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Editorial

We are delighted to introduce the first issue of volume 11 of *Sāhitya*, the web journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India (CLAI). The articles published in it undergo a rigorous peer-review process. We are happy to note that a substantial number of articles and reviews were submitted by enthusiastic scholars for publication. Our diligent reviewers and editorial board members sought to ensure that this issue contributed to the field of comparative literature in India.

The discipline of comparative literature is currently undergoing a remarkable transformation in terms of its university-level curriculum. With the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 in select states of India, comparative literature stands to gain greater visibility. The Policy envisages comparative literature receiving more attention at the postgraduate level. Additionally, it aims to develop both undergraduate and dual-degree programmes, including a 4-year B.Ed. programme, in this subject. Hence, it is hoped that in the coming decade, a larger number of departments and centres focussing on the study of comparative literature and comparative Indian literature will be established. The expansion of comparative literature will benefit from its association with other emerging fields. This edition of Sāhitya, therefore, presents seven research articles and three book reviews that aim to highlight the methodological concerns within the discipline as well as explore related areas such as children's literature, translation of folklore, gender studies, and the reception of mahākāvyas.

In the article titled "Telling Tall Tales: The Figure of the Storyteller in Select Bengali Fiction," Aritra Basu examines the craft of storytelling in the realm of fictional literature. The second article entitled "The Structure of 'On the Other Hand' in Anton Chekhov and David Foster Wallace," Arghya Ganguly finds interesting parallels between David Forster Wallace's "Authority and American Usage" and George Saunders' reading of Anton Chekhov's short story "Gooseberries." The article "Beyond Theory: The Necessity of a Pluralist Framework in Comparative Literature" written jointly by Chinmay Pandharipande and M. Jagadish Babu seeks to democratise the study of comparative literature. Ruchika Jain, in her article "Reinterpreting Self and Other through Rāmāyaṇās and their Multifaceted Rāvaṇās," analyses the complex attributes of Rāvaṇās presented in various mahākāvyas. In the article "An Examination of Gender and Socio-religious Practises in Nepali Society," Rachana Sharma subjects to critical scrutiny notions of purity and pollution as they affect the lives of women in Nepali society. Tias Basu's "Tracing the Early Developments of Sahitya Akademi (1954–1960): Is There Something Comparative?" studies the interactions and connections

between the literary activities of Sahitya Akademi and the field of comparative literature. The article entitled "Translation of Manipuri Folktales: Shanrembi Chaisra and its Cultural Elements" comprehensively documents Manipuri folktales in translation and their critical reception. This issue includes three entries in the book review section. Kalyani Samantaray perceptively reviews Kolakaluri Enoch's *Asprishya Ganga and Other Stories* translated by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar. Gopal B. Rao provides a nuanced response to Seema Bhaduri's *A Dynamic Modernity: Adaptation and Parody in Six Twentieth Century Indian Novels*. R. Azhagarasan offers a detailed review of A. A. Manavalan's *Ramayana: A Comparative Study of Ramakathas* translated into English by C. T. Indra and Prema Jagannathan.

The services rendered by anonymous reviewers are gratefully acknowledged. We hope the articles and reviews featured in this issue of *Sāhitya* will gain the appreciation of readers and expand the frontiers of comparative literature.

— Jatindra Kumar Nayak.

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Telling tall tales: The figure of the storyteller in select Bengali fiction

Aritra Basu[1]

***Abstract*:**

The importance given to experience as a critical element for the storyteller by Walter Benjamin in his essay "The storyteller" unites the two most (arguably) popular storytellers in Bengali literature for children and teenagers — Ghona-da and Tarini Khuro. They claim to have experienced the tales they narrate to their attentive listeners. For Ghonada, the tales border on what Linda Hutcheon has described as "historiographic metafiction". For Khuro, the narratives are mostly tall tales from their own lives but exaggerated to suit the curious ears of the young audience.

This paper aims to understand the narrative elements of storytelling, with references to a few of their stories. The first two volumes of Tenida and the stories of Tarini Khuro in Golpo 101 would be the primary texts for this study, along with Benjamin's essay. The common factors in all the short stories around and about these characters would be analysed to formulate a pattern which would analyse and understand other such storytellers in a similar setting. A structuralist understanding of these stories would be posited, with the help of Deleuze's "How do we recognise structuralism."

***Keywords*:** Storyteller, narrative, Ghonada, Tarini Khuro, structure.

Telling Tall Tales: The Figure of the Storyteller in select Bengali fiction

As children, many of us were accustomed to demanding stories as a bedtime luxury (and otherwise), predominantly from the octogenarian section of the house, in which we resided. A large portion of what we heard was from books meant for such purposes, like *Arabian Nights, Aesop's Fables*, *Thakumar Jhuli,* and so on. However, on the off-chance that our grandparents spun a tale out of their lived experiences, it kept us hooked for a longer time. This element of personal interspersing in a narrated tale entices a listener more than a story about a distant king in a foreign land who marries a princess because these are people whose identity is unknown to the listener. The storyteller in fiction, however, presents us with a different kind of discourse. The metatextual effect created by the tale-within-the-tale, and the

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overlap of the author-function[2] with the narrator within the story, create a bubble of incredible curiosity amongst the listeners within and the readers outside the story. When an element of personal experience (often exaggerated) is regularly the direct subject matter of such a tale, instead of it being an anecdote in most tales, and only occasionally the main subject, the listeners grow an attachment to such lucidity and the ridiculous impossibility of such stories.

The importance of storytellers in the lives of children is a two-way street. The storytellers, whether in reality or fiction, presume the children to be their ideal audience since they do not have an optimum capacity to question the authenticity of the stories. In a scenario where the listeners are not children, but the reasoning and thinking adults, what implications does the storyteller have? Especially in a fictional set-up, the politics of storytelling need to be revamped for the postcolonial reader and listener. A story, with its unique, heterogeneous combination of both readers and listeners (and in some cases, readers and listeners within the story as well, like the 'found' manuscripts of Professor Shonku), places the storyteller in a unique position. In the eyes of the unquestioning child, they are the ones who provide them with the sense of adventure, and exposure to a world which is inevitably foreign to them.

In a fictionalised context, therefore, the storyteller's agency is partially shared by the author and is partially left to the imagination of the reader. In the postcolonial Bengali backdrop, the storyteller gains more agency due to the Bengali notion of *adda,* where a group pf people just sit and while away their time, while talking about everything from sports to rocket science. Bengali literature has many such storytellers as authors, who use their first-person perspective to tell stories or introduce a character to tell the stories that they would rather not narrate from their perspective. Satyajit Ray's Topshe (Tapesh Ranjan Mitra), who narrates the Feluda adventures to the readers, Sunil Gangopadhyay's Santu (Sunanda Ray Chowdhury), who is the narrator for the Kakababu series of stories, or Saradindu Bandhopadhyay's Ajit Bandhopadhyay, who narrates the Bymokesh stories to the readers. Though none of these has the tale-within-a-tale feature, all of them are essentially an illustration of the act of storytelling in real life.

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[2] Michel Foucault's idea of an author-function posits that there is no single author of any text, rather an author-function which assimilates the contribution of the "author" along with every other agency that might have contributed to the completion of that text.

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The segment of Bengali literature which is predominantly for children has three such popular characters – Tenida, Ghonada and Tarini Khuro. The similarity in their nomenclature regarding a familial and respectful relationship places all of them on an already established pedestal from which they will not be dethroned at any cost. This hierarchy allows them to exploit their listeners for favours; the two *dadas* more so than the Khuro. In a significant number of Ghonada stories, Shibu, Sishir, Gour, and the narrator Sudhir arrange for a lustrous meal for their storyteller, with the precise purpose of extracting another tall tale from the man. In Tenida, however, the "six-foot-tall nightmare for the British at the Kolkata Maidan" himself snatches away bites of food that Pyala, Habul or Kyabla might be having at the moment. In some cases, we see him demanding an edible incentive to continue with a tale on which he had them hooked. Tarini Khuro, being an aged man, cared only for raw tea, and export-quality *biri*[3], where he carried the latter himself (probably because he could not have asked his listeners, minors as they were, to provide him with a *biri*).

This paper will focus on the last two characters from that list, as Tenida often participated in real-life and real-time adventures with his friends and juniors, whereas the tales of the other two characters were almost always exclusively narrated. The alienation imparted due to this deliberate distancing from the action described in the tales makes the stories all the more exciting, both for the listeners within and the readers outside the fictional narrative of the stories of Ghonada and Tarini Khuro. For this purpose, I would only be considering the first two volumes of the *Ghonada Samagra,* as there is an unprecedented change in the tone, language, style and content in the third volume which cannot be discussed or included within the purview of this paper.

A comparative analysis of the two characters with textual instances would reveal that while they have certain structural and narratological similarities, these two storytellers are fundamentally different from one another in many key aspects. In addition to the characteristics that the characters themselves exhibit, there is a major difference in the perspective of their writers as well. While Ray published most of the Tarini Khuro stories in the children's magazine *Sandesh,* Premendra Mitra's audience was more broad and versatile.

[3] A *biri* is a cheap, cylindrical and smokable leaf with tobacco rolled inside it. It is popular in Bengal and other parts of India, mostly among people who cannot afford a cigarette. However, Tarini Khuro smoked a biri because he liked it, and not because of financial incapability.

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The element of science fiction, for Ray, came with his other creation Professor Shonku, and that of retelling of history seldom occurs. While Ghonada shares a relationship of superiority with the other occupants of the mess they inhabit, Tarini Khuro exhibits a relationship of equality with his listeners. The point of similarity, however, is the relationship of codependence that these two tellers share with their listeners. This is true for Tenida as well, as he cannot survive in peace without showing some *dadagiri*[4] to his listeners. Similarly, Ghonada cannot go long without the company of his appeasers, as numerous instances from the tales display. Perhaps the least amount of explicit codependence is displayed by Tarini Khuro, but that can be attributed to the fact that there are not many stories on him, as compared to Ghonada who has three volumes of complete stories and Tenida who has the solo volume.

In the stories of Ghonada, Premendra Mitra brought science-fiction to Bengalis in the wrap of historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* wrote, “One of the few common denominators among the detractors of postmodernism is the surprising, but general, agreement that the postmodern is ahistorical. It is a familiar line of attack, launched by Marxists and traditionalists alike, against not only contemporary fiction, but also today’s theory—from semiotics to deconstruction.” (87) This act of deconstruction comes to the readers by deliberately altering historical facts in simultaneous jest and sincerity. For instance, in the story “Tupi” (The Cap), Ghonada claimed that he had climbed Mount Everest, tied to an abominable snowman with a lasso. The story was written before the maiden summit of Everest in 1953, as is mentioned in the story itself. Ghonada has, in other stories, taken the responsibility for the Second World War, finding Uranium, tektites, assisting in the invention of artificial chlorophyll, and other such significant feats. Mitra walks the line between fantasy and absurdism with such deft precision, that even the listeners within the story get confused as to whether the stories are real or not.

In the second volume of the Ghonada Samagra, an institution named “Mou-Ka-Sha-Bi-Sh” (MKSBS) – an abbreviation for Moulik Kahini Shaar Biponon Shongostha [An organisation to provide and distribute original story summaries] [5]makes an appearance. They

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[4] A form of dominance expressed on younger people by a senior male member, based on the exclusive virtue of them being senior.

[5] The translations quoted in this paper are done by the author of this paper unless otherwise mentioned in the citations.

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write incessant letters to Ghonada, claiming that the stories which Ghonada narrates are made up, and soon he will run out of original ideas to please his listeners for a sufficient amount of time. Fantastic as they are, Premendra Mitra does not let the readers discard the tales as completely falsified, or even imaginary for that matter. When MKSBS challenged Ghonada in their second letter, by testing the limits of his knowledge through trick questions, or when the four inhabitants of 72 No. Banamali Naskar Lane[6] wanted to do the same at the beginning of the aforementioned story "Tupi", the author always made it a point to prove Ghonada's superiority, at least in terms of knowledge, by showcasing how these immature storytellers fall too little too short regarding factual or historical accuracy.

The oral element has always been of paramount importance to the genre of storytelling, both in reality and in fiction. In that context, the readers are somewhat amused to learn that Ghonada is afraid of letters coming to him from anywhere. (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 2* 293). The letters, which take up the last quarter of the second volume of Ghonada stories, have some resonances with the act of writing diaries. Anwesha Maity in her paper on Ghonada's tall tales analysed this aspect from a different angle, where she wrote,

> The narrative devices of the tall-tale and the diary, especially where the narrator is also the hero of the tale, necessitate the occurrence of the tale in the past … in the Ghana-da series, this narrative device [of the tall-tale] creates a lacuna in the conventionally accepted understanding of colonial history itself. By deliberately inserting the tale in a history which, as written in a verisimilar 'frame storyworld,' finds no mention of any such occurrence, the tall-tale prompts its reevaluation from a postcolonial perspective. (51)

The "frame storyworld" is built by Ghonada, but the contributors are spread out across the room which he famously inhabits.

This postcolonial perspective is better reflected in the first volume of the stories, where he claimed responsibility (or credit) for achievements which were typically assigned to the British, or Europeans/Americans in general. However, the element of storytelling remained constant in both volumes. Often, Ghonada was seen to sabotage the almost

[6] The address of the mess in which Ghonada, the narrator and the other characters live.

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exclusively outdoor plans of the group, by enticing them to stay behind. In stories like "Ghori" (The watch), it was a derby between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, where only the four inhabitants planned to go without their supreme leader, whereas in a story like "Knecho" (The worm), all of them had planned to go fishing together. While the former could have been out of spite, the latter was definitely from the all-consuming fear of his bubble of superiority being burst open, especially at outdoor sports, at which he claimed to be an expert on multiple occasions. An article entitled "The Insectesimal tall tale: Historical catachresis and ethics in the science fiction of Premendra Mitra" argues, "In Mitra, the tall tale operates as an embedded narrative and is initiated by a specific comment by one of the interlocutors, generally a member of the audience of the tale, who inadvertently precipitates Ghanada's narrative." (Bhattacharya and Hiradhar 4)

Premendra Mitra plays around with this element of interlocution, most notably in the story "Dada" (The elder brother"), where a cameo character appears, claiming to be superior to Ghonada in age, lived adventures and tall tales. Using the perfect set-up of almost a year's absence of Ghonada from the mess, this unnamed man appears at the scene, as if maliciously aware of the inhabitants' propensity to give undue advantages and favours to anyone who would entice them with a tale. However, the alleged superiority takes an ironic turn the moment Ghonada returns to the mess, spoiling the heroic element of *dada*'s tale by a simple interjection:

> "Yes, I have returned in one-piece", said Ghonada.
>
> "How Ghonada, how?", we screamed in unison…
>
> "Why are you so shocked? It was not half as difficult as it sounds. I asked it one question.[7] The game was as good as over by that."
>
> "What was the question, Ghonada?"

[7] The reference here is to a machine which had gone beyond its purview and was continuously consuming humans in its quest for knowledge.

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> He said, with a wry smile, "I asked, what came first, the plant or the seed? It is still thinking about that. Might as well have extinguished its thirst for knowledge and itself in the process."
>
> *Dada* suddenly bowed down to touch Ghonada's feet and left the room without further ado. (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 1* 125-126)

This masterful, clever, yet simple question, which is a variation of the egg-chicken question, goes a long way to point out how a tall-tale can be blown apart by a single detail.

The inhabitants of the mess attempted the same, notably at the end of the story "Chunch" (The needle), where Ghonada was attempting to salvage and assist Rene Laval with the invention of a mystery substance, which remained unidentified till the last paragraph of the story. Ghonada had a ready answer to the inquisitive "So, what was the holy grail for which such a fiasco was necessary?" … "You still don't get it? It was chlorophyll." (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 1* 237). These details, along with elements like revealing only tempting details from a story and waiting for the listeners to request him to carry on, are what make Ghonada a great storyteller. These details hold the story together, and it comes as no surprise that Ghonada alone has access to such crucial points of information. Even in the aforementioned story, "Tupi", when the inhabitants of the mess tried to trick Ghonada by uttering the Tibetan names of Mount Everest, only Ghonada knew the correct name, Cho mo hiyan mi (The purest water on Earth).

In the story "Haansh" (The Duck), this is exactly what he does, after a new occupant of the mess, Bapi Dutta, is furious at him for cooking the ducks he had set aside to take home for his family. Not only did Ghonada alleviate his anger by spinning a tale around the anonymous yet highly-priced duck, but he also started the tale thus,

> On 13th July 1935, I was about to lose my way on the world's highest plateau due to a blinding blizzard; one of the shrewdest villains of the world, Faun Brull was breathing on my shoulders as a hyena after its prey. I knew I cared not for the loss of my life but my repute, and I had just witnessed a ghost at sixteen thousand feet altitude. Thank God I was able to kill the *changu* [the local name for the wolf] with my last bullet! (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 1* 159)

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Instances such as these prove the ability of Mitra to give away certain aspects of the plot, in a manner resembling a trailer, so that everyone wants more.

Such intricate detailing without any idea of the plot was bound to keep the regular listeners hooked, but it did the trick on Bapi Datta as well. He sat there, his hands still bearing the smell of the ducks whose loss he had almost forgotten, and ended up bringing ducks to the mess more often than the inhabitants cared for. Such instances abound in the tales, but one of the most interesting aspects of the tales presented in the second volume of the stories is the effortless anachronism in them. Not only does Mitra aware the readers of Ghonada's first appearance at a much later stage, but he also allows him to correct passages, stories and anecdotes from *The Mahabharata.* Such diachronic anachronism not only posits Ghonada's steadfast position as the sole storyteller in the context of this mess irrespective of time but also adds an air of omnipresence to his character who was at least human till the end of volume one.

An article called "Bengali fiction for the teenagers" by D. K. Chakravorty clusters the characters of Ghonada, Tenida, Harshavardhan, Govardhan and a few other iconic characters created by the writers of the *Kallol*[8] era. Though this paper does not take into consideration the character of Tarini Khuro, the essence of it allows for the iconic storyteller to find his place among these characters who have won the hearts of teenagers. This survey-like article finds itself starkly contrasted by the likes of Walter Benjamin's essay "The storyteller" where Benjamin analyses the works of Nikolai Leskov to understand the nuances of storytelling (83). It is the figure of the storyteller which binds these two fictional characters together, and the hitherto mentioned justification for the choice of them as the subject matter for this paper falls perfectly in line with the distancing of the storyteller from reality, as both Ghonada and Tarini Khuro take immense pleasure in effortlessly creating a wall of distance between the listener and the tale. By talking about locations which are "remote" and alien to the listeners, these storytellers ensure that the absence of the lived experience ties the listeners to them in an obligation, thus nurturing their role as the centre of all attention.

Tarini Khuro, one of the three recurring characters created by Satyajit Ray, has a comparatively narrower range of stories, many of which are more believable than even the

[8] The *Kallol* era mainly consists of Bengali writers after the demise of Rabindranath Tagore. The nomenclature came from a magazine named *Kallol.*

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most placid Ghonada story. The fundamental differences between these two characters lie not only in their respective ages and their nomenclature – Ghonoshyam Das is the *dada* (elder brother, or in this case, a generic senior) of the listeners, while Tarini Charan Banerjee is the *Khuro* (uncle), but also in the nature of the stories they tell. While Ghonada mainly focuses on science fiction and an alternate retelling of history. Tarini Khuro attempts to make the tale the independent centre of his attractiveness. In the stories which feature him, Tarini Khuro approaches a new job or business, and problems find him, much like how mysteries find another of Ray's characters, Prodosh Chandra Mitra, popularly known as Feluda. The element of similarity, however, rests in the way these two characters solve the problems which they face, and the way they narrate the experience to their ardent listeners. For both Tarini Khuro and Ghonada, storytelling is not merely a hobby, but their calling in life.

This element of storytelling and problem-solving is best reflected in the arguably metatextual story "Golpoboliye Tarini Khuro" (Tarini Khuro as a storyteller), where *Khuro* is hired by the wealthy Balvant Parekh, apparently to help the latter with his insomnia. It eventually turned out that Parekh was appropriating the stories told by Khuro as his own, and publishing them without giving *Khuro* any credit. Tarini Khuro decided to defeat plagiarism by plagiarism and narrated a story of Sarat Chandra Chattapadhyay as his own, which Parekh then sent for publication. Unsurprisingly, the publishers got to know of the origin of the story, and Parekh was punished for his heinous act, with a dose of his own medicine. Not only does Ray warn the readers against plagiarism, but he also shows how storytelling is a nuanced act. The adventures of Tarini Khuro are his own, which are then stolen by Parekh and published in a Gujarati magazine in the narrative of the story. These stories, in real life, are the creations of Ray. Who then assumes the position of the storyteller in those tales which are found nowhere except their mention in passing in "Tarini Khuro as a storyteller"? The reader is also left to wonder if some of these stories were repeated to Poltu (the narrator of Tarini Khuro's stories) and his friends in the other stories which Tarini Khuro shares with them, and the readers find published, as works of Satyajit Ray.

This set-up resembles the Bengali culture of *adda*. Though there are a few fundamental differences between the set-up of the Tarini Khuro stories, and that of a typical *adda,* these do not disqualify the former as a variation of the latter. Debarati Sen defines *adda* as

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> A kind of informal social talk in Bengali, among friends and colleagues, but its content is always of intellectual significance, addressing issues such as local/global politics, art, literature, and music. Casual conversations and gossip are common in many societies, but the creative performance of this genre by Bengali elites made *adda* a marker of an urban middle-class identity, especially in response to the cultural hegemony of British Imperialism. (521)

From this definition, the interactions between Ghonada and his listeners seem to be a more appropriate fit for this. However, the key element of reciprocity is lacking for both the sets of listeners, more so in the case of Tarini Khuro, who is rarely interrupted while he is narrating his tales.

Despite these differences, it can be argued that the almost exclusively one-way conversations by Tarini Khuro are a kind of adda because it involves a variety, which Sen in the aforementioned quote talks about. Tarini Khuro has discussed the nuances of magic, movies, sports, astrology, superstitions, storytelling, hunting, ghosts, robbery, fraud and so on. While delineating on these topics, Khuro encountered several characters, none of whom were ever found in more than one story. The surprising and almost unbelievable element, however, is that there are three characters, Maharaja Gulab Singh, Daku Tota Singh and amateur actor Ramanimohan Chatterjee[9] who look like Tarinu Khuro at different points of time, to the point where the characters in the story confuse them with Khuro.

This is a narrative technique of storytelling, where the storyteller brings in elements and motifs from the hitherto popular stories into his later tales, to keep the listeners enticed. This is somewhat similar to the argument on embedding made in the article "Notes on Narrative embedding", where the authors opined that embedding can be of different types, which would include the acts of insertion, subordination and homogeneity. (Bal and Tavor 43) This is the embedding which Khuro does effortlessly. He inserts elements from his formerly narrated tales, and ever so often, makes it seem like the tale he is about to narrate is the best and most exciting one the listeners would ever get to enjoy, thus subordinating his

[9] These characters occur in the stories "Maharaja Tarini Khuro", "The wealth of Seth Ganga Ram" and "Tarini Khuro in Tollywood".

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storytelling from the past. However, he manages to maintain the element of homogeneity by keeping some traits of his character consistent throughout the many adventures, like his dislike for stability, his polymath nature, and his tendency to visit new places without having a solid plan thereafter.

These characteristics of Tarini Khuro place him in the line of storytellers who tell the story for the exclusive sake of it. Walter Benjamin in his aforementioned essay dealt with the works of Leskov, while simultaneously delineating the nuances of storytelling. For instance, when Benjamin writes:

> In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story (85)

The readers are immediately reminded of how Tarini Khuro implemented counsel in his stories. In "Tarini Khuro in Tollywood", he showed how one can step up selflessly at the hour of someone's need whom they barely know, while in "The duel at Lucknow" Khuro tried to make his listeners aware that love is transcendental. He does all of this while packing these tales in a wrap of suspense or humour – in the former story it is he who demoralises the recruit Ramanimohan by disguising as a fortune teller, which shatters Ramani's confidence, while in the latter tale, the love story between Hugh Dramond and Isabella materialised in their ghosts re-enacting the day of a fearsome duel.

The difference in age between the two characters (Ghonada and Tarini Khuro) becomes insignificant because their tales are told in the past when they are about the same age. However, the fact that Khuro is an octogenarian does have something to do with the common Bengali notion of the grandparents in a family being the primary source of stories for the children, more often than not. Though Khuro objected to being called "dadu" (Grandpa), he could not possibly have asked school kids to call him Tarini *da.* The age of the listeners also becomes important in this context, as the target audience for both the set of stories is not the same. However, the fundamental difference between these two characters is not in their age, but in their location with respect to the listeners. While Ghonada lives in the

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constant company of the listeners, Tarini Khuro takes a walk and reaches his listeners, as and when he pleases. This seems like the logistical reason behind Ghonada having a lot more stories than Tarini Khuro. It is important to note that Ray did not specify a single instance where Sunanda, Nyapla and the other listeners had sought Khuro out. This takes away a lot of agency from the listeners. Even in Tenida, we can see the narrator Pyala going out and meeting Tenida at a neutral location, which does not happen for Tarini Khuro. This aspect places Khuro a little higher as far as his agency as a storyteller is concerned, but takes away a lot of opportunities for interaction, thus giving Ghonada the edge from a different perspective.

These elements contribute to the argument that the storyteller is a figure who changes his stance, attitude and methods of storytelling to suit the purpose of the story he is telling. Tarini Khuro and Ghonada are fictional characters themselves, whose stories are narrated to us by a different storyteller (Poltu and Sudhir, respectively), which in turn is but an imaginative concoction of the pens of Satyajit Ray and Premendra Mitra, both of whom are master storytellers. The metatextuality comes to the fore as this story-within-a-story sheds some light on the art of storytelling itself. A part of it rests in the ability to structure the narrative in such a way that the reader/listener is hooked till the end. Giles Deleuze in his essay "How do we recognise structuralism" had pointed out seven tenets of structuralism, and these storytellers follow the majority of them in most of their stories, if not all. For instance, the fifth criterion of the "serial", where Deleuze states that signifiers unfold linearly, following Sassure's tenet that the signifier has a linear character (182). This criterion is enacted in the way the events are narrated by Khuro or Ghonada: one character follows the other, and incidents do not come jumbled up in the way they do while remembering something.

The authors take great care to arrange the events in a linear chronology while arranging the stories in an anachronistic pattern, as has been already mentioned with the example of Ghonada. For Tarini Khuro, the order in which the stories appear in the collected volume *Golpo 101* (*101 Stories*) is not necessarily the order in which they took place in Khuro's life. This anachronism in the order of publication displays some rudimentary characteristics of the last tenet of structuralism according to Deleuze: "from the subject to practice" (189). This criterion belongs to the future, and in that act of anachronism, it is

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related to the instance at hand. If a story is narrated from the past at a present moment, then it remains as an indelible mark on the memories of the listeners and readers, which they could refer to in the future. Thus, justifying the title of the last criterion of Deleuze, the storytellers like Khuro or Ghonada move swiftly from being the subject of their own stories which they narrate to practising the art of storytelling itself. This practical act happens in the future corresponding to the time in which the stories took place, which is why this criterion sits well with the instances at hand.

These criteria enlisted by Deleuze structure the stories and the stories within the stories in an essentially metatextual loop. This element of metatextuality not only enhances a structuralist reading of the texts at hand but also contributes to the possibility of extending such a reading to the broader horizon of storytelling in general. If one goes beyond the studied texts in this paper to the realm of *Arabian Nights* or *Aesop's Fables* or even *The Mahabharata* for that matter, it becomes apparent that all of these are essentially a manifestation of storytelling. For instance, The Mahabharata is told to Lord Ganesh by Veda Vyas, and the condition is that the latter cannot stop his narration at any point and the former has to understand everything before he writes it down. Perhaps the structural hero in this scenario is the text itself, which goes through innumerable interpolations and modifications, and yet remains a unique experience in itself irrespective of the version read by anyone. Storytelling can thus be argued to be essentially structuralist, where the differentiation between the signifier and the signified is the key to an individual and independent understanding of the same story by two different listeners or readers.

The structural implications of the stories that these characters tell are manifold. However, not all of the criteria enlisted by Deleuze are followed in the stories which have been discussed or considered in this paper. The fourth criterion of the differentiator and differentiation, for example, is almost nowhere to be found. These exceptions and anomalies argue that the nature of the stories is only borderline structural, and not an exemplary model. The structural nature of the stories also reveals the nature of the storytellers themselves. Since structuralism claims that understanding one unit of an entire system would give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the entire system, could the structuralist implications of the stories narrated by storytellers have certain similarities where understanding the fundamental tenets of one such story would give us the key to unveiling the secret of all the other ones?

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The anomalies which come up while situating the primary texts of this paper in the context of Deleuze serve as an impediment in such a generalisation.

Therefore, the subtle yet sure differences in the stories themselves make them unique. Both Tarini Khuro and Ghonada position themselves as superior to their listeners, and as a result, the narrator places them above the readers while they are narrating their tales from a secondary perspective. It is interesting to note that neither Poltu nor Sudhir was ever seen with a notebook in their hands. In addition to raising the question as to how did they manage to remember the stories in such intricate detail, especially when so much of the story's length is dominated by Khuro and Ghonada's monologues, it also established Tarini Khuro and Ghonada as supreme storytellers. Paired with Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief", an attentive reader would not take long to understand that Poltu and Sudhir, who are but a disguise of Ray and Mitra, have concocted these stories themselves, and then told these stories to the readers as the tall-tales of Tarini Khuro and Ghonada. In a continent and context far from Walter Benjamin, these two stalwarts, with some support from other Bengali storytellers like Tenida, establish themselves as a distinct class all together. The harmless deception of who the storyteller is, contributes to the partially structuralist reading of the stories, as they are all imagined tales, and the awareness of the authors has prevented them from being completely categorised as structuralist blocks. Readers of these tales stand amazed and in awe, as they wonder how these tall tales are spun out of nothing but pure and unadulterated creativity, allowing the unsuspecting reader to enjoy the tales, while keeping enough opportunity for the scholar to dissect their tales along the lines of Deleuze and Benjamin.

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The Structure of 'On the Other Hand' in Anton Chekhov and David Foster Wallace

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***Abstract*:**

At the beginning of 'Authority and American Usage,' David Foster Wallace declares himself to be a language fanatic (a "snoot" as he calls it), and that he is a prescriptivist (a "linguistic conservative"); but then the American author distances himself from prescriptivists (or variants of it) on occasion; he even portrays himself, on one occasion, as a descriptivist (a "linguistic liberal"). In this paper, "The Structure of 'On the Other Hand' in Chekhov and Wallace," I read Wallace's usage essay the way another American author, George Saunders, reads Anton Chekhov's short story, 'Gooseberries.' Saunders observes in *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* that Chekhov's story thinks through a series of "on-the-other-hand" declarations: "Ivan is against happiness; on the other hand, he sure does enjoy swimming." Through this structure, Chekhov is able to convey how petty it is to have a "one-dimensional opinion" about something; or how it is not possible. Similarly, Wallace, or Wallace's persona in the usage essay is that of someone who is not one-dimensional; who does not settle into a single belief regarding English usage; who keeps qualifying his position; and you keep suspending your decision to judge him.

