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A Refereed Peer Reviewed Journal



MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies

A Refereed Peer Reviewed Journal

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FOREWORD

The Department of English and Culture Studies is happy to bring out the present issue of the MZU Journal of English and Cultural Studies, Volume IX Issue II after a breach in publishing only soft copies due to the pandemic. Devoted to a scholarly dialogue on a broad range of issues pertaining to Literature and Culture, this journal has served as a platform to deal with critically less researched areas, texts, perspectives and seek to understand and decode texts from new dimensions and angles.

Literature in its varied forms has produced diverging, often antagonistic attitudes towards life, language and thought. With Indian Writing in English as the theme of the present issue, the contributors' well researched papers attempts to capture the variegated spectrum of responses on globalization, representation, gender issues, subjectivity, ethnicity, nationhood, hybridity and multicultural sensibilities of the North East as well as various academic archetypes from across the country. The thought provoking articles significant to our time and cultures become examples of how critical engagement with cultural production not only assist in comprehending our today(s) but can also help us in raising questions about our tomorrow(s).

All research papers submitted to the editor undergo a double blind review by experts in related areas thereby ensuring the maintenance of standard. It is hoped that this well edited

journal will continue to serve as a valuable forum in enriching literature of the region and encourage critical and analytical investigation.

K.C. Lalthlamuani
Professor and Head
Department of English and Culture Studies

EDITORIAL

MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies (MZUJLCS) has consistently focused upon quality research and has striven to provide utmost value in terms of the literary perspective. In keeping with these endeavors the present issue of the journal has focused upon literature and cultural dynamics that have been essential and yet so fluid across the years. The focus has been on Indian Writing in English and there have been a number of interesting contributions from across the country. This volume has various scholars who have deliberated and debated upon issues that are well and truly eclectic and these have been significantly representative of the dynamics of cohesive research and writings from India. Amongst these are articles that have pondered upon utopian fantasy, conflict, poetry and discourse on various subjects. There are significant discourses too upon themes that are related to violence and insurgency from India's North East. Amidst these there are also critical essays that have pondered upon the notions of caste and transformation, multiculturalism, as well as memory and identity. No debate is significant without a mention of environment and the literary ethos and this journal too has incorporated an article on literature and climate crisis. We have incorporated book reviews as well as a piece in translation and these have added a welcome addition towards the finer nuances of journal.

It has been a tremendous challenge to get back to offline discourse but we are here and we have done it! A huge word of appreciation to all the contributors and here's wishing all of us a very enjoyable time while reading this volume!

Margaret L. Pachau
Editor

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"Sultana's Dream": Feminist Utopian Fantasy of an Indian Woman

Afrida Aainun Murshida

The English and Foreign Languages University
Shillong

Abstract: Feminist utopias are critiques of the patriarchal society that highlight the strongest forces of oppression on women. Authors unhappy with the current functioning of the society, fantasize of a social order free from the patriarchal yoke and its oppressive operations, looking forward to revolutionize and transform it. As a result, alternate fantasy universes are created out of pure yearning with the purpose of wish-fulfillment, to satire the social evils, which the author and many others have collectively experienced. This paper attempts to establish how 'Sultana's Dream, as a Feminist Utopia, critiques and satires the oppressive patriarchal society and further suggests an alternate social order, through a gender-role reversed egalitarian fantasy land. 'Sultana's dream', a feminist fantasy fiction was published by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in 1905, an Indian woman, in the Indian Ladies' Magazine in an era when neither the feminist movement gained momentum, nor had fantasy fiction made any noticeable impact over the literary tradition of Bengal.

Keywords: Feminist Utopia, Fantasy, Patriarchy, Oppression, Indian Women's Writing in English

Feminist utopias are critiques of the patriarchal society that highlight the strongest forces of oppression on women.

Authors unhappy with the current functioning of the society, fantasize of a social order free from the patriarchal yoke and its oppressive operations, looking forward to revolutionize and transform it. As a result, alternate fantasy universes are created out of pure yearning with the purpose of wish-fulfillment, to satire the social evils, which the author and many others have collectively experienced. Though fantasy, yet these fictional works, serve practically as a critique of the present society through the visualization of a morally fortified past/future. These utopian fantasy narratives further provide suggestions in order to accomplish and manifest the imaginary morally sanctified utopia. In this context Barbara Goodwin defines utopias as, 'models of the perfectly constructed, perfectly functioning society,' that evoke the rational judgment and consequently transmit a "scientific" importance for their realization. Earlier than that, few other researchers have explained the feminist utopianism¹ to be a new possibility towards an alternate space for disrupting the patriarchal norm by embodying the new aspects of feminist ideology for female subjectivity and for the overall feminist community. Similarly, Kitch² in her discussion about gender and utopias/utopianism explains how fiction tends to be a powerful and primary instrument of imagination for the feminist visionaries.

Feminism has always been proposing a diverse range of alternate solutions to restructure the unequal power distributions, in the patriarchal society, that would not just emancipate women, but would also liberate men too. Feminist Utopian Fantasy narratives therefore portray fictional models of sexually classless or female dominated societies by further manifesting the present-day feminist desires. Feminist Utopias therefore critique as well as endeavor to predict and establish

an alternative futuristic possibility. In this course of action all feminist utopias aim towards replacing the morally distorted patriarchal culture with that of a compassionate and independent society comprising of women living peacefully in synchronization with nature. These fantasy narratives deliberately distort the patriarchal structure and reaffirm matriarchy, with the attempt to establish the dignity of women, than merely being recognized as ‘pragmatic blueprints’. The challenging imaginative fantasies of possible gender-free society in the direction of which feminists aspire pave way towards the universal welfare.

This article attempts to establish how ‘Sultana’s Dream’, as a satiric Feminist Utopia, critiques the oppressive patriarchal society and further suggests an alternate social order through a gender-role reversed egalitarian fantasy land named, Ladyland, by an Indian woman writing in an era when neither the feminist movement gained momentum, nor had fantasy fiction made any noticeable impact over the literary tradition of Bengal. It would also probe into the historical relationship between feminism and utopia. The paper would further explore the relevance of utopia to feminism in the present time.

In spite of the practicality, fantasy is always connected to the feminist attempt at demanding equality for women. The discourse of fantasy fiction in the form of Feminist Utopia has been extremely up-to-date. Going back to the history of the word as proposed by Thomas More in 1516, originated from the Greek *eu* that means happy and then *ou* that refers to not, next *topos* that can be understood as place that recommend an impracticality in the term itself, thus, as Lise Shapiro Sanders mentions, “utopia may be the good place or the impossible place; the good place maybe no place, or no place may in fact

be the good place; utopia may be beyond place altogether” (Sanders 50). This probability is the most prominent likelihood for the envisioning of feminism through utopia. Utopia³ therefore is largely based on the contradictory ideas of a visionary egalitarian world, but then paradoxically, which does not exist. Darby Lewes points out that when women’s utopias are concerned, the context then further focuses on the comparison among public and private (Lewes 74). Discussing in the same context Robert C. Elliott⁴ explores the close relation between utopia and satire by explaining that only a critical satirical outlook towards the present can lead towards the imagination of a possible visionary world. He further gives an elucidation regarding the conception of utopia that developed out of the Saturnalia, which were a set of prehistoric Roman celebrations that stood for a revisit to the ‘mythic Golden Age’, that is, “the time when all men were equal and the good things of life were held in common” (Elliot 10). These events further inverted the normal arrangement, for the subject matter of the Saturnalia is “reversal – reversal of values, social roles, of social norms” (Elliot 11). Therefore from its initial stages of point of origin, the genre of utopia endorses ‘paradoxes and reversals’ of the normative social orders and its functioning. It is the narrative space where ideology and imagination interplay to disrupt and reverse the otherwise established normative order.

“Feminist utopia,” as an expression of a genre in literature, came into being from the 1980s onwards. Feminist Utopian fictional works specifically manifest the feminist thoughts through the spirit of utopia. These works of fiction concern the female and human future. The feminist utopian literature as a genre appeared in the latter half of the 18th

century and further developed dynamically in the 1820s. According to scholars and researchers the feminist utopian literature was first witnessed in Plato's *Timaeus* and later further thoroughly drafted in Plato's *Utopia*. The citation of *Utopia* was also found in Plutarch's *Lycurgue* which had an ultimate portrayal of the ideal state of Sparta. The legends of Atlantis, too, were highly inspired from many of the utopian mythologies. The sketch and summoning of the "Golden Age" in Hesiod's *Theogony: Works and Days*, too, was among one of the early *Utopias* to exist. Later it was Thomas More who redefined the traditional notion of *Utopia* and revised it by incorporating the self criticism within it. He thus paved the path for a new imaginary space for the materialization and expression of opinions for various social reforms. The feminist utopian narrative has been, from then on, employed by women authors who articulate their desire to rebel against the patriarchal norms of the society.

'Sultana's Dream', is such a similar a feminist fantasy fiction that was published by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932) in 1905, a South Asian, Indian Bengali Muslim woman, in the *Indian Ladies' Magazine* in such a time when feminism was unknown to the Indian society, neither was fantasy fiction any popular. It was Hossain's initial endeavor towards fiction, and also, not just her first, but her only literary piece in the English. Hossain did not receive any formal education through schooling because of her conservative father, rather it was her elder siblings who facilitated her with an informal mode of education at home. Hossain's projection of blatant satire in 'Sultana's dream' is simple with a straightforward plot, as scholars have pointed out that the plot and characters of 'utopian discourse' emerge out of impulse to narrativize some

underlying critical ideology. The story begins when the narrator, Sultana, who starts narrating that, one evening while she was reclining, in an 'easy chair' in her bedroom idly contemplating about the situation of Indian women, she is suddenly visited by another woman whom she had mistaken to be her friend Sister Sara and consequently they go out to take a stroll (Hossain 3). The beginning of the narration sets the theme where Sultana mentions her concerns about the Indian womanhood. The narrative then continues as a Feminist Utopia by ending it with Sultana "lounging in the easy chair" once more (Hossain 14). Hossain, in "Sultana's Dream", attempts at a feminist narratology by deploying utopia, which further seeks to excavate the narratives of disparity in order to critically deconstruct them. In this process she also instills the notion that a feminist consciousness could be permeated through the utopia as an object of self reflection. Through this narrative, Hossain further enacts the practice of critical thinking by conceptualizing feminism through the strategy of utopian consciousness.

