fluid. Literally on the face of it, I know that people like me still have a long way to go to be acknowledged as Canadians on first sight. For me personally, there is an acceptance that as an immigrant I will always occupy and in between space, with the passage of time skewed more towards Canada than India. Multicultural Canada is an aspirational project that is still in

its infancy, its impact decreases rapidly once you start moving away from large metropolitan areas such as Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. The whiteness of small town and rural Canada is quite stark and is set against another dynamic that of First Nation reserves.

I feel what we are seeing is a growing pushback against the notions of global citizenship.

Today with Trump openly espousing views of far right white nationalists and with the rise of nativism in Europe, Canada can feel like an exception. The feeling has quickly disappeared with the last provincial election in Ontario which resulted in an outright majority for a Trump like populist Doug Ford. We are days away from his government taking power and apart from the expected attacks on the fiscal policies I would not be surprised to see roll backs that first indirectly and then directly target programs that affect communities of colour. What makes this even more problematic is the fact that Ford's supporters unlike Trump, include many from immigrant backgrounds. The next four years in this province I'm going to be quite difficult for the 60% of us who did not vote for this man.

R.C: Japanese Canadian author Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* brought to light the horrible reality of the Japanese internment and the government apologized to the Japanese. How crucial a role do you think literature or art plays in bringing up issues from history that demand justice? Can you talk about specific instances in case of the Komagata Maru incident as well (especially in relation to your works)?

A.K: I think I have responded to this question in part. I have to say that I was inspired to become a documentary filmmaker and in a way talk to think of documentary in an instrumental way. Filmmakers would go out to make films that highlighted issues of social injustice, audiences would be moved to action and what start working on ways to deal with the issues. It took me a long time to unburden myself and really unshackle myself from the hubris, the responsibility and the expectations embedded in this simplistic formulation.

I recall I started reflecting on this in the late nineties after reading Arundhati Roy's response to a similar question after her essay *The End of Imagination* – she said she considered her work as a contribution to a conversation. This really resonated with me, and it was very liberating to think of my creative output as a contribution to a conversation that has been going on and that will continue, as different people from different generations pick it up and

add to it in their own way. The best one can hope for one's work reinvigorates the conversation

Continuous Journey was the first film from a South Asian immigrant perspective to examine this history. It is widely used in universities in Canada, across many disciplines. As a professor, I find myself commiserating with colleagues who complain about students not reading. Films can serve and do serve an important role by allowing engagement to take place in a different way.

The most typical response after every screening has been shock and discomfort – for there is no getting away from the evidence presented which is precisely what I had hoped to do. For the vast majority of South Asian students it comes as a total shock that they did not know this history.

I know for sure that a number of people have been inspired by it and as a result have gone on to do academic research as well as produce creative work of all kinds. It is also worth noting that in many cases the acknowledgement to the film is not included in the work but has been acknowledged in one-on-one interactions. And of course, one never knows and can never know how a work inspires people or motivates them to pursue a particular path. I do know that I have been a several screening that Canadian politicians have attended; many of them would become part of the push for the parliamentary apology.

The apology itself is not a case of justice being served – it is a gesture that is fraught with the possibility of adding to another kind of deeper denial, that of examining the present to see how current policies might have the kind of impact. For example, one of the lessons learned by the government was the indefensible practice of indefinite detention for contravening immigration laws. This was tried and tested on the Komagata Maru, and despite the apology it continues to be used today.

Interview II: Ajmer Rode, date: 10.05.2018 (interview over email)

I met Ajmer Rode on March 2018, at Broadway and Cambie St. in Vancouver, Canada. Poet, playwright, translator and an exceptionally warm person, Ajmer Rode introduced me to a set of new works that have been done on the Komagata Maru incident. What made me especially interested in his work is a new kind of approach in reading the Komagata Maru incident that his recent historical-fiction book (illustrated) presents.

Someone who has been living in Canada for most of his life offers, as expected, a fresh and invigorating perspective on the incident. Although he is well aware of the emotional aspects of history and evolution of the South Asian diaspora in Canada his works reflect a rational and objective reading of the incident.

The interview with Ajmer Rode has been presented below. I will be using the following abbreviations: R.C for Ragini Chakraborty and A.R for Ajmer Rode.

R.C: I have read your poems and the illustrated re-telling of the Komagata Maru incident as well, courtesy the books you kindly gifted me. I have also come across some young scholars who are making films on the incident, or creating awareness about the incident. A hundred years after the incident, how much importance, do you think, the incident holds for the present generation of Canadians? Is it merely a story about our Canadian forefathers?

A.R: Komagata Maru incident (KGM) after 100 years is more than a story for new Canadians and will remain so for years to come. It's become a significant chapter in the history of British Columbia and Canada telling us of the interracial attitudes, suspicions and intolerance prevalent at the KGM time. Racial tensions still persist, albeit, in subtle forms. Komagata Maru incident also tells us of the reality of British justice that was so glorified in the colonies of the Raj. India and Canada were both colonies of the British Empire at the time and were supposed to enjoy equal rights for intermigration. In reality, however, it was far from the truth as illustrated by the KGM incident and the writings on it.

R.C: You have named one of your poetry collections *Poems At My Doorstep*. Would you like to talk a little about the title? Besides the Komagata Maru incident, what were some other factors that gave birth to these creations?

A.R: The title reflects the urgency with which some of these poems, raw and unformed, came to me and impelled me to give them written forms. But they certainly are not Found Poems. Issues like cultural dislocation, alienation, and unjust social conducts, especially the way they affected our older immigrants, moved me to write these poems. One day I saw my father (living with my brother) sitting on a bench at a nearby bus stand. He didn't have to go somewhere nor do something, he just wanted to sit there to be among people even though he couldn't relate to them. I saw all those immigrant fathers in my father. I felt a poem was

waiting for me at the doorstep as I reached home. KGM incident was a factor but not the central one in composing these poems. The poem, Apology, in this selection shows the direct influence of the KGM incident. In the poem I as a writer made a KGM apology before any activist or politician thought about it.

R.C: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for the Komagata Maru incident in 2016 the year Canada celebrated its 150th year since the Confederation; and as a part of the celebrations the country also initiated some reconciliatory programs. Do you feel the apology comes as a part of this initiative? Do you see this as a change that might renew broken ties and help evolve India-Canada relations?

A.R: The KGM apology movement was already in full swing before Justin Trudeau became Canada's Prime Minister. His predecessor Stephen Harper had already apologized to a huge gathering of Indo-Canadians in a Surrey conference. But Indo-Canadian activists kept pushing for an apology in the Parliament which Trudeau made in 2016. It seemed more a political pursuit on both sides. I don't think the apology had much to do with any kind of reconciliation, for, there were no broken ties. Indo-Canadians, especially Sikhs-who actually have hijacked the KGM incident- have not been treated worst than any other minority people of colour in Canada. It was only at the time of Air India Bombing that Sikh reputation sank really lowing Canada but it recovered fast. It was, ironically, 9/11 that seemed to have helped restore Sikh image as 9/11 made Air India Bombing look insignificant in comparison, and replaced Sikhs with Muslims as perceived terrorists. Today Sikhs are more involved, and happily, in the federal government affairs than any other comparable minority. As for India-Canada relations I doubt if the apology will have a significant effect.

Incidentally, our book *A Journey With The Endless Eye* was also released on the day PM Justin Trudeau made his Komagata Maru apology in the Parliament. The book was released by Roseann O'Reilly Runte the President of Ottawa's Carleton University, the central university of Canada. Ten of Jarnail Singh's KGM paintings from the book were exhibited and permanently acquired by the university. The book release and the exhibition were coordinated with the apology to highlight the pioneer role played by literature and art in starting the KGM movement that culminated in the official apology.

R.C: As a South Asian-Canadian, do you feel the existence of hyphenated identities is a problem? Are the questions of 'belongingness' or 'fitting-in' still relevant in a

‘multicultural’ Canada? Or, do you feel the situation is changing with time, especially, in an era of globalization when global communities are emerging all over the world.

A.R: Hyphenated IDs may not make many people feel good, though, I feel fine when called Indo-Canadian. I feel extended, feel belonging to two countries at the same time. I think India, in whatever shape it is today, is a great country, greater than Canada. So why should I feel uneasy if my id associates me to India as well? Even though in reality, I feel this id issue is bit overblown by our academic communities (my apologies!). It makes hyphenated people think as if they are somehow lesser and should keep fighting against this hyphenation. Common people don’t care what they’re called unless it’s derogatory like ‘Paki’ or something. Multicultural policy of Canada did influence people’s thinking in a positive way although much remains to be done. Globalization, despite its economic exploitation, is bringing people closer. I as a writer have always shunned nationalist feelings and felt belonging to the world. In our poetry book *Leela* (co-authored with N Bharati) we have written a Writer’s Manifesto:

We believe writers live on earth not in a country or a foreign country. We refuse to accept political boundaries that divide the earth. These boundaries are artificial and drawn with violence. Our concern is with the suffering and solace of humans, with their passion to live, with the blade of grass that holds on to verdure as the desert advances.

R.C: Japanese Canadian author Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* brought to light the horrible reality of the Japanese internment and the government apologized to the Japanese. How crucial a role do you think literature or art plays in bringing up issues from history that demand justice? Can you talk about specific instances in case of the Komagata Maru incident as well?

A.R: Art and literature certainly play important roles to bring about cultural changes that may lead to political actions for justice. I met Joy Kogawa years back when she launched her second novel *The Rain Ascends* in Vancouver. Well-known Japanese-Canadian writer Roy Miki who wrote *Redress* (Raincoast Books, 2004) is also a friend, I worked with him on racial minority writers’ issues in The Writers Union of Canada. His brother Art Miki was really the one who led the Japanese Redress movement to victory. Kogawa’s *Obasan* has become a classic in Canadian literature but is considered controversial as to its contribution to

the Redress movement. In the words of Prof. Guy Beauregard of the National Taiwan University “it played a key role in mobilizing support for the 1988 redress Settlement....” However, for most other critics the theme of the novel-cherishing the Christian-Buddhist ideals of forgiveness and reconciliation- goes against the spirit of resistance that was central to the success of the Redress movement.

I wrote and directed the Komagata Maru play in 1979. The premier in Vancouver was attended by some 500 people. Lot of publicity was given to the performance. A mainstream newspaper *The Colonist* covered it; a British Columbia Cabinet Minister showed up uninvited and congratulated us on the stage. Many Indo-Canadians heard about Komagata Maru first time. After the play the incident never vanished from the memory of Indo-Canadian community. In 1982, the entire play was serialised in *The Indo-Canadian Times* weekly published from Surrey, BC. After its publication in the book form (1984) it was prescribed in several universities in Punjab. In 1999, a second edition was published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, for its graduate classes. The play has been cited widely in South Asian studies and writings.

The play again came to limelight at the 100th anniversary celebrations of the KGM incident. The Simon Fraser University (SFU) of British Columbia digitized and published it on their website for public and students. An hour-long interview was also recorded with the author. Mangla Bansal, an SFU student converted the first scene of the play into an animated film for elementary school children. Prof. Anne Murphy of the UBC prescribed the play to one of her Punjabi classes. The play was performed at the University of British Columbia, Surrey Arts Centre, and several other places in British Columbia; it was also staged in Amritsar by the leading Punjabi theatre group Manch Rangmanch led by Kewal Dhaliwal. Fourth edition of the book is expected to be published soon.

Interview III: Phinder Dulai, date: 06.05.2018 (interview over email)

I met Phinder Dulai in Downtown, Vancouver on a February evening in 2018 at the re-launch of the *Rungh* magazine. That was when I heard his readings on the Komagata Maru incident. That was a profound moment as his poems moved me deeply. I was on my fieldtrip to Canada, doing research for my dissertation, and his works came to be the texts I was looking for. What followed next was a series of warm exchanges with the poet and I could access his poetry collection for my dissertation. Dulai’s poetry and its

relevance as a contemporary take on the Komagata Maru incident, has been integral to my research. Phinder Dulai's interview has been cited below. I will be using the following abbreviations: R.C for Ragini Chakraborty, P.D for Phinder Dulai.

R.C: I have read your poems and listened to your readings on the Komagata Maru incident. I have also come across young scholars who are making films on the incident, or creating awareness about the incident. Hundred years after the incident, how much importance, do you think, the incident holds for the present generation of Canadians? Is it merely a story about the forefathers from the past?

P.D: One of the reasons I wrote *dream / arteries* was to posit a new narrative for the SS Komagata Maru, and connect this story to a greater story of unprecedented migration that was seen in the late 19th century from Europe to the US and Canada via the shipping routes that served both package shipments, mail and raw resources, as well as the migration of human cargo the these countries.

The Komagata Maru and its documented history leads me to believe that this story was larger and has greater implications to not just future generations, but to government departments that inform and recommend immigration laws and policies. The testing of the very laws of exclusion and the fact that surveilling the ship and Punjabi community in B.C. to such an extent was a result of how the Dominion Government of Canada, the US Government, the India Home Office and the Colonial government in India, perceived the KM passengers and the community not as British subjects, but as the greatest challenge and risk to Imperialism. Writing *dream / arteries* was about exploring our collective commitment towards extending compassion and empathy in the current world. I did this by anthropomorphizing the ship, giving it a persona, voice and emotions.

The Komagata Maru and its documented and editorial story enters the public realm; unfortunately is one that is contained, restricted to a more regional legacy and is a story of the impacts of racism and hatred. This is accurate too, but there is a far greater story we must attend to that has continued to be at risk of erasure, historical insignificance, and further silenced by a dismissive print media legacy. What is really important to note is that much of the surveillance record of this ship was hidden away in public record archives and university collections for a long time; the only one who could view it were scholars and those designated as historian/researchers. The public story of the KM was presented under a well

managed limited frame of study as a ship that arrived, refused to leave, and forced to return within a narrow lens of a migrant and settlement history on the west coast and fused to the bucolic historical agrarian Punjabis settling in British Columbia.

I always found this frame belittling and dismissive of the sacrifices made by those who were part of the Indian revolution and the Ghadr movement in the US and Canada; many who were both Punjabi secularists, atheists and Sikhs. The slow and persistent uncovering of recorded information by previous community historians, community writers and advocates opened up the potential for a more fulsome telling.

Prof. Hugh Johnston provided an exhaustive seminal scholarly book on the ship that was published in 1989. Johnston's book reframed the story as a study in how federal, provincial and municipal levels of government worked together to pass multiple order-in-council legislations that were racist and xenophobic. A broader lens was already beginning to retrieve a story that was not fully told.

Along with my own research, this writing process led me to a significant change in how to view the story. My approach to writing *dream / arteries* was to take the story further into the global and into the contemporary moment - I did this by going back to the documentation and making a creative decision to not replay the arrival, detainment, forced removal story; it had and has been part of a community narrative for a long time. As a writer, I see my role as a writer that further explores the possibility of poetry and story; and experimenting with different approaches to write a poem - the fusing of documentation, media clippings into poetic diction, writing a new narrative about the ship that was grounded in facts, but further imbued with fiction and I hope a sense of humanity. The trajectory of the ship's life was global, and by its arrival in Vancouver, it had already been a sanctuary ship for so many poor immigrants and refugees from Europe; discovering this documentation and also reviewing the documented legacy of public record archives and surveillance records confirmed my belief that this story had broad implications for Canadians as it relates to the changes in immigration policy, laws for arrival and settlement and citizenship, as well as the inclusion of this documentation as a key important aspect of the formation of a nation-state in becoming a progressive country. I also believe it is not limited to Canada, but has international links to histories of migration across the Globe.

R.C: You have named your poetry collection *dream/arteries*. Would you like to explain the title?

P.D: I went through 3 different titles before landing on *dream / arteries*. The title comes from one of the poems in the KM section - *Ten Anonymous Journeys* - The words paired in the poem reflect the idea of freedom and emancipation that can be captured through the idea of a dream for a future. The word dream as a metaphor has been used in many written texts - Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech; the word can contain the hopes and aspirations of a many people; I was also reflecting on Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" - I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins". The use of the word "artery" is important in this context. The human body could not circulate oxygenated blood to all parts of the body without the arteries; which I liken to the strands of hope and dream to be that blood and adding this as a trope to migration that brings a common physiological aspect for people in this story, regardless of race or ethnicity. The saying "we all bleed the same blood" was another tactic to inspire compassion and affinity. The fact that the two words sit in a maritime poem then brings a further aspect to this collection - the culminating accruing of voices and people, reflected in a multitude of arteries that move forward to sanctuary and the mode of movement being the water; a central part of the physiological makeup of the human body.

R.C: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for the Komagata Maru incident in 2016. Canada has been celebrating its 150 years since the Confederation and it has initiated different reconciliatory programs as a part of it.

Do you feel the apology comes as a part of this initiative?

P.D: The Federal apology was a significant moment. It was made through the very same mechanisms of government that denied the passengers and the ship entry into Vancouver: Order In Council legislative process that ascended as a proclamation, and an apology, the procedural steps taken to speak the apology in the House of Commons and the process of bringing family members and their future generations, was a laudable and important moment; I do however see one thing that was completely missing and this is central to the idea of a reconciliatory program - there was no initiation, implementation or an announcement with this apology for an cultural-based education initiative. It was an apology without a program. There are many previous apologies that identified a program of that would support education-

based initiatives. Our local South Asian MPs failed in bringing that commitment to the nation and honouring those who were on the ship by advocating some kind of program that was brought forward as part of the apology in the House. This is where I differ with many. I believe the apology was sincere, but I also believe that even this scenario, the Punjabis on the west coast were dismissed.

R.C: Do you see this as a change, which might renew broken ties and help to evolve India-Canada relations?

P.D: I don't think I will answer this question. The answer requires a more detailed answer that also looks at the political history of Punjab and Canada-India relations.

R.C: As a South Asian- Canadian, do you feel the existence of hyphenated identities is a problem? The questions of 'belongingness' or 'fitting-in', do they still apply for a 'multicultural' Canada? Or, do you feel it is changing with time, in an era of globalization, where global communities are emerging all over the world?

P.D: The use of identifiers are practical in certain contexts - census forms; other formal ways of engagement within both political and social based conversations. Each use has its purpose. As a writer and a person, I see myself as a person living in Vancouver, BC, Canada. I am Punjabi by origins and was born in the west (England). The notion of a nationalist identity eludes me still given my family migrations. I have no interest in fitting in or belonging at all; I have come to learn that what is most important, if we are to have a notion of a kind nation state, there has to be a reciprocity of compassion, kindness and openness. There are many uses for a multiculturalism act and policy at various levels of government. It can be used as an instrument to bring equity into government institutions, and be the foundation and tool for inaugural programs to educate different sectors of civil society on the benefits of an equitable society. On the other hand, it can also be used for more sinister reasons - the containment of dissenting voices of society along race, gender and ethno-cultural lines. As I think about this and the question of globalization and nationalisms, I keep coming to the simple fact that there is more hate, disregard and violence in the world, while those working in the areas of archival research and documentation, continue uncovering the depravations that existed under previous global empires. The transnational company is the contemporary colonial model that now binds many nation states to corporate subsidization and the accrual of more wealth in fewer hands. If there is a global mode of being and thinking or living, it is because the

infrastructure for that value system has been built by a global corporate elite set of companies. As a poet and writer, I always come back to how one reflects the world one lives in, while writing in a solitary room; the global part of this exercise is research via the internet which is a globalizing tool for engagement information about the world.

R.C: Japanese Canadian author Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* brought to light the horrible reality of the Japanese internment and the government apologized to the Japanese. How crucial a role do you think literature or art plays in bringing up issues from history that demand justice?

P.D: As a writer I have a keen interest in bringing social realism into the narrative and the work of writing the world onto the page. Literature, as well as art, provide a clear lens of exploring not just the demand for real justice, but also brings humanity into the subject or thematic underlay of an artistic work. There is a broad spectrum of how creative people do this in their lives. A writer that I go back to is Salman Rushdie, and specifically his earlier novels that explore a plethora of theme specific to the subjugation of people by empire, religious orthodoxy, caste identities, geographic-specific prejudices and the impact of capitalism on geo-political concerns impacting South Asia. Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* was a novel Ondaatje wrote later in life and came to this subject of ethno cultural genocide in Sri Lanka, as a way of exploring his own family history in what was then known as Ceylon. In David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, the use of malleable timelines, mutating language and post apocalyptic landscapes speak to the loss of identity, home or culture, and equally demonstrates that culture is not a static moment but ever changing. In Salvador Dali's work, the phantasmagorical renderings of his canvasses and multimedia work continue to shine brightly on the state of the world and the chaotic excesses of human civilization; and on the other end of this spectrum are writers like Virginia Woolf who brings class, gender and the banalities of the upper classes and empire, into the quotidian space of the homes and people she creates; one Woolf's most notable experimental novels *Orlando*, is a wonderful and wondrous story of gender transformation of a human over a four hundred year timeline, and through this timeline, Woolf never says away from speaking to the underlying theme gender violence and inequity against women.

R.C: Can you talk about specific instances in case of the Komagata Maru incident as well?

P.D: In an earlier question about the impact of the Komataga Maru, I noted that for a long time, the KM was framed as a kind of regional parochial moment in the frontier trade post at the edge of the British Empire and an unfortunate incident of racism. The significant documentation amassed by governments, families and advocates tell a different story. Specifically what dream / arteries unearthed was the extreme levels of surveillance that was enacted upon a community of 4,000 Punjabis in Vancouver. A surveillance that was far reaching and monitored from the typewriters of the British Agent and Immigration Insp. William C Hopkinson, Chief Immigration Insp. Malcolm Reid, BC Premier McBride, Prime Minister Robert Borden, the US Government, Home Office in London, and the British India Office in Delhi. Specifically, in dream / arteries, I utilized documentation to bring to light the level of surveillance that impacted the Punjabi community. I also utilized the narrative modes of satire, parody and lyric mode of melancholy, in order evoke and draw the deep psychological trauma the community experienced, as the ship transformed from a site of curiosity, to a public spectacle; for many South Asians, the ship and the site of the ship remained a deep wound for many years.

dream / arteries relies heavily on incorporating fragments of surveillance records into the poems that speak to the exclusionary laws and Order In Council laws passed, as follows:

1907 - South Asians provincially disenfranchised, and in turn denied them the federal vote, access to political office, jury duty, the professions, public-service jobs and labour on public works.

1908 - Continuous Journey Order in Council law prohibiting immigrants who do not come by continuous journey from their country of origin. Landing money required by South Asians increased from \$50 to \$200. Remained in law until 1947

Between 1903 to 1920, the Punjabi millworkers in BC were unable to reunite with their families.

¹Buchignani, Norman, Doreen Marie Indra, and Ram Srivastava. *Continuous journey: A social history of South Asians in Canada*. McClelland & Stewart, 1985. ISBN: 9780771017612.