***Keywords*:** David Foster Wallace, George Saunders, Anton Chekhov, American Usage, Prescriptivist, Descriptivist, Happiness.

In 'Authority and American Usage,' a 61-page essay on Bryan A. Garner's *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage (ADMAU),* David Foster Wallace praises the lexicographer for displaying "Democratic Spirit" in the usage dictionary: it is a quality that is a combination of "rigor and humility, i.e., passionate conviction plus a sedulous respect for the convictions of others" (Wallace 72). The democratic spirit is hard to practice, maintain, on certain vexed issues such as "correctness" in contemporary American usage; you have to look at yourself, honestly, and to question yourself, continually, about what motivates you to believe in something, declares Wallace (72). What strategy does Wallace employ to tackle the "highly charged" issue of American usage (72)? In the usage essay—which is "part narrative, part

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argumentative, part meditative, part experiential"—what persona does Wallace project (Garner, *Quack* 78)? At the beginning of the usage essay, Wallace declares himself to be a language fanatic (a "snoot" as he calls it), and that he is a prescriptivist (a "linguistic conservative"); but then the American author distances himself from prescriptivists (or variants of it) on occasion; he even portrays himself, at times, as a descriptivist (a "linguistic liberal") (Wallace 79). In this paper, I read Wallace's usage essay the way another American author, George Saunders, reads Anton Chekhov's short story, 'Gooseberries.' Saunders observes in his book, *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*, that Chekhov's story thinks through a series of "on the other hand" declarations: "Ivan is against happiness; on the other hand, he sure does enjoy swimming" (Saunders ch. 6). Through this structure, Chekhov is able to convey how petty it is to have a "one dimensional opinion" about something; or how it is not possible (ch. 6). Similarly, Wallace, or Wallace's persona in the usage essay is that of someone who is not one-dimensional; who does not settle into a single belief regarding English usage; who keeps qualifying his position; and you keep suspending your decision to judge, to judge him.

I

In the usage essay, Wallace writes about a song he composed as a kid for the people who make a blunder in Standard English; the Wallace family sang this song together on long distance car trips (Wallace 71). A touch of poetic wisdom from Wallace's grammarian mother, Sally Foster, helped Wallace to smuggle into the lyrics of the song the strangulating tone of W.B Yeats—Wallace added the words "widening gyre" from Yeats's 'The Second Coming' to his song (71). (The song for the English-language-debasers shows the high notes Wallace's precocity hits, as well as adumbrates a prescriptivist in the making.) Below is the wailful road song:

When idiots in this world appear
And fail to be concise or clear
And solecisms rend the ear
The cry goes up both far and near
for Blunderdog
Blunderdog

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> Blunderdog
>
> Blunderdog
>
> Pen of Iron, tongue of fire
>
> Tightening the wid'ning gyre
>
> Blunderdo-O-O-O-O-O-O (71)…

In her grammar book, *Practically Painless English*, Sally declared that an improper pronoun reference drove her "up the wall with confusion" (101), and an incorrect verb tense hurt her teeth (125). At home, during supper, if Wallace or his sister committed a usage gaffe, the grammarian mother began to cough, and kept coughing and pretending to choke, as if from lack of oxygen, until the one who made the error set right the wrong (Wallace 71). As a kid, Wallace's favorite advertising howler was "Save up to 50% and more," and it was a sort of an in-joke between the mother and son, and they often laughed about it (Garner, *Quack* 104).

"Grammar Nazis, Usage Nerds, Syntax Snobs, the Grammar Battalion, the Language Police"—these are the terms usually used to describe the usage fanatics; the term that was used, though, in Wallace's home, is "SNOOT" (Wallace 69). Wallace declares that he is a snoot because of his mother; it runs in the family: Wallace's snoot acquaintances, too, have at least one parent whose relation with English usage is rabid (71n. 8). Wallace defines snoot in his usage essay:

> SNOOT (n) (*highly colloq*) is this reviewer's [Wallace's] nuclear family's nickname à clef for a really extreme usage fanatic, the sort of person whose idea of Sunday fun is to hunt for mistakes in the very prose of [William] Safire's column. This reviewer's family is roughly 70 percent SNOOT, which term itself derives from an acronym, with the big historical family joke being that whether S.N.O.O.T. stood for "Sprachgefuhl Necessitates Our Ongoing Tendance" or "Syntax Nudniks Of Our Time" depended on whether or not you were one. (Wallace 69n. 5)

The snoots know the meaning of "*dysphemism*," and let you know that they know it; the snoots know when and how phrasal adjectives are hyphenated, and can recognize a participle dangling; and the snoots know that they know, and they know that not many in their country know or even care about these things—the rules of Standard English—and they judge these people accordingly (70). The snoots "are the Few, the Proud, the More or Less Constantly Appalled at Everyone else"—with everyone else here referring to the non-standard English

users (71). At the beginning of the essay, Wallace wants you to know, through the repeated use of "We" to refer to "snoots," that he is very much a snoot too (71).

Wallace, though, is "uncomfortable" being a snoot, because his bellicosity (vis-à-vis current English usage) is similar to the bellicosity of religious and political conservatives (vis-à-vis current culture) (70). Wallace, as a professor of English, goes through a pattern every semester: after finding solecisms in the first set of his students' essays, he immediately veers from the regular Literature syllabus and begins taking an "Emergency Remedial Usage and Grammar Unit" for the next three weeks—because Wallace is "pathologically obsessed" with Standard English (70n. 6). As he realizes that his students do not know how to identify clauses, or do not know how crucial the word "only" is, and how misplacing it can completely change the meaning of a sentence—'"I only love you" versus "I love only you"' (Garner, *Quack* 103)—Wallace loses his temper; beats his head against the blackboard (Wallace 70n. 6). Wallace writes:

> The truth is that I'm not even an especially good or dedicated teacher; I don't have this kind of fervor in class about anything else, and I know it's not a very productive fervor, nor a healthy one—it's got elements of fanaticism and rage to it, plus a snobbishness that I know I'd be mortified to display about anything else. (70n. 6)

The snoots—or the "prescriptivists"—the ones conservative about change in English and its usage, the ones looking to effectively use language in grammatical and rhetorical sense, are endlessly at war with the "descriptivists"—the liberals, the scientific observers of language, the recorders of language as it's actually used by the native speakers. If the native speaker, for example, confuses—or swaps—the words "infer" and "imply," the descriptivists do not object; for the descriptivists, it's all right (Garner, *Modern* Preface).

Wallace, in his usage essay, takes apart the descriptivists, especially the arguments of the editor, Philip Gove, in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (*W3*) in 1961. *W3*—which enrages the prescriptivists by endorsing "Ok" and "ain't" (the words W3 claims are used by educated population across the United States in the 60s)—declares: "A dictionary should have no truck with artificial notions of correctness or superiority. It should be descriptive and not prescriptive" (Wallace 79). The descriptivists, through their scientific method—i.e. through value-neutral principles, and direct and objective observation—build the contents of their dictionaries; this is how, they believe, every English dictionary and the correctness of the language should be determined.

Gove in *W3* lists five proclamations of descriptivism that Wallace quotes in his essay: "'1—Language changes constantly; 2—Change is normal; 3—Spoken language is language; 4—Correctness rests upon usage; 5—All usage is relative'" (83). Wallace responds to Gove's edicts, as a sort of spokesperson for the prescriptivists, point by point. 1—If "language changes constantly," the question is at what rate and in what proportion (83)? 2—What is a normal change? Is flux proposed by Heraclitus as normal as a slow change? How many people have to not abide by the usage conventions, or how many usage conventions need to be flouted, to say that a change in language has occurred (83)? 3—The prescriptivists do not concern themselves much with spoken English; their usage guides concentrate on "Standard Written English" (SWE) (84). 4—Gove does not specify whose usage is correctness based on, Wallace points out (84). What Gove wants are grammar rules corresponding to the way people actually use the language, and not usage based on rigid rules (84). But whose usage—which group of people—are you going to pay attention to? Wallace asks Gove (84). Is it going to be: "Urban Latinos?" "Boston Brahmins?" "Rural Midwesterners?" "Appalachian Neogaelics" (84)? 5—From Gove's fifth principle, it appears to Wallace that the answer to the question "which group of people?" is "all of them" (84). Gove is proposing to "observe" and "record" every "language behavior" of every native speaker, to include everything in the dictionary, which is of course impossible to do (84). Such a dictionary, even if constructed, Wallace points out, will weigh millions of pounds and require hourly updates (85).

Wallace calls descriptivists' understanding of what "scientific" means "crude and outdated"; the "scientific lexicography" of the descriptivists—which involves observing every act of every native speakers' language behavior and including all these observations in the dictionary—requires them to naively believe that their undertaking is scientifically objective (85). That the observers are part of the phenomena they are observing and are indivisible from the analysis has been shown by "quantum mechanics" and other sciences; the descriptivists do not understand this aspect; that there is no such thing as an observation free of bias (85). Wallace considers the descriptivists to be "pollsters"; the descriptivists are really observing and recording "human behaviors" and not certain "scientific phenomena"—human behaviors that are most of the time imbecile (89).

Issues of grammar and usage are related to ethics rather than science, declares Wallace (89). It is because the descriptivists include every last utterance of the native speakers in the English language; it is because the descriptivists equate "regularities," in the

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native speakers' manner of using the English language, with "norms," that they fail to see the language—the conventions of grammar and usage—to be a matter of ethics (and not science) (89).

A "norm" comes into being when a community agrees that something is the most favorable way of doing things (89). A community may discover that certain ways of using language are better than others for specific purposes; and if one of the purposes involves communicating—which food to eat and which to abstain from—then misplacing modifiers, for instance, can be an important, and even costly, violation of norm. A sentence by a tribesman with a misplaced modifier—"People who eat that kind of mushroom often get sick"—could confuse the recipient of the message (90). Does this statement mean: only if you frequently eat that kind of mushroom, you'll fall sick (90)? Or: you have a high probability of falling sick the very first time you eat that kind of mushroom (90)? Thus, a community that grows and consumes mushrooms has to ensure that they are not misplacing modifiers, and that it is expunged from English usage, states Wallace (90). In other words, given what language is used for in the community, the fact that certain numbers of tribesmen misplace modifiers to talk about the safety of the food does not make misplacing modifier a good thing (90). This is why Wallace draws an analogy between ethics and English usage: if, for example, a certain percentage of the population evades paying their taxes, scold and punish their kids, it does not mean that they think these acts are good ideas; the descriptivists, precisely, ride on this fallacious reasoning: if "Everybody Does It" then somehow it's all right; all right to say it (90n. 33). Wallace writes:

> The whole point of establishing norms is to help us evaluate our actions (including utterances) according to what we as a community have decided our real interests and purposes are (90).

Wallace understands that it is very difficult for a community to come to an agreement on norms; but when the descripivists assume all norms regarding usage to be "arbitrary" and easily expendable, you have the above misplaced modifier and mushroom-like confusion (90-1).

Thus, Wallace, in his usage essay, as a snoot prescriptivist, finds flaws in the methodology and arguments of the descriptivists. However, he distances himself from the "pop SNOOTs" (79n. 21): the columnists, the practitioners of "Popular Prescriptivism" (79). Wallace observes that pop prescriptivists are at times humorous, but much of what they write

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appears to him to be old men carping about the English language getting sullied (79). Wallace finds, for example, John Simon's arguments in *Paradigms Lost* regarding Standard Black English (SBE) hidebound and offensive and facile. Regarding SBE, Simon writes:

> As for 'I be,' 'you be,' 'he be,' etc., which should give us all the heebie-jeebies, these may indeed be comprehensible, but they go against all accepted classical and modern grammars and are the product not of a language with its roots in history but of ignorance of how a language works (79-80).

The above quote from Simon's book evidently carries a tone of plutocracy; the other pop American prescriptivists like Newman and Safire also write in a similar tone when writing about English usage—a tone they borrow from the hardcore British prescriptivists, Eric Partridge and H. W. Fowler, Wallace points out (80). Wallace, therefore, advertises himself as someone who does not write in a plutocratic tone regarding English usage, does not belong to the pop-snoot category.

But, though, he is not in the pop-snoot camp, the camp that despises SBE, Wallace is not "for" the use of the dialect in essays either. After reading the first couple of their essays at the beginning of the semester, Wallace lectures his black students, in a private conference, against using SBE. In the conference, Wallace tells his black students, at the cost of scaring and perplexing and offending them, that what they are here to study in the college is a "foreign dialect," and this dialect is known as "Standard Written English" (SWE); and the dialect the black students are using, in their essays in Wallace's English class, is SBE (108). And there are several differences between SWE and SBE (108). One of the differences is grammatical: double negatives are considered an error in SWE but not so in SBE (108). There is also stylistic difference between SBE and SWE: in SWE, states Wallace, subordinate clauses are usually used in the early parts of sentences, and these subordinates are set off by commas; and writing that doesn't adhere to this SWE comma rule is considered "choppy" (Wallace 108).

In his lecture, Wallace almost empathizes with his black students for being given low grades, by other prescriptivist professors in the college, for failing to comply with the rules of a language that is "foreign" to them—a fact that has been unknown to the black students, until Wallace acquaints them with the thought that they are "foreigners" in SWE (108). But Wallace, at the same time, gives his students injunction against using SBE in their essays (108).

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And if the students want to argue in their essays, for instance, that being forced to write in SWE when one is fluent in SBE is "racist" and "unfair," they still have to construct these arguments in pristine SWE for their prescriptive professors—prescriptivists in general—to pay attention to them (109). James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and other successful African-Americans, know this, Wallace points out, and that is why their speeches and prose are in perfervid SWE (109).

The lessons about why it is essential to learn SWE, though, are difficult to convey to his black students because it is bluntly "elitist" (107). Wallace writes:

> The real truth, of course, is that SWE is the dialect of the American elite. That it was invented, codified, and promulgated by Privileged WASP Males and is perpetuated as "Standard" by same. That it is the shibboleth of the Establishment, and that it is an instrument of political power and class division and racial discrimination and all manner of social inequity (107).

These issues are touchy to bring up in the English class because the one who is lecturing them is Wallace; and Wallace is, precisely, "a Privileged Wasp Male" and an emblem of the "Establishment," which facts Wallace is inordinately conscious of (107). In his lecture, Wallace tells his black students that the white people have developed SWE, and they—the powerful white people in powerful offices—use SWE now, and, therefore, the dialect might as well be called, "Standard White English" (108-9). Wallace tells his black students that he is giving them the "straight truth" because he respects them; he tells them that if they want to succeed in American culture, they have to learn to use SWE (108-9).

By making the above unfiltered pro-SWE arguments to his black students, Wallace distances himself from what he refers to as the "dogmatic snoots": the type of prescriptivist professors who fail to, or does not feel the need to give arguments about why students must choose SWE over SBE (or other dialects) whilst writing (107n. 60).

The dogmatic snoots consider SWE to be the only dialect in English; and, for them, any student failing to acknowledge this fact is ignorant and character-wise deficient (105). This is tantamount to a preacher delivering sermons, says Wallace, and for a teacher to hold such a preachy attitude is toxic: the teacher has to put in the hard rhetorical yards to make the audience (students) agree on the usefulness of learning SWE, and not presume this to be self-evident (105-6). And when the traditional prescriptivists—the dogmatic snoots—skip this step, take SWE's superiority to be intrinsic and self-explanatory, take themselves to be no

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less than a "prophet" of this dialect (107), you see "elitism" being practiced, feels Wallace (107n. 60).

Wallace indicates that he does not practice elitism in his English class; to his black students, he makes his pro-SWE arguments comprising elitism, explicitly and overtly and loudly; he tells them why SWE, despite teeming elitism, is a desirable dialect to learn the conventions of: Wallace strives to portray himself in the usage essay, therefore, as belonging to the snoot-but-not-dogmatic-snoot category (107n. 60). But when he is among peers, Wallace crosses into the descriptivist camp. Wallace has two native-English dialects: the SWE of his parents and his peers' Rural Midwestern (RM) (99). With his peers, Wallace uses the nonstandard English; he uses: "He don't" instead of "He doesn't," and "Where's it at?" for "Where is it?" (99). He uses these constructions because he does not wish to be a pariah among his peers; and also because he considers these "RMisms" to be better than their SWE equivalents, despite being a snoot (99).

Wallace reckons that some of the traditional prescriptivist rules are "stupid," and those who endorse them are "contemptible and dangerous" type of snoots (100). The traditional prescriptivists, for instance, give injunction against splitting infinitives (100). This stupidity of the prescriptivists, Wallace points out, is born out of a misreading of Latin—the language from which English borrows heavily (100). Since infinitives are only one word in Latin, you cannot split them; the earliest prescriptivists of English, in their enthusiasm to copy the Latin language, overlook this technical aspect, and decide against splitting English infinitives too (100). And the legacy of stupidity lives on through traditional prescriptivists—the contemptible and dangerous snoots. Again, Wallace attempts to portray himself as someone who does not belong to the dangerous-snoot category; again, Wallace is striving to advertise himself as the owner of opinions that are not one-dimensional.

II

In the usage essay, Wallace displays a persona not unlike Anton Chekhov in 'Gooseberries.' Though Chekhov and Wallace write on disparate subjects, though 'Gooseberries' is a short story and Wallace's text an essay, the structure of their arguments appears kindred: both the structures sidestep one-dimensionality.

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In 'Gooseberries,' two friends, Ivan and Burkin, are out hunting on the plains of Russia, when Burkin reminds Ivan that Ivan is supposed to tell him a story (Chekhov 371). It starts to rain the moment Ivan is about to begin the narration (371). For shelter, they go to the farm of their friend, Alyohin; there the three swim in the river; of the three, Ivan appears to have the most fun swimming: he dives, floats, says repeatedly joyously, "By God! Lord, have mercy on me"; he savors the rain drops falling on his face, and is last to leave the water, and that too only when Burkin shouts at him to get out (374). Back in the warmth of the drawing room, Ivan, finally, begins narrating the story about his brother, Nikolay.

Hankering to own a property (with a gooseberry patch) in the countryside, Nikolay lives frugally; he marries a widow for her money and due to his frugality, she dies; after her death, he purchases a plot in the countryside. When Ivan visits Nikolay on his new estate, Ivan sees a man in a fervent state of happiness. On the day of Ivan's visit, the gooseberry bushes bear fruits for the first time; Nikolay looks at the plateful of berries, silently, for a minute with teary eyes (380). Then he pops a berry into his mouth, and glances at Ivan with an expression analogous to a kid who finally gets the toy he has been nagging his parents for a long time (380). Nikolay eats the berries rapaciously and says repeatedly: "How tasty! Ah, how delicious" (380)! The sight of his happy brother sickens Ivan. About his aversion to happiness, to happy ones, Ivan gives a speech to his friends:

> Behind the door of every contented, happy man there ought to be someone standing with a little hammer and continually reminding him with a knock that there are unhappy people, that however happy he may be, life will sooner or later show him its claws, and trouble will come to him—illness, poverty, losses, and then no one will see or hear him, just as now he neither sees nor hears others (381).

But the man with the "little hammer" does not exist, complaints Ivan; and the happy man—the man with few innocuous worries and much tranquility on his side—eats gooseberries (even sour and unripe ones like Nikolay) with relish, without a care for the unhappy lot (381).

The happy man is able to live happily because the unhappy man lets him; because the unhappy man chooses to carry his load, silently; because statistics, and not the unhappy man, wail, protest. The statistics cry out that X numbers of children are dead due to malnutrition this year; and that X numbers of people have been institutionalized this year; and that X numbers of people have been poisoned to death due to consumption of spurious liquor this year (381). (The numbers on the page as though scream out, like the figure in Edvard

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Munch's *Scream*, with hands on its ears, enacting the angst, venting the pent-up unhappiness.) Ivan implores Burkin to work for the benefit of others, the unhappy mute people. Ivan says:

> There is no happiness and there should be none, and if life has a meaning and a purpose, that meaning and purpose is not our happiness but something greater and more rational. Do good (382)!

After his speech on "happiness," all three retire for the night. Ivan dozes off the moment he hits the bed, forgetting to throw away the stinky burnt tobacco of his pipe that he keeps on the table; Burkin is unable to sleep though; he tries to figure out the source of the odious smell (384).

In *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*, Saunders explicates seven Russian nineteenth-century short stories; and 'Gooseberries' is one of them. Apart from Chekhov, the book features stories of Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, and Nikolai Gogol. Though the stories might come across as not being concerned with protestations of any sort, as not being politically hued at all, as just being everyday domestic situations, Saunders refers to them as "resistance literature" (Saunders Introduction).

These are obliquely political stories, which are written by "progressive reformers" in the climate of "censorship," written keeping in mind that the "slants" and accents of their words might put them behind bars, or banish them from the country, or line them up in front of the firing brigade (Introduction). These stories' inexplicit resistance, reckons Saunders, not only comes from the "radical idea" of considering every person to be worth paying attention to; but also comes from the equally radical idea that by observing a single person, you are able to find "the origins of every good and evil capability of the universe" (Introduction).

These Russian stories, Saunders observes, are preoccupied with difficult, non-cheery questions such as: How to live here? What do you have to achieve here? What do you have to value? What does truth mean? How can you recognize truth? How do you stay joyful despite knowing that the people you love are inevitably going to die? How can you live peacefully knowing that some people have more than sufficient and others have barely anything (Introduction)? And also Ivan's tacit question in his speech on happiness in *Gooseberries*: Since you know that there are unhappy people in the world, how can you be satisfied with your lot and yourself, how can you be happy?

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Ivan feels an immense sadness at the sight of his brother, Nikolay, reveling in eating the gooseberries that have grown in his farm; the plateful of gooseberries doesn't let Nikolay sleep; he keeps taking trips to the plate, over and over, throughout the night, to eat one more berry, one more berry, one more berry (Chekhov 380). And one more berry. What Ivan does not tell his brother, he tells his friends: the happy man must have in his room someone who can keep hitting him with a hammer, to remind the happy man of the existence of unhappy people; and also that no matter how happy he may be now, life's vicissitudes are soon going to knock on his door (381). Ivan's final declaration to his friends, Burkin and Alyohin, is: "There is no happiness and there should be none…" (382).

Burkin and Alyohin find Ivan's story about his gooseberry-obsessed brother (and the accompanying speech on happiness) to be dull: Burkin and Alyohin, sitting in the warm drawing room, drinking tea and having jam, hanker for a more elegantly laced story about people and women, stories about the animate-looking ancestors staring down at them from the gilded frames (Saunders ch. 6). To Saunders, it is obvious why Burkin and Alyohin do not find the story interesting; it is because these two exemplify the kind of people that Ivan is talking about: the well-fed, the immaculately washed, the happy bourgeois who do not like their pleasure-seeking to be interrupted, who are chronically deaf to despairing, mood-altering narratives (ch. 6).

As a reader (unlike Burkin and Alyohin), you might support Ivan's thoughts on happiness at first, and travel with the moralist as if in his bike's sidecar, nodding in agreement with his arguments. But you are bound to reconsider your position vis-à-vis Ivan, the impressions that you form about him, after the second last paragraph of 'Gooseberries,' Saunders points out (ch. 6). The mind-turning paragraph tells you that Burkin is unable to sleep because Ivan—the holder of the view that the happy man must be hammered continually to remind him about the unhappy people, and that there is no such thing as happiness, and that life's objective is not happiness but serving others—because, the anti-happiness evangelist, Ivan's unclean pipe gives off a stink (ch. 6). Ivan is oblivious. Ivan smokes, derives pleasure, and forgets to clean the pipe before going to sleep, forgets about his lecture on doing good, being thoughtful of others (ch. 6).

Does Ivan's careless gesture (with the pipe) subtract from the truth of his lecture (ch. 6)? Is it still true? Suddenly, you are not so sure about Ivan; Ivan indulges in pleasure, happiness, but advises against happiness. Therefore, the question is: to indulge in happiness

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or not? Saunders turns the page back to the episode of swimming in a river in the rain to answer this question.

Ivan comes out of the bathing-cabin and throws himself into the river; the wild strokes of his arms on water create waves and disturb the lilies afloat; he swims to the mid-point of the river and plunges with an aim to touch bottom; he does this repeatedly; he plunges and touches bottom; Ivan even swims across to casually talk with the peasants; and then he dives back in and floats on water so that the rain caresses his face (Chekhov 373-4). Only when Burkin shouts—"You've had enough!"—only then does Ivan emerge from the water (374).

Is Ivan for or against happiness? Saunders reckons that despite his anti-happiness lecture later in the story, Ivan still yearns for happiness; in fact, Ivan appears to yearn for it way more than Burkin and Alyohin in the swimming-in-a-river-in-the-rain situation (Saunders ch. 6). Does this reading of Ivan, in a state of euphoria, prove that he is for happiness? Does this mean that the previous reading, of Ivan being against happiness, now stands cancelled? Saunders provides the answer:

> No. The two readings coexist, making a truth bigger than either would have alone. The story just got enlarged. It is, yes, still about the possible decadence of happiness, but it's also now about how trivial it is to hold a one-dimensional opinion. Or how impossible it is (ch. 6).

Ivan despises happiness; when he looks at a joyful man, an element of feverish despair grips him; but he, simultaneously, finds happiness to be indispensable in the river (ch. 6). Ivan sidesteps one-dimensionality, in other words; the stinky pipe in the second-last paragraph changes your understanding of him, makes Ivan ambiguous: if the speech on happiness sounds, on first instance, to be an angry protest on behalf of the mute, the downtrodden (Saunders ch. 6)—"Look at life: the insolence and idleness of the strong" (Chekhov 381)—it now sounds merely an ill-tempered outburst (Saunders ch. 6). Ivan is not fond of the bourgeois (the strong) and their ways of living, but he is not fond of the oppressed (the weak) too (ch. 6): "The ignorance and the brutishness of the weak" (Chekhov 381).

Chekhov's story, obviously, proceeds through a method of self-contradiction: a paragraph or two highlights certain aspects of a concept (for example, happiness), while another paragraph counters these aspects. Chekhov's story, states Saunders, does not teach you "what to think" about the concept of happiness; rather it facilitates in thinking about the concept; the structure helps you to think (ch. 6). And how does this story's structure think?

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The structure thinks, says Saunders, in terms of '"on the other hand"' declarations: Ivan loathes happiness, happy people; on the other hand, he is rapturous while swimming in a river in the rain; Ivan's gestures in the water are self-centered; on the other hand, Burkin's constant tendencies to rein in Ivan ("You've had enough!") are also irritating; Alyohin is living a frugal life in his farm; on the other hand, Alyohin blackens the water due to his excessive neglect of personal hygiene; it may be petty to spend a disproportionate amount of time obsessing over owning a gooseberry-filled farm like Nikolay; on the other hand, Nikolay is at least passionate about something, even if it is a fruit of a particular type; on the other, other hand Alyohin is not responsible for someone's death (like Nikolay is) for practicing frugality (ch. 6).

III

The structure of Wallace's usage essay, similarly, thinks in terms of a series of "on the other hand" statements. Wallace creates a persona in the essay who keeps qualifying himself, and, thus, strives to sidestep one-dimensionality: Wallace declares himself to be a prescriptivist—a snoot (Wallace 71n. 8); on the other hand, he is not a dogmatic snoot (the kind who finds no need to explain to the students about why SWE is a desirable dialect to master) (105-6); Wallace criticizes the descriptivists for thinking of themselves as "scientists," for thinking they are observing "scientific phenomena," when they are merely observing "moronic" behaviors of human beings and tabulating it (89); on the other hand, he finds a number of traditional prescriptive rules to be "stupid," like splitting infinitives, and those endorsing it "contemptible and dangerous" type of snoots (100); Wallace lashes out at Gove's proclamations of language changing constantly and change being quite a normal thing (83); on the other hand, he acknowledges that conventions of usage and English itself change from time to time, and if it didn't, you'd all still be communicating like Chaucer (75); Wallace sort of laments that students are being taught to write descriptively in school, to write abandoning "systematic grammar, usage, semantics, rhetoric, etymology" (81); on the other hand, he is not an admirer of the prescriptive columnists or pop snoots (who grumble about English language blunderers) (79); Wallace finds certain dismissals of SBE, facile and disturbing, like Simon's comments in *Paradigms Lost* (79); on the other hand, he gives injunction to his students of color that they cannot use their native dialect—SBE—in their

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essays (108); on the other, other hand Wallace uses nonstandard English of Rural Midwestern with his peers, not just to be accepted in the group, but also because he finds some of the "RMisms" to be superior than their SWE equivalents (99).

In the above list of contradictory "on the other hand" statements, does a latter reading ("Wallace actually, sometimes, has descriptivist inclinations") override the earlier one at the beginning of Wallace's essay ("Wallace is a prescriptivist, a snoot")? The answer, following Saunders, is no. Both the "readings coexist, making a truth bigger than either would have alone"; the essay's canvas just gets bigger (Saunders ch. 6). The essay is, of course, still about a language fanatic (a snoot, a prescriptivist), but it's also now about how petty it is to have a one-dimensional attitude/opinion. Or how it is not possible.

Wallace declares in the essay that it is always tempting to slide into the "established dogmatic camp," and to let your stance solidify around the stance of the camp and "become inflexible," and to start thinking of the other camp as devilish or mad, and to begin expending disproportionate amount of energy/time trying to out-shout them (Wallace 72). Wallace submits that it is way easier to be on the side of the dogmatic than the democratic camp (72). By making his arguments on usage through the structure of "on the other hand" statements—which structural play might not be noticeable on first read because Wallace does not lay out the above self-contradictory parts, explicitly, one after the other—Wallace presents a flexible persona; a persona that makes you reconsider, again and again, your previous judgment on him.

'Gooseberries,' likewise, is structured with the aid of self-contradictory "on the other hand" declarations, reckons Saunders, because it wants you to refrain from reading on automatic pilot, and to stay attentive that the concept of happiness is not treated simplistically, and that the concept does not harden at any point and develop falsity (Saunders ch. 6). Chekhov's story, therefore, keeps clarifying the concept, and, in the process, keeps defeating your attempts, over and over, to "judge" it (ch. 6). You want to decide, once and for all, whether the story is "for" or "against" the concept of happiness, so that you too can be for or against it; but the story thwarts your instinctive move of gaining a firm foothold; the story desires to defer judgment, endlessly (ch. 6). Saunders writes:

> It's hard to be alive. The anxiety of living makes us want to judge, be sure, have a stance, definitively decide. Having a fixed, rigid system of belief can be a great relief (ch. 6).