The woman assumed to be Sara then takes Sultana to this fantasy universe called Ladyland which is administered by women. Although Sultana hesitates because of the public gaze that she was being exposed to in the beginning, yet very soon, it vanishes and Sultana tells, that she was feeling very shy, when she thought that she was walking in the street in broad daylight, but then "there was not a single man visible" (Hossain 3). But soon she realizes that the women were making fun of her, when she asks her friend the reason the reply she gets was that they thought her to be 'mannish'. When taken aback by this, Sultana asks why they considered her 'mannish', her friend then explains that they thought that Sultana was

very “shy and timid like men”(Hossain 3). Even after that, Sultana narrates again, that she felt somewhat embarrassed because of the fact that she had always been a purdahnishin⁵ woman, who was not at all used to “walking about unveiled” (Hossain 4). In the kitchen of Sister Sara’s house later Sultana further remarks that definitely the men were to be “asked to clear off” whenever she was “going there” (Hossain 7).

Hossain imagines Ladyland as a society in which everything is under the control of women, in the outside world, whereas men are confined in seclusion, taking care of the household chores, in the inside world. The gender roles are reversed in Ladyland where the women pilot ‘air-cars’ and men take care of the homes. Hossain’s Ladyland is an absolute Feminist Utopia with community spaces that are planned as gardens with special attention being paid to horticulture making the environment rich in nature reserve. Ladyland is ecologically sustainable, with green grass growing like velvet contrasting to Sultana’s Calcutta which lacked in the nature reserve and green lush. The houses in Ladyland have aesthetically appealing and resourceful kitchens. These houses in Ladyland, further, are temperature controlled in such a way that the weather condition outside did not matter, and in doing so, the source of energy used was the renewable energy provided by solar energy. The cooking similarly is done using “concentrated sunlight and heat” (Hossain 11). Ladyland therefore epitomizes the employment of scientific resources and technological advancements for the interest of common people in the best possible manner.

The army of Ladyland is constituent of women scientists who protect their country through the utilization of ‘parabolic’ devices that reflected the heat and light of the sun for military

incursions. The weather and rainfall in Ladyland is controlled by a specific kind of balloon in the sky that absorbs the moisture from the atmosphere and redistributes, as and when, necessary. Therefore storm clouds never loom over the sky of Ladyland, neither there are floods or droughts ever, which, otherwise, were so often, were such devastating natural calamities in Sultana's Calcutta. Sultana is highly 'amazed and amused' when she didn't encounter muddy grounds because of rainfall. The women are so competent in their work that they require to work only for two hours a day. There are no diseases in Ladyland and therefore the inhabitants enjoy ailments free longer lives unless they might die of some unfortunate accident. Apart from being environment friendly, Ladyland is also technologically advanced to such an extent that the weather could be controlled in order to make work easier, like, the application of electricity to agriculture, for tilling the ground for cultivation, and use of solar heat for cooking. The confinement of the men in the *mardana*,⁶ have eradicated crime and sin completely from the society without the requirement of police force in Ladyland. Sultana's friend is rather troubled and distressed when she gets to know that in Sultana's world the men "who do or at least are capable of doing no end of mischief," are let free to do whatever they want to, whereas, "the innocent women shut up in the zenana!" (Hossain 9).

When Sultana was totally taken aback without a single man in sight, her friend in Ladyland reassures her saying that, she does not have to be scared of "coming across a man here" (Hossain 8). In Hossain's Ladyland the male population is excluded from all sorts of public and political affairs, women removed men from these vicinities with their outstanding scientific skills. Narrating the story behind this, Sultana's friend

continues that when the army of the men failed to defend the country against attacks by a “neighbouring king, the queen approaches the principals of the two women’s universities” to consult the defense strategy of the country, they agreed to participate on terms of a condition that, “men should retire permanently to the domestic sphere” (Hossain 14). Sultana further gets to know from her friend that from the time of the war, that took place three decades before, men have lived in the domestic sphere. The women on the contrary took over the public sphere after successfully defending the land from the enemies with the application of their knowledge of ‘parabolic reflectors’.

The women have taken over the country since then, and they manage all social matters whereas the “gentlemen are kept in the mardanas to mind babies, to cook,” and to take care of all the domestic affairs in Hossain’s Feminist Utopia (Hossain 15). Hossain created the *Mardana* an equivalent antonym to the word *Zenana* where otherwise women are confined to the indoors in the oppressive patriarchal structures. Justifying the *Mardana*, Sultana’s friend comments that the men are “in their proper places, where they ought to be” (Hossain 8). Although the men in Ladyland were initially certain that their country was going to be defeated in the battle yet they finally had to move into the *mardana* “without uttering a single word of protest” (Hossain 14) when they got to know that the contrary happened, they soon after appealed to be liberated from their captivity mainly to the “Police Commissioners and District Magistrates” (Hossain 14) who permitted them to get back in their earlier positions, yet, the queen did not allow anything such. Sultana’s friend concludes that Ladyland accomplished everything owing to the fact that

men were not allowed in public sphere. She further believed that the problems concerning law and order were solved as a result of men's confinement to the Mardana. Consequently, in Ladyland, people "do not require a policeman to find out a culprit", apart from the fact that they also did not "want a magistrate to try a criminal case" (Hossain 15). The men in Ladyland have been barred from all social and political responsibilities and were confined to household works although they "wanted to be free" (Hossain 14) in the past. Sultana's friend further informs her that the men have now developed themselves to be "accustomed to the purdah system" and have "ceased to grumble at their seclusion" (Hossain 14).

In her exploration, Sultana was so intimidated with Ladyland's extraordinary development, that she gets too curious and requests her 'guide', whom she continued calling Sara, to let her see the queen of the land. Sultana was absolutely enthralled with the queen's extraordinary achievements and the remarkable progression that the country made because of her interest in her people and constant encouragement of their talent and creativity. Sultana is then taken to the queen in an 'air-car' which was built by 'screwing a couple of seats to a square piece of plank', to which was attached two smooth and well polished balls.

When I asked her what the balls were for, she said that they were hydrogen balls and they would be used to overcome the force of gravity. The balls were of different capacities, to be used according to different weights desired to be overcome. She then fastened to the air-car two wing like blades, which, she said, were worked by electricity. After we were comfortably seated she touched a knob and the blades began to whirl, moving faster and

faster every moment. At first we were raised to the height of about six or seven feet and then off we flew. And before I could realize that we had commenced moving, we reached the garden of the Queen. My friend lowered the air-car by reversing the action of the machine, and when the car touched the ground the machine was stopped and we got out (Hossain 16).

The most common mode of transportation in Ladyland was a 'propeller-driven air-car fitted with spheroids of hydrogen', which did not require any roads or rails thereby preventing any sort of accidents. Hossain's Feminist Utopia therefore envisions a civilization where women proficiently manage and work with machines suspended in air.

The queen of Ladyland makes sure that all the women are educated and do not marry before the age of twenty-one. Sultana also narrates that the queen also had an ethical foreign policy that allowed all her subjects to trade with other countries except for the ones where women were not free. The queen further mentions,

Men, we find, are rather of lower morals and sowe do not like dealing with them. We do not covet other people's land, we do not fight for a piece of diamond though it may be a thousand-fold brighter than the Koh-i-Noor, nor do we grudge a ruler his Peacock Throne. We dive deep into the ocean of knowledge and try to find out the precious gems, which nature has kept in store for us. We enjoy nature's gifts as much as we can' (Hossain 16).

"Sultana's Dream" is the satire of all male-dominated societies, here particularly with the context of the Indian society. The women of Ladyland study in the universities and

also have employments in “factories, laboratories and observatories” (Hossain18). Sultana meets the progressive queen of Ladyland, who, was a preacher of women’s education, and also banned the practice of early marriage. In the Feminist Utopia of Ladyland young women were free to pursue their dream professions as engineers, scientists and studied technology. The curriculum of Ladyland was designed specifically focusing on all kinds of sciences. Hossain endeavored at opening up new possibilities for Indian women in the field of education.

The queen of Ladyland has further devised financial strategies which dejected the evil practices like purdah against women, as well as implemented trade restrictions against “countries where women live in seclusion in the zenana” (Hossain17). Sultana then goes for a ‘sightseeing’ trip along with her friend to the “universities, laboratories, observatories and factories” in Ladyland. Sultana then, at the end of everything boards the same ‘air-car’ which brought her to Ladyland however she falls from it after slipping and suddenly shocked discovers herself back in her own bedroom. Hossain’s fantasy employs a revolutionary feminist critical enterprise and exposes the various exploitative practices against women in patriarchal societies. “Sultana’s Dream”, is a feminist utopia where Hossain undoubtedly evokes the readers to reflect further about the evils of the real world and even ahead of whatever is allowed by the faculty of one’s imagination.

As already discussed above Utopias are an effort to find and create spaces of harmony and well-being. In this context Peter Ruppert affirms that Utopias actively situate to challenge the existing social order with the attempt to destabilize the current customs, in order to change the present societal ways

of life. Utopias employ fantasy as a channel of communication between the fictional world and the worldly realities. The realizations of the social discriminations and inequalities are the main reason for the instigation of such an imaginary egalitarian world. As the meaning of the word goes, utopia, therefore, is the intermediate between the worldly reality and the imaginary possibility, the unease between 'what is' and 'what might be' or 'what ought to be' (Rupert 5). Again, Robert C. Elliott⁷ further elaborates that, utopia serves two main critical functions, of first, giving and exemplary ideal society, and second, bringing out the vices of the current society by highlighting an imaginary, equal, reverse phenomenon. Thus, the notion of utopia, as well as the narrative that illustrate it, are complete of paradoxes. Joanna Russ⁸ further clarifies the varied techniques through which these utopian fictions evaluate the culture, wherein they were produced, including the unequal power distribution to the coercive power operations to oppress women in the patriarchal societies.

The most common theme of utopian fiction has always been calling out inequality, whether social, economical, racial, political or sexual, therefore, the question whether these issues could be resolved through the strategy of narrative manifestation remains unresolved. Yet, when feminism is involved with utopia in the context of Feminist Utopia, as the theory of feminism keeps evolving, so does the themes of Feminist Utopia, that includes a wide range of subject matters, making it more complex. While the early stages of feminism concerned itself with the debate of categorizing the individual gendered identities, the present day feminism is concerned with the subject positions of individual identities. Similarly the thematic concerns of the present day Feminist Utopias have

evolved by the inclusion of topics inspired by the current political activism. Therefore, the recurring themes in the Feminist Utopias, in the contemporary times involve discussions and debates about problems such as ecological crisis, hazardous environmental pollution, population overgrowth, sectarian discriminations and the ever oppressive patriarchal capitalist structure. Feminist Utopias have always pursued the ideal egalitarian society through their fantasy narratives, while pointing out all the evil practices of humanity at the same time. Their longing and desire for the female future gets an expression in their fantasy ideal world of utopia, where, the society strives for peace harmony and well being of all of its inhabitants. Utopias as a narrative genre therefore evoke thoughts among the readers, to introspect and assess the real world that they are living in, along with endorsing the

Endnotes

- ¹ A Utopia is the sighting (in terms of the gaze) and siting (in terms of emplacement) of another possibility,”as quoted by Mary Ann Doane.
- ² Sally Kitch puts it: “Many feminists love a utopia. . . . [U]topias offer hope and fuel the imagination. They present near-perfect feminist worlds and new social contracts based on “feminine” qualities and achievements. They promise to transform human nature itself through feminist social revolution.”
- ³ By definition, utopia hinges on [contradiction and] paradox: it is a vision of a better world, but one that does not exist.” (Stein 409)
- ⁴ Satire and utopia are not really separable, the one a critique of the real world in the name of something better, the other a

hopeful construction of the world that might be. The hope feeds the criticism, the criticism the hope. Writers of utopia have always known this: the one unanswerable argument for the utopian vision is a hard satirical look at the way things are today (Elliot 24).