²Kazimi, Ali. *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru: an Illustrated History*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2012. ISBN: 9781553659730.

Travelling Across Languages: Translation and Plurilingualism in Interlingual TravelSaswati Saha¹**Abstract:**

The paper is a way of understanding the relationship of a traveller with language and shows how language mediates experience across culture with regard to travel. It will assess an abridged translation of *Gulliver's Travels* into Bengali, largely regarded as a *bhramaṇ kāhinī* in the target language culture and enquires through the experience of the traveller what happens when a stranger ends up in a world where nobody speaks his language. His humiliation at the loss of words, difficulty in communication and hence the ensuing confusion and panic when encountered with a different language culture will be dealt with through a theoretical framework of travel and translation where the traveller enters in a dialogue with a world of otherness and alien tongue, understands it and then translates it for the readers. Hence the traveller is a translator himself working with language and representation. Taking cue from Bakhtin's concept of "dialogic", it can be concluded that since language serves as the medium for the transfer of meaning in translation, the way it gets deployed speaks volumes about the politics and dynamics of translatability. Therefore, this paper deals with analysing role of language in travel as the means through which dialogue happens between the source text (i.e., the land travelled to) and the translated text (i.e., the travel narrative) through the figure of the traveller-translator. Finally it shows how in spite of learning new languages and attempting to integrate with the foreign, the traveller creates a plurilingual repertoire which enables him to retain an "outsidedness" required for understanding anything that is "other" or "foreign".

Keywords: travel, translation, language, dialogic, plurilingualism

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A travel narrative involves a translation of cultural significations of one culture into another. The traveller enters in a dialogue with a world of otherness and alien tongue, understands it and then translates it for the readers. The translator is the mediator between the source and the target. He is as if in dialogue with both the source text¹ and the target readers. It is based on his understanding of the two that the target text takes shape. Amith Kumar and Milind Malshe in their essay titled “Translation and Bakhtin’s “Metalinguistics”” writes, “translation is the outcome of a “dialogic event”, that is, the open-ended and never-ending dialogue between the translators’ consciousness and the source and target cultures.” (Kumar and Malshe, 2005:116) The translator being in dialogue with the source text agrees and/or disagrees with it according to his understanding of the target culture with which too he is in a dialogue. He does not prioritize one over the other, but chooses his methodology according to his “active understanding”.

An inevitable corollary of travel includes an encounter with a foreign tongue. The displacement associated with the movement from one place to another is not just destabilizing the social comfort of the traveller but also his linguistic comfort. The mobility associated with travel destabilizes the traditional association with the language of one’s own land. Language is an important marker of identity and associates an individual with a particular territory. However, what happens when a traveller enters into a world where his language makes no sense to the natives, neither does he understand their tongue? He suffers from both loss of language and identity marked by language. But since language is intricately linked with the culture of a community, the key to gaining knowledge about a community is only possible through learning its language. This paper will discuss such challenges faced by a traveller-translator whose dialogue with the foreign is the source of his narrative. An abridged translation of *Gulliver’s Travels* into Bengali will provide as a model of a “literary travelogue” that studies the fear of a traveller that comes with language shift and cultural displacement.

Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) has been translated multiple times into Bengali. The present text is an 1876 translation titled *Abākpurī Darśan* which claims to be the first part of *Apūrba Deś Bhraman*. Since the title page introduces it as the first part of a series, it seems that the publisher had planned to take out all the four books of *Gulliver’s*

Travels. However, the rest of the parts could not be traced. The translator does not specify his reader group in the preface but the translation is a rather simplified version of the Swift's text. None of the political allusions are retained and the text emerge as a story focussing on an adventurous travel of a Bengali man who accidentally landed up in a strange world and got to know a new country and learn its language. The translation appears as a commentary on the aspect of travel and representation of what the traveller saw in the course of his journey. The element of travel can be read at multiple layers in the translation.

The narrative in the translation is framed as an autobiography of a Bengali traveller who travels from his home to the world outside. The journey no more remains that of Swift's Gulliver's but is claimed by a Bengali gentleman who breaks out of the social taboo against undertaking sea voyages and desires to see the wonders of the world. This provides a simple middle class Bengali *bhadralok* with a heroic demeanour. The most important strategy used in this *deś bhramaṇer kāhinī* (travel narrative) is the preoccupation with forms of travel and travel experiences that are arduous, unpleasant or downright dangerous. The traveller experiences a shipwreck and lands up in a remote corner of the world which has never been heard of. There is a sense of exploration and the traveller of being a first time visitor. The notion of suffering in travel evokes a sense of romance and gives importance to the persona of the traveller. This self-fashioning differentiated him from other contemporary tourists making him an active agent in the journey he has undertaken and not just passive recorder of facts and events.

Some of the translations of Gulliver's Travels in Bengali have introduced the text in the preface as a "*Bhramaṇ Kāhinī*" or travel narrative and for others the title itself has the word *deś bhramaṇ*. By romanticising the hero of the narrative who has been indigenised as a Bengali gentleman in these translations, the translated text tries to ignite a sense of superiority among the natives, and make them aspire to be powerful enough, much like the imperial masters, to travel to world unknown and discover new lands. To travel, on the part of the colonised, is therefore the beginning of colonial modernity. It is more so because going abroad was socially not approved, it meant defying the caste laws and crossing the black water often led to excommunication. However, the modern economic compulsions, demanded a new form of mobility and hence the "enlightened" and "liberal" section of the community started seeking help from the pundits. It was only in 1894, that the provincial

conference of Bengal ultimately passed a resolution sanctioning sea voyage of Hindus in view of a changed political and economic condition.² It is during this time that *Gulliver's Travels* gets appreciated among the Bengali reading public and gets translated multiple times and thus becomes a "literary travelogue" that helps the young Bengali minds to dream of travelling far and wide. Moreover, *Gulliver's Travels* satisfies all the major characteristics of a travelogue. The narrative is in the first person and the material relates to a journey. The journey implies an autobiographical account of the narrator's experiences- the spontaneous record of day-to-day observations and sensations. Therefore, this paper sees the translation of *Gulliver's Travels* as a model for a travel narrative that deals with the challenges with language and its deployment thereof in the context of travel.

In the very beginning of the text, the protagonist is introduced to the readers as a serious traveller as in the course of his travel, the protagonist uses his free hours in reading book and learning languages of the places he visits. In his affinity towards learning language and keenly observing people of various cultures, he sets him apart from casual tourists and establishes himself as a traveller on whom the readers can rely for producing an authentic travel narrative. The protagonist says, "...*yakhan samudratīre thākitām takhan tathākār bhinna bhinna jātyā loker ācār byabahār o bhinna bhinna bhāṣā śikṣā karitām. Bhāṣā śikṣā biṣaye āmār tīkṣna smaranśakti chila.*" (3) (...whenever ashore, I indulged in studying the conduct and practices of various people and different languages. I had a sharp memory for language learning) [my translation] He declares his affinity towards language learning and boasts of having a sharp memory which enables him to master languages of the places he had been to as a sailor. Thus he is a sincere traveller and therefore makes an effort in preparing himself to deal with the "sudden humiliation of language loss" as the familiar words along with the familiar world recede and a strange unfamiliarity surrounds him. Language ignorance is also associated with sudden infantilization of an adult who fails to make sense of the world around him.³ Loss of language threatens the existence of an adult who suddenly feels orphaned and abandoned by his mother tongue. He is all of a sudden removed from the centre of his language to the margins. There is not just the fear of being ridiculed and bullied by the natives, but also of being cheated, conned, mistrusted which might eventually be a threat to his life. Michael Cronin in his works *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation* deals with the complexities of linguistic shift and identity crisis marked by travel using Roman Jakobson's types of translation as the framework of analysis. In the context of

interlingual encounter between the traveller and the natives, he writes, “Interlingual travellers are dislodged from the centre of the linguistic universe. Their language no longer corresponds with the world in which they (temporarily) live. Like translators, however, they must eventually return to their home language and express foreign-language experience in mother-tongue prose.” (Cronin, 2000:60) Thus learning the language of the land travelled to become essential.

The protagonist reaches a land unknown and unheard of after a shipwreck. The size of the men and their incomprehensible language only adds to the exoticization of the place. A new language is introduced to the reader at this juncture. The translated text instead of retaining the gibberish language of Swift’s text creates its own version. The language in which the native inhabitants speak apparently seems completely gibberish to the Bengali readers bearing not even the remotest resemblance with the languages they are familiar with. But introducing the foreign words in the narrative is a political strategy followed by the travel writers: firstly, it is an indicator of the traveller’s awareness of the cultural difference; secondly, it indicates the cultural identity of the community visited; thirdly, it is a comment on the authenticity of the narrative, thereby sealing the readers trust.⁴ The protagonist says that he tried to converse with the king with as many languages as he was aware of “Bengali, Sanskrit, English, Persian”⁵ but they understood none of these, neither could they make sense of any word spoken by him. The language takes the experience of travel out of the world of cognition. The obscurity of the language provides an exotic feel to the land which is equally remote. Cronin suggests that the obscurity of the language relates to the obscurity of the places, places that are remote or marginal. The peculiarity or the endangered state of the language becomes conflated with the physical peripherality of the speakers. (Cronin, 2010:336)

The narrator fails to comprehend everything that the natives speak and his discomfort at the inability of understanding appears in the translation when he says “*āmi takhan bujhite pārilām nā ye tāhārā ki baliteche*” (6) (at that time I failed to understand what they were saying) [my translation]. This not only shows the traveller’s anxiety with incomprehension and the urge for understanding but also expresses the insecurity of a lonely traveller who can neither communicate with the native nor understand them. Language allows meaning to circulate within the speakers of a community and allows signification to travel across the

community. It has an indispensable relation with the act of travel since writing of a travel narrative, which essentially entails translation, is only possible because of this circulatory nature of language. But the very language that enables communication across cultures can be at the same time inclusive for its speakers, thereby excluding outsiders. Language then becomes essentially “non-circulatory” which according to Cronin makes interlingual translation both necessary and problematic. (Cronin, 2010:336) Retaining the “non-circulatory” specificities of the language is essential also because it is the language, among many other things, that gives shape to the nationalist thoughts. But language had always been a space of tension. As Benedict Anderson has observed, seen as both a historical fatality and as a community imagined through language, the nation presents itself as simultaneously opened and closed because language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language.⁶ Therefore, though language forms the particular solidarity required for the formation of a nation, it is at the same time a vulnerable space, which through the practice of translation opens itself to the threat of the influx of foreign words and ideas into the vernacular.

The traveller’s sense of awe for *Abākpurī* is all pervading. It is the land that he arrives at accidentally. He was totally unaware of the existence of any such land, had no idea about its cartographical presence and its language had no kinship with the languages he had learnt to facilitate his travels. In an unknown world where the language makes no sense, the traveller feels lonely and also experiences a sense of fear resulting from his vulnerability. Although their size of the natives gives him the confidence of defeating them in a battle, yet he shows signs of peace and politeness for he realizes his vulnerability: “*āmi prathamata mane karilām ye yeman tāhārā nikaṭe āsibe amni tāhāder 40/ 50 ṭike ek capeṭāghāte bhūtale nikṣep kariba kintu parakṣaneī mane haila ye yakhan uhāder abhayṭ pradān kariyāchi takhan ār erūp kariba nā*” (11) (At first I thought the moment they approach me, I will smack 40/50 men and throw on the ground at a time. But the next moment I thought that since I have assured them of being fearless of me, I will not hurt them anymore) [my translation] Thus when the king speaks to him he raises his hand as a gesture of surrender: “*āmi urdhe dṛṣṭi nikṣep kariyā o bām hasta uttalan karataḥ namratā prakāś karilām*”. (9) (looking u at him and raising my left hand, I showed signs of politeness) [my translation] Michael Cronin writes, “The absence of a language to explain yourself to unfriendly strangers means a temporary loss of control over circumstances, the terror of helplessness.” (Cronin, 2000:69)

The traveller, stripped of language, moves from the centre of the linguistic universe to the periphery where he feels once again like an infant who needs to learn the language to make sense of the world around him. Along with language, the traveller loses subjectivity and is reduced to the status of an object. He realizes his precarious position in an unknown realm of language-less-ness and soon surrenders himself completely to the king's wish: “...*tāhāder samket dvarā byakta karilām ye tāhārā āmāke laiṅyā yaha icchā tāhāi karite pāre. Ihā bujhiyā ai rājā ebaṁ tāhār anucarerā param santoṣer sahit phiriṅyā gelo.*” (12) (...I told them through gestures that they can do anything they desire with me. Realizing this, the king and his attendants went back with much delight) [my translation] However, this pleases the king and his noblemen for it gives them the sign of assurance and also paves the way for his future acceptance within the community which materializes when the king himself arranges for his language learning.

In a state of language-less-ness, the traveller becomes more sensitive and completely dependent on the gestures and body language of the local people. He tries to bridge the gap in communication by comprehending the gestures of the tiny people around him but much like the way they ran away from him, language seemed to evade him as well. He closely perceives them to make sense of what they are trying to tell him. He takes resort in the universality of gestures to gather and send across information without the help of speech. Most of the narrative at this stage comprises of the descriptions of what the natives do and how they do it. However, gestures can be treacherous—they can be misunderstood, can lead to mistranslation, can become instruments of manipulation and control. Nonetheless, the protagonist presses all his five senses into service to understand the world around him.⁷ Therefore, in his initial days in the new found land he describes what he sees: the little men and their actions and behaviours, what he feels: the ropes, the arrows and the magic ointment that heals the bruises in no time, what he eats: the uninterrupted supply of a huge amount of meat and liquor that the host country provides him as a part of their hospitality⁸.

However, a continuous attempt of conversation goes on but leads to no successful results. The king speaks to the traveller informing him about the further course of action they will take regarding him and thrice during these unsuccessful conversations the traveller mentions “*āmi du ekti kathār uttar dilām*” (I answered one or two questions). But meaningful conversation evaded both the parties involved and hence he writes, “*kintu tāhā kono kājer*

hailo nā. Tāhārā kichui bujhite pāriṅā. Abaśeṣe hasta bhaṅgi dvārā bujhāiyā dilām, ye āmi bandhanmukta haite cāhi". (11) (But it served no purpose. They understood nothing. Finally I made a gesture with my hand to explain that I desire to be unchained) [my translation]

The attempt of communicating with the foreign is a means of making sense of the unfamiliar. The king of *Abākpurī* too uses his entire force to deal with the unknown as anything beyond the periphery of knowledge is unnerving and unsettling. The lack of communication not only enlivens the element of foreign but also breeds mutual distrust. Hence, the king and his men, although, courteous enough in dealing with the stranger, keeps the stranger chained under strict supervision. In fact he even orders his physicians to mix sedatives with the traveller's food, an attempt of physically weakening him so as to deal with him when he is asleep. The traveller is kept chained until he learns how to converse with them meaningfully. The king is undoubtedly caring and generous but also has a terminating side to him which is driven by his kingly urge of protecting his subjects from threats from the external world.

As the narrative progresses, we learn that the king of *Abākpurī* (wonderland) appoints six teachers to teach the traveller the local language. In fact, the king took special care regarding his learning and often visited to assist his learning process. The king also orders his men to make dresses for the traveller according to the manner of their country: an attempt of assimilating the unknown into the fold of the knowable. The outsider is made to adapt to the cultural norms of the host culture over his own culture. But this is not a complete imposition on the traveller because here he wilfully desires to integrate with the cultural norms of the host culture because this is the only way he can earn their trust and learn their way of life so as to translate them into a narrative. This is the opportunity for the traveller to learn the local language and it is through the language that he will be able to enter the cultural complexities of *Abākpurī*.

Learning the language is a "strategy of assimilation, attempting to incorporate himself into the language and the culture of the host group, or as a form of accommodation, trying to negotiate spaces of resistance and of survival for the language and culture of their origin." (Polezzi, 2012:348) The learning of language is facilitating as it is a means of support and also a means of control or both. It is also associated with building trust among the natives about the traveller, ensures security of the traveller and most importantly enables cognition.

The traveller in his eagerness to learn languages of the lands he visits shows an awareness which is significant both sociologically and psychologically. His awareness makes him conscious of the surrounding, language and culture and their engagement with it. Learning of language increases his “intercultural competence” which Guilherme considers “the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognise as being different from our own”. (Byram, 2012:6).

However, the first proper linguistic communication between the traveller and the natives (the king) appears in the text in Bengali translation⁹ and in it he entreats the monarch to grant him his liberty and set him free so that he regains his agency. The narrator provides the readers a disclaimer that albeit the conversation took place in the language of the natives, he has translated it into Bengali for the benefit of his readers. At this point in the text, the translator makes a clear statement on the methodology of his translation. His allegiance is clearly towards his readers and it is for them that he will “domesticate” the source text (language and culture of the land) to cater to the taste and comprehensibility of his readers. He is at the same time aware of the fact that this might compromise the authenticity of the translation. Ergo, to make his narrative more believable, he says, not all of the conversation happened in spoken language, but also involved communication through gestures. It is through this assertion, the traveller-translator is accomplishing two tasks: firstly by choosing the methodology of domestication, he carves a niche for himself in the narrative, thereby making a space in which he reclaims his subjectivity deploying language of his choice based on his subjective understanding and his convenience, hence rescuing him from invisibility. Secondly, he wins the faith of his readers by being on their side, and promises to communicate to them all that he learns and experiences. Moreover, this apparent fluent description in the Bengali, will enable him to be closer to his mother tongue, the language through which he has carved his personal identity and that which will provide him the space to exhibit his personality.¹⁰

From here on the translator communicates every event that happens and he experiences in the land of his travel in Bengali only finding equivalent culturally specific items from his land¹¹. He thereby captures the uniqueness of the culture of *Abākpurī* within a framework of relevance for the ease of comprehensibility. He, in the process, grants himself

the liberty to choose the degree of relevance and equivalence, thus reminding his existence between the source (the journey to the land) and the target (the readers).

However, to carry out the translatorial responsibility, the traveller-translator needed freedom but his freedom was not possible without the permission of the king who held him captive. The traveller's repeated entreaty for freedom was answered but the permission granted by the source (the king) to the translator (traveller) is not unconditional. His movement throughout the land is curtailed by the monarch's order, seizing his agency. He cannot go wherever he wants, his path will be fixed and he will have to inform about his desire of the slightest movements to the king, on whose permission will he be able to see the land. He is made to sign an agreement of posing a threat to the natives of the land and become its ally. Although Gulliver mentions that he gained "full liberty", for the traveller to *Abākpūrī* the signature to the documents lead to only "*Bandhan haite mukti*" (unchained).

Language learning made the traveller's existence in the foreign land of *Abākpūrī* much more comfortable and confident. He could now adapt to new culture, get access to the core cultural practices and can freely communicate with the members of the community. He felt welcomed as he did not feel the need to explain his linguistic otherness every single time. However, soon the traveller started exercising his own will disregarding the contract he signs. Polezzi says, "Language and with it translation, are among those phenomena which keep escaping control and therefore also eliciting attempts to contain them" (Polezzi, 2012:353). He clearly points out his love for freedom, something that he honours as a traveller-translator, when he politely refuses to carry out the king's order of reducing the state of *Balabhadra* to a colony which put his life at risk. Albeit, such a stance earned him the wrath of the king, who wanted the traveller to buttress his passion, no matter how insensitive they were. The cultural difference that exists and brought out by the traveller is necessary because difference is the key critical tool. Therefore complete similarity and assimilation is not desirable. Against the "one-sided and thus untrustworthy idea that in order to understand a foreign culture better, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture", he set the realization that "in the realm of culture, outsidership is a most powerful factor in understanding", since "without one's own questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign (but, of course, the questions must be serious and

sincere)’. In this kind of ‘‘dialogic encounter of two cultures [. . .] each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched’’ (Bakhtin)

All those decisions that he took based on his subjective choice, outside the rules set for him by the state, were used against him to get rid of him. The moment the source of power lost control over the outsider, they suffered from an anxiety of losing influence over him. The punishment decided for him was to pull out his eyes, thereby crippling him of his capacity of observation, the capacity that provides him the identity of a traveller. Hence, the moment the traveller-translator tries to exercise his own authority over the source text (here the land of *Abākpurī*), the custodian of the land decides to snatch away from him, his most important tool, his capacity of observation through which he intimately engages with the land and represents them in his narrative. However, he manages to escape and also later pen down his experience that took the shape of a perfect travel narrative.

Interlingual travellers are removed from the centre of the linguistic universe and their own language no longer corresponds with the world in which they (temporarily) live. So they learn the language of the world they travel to. But they must eventually return to their home language and express foreign-language experience in mother-tongue prose. The traveller is thus plurilingual¹² with ‘‘pluricultural competence’’, capable of using multiple languages and switch between them according to the circumstances in order to cope with the given situation. The traveller’s attempt of learning language shows his due recognition and acceptance of heterogeneity of language and culture. He has respect for the plurality and treats language learning as a source of enrichment. He therefore builds a plurilingual identity to gel with the new found culture and integrate with them so as to understand and comprehend the cultural diversity that he is encountering. He then attempts to build his narrative on it by analysing the culture he encounters through the new language. By learning multiple languages, the traveller builds up a ‘‘plurilingual repertoire’’ (Coste and Simon, 2009:174). The use of the concept of repertoire is interesting since it also entails the performative that underlies the linguistic competence and use of it in accordance to the necessity of circumstances. The traveller switches between language codes with ease as and when it is needed in his narrative. He speaks the local language to convince the people of the land of his allegiance towards them¹³, but thinks and understands the foreign in his mother tongue which he also uses as a means of expression in the narrative. It is in this manner he also earns the trust of his readers. However,

there is no hierarchy among the languages and at certain points “the resources available for plurilingual competence will also vary in terms of value, resonance, affective tone, cognitive role, and consequently the impact they have on identity building.” (Coste and Simon, 2009:176)

In a travel, there are two sets of languaged people involved: the speaking native and the speaking traveller but what they speak is different. The meeting point is arrived when one of them (mostly the traveller) comes out of his own cultural cocoon and allows himself to enter the realm of another. His point of entry into another culture is through its language and complete communion with the culture and its people is possible only by fully learning the language. It is at this point that he is no more just a traveller, but becomes a translator who learns incessantly through interlingual translation with his mother tongue as the fulcrum. With multiple languages coexisting within the traveller simultaneously, he becomes plurilingual. Multiplicity of languages enables him to grow, and to cultivate his own self and also basic social sense which leads him towards becoming ‘cultured’.¹⁴ This idea can be traced back to the concept of translation as advocated by the German Romantics like Humboldt, Herder and Schleiermacher who believed accepting a little of what is foreign is important in cultivating a true culture.¹⁵

However, the traveller’s development is, to use Bakhtin’s concept, centrifugal¹⁶ where there is never complete assimilation but a sense of “outsidedness” retained so as to get a distant/ disinterested understanding of the foreign culture for “in the realm of culture, outsidedness is a most powerful factor in understanding” since “without one’s own questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign”. Bakhtin writes, “In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of their creative understanding in time, in space, in culture.”¹⁷ Hence there is an urge of active involvement yet a conscious distance of the self is maintained with the other so as to understand the subtleties of their cultural practices. (Kumar and Malshe, 2005: 120) Thus interlingual travel writing amounts to interlingual translation where the traveller-translator associates the landscape with language in order to understand the larger world overcoming the limits of linguistic ethnocentrism.