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You can decide not to swim in the rain in the river, or not to swim at all and to sell off your swimming trunks/suits; you can choose to shrug your shoulders and look away in the presence of beauty; you can aim to live as a fervent advocate of "anti-happiness," and drive away the constant uncertainty (ch. 6). Or you can, on the contrary, live as a fervent advocate of "pro-happiness," deciding that every step of yours must be in the service of some form of enjoyment, celebration, unabashed merrymaking, and, thus, extricate yourself from the constant confusion (ch. 6).

Every viewpoint, reckons Saunders, is problematic; if you fanatically believe in it, the point of view turns erroneous (ch. 6). Saunders is not trying to dissuade readers from taking a stance regarding something; rather he is trying to convey that no stance is tenable for too long (ch. 6). Saunders writes:

> We're perpetually slipping out of absolute virtue and failing to notice, blinded by our desire to *settle in*—to finally stop fretting about things and relax forever and just be correct; to find an agenda and stick with it (ch. 6).

Saunders mentions that he likes reading Chekhov because the author appears to be totally sans "agenda"; the Russian author is curious about everything, but he is not zealously attached to any belief system (ch. 6). In Wallace's essay, to begin with, you find a persona zealously attached to a particular belief system of English usage; he is a prescriptivist, a snoot, Wallace openly declares; but then he turns a traitor.

In this essay I have shown how reading Wallace's usage essay through the structure of "on the other hand" that Chekhov employs in 'Gooseberries,' one discovers a persona who sidesteps one-dimensionality, and who does not let his position solidify regarding contemporary American usage, and in the process prevents it from becoming false or dogmatic.

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Beyond Theory: The Necessity of a Pluralist Framework in Comparative Literature

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***Abstract*:**

There are many ways of practising comparative literary analysis; the methods differ. When one says 'method', what does the term imply? Generally, to have a method, one must first have a theory. It is this dynamic of theory and method that the paper intends to explore. It is because of the pluralist assumption of comparative literature - the plurality of languages and cultures - the paper proposes that reading or methods of a scholar cannot be guided by theories. However, reading itself implies reading from a perspective. This 'perspective' is what this paper calls a flexible framework that is democratic enough to allow the scholar to perceive the differences in texts. In the spirit of pluralism, the paper puts forth a framework of intersubjectivity, understanding, and the foregrounding of difference.

***Keywords*:** Plurality, Intersubjectivity, Essence, Entextualisation, and Difference.

Introduction:

The so-called crisis that Comparative Literature is in, is a crisis of methodology. To use comparison as a tool for the phenomenon of reading is essentially what comparative theory tries to propose. This paper looks at one of the theories, and by extension, a method of comparative literature, featured in *A Companion To Comparative Literature*, to test its validity and to propose the idea of a conceptual framework as opposed to theory. In their introduction to *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas say that dominant theoretical paradigms like feminism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis etc. have become prevalent in the study of literary texts in the late 20th century, and new theoretical interventions like new historicism and post-colonialism have defined and highly influenced the field of comparative literature. Behdad and Thomas quote Kenneth Surin when

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he says "from a traditional kind of 'comp lit' [the practice of comparative literature is moving] towards a more intellectually ramified 'comparitism' involving a diverse range of theoretical paradigms" (Behdad et al. 4).

This paper calls into question theoretical paradigms and their potential to be turned into actual practice that assists in a comparative reading. But, what, in the first place, is a comparative reading? And why comparison? In what ways can one form relations with the text? This paper explores such questions, attempts to understand and answer them, and proposes a framework for the reading of literary texts that can unravel the 'being that is seen through literature'. It does so by first providing a subjective reading of Michael Lucery's theory. This paper then provides explores a subjective understanding of literature and comparative literature, and then talks about the implications of such proposition: to move from the fixity of theory to the fluidity of a conceptual framework.

Michael Lucey's *A Literary Object's Contextual Life* and its Implications:

Featured under 'theoretical directions' in Behdad and Thomas's book, Michael Lucey opens his theoretical standpoint by asking a very important question: how does one make meaning of a work of art or literature? He draws the attention of the reader not only to the production of texts but asks them to think of their transmission, circulation and reproduction. He says that when one takes into consideration these phenomena, the meaning held by the text becomes clear. Lucey then goes on to describe various ways in which the ability of a reader to experience a text is based on the "history that brought us to it, on the institutional situation in which we find ourselves with it …" (Behdad et al. 121). The knowledge, sensitivity, and experience of an individual, he says, are not simply personal, but outcomes of his particular interaction with the structured universe. It is this collective experience of a work of art by many such people, he says, that helps produce a public meaning, as a result of the circulation and transmission of literary objects. According to him, the initial days of the life of a literary object, after its publication, are 'fundamentally social.' He quotes from Pierre Bourdieu's *Intellectual Field and Creative Project* - "Society intervenes at the very centre of the creative project and the way artists have to 'face the social definition of their work… the success or failure it has had, the interpretation of it that has been given" (Behdad et al. 122).

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He then talks about how the meaning of literary texts is made differently when one is given a particular direction to reading before their reading happens. He uses Colette's short story as an example to substantiate his argument. He draws on an example from the French secondary school curriculum from 1920-1930 that featured Colette's *The Last Fire* and *Sleepless Nights*, which were dedicated to her female lover, Mathilde de Morny. However, unlike the original short stories, the stories included in the curriculum rendered different meanings because of the 'strong form of editing' they underwent to intentionally depict heterosexuality in the place of homosexuality for convenient inclusion into the school curriculum. This, Lucey says, happens through 'entextualisation' – a "process of lifting text out of context, placing it in another context and adding metapragmatic qualifications to it, thus specifying the conditions for how texts should be understood, what they mean and stand for, and so on" (Behdad et al. 125).

Honore de Balzac's *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* is another French work from the 19th century that, Lucey says, is interested in the history of same-sex sexualities and their literary representation. This text illustrates the sociological and epistemological curiosity of Balzac with respect to the same-sex relationships he witnessed around him. Lucey says that "the text or the contexts on their own, reveals to us now something about the history of sexuality, about the use of this literary text within the history of sexuality, and also about the ongoing production of meaning through repeated contextualization" (Behdad et al. 129). As some cultures do not allow certain reading practices of Colette's work, the English resisted the circulation of Balzac's work in England because of the "differing French and English conceptualization of and valuation of what is 'real' and 'realistic' in literary representation … [and] differing aesthetic tendencies … [based on] aesthetic, sociological, and epistemological dimensions" (Behdad et al. 134).

Theoretical and Literary Analysis of Lucey's Standpoint:

Lucey puts forth his theory of entextualsation and explores same-sex relationships in the two texts by suspending them in different contexts. Lucey's theory is illuminatory on the history of a text, its context, and its location. The word location, as scholars believe, is important to

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the practice of Comparative Literature as it plays a vital role in the ever-present cycle of expression or utterance and the understanding and interpretation of that utterance.

This paper foregrounds a particular way of *relating* to a literary work. For the practice of Comparative Literature, that is, to compare, one must take into consideration more than one text. Comparison, this way, presupposes a practice that always looks at something that is 'more than one'. It presupposes an 'other'. The comparatist must make sense of the two or more literary texts in front of them, understand them and then provide their relation to the texts. For this, one must first start by understanding what a text is. According to Roland Barthes' *From Work to Text*, a text is a "methodological field" that is experienced in language and does not end on a certain page like a book. The text lives inside discourse, weaves through other texts and is plural in nature. What one can understand by this statement is that the state of being of a text is undeniably plural - that it is always in dialogue or in relation with another text, yet a Text, as opposed to a work, cannot be systematised and engulfed inside a theory.

The comparatist perspective in this way, that is of presupposing an 'other', upholds plurality in its assumption. To establish one's relation to texts, one must engage themselves in the reading of them. To study this reading then becomes one of the objects of study for comparatists.

Reading, for a comparatist, is a singular event. This means that it happens anew every time. Through the event of reading, Literature is born. Syed A. Sayeed explains this phenomenon lucidly when he says: "Literature is a complex event, which begins with the aim of the author to create a text that would compel a particular perspective and terminates in the success of the reader in appropriating that text in a certain mode. To use a somewhat old-fashioned terminology, a text has only literary potentiality, which must be activated by the reader for literature to happen" (Sayeed 28). The key word here is 'activated' because it is the reader's act of reading and understanding that brings literature into existence. As Barthes would say, the author is dead the moment the text is produced. What then makes a text 'literature' is the act of reading and an active engagement of the reader who brings meaning to the text, which otherwise would be a piece of paper with symbols written on it. As each reader comes to the text with their own understanding of his surroundings and experiences, every act of reading is unique in its own time and space and each unique act thus produces

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different meanings. Barthes writes, "but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (148). The meaning being made from the text is made 'by' the 'destination,' the reader' and not the 'origin,' the author, Barthes points out. This way, the meaning of a book is plural as it is made and remade endlessly by different readers rather than being assigned to the notion of an all-powerful author.

This endeavour to make meaning is then also affected and dependent on the *language-use* of the author and this must be acknowledged when one is writing about the event of literature. David E. Linge, in the introduction to Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, writes: "Our possession of language, or better, our possession by language, is the ontological condition for our understanding of the texts that address us" (Gadamar xxix). What is ontological here is the being of 'our understanding' and reading, but this ontology is existentially embodied by readers. This essentialises the role of the reader: that the reader is an embodied consciousness placed in a particular time and space who is engaged in the textual practice of reading.

It is through this understanding of literature that one can associate literature with being as something existential, as one enters a particular situation through literature, that is, through language and makes meaning out of it. What one encounters inside literature is the *other* or *difference*. Comparative Literature foregrounds the fact that it can never truly know the difference that it encounters in a text. Hence, a comparatist can only provide their relation to the text. The ethical impulse underlying this practice seeks to understand the difference, rather than erase it or misappropriate it for personal gain. In his *Notes on Comparative Literature*, Sayeed writes: "... It [Comparative Literature] denies itself the luxury of a deferring silence as an option. It confronts the external plurality of literatures while embracing the interior singularity of literature without compromise and out of this fecund negotiation comes all that is valuable in the endeavour of comparative literature" (Sayeed 32). What is presented in the preceding two statements is what lies at the core of comparative literature - the practice of it cannot be silent to the fact that, while comparing, the two literary elements are not taken in isolation. They exist in relation to the literary others in their respective systems while retaining the autonomy of expression. What this means is that the single texts - interior singularities - cannot be representative of the languages or literary

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systems - external pluralities - they are placed in; they are part of a system, but not representative of the system itself. Comparative literature, according to Sayeed, is the practice of comprehending these systems without compromising the independence of the particulars - literature - that are inside the systems.

The assumption of Comparative Literature that difference exists does not seek to intentionally draw strict boundaries, but rather, it propels itself to consider more than a singularity. The establishment that the subject is always in relation to difference begs the question: what is this relation to difference? The relation that the comparatist takes up is one of understanding, and not of knowing. This is the ethical impetus of comparative thought - that the 'other' can never be an object that one *knows*; the other is always a subject, like an 'I', so that an 'I' can *relate* to them. Therefore, one's reading of the other will always be subjective, and never objective, as one's utterances are always human, and therefore conditioned by experience and influence. They are located inside what Raymond Williams calls the 'structures of feeling' (132).

However, one must avoid the danger of saying that one's expression or utterance is representative of one's structure of feeling or context. This is because every expression is a response to a situation and it exists in its singularity not to show us the situation but to meaning itself. At the same time, one cannot be outside of history in some isolated location and grasp the meaning of the text. One cannot, as Hans Robert Jauss says, 'feign objectivity' (29). Ipshita Chanda, in her introduction to *Historiography,* writes:

> "Perhaps the most tantalising answer to this dilemma has been offered by Marx, who pointed out that man makes history, but not in the conditions of his own making. It is this dialectic (between agency and structure, or between the individual and the collective, or self and system, or any corresponding dyad according to the theoretical proclivities of the reader) that forms the dynamic of history as a process… " (Chanda viii).

So, therefore, while man does write and does make history, what the event of writing points towards is not *only* history, or only *contexts*. Events are always open to interpretation when one realises that the interpreters are thinking subjects. The challenge then, is to have a framework that guides one's interpretation but does not fix it. It is here that intersubjectivity can become the field of comparative literature as comparatists navigate the waters of various

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literatures. While some scholars agree that contexts are important and that they can be found inside texts, this paper differs from Lucey in the following ways. Lucey fails to provide his understanding of what a literary object is when he writes:

> It can become part of our critical practice to learn to watch ourselves doing those things, to find ways to objectify our own relations with literary objects, to objectify the set of practices that make up our "approach" to literature, to study the history (in which we ourselves are caught up) of the use, circulation, transmission of this or that literary or cultural artefact (Behdad et al. 121).

Comparatists compare, and for one to compare texts one has to understand a text, rather than use it. The understanding can then be articulated as a *relation* to the text. If one were to approach a text with a predetermined 'usage' of it in their mind, one would end up objectifying the difference one encounters in the text rather than understanding it, simply because one would be 'looking for a use' of the difference. As discussed above, one cannot objectify their relations with literary texts. It is always a relation of *someone* with someone or something else. A comparative reading, however, can question and study one's subjective relations with a text as the study or reading of a subject, and not of an object.

Lucey uses Collete and Balzac's stories to comment on the sexual politics of their time. The problem with using what is inside works of fiction to support what is non-fiction is that this inquiry then becomes sociological/anthropological and fails to be a literary enquiry. To make a literary enquiry would be to show how a work of literature produces the literary effect. Using literature to show how society functions would have to come under a different discipline. Dr Syed Sayeed explains this split between fact and fiction in his paper, *Freedom of Expression, Literature, Fact and Fiction*: "Fiction is an expression of what is imagined, which means that it does not represent the real. *We perceive what is real and imagine what is not real* [and vice versa] … Therefore, fiction is the *other* of fact and they stand in a relationship of mutual exclusiveness" (7). Further, he says, fact and fiction are only related to each other by their "*mutual non-relation*" (10). Thus, one of the very important points to understand is that when fact enters a frame of fiction - a book, a movie, a play - it loses its hold on its truth-value, as fiction fundamentally is what is imagined or created. So, it is important to remember that literature is a fictive institution.

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However, the *censorship* of the letter "e" in Colette's *Nuits Blanches* which Lucey uses to put forth his theory is very much real. The decision to censor same-sex love in the publication shows the nature of that particular publication house and points to the existence of, among other things, a dominant structure of feeling that was heteronormative in nature which erased the differences in sexuality.

Lucey then introduces the concept of 'entextualisation'. He asks the reader to consider the possibility of an aspect of a text becoming salient only later. He says that 're-entextualization' allows this. But, one does not need to 're-contextualise' a text to understand it. Rather, one needs to study how it was received. In his theory, Lucey talks about circulation and transmission but never about the reception of the text by the reader. The reader must not be treated passively but as a formative of history itself. One must aim to make their enquiries with an understanding that presupposes a dialogical relationship to the text. Different readings from different times make up the eventfulness of literary history - in this way, the text is like an undulating landscape: always opening and closing, revealing and concealing at the same time new experiences that new readers pull into the present by reading something that was written in a different time. Jauss explicates this understanding in his theory of reception and proposes a 'horizon of expectation' as a tool to understand reception. When he writes about reading in the context of experience, he says that reading an unknown text will have references or inferences from something that is known and this knowledge builds a reader's expectation towards a middle and an end of the text. Each text, in this way, evokes earlier 'horizons' in the genre, time and place. "... Through the negation of the familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness," the horizons of expectations then get altered or pushed or even just met because of the event of reading, and these effects, in turn, can produce poetic effects on the reader (Jauss 25).

What can be inferred from this is that the horizons of the dominant structures of feeling in which Collete and Balzac wrote, were hostile towards the expressions of same-sex relationships. Jauss's theory also explains the rise in studying lesbian and gay writing that Lucey writes about: "With the rise of lesbian and gay literary studies in the late 1970s, the importance of the original context of *The Tendrils of the Vine* began to be reasserted" (Behdad et al. 125). This shows that the horizons of the readers of the 1970s were stretched

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further to expect or to accommodate the same expressions of same-sex relationships that were erased or frowned upon at the time of their production.

In his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Hans George Gadamer presents the thoughts of Aristotle: "Man is of logos who has the capacity of thought unlike animals" (59). The word 'logos' mean 'reason,' 'concept,' and 'law', and the concept of 'language' and its use underlies all these references. He says that language "has the ability to 'communicate' everything that he [a human] means, there exists a common meaning ... in the form of social life ... [and] all of this is possible because he possesses language" (Gadamer 60). The different attributions of meaning are possible because "human language takes place in signs that are not rigid ... not only in the sense that there are different languages but also in the sense that within the same language, the same expression can designate different things. It is precisely this possibility of attributing different meanings to the text that has the potential to break the horizon of expectations and affect the outcome of the event of literature.

Lucey then looks at Balzac's *The Girl With the Golden Eyes* as a manifestation based on real life. This work of literature is read, perceived, and discussed in the background of the structure of feeling and horizon of expectations of that society which assigns a value to it. The value attached to a text is an outcome of the literary tastes of society, its culture, and its symbolic systems (Behdad et al. 128). On such a basis, Lucey wishes to look at the history of sexuality in the text which is impossible, as matters of factuality cannot be found in a work of fiction. In the next paragraph, he says:

> "When you suspend a text in a particular context, you reveal how it points to that context, how it indexes it. … indexing [towards] a context is not just part of what *texts* do, it is also part of our own daily practice of existing, of rendering our lives intelligible to ourselves and others. Making ourselves intelligible in different ways in different contexts … is one of the most basic forms of social competence one possesses … *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* is … about the social intelligibility of certain sexual practices and cultures in particular." (Behdad et al. 128)

Contexts or structures of feeling do play a part in understanding texts. But to read a text only to understand the context or the structure of feeling at that time and place is to rob the text of its singularity, of the unique utterance of language-use by the author. If a text is read with a predetermined notion of understanding the context of its time and space, then it is

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not a literary reading. It could be a reading motivated by a socio-economic or political query wherein one 'knows' what political affairs went on when, what economic factors were present in influencing the text and so on. Since literature, or reading, is a singular event and because of one's relation to the text, one understands that the encountered 'other' is not an object that serves the purpose of "pointing outwards towards" a context, but it is the subject of their own story. It is this act of relating to the text in such a way that reading does not fall into the trap of representation but embraces the recognition of articulation of a voice inside hierarchical structures that then becomes the ethical standpoint for a comparatist.

Lucey's reading of *The Girl With The Golden Eyes* is based on how the culture of a society is formed with respect to the previous knowledge system of sexuality, how it has been understood, the evolving nature of sexuality, and how these ideas are perceived, discussed, and standardised as conventions. However, as discussed previously, such an understanding is not the purpose of a literary text since it is fiction and an imaginative imitation of beings of society. Furthermore, if one uses set contexts and conceptual boxes to understand a text, it will not be understanding, but merely *fitting* the text according to the context; a structure. One must aim to fit their concepts and theories to the text rather than the opposite. Amiya Dev calls this 'Comparative Literature from Below.' He says, "... every time we do have fresh data – it is simply a matter of recognising them." (93). According to Dev, one must not look for structures that resemble other structures in new data.

Studying and questioning one's reading makes the event of literature and experience of it richer. Comparative Literature may seem like a way of stating the simple, *ethical* and commonsensical that one cannot speak for the other. It specifically does because one lives in a world where there is an equality of difference. Dominant groups generally tend to speak for the non-dominant and objectify the other. In the light of comparative practice, this paper foregrounds difference in a way that acknowledges and celebrates the other in the spirit of pluralism.

Application of Lucey's Theory to Literary Texts and its Implications:

For this exercise, the authors read Anna Bhau Sathe's *Gold From The Grave,* translated from Marathi into English by Vernon Gonsalves. If one were to read this text in the light of Lucey's theory where the social distribution of ideologies and historical knowledge systems concerning their evolution forms the authentic reading of the text, then that would differ from

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the original reading of the same text. While the authors understand the plight of the quarry worker and the inequality between the rich and poor *in* the text, that was not all that the paper took from the text. In fact, it wasn't the central concern of this reading. For example, one of the things that was learnt was that jackals existed in the story. A lot of attention was also paid to the language of the translator. The mention of Kurla, an area in the city of Mumbai, made us want to look it up and look at its images. This reading of the text didn't point "indexically" to a social or an economic situation. It struck wonder about what would happen if one attempted a translation of the text and if one would use the same words.

Another text taken into consideration for this paper is C.S. Lakshmi's, aka Ambai, *The Kitchen In The Corner Of The House*. This story was written in the light of the Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu led by women to address several important issues like the Hindi imposition, caste conflicts, liquor prohibition, practices of oppression of women, and religious hatred prevalent during and after independence in India (Lakshmi 1997). C. S. Lakshmi penned several short stories in Tamil especially addressing the issues of women before marriage, in marital life, and widowhood, and this is one of them. At the University of Chicago, J. Bernard Bate and A. K. Ramanujan with a couple of other members of their class decided to translate this story as a part of their class project and published it in 1990 (Ambai, 1992).

Conventionally, a feminist reading of this text upholds the tortured experiences of Indian women trapped in kitchens by patriarchal norms of society and depicts their exhausting daily routine of cooking which is romanticised in the name of 'feeding and taking care of the family' and how that physically and mentally damages women. In fact, this story is taught in the curriculum of undergraduate education at a university in Bangalore, India under the context of Indian feminist writings. However, *Pappaji's* interior monologue in response to Minakshi's questions about the condition of the kitchen immensely affected the findings of this paper:

> "Oh, little girl, little Mysore girl who hasn't lived here all your life, what do you need mountains for? Why do you need their greenness? And what's the connection between Rajasthani cuisine, a window and a cistern, little girl? Huh, little girl, you chatterbox, who refuses to put on a veil, little dark girl who seduced my boy?" (Ambai 25)

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Both Pappaji and Jiji have complaints about how Minkashi cooks, and can only cook Mysore food but not Rajasthani food. While expressing his distress about Minakshi's resistance against upholding Rajasthani cultural norms (for instance, denying to cover her head with a veil), Pappaji makes stereotypical comments on her colour by referring to her as a 'little dark girl'. The authors were taken aback by this statement and could not undo its impact on them and look at the functioning of their house under a toxic patriarchal system. They were struck by the cultural conflict encountered by an educated South-Indian daughter-in-law who is married into a North-Indian patriarchal household, and their focus was settled on looking for such conflicts in the rest of the story. To sum up, the cultural conflict in the story strongly stood out for them over the conventional feminist reading of the patriarchal and oppressive practices foregrounded in the story.

As Lucey's theory argues, the history of the literary object accumulated through production, transmission, and circulation should impact one's reading of the text and what it means to them. But, the authors of this paper knew no history of the text, its source, inspiration, author, author's works, and her contribution to South Asian Studies. Although one was expected to read this story in the context of feminist writings, the reading and understanding of this text significantly varied. It has varied because they were struck by certain elements of the text and they continued to have an impact on them.

The paper's approach and reading of this text destroys the assumptions of Lucey's theory that every text is read in the knowledge of its production, transmission, and circulation. In the context of schooling in literature and cultures, Lucey depicts schools as 'habit-forming forces' that train students to assign a value to literary and cultural artefacts and transmit some sort of "knowledge and experience to apprehend and interpret values" (Behdad et al. 122). This knowledge and experience, again, comes from the sanitised making and production of meaning of society. While a feminist reading of this text is important to sensitise society towards the experiences of women, this paper argues, from a literary and ethical standpoint, prescribing this as the *only* way to read a text kills the possibility of plural reading and relation and homogenises the experience of reading. If one were to read this text and not understand the situation of the women in the text, then their reading and articulation of the same can be called into question from the walls of their ideologies.

Conclusion:

A study of these two texts would also have to include the *interliterary* condition that is responsible for the evolution of the respective languages, Marathi and Tamil. This paper would also say that while one aims for a "Comparative Literature from Below", it is not only that one should fit theories to texts, but one must also provide their *individual relation* to the difference, singularity, and plurality that one encounters inside the text. Ultimately, Comparative Literature is a way of looking at the difference and this 'way' is at the level of the individual. A scholar's engagement with it must be an engagement of *understanding* rather than *knowing*. This can be understood well through Dr. Sayeed's essay *A Note on Understanding* where he makes the distinction between the verb 'knowing' as a process and the noun 'knowledge', which is the product of that process. Understanding, however, is both a process and a product; it is a state.

> "But ultimately, truth is a matter of just facts. It is a question of whether or not something is so. Our relation to the world, in fact, the orientation of our consciousness to the world is not exhausted by facts. We may know some facts. But we must understand what they mean. This is not always a matter of logical implication. It is to do with organising the facts into a structure and seeing what they mean. This is understanding." (Sayeed 8)

Sayeed says that *entities are known*, whereas *relations are understood*. This is crucial to the practice of Comparative Literature because comparatists, as subjects, look at other subjects. This 'way of looking' can only be relational simply because subjects can only *understand* themselves in relation to the world, that is in relation to the difference in it. So, the ethics of engaging with difference have to be of understanding. From *A Note on Understanding*, one learns that language is not isolated from understanding. In fact, to use language is to show understanding. "...language embodies understanding," writes Syed (9). In this way, language is ontologically understood because it is fundamentally and existentially tied to a being; language and man are inseparable. It is on these aforementioned frameworks this paper understands the practice of comparative reading. It is at once a way of understanding ourselves and also the world. It is to understand the *being* seen through literature.

Micheal Lucey's theory contributes greatly to the field of Comparative Literature. What he says about 'context' is of particular relevance to this discipline. For the comparison of two or more texts, one must ground each of the texts in their relevant literary systems and

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time and place (chronotope). This endeavour is a task of rigour, research, knowledge, and reading.

If one looks at the etymology of the word context, one learns that it is a combination of two Latin words: '*con'*, meaning together, and '*texere'*, which refers to the action of weaving. One must weave together the 'surroundings' of a text and understand the discourse around it in order to actually compare it with another. The other text too must be understood this way. Such a study is undeniably needed for Comparative Literature. However, one of the pitfalls of comparative literary studies is that, in search for comparison and meaning, it essentialises the 'other' that it is attempting a dialogue with. This is why Dr. Sayeed says that comparative literature lives through the "tension between essentialism and anti-essentialism (32)" in *Notes On Comparative Literature.* To be open, to be welcoming, to truly listen to an 'other' is the assumption one has to undertake when one engages in such a study. Only then can the study be pluralist. There have been, and there are enough examples of the erasure of differences. Therefore, on the quest of comparative studies, it would prove to be futile if one ends up contributing to such an erasure. Lucey's theory unfortunately 'places' the context on the text rather than discovering the text in its own context. It also forgets that, as mentioned earlier, contexts change from individual to individual.

It is only ethical, then, to embrace a conceptual framework that allows a scholar to expand or contract itself for the scholar to perceive the 'other'. The other does not exist for a predetermined context - the other just is, emphatically so.

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Reinterpreting Self and Other through *Rāmāyaṇās* and their Multifaceted Rāvaṇās

Ruchika Jain[1]

***Abstract*:**

For any community, outlining the other appears to be essential for constructing the identity or sense of self, and society. In the Indian context, however, the euro-centric and binarized implications of 'self' and the 'other' must be seen as non-antithetical. Alterity needs to be redefined in lieu of the integral nature of diversity within India. This paper attempts to make this argument with the help of the Rāmāyaṇā tradition.

Believed to be an epic about the fight between good and evil, Rāmāyaṇā appears to propagate various binaries parallel to the concept of self and the other, personified in the characters of Rāmā and Rāvaṇā. However, a deeper look at the diverse, and even contradictory, interpretations and functions of the character of Rāvaṇā– the other notes resistance against binarizations. The paper analyses Rāvaṇā's unique otherness within Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇā*, alongside an overview of its contemporaries Vimalasuri's Paumacariyam, and Lankavatara Sutra.

***Keywords*:** *Rāmāyaṇā*, Alterity, Binarization, Self and other, Rāvaṇā.

Introduction:

According to GN Devy, a community's sense of tradition is composed of its "sense of self… in relation to the associated sense of the other" (7). Outlining the other appears to be essential for constructing the identity of self and society across discourses, and thus building a society's idea of the self. It helps determine what the self is made of, and the way a society or a cultural space is divided. The construction of such a useful other is often marked by a selective perspective, and must be studied in the required contexts.

Stories, myths, and the study of myths are motivated to, and effective in, understanding the self and the other, by defining good and evil, or right and wrong, which are value structures necessary for every society, for the so-called common-man. However, it is important to note how binaries such as these do not translate to a neat binary in the context of Indian epistemology of stories or myths. This paper attempts to do so with the aid of the

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Rāmāyaṇā tradition which is a conglomeration of knowledge on and interpretations of the Rāmāyaṇā tale in various forms and mediums. The tale is much more than a myth. It functions as a treatise or way of life within the interdisciplinary and intersectional nexus of Indian mythology, literature, art, religion, history, politics, and philosophy. It is folk and popular; religious and secular; ritualistic and performative.

The tale, however, has also increasingly become more politicized and polarized over the years so that it juxtaposes the acceptable part of the self and society against the ones that are shunned. This paper aims to question this tradition of looking at Rāmāyaṇā with the perspective of, and as a means of, binarizing by analysing diverse, and even contradictory, interpretations and functions of the character of Rāvaṇā–the other, within one of the oldest Rāmāyaṇā tellings in India- *Valmiki's Rāmāyaṇā*, along with brief overviews of its contemporaries Vimalasuri's *Paumacariyam* and *Lankavatara Sutra*.

Self and other:

Across world religions, many Semitic monotheistic faiths such as Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism interpret the self and the other as a binary, in the shadow of the belief of the God against the devil, Allah against Shaitan, or Ahura Mazda against Ahriman, respectively. This is known as Ethical dualism[2]. However, across major Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the concepts of god and evil are not uniform single categories represented by singular entities. On the contrary, either there are multiple gods (Hinduism) or no gods (Jainism and Buddhism), evoking numerous interpretations and contradictions for both the ideas of good and bad across, and even within, each religion. These multiple and contradicting ethical codes have nevertheless co-existed, and thus, in Indian epistemology, the binarized implications of 'self' and the 'other' must be reinterpreted.

Furthermore, there is no specified being within most Indian religions specially imagined to represent an absolute evil. There is neither a single God nor a singular antithesis to him, but rather both good and evil may be contextual. Among such plurality of the concepts of good and evil, there does not emerge any equivalent of a solitary repository of

[2] Ethical dualism is a practice (religious or philosophical) of standing by a neat binary of self versus the other where the self is completely devoid of evil and the other, which may refer to person or a group, is replete with evil.

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evil– "a demon, the absolute embodiment of evil, who engenders all evil, and... is as coeternal as god, who is an absolute good" (Nayak 61).