- 5 Veiled women in purdah
- 6 The term comes from Persian word ‘mard’ meaning men. Hossain coined this term as opposed to the term ‘zenana’ that is used for women.
- 7 Utopia necessarily wears a Janus-face. The portrayal of an ideal commonwealth has a double function: it establishes a standard, a goal; and by virtue of its existence alone it casts a critical light on society as presently constituted” (Elliot 22).
- 8 The stories’ classlessness obviously comments on the insecurity, competitiveness, and poverty of a class society. Their relative peacefulness and lack of national war goes hand-in-hand with the acceptance of *some* violence – specifically that necessary for self-defense and the expression of anger, both of which are rare luxuries for women today. The utopias’ sexual permissiveness and joyfulness is a poignant comment on the conditions of sexuality for women: unfriendly, coercive, simply absent, or at best reactive rather than initiating. . . . The emphasis on freedom in work in the public world reflects the restrictions that bar women from vast areas of work and experience. (Russ 82).
- 9 According to the Purusha Sukta, the entire cosmology is created out of the four parts of Brahma: the Brahmins from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arm, the Vaishyas from his thigh, and the Shudras from his feet.

- ¹⁰ Ambedkar describes the Indian society in the semblance of the pyramid of earthen pots, with the top layer of Brahmins, followed by the three other castes. The Dalits being in the bottom-most layer are the most exploited and oppressed.
- ¹¹ The two-feet bronze statue is modeled after the Statue of Liberty, and is seen as the symbol of renaissance for Dalits.
- ¹² The term refers to the urban Dalit youth, born or brought up around the economic liberalization in 1991, who are well-located in terms of language, education, networking, skill sets, and consciously choose to discuss their identity.
- ¹³ An organisation founded by Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale and Arjun Dangle in 1972, Maharashtra.
- ¹⁴ The political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton in 1966, Oakland.
- ¹⁵ The phrase refers to Dalits falsely wearing ‘upper caste’ identities in order to be socially acceptable.
- ¹⁶ The policy that provides quota, scholarships, grants etc. to the historically disenfranchised, aimed at improving representation.
- ¹⁷ The article prohibits discrimination based on caste, religion, race, sex, or place of birth with regard to the Indian citizens.
- ¹⁸ The article considers untouchability as a punishable offence.
- ¹⁹ It refers to the millennial generation, born between early 1980s to around 1996.
- ²⁰ The generation, born between late 1990s to early 2010s.

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Narrativizing Conflict in Robin S. Ngangom's "The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom"

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Abstract: Like every other state of North East India, Manipur boasts of its beautiful landscape and rich cultural heritage. However, it also has a long record of violent insurgent movements and inter-ethnic clashes throughout modern history. British colonisation and the eventual merger of Manipur with India after the departure of the colonists in 1949 brought about conflicts in the area as it led to the rise of many insurgent groups. Resistance against the aforementioned merger and its consequential struggle for independence, clashes between ethnic groups within the area as well as with the state's neighbouring regions result in Manipur being the most agitated and hostile among the North East states of India. Robin S. Ngangom's poem "The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom" is a commentary on the contemporary social and political unrest in Manipur. This paper analyses the themes of violence and conflict that are seen in this poem in order to highlight the socio-cultural impact of the insurgent movements in Manipur.

Keywords: Violence, Conflict, Loss, Unrest, Trauma

Robin S. Ngangom's poem "The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom" was written in 1997. One of his finest and most passionate poems, it is a commentary on the contemporary

social and political unrest in Manipur, the author's homeland. Manipur, like every other state of North East India, boasts of its beautiful landscape and rich cultural heritage. However, it also has a long record violent insurgent movements and inter-ethnic clashes throughout modern history. British colonisation and the eventual merger of Manipur with India after the departure of the colonists in 1949 brought about conflicts in the area as it led to the rise of many insurgent groups. Resistance against the aforementioned merger and the consequential struggle for independence, clashes between ethnic groups within the area as well as with the state's neighbouring regions result in Manipur being the most agitated and hostile among the North East states of India.

Robin S. Ngangom, along with many other North East poets, writes a number of poems that depict the history and culture, beautiful landscape and the enticing myths and legends that are connected to his homeland. However, there is a marked shift in Ngangom's poetry of the 90s as they transition to works engaging themes that revolve around socio-political issues pertaining to his now troubled homeland. Addressing this change in tone, Ngangom writes:

If anyone should ask now why my poems do not speak
of my land's breathtaking landscapes; its sinuous dances,
its darkmaned women, I can only think of Neruda's
answer: 'Come and see the blood in the streets!' ("Poetry
in the Time of Terror" 171)

Ngangom is "concerned of the problem of insurgency in the north-east in general, which, to a large extent, is responsible for the erosion of human values as well as degradation of the environment" (Hazarika 9). His preoccupation with the hostile

environment of his native land also finds expression in a number of poems, including “My Invented Homeland”, “Native Land” and “Revolutionaries”. However, “The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom” is the most detailed and graphic portrayal of the contemporary state of affairs in Manipur and it captures the socio-political zeitgeist of the insurgent movements of the 1990s. The poem is a critique on how the powerless has to remain subdued and succumb to the wishes of the powerful even if that dispossesses them from their rights and freedom (Bezbaruah 854). The significance of the poem can still be seen today as the themes and concerns of the poem is as relevant today as it was at the time of its publication. The poem talks about the grim reality of life in Manipur, as witnessed by the poet, which is a result of the external violent clashes as well as the ideological conflicts that the state continues to struggle with. The poet’s weariness over the loss of lives and property, as well as the monetary and moral corruption of his people is vividly and passionately described in this poem. The poem is structurally divided into four parts. In each part, the poet deals with specific themes which are all encompassed by the themes of violence and trauma.

Part I of the poem talks about the poet’s personal experiences as he reflects upon the current socio-political climate of his homeland. It chronicles his physical journey or return to his homeland and the changes that he experiences upon his visit: “Rushing back I discovered/something had changed me” (lines 8-9). Here, he implies the loss of childhood innocence and the idyllic existence that he once enjoyed before he left his homeland: “That well-meaning world is no longer recognizable now; the scared landmarks have disappeared long since” (Ngangom 168) The loss of childhood innocence is a

theme that pervade a number of Ngangom's poetry including "Native Land" and "A Libran Horoscope". The behavioural change in the poet and his people is seen when he recalls, "As a boy I was made a sheep,/now I am enchanted into a goat" (lines 16-17). The transition here highlights the superficiality of his people as he explains later in the poem, "Now they go to gloating (glorying) neighbours," (line) which further denotes the corrosion of their society and culture. This is also an idea that is explored in Part IV when he states, "Slave to an unexamined life/all that I've done/I've accomplished blindfolded:" (lines 156-158)

The poet's attempt at averting responsibility for the ongoing conflicts and violence is shown at the very outset of the poem: "Not once can I say/I am the captain/behind this wheel of fire." (lines 1-3) While trying to avoid accusations, his sense of guilt is then abruptly expressed in the lines that follow: "I remember misplacing/a bronze bell/somewhere, sometime./I left many untended hearths" (lines 4-7). As he recollects his own past, he remembers his effort to escape reality by immersing himself into art during his youth:

At twenty-four/I invited myself to Bohemia.
The Kingdom of Art,
where people never grow old, (lines 22-25).

His disillusionment can be felt when he expresses his inability to cope with the Bohemian lifestyle. Upon entering the heart of this new-found kingdom, he witnessed the decay and decadence that eventually prompts him to say, "I often mix my drink with despair" (line 33). He continues to expose the negative traits that he saw in his people amidst the ongoing unrest. The uncertainty of life that resulted from the conflicts

bring forth elements of fear, suspicion and hatred among each other as they pointed fingers at each other (line 40) for the “wheel of fire” (line 3) that consumes and destroys their society. The impossibility of escaping reality is an idea that is reiterated at the end of the poem. Thus, the confluence of contradicting aspects of alienation and rootedness towards one’s native land is skilfully portrayed in this poem.

The second part of the poem portrays the grim reality that the violent conflicts produces. The destruction of both men and property is vividly described in this part. In the beginning of Part II, the poet presents the image of himself caressing a woman and addresses the physical damage he witnesses on her body. His use of woman here can be interpreted as a metaphor denoting his motherland. As he wanders around his native land, he is filled with hurt and guilt. The physical destruction of his native land is seen when he writes:

Hands filled with love,
I touched your healing breasts.
Like the beaten-up past
Scars appeared on your body.
I ask, who branded the moonskin of my love?
Who used you like a toy doll?
And my hands returned to me
Stigmatised with guilt. (lines 64 to 71)

The devastation and horrifying effects of the conflicts is best exemplified when he states, “...for the first visitor to the fabled homeland,/the graves of youths who died in turmoil/ are the only milestones to the city” (lines 81-82) The natural beauty of the land is no longer recognizable as the beautiful

landmarks are replaced with the graves of those whose lives are taken in the violent clashes. The use of this metaphor paints a grim picture that induces sentiments of hurt and pain. Death and destruction permeate the poet's native land and "items" such as rape, extortion, ambushes, confessions,/embezzlement, vendetta" (95-96) are what is constantly reported on the media. Fear and suspicion grip the land as everyone feels constantly threatened by an unknown "enemy" where rights and freedom of men are vanishing. Thus, fear itself is an epidemic that spreads through rumours and speculations as "Everyone has correctly identified/the enemy of the people./He wears a new face each morning," (lines 103-104)

The third part of the poem describes the degeneracy and confusion of his native people as he examines their existing culture and beliefs. In doing so, he juxtaposes contradicting ideas in an attempt to highlight the inverted beliefs and hypocrisy of his people. In "Poetry in the Time of Terror" Ngangom writes:

Manipur, my native place in North East India, is in a state of anarchy, and my poetry springs from the cruel contradictions of that land. Manipur boasts of its talents in theatre, cinema, dances and sports. But how could you trust your people who would entrust corruption, aids, terrorism and drugs to their children? Naturally, the Manipur that I ritually go back to every year is not the sacred world of my childhood..." (168)

Themes such as violence, corruption, betrayal and indoctrination are prominent in this poem. The poet is critical of the distorted values and beliefs that are prevalent in his society where he questions the ideas of "uprightness",