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¹ The source text in case of travel writing is the land travelled to, its people and culture.

² See Simonti Sen's *Travels to Europe: Self and Other in Bengali Travel Narratives, 1870-1910* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2005) for detailed discussion.

³ Michael Cronin in his *Across the Lines* (2000), compares the language loss of the traveller with the fear of infantilisation where he desperately tries to make sense of the world around him. The tour guides/ interpreters play the role of the parent who saves the tourist from the fear of being suddenly orphaned in the world of strange language. (43)

⁴ See María Isabel González Cruz & María del Pilar González de la Rosa (2006) Language and Travel: Spanish Vocabulary in British Travel Books, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 12:2-3, 203-217, DOI:10.1080/14701840601085048

⁵ In Swift's work, Gulliver tries High and Low Dutch, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian and Lingua Franca which is a mixture of several languages, principally Romance languages, Arabic and Greek, used by traders in the Mediterranean.

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).

⁷ Cronin, in his *Across the Lines* talks about how language and gestures do not exhaust the range of human possibilities for communication in the chapter "Making Sense". Here he discusses the plight of a traveller in a country where he does not understand the language and how that gets represented in the narrative. He equates such an experience of writing a travelogue with inter-semiotic translation as described by Roman Jakobson.

⁸ Cronin suggests that food is an important communicative signifier in travel literature. It tells us about the cultures that produce or offer it, the way it is eaten, the hospitality that is offered to the traveller in the form of meal. (*AL*, 77-78)

⁹ As soon as he starts understanding the language, his familiarity with it is expressed in a language he is most familiar with. The strangeness and peculiarity of the native tongue dissolves and cognition is arrived at.

¹⁰ Michael Cronin in *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation*, points out that in case of many travellers. "the fear of being unfaithful to the mother tongue prevents the accent of the mother tongue from receding. The sounds of the mother's language are perceived at an early stage in the infant's development so that these sounds come to be viscerally identified with personal identity as elaborated through language." (47)

¹¹ However, this is not the case in the Swift's text. In fact in this very first conversation with the king, the king's words are in the language of Lilliput, later translated into English.

¹² Plurilingualism is defined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* as "the ability to use languages for the purpose of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience in several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw". (Coste and Simon, 2009:173)

¹³ Coste and Simon states that "the resources in the repertoire may be mobilised by an individual in response to specific situations and to express allegiance to different groups."

¹⁴ The idea inherent in such a concept is that a society becomes an accomplished culture only when it comes in contact with other languaged societies and tolerantly accepts certain foreign aspects missing in its own only to enrich it further.

¹⁵ According to these German Romantics accepting a little of what is foreign is important in cultivating a true culture: "a nation, expressed through its language as its very essence, gives up a part of its natural originality and accepts contamination by the foreign in order to achieve the state of culture... the ideal translator... must sacrifice a part of his or her freedom in order to accomplish a cultural mission that is seen as an intrinsic part of translation practice." (Buden and Nowotny, 2009:200)

¹⁶ Bakhtin uses the concept of centrifugal to denote polyglossia as against centripetal for monoglossia which pulls an individual towards the centre of his own ethnicity.

¹⁷ Polezzi has discussed this in the context of migration in her essay "Translation and Migration" (2012)

The Victimization of People in a Conflict Ridden Zone: Manipur and Nagaland

Seram Guneshwori Devi¹

Abstract:

Violent political conflicts are not new for the people in the North Eastern India as the region has been in turmoil for many decades. Recurring violence affects the lives of the ordinary people directly or indirectly. This paper tries to explore some of the ways in which common people are victimised by the armed groups whether it be security forces or insurgents. Many social and political analysts have described the contemporary socio-economic and political situation in the North Eastern states of India as an impasse. With particular focus on Manipur and Nagaland, two of the eight North Eastern states, this paper looks at the ways in which people live through this social and political crisis. Through some selected short stories from Temsula Ao, Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh and Yumlembam Ibomcha, the precarious lives of these people are discussed. These fictional narratives echo not only the unending conflict but also engaged in the larger critical debate on human rights violation where one act of violence can result in a chain reaction and an unending vicious cycle that seems impossible to come out of.

Keywords: North East India, Conflict, Victim, Insurgent, Security Personnel, Short Story

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Introduction

The “North Eastern region of India is both a [c]olonial [c]onstruct and a post – colonial region created by the Partition of the sub-continent” (Nepram 86). It comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The entire region is linked with the mainland India through a 22 kilometre stretch in Siliguri that is often called the Chicken Neck¹. The region is multicultural with close historical links with China and Southeast Asia and one of the most ethnically diverse areas in South Asia. It is home to around 40 million people including 213 of the 635 tribal groups listed by the Anthropological Survey of India. The native population has much common in culture and tradition with the neighbouring Tibet, Burma and the countries of Southeast Asia but each of the states that form this part of India has its own culture and tradition. Despite its rich cultural heritage, the North East (NE) India is plague by the problem of insurgency and various political and social problems related with it. In August 2011, the Indian central government identified 79 armed insurgent groups active in the six states of NE India. The conflict dynamics ranges from insurgency for secession to insurgency for autonomy, from sponsored terrorism to ethnic clashes, to conflicts generated as a result of continuous inflow of migrants from across the borders as well as from other states of the country (Hayes 6). All these conflicts are for power and control of territory and are traceable to the historic reasons rooted largely in the colonial period.

The notion of lack of development and security has also created strong feelings of frustration and anger against the Indian Union in the region. Apart from this there is economic backwardness and lack of opportunities. The continuous inflow of illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh has added an additional burden to the people which has changed the demography of the region. All such major issues have sown seed for the several movements for sovereignty and right to self-determination and self-identity and finally generate militant organizations. One of the root causes of insurgency also lays in the economic factors such as inequality caused by continual deprivation and exploitation of the region. Even though the causes of these rebellions are diverse, in Manipur and Nagaland the nature of conflict is similar. The idea of resistance against alleged Indian

domination and territorial claims gave birth to rebel groups in these two states (Sen 12). This is the reason why Nagaland and Manipur have been chosen out of the eight North Eastern states for the analysis.

Narratives of Violence

While discussing the work of the writers from North East India, Preeti Gill, a senior editor – Zubaan Books says, “Many writers continue to grapple with these [violence] issues. Having grown up in the shadow of the gun, their desire to analyse the common people’s reaction to insurgency is as strong as ever” (Gill n.pag.). Literature produced from NE in fictional form has tales of violence encountered in everyday life because of the socio-political unrest.

Writers like Temsula Ao in her *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) and *Laburnum for my Head* (2009) locate the trauma and suffering of both individual and collective. Easterine Kire in her *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) and *Life on Hold* (2011) illustrates the human rights violation both by the state and non-state actors in Nagaland. Similarly Indira Goswami in her *The Shadow of Kamakhya* (2001), Siddhartha Deb in his *The Point of Return* (2002) Mitra Phukan in her *The Collector’s Wife* (2005), and Dhruva Hazarika in his *Sons of Brahma* (2014) has explored the widespread of violence and its victims in Assam. Yumlembam Ibomcha in his *Numitti Asum Thengjillakli*² (1990), Hijam Guno in his *Epam Meihoure*³(1992), and Siddhartha Deb in his *Surface* (2005) explain the same genre of violence from the state Manipur. These literary productions highlight and question the violence that has damaged the land and complicated the ordinary lives of these peace-loving people:

The writer from the North-east differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but perforce master the art of witness. (Nongkynrih and Ngangom IX)

At present none are left untouched by the violence of insurgency. Violence becomes a mode of life. This is what Temsula Ao writes about in her volume of short stories *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. She describes how ordinary people cope with

violence perpetuated by various militant outfits as well as the armed force. In the introduction to this book, Temsula Ao comments that:

[For] the victims the trauma goes beyond the realm of just the physical maiming and loss of life — their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors scarred both in mind and soul (X).

The present study finds that the insider position in turn influences the writer's specific instance and outlook on the war. The study focuses on the short stories of Yumlembam Ibomcha, Temsula Ao and Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh in which characters such as Leihao and Sakhitombi in "Theng-gainaba"⁴, Satemba and Jemtila in "Curfew Man", Apenyo and Libeni in "The Last Song" and Tombi in "The Mauled Cub" depict all the shared condition of uncertainties and anxieties regarding their survival in a society torn apart by violence.

Men as Victims in Conflict Situations

The impact of armed conflict on gender relations are significant; even if "men are the primary perpetrators of violence towards women and children, it is important to note that men too are subject to victimisation and violence, including sexualised violence" (Jack 3). Not only women but also men experience human rights abuses that are different from but equally unjust to those afflicting women, whether as prisoners of war or soldiers. Ao's brings up her protagonist not as prisoner or soldier but as an informer to the SDO (Sub- Divisional Officer) in her story "The Curfew Man". The story has its setting against the background of the Naga nationalism in which the author reveals the predicament of people living under constant worry under the shadow of violence from both the insurgents and security personnel in Nagaland where:

Everything had been plunged into a state of hostility between two warring armies; the one overground labeling the other as rebels fighting against the state and the other, operating from their underground hideouts and calling the Indian army illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories. Caught between the two, it was the innocent villagers and those living in small townships who had to bear the brunt of the many restrictions imposed on their lives. (Ao 34)

The opening of the story itself draw the reader attention to the political turmoil of the region “[the] night curfew was still on because there were troubled times for all in the land” (Ao 34). In this situation Ao introduces two characters Satemba, a retired Naga constable in Assam Police and his wife Jemtila who comes to Mokokchung town in search of a new beginning of life. The husband is appointed as a government informer by the SDO and made him a messenger against those insurgent groups. But unfortunately during the process he is caught by one of the insurgents and warned him to quit his job. He “gripped Satemba by the neck and hissed in his ear, ‘Go back home curfew man, and if you value your life, never carry tales’. So saying, the stranger quietly vanished into the night” (41) and wounded him on his knee. At this moment he does not understand how to react “should he do as the stranger [insurgent] had just ordered? What if his movements of the evening and the encounter with the masked character had been monitored by ‘other’ secret eyes?” (41). The husband-wife, after this incident is frightened to take risk of their lives and thought of departing the land. Here the protagonists conditioning to fled the land is a part of “forced displacement, the clearest violation of human, economic, political and social rights” (Moser and Clark 32) produced by the SDO and the insurgent.

The story also represents the socio-political scenario of NE India where the gun culture and curfew culture are always associated with the people and their land. Ao’s narrative gives light to the most striking situation of the people living in this region with the character Satemba. The nightmarish atmosphere in the story that traps almost all the characters without giving any hint of upcoming events is the reality faced by the people. The characters are seen all the time in disturbance of possible violence that may come anytime to their lives. Both the armed groups threatened the protagonist time and again and at the end of the story the SDO says to Jemtila “Tell your husband that his services will no longer be needed. And also say that his wounds will heal properly only if he nurses them quietly” (Ao 43). The life of Satemba is what Butler called “ungrievable”⁵ lives in the essay “Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect”. Satemba is no more different from what Butler considered ungrievable being as he most oftenly becomes the target for annihilation in protecting the life of the SDO who is considered creditable of living. The ordinary people such as Satemba is taken for granted; time and again such folk are used by the dominant one during these curfew nights.

The political term 'Curfew' is what Ao puts forward at the title of the story "The Curfew Man". If there be a hidden connotation to this; is it possible to articulate this political term 'Curfew' with a man? This answer can be conceived from the author portrayal of the character Satemba whose business is to carry information during the curfew night. He is the mighty man during the curfew night and "curfew [is] no problem for him because he [is] given the password each night by his masters to enable him to move about freely gathering or giving information" (Ao 39). Curfew is a political situation that is familiar to the people of the NE India. It becomes the most terrible thing for the people living in this region because soon after "dark all social activities ceased, even church services or social gatherings [have] to be concluded before the curfew hour began" (34). Curfew is something that is declared to keep situation under control but "[there are] several incidents where civilians were shot dead by the patrol parties after curfew and their deaths reported as those of underground rebels killed in 'encounters' with the army" (34).

The attack on the civilians both by state and non-state actors is also depicted by Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh, a poet, writer and translator from Manipur. He is keenly aware of the victimhood of his land – "deaths, injuries and humiliations resulting from 'insurgencies' and 'counter-insurgency operations,' as well as the hidden hurt that citizens quietly endure" (Baruah 3). In his story "The Mauled Cub" the author made a striking in the narrative by showing the two way victimization of an innocent family. Located in the heart of the present Manipur, the story portrays the anguish of people in a designated disturbed area:

The shootout went on for nearly half an hour. Soon after the sound of the gunshots has died down, heavily armed men in uniform forcibly entered their house and dragged her brother, a student of class X at that time, out of the house without giving any reason (Misra 188). He has become one of the many youths arrested without arrest-memos and not returned (189).

This arrest of Tombi's brother by the security personnel deployed in the region reflects a militarized zone. Random arrest and killing of "innocent people [are] not a new development in Manipur, as also in various areas of the Northeast where the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act⁶ is imposed" (Gill 358). Primarily focusing on the characters Tayenjam also

draw attention of the readers how the characters out of fear become the victims of the underground groups:

He was the leader of the three youths who claimed to belong to one of the numerous insurgent groups and had forcibly stayed in their house. They had done so earlier many times. They came and went as they wished. Tombi and her mother were helpless against the heavily armed strangers. They could neither inform their neighbours nor report to the police - it would only create more trouble and complicate the matter. (Misra 190)

The story depicts the nightmarish experiences of a family where the son (Tombi's brother) has been taken away by the army and "the whereabouts of [him] could never be known" (Misra 191). On the other side of this violence, the protagonist, Tombi has been raped by the insurgent as well as the security personnel. Tayenjam is successful in bringing up his fictional characters and visualizing both the state and non-state sponsored violence.

The narrative centres on human rights abuses and particularly the juvenile group, in the entirely social and political agenda. The author also creates the image of the dishearten parents and their traumatic memory of losing their children. When Tombi's father reported to the police about his son, they "charged that her innocent brother must have been a member of an insurgent group to warrant arrest" (Misra 190). The father was being harassed by the police and detained for a number of days for questioning. It seems totally tragic in the setting as the consequence is the death of the father. This story portrays the emotional experiences of every individual in a conflict ridden state by highlighting the predicaments of Tombi's family – the arrest of the brother, death of the father, rape of Tombi (both by insurgents and army personnel). The character Tombi and her brother represent a whole generation of children and young people in Manipur who have been emotionally shattered by the violence all around them.

Women as Victims in Conflict Situations

In conflict situations, "women are activists, caretakers, providers and survivors" (Dodds 58); their role changes according to the situation and their lives are more vulnerable because of their status and femininity in society. During conflict, the image of men on the frontline and

women and children stay in the safe zone of the home, no longer holds true. Women and girls are the main victims in many armed conflicts as they are subjected to attacks and violence precisely because of their gender and “rape has been used as a weapon” (Pilar 247) to dishonour and bring harm to the hostile community. This is no different during the Naga Independence movement and Ao has taken up this issue to explore terror in Nagaland. In the narrative “The Last Song”, Ao looks at the Naga society where tremendous brutality is practised by the Indian army. The story begins with a widow called Libeni, whose husband has gifted for singing. Their daughter, Apenyo has inherited the gift of the father. The setting of the story happens to be a Naga village where the background is given as:

These were, however, troubled times for the Nagas. The Independence movement was gaining momentum by the day and even the remotest villages were getting involved, if not directly in terms of their members joining the underground army, then certainly by paying ‘taxes’ to the underground ‘government’ in which this particular village is ‘no different. (Ao 25- 26)

The narrative discloses how the militants in the name of Naga nationalism corrupts to the villagers by collecting money from every household as a tax for the travel expenses of the rebel leaders. To this particular year in the village, a church is built and now the villagers are busy with the dedication of this new church building. The singers, the church members and the rest of the villagers are all moving with preparations for the grand event, on the other hand, the army is also arranging to use their power to arrest the village leaders for their support to the underground groups by paying taxes (Ao 26). When the function starts the villagers could hear the sound of gun fire in the distance. The choir started singing and the soldiers are incensed because it is an act of open rebelliousness. Everyone runs for their safety including the members of the choir; it was only Apenyo who stood the ground. Hers only single voice becomes a challenge to the soldiers, later she was grabbed by the army and pulled her away from the crowd towards the old church building. The girl was heard singing the chorus of her song over and over again even as she was being carried off to be repetitively raped by the Indian Army. Even the mother was raped by the soldiers and killed. The Captain ordered his men to take position around the church and empty their guns into the building so that those who witnessed the scene should not forward the story of this Black Sunday. Again the old church is burnt down and many innocent villagers lose their lives. Apenyo and her

mother lose their life in a mindless massacre and the action of the brutal killing explores how the soldiers treat these ordinary people. One can also visualize and experience the destruction and the terrible situation produced by the armed forces in the following depiction:

There was chaos everywhere. Villagers trying to flee the scene were either shot at or kicked and clubbed by the soldiers who seemed to be everywhere. The pastor and the gaonburas were tied up securely for transportation to army headquarters and whatever fate awaited them there. (Ao 29)

From the postscript one knows that the story is told by an old grandmother who is witnessed to the killings and who cares the memory of that Black Sunday. Ao's characters projected that how people are locked in a conflict area that somehow becomes the historical setting but who are still human in their suffering and pain. Through the characters of Apenyo and the mother, Ao rebuilds the representative of all the women who becomes victim at the hands of the state army. She gives voice to the outside world "how half a century of surviving in a war-zone has taken its toll especially on the women who have to bear the maximum brunt from both the establishment as well as the rebel militants" (Zama 73).

The story demonstrates the manner of power and powerlessness. Within the artistic of storytelling the author brings the incident of that Black Sunday and reveals the violent action of the army where human rights are being violated where "the storyteller invests the past with a significance that must be kept alive" (Syiem 31). The narrative elucidates the conflict that has made up the texture of the struggle of the Naga community. Even the title 'The Last Song' signifies much more than the mere song (of voice), it defines the need for revenge, the blood of sacrifice of the innocent and the blood which purifies. The story sensitise the reader to the disturbing currents of a hostilities society.

With this particular story the reader can bring up what Butler has mentioned in *Frames of war*:

[We] feel more horror and moral revulsion in the face of the lives lost under certain conditions than certain others. If, for instance someone kills or is killed in war, and the war is state-sponsored, and we invest the state with legitimacy, then we consider the death lamentable, sad, and unfortunate, but not radically unjust. And yet if the

violence is perpetuated by insurgency groups regarded as illegitimate, then our effect invariably changes. (41)

What Butler emphasized is to the idea that most of the people considered the state sponsored attack as legitimised to some extent. Ao resists to this idea of Butler and her narratives can be a response to this notion. She does not take any consideration to the killings of the state sponsored as legitimate; her narrative implicitly reveals whether the killing is through the state sponsored or non- state sponsored; lives should be seen from the humanistic perspective.

Ao also explicates women's fatality in the narrative "The Curfew Man" through the character of Jemtila. She is not a direct victim in the sense that she does not receive any physical harm or assault like her husband; but she too have the psychological injuries because of her husband position and the environment where she lives:

This woman was by no means ignorant of what was happening all around them and how circumstances were forcing innocent, peace-loving people to turn to means that they would not ordinarily employ, just to stay safe and alive. She had to admit that they were indeed caught in a vice-like situation and every time Satemba went out at night, she kept a lone vigil in the darkness of their small hut and worried until he appeared at the door. (Ao 39)

Manipur being one of the conflict torn areas of India, the women of this region also experiences the degradation of the human values in the society. In his story, Yumlembam Ibomcha, a short story writer and a poet, articulates the same sentiments which Ao expresses earlier. The short story "Theng-gainaba"⁷ by Yumlembam makes an attempt to foreground and highlight the underlying theme of violence. Through the third person omniscient narrator the story begins when Leihao, a sixty year old vegetable seller is asked not to go to market because of the firing that had taken place earlier day. A market place where people gathered from each and every corner of the society becomes a target for their conflict. Yumlembam here creates a situation to illustrate how the prolonged unrest in the region has affected the social harmony and the people of NE as a whole and particularly women and children and particularly the poor one. The author here uses the flashback technique in which he portrays the strife (interior and exterior) of Leihao. The protagonist, Leihao even feels terrified when she remembers the incident of Sakhitombi dead and exclaimed:

Ish! Magi asum thok u tamlakpa haibadu tareko. Eigi ekoksi lanthok khraga etung da famlibi magi makokta hotchinduna karamna paluriba. Emaipema! Ei siramgani. Ish:Siramlabanine siramlaba. (Yumlembam 111)

[Alas! It was written to be happened in her life. How is it possible the bullet whizzed overhead of mine and hit her. Oh! I would have died. I am almost dead, dead]

*(Independent Translation)

It is seen how a firing on the market place changes the entire otherwise peaceful environment into a tense one. An innocent woman has to lose her life in the firing creating a psychological trauma to the main character Leihao as she used to sit next to her in the market. This kind of frightful incident happens in a routine manner in Manipur. For instance the killing of Rabina⁸ on 23rd July 2009 and the incident of Malom Massacre⁹ on 2nd November 2000, are few examples of such killings in the state.

In order to show such terror Yumlembam brings out the incident of Sakhitombi's death. The story indicates the chaotic situation at the market place like Ima Keithel¹⁰ in which the civilian population, especially women has to cope with daily occurrences of violence at their very doorsteps. It also explores a sense of despair with the increase of happening unexpected things. We are unsure about our lives what will happen in the next moment. Just as Sakhitombi died, we feel unsafe and insecure at every place. This is what Butler explains in her essay "Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect" when she says that our lives are vulnerable in the social way we are living. We feel insecure when we are exposed to other persons whom we know or have never met. This uncertainty of our lives in the hands of the other is the underlying message of this narrative "Theng-gainaba".

The author has used Leihao's way to market as the route to reveal her psychological sufferings of this violence ridden society. With open ended narrative the author tries to draw the picture of the contemporary Manipur society where every place is seen as an execution

ground, the market place being no exception. The realistic picture of society where the virtual collapse of the law and order is clearly highlighted by the writer, also tries to narrate the lives of the unsung heroes, the hardworking innocent masses made victims of circumstances.