This may be called as 'Ethical pluralism'[3], and this manner of looking at the Indian context beyond binaries is a way of thinking best understood through its application within myths, legends and other forms of storytelling. Mythological figures such as Asuras, Rakshasas, Daityas, and Danavs are often associated with wrong-doing, mischief, and immorality but "in Hindu myths," Nayak writes, "asuras are often more evolved, more ascetic, more adhering to the principle of dharma than devas, brahmins, or honoured kshatriyas…Asuras and devas are not opposite sides of the ethical paradigm– good and evil" (61). Theirs is not a battle "about good against evil… [but] simply a cyclical archetype of a conflict" (61).

Even the concepts of *dharma* and *adharma* have no single definition. Doniger acknowledges, "…In India, nature, man, and god all consist of a mixture of good and evil. The only wrong, the only "evil," is to strive against nature" (95). This extremely controversial but fundamental principle called dharma "implies that "should" and "is" are one – that one should do what one's nature inclines one to do" (Doniger 94). This difference is interpreted as that between the self and the other.

In the context of Hindu philosophy, Kakar writes that "The maintainence of ego boundaries, between 'inside' and 'outside', and between 'I' and 'others', and the sensory experiences of social relations based on these separations, is the stuff of reality in Western thought and yet maya to the Hindus" (Sudhir Kakar qtd. in Devy 145-6). GN Devy re-examines the terms self and other in this context, and in order to make them more nuanced to Indian epistemology, reads them as "swa" and "para" respectively. "Para" is a well-accepted concept within "majority of Indian languages," and is "used to indicate 'otherness' as a psychological phenomenon as well as a spatial term" (143)[4].

[3] Ethical pluralism is an ethical theory which, simply put, emphasizes that moralistic value of right and wrong may differ as per different perspectives and although these values may be contradictory or incommensurable, they hold true and important to their respective context.
[4] For more on Devy's interpretation of the self and the non-self, read "Swa and Para: Self and The Other" in his work "Of Many Heroes".

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However, Devy also warns against falling into the trap of such binarization, or in his words, polarities. According to him, looking at self and other as polarities in Indian thought is a "profoundly ignorant act of consciousness" (145) Swa and para, unlike self and the other, are not antithetical. Instead, para may be seen as the transcendental which is both, beyond swa (or its extension) and the inner capability of swa (often an indiscernible part). Swa and Para, then, are separated and intermeshed so that they are both– parts of the self, and more. Thus they do not become parts of a binary, but instead a complex whole. This is not to say, however, that "the Aryan epistemology of the self-other relationship remained unchanged in the long history of India" (Devy 146). But tracing the etymological changes of this concept is beyond the scope of this paper.

***Rāmāyaṇās*:**

The worldview of Rāmāyaṇā tradition is an inherent nexus of mythology, literature, and philosophy. Across most of its scholarship, literary interpretations, and uses as a socio-political symbol, the Rāmāyaṇā story has come to represent a literary canon and socio-cultural hegemony. "Rāmāyaṇā" has come to represent the Hindu Rāmāyaṇā, and mostly the Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇā*. A lot of scholarship within this field of Humanities has claimed (and a lot many has resisted) this hegemony. However, such hierarchical overview of the Rāmāyaṇā tradition is widely popular and accepted, even if often questioned, among various manifestations of the study and telling of Rāmāyaṇā. It imagines the Rāmāyaṇā tellings in power relation to each other, with the Hindu Rāmāyaṇā being at the top.

In his essay "Three hundred Rāmāyaṇās", A.K. Rāmānujan expounds on the multiplicity and context-specificity of the tale. The essay denies the hierarchical and top-down conceptualization of the Rāmāyaṇā tradition where *Valmiki Rāmāyaṇā* is believed to be the ur-telling. He instead propagates the use of "tellings" to understand the phenomenon that is the Rāmākatha to emphasize that every Rāmāyaṇā telling exists both in constant interaction with others and self-dependently in its own context. This argument stands in the way of scholarly conceptualizations that give a few Rāmāyaṇā tellings the pedestal of being dominant and many other tellings the label of marginalised. This further implies that alterity needs to be redefined in lieu of the integral nature of diversity within India.

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Believed to be a simple epic about the fight between good and evil, Rāmākatha appears to propagate various binaries parallel to the concept of self and the other, personified in the characters of Rāmā and Rāvaṇā. Besides being "the basis of popular ethics," it has "vividly described moral principles…which can be easily followed and understood by ordinary males and females (sic)" (Sharma 7). Rāmākatha may be seen as a treatise on the universal and the contextual ethics which may also be understood here as the concepts of *sarvadharma* and *swadharma*[5], which respectively imply duties and righteousness which are common for all beings, and those are particular to a group or person.

Notably, the Rāmāyaṇā story is one of the most used, and useful, tools across Indian history in determining, distinguishing, and problematizing alterity and its contextual ethics. According to Sheldon Pollock, "The Rāmāyaṇā is profoundly and fundamentally a text of "othering"" (282). It is considered a text that not only defines the other there is but also a text that can be used or appropriated to make the other. Pollock believes that within Rāmāyaṇā,

> Outsiders are made other by being represented as deviant-sexually, dietetically, politically deviant. Rāvaṇā is not only "other" in his reckless polygyny-"others" always threaten to steal "our" women but is presented without question as a tyrant, perhaps even as a kind of "Oriental despot" constructed by a preform of Orientalism. (283)

However, while such an analysis captures the inherent alterity in the symbol that is Rāvaṇā, it does not acknowledge the ambiguity and multiplicity in the interpretation of this "other". Simultaneously, Pollock's estimation of Rāmāyaṇā as a text of othering obscures the vital qualities within Rāmāyaṇā tradition, of plurality, diversity, and self-questioning.

Rāvaṇā the Other:

Rāvaṇā is the infamous antagonist of Rāmāyaṇā who is almost always in the wrong. If Rāmāyaṇā is profoundly and fundamentally a text of "othering," Rāvaṇā is the epitome of the other. He not only belongs to Lanka or a space that is different but also has different morals and way of life than the 'self' or dominant way of life which is why the tale becomes that of victory of one value structure over another. Across different Rāmāyaṇās, Rāvaṇā is described

[5] Universal and contextual ethics may also be understood here as the concepts of sarvadharma and swadharma, which respectively imply duties and righteousness which are common for all beings, and those are particular to a group or person.

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with the help of many terms such as Rakshasa, Asura, demon, monster, and Evil. This further creates association between the character of Rāvaṇā and the idea of the other. Yet, his character's "evilness" is also almost always ambiguous. Anita Shukla believes that

> The popular perceptions of the evil in Rāvaṇā have not really existed in the text as much as they have been utilized for the maintenance and sustenance of certain primordial values which have been polarized in society and very often politicized by communities to meet their own ends. (10)

This further supports the need to redefine the other as is created in a mythological context and understand how and why does the other become so. Although Rāvaṇā is demonized in the popular consciousness, he also persists as a highly ambiguous and versatile antagonistic character in the cultural domain. Although his effigies are burnt annually on the festival of Dussehra across India as the symbol of social and spiritual evils he also represents human qualities and potential for good. Rāvaṇā is also respected (and even worshipped in Hindu temples) as a devotee of Shiva, a Hindu God.

Among the various temples dedicated to Rāvaṇā across India, while some worship him as a devotee, some idolize him as an ancestor or a beloved king. For instance, temples dedicated to Lord Shiva in Mandya and Kolar in Karnataka, and Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, are also known for Hindu devotees who come to worship Rāvaṇā in idol form. There is a temple solely dedicated to him in Kanpur as well, although it opens only on Dussehra. Among the Maudgil Brahmans of Rajasthan, Dussehra is a day to perform Hindu death rites for Rāvaṇā, whom they consider their ancestor.

The binarization within Rāmāyaṇā and the consequent demonization of Rāvaṇā have seen different trajectories across cultural and political imaginaries in India. Pollock writes that "If one actually plots a history of the Rāmāyaṇā in the two realms of the political and literary imaginations, one finds a stark disparity" (263). But according to him, the tale or "the text" itself, "offers unique imaginative instruments… whereby, on the one hand, a divine political order can be conceptualized… and, on the other, a fully demonized Other can be categorized, counterposed, and condemned" (264). But Paula Richman, in her text *Rāmāyaṇā Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology,* blames "authoritarian texts" like those of "Valmiki and Tulsidas" for polarising their characters into clear heroes and villains (174).

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She explains, "If dharmic acts fall at one end of the spectrum, authoritative Ramkatha present the adharmic deeds of rakshasas at the opposite end" (174). Rāvaṇā is thus "demonized and othered...fit only for destruction" (175).

But there is neither a god, nor an antithetical demon in the Indian epistemology of Rāmāyaṇā. There is no absolute good or evil, so that alterity is not absolute either. The concept of a vague, non-absolute, and non-binarized Rāvaṇā the other can be traced back to the literatures of early centuries of the Common Era. The following is an analysis of the character of Rāvaṇā in Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇā*, along with a brief juxtaposition of Rāvaṇā in the Jaina and Buddhist Rāmāyaṇās.

Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇā*:

Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇā* is one of the most popular Hindu Rāmāyaṇās in India dated somewhere between the first century Before Common Era to first century Common Era. It is a sacred text for Hindus and one of the two main classical Indian epics. While Mahabharata attempts to understand the complexities of dharma, Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇā* seems to have a relatively straightforward take on morality. It is popular as a token tale of the victory of good over evil. Moreover, the didactic underlining of the text percolates through its characters so that they are almost divided between good and bad. Rāmā is the great good pillar of the epic. He is an admirable hero who is above any blame or blemish. Rāvaṇā falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. Most of his 'evil' deeds are inexplicable and he inspires fear in the readers. Yet for a text that seems to binarize good and evil, the villain is an interestingly varying character.

Like most Hindu Rāmāyaṇā tellings, Valmiki introduces Rāvaṇā as hedonistic. He is shown to be materialistic, proud, and greedy for power. He is the king of rakshasas, a word which, in most translations of Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇā*, is translated into either demons or ogres[6]. His primary role in the epic is that he abducts Sita after falling for her beauty, and relentlessly cajoles her to accept him. He becomes so blinded in his desire for her that he puts his family, kingdom and even himself at stake, ultimately losing it all. Introduced early on in the epic,

[6] The words demons or ogres are primarily used to refer to supernatural and malicious creatures, spirits or monsters in west-originating tales or beliefs. They almost always represent unwanted physical, moral, and behavioral aspects of society. There are different types of Rakshasas described in the epic, such as kinkaras, daityas, and daanavs. But like demons, all rakshasas are described as deformed and dreadful creatures who disturb the rishis or ascetics. However, there are good rakshasas too, as discussed in the subsection Evil and the Other.

Rāvaṇā is established as the antagonist of the story. He appears as the ultimate problem that needs to be solved.

Nevertheless, Rāvaṇā is also shown to be extremely learned in philosophical literature, music, astronomy, arts, and various other disciplines. He even has moments of expressing his feelings of shame, fear, hurt and guilt. He is superior to even the protagonist Rāmā in the matter of caste[7] but because of his vices, his rigorous spiritual currency earned via penance and knowledge is brought to naught in the story. Within the religio-cultural realm, however, he is still praised and worshipped for his knowledge, as proven by examples of multiple temples and traditions mentioned above that honour him. Valmiki sporadically offers explanations into Rāvaṇā's spiritual greatness. He writes, "Rāvaṇā is a great soul... but because of the power of his penance, he was not burnt even though he touched her (Sita's) hand (5.59.3-4)".

Also, as the story proceeds, Rāvaṇā's potential for good and greatness is acknowledged by other characters as well. In the "Sundar Kaand", Hanuman observes: "How great is this demon king, an endowment of all merits. If only this lord of demons was not unrighteous, he could have become even the lord (protector) of gods including Indra (5.49.17-18)". Furthermore, even Rāmā notices Rāvaṇā's "glory," and "majesty," differentiating him from gods and demons altogether:

> Rāvaṇā is beaming like the sun with his rays difficult to be gazed, neither can the eye rest on him such is the binding strength of his magnificence! The body of celestial or demonical heroes may not be so radiant in this manner as this body of the king of demons. (6.59)

Rāvaṇā is a plausible example of the complexity of and contradictions within dharma (especially its aspect of social duty). For instance, in Valmiki *Rāmāyaṇā*, he is the son of a Brahmin (the highest caste of learned men), thus making him a Brahmin. His mother Kaikasi, however, is a rakshasa, a race believed equivalent to demons. Even though Rāvaṇā is mostly known as a Rakshasa, his parentage makes him a half- Brahmin and half- Rakshasa. Rāvaṇā is thus a combination of contradictions; of highs and lows. The rakshasas are accused to

[7] Rama belongs to the Kshatriya caste, which ranks lower than the Brahmin caste. Ravana is a Brahmin on his father's side and a Rakshasa on his mother's.

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be "the destroyers of brahmins (3.20.11)" in the texts. Rāvaṇā's dharma, duty, and nature, are in conflict. He is an extremely learned Brahmin who performs *yajnas* or fire rituals, knows all the scriptures, and performs penance for many years which requires severe self-sacrifice, earning him boons from the gods. But as a rakshasa, it is his *svadharma* (personal duty) to be self-indulgent and make chaos. This state of his being emphasises the oxymoronic blend of good and evil within him.

The creation of a conflicted core in a character serves the didactic purpose of the epic by giving Rāvaṇā the potential of being a hero. Nonetheless, this potential, his penance, and his life before abducting Sita, for that matter, are never explicitly explored in the epic before Rāvaṇā's death. The Rāvaṇā one comes across in the first six books is the obvious villain with undercurrents of such potential. Still a Rāvaṇā cannot be Rāvaṇā without this unfulfilled potential. Thus Rāvaṇā's ambiguity forms an essential part of the core didactic essence of the tale and the awareness of such coexisting and contradicting multiplicity is an integral quality of the Rāmāyaṇā tradition.

Vimalasuri's *Paumacariyam* and *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*:

The first Jaina Rāmāyaṇā, Vimalasuri's *Paumacariyam* (dated between first to fifth century) is one of the earliest written texts in the Rāmāyaṇā tradition. Not only does it vastly differ from Valmiki's text, it is also one of the first retellings of the tale that directly questions Valmiki's telling on various points. Vimalasuri's Rāvaṇā is not a demon with multiple heads but a rational and believable human. He is a great king and an ardent Jaina devotee who has proved himself worthy through his hard work and penance.

Being one of the main characters of *Paumacariyam*, a substantial amount of space is allotted to the depiction of Rāvaṇā's noble birth, penance, knowledge, adventures, feats, and glorious being. His Carita or character sketch takes precedence to the main narrative. Physically attractive, learned and brave, he is rendered a grand figure and a great king, loved by his family, friends, and kingdom. Although there is no denying that he is in the wrong, there is an attempt to justify and redeem his character, while questioning and countering the beliefs in Valmiki's telling. Vimalasuri depicts Rāvaṇā as a super-human counter-hero; his role explored and expanded upon so that one understands the character more than as a mere antagonist.

The first noted Rāmāyaṇā is believed to be a Buddhist Rāmāyaṇā called the *Daśaratha-Jātaka* but it has no Rāvaṇā. Another Buddhist text, *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (first published in the fifth century C.E.), has only Rāvaṇā and no other Rāmāyaṇā character. It is mainly a philosophical treatise of Buddha preaching to Rāvaṇā and other Rakshasas willing to learn about Mahayana Buddhism. Rāvaṇā, referred to as the "Lord of Lanka" or "Lord of the Rakshasas" throughout the text, is an inquisitive learner here who invites Buddha to teach him the ways of a Buddhist life. Rāvaṇā asks two questions: "(1) what is the distinction between dharma and adharma, and. (2) how could one pass beyond both dharma and adharma?" (qtd. in Vidyābhūṣaṇa 833). One may note how evil exists here only in the way that the characters want to be rid of it, asking for Buddha's advice. The Buddhist text relates how Rāvaṇā

> found himself abiding in the Buddha-knowledge when a voice was heard from the sky, saying, 'It is to be known by oneself.' 'Well done, well done, Lord of Lanka! Well done indeed, Lord of Lanka, once again. The Yogin is to discipline himself as you do. The Tathàgatas and all things are to be viewed as you view them. (qtd. in Hamlin 271)

Conclusion:

In the history of Indian ethics, according to R.N. Sharma, "Rāmāyaṇā has [always] been the basis of popular ethics…right from the Epic age till our own time… It can be, therefore, rightly considered as the most important and valid book of ethics in India" (7). This book of Indian ethics is also used as a meaning-making symbol. In today's times, Rāmāyaṇā has come to represent socio-cultural hegemony within the context of its association with Hinduism. It is believed to be extremely polarized and politicized so that it is a readymade framework for creating binaries, and specifically creating an other. It is a text that determines or helps determine otherness.

Yet, when studied amidst the crossroads of disciplines like mythology, philosophy, history, literature, and religion, while acknowledging the need of doing so from the context of an epistemology that relies on plurality, diversity, and contextuality, the study of Rāmāyaṇā counters structures of homogenization and hegemony.

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By looking at the Rāmāyaṇā tradition from such a perspective, its scholarship stands to gain on its capability of highlighting and sustaining plurality and diversity, in the stead of looking at a text of binaries and "othering". Rāmāyaṇā tradition must be acknowledged for its capability to hold co-existing contradictions, be they of the tellings, the characters, or even the identities of the self and the other. This paper hopes to highlight the scope of interdisciplinary humanities in re-shifting perspective from looking at our literary traditions and socio-political realities in binaries, to acknowledging plurality, contextuality, and difference.

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Understanding Gender and Socio-religious Practices of Nepali Society

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***Abstract*:**

This paper is an attempt to understand the position of women, gender roles and socio-religious practices followed by women in Nepali society. In so far as the status of women is concerned the stringent laws are constructed around the notion of purity and pollution. A woman's sexuality becomes a major driving factor in deciding her position within the society. The second segment of this paper would focus on the interrogation of old socio-religious and socio-cultural practices which are performed by mostly Chettri-bahun, newar women, or upper caste women. The entire socio-religious culture proves that a woman is viewed with gendered lens situated in a domestic space in a Hindu Nepali society. Finally, the last section of this paper would examine the position of a woman in a Nepali society and understand the gender position from the literature written in Nepali.

***Keywords*:** gender roles, socio-cultural, gendered, purity, pollution.

This paper is an attempt to understand the position of women, gender roles and socio-religious practices followed by women in Nepali society. The question that would arise next is who comprises a Nepali society?

'Nepali' as a term is used in three different ways. i) it represents the language, ii) a person who is a citizen of Nepal, despite the fact that he/she speaks any other language but is bound by political boundaries of the country of Nepal. iii) He uses Nepali as a cultural symbol of a distinctive nation whose members are not confined by the geographical boundaries of the country called Nepal. (Pradhan,4) Therefore, it has to be understood that Nepali literature is not the literature coming out of Nepal, but literature written by any Nepali speaking person living in Nepal or Indian continent or anywhere else.

Further, it has to be understood that in relation to the categorization of Nepali speaking people, that not every person speaking Nepali language can be termed as an ethnically Nepali.

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In order to push this argument forward, Kumar Pradhan argues that they can be understood as culturally Nepali as they share a similar culture, language, and are bound to be called by the same register. This by definition has erased the differences outwardly and have classified people with all ethnicities and identities as a singular entity of being called "Nepali" which I believe needs to be exercised with caution. For the lack of a better terminology, I would be using 'Nepali women' while referring to women from Nepal or Nepali speaking Indian populace. But that is not to override the ethnic identity, or their gender roles assigned to them through their position in their community.

I would begin by drawing a brief outline of the evolution of the legal structures which acted as a governing body of Nepal. But there is no documentation of the laws with regard to Nepali women residing in the Indian subcontinent, other than the migration and reference to Nepali population living in the hills of Darjeeling and Sikkim. As the early records, sparsely states the figures alone of the Nepali population. Sikkim was a landlocked kingdom until 1975 and there was little access to education due to feudalistic practices. The king belonged to a Bhutia community and people of other communities had little access to the privileges of a feudalistic state. But, what cannot be denied is that the Nepalis living outside of Nepal more or less adhere to the traditions and customs followed by the Nepalese of Nepal as the former can be seen as extended entity, in a different nation state. Richard Brughart has argued on the same lines stating that Nepali as a group is an expression of the will or character of a culturally unique people and whose political boundaries are delimited with reference to the territorial distribution of the people.[2] This argument makes it simple to understand how the communities of Sikkim, Darjeeling and other parts of India, have accepted the idea of calling oneself a Nepali, despite having identities belonging to that particular nation. To begin with, understanding the legal initiatives of *Muluki Ain* of 1854 would be important along with the amendments made in *Muluki Ain* (henceforth MA), of 1963, which is considered to be a landmark amendment with regard to rules and regulations and the implication they hold for women and the structuring of gender roles in Nepal. Along with this, with the help of the literature, it will situate the struggle faced by Nepali women and contextualize their position in

[2] The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal.

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the society vis-à-vis patriarchy and gender positions. It will attempt to understand, if there has been any influence on the understanding of gender among the Nepali women and fathom the cultural practices deep set within patriarchy.

As stated above, the first segment will trace the legal documents of MA of 1854 with regards to the position of women and the amendments associated with the MA of 1963 along with the help of Siera Tamang's work, where she has managed to understand the caste system of Nepal, as being arbitrary towards the inclusion of all ethnicities within the caste fold. When the civil code was framed and established in 1854, referred to as the MA under the Hindu king Jung Bahadur Rana, who ruled Nepal following the appropriation of power from the royal family. As no codification of law had taken place before this time, the creation of the MA as a national legal system had great importance in terms of the structuring the chief agents of state intervention. The MA was a comprehensive legal code which divided and ranked the entire population into a caste hierarchy with Bahun and Chettri castes who were earlier known as Brahman and Kshatriya, of Indic origin and usually referred to in Nepali as being Bahun and Chettri on the top, Tibeto-Burman tribes in the middle as *matwalis*[3] and untouchable castes or *pani nachalne*[4] at the bottom. (Höfer,7,22). The MA placed non-Hindu population into the middle-ranking positions above the low castes. In the creation of a caste system, it ranked Hindus, Tibeto-Burman and ethnically Tibetan people in a single caste hierarchy, thereby exercising the cultural dominance of Hindu norms. Likewise, the position of women, within the family, ideas of purity and pollution, notions of gender, sexual purity started being governed and implemented by laws laid down by MA. In Höfer's terms, the MA represented a significant advance towards integration and is the "chief factor determining an individual juridical status and the relation between individuals is to a large extent determined by purity conditioned status" (Höfer, 179). In so far as the status of women is concerned the stringent laws are constructed around the notion of purity and pollution. A woman's sexuality becomes a major driving factor in deciding her position within the society. Siera Tamang has argued that the women of Nepal are daughters of Sita whose minds are ruined by old beliefs and superstitions. This is a socio-cultural belief where a woman is treated as a devi, but it remains fully unexplored, as on one hand girl child are seen as goddesses but at the same time that woman is

[3] Alcohol Drinking caste
[4] From whom the water is not accepted.

controlled by the patriarchal structures. There are certain notions of purity and pollution and this notion remained purely applicable to the women mostly of the upper caste. Whereas, women from lower caste are seen with condescending eye and often times abhorred. But, to avoid the derogatory outlook towards women from janajati groups also started imitating the practices and started getting assimilated within the caste system. If we consider the janajati women of Sikkim, they are very matriarchal in nature and they share certain cultural practices but are not assimilated within the caste system, which is not to say that they do not have caste affiliations but is not patriarchal in nature. Gellner has argued that the culture of the dominant *Parbatiya*[5] group has influenced in various significant ways to the tribes, so that the tribes have come increasingly to resemble castes but are far from being bounded homogeneous units. (Gellner, 106,107) Tamang argues that Hofer saw with "conspicuous indifference" (Höfer, 36-49) towards most ethnic groups in the 1854 MA by readily accepting the notion of Nepali women even if it was mostly used by upper-caste Nepali women. To take an example with regard to marriage, women of upper caste are given as *Kanya-dan*[6] or gift of a virgin by the father of a girl in marriage to a man, is seen as married. Whereas terms like *lyaita*[7] and *rakheko*[8] (Höfer,41) were used for women married without full rites as prescribed by the Hindu marriage standards. This pushed women from other communities and caste to accept the norms at a larger level, laid down by Hindu code among the lower castes and tribes. Among the tribes, a prospective groom, stayed with the bride's family for some years, without any official ceremony. Nothing to this effect, is seen among the upper caste men as stated by Höfer. He states that the number of women with whom a man has had non-polluting and legal intercourse will not affect his caste status (Hofer, 41).

On the other hand, a woman becomes polluted, irrespective of her male partner's caste if she indulges in sexual intercourse outside of marriage. This then further asserts the belief that a woman's body and her decisions are controlled by a man in a patriarchal set up. Höfer points out that the *feme*[9] status and caste status are interlinked in the dominant upper caste society. This is not to say that patriarchy does not exist in non-Hindu communities but to point

[5] Mountain people, in the case of Nepali speaking population, it would mean people living in the hilly region.
[6] *Kanyadaan* where a daughter is offered by a father to the prospective son in law by washing her feet and drinking the water. It is a belief that the father earns punya by this act.
[7] *Lyaita* meant brought.
[8] *Rakhita* means kept without any social sanctioned wedding.
[9] Woman's status

out that in some communities in Nepal, women's roles have not been restricted to childbearing and rearing within the private home as a norm with men primarily defined as participating in the political and economic spheres of the public, in contradiction to this "Hindu template" a term used by Kate Gilbert. Tamang argues that women are not recognized as full rights-bearing persons by law and have unconvincing claims to family property only as daughters and wives. Tamang makes a passing reference to Bennett who has mentioned about women's right to property, but this can be exercised only if she remained married, or she remained with the family, even after the husband is dead. Another clause, for acquiring *amsa*/property by an unmarried woman is if she remains unmarried up to thirty-five years of age. This goes on to show that by establishing a law, the state in not only regulating women's sexuality, her decisions on marriage but also maintaining and reproducing gender hierarchy. Further, Tamang stresses that the state seeks to appropriate traditional patriarchy, and adopts and perpetuates male power (Tamang, 143). From what we have read above, it shows that the position of women in Nepali society, (in this paper, read as Nepal) is very limiting. The paper has limited itself to understanding it through the legal code of Nepal and a novel written by an author from Nepal as no such codes or books on similar issues can be found outside of Nepal. This can be attributed to the Sikkim being an independent kingdom and accessibility to education remained in limited hands.

The second segment of this paper would focus on the interrogation of old socio-religious and socio-cultural practices which are performed by mostly Chettri-bahun, newar women, or upper caste women, as they comprise of the influential population within Nepal and outside of Nepal, even where Indian Nepalis[10] reside. McGee has argued that the Hindu philosophy has accorded a very high position to a hetero-patriarchal relationship, where a man and woman are bound by marriage. Marriage as a ceremony has been understood to be unbreakable. Bottomore has argued that it is a belief that a man gets his wife by the grace of the god and the relationship continues for several rebirths. The concept of *saat phera*[11] practiced in a Hindu wedding is associated to being tied to each-other for seven lives. A woman is believed to gain cultural status only after her marriage, whereas a man is believed to gain

[10] Indian Nepalis is a term largely used for Nepalis of Indian origin. It is a term first proposed by A.C Sinha.
[11] *Saat phera* is translated as seven rounds around the holy fire with a promise to be together for seven lives, in Hindu tradition.

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through *upanayanam*[12] ceremony. This reiterates the fact how women's identity is gendered in Nepali society which can be understood as woman assuming a sense of wholeness only by being married to a man.

Another very important practice seen among the Nepali upper-caste people present to this day is the importance associated to texts like *Garudpuran*[13] which is read during the death ceremony for ten days. *Garudpuran* prescribes do's and don'ts to be followed by the wife and the husband. *Garudpuran* amplifies that once a relation between a husband and wife is established, it continues for many rebirths and states the importance of various practices and stresses on these issues as a part of the mourning ceremony practiced by the Hindu Nepalese community. *Garudpuran*, though a very outdated text, is still a very well accepted text and used during the thirteen days mourning in a Hindu society among the Nepali speaking population. There has been no instance found with regards to the questioning of *Garudpuran* even among the educated as well as the affluent. It is seen as a religious text, which is to be followed without questioning. After any death in the family, a pundit is immediately appointed to read the *Garudpuran* to the wives, daughters and sons of the deceased in presence of the guests, which invariably acts as a reinforcement of traditional cultural values.

Additionally, an important religious and social ritual performed by the Nepalese as well as Indian Nepali women is *Swasthani Brata. Swasthani Pooja and Brata,* the aim is to influence the social conditioning of a woman, in a hetero-patriarchal set-up through the story of Brinda in the text *Swasthani,* who burnt herself in the pyre of her husband after his death. This story is circulated to reinforce the *patibrata dharma*. This story recollects that, a *patibrata* woman is spiritually powerful than any God or Goddesses. Poddhar and Goswami have argued that the final aim of a woman is to achieve salvation through self-sacrifice. *Swasthani* text is a popular text among the Hindu women, which is read from *Paush Purnima*[14] to *Maagh Purnima.*[15] Women fast for an entire month and listen to *Swasthani Brata katha* every evening for an entire month. This is still a continued cultural practice among the older Hindu women and has been practiced inter-generationally and is taken up by younger women after coming of age.

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[12] Sacred thread ceremony.
[13] One of the eighteen Mahapuran.
[14] Full moon night in the month of December.
[15] Full moon night in the month of January.

A very discriminative practice among the Nepalese people is that of the remarriage system, which is entitled to male mostly and a female could remarry only on certain condition. There were provisions laid out which stated that a male could remarry. As cited by Bhandari from sources like *Manusmriti, Swasthani, Nirnayasindhu, Satyarthaprakash,* that a man can marry, if the first wife shows misdemeanour, if the wife succumbs to death, if the wife is barren up to eight years of marriage, if the children die during ten years of marriage, and if there is only a girl child up to eleven years of the married life. This method is adopted to ensure the lineage continuity among the people and though not practised in the same manner, male are often seen getting married after their wife's death under the premise of not having anyone to take care of him. This proves that women are mostly assumed to be the care-takers in a male dominated set-up and there is no provision for widow remarriage, which has pushed women to accept widowhood as a punishment for their sin against the men and to remain *patibrata*, even to ill-behaved husband.

Likewise, another important attribute of socio-religious practice among the Nepalis is *Hartalika Teej*[16]. It is considered as a very important festival among the Nepali women and has growing relevance even in the present day. Quoting Bhandari, *teej* ritual is symbolized to manifest two functions. The first is to become *saubhagyabati*[17], to remain/ be married. The second is to wash the sin, a woman might have committed during her menstruation. The first day of *Teej* is called *Dar Khane Din*[18].The second day is the day of fasting where the fasting is observed by married and unmarried women. Married women abstain from food and drinks with a belief that their devotion to the gods will be blessed with longevity, peace and prosperity of their husband whereas the unmarried women observe the fast with a hope of being blessed with a good husband. Then, on the third day of the festival, is *Rishi Panchami*, where women pay homage to saints, offer prayers to deities, and bathe with red mud found on the roots of the *datiyun*[19] along with its leaves. The third day of *teej* is the time when women cleanse themselves of the possible "sin of touching a man during menstruation."