“integrity” and “worthiness” (lines 108-110). The land is in a state of flux as the virtues that are being taught are merely vices in disguise, and greed and corruption become commonplace –

Service is milking the state
and when you can lift no more
to start burgling each other
so that we can become paragons of thievery, (lines 112-115)

The poet mourns the fate of his motherland (Ngangom 169) and his frustration with the current state of affairs finds its best expression, perhaps, in Part III where he examines the idea of patriotism. The glorification of “patriotism” and the absurd ideas that people associate with the concept of patriotism is questioned here. Ngangom writes:

Patriotism is preaching secession
and mourning our merger with a nation,
patriotism is declaring we should preserve our customs
and traditions,
our literature and performing arts,
and inflicting them on hapless peoples, (lines 132-139)

The ideas of patriotism denoted above shows the insurgents’ desire to become independent, and their rebellion against being a part of India. They further preach the importance of preserving their indigenous cultures and practices in order to return to their roots. The romanticization of their past despite the fact that their ancestors “reaped heads and took slaves” (line 52), as well as the politicization of the secession movement lead to fatal consequences as confused men die while fighting losing wars. The depravity of the secessionists is criticised due to their lack of concern for the welfare and future of the youth:

patriotism is admiring
the youth who fondles grenades,
patriotism is proclaiming all men are brothers and secretly
depriving my brother,
patriotism is playing the music of guns
to the child in the womb.(lines 140-145)

These descriptions of “patriotism” show how the very concept of patriotism is distorted and the manner in which the idea has been employed to indoctrinate the youth is brought to light in the aforementioned lines. The tone of the narrator shows how “patriotism” is employed as a mere political tool to spread false awareness of one’s history and culture, and the self-destructive manner in which the ideology is spread, is intensely criticised. While the poet’s political affiliations cannot be specifically deduced from the poem, his dismay over the damage caused by the violent conflicts is clearly shown in his work.

The exercise of power through acts of terror, as seen in the poem, by the government and armed militants to control and govern their native sow seeds of fear and suspicion contribute to the decline of unity and integrity of the poet’s native people. In his essay, Ngangom writes:

...slogans such as self-determination rive my society. We have witnessed growing ethnic-aggressiveness, secessionist ventures, cultural and religious bigotry, the marginalisation of the minorities and the poor, profit and power struggles in the government, and as a natural aftermath to these, the banality of corruption and the banality of terror. (171)

Part IV of the poem shows the psychological impact of the conflicts. The contrast between childhood bliss and the current situation of his homeland clearly shows the effect of the violent conflicts:

The festival of lights
happened during childhood
Today, I'm again with widows
who cannot light lamps anymore.(lines 173-175)

The sense of alienation and depressing nature of reality is also vividly expressed in these lines:

Maybe the land is tired.
of being suckled on blood,
maybe there is no peace
between the farmer and his fields,
maybe all men everywhere/are tired of being men,
maybe we have finally acknowledged death (lines 176-182).

The painful disillusionment of his native people shows the psychological impact of the insurgency movements. Towards the end of the poem, the poet expresses his desire to avoid and escape from the clutches of his homeland yet says that it is impossible to do so:

But where can one run from the homeland,
where can I flee from your love?
They have become pursuing prisons
which hold the man
with criminal words(lines 190-194)

“The Strange Affair of Robin S. Ngangom” is rife with powerful symbols and imagery that represent the violence and destruction, as well as the ensuing trauma that scar the poet’s

homeland and his people. It is a poetic representation of the war-ravaged land and the brutal effects of the conflicts in Manipur. It depicts the destruction of property and worse, the loss of lives of innocent people as well as insurgents alike. Although the physical loss is extremely devastating, the poet also stresses the loss of morality and the corrosion of his people's "pristine" history and culture. He expresses his dismay over the rampant greed, hatred and corruption that has overtaken his people. While the conflicts that precedes the poem apparently stemmed from the insurgency movements, the poem shows how the native people of Manipur appear to exacerbate the existing issues by their lack of love for their homeland and concern for each other. The poem also shows how power is exercised in times of social unrest as it is used as a means to control and exploit subjects through fear and indoctrination. By narrating the malignant impacts, the poem is a cry of outrage against the violent conflicts that ravage the poet's homeland.

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The Explosion of the 'Cultural Bomb': An Analysis of Selected Poetry from Meghalaya and Mizoram

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Abstract: This paper will make use of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's term "cultural bomb" in analysing poetry from Meghalaya and Mizoram. The first part of the paper will critically analyse the term 'cultural bomb' alongside the selected poems. The second part of the paper will be a study of "the forgetful generation", a generation that "imports nightmares". The third part of the paper will be about the poets' portrayal of their land, including their portrayal of Nature focusing on how their land and their women have been exploited by "a baneful breed of migratory men". This paper will thus give a detailed study on the language, culture and customs of a people and how they "must protect their own" from "vultures" and "parasites that have multiplied / beyond remedies".

Keywords: Cultural bomb, Seng Khasi, Northeast India, British, Christianity, Mizo, Tribal

This paper is an attempt to bring out the state of anxiety brought forth by multiculturalism and the "cultural bomb" (term taken from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*) on the people of Meghalaya and Mizoram. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes about how the English language acts as a "cultural bomb" in Africa as it erases the native's memories of precolonial times. The cultures of

Meghalaya and Mizoram are different cultures but are seen by the rest of India under the umbrella term of Northeast. So, I have chosen two cultures/societies from the North-east – one with a patriarchal society and the other with a matrilineal society. Poems of Mona Zote and Ramdinthari from Mizoram will be analysed and from Meghalaya, poems of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond Kharmawphlang, Paul Lyngdoh, and Robin S. Ngangom will be analysed. Poetry from Meghalaya and Mizoram have a strong sense of rootedness to the land, the culture of the people, the condition of the present times, and the roots of the past which are mainly portrayed through the myths and tribal folklore. The first part of the paper will critically analyse the term ‘cultural bomb’ alongside the selected poems. The people of Meghalaya and Mizoram have felt the need to identify themselves with the language and culture of other people for their ‘survival’ in a multicultural world. The sound of “...a hundred footsteps / Tramping by...” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2003, 202) is seen as a threat by some of the natives while some of the natives seem to adapt well to the ‘bomb’ of the new age. With the explosion of the ‘cultural bomb’ arise the native’s fear that “The hybrids shall inherit the land” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2003, 204). Moreover, with the passage of time, some of the natives who had once been adamant on driving out the ‘outsiders’ have gradually forgotten the main reason for their agitation. The second part of the paper will be a study of “the forgetful generation” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 148), a generation that “imports nightmares”. The third part of the paper will be about the poets’ portrayal of their land, including their portrayal of Nature. In the cultures of Meghalaya and Mizoram, Nature is considered feminine and the land itself is

seen as a woman who has “suckled” them. The land becomes the factor which defines the identity of the natives. The collapse of the boundary walls which has brought the natives into a multi-cultural world has subdued the natives by a fear of the ‘outside’ world as frontiers can no longer be built. To use Mona Zote’s line, this is a result of the natives being “...exacerbated by a long tradition of self-enforced isolation” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 314).

‘Cultural bomb’

What is the ‘cultural bomb’? In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngungi wa Thiong’o mentions the term ‘cultural bomb’ which destroys the beliefs of the natives in their culture, abilities and their very being. He writes how, “Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries” (Thiong’o 1986, 15). The Christian missionaries with the active support of the British administration had taken the initiative to educate and convert the people of Meghalaya and Mizoram. The influence of Christian thought had spread alarmingly far and wide in both the states. In Meghalaya, Seng Khasi was established in 1889 by young Khasi writers and thinkers in order to counteract the alarming spread of Christian thought and also to wield the thoughts and ideologies of the people back to the indigenous concepts (Marak and Shangpliang 2008, xii). Seng Khasi is an organisation considered as custodian of the Khasi heritage and indigenous faith. Christianity can be considered as the ‘cultural bomb’ which “comes again and again seducing our hearts with promise of heaven” (Nongkynrih 2011, 31). In ‘Rain Song 2000’, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih writes about “Christians (who) have forced too

many conversions / and cocksure Seng Khasi (who) should not have ascended our holy mountain” (Nongkynrih 2011, 39). In ‘The Conquest’, Desmond Kharmawphlang writes –

Later came the British
with gifts of bullets, blood money
and religion.
A steady conquest to the sound of guns began.
...
But in the wavering walk of time
There came those from the sweltering plains, from
everywhere. (Kharmawphlang 1987, 2)

In this poem, Kharmawphlang writes about his “stricken land”, how the people from the plains have come to exploit their soil and their “bruised children”. In Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, you will find that most of the big shops are owned by the Marwaris and the Bengalis. The Khasis have lost the supreme power of ownership even in their own land. Even the Khasi Students’ Union have stepped forth to unite and assert their power in their land. Day by day it becomes harder and harder for a non-Khasi to purchase land or even construct a building. The anger of “the bruised children” has melted. Kavita Navlani Soreide writes about the “unique land ownership” in Meghalaya. She writes, “Simply put, land in Meghalaya primarily belongs to the people and is owned by individuals, clans and communities. Land distribution and management is done according to customary practices” (Soreide). She also writes about how the social changes in the society have a unique relation with land and understandings of it. Therefore, land cannot be sold from “tribals” to “non-tribals”. The sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution under the British India’s Act of 1935 was made to safeguard the land

rights of indigenous people of Meghalaya. Till date there is conflict in land ownership between the tribals and non-tribals in Meghalaya as land management and control is single-handedly assigned to the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).