It would not be out of context to make a reference that Yumlembam is true of being a sensitive writer who writes of human sufferings, particularly of sufferings that are encountered in everyday life due to the instability of the socio-political nature.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the selected short stories it can be concluded that the North East India has witnessed a prolonged conflict situation in the last several decades. With this study of the narratives it is exposed how both innocence men and women become victims of conflict, whether directly as war fatalities or casualties or through the effect of dislocation of their livelihood and social network. All the stories which have been discussed reflect the hardening of hearts against the militants at a particular phase in the course of the armed insurgencies in these states. To some extent it also reveals the extra judicial killings and fake encounters taking place routinely in the region. The significant epicentre of Ao, Tayenjam and Yumlembam stories are within the realm of the human; their concern is with the lives of ordinary people who are caught in the socio-political conflict with no choice of their own.

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¹ It is the narrow 22 kilometre corridor between Bangladesh and Bhutan that connects the Indian subcontinent with the North East and also often used as an apt image to describe the alienation of the North East from the national mainstream. This 22 kilometre border is supposed to constitute only about 2 per cent of the total boundary of the North East with India. The remaining 98 per cent are international borders, with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal (See Phanjoubam Pradip "Northeast Problems as a Subject and Object").

²Numitti Asum Thengjillakli meaning *The Day has Advanced Gradually*

³Epam Meihoure meaning *My Home is on Fire*

⁴Theng-gainaba meaning the Clash

⁵An ungrievable life according to Butler is the one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all (See Judith Butler *Frames of War*, 38).

⁶AFSPA was first enacted on 11th September 1958 in the Naga inhabited areas of the state of Assam and the Union Territory of Manipur to tackle the Naga insurgency but later to control the secessionist action and other issues such as drug trafficking and other border-related crime, it has extended to all the other states of the North East region barring Sikkim. AFSPA violates the right to life of the Indian Constitution by section 4(a) which grants the armed forces to shoot to kill in law enforcement situations without regard to international human rights law restrictions on the use of lethal force. The right to liberty and security of a person is violated by section 4(c) of the AFSPA which allows the soldiers to arrest without warrant merely on suspicion. The law also states that “no prosecution can be initiated against an officer without the previous sanction of the Central government”. (See Saikia “9/11 of India: A Critical Review on Armed Forces Special Power Act (Afspa) and Human Right Violation in North East India” 268-269).

⁷“Theng-gainaba” can be translated as “The Clash”

⁸ On July 23, 2009 there was a shootout at Khwairamband Keithel (market) of Imphal where Thokchom (o) Rabina Devi was killed by a stray bullet that pierced through her head. The ex-militant Chungkham Sanjit was killed in what is obviously a case of fake encounter and injuring five others in this incident (See Vivek Chadha *Armed Forces Special Powers Act: The Debate*, 2013).

⁹ On November 2, 2000, in Malom, a town in the Imphal valley, 10 civilians were allegedly killed by the 8th Assam Rifles at a bus stop including a 62 year old woman, Leisangthem Ibetombi and 18 years old Sinam Chandramani, a 1988 National Child Bravery Award winner. The incident later came to be known as “Malom Massacre”. This incident has promoted Irom Sharmila to take the fast-unto-death agitation (See Meghalaya Times, accessed on Thursday 29, June 2017).

¹⁰ Ima Keithel (literally a market run by mothers) is the second largest women’s market in Asia. (See Bisoya Loitongbam and Priyatam Anurag “Interplay Between Individual and Shared Identities of Women Entrepreneurs in Manipur).

Critiques of Nation and Gender in South Asia:**Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Khwabnama* and Savitri Roy's *Trisrota* and *Swaralipi***Soma Marik¹***Abstract:***

This paper argues that Savitri Roy (*Trisrota* --1950 and *Swaralipi* --1952), and Akhtaruzzaman Elias *Khwabnama* (1996), presented quite distinct critiques of nationalism. Roy has a sensitivity about gender and the intermeshing of gender and class. Consistently, there is a significant mapping of how gender leads to divergences in political activism and social standing.

However, like much of the bhadralok Progressive cultural camp, there is an inadequate conceptualization/representation of Muslims, and they appear mostly as minor characters in Roy. In *Khwabnama*, the Muslim majority of Bengal are brought to life, and fissures, class and gender relations, are examined within them.

Elias confronted the question of the project of national liberation for Pakistan, suggesting like Fanon that a national-liberation struggle is nothing if it does not become a struggle for social emancipation. And in historicising myth, Elias questions the paradigmatic view of modernity. While Roy's project ultimately foregrounds a hegemony of the caste Hindu educated middle class, in the case of Elias, one finds the coming together of a critique of form with critique of elite (including left-elite) centred writing.

Keywords: Class, Gender, Nationalism, Community, Caste

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This paper looks at how Savitri Roy and Akhtaruzzaman Elias, authors of two different generations and national/religious identities but with shared communist ideological orientation and a partly common internal chronotope present nation, class and gender. Roy's nation is mostly the post-1947 nation, almost taking the partition as a given without examining the trajectory of Muslims and the complexities of rural class formations and struggles. Elias would look at the coming together and growing apart, of class and nation in peasant aspirations, and the foundations for the making and the unmaking of Pakistan in Bengal.

Roy would make gender a much more central aspect of her narrative, while in Elias it would be much less stated. Finally, while Roy and Elias would both look at left politics, Roy would attempt a view of left politics, especially the politics of the CPI, where constant positive and negative engagements of the lower ranks with the leadership have been portrayed. Elias would look at the politics of the left as it entered the popular consciousness through dreams (*Khawab*) reflecting the narratives (*Namah*) of the past and present among peasants, but where that also intersected Muslim community identity.

Savitri Roy's Bengal Politics: Communism, Class and Gender in *Trisrota*

Trisrota, a semi-autobiographical novel, comes as both an early narrative and one where the image comes to readers, chiefly through the eyes of secondary participants of the political movements. The novel begins with Rupasi village in East Bengal, sometime in the 1930s, and ends in Calcutta, during the Left Line¹ under B T Ranadive². *Swaralipi* is set in the Left Line and its Maoism influenced alternative Left politics over 1948-1951. Roy had joined a students' strike called by the All India Students' Federation³ way back in 1938 (Nag, Nivedita, personal interview, 3 March, 2001). But her family had a Gandhian tradition, and she was also close to family members following the politics of armed nationalism. She married a communist⁴. So while her novels show much sympathy, especially for the struggles led by the communists and for the causes they espoused, they also contained political sympathy for people on other parts of the spectrum. Also, Roy joined the CPI for only one year, and was sceptical about its politics of tight discipline. (Chakravarty, Gargi, personal

interview, 1 September, 2009) She had spiritual and aesthetic needs which her comrades would denounce, particularly in the “Left Line” period, as products of bourgeois individualism. She celebrated ritual performances that are often important for (caste Hindu) women. (e.g., Roy 2005: 178, 188, 191) She liked the literature that came from dominant classes. But she was also capable of recognising that the same world of rituals could impose great cruelties on many women, for example on widows. Savitri Roy was also capable of acknowledging the oppressive dimensions of upper class aesthetics, and the cost at which the aesthetics came. The lives of widows were noted with careful attention in her novels, especially in *Trisrota*, but also in *Swaralipi*, where Sheeta has to confront the dictates of the rigid life of a widow that her mother-in-law insists upon. (Roy 1992: 43-44, 285)

Often ill, Roy could not be publicly politically active at all times. This also impacted her relationship with communist activists. In the substantially autobiographical *Trisrota*, this comes out:

The next day too, Ira comes in search of Arunava. Padma pulls up the chair to let her sit. Ira does not sit. Standing beside the table she writes a note addressed to Arunava. Padma is reading with deep attention an old issue of *Forward Bloc* sitting by the window. Ira looks aslant at the journal in Padma’s hand. The yellowish bright pupils of her eyes show a brief shadow of doubt mixed with condescension. It does not escape Padma’s eyes either. Ira ... says, I must go now. There is a meeting in the afternoon in Shradhdhanada Park. Sympathisers can also go. You can come too. (Roy 2005: 218)

And yet, her novels displayed an acute commitment for the toiling people and to their struggle for social emancipation. What she could not accept was the claim that *the* party could have infallible understanding of the road to such emancipation.

In *Trisrota*, we note first the range of registers of the Bangla language. The narrator’s voice comes, somewhat surprisingly, in the *sadhubhasha*⁵, something that would change in *Swaralipi*. But the spoken language seeks to present a wider range.

Trisrota has a wide range of characters, but begins and ends with Padma, a young girl of a landed family in a village through whom we are introduced to two important elements of nation building. She admires the History teacher and the way he teaches the subject. And in the form of disciplinary mechanism present in schools in those days, a *truant* student is to be

punished by twisting the ears by the classmate. It appears more insulting, because it is a *girl* who is asked to punish the boy.

In the twentieth century, there was a significant rise in the number of politically active women (Southard). For them emancipation did not mean a liberation whose terms were set out by a modernised patriarchy (Banerjee). Yet they too had to operate within codes created by powerful forces, like nationalism (Forbes; Sinha). This was where the communist movement seemed to be moving way ahead. However, there were distinct elements of *bhadralok* culture embedded within the communist movement in Bengal and its attempts to build a women's movement. (Marik 79-118)

Roy's fiction highlights a wide range of women's voices. Kusumlata, Padma's aunt, is a Gandhian nationalist, and within that framework, has been one fighting for women's rights and rejecting the worst of casteist practices. (Roy 2005: 169-70, 175). But the gender and class codes are strongly present in that society. Padma's parents live elsewhere. When they come home for a few days, they find it objectionable that their teenage daughter should go out for community service along with girls and boys of the common sort (Roy, 2005 :177). Although Padma's stay at a hostel independently was seen as a far more reprehensible act by her other kin. (Roy 2005:181)

In her college days Padma learns about the communists. Her traditionalist uncle talks of the achievements of revolutionary Russia (Roy 2005: 189). Bipasha, a college friend, also plays a role, taking her to workers' quarters, meetings, talks of proletarian revolution, five-year plan, and Fascism. And along with that, she meets the elder brother of Bipasha, Arunava, a communist activist. (Roy, 2005: 191-193)

The CPI inspired many young women to ignore, the traditional sexist codes of conduct (Roy Chowdhury, Reba, personal interview, 30 June 2001), as brought to life in Roy's depiction of Padma's elder brother Prakash. When Padma turns down Prakash's decision of arranging a wedding for her, he accused Arunava of indecent relationship with Padma. (Roy 2005: 199) Yet after marrying Arunava, she was taken to his home in the remote countryside, left long ago after his mother's suicide. When he leaves, Padma had to remain as the '*boutharan*' [daughter in law of the house] who has to symbolically take over the keys to the stores. (Roy 2005: 209) Activism was seemingly not meant for married women.

Back in Kolkata, Padma watches political developments, but keeps herself a little aloof. As a result of the new CPI line of supporting England in its war efforts (imperialist war has become “People’s War” as the USSR is under attack by Hitler) the CPI is legalised in July 1942. Padma becomes increasingly aware of a patronising tone and condescending attitude. Party comrades, women no less than men, take the services a non-party member provides, (making regular cups of tea) for granted. Yet she turns down Arunava’s proposal to get an additional part-time job for himself, because she feels that politics for Arunava is like water for fish. But her deep anguish remains, as Arunava “does not seriously try to get her involved in the party’s work”. (Roy 2005: 219) The personal interviews given to the present writer by numerous communist women from the 1940s and 1950s show this tension in real life, the willingness, yet unhappiness in sharing the bulk of domestic work, because the husband’s political work is ‘more important’. (Nag, Nivedita, interview, 3 March 2001; Gupta, Manjari, interview, 25 May 2011; Chatterjee, Mira, interview, 12 November 2008)

A subordinate storyline looks at women and men of poorer classes. Double standards of sexuality are exposed, as when Madan, a wartime-contractor, has extra-marital affairs, but poor peasants like Surya and Jamuna (Madan’s wife) cannot express their love for each other. Emplotting the Quit India and the Bengal Famine are weaker, possibly because writing in 1950, the CPI line of opposing the Quit India Movement could not be glossed over, while the obvious hesitations of the author made presenting communist work against the Quit India Movement in a fully positive light difficult. So in this phase, other dimensions were taken up like the growth of trade unions and the strategies to smash unions. At the same time, Roy consistently presents the developments through the eyes of women – Padma, Bipasha, Jamuna, and others. The narrative picks up with the post-war political upsurge which ended in partition of India. (Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 2004; Chatterjee, J. 2002) Roy however mostly ignores complexities and the different language registers among Muslims. The confrontations between nation and gender therefore end up being limited to an assumption about the political nation being divided between the Gandhians, the national revolutionaries/Forward Bloc, and the Communists. Partition is seen almost solely from the perspective of Hindu, bhadralok/mahila. It appears as though Muslim desire for partition was based just on the well to do Muslim’s wish for the land of the Hindu landlords.

The Politics of the CPI: Class, Party and Gender in *Swaralipi*

A much more powerful novel, *Swaralipi* looks more sharply at the class struggle and covers the coming of independence, the partition, the beginnings of the refugee problems, the twists and turns in CPI politics, the language issue in East Pakistan (Umar) leading to the process whereby the concept of a Muslim nation begins to be unravelled, as well as international events of great significance, like the ending of World War II, the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan, the Chinese Revolution, etc.

It begins with a mass meeting in Calcutta, where the speaker announces that the path of Telangana⁶ [i.e., armed struggle] is the true path. And there follows a denunciation of Shohanlal and the glorification of Shukul, who seem transparent covers for P.C. Joshi and B. T. Ranadive respectively. (Roy 1992: 1-5) The nation that has emerged is split between the official standard bearers, now in power, and the masses of toiling people, as she sees them.

But Roy highlights contradictions. The Ranadive line, adopted by the Second Party Congress of the CPI called for a rapid transition to insurrectionary struggles. The party declared India's independence a fake and condemned Gandhi and Congress politics. The simple equation of the nationalist leaders with bourgeois exploiters was not easily acceptable even to all rank and file communists such as Prithvi, a journalist, and Sumitra, a dedicated party whole-timer. Sumitra wonders how to characterise Gandhi.

Yet, it was not only an ultra-left departure on the part of the CPI that caused a gulf. As Bipan Chandra has demonstrated, the ideology of Indian nationalism had assured, from very early times, that colonial exploitation and the drain of wealth was what kept the masses starving (Chandra). Now, the coming of independence meant there was a tremendous popular expectation. Popular movements did break out, even if the CPI strategy of turning them quickly into a revolution to overthrow the newly created nation-state was chimerical. (Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 2008:11-32) It is the reality of such struggles that Roy seeks to capture.

For some historians, the second phase of the *Tebhaga* movement (1948-49), was often ultraleft (Bose; Basu). However, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay suggests that the Ranadive Line was an inchoate response to CPI's possibility of being reduced to the margins. This too is only

partially true in the context of the world wide shift brought about by the Communist Information Bureau around this time (London). But had there been no real peasant militancy the CPI tactics would not have produced a huge peasant rally (November 1947) in Calcutta organised by the Kisan Sabha. Agrarian violence broke out from early 1948 under mainly CPI leadership in several districts (Lahiri).

The demands of this communist upsurge were much broader than the pre-independence *Tebhaga*, and included demands like abolition of the *zamindari* system without compensation and land to the tillers, which appealed to a large section of poor peasants and landless labourers. The movement became especially popular in parts of 24 Parganas, like Kadwip; as well as in five or six other districts.

While the more theoretical disputes (Ranadive Line vs. Andhra Line etc) were not targeting the mass of peasants, and while it is true that the initial mobilisation came from *bhadralok* leaders from outside, in every area a local leadership also emerged. The other interesting aspect of this rural insurgency was the active participation of women, well beyond what the CPI envisaged (Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 2008). This went all the way to armed confrontation with the police. (Chattopadhyay, K.1997:101-115; Chattopadhyay, K. 2001)

Roy's deft handling shows that just as class cuts through the homogenising claims of nation, so gender and class are to question universalist claims of each other. The calculations of the middle class Sagari are challenged by the peasant-woman Radha.

Sagari: Before taking any decision every member of the Fighting Council must reflect carefully whether by breaking the silo of *jotedars* like Gopinath Mondal, we are not merely increasing the numbers of our enemies.

Radha: We have not seen only in this one birth, but we have reflected over many births – urban women reared in milk and cream cannot be expected to know the tales of sweat and blood drenched woe, tears, of our fathers and grandfathers. (Roy 1992:170)

On the other hand, Sagari herself is the victim of the intrigues and the sexual overtures of the party-bureaucrat Nandalal. The confrontation between Nandalal and his agents and Sagari on one hand, and that between Sagari and Radha on the other, show that for Savitri Roy, no less

than nation, gender and class are also fractured identities where unity is never an automatic process.⁷

But while there was a rationale for the agrarian struggles, even if the party leadership was in gross error in pushing them to adventurist directions, the playing at revolution in the urban areas was utterly meaningless. While in jail, Prithvi hears comrade Manish, newly arrested, talking about how hundreds of thousands of toiling people are responding to the call of the party, how workers are taking over factories, *jotedars* are fleeing the countryside and Calcutta is witnessing a floodtide of revolution. Prithvi catches hold of Rathin (comrade who changed his position in favour of adventurist strategies) later and asks why these falsehoods are being circulated. Rathin explains that the prison too is a front, and members have to be kept inspired and also primed to die. (Roy 1992: 267-268)

Secularism and religious nationalism/communalism were in contestation at this time. In the late 1940s it was not yet certain that secularism would be adopted firmly, and the incoming refugees from East Pakistan were a major testing ground for all three discourses – secular nationalism from above, Hindu nationalism, and left nationalism (periodically intertwined with internationalism). In West Bengal, unlike in East Punjab, there was an utter governmental failure in settling refugees (Chakraborti). In that sense, there was a failure of secular nationalism from above. The refugee issue would be a major weakness of the ruling Congress. (Chatterjee J. 2007)

Roy shows, with an honesty that was remarkable, that the Hindu Right no less than the Communist Left tried to propose paths of resolution. For the right, the path was to reject partition and create a Hindu nation, undivided. (Roy 1992: 193-195) The politics of the right is drawn in a much briefer span, as the Left is the author's main focus. Yet Madhu Mukherjee, a former detainee, a revolutionary nationalist who has now turned Hindu nationalist, is deftly sketched.

This is the age of politics. So, in order to draw in educated boys, serious political education is needed. The explanation of Hindu dharma, of its specificity, its liberalism – from the essence of Aryanism, Gita, Upanishad, the Vedas and on to the regeneration of Hinduism. (Roy 1992: 195)

But Mukherjee is also linked to petty and medium capital, to contractors and builders. He assists those who want land from refugee-settlements, for profit. In a scene towards the end, Mukherjee's voice reminds the reader that rape as a community/national vengeance was not invented only in the late 20th Century, when he invokes rapes in East Pakistan to organise rapes of Muslims in West Bengal. (Roy 1992: 303) The consequence is the gang rape and subsequent death of Hasiya, a young Muslim woman. (Roy 1992: 304-307)

All this does not turn Roy's work simply into a political document or a history. It is through *Swaralipi* that the meaning of nation can come out in personal terms. The relationship between Sheeta and Prithvi does not lead to a union. The internal logic that the author provides is that Sheeta, a widow who cannot overcome social conditioning, despite being an active communist and free in her relationship with men. Prithvi blames 'feudal' values for her refusal to marry him. (Parenthetically speaking, the term feudal implies the absence of concepts like patriarchy, or sexism.) But trust and love exist, with Sheeta refusing to turn away from Prithvi when he was expelled for his supposed reformism. She also felt relieved to let Prithvi take her daughter Mithu's custody in India when she is arrested in Pakistan during the second round of riots. All these subtle emotions and political nuances are worked out with plausible artistic and linguistic skills. And in doing this, Roy brings into view a subtle gender dimension. Sheeta herself is a firm activist by the time she is arrested, and even under arrest, carries herself with dignity and firmness. But to Prithvi, the news of her arrest brings the imagery of Sita abducted by Ravana. This suggests that revolutionary men too had internalised sexism, since the Sheeta of the present is a militant communist, who is devalued when she is seen as a helpless woman. (Roy 1992: 332, 330)

Roy is able to bring together a profound sympathy for the struggles of the downtrodden, alongside a critique of nationalism as an ideology of new states in the making, with their own violence, along with a rare sensitivity to the complex situations of women. Women of the middle class with all the attendant social markers, the uncertainties of the 1940s and 1950s emerge with clarity and a sensitivity no male leftist writer of that time had achieved. But so do peasant women, in *Swaralipi* and the urban poor. Padma in *Trisrota* shows it is possible for a woman to acknowledge more than one love. It was also not possible for a male writer to hold up a figure like Nandalal, abusing his bureaucratic power to try and get access to Sagari after almost forcing her to become party whole-timer and telling this

young dynamic member to divorce her husband. Yet, the “ban” on the book and on Roy, (and the suspension from the party of Santimoy Roy)⁸ suggests that it went beyond one bureaucrat. It suggests that the CPI saw any criticism as enemy action, and refused to accept the negative portrayal of Nandalal or any challenges thrown to sexism that did not permit equal comradeship.

***Khwabnama*: Class Struggle, Peasant Aspirations, Alternate Histories**

Akhtaruzzaman Elias was the son of a Muslim League leader. Born just a few years before independence, he grew up in Gaibandha district and Dhaka. Elias also developed a Marxist commitment, and confronted the question of how progressive the project of national liberation. For him, anti-colonialism was a distinct articulation of protest against socio-economic and political exploitation before it was a demand for a nation state. And in historicising myth, Elias questions the paradigmatic view of modernity.

A tremendous amount of scholarship went into the making of *Khwabnama*. In giving the novel this title, Elias was relating it to very different genres. The *namah* is historically a biographic or an autobiographic prose form, originating in pre-Islamic Persia, intersecting with the rise of Islam, and then carried to various parts of the Islamic and Islamicate world (Chanda) But the *namah*, turns in Elias’s hand into a historically situated prose fiction.

A second tradition that Elias draws upon is the dream. Looking for new “*sholoks*” (verses) Keramat, goes in search of Cherag Ali’s old, tattered book of verses. Written on its cover in Bangla is a title – *Khabnama Palnama* and *Tabir*. As he looks inside, he finds descriptions of various *khwabs*; what can happen if one sees such and such *khwab*, and so on (Elias 1998: 205) It has been argued by Sarkar (Sarkar, J) that a dense inter-textuality can take the readers back to dreams and their interpretations in Islamic thinking, and bring them forward, again, to the dream/s of a Muslim homeland called Pakistan, *Tebhaga* or the peasants’ aspiration for land, the relationship – real and assumed, between *Tebhaga* and Pakistan – and the different forms and contents of different nationalisms.