[16] It is a day when unmarried women fast for a husband and married women fast for the longevity of their spouse.
[17] Saubhagyawati referring to the gift of remaining or being married.
[18] Delicacies are prepared and relished.
[19] Apamarga, a plant believed to mitigate doshas.

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Lastly, a common socio-religious practice continued among the Nepalese people is *nachhuni hunu*. During this phase of menstruation, women are not allowed to cook, touch pickles and plants. Bhandari cites an example from her personal experience and states that sometimes she used to imitate her mother and pretended she menstruated and would not touch this and that, like her mother used to do in the house. She remembers that was her way of constructing knowledge of gendered menstruation through enculturation process. Bhandari remembers that when she revisited her past, she remembered that, till nine or ten years, her mother's menstruation was attached with the notion of *chhuna nahune*[20] culture. The terminology *'nachhuni'* itself tells its meaning recollecting the stage of untouchability, popular in a public space with the culture of forbidden practices for touching kitchen and puja items. During the four days of menstruation, a woman is considered impure, and is forbidden from touching and partaking in the household activities, provided she misses it, it would cause defilement, pushing women to practice *Rishi Panchami* along with *teej.* There has however been a turn towards questioning the political position of women in recent literature in Nepal, with a focus on resistance and subversion of meanings in the songs of *teej*. The songs sung at the *teej* festival as part of rituals which reaffirm patrilineal principles, provide critical commentaries on the gender relations, domestic relations, political and social conditions in general.

The entire socio-religious culture proves that a woman is viewed with gendered lens situated in a domestic space in a Hindu Nepali society. Bhandari argues that a pure-virgin girl, a non-virgin un-married girl, unmarried older woman, a barren married woman, a woman who has only daughters, a mother, a widow, a prostitute, are valued differently. They are treated differently by the perceived social status. Bhandari stresses on the fact that women are socialised in such a way that they do not tend to live for themselves wherein they are trained to be social, cultural, emotional, tolerant and habituated to please others. These socio-religious cultural practices have been shaped in such a way that the women cannot fully put behind these practices despite of their education and social mobility. Various practices have religious connotations attached to it, making it impossible to question and stop practicing the same. Questioning these socio-religious practices would stem as being anti-religious, even if these practices seem irrational further pushing women to accept the societal standards set by the

[20] untouchable

hetero-patriarchal society. Unlike the practices stated above, a very strong socio-cultural practice whose practice has enabled women of Newari community is the beli-bibah/*ihi.* In this practice, a girl is married to a *bael*[21], before attaining her menstruation. This marriage would give her a social sanction that she wouldn't be considered a widow, even if her husband died as long as the *bael* remained intact. Popularly it is usually said that she is marrying the *bael* fruit itself and it is argued by Gellner that say that the ritual of *ihi* means that a Newar woman will never be a widow, even if her human husband dies. (Gellner,112)

This practice can be read as questioning the patriarchal standards, where a woman becomes widow and her marital status still remains intact. It also allows more mobility for women as she doesn't have to clad in white dress and mourn the loss of her husband. Another traditional practice which is very empowering is *Miteri saino*[22]. This *miteri saino* is forged by both men and women through certain rituals and is not bound by caste, class or community. This relationship is forged with people of any community, which has led to the weakening of the rigid caste structure in the hills. This is a fictive relationship, where the person who becomes the *mith* bears a familial relationship and all the rites and rituals of death and birth are followed like that of a family. Therefore, we can safely derive to a conclusion that the socio-cultural practices are binding towards the upper-caste women practicing it, whereas towards the other caste groups, it is very flexible.

Finally, the last section of this paper would examine the position of a woman in a Nepalese society and understand the gender position from the literatures written in Nepal, as no literature focussing on gender issues could be traced from the Indian region from early periods. Tracing back the literature written in English or Nepali, with gender as a focal point would be Rudra Raj Pandey's *Rupmati*, a Nepali text, written in B.S. 1991, which is 1934 of the British calendar and would qualify itself as one of the first works written on the social positioning of woman in a patriarchal set up. The text opened up deep set patriarchal values which Rupmati had imbibed. It doesn't question these values, but it becomes blaringly evident that the torture Rupmati faced at the hands of her mother-in-law and her endurance seemed like an ideal quality of a daughter-in-law, but no doubt, it did open up a space for questioning such

[21] Bael is a wooden apple, which has strong shell and doesn't break easily.
[22] Miteri saino is a relationship forged through a certain function.

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traditional values and conventions. Rudra Raj Pandey has been given a title of modern writer in Nepali society and his work *Rupmati* centred around the issues of a Nepali woman. With the help of two extreme opposite characters Rupmati and Baralputri he has showed their nature and the repercussions of being good and bad in a civilized Nepali society. Through his characters he has exemplified a true feudal society wherein, the wife is expected to serve her husband, and the man invariably acts as a master. Not just that, the *sasu-buhari* relationship, which is a complex hierarchical relationship is explored in the novel. The protagonist Rupmati has been portrayed as an extremely beautiful woman, which can be gauzed from the title of the novel. The protagonist is not just good looking but somebody who imbibes by the patriarchal standards which according to the author is a sought-after quality among the Nepali women. Rupmati's good character and behaviour is considered a very important aspect. During that period, the patriarchal society had a great control over women's body and the need to produce an offspring. If one sees the codes and sections laid down by various religious texts as well as *Muluki Ain*, it is stated that if the wife is barren during the first eight years of marriage, if there is only girl child born up to eleven years after marriage, the man can exercise his rights to remarry another woman. Since Rupmati couldn't give birth to an offspring in the stipulated time after marriage, her mother-in-law asked her son Havilal to bring a *sauta*[23]. Havilal on the other hand, consulted a doctor, which shows that Havilal was influenced by science. Sudha Tripathi has argued that though the novel reflects patriarchal mindset, it also reflects the western influence Havilal has had in his life up to a certain degree. His willingness to be examined by a doctor for not being able to produce an offspring, going for a movie while he was away studying in Benares and eating foods like biscuits reflects that men in Nepali society were influenced deeply by the western civilization. Rupmati, only child to Luitel bajey and his family, was pushed by ills of the patriarchy to get married as early as six years old. But, since she was married at a very young age, she returned to her *maitaghar*[24] and had to come back to her husband's home when she experienced *rajaswala*[25] as it was considered ill to menstruate in mother's house. Bennet has argued that among high caste *parbate* community the cause of early marriage is associated with maintaining girl's sexual purity. A girl is given in *Kanya dan*[26] by her father. *Kanya dan* is described by Bennett as "patrilineal ideology" which means

[23] Sauta meaning co-wife.
[24] *Maitaghar* meaning her mother's house.
[25] *Rajaswala* meaning menstruation.
[26] Kanya dan is defined as a 'gift of virgin'.

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that a girl is given as gift, which is understood as "gift of virgin" by Hofer. The *kanya dan* is also believed to help the bride's father acquire *punya*[27] as he is the one who helps to ensure the continuity of the groom's descent. And the reason behind sexual purity is that the man can inherit a generation of pure patriarchal lineage.

Rupmati was forced to take up responsibilities of her family at a very young age, which eventually affected her mental and physical health, straining her relationship with her husband Havilal. But she strove to be a good wife thinking, "*Barha barsa ma kholo ta pharkancha bhandachan, patiko sudrishti pani jarur pharkala, kina pharkidaina?*" (Pandey, 28) which is translated as, "in twelve years, even the dried river comes back to life, why wouldn't my husband's ill behaviour change?" This shows us how women have an undying faith in the system of marriage, and how in the hope of transformation, they never question the ills inflicted by their husbands.

Likewise, women were uneducated, leading to a *malik-dasi*[28] relationship, where she was incapacitated into making her own decisions. Even Rupmati was given to Havilal in marriage only because he had started his education and would be in a better position to understand things than her. She had always remained a dutiful wife, in spite of the differences she had with Havilal. This goes on to show how she has internalised the standards set by the society wherein women are expected to worship their husband despite of the ill treatment meted out to them through their husband and mother-in-law. Feminist critics like Bhasin and Khan have argued that a patriarchal system have been primarily supporting calls for oppression of a woman in every sphere of her social as well as her private life. In addition, they argue that in a patriarchal set-up, a man controls a woman's sexuality, mobility, production and reproduction. The "hetero-patriarchal" rules which are blended and manifested in cultural traditions have pushed to contribute towards a stereotypical gender culture which has been socially accepted. The women are pushed to become subservient to men by observing *patibrata dharma*[29] which loosely reads as loyalty to one's husband, as it was seen as a spiritual path, where a woman is supposed to worship her husband to attain salvation. Bhandari argues that *patibrata* dharma has restricted woman to associate freely with other males who might be regarded as compatible

[27] Punya meaning religious merit.
[28] *Malik-dasi*, where in it is told that a woman must serve her husband selfless to attain salvation.
[29] Patibrata meaning being dutiful, faithful and loyal to the husband irrespective of the behaviour.

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partner (Bhandari, 28) in the novel, when Rupmati couldn't produce an offspring, Havilal chose to remain silent on Rupmati's barrenness, rather the mother-in-law suggested that he bring a *sauta*[30]. *Sauta janu*[31] could be seen as a sin for a woman but *sauta halnu*[32] for men is acceptable and the first wife is expected to remain cordial in such a situation. Not just that, an older woman of the family never comes in rescue of younger woman, i.e., her *Buhari*[33]. She rather finds faults and loopholes to make her life uncomfortable. Bhandari has described the *sasu-buhari's* relationship from a socio-cultural viewpoint and argues that every person is expected to fulfil, his/her own cultural demands. If we try and understand the *sasu-buhari* relationship, it is a culturally hierarchical position and is often considered a natural state of affairs. In a value-based contextual understanding, it is often seen as a duty of a *sasu*, who is an elder member of the family, to train and mould her *buhari,* who is a younger person in the family the certain behaviours and patterns so as to ensure the continuity of the cultural values shared by the family. The stress on the cultural values and the need to perform in a certain fashion can be well understood not simply as family values but as a way of conditioning and pushing women to carry on the patriarchal dictums. Bhandari has further claimed that *sasu* being a member of the older generation endeavours to maintain hetero-patriarchal values as much as possible. Having showcased these in the novel *Rupmati*, Pandey has managed to expose the underbelly of the Nepali society. Pandey has managed to open up the claim that the nature of patriarchy or the rule of male is inherently an oppressive system towards women. A man by virtue of his dominant power 'social, cultural, religious, economic' controls every aspect of a woman's life.

Therefore, analyzing *Rupmati* and trying to understand the women's position and the influence of the western feminist thought, what can be understood is that the resources on women in Nepal limits itself to descriptions that does not extend beyond highlighting the position of women in a domestic and cultural space. Women are placed within the categories with no relation to the state, government and its functioning rather women are empirically described mostly within the contours of the family argues Tamang. If we continue to read the roles of the women, it is limited to understanding them from an ethnographical, anthropological and caste position, without any specifications on their rights and duties outside the family.

[30] Sauta as in second wife in presence of first wife/Co-wife.
[31] Sauta janu, when a woman marries a married woman.
[32] Sauta halnu, when a married man brings another woman as legal wife.
[33] Buhari is a register used for daughter-in-law.

Likewise, Tamang has argued, the discipline of anthropology in Nepal has paid attention to gendered dynamics within society and have mapped out communities and their norms of interaction and relations in great detail. However, these studies leave out questions of political and economic power as they focus on the symbolic aspects of gender and ethnicity. But what cannot be overlooked is the fight towards the patriarchal norms even in tiniest ways have begun in Nepali society. Considering the fact, that *Rupmati* was written as early as 1934, the fight towards the evils of society had begun very early.

Another writer who was vocal about the gender issues and wrote in his works is Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan. Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan's work *Swasnimannche*, had a very progressive bent of mind. He wrote *Swasnimancche* in 2011 B.S which is 1954 of the British calendar. In this novel, he takes the issue of prostitute and discusses how prostitutes are made under the societal pressures. He reasons that the economic condition pushes a woman to become a prostitute along with rape and sexual violation of women.

The text, *Swasnimanchhe,* opens up the story of Motimaya and her son Binod. Motimaya is a prostitute, who her son Binod thinks has been pushed by the society to become a prostitute. Binod is aware of the fact, that Motimaya has become a prostitute, but doubly assured by the fact that Motimaya did not take up prostitution on her own accord. Binod is worried that Motimaya, his mother was pushed to becoming a prostitute by his father Pramod, and the society at large. He is not ashamed of the fact that his mother has turned to prostitution but is trying to analyze and understand the reasons behind such a drastic step. He continues to see her as a pious woman and the need to question the society that is responsible for pushing women to prostitution.

Pramod, husband of Motimaya has brought home a *sauta*[34], Kamala, and she is constantly trying to win Pramod on her side, by persistently complaining about Motimaya. In one such incident, she brought a letter addressed to Motimaya from under her pillow and stated that Motimaya had been meeting man outside of Pramod. This incident sparks the flames of anger and allows Pramod to favour Kamala over Motimaya. At this juncture, the issue of *sauta-sautan*, can be explored. When two women are married to a single man, at the same time, it is mostly the second one, who is favoured and in doing so would create unnecessary tensions

[34] Co-wife

within the family for the sake of his needs. The patriarchal society which is largely favourable to men accepts men marrying and bringing a co-wife, without undergoing a divorce or any liability from his first wife as no provisions and laws are made for divorce. This points out the gender differences in a patriarchal society, where a woman cannot choose to leave her husband, in spite of having to share the space with a co-wife. It questions her *satitwa* and *pratibarata* dharma if she doesn't maintain a cordial behaviour.

Pramod remains unmindful of the fact that he has failed in fulfilling the duties of a husband and has brought a second wife, without the consent of Motimaya. Rather he thinks, he has ownership rights over Motimaya and her decision. He abuses her by calling her *randi*[35] and questions her for going to the neighbour's house. *He says, "mero ijjat bikawna gayeki ho, gharko kura pokhna gayeki ho." (Pradhan, 36) Which can be translated as, she had gone to her neighbour's house to talk ill about him and expose his position.* His insecurities are deep seated because of which he wants to control her movement, and respect the fact that she has equal rights as a wife to question his behaviour. Motimaya is a *patibrata* woman because of which she cannot imagine leaving him or questioning Pramod's behaviour, she rather thinks of committing suicide, so as to avoid facing the troubles of her life. When she could not face the torture anymore, she left her child Binod and her husband Pramod, to commit suicide. Motimaya instead was seeking forgiveness even in death, as she was going to commit suicide,

> *Ma gaye, Binod timro pani ho, aba usko aadhar yo sansar ma phagat matai cha, mero kunai bhool bhaye chyama gara*." (Pradhan, 65)
>
> I am leaving now; Binod is yours too. Now you are only one left in this world, for him. Forgive me if I have wronged you. (my translation)

Meanwhile, Mohan Bahadur finds her in the jungle as she was attempting to commit suicide and asked her to go back home or go with him to his house. Initially, her previous experience with Pramod, pushes her away from it, but on his constant insistence, she finally agreed to go with him on the condition that he would treat her like a sister. Mohan Bahadur says,

> "*Timi murkha rahichau Motimaya, aatma hatya maha paap ho.aatma hatya garera marnu paap matra haina, chitaunu samma pani paap ho."* (Pradhan, 126)

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[35] prostitute

> You are stupid Motimaya, it is a sin to commit suicide. To die by committing suicide is not only sin, but the thought in itself is a sin. (my translation)

But, looking at her vulnerable situation Mohan Bahadur did not hesitate to use the opportunity to claim his rights over her. During this period women had no access to the outside world and her exploration remained within the domestic realms alone so she believed Mohan Bahadur despite her traumatic past experience. Motimaya was bereft and helpless so she thought Mohan bahadur would support her, as until then as Tripathi has argued that the time when *Swasnimannche* was written, women did not have the freedom to work, rather they remained as mere guards to the ancestral property and taking care of their husband and children, so she saw it as an opportunity to seek shelter from a man. Women were prohibited from keeping a relationship outside the family and going out freely. When Motimaya had no choice but to leave Mohan Bahadur's house too, she was compared to *Maiyanani,* who was a prostitute. Because Motimaya left her house, even when her husband was alive, risking her chastity, she was called a prostitute. Motimaya's *sauta*, Kamala who had little morals, kept complaining about her to Pramod with a motive of gaining a favourable position argued Tripathi. Tripathi further argued that instead of helping and supporting one another, the women are constantly fighting to secure a better position in the husband's eye, which has further problematized the situation of the women.

Nevertheless, towards the end of the novel when Motimaya is left with no choice but to leave behind Mohan Bahadur's house, and she landed in the brothel run by Mishri. She could not stay in that brothel, so to escape the snares of the brothel, she goes and stays with Maiyanani, on the grounds that she would only provide the service of singing and entertaining. Tripathi argues that the Nepali society which highly values feudalistic attitude, pushed women towards prostitution and later questioned the same. To add to this, Binod has gone to push the idea that women are pushed to prostitution because of the questionable behaviour and attitude borne by men of the patriarchal society. Binod brought his mother, Motimaya back from the brothel and tried to reclaim and reinstate her position in the family, but Pramod thought that he overstepped the standards of society and decided to shoot him on his feet. Tripathi brought to light that in spite of her devout relationship towards her husband, Motimaya was pushed to become a prostitute. Finally, when Binod took charge of the situation, and stood his ground, that his mother was pushed by patriarchs to become a prostitute, he ended up killing his father

and stepmother. The fact that the novel ended in a revolutionary manner in itself, is beckoning to new thoughts and ideas among the younger generation. Motimaya's house is renamed after Maiya nani as Maiya Mandir, which is a watermark decision to rename a house after a prostitute, who has vowed to bring change in the society.

Therefore, the analogy drawn in the paper is to draw attention to the patriarchal society and its practices. The fact that Nepali as a community as stated in the paper earlier is a multi-ethnic community, because of which some sections are still bound by certain ills and practices. However, what cannot be denied is that the community has been progressing as can be assessed from the words of an author Prajwal Parajuly, where in a personal interview he remarks that the ethnic communities are liberal not just in the sense of food habits but truly liberated as against the upper caste brahmins.

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Tracing the Early Developments of Sahitya Akademi (1954-1960): Is There Something Comparative?

Tias Basu[1]

***Abstract*:**

To trace the history of Comparative Literature in India, not just as an academic discipline, but as an important method to read Indian Literature, it is necessary to locate it within the practice of literary criticism starting from the late nineteenth century, the introduction of the discipline in an anti-colonial setup and look at its eventual growth in the post-Independence Indian state's educational vision. This paper tries to look at Comparative Literature's relationship with the post-Independence Indian state's ideological pursuits by analysing the formation, initial activities and the publications of the Sahitya Akademi. Sahitya Akademi, a state funded body, has had a dialogue with Comparative Literature, since their initial years. The Sahitya Akademi, in its vision and functioning, talks about Indian literature as a singular category though written in many languages, while the practice of Comparative Literature in India tries to acknowledge the plurality in Indian Literature. The paper will try to trace the transactions and engagements between the literary practices of Sahitya Akademi and the discipline of Comparative Literature by specifically looking at the publication projects and the issues of Indian Literature, the journal of Sahitya Akademi, from 1954 to 1960.

***Keywords*:** Sahitya Akademi, Comparative Indian Literature, Indian literature.

The history of comparative literature in India does not only entail tracing the trajectory of the study of Comparative Literature as an academic discipline but also looking at the manifold elements of literary discourses that contribute to the idea of 'comparativeness'. To do so, it is necessary to locate the practise of Comparative Literature in India within the practise of literary criticism starting from the late nineteenth century, the introduction of the discipline in an anti-colonial setup and look at its eventual growth in the post-Independence Indian state. This paper would specifically look at the growth of the discipline, mostly within the domain of literary discourse, in the context of the post-Independence Indian state's ideological pursuits. In order to do so, this paper shall take up Sahitya Akademi, India's academy of letters, as a case symptomatic of the ideological pursuit of the state and

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as an apparatus functioning within the domain of literature and culture, and hence look at its relationship and dialogue with the practise of Comparative Literature.

The primary reason why I look at the relationship of Sahitya Akademi with comparative literature in India is because of the academy's primary focus and the eventual theoretical turn in the practise of comparative literature in India, which happened to coincide in certain capacities but were not entirely the same. That is, the focus on Indian literature is something that creates these possibilities of overlaps between Sahitya Akademi and comparative literary practises. The academic practise of Comparative Literature in India too showed a definite theoretical turn in the 1970s when it started talking about a specific orientation of the discipline that is based in Indian reality. This orientation, which Sisir Kumar Das, Amiya Dev, Indra Nath Choudhuri, Ayappa Paniker, and other practitioners of comparative literature refer to as 'Comparative Indian Literature' has as its basis the idea of Indian literature. The debates around the conceptualization of Indian literature will be a mediating factor in the relationship between the Sahitya Akademi and Comparative Literature in India that this essay traces.

The Comparative Debate on Indian Literature

In the case of India, where there are hundreds of languages spoken in specific geographical regions within the country and with existing bodies of literature for each of these languages, the question of what exactly constitutes Indian literature has been dealt with by a number of comparatists over time. Sisir Kumar Das has emphasised the fact that instead of talking about Indian literature as a singular homogenised category, one needs to take cognisance of the literatures of various Indian languages separately and study those with equal importance, thereby proposing to look at each of the bodies of literature 'as distinct expression of the experiences of each community. Das speaks at length about the formulations, 'unity in diversity' and Indian literature is one, 'though written in many languages', as products of a nationalist vision that tried to propagate the idea of a national literature as a unified whole, and argues that although there are commonalities and intersections in the literatures of Indian languages, those are neither coincidences nor because the literatures are homogenous in nature. Instead, the commonalities can be carefully studied using tools of comparative literature to understand their transactions with each other (Das xv). Amiya Dev, in his essay titled 'Comparative Literature in India', discusses an a priori location of comparative literature with regard to aspects of diversity and unity in India and talks of how defining Indian literature as both singular and plural is problematic and how, in the case of India, the study of literature should involve the notion of inter-literary process and a dialectical view of literary interaction. Dev writes:

> "…Indian literature is not an entity but an inter literary condition in the widest possible sense of the concept… The inter literary condition of India, we should remember, reaches back much farther than its manuscript or print culture. For instance, *bhakti* -- a popular religious movement as both theme and social issue (stretching from the eighth to the eighteenth century) - - had a variety of textual manifestations in various Indian languages." (Dev 5)

Dev argues that the relationship between Indian commonality and differences is the primary site of comparative literature.

K. Ayyappa Pannikker has spoken of Indian literature as a mosaic of all the regional varieties. He goes on to propose how one may look at Indian literature by acknowledging the fact that the method of Comparative Literature is the only one to read Indian literature (Paniker 24). Swapan Majumdar, on the other hand, in his essay 'Comparative Literature: Indian Dimensions', begins with addressing the question of what Indian literature is in order to reach his argument on the validity of comparative literature in India. Majumdar writes:

> "To begin with, we are struck by the very structural pattern of Indian Literature: is it singular or pluralistic? … In fact, until quite recently, Indian Literature was considered by scholars here and abroad as a mere compendium of several regional literatures … the Indian comparatist's approach is apt to be horizontal rather than vertical, be that thematic, genetic, or formalistic.
>
> True, there is something like an 'Indianness' which is more to be perceived than to be formulated in concrete terms." (Majumder 16)

Chakraborty talks about this idea of 'Indianness' not as a definitive category, but as a philosophical notion. He further states that this 'Indianness' is not to be considered a priori, but to be seen empirically, taking into consideration the scope of inclusion using a horizontal approach that comparative literature facilitates.

Indra Nath Chaudhuri, another important practitioner of Comparative Literature in India, one of the proponents of a specific orientation of Comparative Literature that is specific to India, talks about how, for a proper aesthetic and critical assessment of Comparative Indian literature, the Indian comparatists are making an effort to develop a distinct comparative criticism and form a 'meta language'—a meta language that accommodates Sanskrit poetics and western poetics within the scope of the literatures of India using an interdisciplinary approach (Chaudhuri 7-8). Talking about a method of comparative Indian literature, Chaudhuri inevitably goes back to how Indian literature can be looked at and traces the formulation back historically to see how initially, scholars like Albright

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Weber, Sten Konow, Maurice Winternitz actually referred to Sanskrit literature when they spoke of Indian literature, and how over time, the idea has broadened its horizons to a collection of different literatures of the subcontinent. Indra Nath Chaudhuri focuses on the fact that Sanskrit and other languages should be taken to form Indian literature, which is one, even though it has at least twenty-two different manifestations in the twenty-two major languages of India as recognised by the Sahitya Akademi. Chaudhuri goes on to elaborate on an idea of 'Indianness' that might highlight the spirit of Indian literature as a sensibility that characterises the collective national psyche. This collective national psyche would be formed of myths, tales from the Puranic tradition, folklore, philosophical treatises, religious and spiritual expression, as well as contemporary social realities (Chaudhuri 25).

Formation of the Sahitya Akademi

The idea of Indian literature happens to be central to the formation of Sahitya Akademi, India's official academy of letters, as well. The Sahitya Akademi was established on March 12, 1954, as a national organisation that would work towards the growth of Indian letters, set literary standards, facilitate the expansion of literary activities in all Indian languages, and, by means of all of these, promote cultural unity in the country (The Sahitya Akademi). The plan for the establishment of a national academy of letters is often traced back to 1944, when the Government of India accepted the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal's proposal to set up a national cultural trust that would consist of three academies, including the academy of letters. This plan was taken forward by the government of India formed after independence. Debates on the question of whether the government should take the initiative of establishing such an organisation or wait for competent individuals to develop something similar were considered for a while, but eventually, the urgency to establish the organisation was given priority. It was decided that the government would only set up the academies that would go on to work as autonomous institutions and that the government would not interfere in their functioning.

Linguistic Policies of the Indian Government

In the nascent stages of nation-building after 1947, a definite vision of how India should be shaped the role of the Indian state. This vision, which later came to be known as the 'Nehruvian vision' of a new India, was strongly rooted in the beliefs of equality, secularism, and acceptance of plurality, with an ideology of democratic socialism that could help move India towards being a welfare state based on people's consent, bereft of dogma and violence, and strongly grounded in ethical values. This vision shaped the workings of the state vis-à-vis planning, community development, foreign policies,

decentralisation, employment, public health, education, culture, and so on (Das). Our area of concern, higher education, was also shaped by Nehru's vision of how India should be.

The debates around the linguistic division of states almost always found Jawaharlal Nehru reacting to those demands of "provincialism" (quoted in Husain) that would be harmful for the unity of the country. Despite his opposition, he had to accept the eventual reorganisation of India's states. The demand for a division of a state based on linguistic boundaries at that time would naturally remind one of the Partition of colonial India. Hence, any identity politics based on questions of religion, region, and language were seen as divisive. While Nehru dismissed the demands of the Shiromani Akali Dal to form a "Sikh nation" as being "fissiparous and divisive" (quoted in Husain), he was equally sceptical about a movement that wanted to hegemonize the nation into a singular linguistic community by advocating the demand for the introduction of Hindi written in Devanagari script as the national language of India. In fact, as Nehru opposed the possibilities of linguistic hegemony of Hindi and demands for linguistic identity-based separation of states, he remained strong in his support of linguistic diversity in India. In Nehru's essay titled 'The Variety of India', he talks about the question of diversity in India, which has gone on to be referred to metaphorically as 'unity in diversity'. This very idea initially formed the basis and the vision of the Sahitya Akademi, too.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the then education minister of the government of India, was another important figure who shared Nehru's vision and was extremely instrumental in the setting of the Akademi. Azad, elaborating on his idea of the 'national' that is not only diverse but open to transactions, said:

> "It was India's historic destinies that many human races and cultures should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil… Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavours … our joint life have moulded us into a common nationality." (Quoted in Guha 25)

It was this shared vision of India that translated into the spirit of the three academies of India, namely, the Lalit Kala Akademi, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the Sahitya Akademi. The problem, however, for the third organisation came up in the dealing of the 'national' in the case of language and literature. Precedents of this sort in other countries, primarily Europe, promoting national cultures were easily guided by their national languages, which formed the basis of those nations. In the case of India, there was no national language that the Akademi could work on. The languages listed in Schedule 8 of the Constitution of India were all included under the purview of the Sahitya Akademi. Although it is imperative that the enlisted languages were only the ones that were widely spoken and

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that several languages were excluded, it is safe to say that the ideological framework of India and its reflection on the functioning of the Sahitya Akademi did not promote linguistic parochialism, a hegemonic position of Hindi over other languages, but instead fostered the idea of equality among many Indian languages.

Representation of Languages and Universities

The question of linguistic pluralism and its conscious efforts to curb the overdominance of Hindi have been reflected in the formulation of policies of the Sahitya Akademi as well. Initially, representatives from the fourteen scheduled languages and fourteen universities were to be chosen. These representations were chosen by the committee entitled to form the Akademi while being in direct correspondence with the government. The languages that were to be represented were Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Telugu, and Urdu. Eminent literary figures of each of these languages, like Nilmani Phukan in the case of Assamese, Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen, who was substituted by Rajasekhar Basu owing to Sen's institute, Visva Bharati, already having an institutional representation in the case of Bengali, Shri K. M. Munshi in case of Gujarati, Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi or Shri Diwinder Satyarthi in case of Hindi, Shri Mast Venkatesh Iyengar in case of Kannada, Shri Ghulam Hassan Beg in case of Kashmiri, Poet Vallathol in case of Malayalam, Shri B. V. also known as Mama Varerkar, in case of Marathi, Dr. Maya Dhar Mansingh in case of Oriya, Shri Sher Singh in case of Punjabi, Professor K. A. S. Iyer or Shri. K. S. Krishnamurthy Sastrigal in case of Sanskrit, Shri Pingali Lakshminatham in case of Telugu, and Dr. S. S. Bhatnagar in case of Urdu were suggested. As regards to the fourteenth name to represent Tamil, the government of Tamil Nadu suggested one name, that of Rajaji. C. Rajagopalachari, who had served in a number of government ministerial positions from 1947 to 1952 and had been the Chief Minister of Madras State from 1952 to 1954, had already been nominated by the committee. (Sahitya Akademi – Setting up of)

The strategic inclusion of representations from the universities happens to be even more crucial. There were thirty universities across India at that time, of which the fourteen oldest established universities were to have representation. The fourteen universities that were chosen were Calcutta University, Bombay University, Madras University, Allahabad University, Benaras Hindu University, Mysore University, Patna University, Osmania University, Aligarh Muslim University, Lucknow University, Delhi University, Andhra University, Annamalai University, and Visva Bharati. The chronological list had Nagpur University on the eleventh position and Agra University on the fourteenth, but they were dropped from the list of representatives because "there were already three

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representatives from the universities in the Hindi speaking areas". The correspondence related to the setting up of the Akademi also mentions:

> "The only exception to the chronological rule is Visva Bharati. Visva Bharati was included because it is a Central University of a distinctive type. Though incorporated by an Act of Parliament only in 1951, it was established as far back as 1961 by Rabindranath Tagore and has been developed as a university with a definite bias towards literature." (Sahitya Akademi – Setting up of)

It is to be noted that two universities, although part of the list of the first fourteen universities of the country, were not considered because there were already five universities from the Hindi-speaking region, namely Allahabad, Benaras, Aligarh, Lucknow, and Delhi, which would result in a linguistic disproportion in the committee. It also needs to be noticed that Visva Bharati was given preference not only because of its unique nature, its focus on literature, but also because Rabindranath Tagore was related to it.