After the British missionaries entered Mizoram in 1894, British officers like Major Shakespear and A.G. McCall who wrote during the colonial period did so in order to keep documents to report the procedures of the colonial rule to the Crown. The features of the earlier Mizo songs and poems were changed by the new religion after it prevailed over the old religion and customs. Among the Mizos it is difficult to differentiate between progress and the new religion since it was the Christian missionaries who gave the Mizos their alphabet and were also the ones who helped them climb the ladder of progress. Christianity has always played a central role in the lives of the Mizos. Spirituality acts as a measuring scale in the day-to-day life of the Mizos. From being a simple society with a primitive culture, the Mizos were suddenly hurled into the chaotic world of the twentieth century. Christianity, the new religion, with all its appeal was preached to everyone. In 'Lilyum', Mona Zote writes about the large number of churches in Mizoram, where "Churchdrums busily advertise / The high percentage of faith" (Nongkynrih and Ngangom 2003, 204). In 1898-1899, J. Shakespear, the then British Superintendent of Mizoram, had introduced 'Land Settlement' for each and every chief's land. As a result of this, the Mizos had faced problems with the imposition of forced labour by the British. Shakespear said that it was their right to impose the taxes which was merely a price the Mizos had to pay as a result of the British occupation of their land

(Lalrinawma 2005, 173). The British went on many expeditions to subjugate the power of the chiefs so that they would be able to attain supremacy. The chiefs were suppressed by the people who had entered from “the outside world.” The British made the Mizos believe that their “interference” with their land was merely to improve the condition of life in their land. All their interference was nicely camouflaged by the missionaries with their “Good News Missions.” The British thoroughly transformed the land through their policies of improvement. By the turn of the twentieth century, the British had taken drastic measures to suppress the traditional customs and practices within the community. The pre-Christian Mizo society was spurned by the Church and it started to detach itself from many popular pre-colonial practices. Moreover, the natives were taught to disengage themselves from their earlier “pagan” practices which was once a part of their lived reality. The Church soon defined the very being of the natives. Many of the earlier customs including the tune of songs merged with the practices of the new religion. It is significant to note that *Khuang*, the traditional drum, which was an integral part of the old culture is still an integral part of the new culture. The musical instruments of the churches include modern-day guitars, drums and keyboards alongside two drums *Khuang*. The two *Khuang* controls the rhythm of the singing in the church. In regards to the church meetings of the revival of the first decade of the twentieth century, J.M. Lloyd writes that the presence of the drum had affected meetings profoundly and had a mesmerising influence on many of the people. It was the last of the revivals of that time which made using *Khuang* in the church acceptable. A festival called *Puma Zai* became widely popular in Mizoram from 1907 till 1911 amidst

the spread of Christianity in the land. Thirumal states that this festival is a celebration “to commemorate the composition of an exemplary new lyric”. (Thirumal 2018, 62). This festival made the people feel great emotional upheaval and even made them long to return to their earlier customs. Many even left the church to take part in the festival. Rev. Liangkhaia, a pioneer Christian who became an ordained minister of the church in 1921, called this festival “a power of darkness”. The church leaders controlled this widely popular festival with traces of pre-Christian customs (Zairema 1988, 3-5). Christianity acted as a form of social control which would further convince the natives to willingly remain under the power of the British. The British missionaries had taught them to willingly serve the “others”. There was another great revival among the Mizo Christians in the mid-nineteen-thirties and many converts were “speaking with tongues” (Lloyd 1991, 296). This revival was very extreme and some Church leaders considered it to be ‘unscriptural’ due to the lack of interpretation. The Church leaders and the Assembly could not accept the extreme course of revival and even wished for them to end because the people were “out of control”. The Christian missionaries taught the natives that a Christian should not drink *Zu* (rice beer) as the church and drinking *Zu* can never go together. The debates on prohibition is still a topic of debate among the Mizos – those against prohibition argue that *Zu* has always been a part of the Mizo culture and others put on a strong argument that Christianity has now become their culture. Borrowing from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Mizo society appears to be a “disciplinary society” whereby power is exercised through discipline maintained through constant surveillance. The people of Mizoram are under

constant surveillance - surveillance of the church, the government and the non-governmental organisations. The Mizos, themselves, have pointed out that their society is one of prohibition whereby the various agencies wield power through prohibition. The idle man, who has nothing better to do, has lost his sense of balance in the whirlpool. Mona Zote criticizes the schizophrenic mind of the people. She writes –

The Mizos have now colonized themselves far more efficiently with religion. Their capabilities are squandered in debating the acceptable alcoholic content of locally produced grape wine or the propriety of singing love songs, when not forming vigilante groups to cleanse society of its self-inflicted sore. (Sen 2006, 212)

The minds and thoughts of the people are split between what is acceptable and what is not. The power that the church wields over the people is an important factor that is used to make the government prohibit and enforce new laws. Mona Zote writes about the pious women who go to church and know “the sexual ecstasy of dance” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 319). Robin Ngangom writes that when one does not return to her/his native hills there is no one to care for the earlier traditions and cultures and so “men wear hideous masks” as they have betrayed their “principles” and their roots. (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 198).

A Hundred Footsteps

Ramdinthari writes that the Mizos are a people who live at “the far end of the earth / where the touch of the sun ceases to have meanings” (Sen 2006, 98). Meghalaya is situated near this land at “the far end of the earth” with Assam passing

through the two states. The people of Mizoram are a people “exacerbated by a long tradition of self-enforce isolation” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 314). During the colonial rule, the Mizos were isolated from the outside world. The colonial rulers convinced the outsiders that the Mizos were a blood-thirsty warring tribe and the need for an Inner Line Permit (ILP) for the outsiders to enter Mizoram was made. The Inner Line Permit was again enforced in 1935 and was further validated after the Indian independence from foreign rule. The issuing of this law became a marker in the further isolation of the state of Mizoram and its people from the outside world. The sound of “...a hundred footsteps / Tramping by...” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2003, 202) becomes a threat for the people of Mizoram. There were some natives who were still adamant on maintaining a pure culture, free from the adulteration of the outside world. Some natives seemed to adapt quite well to the “bomb” of the new age. In ‘Lilyum’, Mona Zote voices the fear of the people of the hills which is that “The hybrids shall inherit the land” (Nongkynrih and Ngangom 2003, 204). The “hybrids” who do not realise the value of being a part of a culture will soon take hold of the land. Zote warns her people of the crisis brought about by their schizophrenic thoughts and imaginations. Some of the natives who had once been adamant on driving out the outsiders have gradually forgotten the main reason for their agitation. The question, “Who am I?” becomes linked with the ambivalent thoughts of the natives. The ambivalence of their thoughts produces the ‘hybrid’ that is neither fully like the colonial master nor has maintained the state of being a native. The threat posed by the entry of the “outsiders” makes the people more aware of the “bomb” which will take them out very soon.

Paul Lyngdoh in his poem 'Imported Nightmares' writes about this multi-cultural world which brings with it a generation that imports nightmares in a land "where men try to outdo each other / in savagery". With a melancholic tone, he writes about -

the bitterness of a fellow poet
disowned by the soil of his birth,
or seeing my brothers importing nightmares
from that deathly valley
to haunt the happy sleep
of our hills. (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 174)

In his poem 'Tyrchiang' Desmond Kharmawphlang writes of the stories and myths of his people that give birth to many beliefs. Tyrchiang is a village in Meghalaya popular for terracotta pottery made by the women of the tribe. He writes that he now has to rely on "books to prop up their tribal bones" (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 145). Kharmawphlang in his poem 'Letter from Pahambir' writes about the present generation, how it has become the 'forgetful generation', a generation that has forgotten the reason for its agitation. The people of his generation are filled with "a shame / that splits our present from our past" (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 148). Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih in his poem 'Weiking' calls on the menfolk of his tribe as "...our women are deserting us" (Nongkynrih 2011, 22). *Weiking* meaning 'whirlpool' is a Khasi thanks-giving dance enacted every spring when virgin girls dance slowly in the middle of a circular field and young men dance enthusiastically around them. This dance demonstrates that the women are the keepers of the home and men the protectors (Nongkynrih 2011, 20). He wishes to "whirl on, to a time / when women stood by their men" (21). And so he tells the menfolk of his tribe that "We who carry on the ways of our

fathers / must protect our own” (21). Along with the advancement of the world came the migration of people from outside, “defying man-made borders”, (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2003). The values, traditions and culture of the natives have deteriorated due to immense influx of “...a baneful breed of migratory men” (Nongkynrih 2011, 40). The tribal roots of the natives have been put for sale as they stand in the way of progress and also become a “constant source of embarrassment” when one lives in a multi-cultural world. In his poem, ‘For Sale’ Paul Lyngdoh writes about how his land, the “battered, autistic land with its lucre-laden earth, precious minerals, medicinal herbs, rare orchids, and trees and fields and waters” are all for sale in the same way that the “young, nubile girls, beautiful like the land itself” are also for sale to the “men from the lowlands / or even from across the seas” (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009, 171-172). These men from the lowlands and from across the seas have stripped their land bare. When your ancestors still “insisted on someone from the tribe” and pleaded that “the seed / must be good”, they vehemently ask, “...must your daughters be defiled / by the bawdy blood of a lecher!!” (Nongkynrih 2011, 52).

The hills have become dry and barren as truckloads of timber are transported daily. The forests and country-side have been exploited to fulfill the selfish demands of the humans in order to further their possessions. The songs about the “land of beauty” have been smothered by the plaintive cries of the animals from the woods. Mizoram, a land which was once called “a land of beauty” by Sangkima gradually turns into “holy mothworm ground” (Nongkynrih and Ngangom 2003, 201). In his discussion of global warming, climate control and ecological imbalance, When Kynpham Sing Nonkynrih questions -

...so why is the sky weeping
a river of unreasonable tears?
why is the wind shrieking night and day
and pines beating their chests in pain? (Nongkynrih 2011,
39)

the reply he gets is of the scientific kind namely global warming, climate control and ecological imbalance. On the other hand, the religious men were convinced that immense rain are falling and extremely strong winds are blowing because “the world is too riddled with sin” (Nongkynrih 2011, 39). The poet, after careful pondering over the affairs of the land, sighs with a heavy heart as peace and serenity have left the land a long time back.

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**Negotiation between Agency and Extimacy for the
Sustenance of a Double-voiced Discourse: A Study on the
Bene Israel Jews Women in India in Esther David's "The
Walled City" and "The Book of Rachel"**

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Abstract: Amid the constant flux of multicultural ethos in the present era of globalization, every ethnic group strives to retain and sustain its sense of belongingness through the questions of race, citizenship, and culture. The victims of this racial or ethnic crusade are persuaded to maintain an ambivalent attitude towards life between the hegemonic cultural practices and their subjective emotions. This elasticity of dialogical interaction which entails a space for celebrating differential relations is explored by the twentieth-century Russian literary theorist and linguistic critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Elucidating his concept of double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin opines that discursive coloration in interactivity necessitates human relationships to be engaged in power negotiation. This interrelationship between selfhood and social conventions is also expounded by the twentieth-century French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan through his concept called extimacy. By applying the critical approaches such as double-voiced discourse and extimacy by Bakhtin and Lacan respectively, this paper attempts to demonstrate the cohabitation of self and the alterity in the psyche of the supposed 'bearers' of cultural identity that makes them susceptible to the dominant social discourse in the select novels such as *The Walled City* and *The Book of Rachel* by the Indian Jewish writer Esther David.