In part, the very generic form suggests the need for a different reading than the way we have read Roy. Roy’s texts, as articulations of a dissident communist, can be considered as a variant of socialist realism. It is perfectly possible to read Elias also within the

framework of nation, community, and gender, and a critique of the hegemonic voices. But Chanda's, Sarkar's, or Bandyopadhyay's (Bandyopadhyay, Sibaji 2012) readings indicate the possibilities that emerge when comparatists read *Elias*. Above all, it is necessary to see in *Khwabnamah* three time frames in constant dialogues (Chanda:26): remembering the past through popular memory, dreams and songs; the present of the text reflected in the intersection of *tebhaga* movement with the struggle for Pakistan; and finally the present of the author and the reader, a present in which authoritarianism and communalism increasingly take over the state. This also makes the chronotope of the dream distinct from that of Roy. The socialist realist novel suffers from the problem of an insistence on transparency, a demand that the individual 'hero' has to be a positive hero and the life of the collective must move in certain directions. In *Elias*, the use of dreams and the reliance on a tradition according to which dreams can foretell and legitimise political programmes enables the novel to provide a multilayered narrative. If Pakistan is a central dimension of *Khwabnama*, a running sub-text is *Tebhaga*. It is a tussle between the victorious idea of the religious nation and the defeated class struggle of *Tebhaga* that is worked out by the author.

The dream of a nation of all Muslims of India, where there would be no rich and poor, can be put down as "false consciousness". Yet it does not explain why there would be such false consciousness, nor its source. Tamij, poor peasant, reflects on *Tebhaga* at the moment of Pakistan's freedom. (Elias :244) We need to remember that the majority of the Bangla speaking rural population was Muslim, and the majority of zamindars were Hindus. In the *Tebhaga* movement, class and nation did not come together. Flip flops by the CPI meant it was not well positioned to take on the Muslim League and the Congress, and indeed Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, at the political level in 1946-7⁹. Subhoranjan Dasgupta quotes Sirajul Islam Chaudhury: "The real issue was the clash between the Hindu and Muslim middle class. The Hindu middle class hoped to enjoy all the fruits; the Muslims claimed we want our share.' (Dasgupta) *Elias* does not, *pace* Dasgupta, see this simply as a betrayal. He is presenting a story, where people, including those on opposite side of the political spectrum, are shown in a more convincing way. The complexities of politics and class and community aspirations among Muslims, with the Muslim League, the Krishak Praja Party¹⁰, and the CPI contending for peasant support, and the fact that a real acceptance of religion was what made the power of the League possible, come out in ways one would not find in many writings by writers of Hindu origin.

Prashanto, a compounder, refuses to take even tea or a banana in Kader's (a Muslim League member and a shop owner) house. Doctor Sisir Sen, also a Hindu, laughs at this and tells Kader not to get too upset, because Prasanto has an excessive fear of violating the rules of touching. "A son of Brahman, he does not even eat anything in my house, you see". To this Prasanto responds:

We are poor Brahmins, we have no power of money, no political prestige, if we lose caste what else do we have left?

Kader retorts:

Stay with your caste divisions. As we are a race apart we want to be separate. So why do you object so much to giving us a separate country? (Elias: 78)

Brahmanism forges a Hindu national identity that weakens the possibility of building a secular and united nation. Yet Elias does not see Muslim nationhood as a positive ideal. But it is still a potent idea. Unity based on religious identity and the idea of communal unity against common enemy/ies coexist and battle. The formation of Muslim League hegemony necessitates subduing all identities to an ostensible Muslim (united) identity. The marriage between Gafur, the oil presser, and Bulu Majhi's divorced wife causes tension, and he is ostracised by the fisherfolk who see the oil pressers as belonging to a lower caste. While criticising the new members of the League Altaf Mandal of Chandiharh:

What kind of Mosolmans are they? They regularly hobnob with the santhals....and under their leadership these guys are collecting grains to their own home. The santhal mosolman adhiyars [sharecroppers] are united, what Pakistan are you imagining? (Elias: 120)

The formal acceptance of Islam has not meant the disappearance of caste. This lived reality of India, poses a real problem for an ideology seeking to build a power base through unity of all adherents of one religion. So Kader meets the leaders of the fisherfolk and tells them that practising casteism will lead to their exclusion from the Muslim *quam* (nation/community). Sharafat or Kalam Majhi are as keen on using caste power as the Muslim League leaders are keen on using religious unity as an instrument for power.

Against both, there is also communal unity. The *Tebhaga* movement was launched by the AIKS and the CPI, among other reasons, to foster class unity and contest communalism

(Chattopadhyay, K. 1997: 25-26) But the historical reality is the eventual set back, in which communalism played an important role. But the tradition of communal unity, was seen explicitly in Neelphamari (Chattopadhyay, K. 1997: 47-48), was also remembered and articulated in popular memory and dreams. Cherag Ali's song is remembered by Tamijer *baap* [father], where Bhavani Pathak's war against the East India Company, was fought in alliance with Muslim *fakirs*:

Bhavani enters battle the Pathan general alongside
Thundering his order, cut down the whites. (Elias: 41)

The Pathan general was Majnu Shah or one of his followers. Himself a *fakir* Cherag Ali followed *fakir* tradition in interpreting dreams. He sings songs that bring back historical memory, and also recites '*sholoks*' (*slokas*, verses, going back to Sanskrit roots, showing once again the interpenetration of communities, here in the very stuff of language) which interpret dreams. His *Khwabnamah*, much sought by the folk-singers Keramat and Baikuntha alike, is a dream of interpretation, trained in tradition.

Dream is not a mere metaphor in *Khwabnama*. Since Muhammad was the last Nabi, according to Islam, direct divine communications stop after him. The link between the material world and the world beyond the material is maintained by the *khwab*, which is 1/46th part of the Quran. And so, the novel too links times. Elias presents a response to not only the nation building exercise of the Muslim League, which the very emergence of Bangladesh had smashed, but also the nation building exercise of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. After all, the narrative of the *Sannyasi* revolt that the educated Bengali, and indeed a huge section of the educated Hindu Indian, had read, was Bankim's *Anandamath*. Tanika Sarkar has placed him, and the novel, at a foundational position of Hindu cultural nationalism in *Hindu Wife*, *Hindu Nation*. (Sarkar, T:163-190) In that sense, by the merger of two struggles from the beginning and the end of British rule in Bengal (the *Sannyasi-Fakir* Rebellion and the *Tebhaga* movement), Elias presents us with elements of a counter narrative.

The alternatives that Elias presents are not alternatives only because of the content. Form and content cannot be separated, and there he challenges the Western form of the novel no less than the rules of realism. (Das, S. K.) Purely sociological reading by Subhoranjan Dasgupta ruthlessly cut out of the way the *Khwabs*, Cherag Ali's book, and other elements of

the narrative, which in fact play an important role. But why this should be seen as “magic realism” is not clear. If Bankim Chandra invoking the unknown “*purush*” at the end of the *Anandamath*, or the dialogue between Satyananda and that unknown, does not rule his novel out of historical or “political” novels, there is no need to invoke the extra “magic” from a Latin American tradition that was hardly the inheritance of Elias.

It has been argued that Frantz Fanon’s assertion that a national-liberation struggle is nothing if it does not become a struggle for social emancipation can be seen equally as the stance taken by Elias (Ghosh) Anti-colonialism of the toiling masses is first of all a cry against exploitation, against the domination of capital, before it is a demand for political self-determination. In fact, the search for such self-determination is simultaneously political and socio-economic.

But imperialist rule is not just economic exploitation. It is simultaneously an attempt to deny rationality and national identity to the ‘others’... Asia, Africa, Latin America. It is by challenging the canons of the Western novel, by bringing together the *Khwab*, the *Nama*, and the novel, that Elias achieves his goal. In this novel he constructs an account of the Partition (east), which departs from every mainstream historical position—Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi. He shows that the Muslim League’s communal nationalism, which was reactionary to begin with, thrived only by drawing sustenance from the radical politics of the *Tebhaga* movement.

For Elias, national liberation is a dialectic of two moments — a moment of politically expressing social disaffection and class discontent; and a moment of institutionalization of nation, reification of national identity and the concomitant repression of the moment of social struggle. This dialectical understanding compels us to engage with it, and with similar identity struggles. The engagement has to be such that we are able to see how the form mediates the content.

The *khwab* enables him to examine this in ways a realist novel like *Swaralipi* cannot. Tamijer *baap*, a key character in the novel, encounters the fables in his dreams, thereby transforming those *fictions* into a reality of their own struggles. Within the dream, the events are real. The dream-world and the waking world are inflected by each other. As a result, the dream world is not simply an illusory world, but another world of possible reality. The distinction between ‘myth’ (fiction) and ‘reality’ (fact) is, as a result, blurred. This becomes

evident in the way the ghost of Munshi Barkatullah, shot by a British officer during the *Sannyasi-Fakir* revolt, resides in a *Pakur* (Peepal) tree near the Katlahar *Bil* (a large water body), and keeps irrupting into and transfiguring Tamijer *baap*'s existential reality.

And in the move from Cherag Ali to Keramati Ali, a crucial shift occurs. Keramat does not recite poetry handed down to him by a depersonalized mystic and mythic tradition. He is a singer of new, self-composed songs whose authorship he claims, even if he also seeks inspiration from the book of Cherag Ali. He sings of the peasants' struggles for *Tebhaga*, and then of their dreams for an 'egalitarian' Pakistan. At a meeting of the Muslim League supporters Kader forces him to get up on stage. Despite the pressure he sings:

The enemy of the peasant are zamindars and *jotedars* this is a legitimate word.

So shout for *Tebhaga*, shout loud and say victory to peasants. (Elias:170)

Thus Keramat is a revolutionary poet, not only a mystic. Through this shift, Elias tries to bring in the possibility of a break and the recreation of a new ontology. But as long as labour does not actually overthrow the rule of capital, "real" situations cannot be presented where labour triumphs. That would only replicate the Moscow brand of socialist realism, which demanded that positive proletarian heroes/cults, and party mindedness, alone mattered.

Subjects or Objects of Social Movements?

The weakness in Elias, if one can talk about weakness in a novelist who has been seen as one of the outstanding novelists of Bengal, is the weaker development of gender markers of communities/nations. Certainly, Elias brings in women no less than men of peasant background. Kulsum, Phuljan, are quite different from the women inhabiting the novels the mainstream left writers had written in the 1940s, or even of Savitri Roy's peasant women. A Radha is a militant woman. But she is found only at the moment of militancy, precisely because that is where the radicalised *bhadralok* and *bhadramahila* lives intersect with her life. Elias brings everyday life of the peasant woman, missing in Roy's novels. Phuljan performs hard work in her father's paddy field, but it goes mostly unrecognised. She is an abandoned woman, and the love between her and Tamij creates stresses in their communities of fisherfolk and peasants. Kulsum remains a substantially underdeveloped character, a mostly silent figure. At the same time, through her, the patriarchal domination of women is brought

out. She was secure only as long as Tamijer *baap*, her guardian, was alive. With his death, Keramat and Kalam Majhi both try to take advantage of her. All kind of conservatism keeps women like Kulsum immobile, dark and deaf. This immobility is shown as part of poor landless subaltern women's life. These women characters are mostly portrayed as lacking independent agency unlike Savitri Roy.

Yet, by highlighting their insecurity and oppression, he does create a contradiction. After all, it was in the *Tebhaga* movement that large numbers of subaltern women came out to fight, in course of which they challenged not merely class oppression but also gendered hierarchies (Custers).

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¹ An ultra-left politics, which denounced Indian independence as fake, and called for instant revolutionary adventurist struggles, mainly under the influence of the Communist Information Bureau, though some local leaders were left with the responsibility when the line changed. This is discussed at greater lengths in *Swaralipi*, and accordingly an explanation of the Left Line is left for the next section. For a contemporary critical Marxist assessment see Chaudhuri.

²An important CPI leader and after the 1964 split, CPI(M) leader. Elected the General Secretary of the CPI in the Second Party Congress (February 1948), and the principal initiator of the Left Line.

³The first all India students organisation. Set up in the late 1930s, it was soon to come under CPI hegemony. Eventually, this would lead to a split in the 1940s, with the non-CPI leftists forming a rival AISF (Chattopadhyay, G).

⁴ Professor Santimoy Roy. Later in life he would be deeply involved in propagating secularism. (Chakravarty, Gargi, personal interview, 1 September, 2009).

⁵ Sanskritised form of Bangla.

⁶ An armed struggle had broken out in Telangana in 1946, then a part of the Nizam's state of Hyderabad, in which the CPI played an important role. Partly it was a movement against the Nizam's attempts to keep Hyderabad out of India. Simultaneously it was an anti-landlord struggle, a class war of the poor peasants. Once the Nizam's rule was ended and Hyderabad was incorporated in India, the further development of struggles was a matter of slow evolution. But a current developed in the CPI, suggesting that Telangana could become the starting point for a Chinese line in India (Sundarayya; Pavier).

⁷Several characters are loosely based on real people. So Nandalal could also be based on one or more actual party leaders. It is no wonder the party issued a notice against the book.

⁸Sudakshina Ghosh cites the Central Committee resolution as stating: "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of India directs that no book written by the authoress of SWARLIPI should be advertised by our party journals until she unconditionally express regret for writing the book". She further mentions that her husband was suspended. It is probable that the information came from their daughter, who is acknowledged in the Editor's Foreword (Roy 2005: 8, 5).

⁹ Rather late in the day, the Bengal CPI supported the Sarat Bose-Suhrawarddy call for a United Bengal. Prior to this, it had given partial support to the call for rights of Muslim nationalities in the so-called Adhikari Thesis. In 1944, it called for a Gandhi-Jinnah unity as the basis for a united India. While leading the tebhaga movement the CPI's perception saw a disjunction between the urban and rural struggles. "Class struggle" was seen more in economic terms, and the political "national movement", where class struggle tended to take a back seat.

¹⁰ Fazlul Huq established this Party at Dhaka (July 1936) with a broad based agrarian programme in a non-communal approach its appeal for abolition of the *zamindari* system and *mahajani* system, peasant proprietorship, reduction of rent rate, among others.

Adi-dharam and Jharkhandi Culture:**Understanding *Adivasi* existence in relation to the environmental identity and environmental heritage of *Adivasi-Moolvasi* communities of Jharkhand.**Sudeshna Dutta¹***Abstract:***

Why do the Adivasis of Jharkhand resent the word Development? Since the Koel-Karo movement (Which went on for about thirty-five years) the Adivasis demanded ideal rehabilitation for them. The government officials or policymakers have so far failed to understand the meaning of the ‘ideal rehabilitation.’ In this paper, I argue that without considering the environmental identity of the Adivasi communities, it is impossible to understand the *Adivasi* interpretation of rehabilitation and the rationals behind such understanding. *Adivasi* environmental identity, I argue, has a close connection with the land, water, forest. *Adivasi* culture is closely related to the three elements of nature. *Adivasi* way of living or *Adivasi* way of viewing life is practice-oriented and cannot sustain without them. In this paper, I have tried to engage with the three main festivals of Jharkhand to show how the festivals carry the ethos of *adi-dharam*. The philosophy of *Adi-dharam* is about maintaining harmonious relationships with the other elements of the ecology. The rationale behind maintaining such relationship is acknowledging the contribution of others in keeping the food-security and food-sovereignty of the community. The structure of the relationships shapes the environmental identity of the *Adivasi* existence. The rehabilitation programmes, I conclude, need to incorporate the *Adivasi* interpretation of existence to protect the interest of the *Adivasis*.

Keywords: Environmental Identity, Environmental Heritage, *Adi-dharam*

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Introduction:

The company is luring the tribal communities because it wants their land, forests, water to set up a plant which will displace thousands and thousands of people from their culture, language, identity, and the legacy of their ancestors. It is a known fact that once a tribal farmer is evicted from the land, she/he becomes non-existent. (Barla 8)

The lines quoted above are from a booklet naming “A Sweet Poison”. It was published in 2009 by *Adivasi-Moolvasi¹ Astitva Raksha Manch* (Forum for protection of *Adivasi-Moolvasi* existence). The indigenous and non-indigenous peasant activists of Khunti block formed *Adivasi-Moolvasi Astitva Raksha Manch* in 2007 at the wake of ArcelorMittal’s proposed integrated steel factory project. Under the banner of this *Manch*, residents of some forty-two villages gathered to safeguard their ancestral lands (Dungdung 91). The year 2009 was also crucial for the people of Khunti and Gumla districts of Jharkhand. Geographically both Khunti and Gumla are located in Chotanagpur plateau where Birsa Munda started his Ulgulan against British Raj.

In the historiography of Jharkhand, the year 2009 also bears the valour of Birsa Ulgulan. Because in this year the people’s movement against land acquisition for steel project won the victory. The *Adivasi-Moolvasi* people stood up against Arcelor Mittal’s integrated steel plant project that demarcated twenty-five thousand acres of land for the project. But the villagers of Khunti and Gumla districts were determined not to give one inch of soil (Dungdung 91). It is clear from the lines that the villagers felt apprehended about their existence in the face of these developmental project. Following the cue of apprehension, one may inquire: Why did the villagers perceive that displacement from the land would make them ‘non-existent’?

In reality, the cases of industrialisation or projects related to heavy industries (dam, mining, infrastructures) have failed to bring any hope in the lives of thousands of displaced villagers. Neither they were adequately rehabilitated, nor they got proper compensations. But if we go back to the quoted lines once again, we can notice that the writer is relating the land to Adivas culture, language, and identity which are of no concern in any rehabilitation and

compensation programme. The primary reason for their exclusion is the fact that no fiscal structure can measure the value of these three things. In other words, the rehabilitation programme so far implemented by the government for the displaced Adivasi-Moolvasi communities of Jharkhand made them feel 'non-existent'. Hence, to engage with the question of Adivasi existence, we have to understand the basis of it. How does the 'Adivasi existence' come into being? Why is it distinct?

This article aims to engage with the question of *Adivasi* existence from the relational perspective — that means the intention is to look at the way an *Adivasi* individual builds her relationship with the surroundings. The relational perspective, I will argue, shapes the environmental identity and environmental heritage of adivasi existence and acts as the cornerstone of the distinctiveness of adivasi *Asmita* (identity/pride/selfdom). In the context of resistance movements against development-induced displacements, it is imperative to engage with the issue of connectivity or relationships to understand the interpretations of land from the Adivasi perspective. Here, I have focussed on the Creation Myth (*Sosobonga*) of Munda people and the three annual festivals - *Karam* or *Karma*, *Sohrai*, and *Sarhul*. These festivals can be interpreted as the cultural expression of the Creation Myth. Here three Adivasi women who lead three different resistance movements in Jharkhand narrated their experiential connections with the festivals. Their narrations point out how Adivasi existence is intrinsically related to the *Adivasi* culture, which again is the expression of Creation Myth.

The Creation Myth reflects the ethos of *Adi-dharam* (proposed by Dr Ram Dayal Munda). *Adi-dharam* (as explained by Dr Munda) is the indigenous way of viewing life. From the perspective of *Adi-dharam*, human and human communities exist in relation to non-human and non-living beings on an equal plane.

Environmental Identity, Environmental heritage, and The imperative of *Adi-dharam*: - 'Adi-dharam' is a term coined by late Dr Ram Dayal Munda. He explained in details the term *Adi-dharam* and the exigencies of using the term in Independent India in his book *Adivasi Astitwa Aur Jharkhandi Asmita ka Sawal*, published in 2002. The intention behind coining the term was to establish distinctness of *Adivasi* religion, hence existence (D. R. Munda 48-77). Here, on the one hand, he has presented *Adi-dharam* as one of the components of *Jharkhandi* culture (Munda 2 (Utsler) 002). On the other hand, he has posited the term as a

common religious platform for all the indigenous communities living within the territory of the Indian nation-state. *Adi-dharam* thus is used as the identity denominator to get recognition from the Indian Constitution. *Jharkhandi* culture, according to Dr Munda, is intertwined with *Adivasi-Moolvasi* existence (Munda 2002.29-30) and through *Adi-dharam*, *Adivasi* society can resurge with a renewed vitality. The rationality behind the hope for a resurgence of a confident, conscious and proud *Adivasi* community was not arbitrary. By the time this book got published, Jharkhand has received its statehood, on 15th November 2000 after a long drawn movement.

The idea of Jharkhand as separate state meant for Adivasis itself bore the hope for Adivasi resurgence. In the context of this newly received statehood, the book deals with two burning issues- the rudiments of Adivasi existence and the threat to it. Adivasi communities living within the territory of Jharkhand, he shows in his book have shaped a distinct culture in relation to the landscape. In fact, according to him, the social structure, religious beliefs, the rituals, and festivals, arts and literary creations of Adivasi societies of Jharkhand are intrinsically related to the culture of Jharkhand which is again associated with the land, forest, water of the place. Hence the intention behind the book can be interpreted as the intention to procure environment identity of the Adivasi community.

What is Environmental identity? Environmental identity as David Utsler puts it: “is not only defined in terms of a relationship to the environment but it gathers all aspects of personal and communal identity that are connected to the physical environment of a person or a group”. (Utsler 126).

Hence according to Utsler, environmental identity is both multidimensional and dialogic. The members of the indigenous communities have been maintaining a close connection with the environment for sustenance. The environmental identity is thus intertwined with the experience of a person embedded within her community. With the active presence of experience, the place -the foundational aspect of environmental identity becomes a bearer of the environmental heritage of an indigenous nation. What is most important over to note that the environmental heritage incorporates within its realm several layers of interpretations and meanings of the place. If one considers environmental heritage from the perspective of time, the place of living becomes a vital element of that heritage. Because it

includes within its sphere variegated memories of individuals and the memories are necessarily attached to that place. (Utsler 127).

In other words, it can be said that environmental identity and environmental heritage point out the ways members of a community extend their relationships with the place along the axes of time. The memory plays a pivotal role when a community choose to locate itself within the web of several connections with the various elements present within a landscape. This freedom of choice is what makes the community's existence distinct. Environmental heritage of a community thus bears the memories of connections that the ancestors' chose to establish, nurture, and maintain with the surrounding environment. With the time the memories layered with several interpretations got accumulated in the history of the community. History is not only about what is remembered, but it is also about remembering "how things were done" or remembered (Simpson 22). From this perspective, *Adi-dharam* can be viewed as the environmental identity and environmental heritage as well as the basis of epistemic existence of indigenous communities of Jharkhand and also of India. Any perpetration that is capable of affecting the basic condition-the structure of relationships -of the indigenous existence would be a threat to the environmental heritage of Adivasi being. (Munda 8-9). *Jal, jangal, jameen* (water, forest, land) are the cornerstone of environmental heritage as well as the environmental identity of Adivasi-Moolvasi communities. As the relationship is dialogic in nature, derecognition of any of the two ends of the link - that is distinct *Adivasi* existence or land, water, forest would be intimidating to the sovereign existence of *Adivasi* communities. Ram Dayal Munda pointed out the very fact in his book *Adivasi Astitwa Aur Jharkhandii Asmita ka Sawal*. According to him, even after independence, the word Adivasi is not recognised. Instead of that Adivasi communities are identified as 'Scheduled Tribe' which is, according to Munda, is a misnomer.