Sahitya Akademi and the Question of Indian Literature: Concept and Literary Trends in Publications

S. Radhakrishnan, the academy's first President's words "Indian literature is one though written in many languages" has become synonymous with the Akademi's introduction[2]. This unity in diversity argument in Indian literature surely embodies the nationalist aspiration of the organisation and reflects the Nehruvian vision, but it has been a matter of contention among the Indian comparatists. A navigation through the early projects and publications of the Sahitya Akademi would help provide an understanding of how this idea of Indian literature has been dealt with and if there has been a tendency towards homogenization of the diversities into a sense of unity or of a propagation of unity while making space for diversities.

Early Publication Projects

One of the earliest projects identified and undertaken by the Sahitya Akademi was the National Bibliography of Indian Literature. Since there was no bibliographical information about published literary work in India and since the National Library, Calcutta, had taken up the project of bringing

[2] "Lipiya anek hastakkshar ek", a rough Hindi translation of the same appears on the facade of Ravindra Bhavan, the building that houses the office of the Sahitya Akademi.

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out annual bibliographies from 1954 onwards, the Sahitya Akademi decided to publish a bibliography of Indian literature of the twentieth century, restricted to 1953. The work took a very long time; four volumes divided on the basis of languages in a span of twelve years, from 1962 to 1974. Further volumes were published later, when more languages received recognition and a difference in focus in the work done by the National Library was noticed (Rao, 95). In 1965, the Sahitya Akademi started working on the *Who's Who of Indian Writers* which would include biographical and bibliographical information about eminent literary figures of the Akademi's languages of concern living at the time of the Akademi's inauguration. The book was published in 1961, followed by later editions in 1983, 1993, and 1999. Another project taken up by the Sahitya Akademi in its very first year of function was the histories of literature (Rao, 101). This series aimed at making the histories of literatures of different Indian languages available to readers of other Indian languages. Krishna Kripalani, the founder-Secretary's guidelines to the authors to maintain uniformity, will provide an idea of the framework that had been decided. Kripalani wrote:

> "Each History should be of about 300 pages … should aim at presenting in simple and clear outline the main trends in the development of the literature concerned, emphasising its creative aspects, with apt illustrations … Derogatory criticism and rapturous eulogy should both be avoided … Care should in particular be taken to see that nothing is said or insinuated to hurt the religious sensibilities of any sect or community … It would be graceful not to praise one's own literature at the expense of the other literatures. For example, if the influence of modern Bengali literature on other Indian literatures is discussed, the debt should be acknowledged by other literatures … The modern period which may be assumed to begin with the rise of the British rule in India and the introduction of the printing press, should be treated with particular sympathy and understanding. Impartial evaluation of the contemporary scene is always difficult. The attempt should, therefore, be to understand rather than criticise…" (Quoted in Rao)

It took an enormous amount of time for the project to see fruition, and it took forty-eight years to publish histories of twenty-one languages, some of which have been translated into other Indian languages as well.

Contemporary Indian Literature, Sahitya Akademi's first publication, came out in 1957 in the form of a symposium (Rao 110). It consisted of fifteen articles by fifteen writers on fifteen Indian languages and literatures. The articles aimed to provide a holistic background on the state of each of the literatures. Radhakrishnan's observation in the Foreword to the book is important to note:

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"There is a unity of outlook as the writers in different languages derive their inspiration from a common source and face more or less the same kind of experience, emotional and intellectual". (Quoted in Rao)

Bharatiya Kavita, a project taken up by the academy in this nascent stage, planned to bring out annual anthologies of published poems in the Indian languages of Sahitya Akademi's recognition in Hindi translation and with Devanagari transliteration (Rao, 114). The 1953 issue was published in 1957, after which three anthologies covering the next three years were published, but with gaps. The fifth volume was planned to cover five years, then ten years, and was finally abandoned. This happened primarily because of the logistical problems of compiling the volumes, getting them translated, connecting with the authors, and getting permissions from the publishers.

In the later years, several other projects culminated in important volumes that are crucial to the reading of Indian literature. Some of these are *The Makers of Indian Literature* series, the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, *Ancient Indian Literature* edited by T. R. S. Sharma, *Mediaeval Indian Literature* edited by K. Ayyappa Paniker, and *Modern Indian Literature* edited by Sisir Kumar Das.

Trends in Literary Criticism in the Issues of *Indian Literature*

The Editorial Note of the first issue of *Indian Literature* in October 1957 makes its position clear in terms of its purpose and function. It states that the journal intends to supply information about literary activities in various Indian languages and to help writers and readers in the various Indian languages know each other better. It talks about how, the Akademi or the journal, being state-funded entities, were facing apprehensions about being an agency of control over literary activities in the country, and ascertains that it has no intention to do so; it only believes that an organisation like the Sahitya Akademi, should rather be funded by the state than run by private patronage. Despite its focus and roots in the idea of Indian literature, the issue does not restrict its scope of study to Indian literature, which only affirms its tendency to go beyond boundaries, even beyond the national. The section on critical writings has four essays pertaining to Indian literature and three on literature from other parts of the world. Of the four essays, one is an abridged section of S. Radhakrishnan's Introduction to the English translation of Adi Granth, one on Tagore's short stories, one on poet Vallathol of Kerala, and the last one looks at the literary impact of the year 1857 on its centenary year. The essays dealing with literature from other parts of the world are also varied in terms of geography, dealing with Japan, Bosnia, and America. This is followed by a section of obituaries and another section titled 'A Review

of Current Indian Writing," which consists of reports of contemporary literature in the fourteen languages initially recognised by the Sahitya Akademi, along with a section on Sindhi literature, a language outside the ones listed in the eighth schedule that had been recognised by the Akademi by then.

The second issue follows a similar pattern of contents, where among the critical essays were two on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Vallathol, respectively; one essay on modernism in Indian literature by Umashankar Joshi; another on east-west connections and the west's impact on Indian literature by Annadashankar Ray; and four essays focused on theatre and drama, of which two dealt with the west and two with India. It is to be noticed that the essays from each of the areas were again carefully split into two timeframes, one classical and one modern. Of the two essays dealing with western drama, one was on Moliere's plays and the other on Greek theatre. The Indian counterpart had one essay on Rabindranath Tagore as a playwright and another on the aesthetics of ancient Indian drama. Along with these essays, the first section also carried Rabindranath Tagore's English translation of his poem 'Bharattirtha' and Nehru's broadcast as the Chancellor of Visva Bharati on All India Radio on May 8, 1958, on the occasion of Tagore's 97th birth anniversary. Apart from the careful division of focus on subject areas, the two essays by Umashankar Joshi and Annanadashankar Ray require special attention here. Joshi's essay on modernism in India tries to locate the advent of modernism in Indian literature in a pan-Indian context. He talks about the impact of historical events and ideologies on India and their eventual influence on literature. On the other hand, Annadashankar Ray's essay deals with the question of inter-cultural transactions and their influence on literature. This issue of the journal too has a section dedicated to the recent developments in various languages of its concern, but with a special focus on drama this time.

The third issue (volume 2, number 1, October 1958–March 1959) coincided with the celebration of Kalidasa Jayanti to commemorate the eminent classical poet. This issue opens with Tagore's translation of his two poems on Kalidasa, namely, Ritusanghar and Meghdut. What follows Tagore's poems is a translation titled 'The City Beautiful' of Master Zinda Kaul, an eminent Kashmiri poet's poem. The editor's note points to the interesting influence of Tagore's poem 'Chitta jetha bhoyshunyo…' from Gitanjali. This is followed by an excerpt of Tagore's letter to his niece Indiradevi that talks about the genesis of Gitanjali and an essay titled 'Tagore's Poetry' written by Humayun Kabir. A part of this section has been dedicated to the famous Tamil poet, C. Subramania Bharati, consisting of translations of three of his poems and a critical essay titled 'Bharati's Poems' by R. P. Sethu Pillai. Ralph Rusell's essay titled 'An Eighteenth-Century Urdu Satirist (Sauda, c. 1713–1780)' and A. A. A. Fyzee's essay titled 'On Translating Ghalib' have also been included in this section. Kalindicharan Panigrahi's critical analysis of Chhaman Athaguntha is also part of this

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section. Two important pieces of the section are dedicated to the important Bengali writer Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee: a translation of his short story 'The Fulfilment of a Vow' and a translation of the introduction to a collection of short stories by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee written by another very important Bengali literary figure, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, a collection commissioned by the Sahitya Akademi that was to be published in multiple Indian languages. Two pieces are dedicated to world literature, one on Lyudmil Stoyanov, a writer from the Soviet Union, and a translation of a section of Stoyanov. A reportage on the conference of Asian and African writers held in Tashkent by Krishnalal Shridharani is also part of this section. Finally, like the previous issues, a section has been dedicated to reviews of contemporary Indian literature in the languages of the academy.

The following two issues of 1959 focus heavily on translations from several Indian languages. The fourth issue includes translations from diverse authors, covering most of the country geographically, along with two critical essays on two extremely important literary works: an essay on Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's Aranyak written by Sunitikumar Chatterji, an essay on T. S. Pillai's Ranitangazhi written by K. M. Panikkar, and Victorio Ocampo's reminiscences of Tagore visiting South America. Instead of the section on reviews of contemporary literature, this issue has a section on reviews of the books that were awarded the Sahitya Akademi awards in different languages. The fifth issue also carries a number of translations from various Indian languages to English, along with a few critical essays, of which some deal specifically with components of Indian literature, like M. U. Malkani's essay on the works of Shah Abdul Latif, and some deal with components of world literature, like, Nyugen Khac Kham's essay titled 'Contribution of Indian Civilization to Vietnamese Culture'. The issue again has a section on the review of contemporary literatures of Indian languages that are recognised by the academy.

The Question of 'Comparativeness'

The introduction of Comparative Indian Literature as a specific orientation and as an academic discipline required a methodological framework and its scope of study to be defined. While this methodological framework is not rigid, it definitely embodies a set of ethos that we may look at as 'comparativeness'. Sisir Kumar Das has argued for the necessity and inevitability of Comparative Indian Literature, elaborating on the fact that Indian literature provides a solid ground for comparative literary studies. Das is of the opinion that Comparative Literature has to be practised for the sake of literary studies in India; it is the most inclusive approach to look at Indian literature. His idea of Indian literature is directly connected with the method of study: Das talks about looking at Indian literature as a complex of literary relations, and any study on Indian literature should reflect that. The

practise of Comparative Indian Literature should not be an inquiry into unity alone but should be a study of diversity. Other practitioners and proponents of Comparative Indian Literature have had their own opinions and formulations regarding the method and object of study (Das, 95). However, the central question that has guided all these arguments and theorizations is the question of literary relations between the literatures of different Indian languages. Besides, affinity towards knowing the other, going beyond the barriers of languages, reading and practising translations, and taking a non-hierarchical approach to literary history are some of the basic yet crucial concerns.

Before going on to discuss about the treatment of the unity-diversity question in the Sahitya Akademi's literary endeavours, it would be interesting to note how the formation and preliminary structure of the academy were consciously done so as to not prioritise Hindi over any other language. Nehru's response to Ravi Shukla, who complained that the Sahitya Akademi had failed to pay special attention to Hindi, also needs to be taken note of. Nehru wrote:

> "You say in your address that the Sahitya Akademi does not pay particular attention to Hindi as an all India language and is meant to spread out its activities over all the Indian languages. That is partly correct... Any such Akademi dealing with all India must necessarily take into consideration all our literature and principal language." (Quoted in Husain)

From the very calculated move regarding the representation of universities to Nehru's response to Ravi Shankar Shukla, to the decisions of the language policy taken up by the academy soon after its establishment to include English, Sindhi, and Maithili, these are indicative of the academy's effort to give equal importance to the languages.

The initial publication projects all had a primary focus — to make readers of one Indian language aware of other literatures from India. The National Bibliography of Indian Literatures, Who's Who of Indian Writers, or the history of literature series undeniably fit into the state's vision of unifying the literary communities across India and are limited to less than twenty languages in a country of hundreds of languages, but it would be difficult to say that these promoted any sort of direct cultural homogenization. Krishna Kripalani's guidelines to the authors of the history of literature series aim to adopt a uniform approach in handling a diverse range of literatures but also recognise inter-literary transactions and receptions.

The journal of the academy, although called Indian Literature, does not restrict its object of study just to the components of Indian literatures. One would be reminded of the answer of the practitioner of Comparative Indian Literature to a general apprehension about limiting one's scope of study in Comparative Indian Literature while Comparative Literature itself has endless possibilities in

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terms of object of study. The Indian comparatist argues in favour of putting Indian literature in focus because that should be the primary focus of literary studies in India; that would not restrict the object of study to components of Indian literature. Literary transactions with cultures outside India form a major concern of the study. The contents of the journal are carefully divided to give importance to all literary periods, to various genres, and to all languages. Translations of major writers in the languages that the academy dealt with reaffirm its effort to spread information and literature from one Indian language to readers of another. The essays or editorial notes published are cognizant of influences and reception.

This paper has tried to look into the various understandings and implications of 'Indian literature' that the practitioners of comparative literature were talking about and the ideas that were propagated by the academy. It has then traced the formation of the Sahitya Akademi, its vision, the preliminary publications, and the writings published in its journal, Indian Literature, to understand the dominant trends of literary criticism that it upholds and further tried to understand how the Sahitya Akademi had been navigating through the idea of Indian literature that it initially spoke about. This has finally helped us to arrive at the preliminary question, that is, if there is a possibility of 'comparativeness' inherent in the literary pursuits of the Sahitya Akademi. 'Comparativeness' here is to be seen as a general tendency towards the idea of comparative literature as opposed to a single literature and would refer not to the conformation to a rigid theoretical structure of the discipline but to a tendency to go beyond linguistic boundaries. An analysis of the activities of the Sahitya Akademi and a detailed indexing of the issues of Indian literature published till 1959, that is, till the end of the decade in which the Sahitya Akademi was established, has been looked at as indicative of the Akademi's initial vision and as an adherence to the ideological framework of the Indian state. While Radhakrishnan talks about Indian literature being one, though written in different languages, and has emphasised on the question of unity in one of the 'Foreword' to *Contemporary Indian Literature,* it is the difference that gets highlighted more than an over-imposed oneness.

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Translation of Manipuri Folktales: Shanrembi Chaisra and its Cultural Elements

Thoudam Jomita Devi[1]

***Abstract*:**

The present paper is an attempt to translate Manipuri folktales Shanrembi Chaisra by B. Jayantakumar's Fungawari Singbul (2003) and to investigate cultural elements present in the folktale and to analyse in translation. The analysis is categorised based on Newmark's (1988) categories of cultural words. Therefore, as far as the study is concerned, the problems of culture such as proper names, especially personal names and use of language (forms of address and reduplication) and Meetei's way of life (house structure terms and utensils related terms) will be critically investigated. This paper represents a modest endeavour to shed light on marginalised folktales, with a focus on their translation and critical analysis.

***Keywords*:** Cultural, Elements, Folktales, Translation.

Translation of Manipuri folktale *Shanrembi Chaisra*

1. থায়না মমাংঙৈদা নিংথৌ মনাই ফম্নাইবা অঙম্বা অমগী নুপী অনীখক লৈরম্বোইরে। নুপী অহন্দুনা য়াংখুরৈমা অদুগা অতোম্বী অদুনা শংখুরৈমা কৌবোইরে। নুপী অহল য়াংখুরৈমা শনরেম্বী কৌবী মচানুপী অমগা মৌপ্‌বা অমগা পোকই, অতোম্বী শংখুরৈমনা চাইশ্রা কৌবী মচানুপী অমা পোকই। শনরেম্বীগী মৌপ্‌বা অসিনা য়াম্না অঙাং ওইরিঙৈদা ফম্নাইবা অঙম্বা অসি শিদোকখ্রেদো।
2. Long ago, there was a court official who had two wives. The first wife's name was Yangkhureima and the second wife's name was Shangkhureima. The first wife had a daughter called Shanrembi and a son while the second wife Shangkhureima had a daughter called Chaishra. The court official passed away when Shanrembi's brother was very little.

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3. শংখুরৈমনক পোকচবী শনরেম্বীদি মশক মতৌ য়াম্না চওখোবোইরে। ফজবতা নত্তনা মবুকচেল ফবা, ঈংবা তপ্পা অদুমক্তনা লৈকাইনা মাবু নুংশি, চাল্লি। শংখুরৈমগী মচানুপী চাইশ্রাদি শকথী-পাজোম্বীনি, মপুকসু ফত্তবদা চং ফংই। অদুনা চাইশ্রা মমা মচানা শনরেম্বী মমা মচাবু কল্লকপদা লৈতবোইরে।
4. Shangkhureima's daughter Shanrembi was very pretty. Not only was she pretty, but she was also a kind-hearted girl and gentle in nature because of which the people loved and favoured her. On the other hand, Shangkhurembi's daughter Chaishra was very ugly and wicked to the core. Because of this, Chaishra and her mother were very jealous of Shanrembi and her mother.
5. থায়না নিংথৌ মনাই অওম্বা ওইদুনা অদুক নুংঙাই য়াইফরম্বা ইমুংদো অওম্বা অদুনা শিখিবদগীদি নোংমা নোংমগী অসুম অসুম নংথরক্তুনা মমা অনীনা নোংমগী শীংজন-লোংখোন তৌদুনা মচাশিং অদুবু চাউনবা য়োল্লকপোইরে। অসুক বানা হিংননবা হোৎনরিঙৈ মরকসিদা শনরেম্বী মমা মচাবু মতৌ করমতৌনা মাঙহনসিগে খনবদি ইরেপ লেপতবয়োইরে।
6. Once they were rich and wealthy family, but became poorer day by day after the death of the court member. Both mothers had to work for their daily wages to bring up their children. In the midst of this hard-stricken life, Chaishra and her mother never stopped conspiring on how to harm Shanrembi and her mother
7. নোংমদি শনরেম্বী মমাগা চাইশ্রা মমাগা অনীদু ঙারল থিঙেন্দা লোংখোল্লুসি হায়নদুনা লোং খোনবা চৎপোইরে। শনরেম্বী মমাদি লোং খোনবা খুদিংগী ঙা লকই। চাইশ্রাগী মমানা খোনবা খুদিংগী লিন ওইনা হেক্তা লকপোইরে। নুমিৎ তাশিল্লকপগী অদুবাইদা চাইশ্রা মমানা হায়রকপোইরে, "ইচে য়েংউ আঃ উথক্তা হৈবোং অমুনবাময়াম পাল্লিসে চানীংদ্রা, ঐ কাখৎলগা হেক্লুগে, অদুগা থাদরক্কে ইচেনা মখাদা ওকপিয়ু, হৈবোংসি খরা হেক্লগা য়ুমদা চৎলসি"। অসি হায়নদুনা চাইশ্রা মমাদু উথক্তা পরপ-পরপ কাখৎখ্রে অদুগা হাওগদবা অমুন-অমুনবা খল্লগা মখাদা শনরেম্বী মমাগীদমক্তা থাদরকপোইরে।চাইশ্রা মমানা উথক্তগী, "ইচে হাউব্রা", "হাউই ইনাও" অসুন্না বারী শান-শান মখোয় অনী হৈবোং হেক্ল খুল্ল চার তৌরম্বদগী চাইশ্রা মমানা মথক্তগী

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হায়রকপোইরে, “ইচে হন্দক্তি খ্বাদগী হেন্না হাউবা অমা থাদরক্কে নমীৎ উইশিল্লগা নয়া কাখত্তুনা য়াউ, নয়া মনুংদা চপ চানা থারক্কে”।

8. One day Shanarembi’s mother and Chaishra’s mother went for fishing in *ngaralthingel*[2]. Shanrembi’s mother caught a lot of fish in every catch while Chaishra’s mother caught snakes with every catch. As dusk was approaching Chaishra’s mother said, “Sister, see, all the ripe fig on that tree, don’t you want to eat, I will climb, pluck them and drop them down while sister catches it below, let's pluck some figs and go home”. After saying that, Chaishra’s mother hurriedly climbed the tree and plucked the ripe ones that will be delicious and dropped them down for Shanrembi’s mother. Chaishra’s mother asked from the tree, “Elder sister, is it tasty?”, “younger sister yes, it is”. Thus, they were talking and picking up the figs and eating them. Then Chaishra’s mother said from the tree, “Elder sister, this time I will drop down the most delicious one, catch it with your eyes closed and mouth open, I will drop it down perfectly in your mouth”.

9. শনরেম্বী মমাদো মমীৎ উইশিল্লগাময়া কাথোক্তনা য়াদুনা লৈরে। তঙ্গা অসিদা চাইশ্রা মমানা, মানা ঙসাই ফাখিবা তুঙ্গোন্দগী লিন ময়ামদু শনরেম্বী মমাগী মথক্তা হৈথরক্তুনা শনরেম্বী মমা লিন্না চিক্তুনা শিরেদো। অশিবা মশাদু ফুমদী মখাদা ঈন্থরল্লগা মচেগী ঙা য়াওবা তুঙ্গোন্দু পুরদুনা চাইশ্রা মমা ময়ুম য়ৌরক্লে।

10. Shanrembi’s mother closed her eyes and waited with her mouth open. Meanwhile, Chaishra’s mother poured all the snakes from the *tungol*[3] over Shanrembi’s mother. They bit Shanrembi’s mother to death. After pushing the dead body below the *phumdi*[4], Chaishra’s mother took her sister’s *tungol* along with the fish and reached home.

11. মমা লাকপা উবদা চাইশ্রা হরাওজৈ; শনরেম্বীনা মমা য়াওরক্তবা উবদা, “ইমাতোন ইমাদি কদায়দা লৈহৌই, কারকহৌদ্রিবরা” হংলুবদা চাইশ্রা মমানা, “নমা করাম চাউবীদি তুঙ্গোল থনবা ঙাইহৌরি, লেম্লে ঙাবু ফাহৌরি” হায়না খুম্বোইরে। চাইশ্রাদি

[2] A kind of small earth dam.
[3] A kind of basket made out of bamboo for keeping fish while catching it.
[4] A kind of floating biomass.

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মমানা পুরকপা ঙাদু হাউনা চারবোইরে। শনরেম্বীদি মৌপ্‌বানা চরা বানবদা ঙারৌ পীজনিংঙাই লৈত্রদুনা মমাতোন্দা ‘ হোরেন ইমা লাক্লগা শিংগে ঙারৌ খিত্তা পিয়ু’ হায়রুববু তুঙ্গোন্দা পকপা ঙাখা খরা পীরকপোইরে।

12. Chaisra was happy to see her mother has returned; as Shanrembi did not see her mother, she asked, “Stepmother, where did my mother stay back, hasn’t she returned back?”. Chaishra’s mother replied, “Your greedy mother is still waiting for the *tungol* to be full, still catching fish”. Chaishra ate the fish that her mother brought deliciously. As Shanrembi did not have any *ngarou*[5] for her brother to have with for the evening meal she asked her stepmother ‘Please give some fish, I will return after my mother returns’ to which the stepmother gave the few *ngakha*[6] that was stuck in the *tungol’*.

13. অহিং থেঙজিল্লক্লবা ফাওবা শনরেম্বী মমাদো লাক্ত্রেদো। শনরেম্বী মচীল-মৌপ্‌বাদো উখোক্তেন্দা ঙারদুনা মমা লাকপা ঙাইরম্বদগী তুমথোকখ্রবোইরে। শনরেম্বীগী মমঙদা মমা লাক্লগা, “ইমাগী ইবেম্মা, নচীল-নৌপ্‌বাদি ইমা লাকপা ঙাইরিদো, ইমাদি, নমাতোন্না হৈবোং মথক্তগী হৈবোং থাদরকপা শাশিন্নদুনা লিন ময়াম হৈথরকপাদগী লিন্না চীক্‌তুনা শিরেদো,ইমাদি লাইরম্লেন্দা তিল্লেদো; ইমা লাকপা য়াররোই। হয়েং নোং ঙানফুং-ঙানফুং তৌবদা লোং পায়দুনা ঐবু খোল্লো ইমা লাইজনুংদা থেঙ্গু ওন্দুনা লৈরমগে। ইমাবু ফারগা ঈশাইফুদা নুমিৎ মঙানি য়োক্‌তুনা থম্মু। মঙানি শুবদা ইমা অমুক মী ওল্লক্কনি; অদুগা ইমা ইচা ঐখোয় অহুম অমুক হন্না পানমিন্নসি” হায়রকপা তাবদগী শনরেম্বী হিক-হিক কপ্তুনা মীকপ খংথোক থোক্লে।

14. Shanrembi’s mother did not return late at night as well. Both Shanrembi and her brother fell asleep leaning against the pillar waiting for their mother. Shanrembi’s mother came in her dream and said, “My dear daughter, you and your brother are still waiting for your mother’s return but your mother is dead, your stepmother pretended to drop figs and poured many snakes upon me from the fig tree. I was bitten by the snakes and have died; your mother is in the spirit world; your mother cannot come.

[5] Roasted fish.

[6] An indigenous small fish, it has been listed as endangered.

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Tomorrow in the early dawn, come with a *long*[7] to get me, your mother will be there in the water as a turtle. Catch me and put me in an earthen pot for five days. On the fifth day your mother will turn back into humans; and the three of us mother and child will be together again." Upon hearing what has been told Shanrembi broke down crying and suddenly woke up from her dream.

15. মমঙদা মমানা হায়রম্বা মতুংইন্না শনরেম্বী লোং অমা পুরদুনা মমানা তাক্লম্বা মফম অদুদা লোং খোল্লুরে। অসুম খোল্লকপদা ঙখা অমা লক্লে; শনরেম্বীনা কপ্লদুনা, "হা ঙাখা মৈঙাংবী নঙবু খোনবা নত্তেকো পলেম ইমাবু খোনবনি" হায়রগা থাদোকখ্রে। মথংদা ঙমু অমা অমুক লক্লবদা, "হা ঙমু মীৎশুকপা, নঙবু খোনবা নত্তেকো পলেম ইমাবু খোনবনি" হায়রগা অমুক থাদোকপিখ্রে।ফনা কুইনা খোল্লবদা থেঙ্গু অদুদি লকপা কৌবা লৈখিদ্রবোইরে। শনরেম্বী তেংথাদুনা কপ্লকই, "হা পলেম অপোকপী পলেম নঙবু কৈদনো, বারেদকো নচাদি"। অসুন্না মপী চদুম তাদুনা তেংথারগা অমুক হন্না লোংবু খোল্লকপবু হন্দক মুক্তি থেঙ্গু অদু লক্লবোইরে। শনরেম্বী হরাওজরে থেঙ্গু অদু পুদুনা ময়ুমদা হল্লক্লগা য়োকচরে।
16. As has been told by her mother in her dream, Shanrembi carried a *long* and started fishing where her mother told her to. She caught a *ngakha* after some time. Shanrembi cried and said, "Ha *ngakha* (small fish) with the red tail, I am not fishing for you but for my mother". Saying thus, she released the *ngakha.* Next when she caught a *ngamu*[8], she said, "Ha *ngamu* with the curved eyebrows, I am not fishing for you but for my mother", after saying that, she released it again. Even after fishing for a long time, the turtle could not be caught. Shanrembi cried out loudly calling, "Ha mother, birth mother, where are you? Your child is tired." She cried out loudly with teardrops and started fishing again. But this time she caught the turtle. Shanrembi was happy, she carried the turtle and returned home and took care of it.
17. অসুম থোকউ হায়দুনা, মচে শনরেম্বীনা ঈশাইফুদা য়োক্লিবা থেঙ্গু অদু চাইশ্রানা উখ্রবোইরে। অদুনা মমাদা, ইমা থেঙ্গু চাগে, ইচে শনরেম্বীনা ঈশাইফুদা য়োক্লিবা থেঙ্গু চাগে" হায়দুনা নিংঙাই তৌরেদো। মমাতোন্না, "হায় শনরেম্বী নঙনা ঈশাইফুদা

[7] A bowl-shape bamboo basket used by the Meeteis as a fishing basket
[8] Snakehead (fish).

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য়োক্লিবা থেঙ্গুদু ইচানা চাগে'ইএ। ফুৎলগা পীজৌ" হায়রকপদগী শনরেম্বী কপ্পা কপ্পা মৈ হৌগত্তুনা ঈশাইফুদু মৈথক্তা থোংগৎলবোইরে। ঙাইহাক লৈরগা ঈশাইফু মনুংদগী থেঙ্গুনা, "শনরেম্বী, ইমাদি খুজেং য়ৌরেদো" হায়রকপদা শনরেম্বীনা খংশৎ শৎতোকই। চাইশ্রানা মমাদা তাকপদগী মমানা চঙলক্লগা মৈহুন্না মকোক্তা চুশিল্লি। শনরেম্বী কপ্পা কপ্পা মৈ অমুক ইনশিল্লি। ঙাইহাক লৈরগা ঈশাইফু মনুংদগী থেঙ্গুনা, "শনরেম্বী, ইমাদি খ্বাং য়ৌরেদো"।শনরেম্বী কপ্পা কপ্পা মৈ অমুক শন্তোকই। চাইশ্রা মমানা মৈহুন্না মকোক্তা হেক চুবী। শনরেম্বীনা মৈ অমুক ইনশিল্লি। মনুংদগী থেঙ্গুনা, "শনরেম্বী, ইমাদি থবাক য়ৌরেদো" হায়রকপদা শনরেম্বীনা, "পলেম, নচাদি লোইরেদো হা ইমা নঙবু, নমু তাইবঙমী ওইনা ইমা ইচা উনৌ তম্লমদ্রবোইদকো;" হায়দুনা মৈ অমুক শন্তোকই। চাইশ্রানা মৈহুন্না মচেগী মকোক্তা চুশিল্লি। মৈ অমুক ইনশিল্লি। অসুন্না থেঙ্গু অদু ফুতোক্লগা চাইশ্রা মমা মচানা চাথোক্লে। শনরেম্বী মমাদি নমু তাইবঙমী ওইনা মালেমসিদা অমুক হন্না উখিদ্রে।

18. As if it was fated to be, Chaishra saw the turtle that was kept in the *Ishaiphu*[9] by her sister Shanrembi. So, she cried to her, "mother I want to eat turtle, I want to eat the turtle that is kept by sister Shanrembi in the earthen pot". When her stepmother said, "Hey Shanrembi, my daughter wants to eat the turtle that u kept in the earthen pot. Boil it and let her eat" Shanrembi started the fire crying and put the earthen pot on the fire. After sometime when the turtle inside the pot cried, "Shanrembi, your mother has reached the knees" Shanrembi suddenly pulled the fire out. When Chaishra informed about this to her mother her mother came and brazed the head with the burnt torch. Shanrembi fed the fire again, crying. After sometime when the turtle from inside the pot cried, "Shanrembi, it has reached your mother's waist, Shanrembi pulled out the fire crying. Chaishra's mother beat her head with the burnt torch. Shanrembi fed the fire again. When the turtle inside cried, "Shanrembi, it has reached your mother's chest" then Shanrembi cried, "Mother, your child is finished oh! mother, mother and daughter are not destined to meet as human" and pulled out the fire again. Then Chaishra beat her sister's head with the burning torch. She fed the

[9] An earthen pot. The place where it is kept occupies a sacred space in Meetei's house.