Keywords: Agency, Extimacy, Bene Israel Jews, Identity, Self-consciousness

Amid the constant flux of multicultural ethos in the present era of globalization, every ethnic group strives to retain and sustain its sense of belongingness through the questions of race, citizenship, and culture. In this perpetual endeavour to reinstate a group's cohesiveness and uniformity, usually some subjective aspirations within the same group get compromised against the pressure of empowering socio-cultural practices. The victims of this racial or ethnic crusade are persuaded to maintain an ambivalent attitude towards life between the hegemonic cultural practices and their subjective emotions. This elasticity of dialogical interaction which entails a space for celebrating differential relations is explored by the twentieth-century Russian literary theorist and linguistic critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Elucidating his concept of double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin opines that discursive coloration in interactivity necessitates human relationships to be engaged in power negotiation. This interrelationship between selfhood and social conventions is also expounded by the twentieth-century French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan through his concept called extimacy. Defining the intricate patterns of alienation, Lacan negates the notion of ostensible epistemic relativism by claiming the presence of otherness in the core of the subjective self. By applying the above-mentioned approaches such as double-voiced discourse and extimacy by Bakhtin and Lacan respectively, this paper attempts to demonstrate the cohabitation of self and the alterity in the psyche of the supposed 'bearers' of cultural identity that makes them susceptible to the dominant social discourse in the select novels such as *The Walled City* and *The Book of Rachel* by the Indian Jewish writer Esther David.

The penchant for acculturation by overcoming barriers of enculturation often results in stress (Ward et al. 24). Exploring this stress factor, Esther David delineates the anguish of displacement and desire for home in the Bene Israel Jewish communities in India through her writings. The winner of the 2010 Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *The Book of Rachel*, Esther David mingles her personal experiences as a creative self in her eclectic illustration of cross-cultural conflicts in the Bene Israel Jewish communities. Born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, in 1945, into a Bene Israel Jewish family, Esther David from an early age became acquainted with humanitarian tenets from her father's veterinarian values. Looming desire to leave for the Promised Land, Israel, at the confrontation of the cultural threats like assimilation and acclimatization among the Bene Israel Jewish communities in India is a recurrent theme in David's fiction. Rendering and tendering her compassionate spirit on this issue of the liminality of identity, David propounds the ideals of tolerance and harmony in her writings.

The Bene Israel Jewish communities or the "Children of Israel" have had a long history in India with their integrated identity and culture. Tracing the history of the Jewish communities in India, Shalva Weil mentions that "In the Biblical Book of Esther, the kingdom of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) is described as stretching from Hodu (generally accepted to be India) to Kush (generally accepted to be Ethiopia). In addition, there are uncorroborated legends about the "Ten Lost Tribes" of Israel which were exiled from the kingdom by Assyrian kings in 722 BCE, remnants of which have been traced to remote parts of the world, including Kashmir, Goa, and the northeastern states of India" (10). Unlike

Europe and some other parts of the world, the Jews in India have never been segregated in the name of anti-Semitism. With the advent of print and television media, the Indian Jews become aware of the atrocities faced by other stranded Jews in different areas of the world and this cognition gets enmeshed with their own 'otherness' in India (Ete and Biswas 50). It is also undeniable that cultural diffusion posits lurking threats to the integrity of ethnic identity. This dissemination of variegated principles of mainstream cultural practices sometimes gets resulted in rigid and unyielding demeanour among the rule-makers of minority communities. Delving into this psychic scrimmage of exerting one's own cultural and ethnic values, Esther David upholds philanthropist morale of co-existence in her narratives about the Jewish experiences in India.

Esther David's debut novel, *The Walled City*, published in 1997, provides an illustrative framework for the liminality of recognition in the life of a Bene Israel Jewish girl who struggles to maintain oneness with her Jewish identity. With the traces of semi-autobiographical elements, the novel captures the dilemma of the protagonist who constantly sweeps between Judaism and Hinduism. Falling into the limbo between her desire to have cultural security and an emotional dependency, the perturbed narrator after her Granny's death feels that "The walls have fallen and the gates of the city we stand exposed, vulnerable and defenseless" (133). Experiencing different facades of cross-cultural proprieties, the protagonist has always carried an altruistic concern for the cultural practices of other religious and ethnic communities. She gets fascinated by the ways how Mohun, the caregiver to her grandfather, wholeheartedly succumbed to the rituals of

the Hindu gods. Unleashing her desire to be part of a predominating cultural conscience, the protagonist surreptitiously creates an idol of the Hindu god, Hanuman, but soon after that following the recommendation of Mohun, she dissolves the lump of clay into water. The deep angst as a result of her inability to take a well-fitting cultural stand prevails in her heart as she feels that “under the night sky, the mass of clay would perhaps have taken the form of another ogre and joined my tormentors” (45). The outcry of this striving self that seeks completion either from subjective cognition or from external realities can be adequately examined by Jacques Lacan’s concept of extimacy. Defining extimacy, Paul Kingsbury writes that “Jacques Lacan coined the neologism ‘extimacy’ (extimite) to theorize two interrelated modes of psychical apprehension: first, how our most intimate feelings can be extremely strange and Other to us. Second, how our feelings can be radically externalized onto objects without losing their sincerity and intensity” (235). It can be conceded from Lacan’s rendition of extimacy that intermingling of exteriority with instinctive realizations posits the self in a non-distinctive arena in which it becomes unfeasible to discriminate the emotive impressions of the self and the Other. Called into question the authenticity of essentialism against the multiplicity of modifications, extimacy exterminates the formidable unison of the self as an integrated authority. The resultant encasement of psychic integration becomes part of continual adjustment and alternation. Taking a cue from extimacy, it can be argued that by maintaining simultaneous empathy for both the core values of Jewish heritage and acclaimed traits of Hinduism, the protagonist of *The Walled City* confronts the ethical concerns of estrangement. Though constantly persuaded by

her Granny to leave for the Promised Land, Israel, as the Jewish community in India is getting shrunk amid the prevalence of multiculturalism, the protagonist feels reluctant to break off her affectionate relationship with India.

The consequence of situatedness provides contributing factors to problematize the fervency of one's cultural precepts. Due to the wake of multifarious societal demands, reflective eros gets shaped and reshaped by interactive discourses. Explicating the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky's works, Mikhail Bakhtin sets forth the idea of double-voiced discourse. As a mode of stylization and super-diversity, double-voiced discourse invalidates the concepts of 'pure' linguistics. Assessing the distinctive nature of the double-voiced discourse, Judith Baxter writes that "A key principle of DvD is that language is 'dialogic': that is, in close paraphrase, every utterance, and shapes itself in anticipation of the addressee's response" (25). Though primarily Bakhtin uses this concept to elaborate on the mechanisms of linguistics yet the essence of this double-voiced discourse can be applied to decipher the in-between phase of human identity. Social interaction enforces abstract objectivism of linguistic parameters to be changed by accommodating polyphonic discourses of others. Esther David's 2006 novel, *The Book of Rachel*, narrates the story of Rachel Dandekar who suffers from double marginalization, as a woman and a member of a minority Jewish community. The novel is poignant to show the indomitable spirit of Rachel, a middle-aged woman, who strives to justify her individualistic identity by protecting and preserving an age-old synagogue from some money-mongers. Rejecting the charm of a luxurious lifestyle in Israel where her children live, she stays back in India by embracing her Jewish heritage. Looking after the

deserted synagogue, Rachel has developed a close affinity with it. Her sense of oneness with the Jewish heritage through the synagogue faces starts to shatter when the patriarchal rule-makers suddenly appear to remind her of her secondary and subjugated position in terms of claiming rights. Her single-voiced discourse has always given her the neutral position as a worshipper of the Jewish religious customs surrounded by the synagogue but when she is forced to heed the dialogic interaction by imbibing double-voiced discourse controlled by characters like Mordecai she is almost relegated to her role as a passive woman. Struggling to maintain a symbiotic relationship with the one-sided demands in favor of power and unquestioned authority, Rachel adapts herself to tactfully participate in the extimacy through double-voiced discourse. Giving space to both the social structure and her agency, Rachel appears to be an efficient articulator of intricate politics of dialogic interaction.

Analyzing the novels such as *The Walled City* and *The Book of Rachel* under the light of extimacy and double-voiced discourse, it can be argued that both the novels attain sublimity by giving exertion to the agency. This celebrated agency is not devoid of polyphonic articulations of contradictory views that sometimes attempt to subdue the exposure of agency. The co-existence of otherness with individual perception in the case of both the protagonists makes them enable to give voice to their shaded discerning spirits. Construing the specificity of otherness, Pramod K. Nayar states that “Alterity is what enables us to distinguish ourselves from the world, to see the world as outside us and our consciousness” (6). In this context resides the uniqueness of Esther David’s maneuvered narratives that show the equal relevance of the otherness with

which the protagonists strive to acquire their aberrant identities. David Pavyn-Cuellar argues that his mutualism between alterity and subjectivity is “the landmark of our journey through life. It is the fixed center of our movements” (662). The psychic projection of extimacy serves to corroborate the sustenance of the double-voiced discourse. The interminable anguish ensued from the pressure to nourish an enduring semblance of ethical reflection and community-based assertion often gets expressed in the novel *The Walled City* as the protagonist declares that “I look my image in the mirror. I am but a wisp of that memory and sometimes I question of my Jewishness. My complexion is as deep brown like Subhadra’s and my long plait is tied with red tassels. I could be her sister” (28). While this protagonist struggles to contemplate on her expected role in familial and societal contexts, Rachel in *The Book of Rachel* stands out to break free from the pre-conceived notion of womanhood. Becoming aware of the predominant conviction about her role as a victim of domesticity through dialogic interaction with Mordecai, Rachel exerts her subjective self to break herself free from the caprices of the Other: “So, I am merely the caretaker, sort of a servant, that you can throw me out as though I am the sweeper woman? No, you cannot. You seem to have forgotten that I am Rachel Dandekar. I belong to an illustrious family...I will not allow you to treat me like a common labourer” (74). This assertion by Rachel comes at the cost of appropriating her selfhood about stylization that engenders the scope of co-existence.

While defining Bakhtin’s question of subjectivity, Steinby and Klapuri state that “...speakers use discourse types that are socially and ideologically determined” (xii). This essence of sociolects in dialogical interaction generates affective

emotion in the subjects. The intersubjective turmoil to cope with the systematic pronouncement of an individual's involvement often takes an interactional turn. Situating the cardinal principles of extimacy in this context, it can be argued that through this dialogical encounter, the real and the Other are amalgamated. The recognition of the otherness is as important as perceiving selfhood and it is only through a common ground of symbiosis between exteriority and interior cognition, the potentiality of subjectivity can be recognized. Homi Bhabha states that "Culture only emerges as a problem, or a problematic, at the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life, between classes, genders, races, nations" (50). Capturing this essence of culture as an all-encompassing zone, Esther David seeks to highlight the core issues of identification such as cultural assimilation, migration, and rootlessness in the Bene Israel Jewish community. The protagonist in *The Walled City* seeks to reshape the cognizance of how stringent values of a community can entail domineering effects upon an individual self, as she says that "I have not found my own god and have begun to believe that they're all the same, a common karma or kismet, a common destiny, a common creator with a different name" (129). This contemplation by the protagonist justifies her desire for cohabitation in a multi-ethnic country like India during her perpetual peregrination to secure a "Home Sweet Home". Consideration of the other arguments in a double-voiced discourse renders the platform for stylization modified identity can be discerned. Illustrating stylization, Baxter writes that "Bakhtin indicated that stylization was a form of multi-voiced utterance that could be used to discredit hegemonic, monologic discourses by appropriating the voices of the

powerful and reworking them for resistant purposes” (30). Applying this approach to mediate opposing views to establish her agency, Rachel in *The Book of Rachel* allows Mordecai to express his latent desire to expel Rachel from the synagogue. She allows the cohabitation of her autogenous mindset and contending traditionalism of Mordecai and in this way finally proves her authority as a neutral worshipper of the Jewish heritage.