(आदिवासी (शब्द को संवैधानिक मान्यता नहीं है .संवैधानिक शब्द है अनुसुचित जनजाति) शिङ्गुलड ट्राईब .. .('अनुसुचित जनजाति' में यह इशारा साफ है कि यह 'अनुसुचित' होना एक अस्थायी स्थिति है .और शेष बचे 'जनजाति' के रूप में भी आदिवासी भारतीय जाति ब्यबस्था के हि एक अंग है. (D. R. Munda 42).

(*Adivasi*) *shabd ko sangvaidhanik manyata nahi hai. Sangvaidhanik shabd hai anusuchit janjati (scheduled tribe)... 'Anusuchit janjati mein yeh isharah spasht hota*

hai ke yeh 'anusuchit' hona ek asthayi sthiti hai. Aur sesh bache 'janjati' ke roop mein bhi adivasi Bhartiya jaati byabastha ke hi ek ang hai'

the word adivasi does not have constitutional recognition. The constitutional word (for adivasi) is 'scheduled tribe'... The presence of 'scheduled' in the word 'scheduled tribe' is a clear indication of the fact that the state (of the tribe) is temporal and the remaining tribes, is a part of the Indian caste system.

Here the author implies that Adivasi societies being recognized as scheduled tribes are deprived of their *Adivasi* identity and *Adivasi* heritage. Both the *Adivasi* identity and *Adivasi* heritage fall under the domain of different value system. The values are governed by way of viewing at the world. As an Adivasi scholar, activist, and thinker, he took the onus of describing the basis *Adivasi* existence. His endeavour in extending the meaning of *Adi-dharam* can be read in tandem with the need for recognition of Adivasi society by the Indian government. In his introduction to *Adi-dharam*, Dr Munda says,

By *Adi-dharam* we mean the basis, the roots, the beginnings (*adi*) of the religious beliefs of the Adivasis, the first settlers of India. Behind this effort of analysis and determination of the roots, our purpose is to set participate in the process of setting up- at the national level-a religious system on the basis of which the self-confidence of the Adivasis could be restored and re-awakened, and in the absence of which the religious identity of the Adivasis is probably almost negligible. ((R. D. Munda 1).

The politics behind his proposition of *Adi-dharam* can be seen from the perspective of 'native survivance'. Gerald Vizenor describes native survivance as " an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" (Vizenor 85). In the census of India, there is no definite recognition of '*dharma*' of Adivasis. It is recognized as 'other'. According to Munda, this is a conspiracy against Adivasis. By categorising *adi-dharam* as 'other', the government passively encourages Adivasis to declare themselves as Hindu or other. (D. R. Munda 45).

The encouragement, according to him, a deliberate attempt to erase the existence of *Adivasis*. To resist such attempts that push the *Adivasis* into obscurity, Dr Munda, in his book, has tried to bring forward the uniqueness of *Adi-dharam*. *Adi-dharam*, as explained by Ram Dayal Munda, is a strategy to continue the stories of *Adivasi* existence. This strategy of survivance

is intrinsically related to the question of displacements of *Adivasis* from their ancestral lands. Hence, it is to be understood the rationality behind choosing *Adi-dharam* as one of the components to show the importance of land in Adivasi existence.

Adi-dharam- A way of connecting with the world:-

आदि-धर्म की सबसे बड़ी विशेषता सम्भवतः यह है कि संस्थागत धार्मिक आवश्यकताओं के विपरीत इस धर्म में मनुष्य और प्रकृति का सम्बन्ध पारस्परिक निर्भरता में निरुपायित हुआ है, न कि सृष्टि के उपर विजय पाने की भावना में।” (D. R. Munda 46).

Adi-dharam ka sabse bari viseshta sambhavatah ye hai ki sansthatgat dharmik avashyakatayon ke viparit is dharam mein manushya aur prakriti ka sambandh parasparik nirbharta mein nirupayit hua hai., na ki srishti ke upar vijay pane ki bhawna mein”

The primary aspect of *Adi-dharma* probably is the fact that unlike the institutionalised religions, it has manifested itself on the mutual relationship of the human being and nature. It does not believe in the superiority of human beings over the creation.

The aspect of ‘mutual relationship’ and its manifestation in human lives are the basis of *Adi-dharma*. *Dharma* in ‘*Adi-dharma*’ in its signification holds closer relation to the Sanskrit word than its English counterpart -Religion. In Classical Sanskrit, the root of the word ‘*Dharma*’ is ‘*dhri*’ (धृ). ‘*Dhri*’ according to *A Sanskrit Dictionary* means “to hold, bear (also bring forth), carry, maintain, preserve, keep, possess, have, use, employ, practise, undergo. (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>). The range of meanings attached to *Dhri* compels us to look at the word ‘*dharma*’ beyond the stringent meaning of law or duty. According to Vrinda Dalmiya, *Dharma* with big D can be interpreted as harmonious existence of the moral, ethical, social values. The motto of such harmonious coexistence is to reach the ultimate Good’. As there is no definite formula or law to attain that point of harmonious coexistence, an individual must use her reflexive mind to, the right way among various alternatives and obligations. The general guideline to that choice must be ‘made clear through love’. Vrinda Dalmiya interprets the phrase ‘made clear through love’ in the care-ethical term. In her interpretation, (R. D. Munda, *Adi-dharam: religious Beliefs of the Adivasis of India*) *Dharma* bearing the telos of Ultimate Good ‘means establishing non-violent webs of relationality’ (Dalmiya 101).

The mutual relationship between the human being and the nature seen from this interpretation can be read as a continuing knowledge-building system. The individual who follows this system must deal with multiple layers of relationships. But it should be noted the motto is to maintain the intention of the Great Spirit behind the Creation.

“It is impossible to understand the Great Spirit in ‘totality’. But it is ‘bound by its creation’. The Great Spirit is the ‘embodiment of patience, compassion, love and cooperation” (R. D. Munda, *Adi-dharam: religious Beliefs of the Adivasis of India* 4).

But how could one prove that the Great Spirit embodies those qualities mentioned above (*Guna*)? To know the qualities, one must observe the creation closely from the position of a caring epistemic knower. The Creation Myth or *Sosobonga* embodies two narratives. The Creation narrative and the *Asura* Story. The Great Spirit or the *Singbonga* and the First Mother planned to create the world, as there was no one existing but them. So they felt the need of someone with whom they could communicate.

“ Our questions

Our inquiry...

Returns to us.”

They wanted to hear songs; they wanted to try dances, feel warmth; they wanted to express their emotion (Ram Dayal Munda 21-23). So they created Earth over the water. Various animals of water helped them to fulfil their desire. Human beings, the children of *Latkum Haram* (the first man) and *Latkum Buria* (the first woman) grew in number. ‘Wherever they could make a living’ they settled. They ‘followed’ the forests, hills, rivers, and streams. With their growth in numbers grew the love among them.

“ There spread all around

A kingdom of happiness” 11

The Creation Myth, the very basis of *Adi-dharam*, is the intrinsic part of the ‘*Karam*’ festival. This festival is celebrated by every Adivasi communities of *Jharkhandi* society in August - September. The song and dance that follow the ritual of *Karam* can be seen as the real celebration of the Creation Myth. Dayamani Barla belongs to Munda Adivasi community. She narrated her relationships with *karma* like this:

वो तो प्रकृति के साथ आदिवासी समाज का जीवनचक्र चलता है...और करमा तेओहार पहले का जो होता था, बड़ा धुमधाम से होता था .उस मे आदिवासी एक जुटता का परिचय जो था वो मिलता था...सामाजिक रिस्ता जबरदस्त था... .वसन्त के बाद गरमि आता है, उसके बाद बरसात आति है...आदिवासी सब लोग खेति के काम में लगे हुये है....तो करमा तेओहार मनाया जाता है खेतिबारी को लेके और वो जंगल को लेके...तो जो अभि सभि खेतिबारि करके, थकके निकलते है, उस के वाद ये तेओहार मनाया जाता है...

Wo to prakriti ke saath adivasi samaaj ka jivanchakra chalta hai..aur karma teohar pahle ka jo hota tha , bara dhumdham se hota tha. Us mein adivasi ek jutta ka parichay jo tha vo milta tha....samaajik rista jabardast tha..vasant ke baad garmi aata hai, uske baad barsat aati hai,..adivasi sab log kheti ke kaam mein lage huye hai..to karma teohar manaya jaata hai khetibari ko leke, aur vo jangal ko leke..to jo abhi sabhi khetibari karke, thakke nikalte hai, uske vaad ye teohar manaya jata hai.

It is with the nature the lifecycle of Adivasis moves on. And on earlier days Adivasis used to celebrate the *Karma* festival with much more enthusiasm. The festival reflected the solidarity of Adivasi society. The social relation was strong. The season of summer comes after spring. After that comes the rain. Adivasis are busy with cultivation. So Karma festival is celebrated in relation to cultivation and forest. So now as all of them have finished their work of cultivation and they are tired, there would be a celebration of the *Karam* festival.

The exciting part of this narration is her use of time in relation to *Karma* or *Karam*. There is a continuous dialogue between past and present. She starts with the past tense and then moves to the present time. This sudden shift of time reflects a sense of eternity in relation to the interpretation of time that connects the past with the present. This sense of eternity demonstrates her way of connecting to the Creation Myth. Her narration starts with the relationship of Adivasi lifecycle with nature. Why did she choose to begin her narration from the perspective of the relationship between *Adivasi* existence and nature? Should we read the first sentence from the standpoint of Dayamani-the Adivasi activist? Or Should we read the sentence from the perspective of an Adivasi woman who is bearing the Creation Myth through her cultural epistemology? Or the activist Dayamani is a reflection of that Dayamani-the epistemic knower of *Sosobonga*? If we read the lines from the perspective of *Sosobonga*,

we can understand the meaning of lying beneath her word ‘*Adivasi* solidarity’. *Singbonga* and First Mother desired to get answers to their questions and inquiries. They wanted voices that will carry on their problems and queries. So they created the world, made human beings and taught them to live with happiness. They taught them to live with others, to learn the flows of life in hills, forests, rivers, and streams. Every single place bears the memory of the Creation. The celebration of *Karma* is a celebration of that relationship that has been sustaining the *Adivasi* lives along with nature. But again, one must ask why do the *Adivasi* society celebrate after roping the seedlings? The ritual, of course, includes the prayer for a good harvest. But there is more to it. There lies the principle of keeping a balance between the work and rest.

The second part of *Sosobonga* carries the story of *Asuras* who were also created by *Singbonga* and First Mother. *Asuras* knew to forge iron and chose to work day and night. Thus they polluted the water, forest, field, air, and everything living on it became unhealthy. *Singbonga* asked them to keep a balance between work and rest. So that the “Earth can cool down” and “the sky can calm down”.

Asuras declined to listen, and finally, *Singbonga* defeated them. The balance of the world is restored. (Ram Dayal Munda 71-217). *Karma* is not only sharing solidarity and remembering the connection between human beings and every other species but it also about keeping a balance between work and rest. That’s how nature and different species can live in a usual, healthy way. That’s why after the strenuous jobs of cultivation, people need to rest. So the energy can be restored in every species. The celebration is to remember that “the land for us all, the earth for us all”. Sharing the land and the Earth with all is the ‘ultimate Good’. The aspect of maintaining the well-being of the environment is the basis of *Adi-dharam*. One can understand the happiness in sharing by knowing the way to balance between the work and the rest. This way of looking into life may give an idea about the ‘simple’ living style of *Adivasis* and their practice of ‘minimalism’.

If the festival of *Karma* rekindles the memory of the Creation Myth, *sohrai* festival is about expressing gratitude to both human and non-human beings who helped to get a successful harvest. *Sohrai* is observed by the *Adivasi* communities in the month of Kartik and Poush (November-December). It is “basically an observance and of honour of the cattle, which assist in the cultivation operations..” (R. D. Munda, *Adi-dharam: religious Beliefs of*

the Adivasis of India 21) (Barla, Visthapan Ki Dard). In the context of India, showing reverence to particular animals is not unusual. While walking on the roads of Ranchi, one won't fail to notice the scene of feeding roti to a wandering cow. Hence, one can argue that even in the non-Adivasi Hindu society, there exists a connection of reverence with the animals. What is so special about Adivasi relationship?

I think the distinction can be determined by critically examining on which plane the connection is perceived. Feeding a cow does not mean placing the cow on the same plane of a human being. The act of feeding a cow is a way of earning 'punya' (merit). The man or woman feeding cows is just concerned about securing a good place in heaven. The cow is just a medium to reach there. So the sight of stray cows chewing plastics by the roadside does not agitate them. Neither they would feel ashamed for appropriating the grazing land for housing. The cow is just the resource for milk or merit. The consumer of that milk both psychologically and socially alienated from that resource. The reflection of this kind of attitude is apparent in cases of rehabilitation programmes that follow the development-induced displacements. The plans do not think of rehabilitating cattle or poultry with the displaced Adivasis. In the book naming *Visthapan Ka Dard (The Trauma of Displacement)* the representative members of various public organisations working against development-induced displacements have registered the voices of the displaced. During their fieldwork, they met "Shrimati Dukhni Dige" at Nandup rehabilitation Colony. She expressed her resentment against rehabilitation. Dukhni Dige, a resident of Nandup village, was displaced because UCIL company started coal-mining. The number of displaced persons was two-hundred and forty-five. The company, as part of a rehabilitation programme, built twenty-five small houses are measuring six by eight feet. The report says,

इतने छोटे घर में रहना किसी भी आदिवासी परिवार के लिये संभव नहीं है.

Itne chote ghar mein rahna kisi bhi Adivasi parivar ke liye sambhav nahi hai.

(no Adivasi family can live in such small houses". Dukhni Dige says,

हमलोगों को तो अपने घर से खदेड दिया और वो लोग) सरकारी) तो पक्का मकान में रहते हैं . हमलोगों को तो अपने खेत-टांड, जमीन के साथ अपना मूर्गी -चेंग्रा, गारु-छगरी सब से अलग कर दिया." (Barla, Visthapan Ki Dard 8)

Humlogon ko to apne ghar se khader diya aur wo log (sarkari) to pakka makaan mein rahte hain. Humlogon ko to apne khet-tanr, murgi-chengna, gaaru-chagri se alag kar diye..

They expelled us from our home. And they (government employees) live in the brick houses. They separated us from our land-field, chicken-chicks, cow-goats.

The festival of *Sohrai* and the celebration of it bear the evidence of adivasi existence in a dialectic relationship with another world. The pain of being separated from the livestock could not be understood until we get to understand the way the non-human species are viewed. In relation to this, I would like to bring here the voice of Munni Hansda narrating *Sohrai*. Munni Hansda belongs to the Santhal community.

सोहराइ में सारे बहन को बुलायेगा..सारे बहन को सोहराइ में आना हि चाहिये..बैल का भि पुजा करेगा...बैल के सिंग में धान बंध देगा .और बैल के गले में बडा बडा पिठा बंध देगा...और झुक झुक के उस के पास से पिठा लेगा.. .पूजा के बाद सुबह गौजगा होता है...घर घर में मन्दार बजाके जायेगा . गीत गाये गा .गौ जागा का गीत होता है बाहा का गीत होता है..सब का अलग अलग गीत होता है..गौजागा के बाद हि नाच-गान शुरु होता है.

Sohrai mein saare bahan ko bulayega..saare bahan ko sohrai mein aana hi chahiye..bail ka bhi puja karega..bail ke sing mein dhan bandh dega..kahega ke bahen ka baal bandh diye..bail ke gale mein barabara pitha bandh dega aur jhuk jhuk ke us pitha ko lega..puja ke baad subah gaujagaa hota hai..ghar ghar mein mandar bajate hue jaayega, geet gaye ga..gaujaga ka geet hota hai..baha ka geet hota hai..sab ka alag alag geet hota hai..gaujaga ke baad hi naach-gaan shuru hota hai.

According to Munni Hansda, *Sohrai* is a festival in which brothers invite sisters. The centre of the festival is the cattle. Here the sense of kinship includes both the human and the non-human species who unless come together and work in harmony food can't be produced. Hence, the images of *Sohrai* drawn by Munni Hansda from her experience becomes rhetoric of cooperation and coexistence. Through this festival, Adivasis acknowledge the work and collaboration of the bulls and cows in leading a self-reliant way of living.

I am here quoting from RamDayal Munda's book. The songs may differ across region and communities, but the essence remains almost same. Master of the house after invoking prayers to Singbonga recites the prayer to the cattle god like this:

“In our work, in our cultivation,

Those who help us, those who assist us,

.....

Those who stood by us,

Those who faced hardship with us

For our welfare, for our well being

.....

Friend -like bulls, mother-like cows,

we honour them; we greet them.” (R. D. Munda, *Adi-dharam: religious Beliefs of the Adivasis of India* 22-24)

The prayer ends with an appeal to cattle god and cultivation mother. The *Pahan* (the priest)² appeals to the Great Spirit, gods, and goddess to provide enough grass, leaves, and water for the cattle. So that the animals can retain their vigour. Muni Hansda talks about a congregation of family members to celebrate the -cattle festival. The cattle festival can be read as the celebration of the connection between human and non-human species. The festival is the space where the *Adivasi* communities of Jharkhand show gratitude to those human and non-human beings that help in farming and thus play a critical role in maintaining the food security and food sovereignty of *Adivasi* communities.

Both food security and food sovereignty are the cornerstones of the self -reliant identity of *Adivasi* communities. This festival can also be read as an acknowledgement of agencies of the animals. If the harmonious coexistence or the balance of harmonious coexistence is not maintained, the *Adivasis* will lose the strength. The connection thus thrives on an equal plane, and this is the cause behind egalitarian characteristic of the *Adivasi* social system. The festival is also a way of remembering the desire of *Sing Bonga* and First Mother. So long *Adivasis* have land to cultivate, they would connect with the desire of *Singbonga* and First Mother through practice. The showing of gratitude does not end with the ritual. The

practise of remembering the functional relationships of various species with the peasant *adivasis* persists in everyday living. That's why the interpretation of *Adi-dharam* is personal.

Every individual understands the meaning of *Adi-dharam* through her engagement with *Adivasi* way of living. There is no single or monolithic experience. The arrays of experience and continuous active engagement with the Creation Myth make the relationship both personal and communal (Simpson 31-32). It is a way of connecting with the ethos of harmonious coexistence in a self-reflexive manner. The *Adivasi* existence is conscious and careful about the other non-human existence. This careful consciousness emerges out from the sense of moral obligation existing in *Adivasi* environmental heritage. The 'moral obligation' of the relationship demands the active engagement of both the mind and body of an individual. From the perspective of care ethics, this moral obligation situated in the '*inter-relation*' can only be reached by means of feeling the relationship. The objective relation, when perceived from the subjective standpoint, one finds out her meaning of connection. The rituals and the festivals act as a medium of connecting the personal experience with the collective. "Moral obligations arise from and within relationships when they are: how one should live follows how one feels one's circumstance. *Anukrosa* (*empathy*), thus works to convert actual relationships into *experienced ones* and, thereby into motivating bonds" (Dalmiya 63-64).

If *Sohrai* is the festival of showing the gratitude to both human and non-human beings who help in cultivation and a way to practice social relationship, then *Sarhul* festival is the festival of hope for a new cultivation year. Ram Dayal Munda explains the essence of the festival like this: "By extension, *sarhul* is the welcoming of nature in its new form through honouring the *sal* flowers... No *Adivasi* would bring home any new leaves or flowers or use them in any way before the village priest has formally welcomed it" (R. D. Munda, *Adi-dharam: religious Beliefs of the Adivasis of India* 11).

Nandi Kachhap belongs to Uraon community. She resides in Nagri village, which is some twenty-three kilometres away from Ranchi -the state capital of Jharkhand. The festival is named after *sal* tree. But why specially *sal* flower is honoured? What is so special about *Sal*? To answer my question, Nadi Kachhap chose to narrate a story that she learned from her elders. And she did not forget to mention that she would not push me to believe the story. She did not care whether a non-*Adivasi* non-Jharkhandi researcher believed in her story or, not.

Before she began her story she told me that she would not be able to tell me how much of the story bore the 'truth'. The only truth is she heard the story from her elders. She only reiterated: “हमने ये सुना है अपनि पुर्वजों से”. “That's what I have heard from my elders”.

The story tells about a time when the Adivasi ancestors made their living by hunting-gathering. Once a group of five men went for hunting. One person among them met with death. Rest four could not bring his body back to the settlement. So they covered the body with the flowers of a *sal* tree. It took them four to five days to bring back more people to that place. And on reaching over there, they found the body of the dead person was intact. It did not decompose. The other forest animals, insects left the body untouched. The *sal* flower thus gained the reverence of the Adivasis. The body got a proper burial, and the spirit of the dead could join the spirits of the ancestors. Thus *sal* flower helped that adivasi community to maintain the balance between the world of the living and the world of spirits. The narrative of the story demonstrates the way a relationship gets established through the act of observation and interpretations. It also exhibits the way Adivasi ancestors acknowledged the agencies of *sal* flower. Here *sal* flower helped Adivasi villagers to perform proper death rituals for the deceased member. Thus the spirit of the dead was allowed to sit with his ancestors.

Hence the relationship once made by the ancestors with the *sal* tree is still remembered in *Sarhul*. It is celebrated in the springtime. In this festival, *Adivasis* predict rain for the upcoming season of cultivation. The prayer again carries the essence of *Sosobonga*. Though the prayer *Adivasis* ask *Singbonga* and Mother Earth to come to them and talk to them. Then the prayer seeks peace and protection from both the spirits and non-human species. Because it is for their active participation and cooperation, *Adivasis* can sustain their lives peacefully. The prayer is recited 'hoping' proper cultivation. Finally, the prayer ends with a longing for peace and harmony.

“ Let there be no stumbling

Jealousy among us,

Anger and greed among us,

Let them be uprooted; let them be destroyed”. (R. D. Munda, *Adi-dharam* 16)

The main ritual or *puja* is performed on the ground of the sacred grove (*Sarna*). *Sarna* is the place that bears the memories of the forest that once permitted the village ancestors to settle down there. And the last part of the prayer seeks protection from jealousy, anger, and greed—the elements that bear the power to disintegrate the community.