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fire again. Thus, the Chaisra's mother daughter pair ate the boiled turtle. Shanrembi's mother could not be seen again as a human being in this world.

19. চহী কয়ামুক হৌখরে; শনরেম্বী চাইশ্রা অনীদো লৈশাবী মপুঙ ফারক্লে; থাজ য়োঞ্জবা মতম ওইরক্লে। নোংমা নুমিত্তা শনরেম্বী চাইশ্রা মচীল মনাওনা পুন অমগা সনাবুন অমগা পায়রদুনা ঈশিং শোকপা লাকপোইরে। তাঞ্জা অসিদা নিংথৌ মচাগা মন্ত্রি মচাগা অনীসু শগোল অমমম তোংলদুনা ঈশিং শোকফম হিদেন অদু তন্না লাকএদো। পুন পায়বী শনরেম্বীগী মশক-মতৌ চঙখোনবদু উবদা নিংথৌ মচাগী মপুকনিং খোয়দারবোইরে। হায়রকই, "সনাবুন পুবী পামদে, চেগায়পুন পুবী পামই"। চাইশ্রাদো মথ্বায় নুংঙাইত্রবোইরে। মথংগী নুমিৎত্তা মমাগী থৌশিন্দগী চাইশ্রানা পুন শনরেম্বীনা সনাবুন পুরদুনা ঈশিং শোকপা লাকএদো। অদুগী নুমিত্তুদসু নিংথৌ মচা, মন্ত্রি মচা অনীদো অমুক হন্না লাক্তুনা মখোয় মরী ঈশিং শোকফম হিদেন্দা থেংনরে। নিংথৌ মচানা, "চেগায়পুন পুবী পামদে, সনাবুনপুবী পামই" হায়রগা শনরেম্বীবু শগোল মথক্তা চিংখৎলগা কোনুং তন্না থৌদুনা পুখ্রে।

20. Later, after many years, both Shanrembi and Chaishra became full grown young women; it was the time to be betrothed. One day Shanrembi and Chaishra carried *poon*[10] and a *sanapoon*[11] to fetch water. At the same time, a prince and a minister's son happen to be riding on their horses and were approaching towards the bank. The prince fell in love when he saw the beauty of Shanrembi who was carrying the *poon*. He said, "I don't like who is carrying *sanapoon*, I like the one who is carrying *chegaipoon*[12]". Chaishra felt unhappy. The next day, on the suggestion of her mother, Chaisra carried the *poon* and Shanrembi carried the *sanapoon* while coming to fetch water. Even on that day the prince and the minister's son also came again and the four of them met at the river bank where they fetch water. The prince said, "I don't like the one who is carrying *chegaipoon*, I like the one who is carrying *sanapoon*" and pulled up Shanrembi on horseback and galloped towards the palace carrying her.

[10] Water pot.

[11] Water pot made of metal especially brass.

[12] An earthen pot.

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21. য়ুমদা লৈহৌরিবা মৌপ্‌বা কায়নবদা অবাবা হায়বদু ওইখ্রে। অদুক নুংঙাইবা, অবাৎ-অপা লৈতবা কোনুংদুদা লৈবদা মৈথক্তা ফম্বগা চপ মান্নবোইরে। কপ্ন-কপ্ন চাদ-থক্তা নুমিৎ কয়ানিকমুক লেল্লক্লে। মতুংদা মৌপ্‌বা অদু পুরক্‌তুনা কোনুংদা থম্লম্বদগীদি শনরেম্বী অবাবা কোকচখি। খরা লৈরগা নিংথৌগী মচাদা লুহোংদুনা লৈমা শীজ কাখি। মতমগী খোঙৌলে মতুং ইন্না মচা নুপা নীংথিজরবা অমসু ফংজখি।

22. She was stricken with grief over the pain of separation from her little brother who was at home. Staying in that very pleasant place where there was no shortage but she felt like seating on the fire. She cried without eating anything for a period of time. Later on, when her brother was brought and kept in the palace, Shanrembi was free of sadness. After a short period of time, she was married to the prince and became the queen. With the passage of time, she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.

23. কল্লক কঞ্জাওনবী চাইশ্রা মমা মচাদি শনরেম্বী করম্না মাঙহনসিগে খনবদা তুম্বা চাবা চঙখিদ্রবোইরে। মতুংদা লৌশিং অমা পুথোক্‌তুনা শনরেম্বীবু ময়ুমদা চাক কৌরে। শনরেম্বীনা চাক চাবা লোইরবা মতুংদা চাইশ্রানা, “ইচে, নঙগী ফিরোল, লীক-কোন ময়ামদু ঐ অমুক্তা শেৎকে ফজব্রা য়েংগে” হায়দুনা লৌরগা লোইনা শেৎচিন-শিজিল্লবোইরে। ঙাইহাক শিহল্লবা মতুংদা শনরেম্বীনা, “কদায় ইবেম্মা, থেঙলে ইচে চৎলগে লীক-কোনগা ফিরোলগদু পিরো” হায়রুবদা চাইশ্রানা শাউজিন্নদুনা “নঙগী ফিরোনগাসি ঙাইহাক ফাওবা শেৎপা য়াপোন্তে, লৌজরোসে হায়দুনা লৌথোক্লগা কাংঘদা লোইনা হুঞ্জিনখ্রে। শনরেম্বীনা কুন্থরগা কাংঘদা চঙদুনা লৌথোক্কে তৌরিঙৈদা চাইশ্রা মমানা লোকলোক শৌবা ঈশিংনা শনরেম্বীগী মথক্তা হৈজিন্দুনা হাত্তোক্লগা লীক-কোন ফিরোলগা ময়ুমদা লৌথোক্লগা চাইশ্রাবু শেৎচিন-শিজিনহল্লে। অদুগা শনরেম্বী শারগা কোনুংদা হলহনখ্রে। নিংথৌসু চিংন-চিংন করিসু হায়বা ঙমদনা লৈরে। অসুম্না চাইশ্রানা শনরেম্বী শাদুনা মতম খরা কোনুংদা লৈমা-শীজ ওইদুনা লৈখিবোইরে।

24. All the while, the jealous Chaisra and the mother duo could not sleep conspiring how to destroy the life of Shanrembi. Later they thought of a wicked plan and invited Shanrembi for a meal at home. After Shanrembi finished having her meal, Chaishra said, “Sister, I want to wear your clothes, all your ornaments and see whether it is beautiful” and she took it and wore it. After letting her wear for some time,

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Shanrembi asked for them saying, "where is it younger sister? It is getting late; your elder sister must leave. Give me the ornaments and clothes." Chaishra pretended to be angry and said, "Can't even wear your clothes for some time, take it" having said that she took it off and threw it under the bed. While Shanrembi knelt and went under the bed and was trying to take it out, Chaishra's mother poured the boiling water over Shanrembi and killed her after which she took out the clothes and ornaments and let Chaishra wear it. And she pretended to be Shanrembi and returned to the palace.

25. নোংমগী নুমিত্তা নিংথৌগী মনাই পাঙল শজীকক্লোয়না শজীক ফাল্লিভৈদা লমখুনু অমনা মঙোন্দা ওনশিল্লগা খোংলকপোইরে-

"হা নিংথৌ তুকাউবা

ইচা নিংথৌ শিগনি

ফীগে ইয়োং তৎকনি

হা পাঙল শজীক

নবুংঙোদা তমজরু

নঙনা অদুম তমদ্রবা

শাগোল শামু শিহনগে

কুক্রু কু কু খাঙমৈতৎ-।

26. One fine day when the grass cutter, a servant of the king, was cutting grass, a wild pigeon turned towards him and started cooing-

"Ha king who forgets his wife

My son the king will die

The silk thread of the woven cloth will break

Ha grass cutter

Tell your master

If you don't tell

Will untie the horse's rope and make elephant to die

Kukru ku[13] khangmeitat.

27. শজীকক্লোয়না বাফম অসি নিংথৌদা হঙ্গৎলুরে। নিংথৌসু, নোংমা মাগী মমঙদা উখিবা লমখুনু অদু নীংশিংলক্লুবোইরে। লমখুনুনা খোংলিবা মফম অদু চত্তুনা চেঙ খুবম অমা পায়রগা হায়রকপোইরে-

চেক্লা চাদী নুংশিবী

লমখুনু ও!চেকনুংশি

ইশানৌগী থবায়না ওনবা চেক

চেক্লা নঙনা লাক্লুবদি

নশাবী ঐ গী খুবামদ

চেক্লা নঙবু তোংলোরাউ

সেঃ সেঃ নবুক থন্না চারোলাউ!

28. The grass cutter informed the king about the matter. The king too, remembered the wild pigeon he saw in his dream. He went to the place where he heard the cooing of the wild pigeon holding a palm full of rice and said –

The bird who loves its kid
O! wild pigeon, lovely bird
The bird who turned from the soul of my beloved
Dear bird if u have come
On the palm of your beloved
Bird come and sit

[13] Onomatopoeia of cooing sound

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Here here, eat to your stomach full!

29. লমখুনু ইরেন্না পাইথরক্তুনা নিংথৌগী খুবাক্তা তোংলগা চেঙ চাররে। নিংথৌনা, মমঙদা তাক্লুস্বা মঙতাক 'লমখুনুদু নুমিৎ মঙানি চুপ্পা য়োক্তুনা থম্লম্বোইরে। মসিদা চাইশ্রানা চিংনরদুনা পোন্দগী লমখুনু অদু ফারগা চগেম পোমথোক্লে। নিংথৌনা চগেম অপোম্বদু চাগে হায়না তৌবদা চিংনরদুনা চাইশ্রাদা হংলকপদা, 'পোন্দগী য়োকপা লমখুনুদুনি' খঙবদগী নিংথৌ অদু শাউবগী ঙমখৈ লৈত্রবোইরে। চাদনা অদুম মনীং থোঙদা হৈদোকখ্রেদো। খরা লৈরগদি মফমদুদা হৈজাং পাম্বী অমা হৌগৎলক্লীরে।

30. The wild pigeon calmly flies over and sits on the palm of the king and eats the rice. The king, as he has been told in the dream, so, he 'raised the wild pigeon for five days.' Then Chaishra started feeling suspicious and caught the wild pigeon from the cage and made porridge out of it. When the king tried to eat the *chagempomba*[14], he felt suspicious and asked Chaishra the dish, the king came to know that it was the pigeon that was raised in the cage. His rage knew no bounds without eating, he threw it outside the backdoor. After a period of time, a *heijang*[15] plant sprang up in that spot.

31. হৈজাং পাম্বী অদু চাউরদুনা হৈ অমা পাল্লবোইরে। নিংথৌগী মমঙদা নোংমা শনরেম্বীনা লাক্তুনা, 'হৈজাং অসি মপুঙ ফারবা মতমদা হেক্তোক্লগা নুমিৎ মঙানি চুপ্পা চেঙফুদা হাপ্তুনা থম্বীয়ু, ঐহাক নমু তাইবঙ মী অমুক ওঞ্জরক্কে। হায়রবদা নিংথৌনা হৈজাং অদু মী চঙদনবা খাজিন-খোৎচিন্দুনা চেকশিন্না থম্লবোইরে। মসি উবদা চাইশ্রাদি চিংনবনা লোইরে।

32. The *heijang* plant grew big and bore a fruit. In the dream of the king Shanarembi came one day and told her, "when this *heijang* becomes mature enough, pluck it and keep it inside the *chengphu*[16] for five days, I will turn into human again." The king

[14] Traditional dish made with green leaves, herbs, fermented soya bean and bit of broken rice.
[15] An indigenous citrus fruit. It is one of the most important fruits used in religious offering such as in *Tarpon* (offerings to the ancestors in the month of September or October).
[16] Rice keeping pot.

surrounded the *heijang* with fences to keep people away from the it and kept it carefully. Seeing this Chaishra got very suspicious.

33. নোংমদী, পাওল শজীকক্লোয়না হৈ চানীংই হায়দুনা কোনুংদা অসুম থীরকপদা চাইশ্রানা, “মনীংদা হৈজাং অমা পাল্লিবদো হেক্লগা চারু” হায়বদগী শজীকক্লোয়না হেক্লগা ময়ুমদা পুখ্রে। খোক্তুনা চাগে তৌবদগী অথুবা থবক অমা লাক্তুনা কোন্না চারগে হায়দুনা চেঙফুদা থমখিবদগী নুমিৎ মরিনি শুবগী নুংথিন্দা নীংশিংলক্তুনা লৌথোক্লগা থাঙ থিবদা খঙদ্রেদো। থাঙ অমুক লৈরম্মে হৈ অমুক থিবা খঙদ্রে। শজীকক্লোয়দো শাউরদুনা ‘চাদ চাজররোইগে’ হায়দুনা অদুম লৈথোকখিবদুনা মঙানি শুবা নুমিৎত্তা হৈজাংদুদগী শনরেম্বী ওল্লবোইরে। পাউ অসি শজীকক্লোয়না কোনুংদা চেল্লগা নিংথৌদা তম্লুরে। নিংথৌনা চত্তুনা শনরেম্বীবু লৌরুরগা কোনুংদা থম্লে। অদুগা মপুকচেল ফত্রবী চাইশ্রাবুনা মরালগীদমক্তা খুদক্তা অঙাং ওলহনখ্রবোইরে।

34. One day, when the grass cutter felt like eating a fruit and was searching around the palace for it, Chaishra said, “there is a *heijang* fruit in the backyard, pluck it and eat it”. The grass cutter plucked it and took it home. When he tried to peel it and eat it, some urgent work came up, he kept it in the rice keeping pot to eat later. In the afternoon of the fourth day, he remembered and took it out and searched for a knife but couldn't find it. When he got the knife, he could not find the fruit. Feeling frustrated, the grass cutter said that he'll never eat this fruit'. On the fifth day, the *heijang* fruit turned into Shanrembi. The grass cutter went to the palace and gave this news to the king. The king went and took Shanrembi and kept her in the palace. As for the wicked Chaishra, she was killed at once for her crimes.

35. অসুন্না অবাবা খুদোংথীবা কয়া থেংনরবা মতুংদা শনরেম্বী অমুক হন্না নিংথৌগা লৈমিন্নদুনা, লৈম-শীজকা ওইদুনা নুংঙাইনা পানখিবোইরে।

36. Thus, after facing many hardships and danger, Shanrembi once again lived together with the king as his queen and lived happily ever after.

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Cultural elements in the above folktale.

Personal Names:

	Source Language	Target Language
1	Yangkhureima	Yangkhuriema
2	Shangkhureima	Shangkhureima
3	Shandrembi	Shandrembi
4	Chaisra	Chaisra

Alford (1988:51) says that personal names represent individual identity in two ways. They inform the society who the individual is, and they tell the individual who he or she is or is expected to be[17]. In Meetei also personal name indexes a great deal of information about the culture; values, cultural practices, ethnic and religious background, environment, languages, etc. In the above table, SL (1) and (2) do not have meaning in the SL whereas SL (3) and (4) are insects which stick at the backside of a green plant leaf. SL (3) is gold in colour whereas SL (4) is black in colour. Therefore, SL (3) is characterised as beautiful, calm and good natured while SL (4) is characterised as ugly and notorious. In Meetei philosophy, the name is so closely associated with the person himself that it is believed that a good name will bring good fortune to the person who bears it. (Moirangthem 1993:173).

Form of Address:

	Source language	Target language
1	*Machanupi* (sl.1)	Daughter (sl.2)
2	*Iche* (sl.7)	Elder sister (sl.8)

[17] Russell, Nongthombam. "Meithei Personal names", LANGUAGE IN INDIA. Volume 7: 12 December 2007.

3	*Inao* (sl.7)	Younger sister (sl.8)
4	*Leimashija* (sl.21)	Queen (sl. 22)
5	*Nabungo* (sl.25)	Superior or master (sl.26)
6	*Ishanou* (sl.28)	Beloved for female (sl.29)
7	*Nashabi* (sl.28)	Beloved for male (sl.29)

Meetei has a unique form of address in the above table demonstrates the forms of address present in the selected Manipuri folktale for the analysis. Most of the people avoid using name while addressing someone. For an example *Iche*, which is used to refer to a woman who is elder to the addressee and *Ibema* if the older person address to a younger female. It is not mandatory to be blood relation. Whereas for male *Ibungo* to the younger ones and *Tada* for the older male. SL (1), (2) and (3) has been translated with TL equivalence. Meetei royal titles for the queens are address according to their positions such as *Meetei Leima/Leimashija* for head queen; 2nd queen – *Apambi Ahal*; 3rd queen – *Leimakhubi*; 4th queen – *Leimakhubi Ahal*; 5th queen – *Leimakhubi Naha*. However, SL (4) has been translated as queen, as in the tale there is no mention of other wife rather than her. So, while translation first or second wife has not been mentioned. SL (5), has been translated as master to fit the context and SL (6) and (7) has been translated with TL equivalence as "beloved".

Reduplication:

	Source Language	Target Language
1	*Nongma-nongmagi* (sl.5)	Day by day (sl.6)
2	*Parap-parap* (sl.7)	Hurriedly (sl.8)
3	*Nachil-noupwa* (sl.13)	Siblings/brother and sister (14)
4	*Ingba-tapa* (sl.3)	Calm and good natured (sl.4)
5	*Nganfung-nganfung* (sl.13)	Dawn (sl.14)

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6	*Thaja-yonjaba* (sl.19)	Betrothed (sl.21)
7	*Awat-apa* (sl.21)	Shortage (sl.22)
8	*Kapna-kapna* (sl.17)	while crying (sl.18)
9	*Chada-thaktana* (sl.21)	Without eating anything (sl.22)
10	*Kalak-kanjao* (sl.23)	Jealousy (sl.24)
11	*Lik-kon* (sl.23)	Jewellery (sl.24)
12	*Setchin-sijinle* (sl.23)	Wear (sl.24)
13	*Chingna-chingna* (sl.23)	Suspicious (sl. 24)

The above table shows the reduplication mentioned in the folktale *Shanrembi Chaisra.* SL (1) has been translated with its literal meaning, SL (2) is used to refer to being fast or haste and it has been translated with the adverb ‘hurry’. SL (3) is used to refer to siblings as in a collective noun and has been translated with its literal meaning. SL (4) is used to refer to someone’s behaviour and nature, so it has been translated with its functional equivalent, TL (4). SL (5) is the repetition of the word ‘dawn’. It has been translated without repeating the word with its literal meaning and the word ‘early’ has been added. The literal meaning of SL (6) would be selling or giving away. But it is used to say when a girl reaches a marriageable age and is to be betrothed and has been translated with equivalent word in English. SL (7) has to be used together as they do not have individual meaning and it has been rendered with its equivalent word ‘shortage’. SL (8) has been translated with its literal meaning TL (8). SL (9) has been translated with its literal meaning. SL (10) is used for jealousy and the word *kanjao* could not be used separately as it does not have an individual meaning. SL (11) is used to refer to ornaments as a collective. But when these two words are used individually, then *kon* means utensils and *lik* means necklace or jewellery. SL (12) refers to getting dressed up but it has been translated as wear to convey the meaning of the context. SL (13) is used to refer to the degree of doubt or suspicion. Therefore, it has been translated with the adjective ‘suspicious.’

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Food Items:

	Source Language	Target Language
1	*Heibong* (sl. 7)	Fig 9 (sl.8)
2	*Ngarou* (sl.11)	*Ngarou* (sl.12)
3	*Ngakha* (sl. 15)	*Ngakha* (sl.16)
4	*Lemlei* (sl. 11)	Fish (sl.12)
5	*Ngamu* (sl. 15)	*Ngamu* (sl.16)
6	*Chagempomba* (sl. 30)	*Chagempomba* (sl.31)
7	*Heijang* (sl. 30)	*Heijang* (sl.31)

SL (1) is translated with its literal meaning. SL (2) is roasted fish that could be eaten with rice as a side dish. It has not been translated into English as the importance of this particular food in Meetei culture would not remain the same if it is rendered into English. SL (3) and (4) have not been translated into English. It has been kept as it was given in the SL and a description is given in the footnotes instead. SL (6) is problematic in translation due to the cultural nuance attached with the curry. It is cooked with a variety of green leaves such as mustard leaves, potato leaves, etc. and green herbs along with *hawaijar* (fermented soya bean) which is the main ingredient. A bit of rice and some dried fish are also added while making this particular curry. However, some community use pork or other meat. SL (7) is a fruit which is used as one of the most important fruit related with religious offerings in Meetei culture. Therefore, it has not been translated into English to acknowledge the importance.

House and structure related terms:

	Source Language	Target Language

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1	*Ukhongten* (sl.13)	Pillar (sl.14)
2	*Maning* (sl.30)	Backyard (sl.31)

The Meetei community has specific house model, which become a sign of the community's identity. The members of a family establish a behavioural pattern in relation to spatial norms. As a result, selecting a site for their home and constructing their home are both religious practices. Interior and exterior architectural spaces, closed and accessible, private and public, are both developed.[18] Meetei *yumjao* is constructed facing east direction as it is believed that it will bring good fortunes and health. It is believed that the house is constructed imitating the human body. The base of a house is made up of different pillars which are horizontal and vertical poles. The roof is supported by bamboo poles and has a gable shape. The *humdang* (rafter poles) are arranged in odd numbers. Meetei Yumjao has separate rooms *Sanamahi* (family diety), *Phamen ka* (father's room), *piba ka* (son's room, *ningol ka* (daughter's room), *chakhum* (kitchen), *Mangol* (porch), *phamen* (elders' resting place) and *leimarel* ka (mother's room). SL (1) and SL (2) have been translated with the English equivalent term 'pillar' and 'backyard' respectively. If we discuss on the architecture of the Meetei *Yumjao* would be unending.

Household Utensils:

	Source language	Target language
1	*Ishaiphu* (sl.13)	Earthen pot (sl.14)
2	*Poon* (sl.19)	Water pot (sl.20)
3	*Chegaipoon* (sl.19)	Earthen water pot (sl.20)
4	*Sanapoon* (sl.19)	Brass pot (sl.20)
5	*Chengphu* (sl.32)	*Chengphu* (sl.33)

[18] Yu Fu, Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, London: University of Minnesota, 2001, pp.101-104.

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Poon and *Chegaipoon* have been mentioned in *Shanrembi Chaisra*. *Poon* is a pot made of mud and *Sanapoon* is made of brass. It shows the different status of the carrier but both are used to fetch water. *Ishaiphu*- It is also an earthen pot but this pot cannot be used daily for fetching water. It is kept filled with water in the kitchen or near *Lainingthou Sanamahi* (local deity which is worshipped in every Meetei's house). *Chengphu*- Its function is for keeping rice but during the translation it has not been translated as it occupies a significant role in every Meetei's house. It is believed to be sacred. There are various beliefs regarding *Chengphu*. One cannot keep it empty or while taking out rice one should put back three handfuls of rice.

In *Shanrembi Chaisra,* there are lots of illustrations on customs and beliefs which are followed in the Meetei society. There was a custom in the Meetei society to have two wives especially among the rich or those who held high positions including the King himself. For instance, in *Shanrembi Chaisra* it is evident that the court officials had two wives. In addition to this, there was a custom of getting married for the second time after their wives deceased. In Meetei society, there is a strong belief about the number of days to perform something good or new. It is very important in Meetei society that while counting numbers, it should be in odd numbers. It is believed that odd numbers are auspicious and bring prosperity. For instance, when Shanrembi mother instructed her to, 'catch me and put me in an earthen pot for five days' and in the king's dream also he has been told in the dream, 'to raise the wild pigeon for five days.

In the earlier times, abduction of a woman was a common practice in the Meetei society, which could be evident in *Shanrembi Chaisra* when the King's son abducts Shanrembi. In the early period, males used to go out and work, they used to go for days to earn money or to gather wood in the hills. Whereas women used to work at home or in the neighbourhood such as looming, fishing, etc. For instance, Chungkheirema and Yangkhureima in *Shanarembi Chaisra* go to catch fish to run their family.

The main objective of the paper was an attempt to present the culture of Manipur to the readers with some of the available cultural elements in the selected folktale as it is not possible to discuss all in details for instance Meetei *Yumjao* structure as it a vast area. Therefore, Lawrence Venuti's foreignisation was used to solve the problems. Title of the

folktale has not been translated instead has been given inside a bracket. So, the SL will be retained and easier for the readers to understand. Personal names have been rendered by means of foreignisation. In order to retain the Manipuri cultural terms, they have been kept in italics and footnotes and explanations are provided. Foreignisation strategy was preferred for the study because I wanted to keep the main core of the contexts during translation and to extend the promotion of the culture. In addition, this strategy would help readers to understand that the folktale is set in a different culture.

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Book Review

by

Kalyani Samantray[1]

Enoch, Kolakaluri. *Asprishya Ganga and Other Stories*. Translated by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar. Ratna Books. 2021. Pages 256. Rs. 448/-

Dalit stories are a powerful and necessary addition to the literary canon. The stories in *Asprishya Ganga and Other Stories*, written by a Dalit writer, Kolakaluri Enoch, and translated into English by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar, offer a unique perspective on the experiences of those who have been historically marginalised and oppressed in India.

What strike most about the stories in this collection are the rawness and honesty about the realities of Dalit lives without creating too brutal a picture of the existential oppression that is their daily lot. At the same time, these stories do not shy away from the problematics of discrimination, violence, and poverty. The tyranny is equivocal in terms of the perpetrators, both human and Nature. The contradictions in Dalit circumstances are also many. While the police bash up Obulesu, who receives Nature's bounty, the teacher couple digs an essential well that ends with a boulder instead of water. Bright Sudhakarrao's aspirations to be a doctor gets crushed by the verdict of a court of justice. While Sudhakarrao succumbs to the circumstance, Dr Simha turns his circumstances to become a successful cardiologist where his caste becomes inconsequential. The anti-Dalit Minister and the pro-Dalit VC, both ironically being Dalits themselves, espouse completely opposite values; eventually, conscience wins and power succumbs. Along with the pathos of the Dalit reality, hints of humour and sarcasm can be traced in stories like 'What's the Weapon?', 'Somersault', and 'Liberation'.

In addition to their raw honesty, the stories offer unique insights into the culture and traditions of Dalit communities. For example, although most characters are invariably burdened with monetary loan from the local moneylenders, it hurts their self-respect the most if the lender mentions this in the public. That would be the worst form of persuasive torture

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by the lender to subjugate the Dalits of their own volition. In each story, the self-esteem of the Dalits comes to the fore, be it not picking up the coolie money thrown at them, not paying obeisance to the unduly abusive members of the higher caste or challenging their taken-for-granted attitude that "Dalits can't revolt". Redeeming characters, Achary, Vinayak, the VC, the munasabu, Kodandam, and such others, provide the 'touch of love' and succour for the unfortunate Dalits. Some stories draw on folk tales and oral traditions, as 'The Crows', showcasing the cultural heritage of these communities. Universal ethics and morality that uphold humanity form the underlying core of the stories to contrast the acts of the scheming against the Dalits.

The third-person narrative gives voice to the characters, such as Sonabolu, Venkataramudu, Fakirappa, and even the multiple wives of the village heads or the prostitutes in the small towns, who have been silenced for far too long.

Certain powerful images interplay with the emotions of the characters. When young Sonabolu went forward to accept his 'coolie' money for the display of his superb artistry, he had to almost bare himself in the public, an imagery that captures how the Dalits have to relinquish their last particle of dignity to receive the pittance that is legitimately theirs. The sarcasm wrenches the heart. The complex and layered imagery in the title of the book, the same as the title of the story, 'Asprishya Ganga', the untouchable Ganga, weaves through each story creating the dark colours of illegitimate subdual of the Dalits. The sarcasm in the imagery is caustic and pervading as is the inherent paradox. In the story, the wife and their house both bear the name Godavari. The river Godavari considered the elder sister of River Ganga, and called the Southern Ganga, is equally sacred, yet the character, Godavari, is an untouchable. Govindalu, who gets the water spring into the well, is also an untouchable. One of the primordial elements, water, that sustains life knows no boundaries between a Dalit and a non-Dalit. The 'sami', the owner of well, and not a Dalit, resolves the distinction by drinking the leftover water that Govindalu has drunk. The river Ganga herself, who bears the ultimate power of purification, has become an untouchable, since the concept of untouchability has polluted the body and the soul of the society through Dalit repression. The writer tries to resolve this in the stories just as Vinayak has done, in a dispassionate, matter-of-fact manner. The narrative style is straight forward without fringes and negative emotions.

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One conspicuous aspect in the stories is that women have been underscored only as subservient to men, Dalit or non-Dalit. Not a single woman protagonist has been projected in any story, whereas certain male Dalit characters have been shown to even transcend their circumstances.

Overall, Dalit stories are an important and necessary addition to the literary circle. They offer a perspective that is often overlooked and ignored, and they challenge us to confront the injustices that continue to exist in India. *Asprishya Ganga and Other Stories* offers all these aspects to the reader. These stories reclaim the history and culture of the Dalits, suppressed, and erased by dominant castes for centuries.

Book Review

by

Gopal B. Rao[1]

Bhaduri, Seema. ***A Dynamic Modernity: Adaptation and Parody in Six Twentieth Century Indian Novels*****. Notion Press. 2022. Pages 477. Rs. 447/-**

It is a widely accepted fact that Indian scholarship on the varied aspects of the stream of consciousness narrative mode and its applications in Indian literature, is relatively speaking, not upto the mark. Therefore Dr. Seema Bhaduri's book A Dynamic Modernity – Adaptation and Parody in Six Twentieth Century Indian Novels marks a welcome sign of positive change in this direction. The book clearly demonstrates Ms. Bhaduri's deep understanding of her subject. Her interpretation of six critically acclaimed novels from the Bengali, Hindi and Indian English literatures, provides ample evidence of her critical acumen and scholarly training. Very few Indian writers have so far, properly evaluated the significant contributions of the stream of consciousness technique to Indian fiction.