It can be explicitly observed that through the recurring themes like acculturation, displacement, and migration, Esther David in her novels such as *The Walled City* and *The Book of Rachel* delineates subjugated feminine psyche that strives to attain subjective agency amidst the cultural struggles to protect the Jewish heritage. These victims in this crusade of uplifting a group’s ethnic identity have to undergo a rigorous process of psychic transformations through which they learn to consider the group’s dominant cultural hegemony in terms of its cultural practices, rituals, and restrictions as the supreme sources of identification. By giving equal authority to both the subjective emotions and the contending other societal norms, Ester David cherishes the values of harmony and cohabitation in these novels. The protagonists retain their humanitarian spirit that renders a noticeable shape to their reflective self-consciousness.

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**Revisiting North East: A Study of 'Insurgency' and
'Violence' Construct in Select Stories of Jahnabi Barua's
Next Door**

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Abstract: The political upheaval in Assam attracted the attention of the world, and subsequently the struggles and insurgency began to acquire prominence. The struggles provided the subject matter for a variety of literary works. The writers often highlight or question the violence caused by insurgency and counter intolerance that has ravaged their home state. Jahnabi Barua's stories take us to the centre of a trouble-torn land. Barua represents a way of life that is under constant threat of violence. She describes how ordinary people cope with violence caused by various militant outfits and the armed forces as well. The stories capture the voices of ordinary people who are trapped and wounded in the tussle between the state and Assamese ethnic insurgency groups. Through her stories, Barua registers her protest against such atrocities. The subject of insurgency has been addressed in depth and more skilfully by many accomplished authors in Indian literature; it comes into the stories of Barua as a part of everyday life in Assam. This paper is an attempt to study the variety of intricate patterns of insurgency and violence 'construct' by Barua in select stories from *Next Door*; which establish her as a master observer of minute details of human life.

Keywords: Insurgency, Intolerance, Atrocities, Protest, Human life.

Women writers in India, unlike other creative artists, have remained committed to the social cause by making diverse efforts to change society's awareness of the country's contemporary social and political issues. While the earlier writers have confined themselves to presenting the issues related to the sexuality of female protagonists who suffer within the framework of relationship, marriage, love, sex, and the search for identity and individuality. The paradigm shift from the traditional to the archetypal issues of contemporary Indian society is due to their sheer tenacity to expose the intricate mesh of emotions so often concealed under the facade of people's everyday lives. Modern female writers mostly focus on presenting issues related to identity crises, violence, and social and political extravaganza.

Contemporary Indian English literature contains a gamut of ethnically diverse authors like Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy, Urvashi Butalia, Sudha Murthy, and Namita Gokhale. These authors have moved away from traditional portrayals of the enduring, self-sacrificing status of characters; rather, their discourse echoes an outcry of issues like healthcare, education, poverty alleviation, and treatment of female sexual violence, hostility to insurgency, religious and social bigotry, intolerance, and so on. These issues are also present in the literature written by North Eastern women. The literature written by female authors from the region is no exception to the fact that gender influences women's writing regardless of the community, tribe, race, nation, or location from which it originates. Since it was difficult to access and expressed itself mostly in tribal languages, the literature of this region was long ignored by

the rest of India. But after the 1980s, Assam's political unrest captured the attention of the world, and as a result, conflicts and exploitation came to the fore. After certain prominent English writers rose to prominence, like Siddharth Deb, Mitra Pukhan, Jahnabi Barua, and Arup Kumar Dutta, whose works were translated from Assamese into English, the literature of Northeast India attracted notice. Numerous literary works have used the battles as their subject matter. Among the most contemporary Indian English writers, Jahnabi Barua is a fresh story teller with a fervour for post-modern efficacies.

The North-East is a mix of multiethnic and multilingual cultures within a region that is physically isolated from the rest of India, and writings from the area embody layers of complexity. Art in all its forms seems to be a medium for propagating social causes now, with writers, poets, painters, and musicians jumping eagerly onto the bandwagon. Barua chooses to stay an exception by writing about the psyche and trauma of Assamese people who become the victims of the cruel jaws of insurgency, violence, social-bigotry, and intolerance. As we know very well, Assam, the gateway to the entire northeast, has become a liminal space and marginalized area in the context of mainstream India. Through their brazen exposure of their writings, a few concerned authors from the region raised their voice against the marginalisation, trauma, and violence of insurgency. According to Udayan Mishra:

Insurgencies in India's northeast do not represent a stereotype and their similarities often end with their opposition to federal control and use of violence to challenge it. It will also be simplistic to see the insurgent movements as manifestations of core-periphery conflict as some writers have done. (Mishra 139)

Jahn timer Barua is one of the few authors who uses their writing as a protest platform to attempt to understand the human condition. She has become one of the region's most powerful voices, using fiction to help people see the world in new ways. Every female writer's writing reflects her region's rituals, customs, and traditions. If she belongs to a minority group, undoubtedly, her work represents her religion. She assumes the role of a mediator between her people and the world. Barua's *Next Door* is a collection of moving stories about human suffering set against the backdrop of insurgency and draconian government. Predominantly set in the verdant, politically charged landscape of Assam, yet constantly transcending the particular, the stories in *Next Door* are unerringly human. Subtle and evocative in their telling, they mark the introduction of a highly accomplished voice. Parbina Rashid's article "A Heavy Dose of Northeast", published in Spectrum of *The Tribune* in 2009, elucidates the idea that Jahn timer's *Next Door* "is a heavy dose of Assamese... uncomplicated desires of the people of this region that come through her stories. She takes inspiration from everyday life and events...." (Rashid5).

This research paper intends to explore the issues concerning social bigotry, violence, and trauma originating from insurgency. It presents an interpretative reading of Barua's select stories from the collection *Next Door*; asserting how she has become a marginal voice in representing the conflict as a backdrop transcending any sort of political commentary. The paper focuses on the close reading of select stories from the book, which reflects trauma caused by the violence of insurgency and intolerance, the unrest and turmoil that have devastated the lives of common folks of the land. Focusing on

Barua's stories, the paper will illustrate the power patterns resulting from the politics of violence emanating from insurgency.

Predominantly set in the verdant, politically charged landscape of Assam, yet constantly transcending the particular, the stories in the book are inspired by political disruption that has devastated the land with the diminutive promise of a peaceful solution. The book's study is specifically of the life of the Assamese. It unfolds the story of the everyday lives of people who belong to almost every stratum of society, who struggle to ensure their survival and see the changes taking place around them.

Honeybees: Doing Away with Choices of Brawls and Disputes

Honeybees, the fourth story in the book, alludes to how the unstable river Pagladiya becomes instrumental in deciding the fate of a boy having shallow desires in life. Since the attachment to land is the major concern in Assam, most of the brawls and disputes are based around the land. The land has become a source of emotional and lasting relationships. The boy in the story, Anupam Kalita, wants to make a living off of his little farm land. He aspires to a decent living; therefore, he decides to earn money in order to purchase another piece of land. To fulfil his dream, he joins the police force as a home guard so that he may perhaps purchase a piece of land in his village. The story reflects the social reality of poor people in traditional Assam. He, in fact, joins the police which fight the insurgency. It also shows how unemployed Assamese youths join insurgent groups in the name of fighting for their motherland, but their true motivation is to earn a living. The

protagonist, Anupam, is a propitious example of it as he becomes a victim of insurgent activities. The story highlights how young men in need join insurgent troops in the name of patriotism. As one of Anupam's best friends, Madan, throws an offer, mumbling, "I had an offer, a few days ago...you know, to join in the fight for the motherland...there is good money in it, you know" (Barua 56). His conscience pricked him time and again when he thought about his family and friends.

The skilled labour of Anupam's struggle suggests the saga of other young boys driven by the romantic idealism of fighting for the cause of the region who wake up to the harsh reality of violence coming from the tragic power struggle. The story illustrates how young people in the North East are frequently caught up in the whirlwind of insurgency violence. With the passage of time, there was a massive mobilisation of adults in such movements, leaving their jobs and careers behind and joining the band of nationalists in order to work for what they believed would benefit their country. The nation created by the people of Assam with the goal of achieving a free state witnessed the loss of many lives in the assumption of becoming rich and prosperous under capitalist slavery.

Honeybees: Depiction of Social and Emotional Adjustment

The story *Honeybees* manifests various strands of cultural dichotomy, narrating the events of intolerance and violence that affect the very fabric of people's emotions. This shows how people are going to lose the ceremonial faith through social and emotional adjustment. Every situation in the story talks of how the characters become the victims of aroused meds of intolerance and mental slavery. These events in the story also highlight that the people of the region have forgotten the fact

that not violence but the use of wit and simple knowledge can bring about change and hope within the state.

Barua, through the combination of influences, does not isolate the human experience from culture and politics. She writes about life instead, showing her readers that no matter how different people may be on the surface, there is a universality to human emotions that only writing can truly put into perspective. We find ourselves relating to people with whom we never dreamed of sharing common ground. The spectre of death and state violence haunts North Eastern civil society each day. Violence is anticipated, experienced and intimate in our lives. There are those that are concomitantly affected. Violence permeates daily life, regulates bodies and conditions behaviour. Thus, the story's central conflict is either the protagonist's personal conflict or a conflict with his family, his society, or his surroundings. This battle has existed since the beginning of human history and is not a product of the modern era. The difficulty in quelling the insurgency is a result of public fury caused by the inhabitants' sense of alienation and violence caused by the government, which makes even the locals sympathetic to the insurgents.

The Patriot: A Tale of Loss and Grief, of Violence and Intolerance

Another story which has references to insurgency is *The Patriot*. It is a tale of loss and grief, of violence and intolerance that desperately needs to be retold. The plot of the story does not only tickle our deep, hidden sensitivities, but it gives us a generous portion of food for thought: about Assam, about society, and about life that demands a socio-political equilibrium for the characters like Dhiren Majumdar. One

evening, Majumdar observed a flickering motion beside the house and noticed a young boy lying in the dark, severely wounded, and when he saw a pistol pointed at his chest, he asked him, “What is the matter with you?...And who are you?”. The boy, ‘smeared and caked in mud’ and ‘looked like dried blood’ replied in anger, “Shut up, old man, shut your mouth if you want to live” (Barua116). The boy is in fact an insurgent and wants Dhiren to keep his arrival a secret. In the story we see a unique bond that develops between Dhiren Majumdar and an injured insurgent rebel who seeks shelter in his old dilapidated house. The old retired Dhiren’s initial fear subsides as he sees the dangerous situation the rebel is in and, out of compassion, he helps him with medicine and food.