The disintegration of the community would mean a violation of the wish of *Singbonga* and the First mother. And integration will continue to live till the community will continue to live, remember, and practice the directives of *Singbonga*. That means *Adivasis* need to place themselves in relation to other human and non-human beings, and that is not possible without psychological and physical freedom to participate in the act of connecting with the surroundings. The environmental identity and environmental heritage of an *Adivasi individual* thrive within a complex maze of relations that give space to memories, interpretations, individuality, and inclusivity. This is how *Adi-dharam* holds an integrated relationship with the Creation Myth. That is how *Adi-dharam* can be interpreted as one of the cornerstones of *Adivasi* existence. Separated from her landscape and community and without a provision for suitable rehabilitation, an *Adivasi* individual loses her sense of environmental identity and also loses her connection with environmental heritage. Without these two, *Adivasi* culture, as well as *Adivasi* existence, lose the vitality and spontaneity and the threat of obscurity looms large over them.

Conclusion:

Hence, it can be claimed that *Adi-dharam* is a ‘*darshan*’ of coexistence that thrives on the practice of cooperation and survives in relation to place/land. Through the festivals of *Karma*, *Sohrai*, and *Sarhul* a cyclical order of remembering and engaging with the memories of Creation Myth is maintained. This is the way *Adivasi* people nurtures the ethos of balance and harmonious coexistence. It is a way of practising as well as celebrating the ‘inter-relationships’ with the environment. The relationships help to nurture a sense of self-reliance within *Adivasi* communities. This sense is the basis of *Adivasi Asmita*. It also bestows an *Adivasi* community with the freedom of self-determination within the place (Alfred 55). The conglomeration of all these aspects shapes the environmental identity of an *Adivasi* individual who is part of the environmental heritage of her community. These are the sustainers of *Adivasi* existence. *Adivasis* have ensconced the values of *Adi-dharam* as the regulatory force

behind *Adivasi* way of looking at the world. These values are the normative features of *Adivasi* Identity. The presence of self-reflexive agency embedded within and also nurtured by the environmental identity of every member of *Adivasi* society makes *Adivasi* existence distinct. Until she can't have the freedom to exercise her agency within a relationship, she can't be a part of her environmental heritage. Without the environmental heritage, *Adivasi* communities would lose their relationship with their knowledge systems, hence the basis of existence.

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¹ *Moolvasi*- Non-*Adivasi* communities of Jharkhand. But they adopted *Adivasi* way of living.

² The priest should not be interpreted from the Brahmanical aspect. Pahan is the one who conducts the rituals. But he does not enjoy the absolute authoritative position in the community.

Re-reading Women's Writing: 'Sarika Caged' and 'Unpublished Manuscript'Susmita Ghosh¹**Abstract:**

This paper concentrates on women's writing and explore two feminist literary text 'Sarika Caged' by Saroj Pathak and 'Unpublished Manuscript' by Ambai. Both the texts deal with the question of women's space in distinct way. They deal with contradictions within the respective spaces of Sarika in 'Sarika Caged' and Thirumagal in 'Unpublished Manuscript.' While 'Sarika Caged' focuses on self expression and resistance in women's lives which are muted within the patriarchal status quo, 'Unpublished Manuscript' reveals the contradictions of space gained within patriarchy. It reveals the fact that improving the quality of women's lives does not always remove certain silences in their lives. This paper also address the question of the specificity of women's writing. The critical question is why do we at all need to talk about women's writing? The paper tries to explore possible answer to this question.

Keywords: women's writing, patriarchy, silence, women's space

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In this paper I would like to reread women's writing from a feminist position. The central question is if there is any specificity of women's writing. Whether women's writing itself need any separate discursive engagement. This I want to look through close reading of two stories. The stories I have selected are 'Sarika Caged' by Saroj Pathak and 'Unpublished Manuscript' by Ambai. It is therefore my political choice to talk about women's writers, but it does not ensure that talking about women writers is in itself a feminist position. To be a feminist critic, it is more important to consider gender perspectives of a text and not simply to focus on female writers. Though focussing on women writers within a male dominated literary tradition is in a sense locating female agency. When my project is to understand the specificity of women's writing, things become problematic. It is assumed there is an essential quality in women's writing. If femininity as opposed to masculinity is essential to every woman in patriarchy, then we place ourselves in the same patriarchal notion of biologism. Even if we point out that this femininity is a socio-cultural construct, we are none the less emphasising the difference between the male and female, which ultimately serves the patriarchal status quo. So it becomes an important task for feminists to redefine the notion of femininity. If femininity can be seen as a position which is marginal in the patriarchal order, the problem can be solved in certain sense. Now when femininity is not an essence but a position, it is no longer explicitly concerned with women. Here comes the second problem which is how do we then define women's writing as a category. Why do we at all need to talk about women's writing, when we are not arguing that the female experience is ultimately culminate in feminist utterance. If a feminist position is not essentially a women's point of view, when theoretically even men can be feminists, then what compels us to focus on women's writing? Is it to make room for women writers in the literary canon? My point of view regarding this is that a re-reading of women's writing is important in order to locate a feminist intervention.

It is also important to mention here that the total rejection of the male symbolic order cannot be a feminist agenda. Then we will again be producing an exclusively female space. The strategy of women's writing is to subvert the dominance of male cultural/linguistic discourse from within. This strategy is of course not that of women's writers alone, but I want to confine the framework of my paper to women's writing to locate a female subjective

agency. My re-reading of female writers does not mean a return to a specifically 'female' domain. The women's writings I have chosen are feminine in position and I have deliberately excluded women's writing which maintain the patriarchal status quo. The texts I have chosen deal with the gendered experience and provide the scope for a feminist reading. When margin speaks in terms of centre, its own inheritance is muted. It is being silenced but it does exist. Through this silence, patriarchy is subverted from within. This is the politics of feminine position. Feminist scholarship must reread this silence within phallogocentric discourse. But women's writing is not a practice about form. If we focus our attention on the themes of women's writings, we will find that they are about the space that women occupy within patriarchy. This is the very physical space women occupy in life and thus it is the recurring theme of women's writing. The possibility of transforming the quality of this space is the feminist politics of subverting power, though not every feminine writing projects the possibility of transforming the quality of this space. But feminine writing does deal with the binary of inner space and outer space of everyday life.

The two stories I select is not only written in different language but also written in different time. Saroj Pathak and Ambai lived in different times and spaces altogether. Both of them are eminent writers of Gujrati and Tamil literature respectively. Their writings represent ambiguity of women's life within the complexity of Indian modernity. Saroj Pathak generally focuses her attention on the analysis of human mind, "mind warped or diseased through inner or outer pressures" (Kudchedkar X). Her selection of characters is irrespective of their class, caste and gender. Her writings took shape in the mid-fifties and sixties. Ambai, on the contrary is one of those writers are "are influenced by, or engage directly with, issues that emerged in Indian society since mid-seventies" (Tharu and Lalitha 113). And Ambai as a writer is interested in retrieving and rewriting women's lives and history. This spacial and temporal distance between the contexts is very much represented in the selected texts.

I would now give the summary of these two stories. Sarika is the central character of the story 'Sarika Caged'. She is women from upper caste upper class family. She was not economically or socially deprived but she was unable to exercise personal choice throughout her life. She was forced to study maths then science. Her marriage was settled at the cost of her preference for becoming a doctor. After marriage she had to follow what her husband wanted. She was taught dancing though she disliked dancing in the public. She had to attain

the clubs and party with her husband. She was denied motherhood and had to take a puppy instead. After the sudden death of her husband she realized that there is no one in her life whom she had to follow. Knowing this as a greatest misfortune of her life she cannot cry. She was unable to perform the role of widow. This led her to insanity. She was admitted to a hospital and whatever she says seems to be raving. She was unable to communicate. Finally she became caged for her insanity. The 'Unpublished Manuscript' is the story of Thirumagal and her daughter Chentamarai who are much privileged than Sarika. They were given much more personal space. Thirumagal was grown up by a radical father who does not believe in any gender specific role. She was exposed to intellectual life by his father and his progressive friends. She fell in love with a Tamil poet Muthukumaran and this brings her misfortune. The married life was not a happy one as Muthukumaran believed in gender specific role. He expected Thirumagal would entertain him and his friends as a traditional Tamil wife. But Thirumagal has other things to do. She was busy with her studies and her father's printing press. The details of their conjugal life were written in her autobiography which would be eventually read by Chentamarai. When the situation became extreme Thirumagal had to take a decision. By the time her father died. She left Muthukumaran and took a job in Benares University. She realized it is easier to stay with Muthukumaran's poetry than with the person himself. In the autobiography she mentions her hardship as a single woman settling in an unknown city. We find both the mother and her daughter well settled in Benares. Chentamarai is even more assertive and empowered than her mother as she was more exposed to radical thinking. We come to realize this is a story of women's empowerment which Sarika was unable to achieve. But there are blind spots within this story. Muthukumaran's death and the invitation for Kavignar Memorial Festival expose the complexity of the mother's and daughter's relationship with the poet. Chentamarai's eagerness for a father figure and Thirumagal's unexpressed grief would lead us to such reading.

My entry point to these two texts is through the physical space that encloses or expands around both the female central characters. There is a thematic similarity in the narration. Both the central characters resist the physical space given to them by patriarchy. In the case of 'Sarika Caged' Sarika tries to subvert patriarchal norms and is finally encaged because of her insanity. Her resistance encloses her in a limited physical space. While in 'Unpublished Manuscript' Thirumagal successfully breaks off with her husband and establishes her own individual space. She triumphantly manipulates the outer space and thus

widen her physical space. The contrasting feature of these two stories attracted my attention. We might come to conclusion that 'Sarika Caged' is the story of a woman's oppression within patriarchal society while 'Unpublished Manuscript' is a story of women's empowerment. But this kind of closure limits our vision from more complex positions of women's space. The representation of gender relations in these texts is more heterogeneous. These closures must be challenged because of their superficiality. My reading of these texts explores the blind spots which transgress this binary of triumph and defeat. It is important to note that challenging the binds of women's space/life is more important than gaining more space within patriarchy.

In 'Sarika Caged' the incidents that unfold in Sarika's life are specific occurrences of gender oppression within her upper class/caste background. The incidents can be coined as 'oppression' in relation with Sarika's inability to negotiate with them. She was not deprived of any material access but confined by limited personal choice. She has to learn mathematics, the subject which gets privilege over her imaginative self. She has to take up science though she cannot stand dissection. But when she prefer to be a doctor her marriage is given more importance. A good connection must not slip out of one's hand. The marriage ceremony was not the kind of celebration Sarika had imagined. This was again a choice of the bridegroom with secular ideas. After her marriage she has to suppress all her own feelings for her husband's pleasure and wishes. She could not choose a life without clubs and parties because 'Mr. And Mrs. Always have to go together' (Pathak 50). She is denied motherhood, instead she has to place a puppy in her empty lap. She plays the role of the better half of her husband, though her husband's affections are not exclusively reserved for her. She protest in vain and plays the roles she is expected to play. The death of her husband places her in new role of widow. But she is no longer able to keep up the performance by crying for others on the day of her 'greatest misfortune' (Pathak 53) and thus exposes the incoherence of her life. Ultimately she becomes mentally insane and is engaged for insanity. Sarika's self expression never turns into her self-assertion and that is where her failure lies. It is her failure that she, as an individual is unable to manipulate her own space. Herself expression is muted by the dominant cultural codes. But this failure cannot be simplified as her inability to resist those cultural codes. Rather it should be seen in the context of her pre-existing social relation in contrast to Thirumagal and her daughter in 'Unpublished Manuscript.'

Sarika is situated in a position where epistemological access is limited compared to the position of Thirumagal and her daughter. Their liberal education and exposure to a wider epistemology had helped to build up their assertive selves which was not the case for Sarika. Sarika's imaginative self is never appreciated. This is in stark contrast with Thirumagal's daughter who comeback from school spreading her arms like wings. Sarika's education was not for her own inner quest, nor for earning her livelihood, but to fulfil her parent's dream. Her marriage to a bridegroom 'just like real European' (Pathak 48) make her parents proud which is the opposite of Thirumagal's marriage to Muthukumaran. And Thirumagal's self assertion in the case of her marriage is shaped by her parents relatively compassionate conjugal relationship. Silence in Sarika's marriage can be read as the silencing process of her existence. She protest all her married life in her own terms. She expresses every little wish of her own, even those that conflict with her husband's wishes. She expresses her desire not to dance in public, not to ride a horse, not to murder the child she conceived. But she is interpellated as a subject by the ideology that insists that a wife must follow her husband's command. This is different in the case of Thirumagal. She is exposed to the counter ideology that opposes this kind of patriarchal value. So it was easier for her to counter her husband's abuses. After Sarika's husband's death she comes to this self realization, at whose bidding she danced 'that stage director is no more' (Pathak 54) and this self realization makes her unable to cry, though she knows it is her life's greatest misfortune. Her self assertion can be traced within this contradiction. At this point she collapses into a mental breakdown and loses her coherent self. She loses her relationship with the outside world and can neither make sense of nor shape her own existence. She feels an emptiness, a total void.

In the hospital bed she discovers that the teacher, mother, doctor, nurse all of them in her life are representative of the male symbolic order where her own voice is muted. Even on her sick bed she poses a question to the patriarchal social order by asking whether the girl in front of her bed, is reciting a poem against her wish. But she cannot convey her utterance to the listener. She is in a position where her voice is choked by patriarchy. When she pronounces something it seems she is raving. When she privileges her muted self she becomes insane. This position of insanity is one where her utterances cannot be understood by male stream, main stream linguistic practice. Her ultimate insanity may not be looked upon as an emancipation from the male symbolic order but still her resistance to this symbolic order cannot be underestimated. It is obvious that what happened to Sarika is not

empowerment but a close reading of the text will established her ability to subvert patriarchy. The focus of feminist criticism should not only be the successful manipulation of patriarchy. Thus Sarika's story is not only the narrative of her oppression but also of her resistance from within her socio-cultural context.

In 'Unpublished Manuscript' Thirumagal is situated in the same socio-cultural position but with more epistemological access. She was brought up by a liberal father whose idea about women's liberation was radical for his time. He does not believe that a woman's goal in life is to get married and confine herself to household chores. Thus he insists on women' education, women's access to job over widow remarriage. Though he himself married a widow, it was not out of a sense of social responsibility. He was in love with Thirumagal's mother. He insisted on her education and her obtaining a teacher's training degree. Then she joined him in Malaysia. After the death of his wife, he returned with his three year old daughter and set up a press that refused to publish books that made obscene allegations against particular castes or against those who spoke particular languages nor did it print invitations of coming of age celebrations or for marriages performed with elaborate rituals. He never insisted on Thirumagal's learning any gender specific skills. His encouragement towards Thirumagal's education, exposes her to a wider world and expands her mental space. Thirumagal's self assertion develops under the influence of a father with such high principles and the association of his intellectual friends. Her M.A in English literature and her exposure to publishing world situates her in a privileged position in juxtaposition to Sarika. Her daughter Chentamarai's childhood is even more intellectually vibrant. As a daughter of an intellectual and critic she is exposed to biographies of countless writers, poets and artists. To her the stories of Sylvia Plath, Lorca, Anna Akmatova or Akka Mahadevi are stories of people close to her. Thus it seemed natural that Chentamarai grows up enacting a different persona every day from this constellation of radical intellectuals in front of a mirror. Her imagination is encouraged by her mother and Chentamarai's exposure gives her a voice which is not muted by dominant patriarchal cultural codes. Thirumagal and her daughter's challenge to patriarchal ideology is possible because of their solidarity with the intellectual traditions that subvert patriarchy. Chentamarai's vivid description of the river Ganges and its banks expresses her unrestrained relationship with the outer world. This relationship makes way for self exploration which culminates in her creativity. This coherence between outside world and her inner self was impossible for Sarika to achieve

within her context. Chentamarai's self assertion of her sexuality is expressed through her naming her breasts. And her self confidence is expressed when she thinks of herself as someone who 'was going to attract the world' (Ambai 105).

In Thirumagal's life self assertion was muted once and for all with her marriage to Muthukumaran. Muthukumaran, who believes in gender specific role and fails to be a supportive husband. His intervention breaks Thirumagal's individuality temporarily. But she overcomes it by leaving her husband and establishing herself as a scholar and critic. By teaching at Benares University, she not only regains her own space but is able to transform the quality of that space. She becomes more sensitive to gender constructions which are assumed to be very natural in patriarchal value system. Thus when her daughter talks of her longing for a man who can feel deep sorrow, so that she can then play her *yaazh* and make him happy, Thirumagal asks her daughter if she ever imagines a man playing his *yaazh* to drive away her sorrow. After this conversation Chentamarai comes to the self realization 'A thing that seemed normal when a man did it, why did it seem crazy when a woman did it?' (Ambai 108-109) Finally she makes up her mind about the kind of man she would respect. He would have to know 'how to melt' (Ambai 109). Thirumagal drives Tamil grammar into Chentamarai's head. When Chentamarai asks why she cannot write poetry beyond grammar, her *amma* makes her understand that 'she had to first grasp that which she wished to transcend' (Ambai 107). This phrase can be applied to Thirumagal's journey through life. Thirumagal carves out her own space by understanding the gender perspective of the patriarchal space, a perspective that Sarika fails to comprehend. But within this autonomous space of the mother and the daughter there are silences which patriarchy has inscribed. The autobiography from which Chentamaria learns about her mother is 'unpublished'. She has to discover it from a cupboard in her *amma*'s room. Thirumagal's life might be a story of personal success but blind spots of deep grief can still be located within it. Her single utterance to Mohan that life without Muthukumaran was not an easy one and the cost she has to pay for it, reveals Thirumagal's self contradictions. It was difficult to live with a person like Muthukumaran but it was even harder to leave him. When she finally leaves him and Chennai a poem of Muthukumaran's about a train journey surfaced in her mind. It is not only a hard journey for a single woman to settle down in an unknown city but struggle within her inner self makes it harder. She ultimately comes to the conclusion that it is easier to stay with

Muthukumaran's poem than with Muthukumaran the person. This silent grief remains with her all through her life, her unpublished autobiography is proof of this silence.

The world of Thirumagal and her daughter may look like a world beyond the patriarchal value system, interpellated by a different sets of ideologies but a close reading reveals the other side of this 'emancipated space'. The contradiction within this space are very prominent. Though Chentamaria's relationship with her mother is very fulfilling, there is a undertone of desire for a father figure in her life. She tries to imagine how her father must have looked. But the picture remains incomplete in her imagination as the only picture of Muthukumaran in his anthology of poem is faded and creased. Thirumagal informs Chentamaria of her father's death as if it is a news item. Thirumagal's inability to express her emotion is our entry point to the silencing process at work in her life. The day Chentamaria hears about her father's death, she comes across a girl child in its father's lap. She cries a lot in her room that day. Then her mother takes out a photograph from her childhood that shows her with both her father and mother, and it is kept 'where her eyes could fall upon it every now and then' (Ambai 126). And when the invitation from the Kavignar Muthukumaran Memorial Festival arrives she decides to attend the programme. In a way the father figure for Chentamarai is established by the fact of his absence after his death and the patriarchal order thus re-establishes itself. Thus the reading reveals the spots where the binds of heterosexual social matrix are not undone. Thirumagal's individual space, unfortunately, can neither transgress her grief and solitude, nor transcend her daughter's expectation of a father figure.

The stories I have chosen, deal with contradictions within the respective space of these two women. The space of these women can be historically linked. The historical context of a character like Sarika is transformed within two decades. Thus Thirumagal has to deal with different sets of complexity within patriarchy. Within these two decades women of upper class/caste have achieved considerable power but the silence of their lives has not been erased by gaining power. While 'Sarika Caged' focuses on self expression and resistance in women's lives which are muted within the patriarchal status quo, 'Unpublished Manuscript' reveals the contradictions of a space gained within patriarchy. It reveals the fact that improving the quality of women's lives does not always remove certain silences in their lives. These contradictions within self assertive individuals make room for a more complex and heterogeneous existence for women's lives. These silences must be located by feminist

scholarship. And as long as these silences remain in the physical space inhabited by women, women's writings which deal with these silences will demand a separate discursive engagement.

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Hegemonic Historiography vis-a-vis Subversive Politics: A Comparative Study of Heroic Uprising in India and Africa

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Abstract:

This paper investigates hegemonic historiography and subaltern consciousness to bring out a comparative understanding of heroic uprising vis-a-vis subversive politics in India and Africa. Subaltern resistance and subversive stance of Kenyan literary giant Ngugi wa' Thiongo and his Indian counterpart, Mahashweta Devi concerns our attention here, as both these writers as activists and as the champions of 'history from below' carry forward their counter-discourse against elitist discourse in order to prove that indigenous resistance to oppressive power in all its elite and colonial manifestations strikes at the roots of hegemonic historiography. While engaging in the problematics of historiography, Ngugi wa' Thiongo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and Mahashweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977) have been examined to unravel how hegemonic historiography, both in Indian and African context, is re-appropriated through Subaltern historiography, which seeks to re-establish the balance of knowledge by establishing that 'inferior' is made so through discourses of power and politics. Both the texts bring about a paradigmatic shift in mainstream historiography, which is largely elite and expediently concealed the local uprisings and struggles of the subalterns and highlights the subversive stance of respective writers in their cause to excavate heroic figures, who were never the docile victims of the hegemonic forces, but resisted the dominant system that sought to victimize them.

Keywords: hegemonic historiography, subaltern consciousness, subversion, uprising

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This paper is theoretical, critical and textual which investigates hegemonic historiography and subaltern consciousness to bring out a comparative understanding of heroic uprising vis-a-vis subversive politics in India and Africa. And in engaging in this enterprise, subaltern resistance which finds a vehement expression in Ngugi wa' Thiongo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and Mahashweta Devi's *Aranyer Adhikar* (1977) have been examined to unravel how hegemonic historiography, both in Indian and African context, is re-appropriated through Subaltern historiography, which seeks to re-establish the balance of knowledge by establishing that 'inferior' is made so through discourses of power and politics.

The historical experience of European colonization juxtaposes India and Africa on social and political landscape of the world, wherein Indians and Africans share the same colonial destiny, consciousness, memory and imagination. Therefore, modern literature in India and Africa has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism, and Neo-colonialism. The convergence of postcolonial discourse initiated by Said, Spivak and Bhabha with subaltern studies empowered the colonial subjects by re-visiting and re-documenting their past is aptly enunciated by David Ludden when he writes, "Subaltern historians and postcolonial critics stand together against colonial modernity to secure a better future for subaltern people, learning to hear them, allowing them to speak, talking back to powers that marginalize them, documenting their past" (Reading 20). Hence, both Post colonialism and Subaltern Studies intend to expose the epistemic stratagems which justify elitism. Therefore, in the Indian context, if racism has been propagating discrimination, Subaltern Studies investigates the social malaise of caste to comprehend the inverse relationship between high caste and knowledge production. Further, Subaltern Studies or subaltern historiography began to delve into the arena of --- "religious minorities, caste and gender" in order to destabilise the institutions of power and highlight how they have and continue to relegate the subaltern to the fringes (Empire 239).