Ms. Bhaduri's book looks closely at the elaborate use of parody in the selected novels. Parody imitates and then critiques the characteristic features of a particular literary work. In this it becomes an inbuilt mirror – of - a - mirror critique of the aesthetic view of life and of its philosophy, as articulated in a given work of art. To a great extent parody works through a whole range of incongruous juxtapositions that end up questioning pertinent categories of literary – cultural assumptions underlying the artwork. The result is a complex intermingling of aesthetic effects that become a running commentary as it were, on the ever-changing dynamics within the given field of art. In the Indian stream of conscious novel, parody became an important tool by means of which authors brought in their regional socio-cultural and literary contexts while portraying the random flow of impressions in the individual characters' minds. In the process they also questioned several entrenched literary and cultural premises underlying Western stream of consciousness novels. Ms. Bhaduri's book thus highlights the numerous conflicts between Western and Indian traditions and literary

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practices that appeared both, in the mental flux within the characters of the Indian novels, and in the respective novelists' field of vision. It draws attention to the novelists' extensive use of psychoanalysis together with existential perceptions as they explored the contemporary Indian reality.

It may be argued that though these novelists employed stream of consciousness as a set of narrative tools, they did not explore the subtler aesthetic dimensions of this mode, as unlike their Western forerunners. This perhaps is because to them neither the intricacies of the mind, nor the artifices of the technique in itself, were the targeted ends. The novelists - Dhurjati Prasad Mukhoipadhyay, Mahasweta Devi, Sacchidanand Vatsyayan Agyeya, Mannu Bhandari, Raja Rao and Anita Desai rejected, for the purpose of avoiding the over-insistent authorial rhetoric, the use of extreme psychological realism to the exclusion of the larger social reality. Instead, they sought to evoke through their characters' subtle, subconscious thoughts and feelings, this larger reality.

The book's main thrust is quite specific - to draw out the range of discourses on tradition and modernity literary and cultural, in each novel. In diverse ways these novels reflect the ordeals of the reflexive consciousness in the individual and the increasing marginalization that such individuals face in a society which is losing hold over moral value systems. Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay's Antahsheela and Mahasweta Devi Bhattacharya's Baiskoper Baksho evoke the psychological aspects of a vision and sensibility that characterized the rise of modernization in Bengal. Agyeya's Shekhar Ek Jivani Vol. 1 and Mannu Bhandari's Aap ka Bunti present the numerous conflicts between conventional society and the sentient individual in the Hindi speaking world. Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope and Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock bring out the many mutually conflicting dimensions of the Indian consciousness in contemporary history.

The Indian novels have been compared broadly with Virginia Woolf's To the Light House and Mrs. Dalloway, James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, in order to highlight how the Indian novelists, even as they clearly borrowed features of theme, technique and style from these works, altered their content as well as its aesthetic perspective to project the Indian reality. In both sets of fiction, social and psychological realism are blended together largely through private thought processes, i.e., through moods, memories and reveries, dreams and imagination. In

her introductory chapter the writer has discussed the contribution of Sigmund Freud, Henri Louis Bergson, and Mikhail Bakhtin to the origins of this new style of writing in the West. These thinkers had focused on drawing out the conflicting multiplicities of time and reality in the individual's psyche, within the narratives. Indian novelists used these techniques to dramatize the changing modes of consciousness within the character, though they also positioned the character firmly in the larger regional context with all its traditional and historical multiplicities.

The book clearly states that the understanding of the modern is significantly at variance with the conventional conceptions of Western modernism especially in the field of art. Broadly, while the modern western vision emphasizes the individual's liberty from all socio - traditional constraints the Indian novels have emphasized the need within the individual, to attain liberty also from the shackles of subjectivity and memory that bind one to a limited view of truth. This gives to the Indian novels, a transcendental dimension.

The book is interdisciplinary in nature; it draws in both Indian and Western approaches to existence, psychology, history, and art. It throws light on the ontological dimensions of the Indian myths and traditions appearing in the novels. In these narratives the issue of identity - cognitive, moral and aesthetic, is seen to rise above all judgmental categories, to metamorphose as it were, onto a transcendental plane through a luminous force of perception. Their perceptions on human identity repeatedly parody the Western cult of individualism. There clearly appears among these writers, a degree of implicit consensus on the idea of modernity. This broad consensus is also reflected in their larger reception of the Western perceptions on man, art and society.

This book illustrates how these novelists had mastered the intricacies of the new technique and employed them with characteristic aplomb to explore and lay out for the first time in modern Indian literature, the subconscious world of the individual. With exacting technical scrutiny they produced works with the most satisfying content, thickness and resonance that reverberate with deepening layers of meaning. Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay's autobiographical novel Antasheela analyzes its material – the subconscious conflicts within a highly learned Westernized Indian intellectual, rigorously. The value and the quality of the experiences that it depicts are not defined by any appended comment or moral epithet, but by the very texture of its style. In this it echoes Joyce's A Portrait where a

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young artist's growing alienation from his environment is explored and evaluated through three different narrative styles, as Stephen Dedalus moves from childhood through boyhood into maturity. In Joyce's novel the opening pages resemble the stream of consciousness of his later work, Ulysses. The environment impinges directly on the consciousness of the infant and child, and the response is a strangely new, budding world of the mind which does not yet subject anything to questioning, selection, or judgment. This style changes very soon as the boy begins to explore his surroundings. As his sensuous experience of the world gathers strength it takes on heavier and heavier rhythms and a fuller and fuller body of sensuous detail, until it reaches a crescendo of romantic opulence in the emotional climaxes which mark Stephen's rejection of conventional values. What has happened to Stephen is of course, a progressive alienation from the life around him as he began to face it, and by the end of the novel the alienation is complete. In essence Stephen's alienation, like Khagenbabu's in the early pages of Antahsheela, is a denial of the human environment; it is a loss. The austere discourse of the final section, abstract and almost wholly without any sensuous detail or rhythm, tells us of that loss. It is a loss so great that the bare prose-like texture of the notation here suggests an emotional aridity.

Khagenbabu's thoughts and feelings represent the modernist Indian mind and sensibility which explores its own nature as closely as it does the world around. This world includes both Western and Indian traditions of thought, as well as their concrete social realities. Though he is obsessed with the ideal of total detachment from bodily wants and from society in his quest for wholeness and meaning, Khagenbabu's scrutinizing vision exposes the ironic conflicts between intellectual idealism and natural demands in his own character. Ultimately, he comes to realize that rather than repressive intellectuality, only a harmonious interrelation of one's higher and lower needs through art can lead to one's transformation. Based on this realization he evolves his personal theory of art. This theory is far more comprehensive in its vision and its range of applications than is Stephen's in A Portrait. Khagenbabu's character as well as his theory mark a remarkable point of achievement in modernist Indian aesthetics.

Khagenbabu and Stephen also share several character-traits. Both of them "are ambitious, idealistic, dreamy lovers of learning, but self-conscious, rather haughty, sensual on the subconscious plane." They are envious and disdainful with their lovers. Both reject the

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calls of society, nation and religion in their pursuit of freedom and wholeness. Stephen moves away from family, society and nation to develop himself as an artist. Khagenbabu too moves away initially with the purpose of gaining independence, but when he realizes that art is all about building connections and harmony in life, he invites Romola the lady he loves, to join him in Kashi where he now lives, for a life of meaningful companionship rather than marriage. Stephen comes upon no such realization.

The second Bengali novel discussed in this book is Mahasweta Devi's Baishkoper Baksho. It portrays impressionistically the seven decades of socio-cultural and political turmoil during the independence struggle, that had deeply affected the world of an aristocratic community in Bengal. This long time span is captured within the narrative time of a few hours of an evening through the memories and reveries of some elderly characters. The central metaphor in this narrative is the cinematograph, an instrument used by Western Stream of Consciousness novelists to symbolize the way in which mind and memory work through the association of ideas. In the Bengali novel, all the memories coursing through the minds of the eight characters persons who had assembled at the evening's get-together appear 'like snapshots on a cinematographic film'. In the novel an old cinematograph which had been the now dead Neli's plaything, captures in the photographs that it contains, the many undercurrents of thought and feeling that make the memories. These memories, however, entrap the characters in their dead past. It is only Shelimashi the sixty-year-old beautiful protagonist who succeeds in transcending the blinding grip of her memories into the full awareness of present freedom, and to exercise her freewill.

The book brings out the host of similarities between Woolf's novels and Mahasweta Devi's work. Both novelists had used multiple perspectives to build their major characters. As a result, the different aspects of these characters continued to emerge in random ways through other characters' memories of them. This technique imbues the texts with a fluid texture, the characters keep evolving until the very end of the narratives. Again, Clarissa the protagonist in Mrs. Dalloway, and Shelimashi, both are deeply obsessed with their past lovers whom each meets after a long-time span at the get-together or party that each one hosts. Shelimashi's lover Kapil had suddenly married her younger sister Beli, plunging the rest of the family into despair, and the two had gone away twenty years ago. It may be asserted that her range of experiences and feelings far surpass those of Woolf's Clarissa and Mrs. Ramsay.

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These English protagonists suffer a spiritual void despite their unique social status and yearn for death. On the contrary Shelimashi who has suffered much more than they, is helped by Debasish the poor teacher and painter, to discover a new, transcendental vision of life in which the past is integrated meaningfully with the present in the "larger world of ethereal consciousness".

Woolf's ideas on art and the artistic perspective are reflected in Mahasweta Devi's novel. Debasish like Woolf's Lily Briscoe uses the creative imagination and the detached perspective to arrive upon the intuitive sense of balance that carries the vision of truth. In these texts clock time is replaced by the intuitive sense of duration as felt through moods, feelings and awareness which are infinitely elastic. Mahasweta Devi's artistic blending of moods, memories and atmosphere, echoes Woolf's. Both these novelists' concerns with art and with time reflect a spiritual dimension that in these texts, blends the aesthetic with the holistic vision. Debasish's vision of life and his applications of art parody those of Lily Briscoe whose character had obviously influenced his.

Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsyayan Agyeya's autobiographical novel Shekhar: Ek Jeevani had been a landmark in the history of the modern Hindi novel. He was the precursor of the modernist experimental movement, Pryogvaad. Following Agyeya, other eminent writers like Ilachandra Joshi, Jainendra Kumar and Mannu Bhandari had started the Nayi Kahani Movement. They had adapted cinematic and stream of consciousness techniques to effectively co-relate both present and past for unifying the thematic design of their narratives.

Shekhar Ek Jeevani builds on Agyeya's personal life, the rallying point of which was his experience of imprisonment in the Lahore Jail for seditionist activities against the British Government. The narrator-protagonist Shekhar revives his past by means of memories and reflections, looking for the essential "meaning of life from the casual point of view". Even as child Shekhar had been a rebel and a visionary. To him, "rebels are born, not made", and rebellion exposes the ugly truth of religious bigotry, hypocrisy and social evils. He attributes to his cousin Shashi who personally had rebelled against male dominion in matrimonial life, and had supported Shekhar's own development, the subject-hood of his novel. This was a major act of subversion of the idea of subjectivity, of cloistered individualism, in Western fiction, particularly in its Stream of Consciousness novels.

Unlike Joyce's narrator in A Portrait, Agyeya "does not seek to control the narrative". Instead, he allows his character to evolve freely, and watches him grow much like Pirandello whose influence Agyeya acknowledges. Both the novels deal with issues of identity, political slavery and corruption. Both protagonists suffer from libidinal hungers, guilt and repression and the growing awareness of social hypocrisies. They are led to rebellion against conventional notions of art and beauty, morality and religion. But unlike Stephen, Shekhar is fired by the zeal to uplift society's downtrodden. Literature and aesthetics are not his concern. He wants to nurture the spirit to rebellion, to pass it on to future generations, to keep the flame of justice burning. In this zeal, he rejects the narcissistic subjectivity of Stephen's kind, opting instead for sheer self-command and the will to fight for social reformation.

Agyeya acknowledged that T.S. Eliot's concept of impersonality had shaped the thematic organization of his narrative. Pondering on his childhood, the narrator slowly arrives upon "self-understanding" and the apperception of the deep iniquities in society. Herein lay the roots of his modernist rebellion again convention in pursuit of an egalitarian social order. Ms. Bhaduri's penetrating observations on the novel, her approach to the complex issue of subjectivity, her elaborate discussion on the uniqueness with which the stream of conscious narrative techniques have been used here, as well as her style of presentation are not only scholarly, but they make a very impressive contribution to the study of Hindi literature as well.

The second Hindi novel to be taken up in this book is Mannu Bhandari's Aap ka Bunty. She belonged to the prominent group of Hindi novelists who were called "Metropolitan Intellectuals". While their fictional works focused on the subjective and reflective dimensions of life, they also experimented with fantasy to project the schizoid mindsets thriving in conventional society. Bhandari's radical views and innovative narrative techniques had made a significant contribution to the Nayi Kahani movement. The much-acclaimed Aap Ka Bunti deals with the agonizing dilemma of a nine-year-old boy traumatized by the marital differences between his parents. In her Foreword, the author introduces the social agenda of her narrative, highlighting the damaging impact of parental disharmony upon children. The proud and egotistic Bunty is torn in by the recurring sense of being "unwanted and rootless" in a breaking family. The tales of the ogress Sonal Rani who would change appearances and eat up her own children, become to him a metaphor for his

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own mother who had been detaching him from herself. He fantasizes on thrilling imaginary experiences of cycling through bridges, valleys and hills to meet sadhus and with their magic flying scandals, go to his father. But his over-protective mother doesn't allow him even to go outside the garden-gate.

Bunty's desires reflect a Freudian angle. Pampered excessively by his lone mother, and not allowed to play with other boys, he carries strong oedipal traits and feels that he is the man of the house. But he deeply loves his father too. The narrative portrays impressionistically all his innocent, ambitious yet failing efforts to reconcile his parents. His mother's remarriage and the disturbing sexual sights in the new house aggravate his sense of alienation, plunging him increasingly, into despair. Ms. Bhaduri highlights the subtle concussion of the subconscious and unconscious forces of fear and loneliness, hope, guilt and repression, wrath, hate and libidinal desire in the child's mind. Ajay's taking the already unstable Bunty away with him to Calcutta, and then on to some children's hostel, are increasingly tragic moves pushing the once bright and spirited boy into schizophrenia.

Both Bunty and Joyce's Stephen are very close to their mothers. Both are infatuated with beauty, flowers and women. Craving for knowledge, and egotists by nature they live in private dreams and fantasies of hope, love, power, and fear too. Bunty is a remarkable painter; Stephen loves the visual magic of colours. But Stephen's world evolves through legendary characters of history and myth, through success and approbation; Bunty's talents are successively marred by indifferent circumstances which bring emotional insecurity, loneliness, disillusionment and ultimately, the loss of his dearly loved identity. It strikes the child that he is a mere toy being jostled between his estranged parents. Only, he wonders to whom exactly he belongs.

Mannu Bhandari uses the techniques of stream of consciousness superbly to portray Bunty's failing mental powers, and his agonizing awareness of it all. The pattern of the novel is textured with extreme delicacy, his past fused with his present through a variety of persuasive devices of narratology. The novelist paints verbally, the widening discord between mother and son. Neither of them is aware of what the other is feeling, and so the discord reaches snapping point. The reference in this book to William Faulkner's device of using symbols as "substitutes for rationally formulated ideas" is remarkable and pertinent, particularly regarding the bottles of cosmetics standing on Bunty's mother's dressing table.

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The child attributes to them the pernicious magic with which his mother changes her appearances, like Sonal Rani. Full credit to Ms. Seema Bhaduri for her lucid analysis of the text. The style of her assessment is carefully cadenced and at times, almost poetic.

The fourth chapter of this book deals with two literary masterpieces in Indian Writing in English. Dr. Bhaduri's thesis is that the Indian writer in English can retain his identity only by transcreating the Indian ethos in an idiom independent of the Englishman's, by suffusing his creation with native colours and rhythms. The Serpent and the Rope is a classic metaphysical novel, a brilliant, artistic exposition of the Advaita of Sri Sankara in the context of present life. The protagonist Ramaswamy looks at both self and world in terms of the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta which denies that the dualism of the material world is reality. Rama's talks and reflections on the nature of reality comprise the content of the narrative. Rama tries to transcend the subjective divide between his self and the outer world by rising to the impersonal plane of experience. He dwells on the nature of the Supreme Self, on the mysteries of Creation, destiny, death, and Nirvana. He explains the dualistic character of bourgeois Puritanism, Buddhism and Marxism dwelling on their emphasis on the relative and the illusory. Only the Vedanta, he claims, explains the ultimate Reality.

While Rama's relations with his wife Madeleine cool off due to their basic cultural differences, Savithri becomes Rama's soulmate because the self-other divide that comprises Madelaine's worldview, does not exist in her view of things. Rama is in fact a slave to phenomenology. He has lent his soul to the worldly aspects of Madeleine and Savithri and all that they represent. Though a wanderer essentially, he is thus bonded to maya. Disenchanted in having failed both Madeleine and Savithri in different ways, he feels the severe pressure to transcend his shortcomings, the urgent need for a redeemer, a Guru who could lead him to liberation. He is looking for the ultimate Truth, the simple white rope of life that under influence of maya, appears to be the serpent of myriad qualities. The analogy of the serpent and the rope, derived from the Vedanta, illustrates how in ordinary life, the relative masks the Absolute, the illusion hides the Reality, the shadow appears for the Substance.

The Serpent and the Rope is a masterpiece of narration. Dramatic interest in the novel lies in the writer's building up of the psychology of the major characters through imagery, symbol, and myth, such that these characters come to acquire a transcendental dimension of

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being. The narrative patterns and techniques are drawn from the puranas and from the stream of consciousness novels as well.

The next text in English, Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock, is about the young Maya's intense emotional suffering, her hallucinations and schizophrenia that have their origins in her childhood with its repressed passions and feelings. The memory of the dreadful astrologer who had predicted the death of one of the spouses in the fourth year of their marriage, had weakened her sensibilities. The neglect that she suffers at the hands of her elderly husband Gautama, and finally, the death of her dog Toto, her only companion so far, all go on to trigger a chain of morbid, volatile reactions to understand the origins of which she resorts to her usual practice of "furious pillow – beating" that tires her restless mind and body out, so that repressed memories emerge onto the planes of consciousness. This battle between the conscious and the subconscious impulses planes leads to dark, often unconscious desires surfacing on her mind. They begin to influence the lonely girl's thought and action. Macabre images of Toto's rotting corpse, of bodies bathing in warm blood, of nocturnal snakes, hounding drumbeats, nightly shrieks of peacocks, and of the sinister, watchful eye of the lizard on the wall, all reflect her growing neurosis. The ghastly colours of sky and vegetation appearing to her eyes remind one of similar colours into the Lighthouse where they indicate an overhanging sense of violence, death and decay. In both texts these images reveal the "irruptions from the preconscious".

The arrival of Gautama's mother and sister revives Maya's spirits. The old woman was "a pillar of support" in living, an anchor much unlike her son. But after they leave, Maya's subconscious intentions override her will; her killer instinct becomes stronger as she places all blame on Gautama and craves for liberation from him. Her schizoid furies are finally unleashed. She cajoles him to the roof top from where in maddening fury and glee she pushes him down the parapet wall.

The novel makes a marvelous use of the stream of conscious narrative devices to project the progressive subordination of rational impulses to subconscious promptings, ending in devastating consequences in a context that is clearly contemporary. Maya, like Mrs. Ramsay and Clarissa, has realized the "inadequacy of human relationships". Rich in emotion and in artistic tendencies, these fine ladies are incapable of abstract intellectual thinking. At the same time, Maya resembles Woolf's Septimus Smith who too is a highly sensitive person

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and to whom nothing matters more than love, beauty and harmony. Their mental derangement stems from abusive external agencies. Both novels illustrate Woolf's view that life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged. Maya's neurotic condition may be likened to Woolf's idea of a semitransparent envelope surrounding her being from the beginning of the narrative to the end. Both novelists provide picturesque verbal and syntactical approximations of the mind in a state of flux, one which restlessly drives itself to emptiness and extinction. Both of them succeed in imposing a rigorous aesthetic order and form on this complex psychic content.

Criticism of the Indian novel in English could be said to have oscillated until very recently, between mere textual explication often exasperatingly banal, and the audacious advancing of ponderous claims with characteristic complacence. Explanations and clichés rather than scrutiny and critical acumen came to abound. The situation however is rapidly changing, owing mainly to the greater experimentation with new outlooks found in the Indian novel in English today. There is more of systematic survey of content, and of candid appraisal. This is reflected in the present book which in many ways counts as being a representative one. The author's meticulous treatment of themes and discourses in all of these novels exemplifies the essential nature of aesthetic evaluation.

While the overall usefulness of the book is un-deniable, its logic of being comprehensive is sustained by the criteria of her selection of the texts. Each one of these six novels represents as Dr. Bhaduri herself notes, some of the most pertinent concerns of modernist Indian writing. Well-researched, well-organized, and well-documented, this book throws light on certain very crucial and currently relevant aspects of Bengali, Hindi and Indian English novels in a manner that is both lucid and scholarly. I am sure it would make a valuable addition to the University and College libraries both in India and abroad.

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Book Review

by

R. Azhagarasan[1]

Manavalan, A. *Ramayana: A Comparative Study of Ramakathas*. Translated into English and Edited by C. T. Indra and Prema Jagannathan, Vitasta, 2021, pp. 416, Rs. 995/-.

The return of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in research and fictional retellings has occupied a significant place in the literary-academic domain in the last three decades. Unlike the early 20th century readings, which either endorsed traditional values or totally rejected them as oppressive, the 1990s and the years that followed offered novel readings, rather re-readings of the *itihasas*, puranas, and myths. It was taken up in the scholarly studies on puranic narratives, the return to roots in the theatre movements, and the retellings of the stories of Ekalayva, Karna, Sambuka, and Draupathi in English and Indian regional languages from a feminist and marginal perspective. Such diverse activities in the cultural sphere made the puranic narratives not just a contesting space but also a spectacle through the nation-wide telecast of the Ramayana and Mahabharata in Doordarshan. It was in that context that Dr. A. A. Manavalan, former professor of Tamil, University of Madras, a renowned comparatist, linguist, Sanskrit and Hindi scholar, Fulbright fellow and a scholar of Epic Studies, undertook this study, Rama Kaathaiyum, Ramayanangalum, and published it in 2005. In this study, Prof. Manavalan seeks to move beyond his earlier comparative study of Milton's Paradise Lost and Kamban's Ramayana. First, he disengaged with the notion that comparisons needed to be made between the texts/authors of two different cultures. Secondly, he took into account the challenges made in the US universities against comparative studies, especially Gayatri Spivak's declaration of the 'death of a discipline'. He thus moved towards studying literary cultures, eventually publishing a collection of his writings in English under the title Studies in Literary Cultures. As a translator of Aristotle's Poetics into Tamil and part of Tolkappiyam into English, he undertook this study of Ramakathas from the perspective of the change in Comparative Literature that foregrounds Translation Studies. He was greatly inspired by Susan Bassnett's treatment of the versions of Guinevere story as translations, which in a way

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drove him to establish the role and function of Ramakathas in tune with the socio-cultural spheres. It is for this wider scope and depth, and for its methodology that this study received the prestigious Saraswati Samman Award from K. K. Birla Foundation, Delhi in 2011.

The English translation of this study (Ramayanas: A Comparative Study of Ramakathas) published by Vitasta in 2021, became part of this continuing interest on Ramayana and Mahabharata research. With the conscientious efforts of Prof Indra - former professor of English, University of Madras and a Fulbright post-doctoral fellow who audited a course with the famous American Comparatist Prof Harry Levin at Harvard and listened to lectures by Prof Claudio Guillen, and a winner of Katha award for translation, and Prof Prema Jaganathan, former Associate Professor of English, Stella Maris College Chennai, with a deep devotion to Tamil literature, this translation has come to us with fine flare of an Indological study. As we get to read this, we also come across a few significant works on Ramayanas: Living Ramayanas: Exploring the Plurality of the Epic in Wayanad and the World (2021), Hikayat Seri Rama: The Malay Ramayana, translated from the original Malay by Harry Aveling, Writer's Workshop, Kolkata (2020), and The Multivalence of an Epic: Retelling the Ramayana in South India and Southeast Asia, ed. Parul Pandya Dhar, Manipal University Press (2022)—to name just a few. What makes Prof. Manavalan's work different from these works is his thrust on the methodology and not just on the object of study. The translators have also been conscious of preserving this. This work undertakes a comparison of 48 Ramakathas from about 22 languages across India and South Asia from 5th century BCE to the 19th century CE. In this work, Manavalan takes up Bala Kaandam, Ayodhya Kaandam and Aranya Kaandam. It is unfortunate that he did not live a little longer to continue his study of the other kaandams. It is important to note here that these researches were later accommodated when he edited the eight-volume Ramayana for the authentic edition of Kambaramayanam published by the Kamban Kazhagam of Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

His focus on the 'ethics and aesthetics of comparative study' resisted any possible appropriation of his data regarding contesting versions of Ramakathas. It also made his work non-polemical and demanded objective reflection on the corpus. In his preface, Professor Manavalan has made this very clear saying that his study "stems from the keen interest to do comparative research into how the various Ramayana epics... reveal these transformations in artistic forms... The differences discerned through this study are not used as criteria for

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evaluating the relative superiority or inferiority of the linguistic, literary and cultural variations" (2-3). It is this focus on the 'method' that keeps the reader from reading it as yet another work on Ramayana. This was highlighted in the translator's note as well as in the "Foreword" given by the Sahitya Akademi and Saraswati Samman award winner, Dr. Indira Parthasarathy.

Referring to the Buddhist Jataka tales as the first to name Rama, this study located the birthplace of Rama in Varanasi against the accepted notion that it is Ayodhya. Unlike other scholars who invoked arguments citing the version of Rama and Sita as siblings or the version treating Sita as Ravana's daughter, Prof. Manavalan makes such observations in a non-polemical sense. He says: "Although the living aspect of a culture sustains the continuous flow of life of a country as a subterranean spiring, it is but natural that the mechanics of existence driven by politics, history, society and external cultural mixing or blending should radically transform it on the surface, modifying it in such a way that it appears to be an entirely different set of cultural features" (2). Those who can compare these words with the Tamil source will definitely appreciate the translators' assimilation of Prof. Manavalan's nuanced argument. Prof. Manavalan, who had a life-long passion for comparative study, maintained continuous correspondence with leading comparatists like Ulrich Weisstein, Anna Balakian, and a few others in the West, and chose to produce this monumental work in Tamil with a view to highlighting the virtue and value of the 'method' over 'matter' for his native Tamil audience. While other works that appeared recently regarded Ramayana(s) as their 'object' of study, Manavalan placed the data to raise questions regarding the status of the 'object' and its relation to the 'subject'. This, he claims, helped him to let the corpus speak for itself.

I wish to cite here just two instances of professor Manavalan's study that holds relevance in the present academic context: one, his comparisons of the Ahalya story as found in the various versions he cites; and the other, his reference to Rama's birth in Kambaramayanam lending itself to its diffusion from south to northern recensions, leading to the celebration of Ramanavami.

The appearance of the Ahalya story in the southern recension as a cursed being turned into a stone for her apparently unwitting sexual misconduct with Lord Indra, Professor

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Manavalan says, has its connection with the ancient Tamil tradition. Expressing his awareness of the debate on this from a feminist perspective, but avoiding taking any stance, he chose to cite the prevalence of this view as part of the earlier Tamil literary tradition. As evidence, he cited Parimelazhagar's commentary on the lines (19:50-52) in the Tamil Sangam text, Paripadal which tells the story of Ahalya's transformation into stone: "They say that this is the one who became a stone as a punishment for lapse of conduct" (115). This focus on the prevalence of 'retellings within the tradition' is very much relevant in the present-day context when scholars privilege one fictional retelling over the other. Unlike the ideological claims of the contemporary retellings of characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata, the retellings within the tradition are self-conscious of their status as yet another version in the continuum. Talking about the reference to Ramanavami, he says:

Professor G. H. Bhatt who edited the Baroda University's critical edition of Bala Kandam, states in a footnote pertaining to this section that slokas relating to the planetary positions at the time of birth of Rama and others are to be found only in the copies of the Southern Recension (G1, G2, G3, M1, M2) and that they are not found in the Northern and North Western Recensions… When viewed on the basis of currently documentary evidence, it is Kamba Ramayanam that provides this information for the first time. (99-101)

In an interview with Prof. Manavalan (appeared in July 2013 issue of Ungal Noolagam) that Prof. R. Srinivasan and I conducted, he told us: "This insertion was done by Sanskrit pundits from Kumbakonam mutt. They had translated from Kambar's text and inserted it into the Sanskrit Ramayana. Scholars proved this as an insertion by citing the fact that Valmiki Ramayana did not travel through oral traditions… It is difficult to find out such insertions in a text circulated in the language spoken by the people (61)."

While his study of the Ahalya story holds significance in the present-day academic interest on retellings, his meticulous study on the diffusion of Rama's birth reflects upon the value of textual criticism and the transactions among traditions, versions, and recensions, and breaks the opposition between the folk and the classical. Here Professor Manavalan's interest was not aimed at proving the diffusion and create polemics, but to establish 'counter-influence' of a text from received culture back to the source culture. He thus made a significant challenge against the notion of 'influence' established in the history of

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Comparative Literature in the West. When we asked him whether this could be viewed as a postcolonial gesture, he simply said: "May be. But I cannot claim to have done it consciously" (62).

The translators, by choosing to translate it into English, let the non-Tamil readers both within and outside India know not just the function of Comparative Literature but also broaden the scope of Translation Studies towards enhancing Indology, which depends solely on the scholarship produced in English. What emerges in this translation is professor Manavalan's method and perspective, which are in tune with Comparative Studies as well as with the tradition of Tamil scholarship. Summing up the scope and perspective of this work, professor Indra says in her "Preface": "The book's ideological interests, though deliberately occulted by the erudite professor, also fascinated me much. They are not new, but they refuse to die. I hope this English translation helps to site the Tamil original within such discourse" (xxi). Her comments on the co-translator Prema Jagannathan suggest the challenges involved in translating native scholarship. This includes editing, condensing the material, glossing, and documenting the sources. This is different from the issues involved in the translations of fictional or, in general, creative writings. Thus, Prof A. A. Manavalan's book on Ramayana in English translation, one may say, opens new avenues in Indology as well as in Translation Studies.