As an outcome, the politico-historical phenomenon engaged literary discourse in subversive politics which later became the cardinal rule of writing a historiography. Subaltern criticism spearheaded by Ranjit Guha delves into "the contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite—hegemonic groups whether foreign or

indigenous who monopolized the hitherto historiography of the Indian nationalist movement” (Guha 39). Thus, at the core of subaltern historiography is the autonomy of subaltern consciousness—autonomy meaning that subalterns acted in history on their own, independently of the elite—and these policies constituted an autonomous domain that neither originated from elite policies nor depended on them.

Guided by the assumption that a comparative study is confined to the comparative imaginative temper, so to say, and the comparative denominators or relationships between the Indian and African, heroic figures and their subversive deeds engage our attention here. The ideas of comparative imagination imply the discovery of sameness in dissimilar works, of shared imagination and denominators in works by writers from unlike cultures and traditions. Ostensibly, it suggests oneness in all literatures of colonized peoples and consider it a part of one literary experience and culture. Nevertheless, the implication of such juxtaposition must not be limiting the scope of comparative study; it rather augments our understanding as elucidated by Izevbaye:

The central purpose of comparative literature is a simple unambiguous one. It is to establish a relationship among a variety of writers and literatures, and help enhance our understanding of literature as a human activity with similar aesthetic and social functions in different cultures. (2)

Taking Izevbaye’s stance as the point of departure, the paper juxtaposes the tribal uprising, Ulgulan started by the Indian tribal hero Birsa Munda and Mau Mau uprising spearheaded by his Kenyan counterpart Dedan Kimathi to investigate how hegemonic historiography has been undermining such uprisings. Guha’s observation that the subaltern is the “maker of his own destiny” brought into sharp focus the question of the relationship between texts and power. Given this context, writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Mahasweta Devi emerge as authentic voices of the oppressed through their subversive writing.

The two texts share a subversive stance because both Ngugi and Devi, as the champions of ‘history from below’ carry forward their counter-discourse against elitist discourse in order to prove that indigenous resistance to oppressive power in all its elite and colonial manifestations strikes at the roots of hegemonic historiography. Since mainstream historiography, which is largely elite, expediently concealed the local uprisings and struggles of the subalterns, in the two texts *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Aranyer Adhikar* (Right to

Forest), the respective writers excavate heroic figures from two diverse parts of the world, who were never the docile victims of the hegemonic forces, but resisted the dominant systems that sought to victimize them.

The rise of anti colonial nationalist movements in the twentieth century was a response to the desire for self representation of the marginalized people who rallied under the banner of common culture, language or history. The combative political methods of 1950s gave way to a more militant phase in the decolonization process in the year 1952 when the first incidents of the Mau Mau or Land and Freedom Revolt in Kenya took anti colonial struggle into the arena of armed resistance. Mau Mau was a moment of protest in which one people, the Gikuyu, protested in a peasant's revolt against an unequal economic structure supported by discriminatory laws and institutions. Landlessness was the main cause of Mau Mau revolt as the title 'Land and Freedom Army' indicates.

Dedan Kimathi led this most militant phase of the independent struggle and provided political and ideological legitimacy for the movement. He responded vigorously to the colonialist interpretation of Mau Mau as 'savage' and 'primitive'. To establish Mau Mau as a national liberation movement, Kimathi conceptualized Mau Mau as similar to movements in other colonized countries. Kimathi was captured in 1956 after a long man hunt and was charged with unlawful possession of a revolver and ammunitions. During his trial, all his appeals were dismissed and in 1957, he was hanged and his body was buried in Kamiti prison. But such was the power of this legend that many people refused to believe that he had been hanged. His death saw the end of Mau Mau resistance but he had been a crucial factor enforcing British Government to step up the pace of constitutional change in Kenya. Kimathi's war became the most vivid real life demonstration to the world that the British, severely debilitated by World War II, no longer had either the will or the resources to impose colonialism in Kenya or elsewhere in Africa through the barrel of a gun.

Mau Mau, one of the most radical and politico-historical phenomenon caught the attention of writers from two contrasting perspectives – one set of writers including M. Cornish, V. S. Reid, and G. R. Fazakerley, who had been critical of colonial rule in Kenya, remain hostile to Mau Mau and its political objective by viewing it as a savage and brutal form of extreme nationalism. Another set of writers comprising Meja Mwangi's, G. Wachira's and Charles Mangua's, viewed Mau Mau as reflecting a time in Kenya when the

neocolonial bourgeoisie consolidated its power. Given this context, the intervention of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Mau Mau fiction writing is exemplary due to its subversive stance.

While speaking about the Mau Mau Uprising and Kimathi's contribution thereof, in July 1990 Nelson Mandela in a speech at the Moi International Sports Complex at Kasarani, Nairobi, declared, "In my 27 years of imprisonment, I always saw the image of fighters such as Kimathi..., and others as candles in my long and hard war against injustice." He added, "it is an honor for any freedom fighter to pay respect to such heroes" (The Weekly Review, July 20, 1990). These words of Mandela reflect the undying potential of the narrative set forth by heroes like Kimathi, who created a ripple effect through their struggle and resistance.

In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi reconstructs the history of the freedom struggle from the point of view of the oppressed masses. True to Ngugi's literary agenda, the main impulse behind this literary reconstruction of history is to decolonize the minds of people and to lead them to their cultural freedom. This, he does by exposing the falsehood of the colonial discourse and textuality propagated through its weapons of propaganda such as radio, newspaper education. These, in Kimathi's words, in the play, work to "enfeeble minds,/make them slaves, apes, parrots" and implant "inferiority... in our minds by centuries of oppression" (*The Trial* 68-69).

The play is an imaginative reconstruction of Kenyan history and resurrects the revolutionary hero to inspire the masses. The play is divided into three movements - the first movement portrays the dreadful reality of colonial times when hunger is prevalent all over Kenya and boys and girls are forced to beg and rummage through dustbins. Natives dread the white masters as well as betrayers and the only hope for the people of Kenya lies in their struggle and faith in the leadership of heroes like Kimathi. The second movement depicts the four trials of Kimathi in his cell where the white master employs systematic mechanisms to appropriate the revolutionary opponent. When false charges are levelled against him and he is coaxed to surrender, Kimathi is disgusted to see what colonialism has done to his own people and laments, "Cursed minds! What revolution will unchain these minds! Out. Out. Neo-slaves" (*The Trial* 47).

In the last movement, Kimathi emerges as a loving teacher of the Kenyan masses. He explains to them the politics of imperialism and inspires them to fight. The final scene in the

Courtroom builds up excitement with the woman breaking into a triumphant singing of the freedom song and Kimathi emphatically declaring,

There has never and will never be
Justice for the people
Under imperialism.
Justice is created
Through a revolutionary struggle
Against all the forces of imperialism. (82)

The ending of the play when Boy and Girl are singing a freedom song at the centre of a tumultuous crowd of peasants and workers and when Kimathi is not depicted as dead is intentionally ambivalent. There is no closure and one is left wondering whether Kimathi is dead or has escaped with the help of boy and girl who hold the gun and declare “not dead”. This ploy by the writer lends Kimathi an air of immortality as the Woman tells a Boy earlier in the play that no bullet can kill Kimathi because the Kenyan struggle continues and so does the hard war against the oppressor.

Indigenous resistance to oppressive power in all its colonial and neocolonial manifestations is Ngugi’s major theme and he uses drama as an avenue for consciousness raising. The play highlights the undying spirit of a hero, who is recorded in Kenyan history as a barbaric and cannibalistic evildoer. In writing the play, the writer was motivated by his conviction that “imperialism was the enemy of all working peoples” when he said:

We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history, envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants’ and workers’ struggle before and after constitutional independence. (Thiong’o and Mugo viii)

In a similar vein, Birsa Munda, a tribal heroic figure, led one of the prominent 19th century rebellions in the Indian subcontinent known as Munda Rebellion. Named as Ulgulan meaning ‘Great Tumult’, this movement took place in Ranchi in 1899 -1900 and aimed at establishing Munda Raj and independence. Munda’s prime objective was to empower his Munda community socially, politically and economically. Devoted to the cause, he worked to put an

end to the oppression of the dikus and to drive the British out of their territory. Therefore, he defiantly declared the establishment of the Birsa Raj, in which nobody but only Birsa could be obeyed. He exhorted the Mundas not to pay rent. The government decided to arrest Birsa on 22 August 1895. Birsa was convicted along with others on 19 November 1895 on the charge of rioting and 482 more cases were filed against him. As a result, he was imprisoned and later died in captivity in June 1900 at the age of 25. The British, nevertheless, declared that he had died of Cholera. But the cause of the hero did not die and made him emerge in a new incarnation as a national and as a regional hero, who became a symbol of the anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggle of the early twentieth century.

Mahasweta Devi was an indomitable advocate of reclaiming the past of the tribals and low castes of India. As an activist and a writer committed to empowering the subaltern communities of India, Devi questions the power structure and re-visits the polemics of official history in her oeuvre as she vehemently declares:

I have always been driven by a strong sense of history... (and) In all my writings I have tried to present the subaltern point of view.
(*The Queen of Jhansi* 321)

Aranyer Adhikar (Right to the Forest) is Devi's authentic account of the Munda uprising where she gives a vivid glimpse of the Birsa movement, which is deeply rooted in the tribal struggle and as a historian she goes beyond history to document facts about the tribal uprising which started from the latter half of nineteenth century up to its closing years. *Aranyer Adhikar* is Devi's first novel with which she commences her journey as a historian. Through meticulous research and firsthand experience with the tribals as an activist, she has taken some liberties with the historical facts, without fictionalizing them. With the objective of presenting an authentic document, she goes into the origin of systematic oppression by showing the influx of the non-tribals into the tribal areas in Chottanagpur during the colonial period. The text shows how colonialism, in connivance with the semi-feudal system in India accelerated the process of detribalization and acculturation in various ways. Ranajit Guha calls this doubly articulated colonialism in India when he avers,

Dominance in colonial India was doubly articulated. It stood on the one hand for Britain's power to rule over its South Asian subjects, and on the other, for the power exercised by the indigenous elite over the subaltern amongst the subject exploitation

itself...the alien moment of colonist dominance was matched thus by an indigenous moment within the general configuration of power..(*Dominance without Hegemony* 100)

The narrative flows in the form of memories of a veteran rebel, Dhani Munda, who recounts episodes of Birsa's life by connecting it with the history of their community. Dhani's narration reveals that tribal society was peaceful and progressive living in communion with nature before colonialism, "They were happier then. They used to go to the forest for hunting. They made fields for farming. They had their own god -- Singbhonga"(26). Dhani's oral narration of Munda history to his fellow prisoners in Ranchi jail gives us a veritable account of the ruthless exploitation of the Mundas, the disintegration of their indigenous social order, which was predominantly agrarian, and their militant struggle against the intruders, both foreign and native, under Birsa's leadership.

Mahashweta Devi's subversive stance as a writer lies in historicizing Birsa rebellion which had germinated even before the birth of Birsa Munda in the form of resistance against landlordism and colonial laws. Birsa's father Sugana Munda's extreme poverty after losing his land to money lenders and struggle for sustenance explicates the drudgery Mundas were subjected to. Despite having a hard childhood, doing odd jobs like leaves collection and grazing the cattle, Birsa's instinctive affinity with the forest is reflected in his early years when he roams through the virgin forests and strongly feels that forest goddess is stretching her both arms and telling him, "[A]ll this land is ours" (36). It is this inborn love for the forest, which the veteran rebel, Dhani recognizes to infuse revolutionary spirit in young Birsa. Later, the brutal suppression of the rebellion of sardars by British and the violation of human rights accentuates the anti-colonial spirit in Birsa.

The narration of oral history which is characteristic of Mahasweta's subaltern novels is apparent in Dhani's narration of the Munda history to his fellow prisoners in Ranchi jail. He told them about the independent and happy life in the past and how it came to be disturbed with the incursion of the dikhus, the intruders. Reiteration, a device essential to oral story telling, is deployed by Dhani. By deploying this narrative strategy, Mahasweta has placed the individual experience of Birsa at the intersection of tribal history, thereby seeking to narrate and contextualize the formation of his subjectivity along with the social forces

shaping it. The author has painstakingly explored oral sources with an ethical integrity as declared by her:

I have always believed the real history is made by ordinary people... in various forms of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people...the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human veins...my writing is really their doing ...(Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels 24)

This quotation clearly illustrates Devi's activism as a writer and the same is reflected in the novel, which shows Birsa's metamorphosis from a precocious child to a rebel leader. Interestingly, this transformation takes place through his encounter with the colonial way of life. His keenness to read and write makes him join the German mission at Burju where he receives primary education. Thereafter, his experiences at Chaibasa Mission and later at Catholic Mission bring a turning point in his life when he sees the ruthlessness of authorities and suppression of his own people. Dhani's tone of urgency when he tells him about white men's opinion about Mundas as "naked", "barbarians" and "muggers" jolts him. This is further aggravated with Father Notrit's racial prejudice against the Mundas which surfaced in his presumptuous words: "[T]hese sardars are robbers, plunders and frauds. One must not make company with them." (75)

Birsa's rejection of both Christianity and Hinduism, which provide neither succor or solace to him initiates his evolution as a rebel. Ngugi's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* also presents similar kind of oppression perpetrated by Christianity. Both Devi and Ngugi suggest here that Christianity, whose basic doctrine was love and equality between men, was distorted to spread inequality and hatred. The Priest in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Father Notrit in *Aranyer Adhikar* (Right to Forest) represent the insidious power of religion to mask the true nature of oppression by distorting the sayings of Bible.

Infuriated at his community's plight, Birsa roams in the forest and his imaginary dialogue with the aranyajanani, when he feels that Mother Forest is urging him to save her from the exploiters stirs. The imaginary dialogue between Mother forest and Birsa reflects the mother-son relationship between tribal and forest, which when shaken, causes cataclysm:

Today, I have become impure my son. I will make you pure and chaste, mother These landlords and foreigners made me polluted my son. I will save you mother. My sons are made homeless. I will get back the homes for them (88)

The resultant catastrophe is Birsa's rebellion against the government, Mission and local landlordism. The rebellion was seen as a civic disobedience and later turned into armed rebellion. The text is a poignant description of hegemonic forces joining hands to subjugate tribal people, particularly Birsa's imprisonment without trial and ill-treatment in the jail by Jail Superintendent Anderson, who gives him poison in his food. To dispel the divine aura of Birsa, Anderson cremates Birsa's body by going against their tradition. Nevertheless, this ploy of the colonial master had a reverse impact upon the Mundas. When Sally came to collect the ashes from the pyre of Birsa she tells the jail sweeper who was assigned the duty of burning the body of Birsa: "Ulgulan has no end. Bagvan has no death." (21) This catchphrase is reiterated throughout the text.

Both the revolutionary heroes, Kimathi and Birsa, possess an intense passion to unite and drive out the enemy. This is explicit in Birsa's musing over the dire destitution of his people at the Ranchi prison. His mind is preoccupied with the thoughts of the survival of his people: "he sees everything in front of his eyes, as if in a picture. In the life of Mundas, rice is only a dream. Their food is another thing - ghato, the gruel made of china grass. It has become a dream for them". Birsa always fought for rice. His slogan too was not different: why should the Munda keep on living by drinking the gruel made of grass? Why can't they eat rice like others?" (5). Likewise, Kimathi is pained to see the injustice suffered by the poor who labour on farms owned by the rich landowners, "cattle and sheep ---by the thousands" " acres of maize and wheat", only to see the fruits of their sweat taken away by their rich and powerful masters; working as ayahs, houseboys and rickshaw pullers, " loyal, meek, submissive". Ostensibly, Ngugi and Devi address the issue of survival here - both at physical and cultural level - which instigates Kimathi and Birsa to take up cudgels on behalf of their community leading animal-like existence.

The atmosphere of both the texts under analysis here, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Aranyer Adhikar* (Right to Forest) is charged with unrelieved tension between the charged revolutionary spirit of the natives and tyrannical oppression of the colonial soldiers. The inner solidarity and courage of the people upsets the colonialists. Where on the one hand there is

the reiteration of a catchphrase, *Ulgulan* has no end..." throughout *Aranyer Adhikar*, the "thunderous freedom song" both in the beginning and ending of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and a declaration by Boy and Girl jointly: "Not dead" impart immortality to the undaunting spirit of Birsa and Kimathi.

The concern of the comparativist here is the satisfaction derived from juxtaposition of these two heroes who are from disparate socio-cultural matrices but the *raison de etre* of their life, their unflinching faith in their individual commitment to an egalitarian society bring them on a parallel move. The two revolutionary figures examined here possessed exemplary patriotism, and land alienation turned them into nationalist insurgents infused with valour and intellect, who provided political and ideological legitimacy to insurgency in their respective country by resisting feudal landlordism, exploitative practices of rulers, colonial rule and neocolonial bourgeoisie. Further, the organic intellectual sensibilities of Ngugi and Devi are exhibited in championing the cause of re-visiting hegemonic historiography in order to resurrect the subaltern heroes.

Fanon underscores self-assertion and violence while elucidating the logic of the process of decolonization which, according to him, "never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them." (*The Wretched of the Earth* 28). In this way, *Ulgulan* and Mau Mau chart a drastic digression in the routines of the tribal and colonized people.

The Indian and African heroes who have been the spirit behind significant uprisings, which engage our attention here from the perspective of a comparativist, establish the autonomy of the subaltern consciousness which is the core of subaltern historiography. Kimathi and Munda are celebrated as subaltern historic figures who subverted domination by inversion of the symbols of authority. Whether it was Kimathi who declared himself as "king of the British Empire as well as President of Colonial Parliament" or Munda who declared himself God and began to awaken masses against the landlord-British combine, both these heroes, although demonized in history, have been re-constructed by writers. Their sacrifice served like a springboard for further revolution with a stronger impact. Barrsitor Jacob's admission rings poignantly true, "His body is perished. But his ideals are very much alive in the minds of Mundas".

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Book Review

Jareela (The Castrato) by Bhalchandra Nemade (translated by Santosh Bhoomkar)

by Swagata Bhattacharya¹

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(Price: Rs 230/-)

Published ten years after the publication of *Bidhar* and *Hool* (published initially in 1967 and later identified as two separate novels), *Jareela* (1977) continues with the quest of Changdeo Patil for the meaning of existence. The protagonist of Marathi novelist Bhalchandra Nemade's tetralogy (*Bidhar-Hool-Jareela-Jhool*), Changdeo Patil is the quintessential hero in an existentialist crisis, the 'degraded hero in a degraded world' who has realised the need to adjust. While the protagonist of Nemade's debut novel *Kosala (The Cocoon, 1963)*, Sangvikar was cynical in his attitude to the world at large, Patil learns to compromise and adjust to the situation around him. In the words of the novelist himself, Sangvikar had come to realise by the end of *Kosala* that in order to survive he will have to adjust and so Patil was born. What is most striking in Changdeo Patil is his ability to simultaneously accept and reject the world. In *Bidhar*, Patil was seen confronting the questions of life and death which perpetually vexed him. His western education had played a great role in shaping his mind and making him a misfit in his own society. In *Jareela*, however, we get to see a pacified Patil who has sobered down to the extent of accepting his restlessness and trying his best to adapting in a new environment absolutely alone.

Jareela opens with Changdeo Patil's journey to the new town where he had joined as a Professor in English. His shabby rented place, his loud garrulous colleagues, his often boring teaching assignments and power tussles at the college leave him with enough leisure for self-introspection. The issues of caste and language come up again and again throughout the novel as Changdeo relentlessly insists on the significance of the native tongue. What Vice-Principal Rajput had declared towards the beginning of *Jareela* — "Marathi must be made compulsory" keeps on recurring as the small town college battles its own prejudices

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against casteism and provincialism. And when suddenly the power station collapses making the entire town plunge into darkness after sunset, Patil begins to confront another enemy, this time his own loneliness engulfs him. Maddened by the thought of having to survive without a human companion, Patil finds himself attracted to the opposite sex in a way he has never felt before. From here begins the second phase of his self-mortification. Thus his obsession with Gulab bai's song "akeli dar lage/ raat mori amma" becomes symbolic of his state of mind. His initial attraction towards a female student, his advances to Dr. Miss Pingle and his eagerness to get married to the girl arranged by his aunt, all ended in making a fool of himself. It was better to get married than remain a bachelor, Patil had thought and in his imagination marriage was the magical cure to all his problems of loneliness, social ostracism, and even the drudgery of daily household chores! With the refusal of the girl's family, Changdeo decides to quit his present job and move on to a new place for yet another time. As he quits the place, he allows himself to be "caught in the throes of change—a new town, a new road and a new life". But will Changdeo's life change at all? Change of place has never been able to make any substantial change in his life. *Jareela* had opened with Changdeo's journey and his query to the bus conductor, "How far have we to go yet?" As he was being shown his destination, Changdeo had thought to himself that nothing had ever come easy to him and that struggle had left its bitter memory in his mind.

Forever haunted by his disturbed childhood, Changdeo Patil (~~deleted~~) is referred to as 'Jareela', a reference used for a bullock. The English translation 'The Castrato' refers to someone who has been castrated, one who can never attain sexual fulfilment. Towards the beginning of *Jareela*, Patil had felt that "There could be procrastination as far as teaching was concerned" and that he had to be careful about it. By the end he realises that he is as good as a castrated bullock. The procrastination motif is another recurring motif which in fact becomes the theme of the novel. The castrated one learns to adjust to the world and move on while rebelling silently, internally.

Following the pattern of *Bidhar*, the translation is replete with indigenous words, particularly the Marathi words 'bhau', 'chiwda', 'bidi', etc have been retained. Portions of the text even retain Marathi transliterated into English as part of a dialogue, for eg, "Si Taht telmo si revo" meaning "Is that omelette business over?" (p 68) Such instances lend more authenticity to the translation. The glossary at the end of the text is a comprehensive one

featuring all the culture-specific words, their connotations along with short bio-notes on historical, political as well as contemporary famous figures mentioned in the text , for eg, Aurangzeb, Bajirao, Bhagat Singh, Ambedkar, Namdev and even Naushad among others. Notes on texts such as *Dhyaneswari* and organisations like the Arya Samaj shall definitely help the foreign reader to get acquainted better with the text.