Through the eyes of Dhiren Majumdar, the main protagonist of the story, Barua paints a picture of Assam centred on the gross violation of human rights by secret and systematic killings, exploitation, and rapes of relatives, friends, and sympathisers of ULFA insurgents. When Dhiren learned that his son, Anjan, was looking for the same insurgent for whom he had provided shelter, Anjan exclaimed, “oof, Deuta, have you lost your mind? This is the dangerous criminal, a member of a banned terrorist outfit.” I have to take him in “(Barua133). Dhiren’s fatherly attachment to the insurgent made him escape the boy from getting arrested by his son. He stepped forward aggressively and told Anjan, “I will not let you, and if you do, I will shout out in public that I gave him shelter voluntarily. Now do what you will” (Barua 133). Through the portrayal of Manoj (insurgent) and Dhiren, Barua portrays the ever-present onlookers and their morbid curiosity. She also deliberately grafts the bloodshed and violence of the insurgency onto the pathos and neediness of Dhiren’s life.

The emotion of ‘violence’ that Manoj’s character reveals represents his fragile world of unfulfilled dreams and aspirations. It also symbolises the entire outside world of the North East region. As “the boy” prepares to step into the outside world from the world of fantasy, he feels more and more frustrated and disappointed about his status as a ‘criminal’. It signifies to him an identity that he is not able to accept, once he wants to cast aside it when he tells Dhiren his reason for withdrawal from society:

Do you know I have passed my pre – university examinations? You had not thought I had, had you? And when I passed my interview for appointment as a lower primary schoolteacher, they said I needed to pay one lakh rupees for the post. One lakh! Where would I get that kind of money? ‘The bastards’. (Barua 130)

This confession illustrates the social identity of Manoj as a helpless and jobless boy who has to bear the responsibility of his family. The very ‘construct’ of an insurgent out of innocent Manoj is in full conformity with Barua’s understanding of the psyche of people around her. On the other hand, Manoj’s abandonment of his family in search of a misguided but promising identity represents that he, like other unemployed youth in his region, has entered the arena of insurgency and violence.

Barua has pathetically recounted in these stories that the security forces deployed by the state mechanism have tortured aggressively to stop the voice of the North-Eastern people for their rights and to protect their identity. Barua is deeply concerned about the insurgency problems faced by the local people, both mentally and socially, particularly the insecurity

of women and children from both the armed forces deployed by the government and the outfit militants in the society owing to their harassment in various ways of demanding money, torturing women, kidnapping innocent children on the one hand and physically distorting family members during an army operation on the other.

Thus, it is usually natural for the North-East to serve as Barua's favourite literary setting, as she has grown-up there. Through the narration of her stories, she points out the aimlessness of her childhood, brought about by her father, who is a civil servant. During her stay in Assam, she closely observed two Assam – one is of 1980 and the latter, she herself asserts - "*The AASU-led students*' was in full flow and things were very turbulent. Later, with the insurgency, matters became even more troubled" (Darshana). *Next Door*; therefore, bridges these two very different worlds. The juxtaposition of the two situations is something she finds intriguing, and she explores it in her short stories. There is a profound sense of loss of human lives, opportunities, and time associated with the turbulent period that she often weaves into her stories.

The concept of insurgency resulting in violence practised by the people of the North-East in the expectation of a free state endorsed the cost of many innocent lives. Not only is society in complete disarray, but many families are mourning the sudden disappearance of their loved ones. Most of the stories in the collection lament the strain of losing their men from home. Many of them joined the rebellions to fight for the freedom of the state, and some unintentionally found themselves caught in the vicious circle of the warring groups. Barua herself admits that the youth of her region joined insurgent groups 'some by choice and others by compulsion' (Darshana).

Broadly speaking, the problem of insurgency and violence in the North-East has become an object like commodity within the international arena and has claimed the status of being a burning question where people's lives have been taken for granted. The plight within the region triggered its own path of destruction, generating a negative perspective towards the North-East and the people living there. The stories we went through from *Next Door*, have been considered for taking up the theme of violence and insurgency. The main objective of this paper has been to depict the agony and angst of the characters, and it tries to revisit the terror-stricken people of the North Eastern region. The paper has successfully revisited the 'construct' of violence and insurgency conflict through a selection of stories that can be linked to the problems of the entire North East region on a large scale.

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Understanding the Transformation of Caste in Twenty-first Century Urban India

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Abstract: Caste is at the very bedrock of Indian social system, so much so that every aspect of a person's life is defined by his/her caste. Despite the incessant efforts of reformers like Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar to challenge 'legitimized apartheid' in India, society is still not caste-free. The economic progress and certain other Affirmative policies have contributed much in creating a new section of Dalits, the educated, urbanized, and techno-savvy, who is exploring various new avenues to push forward Dalit Activism. It is a happy sign to see the corpus of Indian English literature also expanding with the mushrooming of Dalit literature by young Dalit writers like Yashica Dutt, Suraj Yengde, Meena Kandasamy, Sujatha Gidla, Sumeet Samos, to name a few. However, the ubiquitous nature of caste and its deep penetrating repercussion make it necessary to understand the changing nature of casteist practices, especially in urban India. Hence, the present paper would focus on, (i) the 'disguised casteism' in the twenty-first century urban India, and (ii) the new class of Dalits.

Keywords: Caste, Urban India, Legitimized Apartheid, Dalit Activism, Disguised Casteism

The caste system is not only one of the prominent features of contemporary India, but it is also at the centre of many of the country's past and present formations. To understand India, one, inevitably, needs to understand this intricate institution. As per the Hindu caste system, each person is born within an unalterable social hierarchy which, as per the hymn called *Purusha Sukta*¹ in the *Rigveda*, puts Brahmins (the priests) at the top, subsequently followed by Kshatriyas (nobility), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (servants) while a large population of society is born entirely outside (and below) of this system called 'Untouchables' or Dalits, i.e., the trodden ones. Ambedkar also refers to such a stratified set up of Indian society, using the analogy of earthen pots.² Researchers have further identified a variety of dimensions along which caste differentiation occurs, such as matrimonial conventions, food practices, and religious worship etc. Though these caste customs have been evolved and thus vary across time and region, they have become a very strict line of separation between Dalits and non-Dalits in most parts of India.

Since economic mobility is always a prerequisite for development, present India, being one of the world's most dynamic economies, raises the question of whether caste still matters in modern India or not, and if it does, in what form. With the restructuralization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, new opportunities for industrialization and modernization were produced which aided in diluting the rigid caste system and changing the caste dynamics. Liberalization, privatization, and globalization were introduced as repercussions of these economic reforms and the effects could be seen in the expansion of urbanization. The migration to the cities was seen as a way to progress, and in the case of the

Dalits, it also meant escaping the caste atrocities at the hands of the upper caste villagers. Ambedkar, in fact, exhorted Dalits to flee the countryside and move to the cities since desegregation begins in an urban setting that enables a society to transcend the villages where ignorance, intolerance and prejudices flourish (Jodhka 3351). Some of the factors associated with cities like, easy transportation, communication and modern education, have brought a radical change in this sphere. From Ajay Navaria's short story called "Subcontinent", one can take in the essence of this literal journey from the village, where the *panchayat* is supposed to punish Dalits for riding a horse on weddings so that "all the other lowborns think a thousand times before breaking the rules of the village again" which the "ancestors worked hard to build" (89), to the city where the protagonist has "a car with an air-conditioner and a middle-aged, Garhwali Brahmin driver, Bhatt, who would never forget to bow and greet (us) when he opens the door" (99).

Though it was during the British period that modern secular education in the English language was introduced, English knocked out the intellectual monopoly of the dominant castes in the transition period from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. It, in fact, is developing into "the language of enfranchisement for Dalit writings in the regional languages" (Basu 26). It is interesting to mention here about the temple of 'English Goddess' in Banka village of Uttar Pradesh.³ Since English serves as an equalizer, it has become a powerful force in stimulating change, by making Dalits being heard and shifting the discourse from "about" them to "by" them. Of late, many Dalit writers have resorted to using 'English' as the choice of their writing, as against the regional languages

of the earlier writers; Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out as Dalit*, Suraj Yengde's *Caste Matters*, Meena Kandasamy's *Ms Militancy*, and *Touch* are some of the recent examples. The 'new avatar'⁴ of Dalit has borrowed its spirit from the radical social organization, Dalit Panthers⁵ which rose in the struggle against Brahminical feudalism. It was modelled after the famous African American revolutionary organization, The Black Panthers⁶ which sought to destroy American White Imperialism. After Indian independence celebrated its 25th anniversary, the Dalit Panthers questioned the very idea of it and stood up to get independence, in its most sincere sense. This laid the groundwork for the modern activism, based on 'liberty, equality, and fraternity'. The rebellious streak thus generated, continues in the contemporary times as well.

In the twenty-first century, technological advancements, particularly the smartphone and internet revolution, have enabled Dalits to participate equally in public discourse, which had previously been overtly dominated by the symbols and values of social elites. Yashica Dutt contextualizes this Dalit persona in her memoir. She details how Round Table India, Dalit Camera, Ambedkar's Caravan, Savari, Velivada and other Dalit-run portals not only instantly covered and circulated the news of Rohith Vemula's suicide but also gave it in-depth coverage. Her memoir evokes the crumbling away of the 'classic' media's monopoly with the arrival of these online media outlets, which was reflected in the protest against cases like the rape and murder of Jisha and Delta Meghwal, the physical assault of adolescent Dalit tanners, and the follow-on protest rally called the Azadi Kooch March. This Dalit emergence has been highlighted by Suraj Yengde as "a newer version of Dalit radiance into the alternative world of

rectangular screens” (95). The spread of this new system provided varied opportunities for exercising democracy, visible from Dalits considering more suitable and income-oriented occupations rather than “their traditional” ones to an increasing number of inter-caste marriages. The dynamically configured structure of caste adapts to the vigorous political, economic, and technological changes, and so do the counter measures employed against it. Social media is a prime example of that. Its web-based networks allow people to interrelate virtually across the globe and have the core information (often disregarded by the majority of the media) stream efficiently. This has led to a widening and deepening of the digital education among Dalits, thereby revolutionizing the power relations based on access to information. Several digital platforms, including online news, blogs, twitter, websites, YouTube channel such as #dalitwomenfight, twitter@dalitawaz, Dalit Camera, etc are helping in making the web truly democratic, and also in mobilizing Dalits across/ outside India. By exploiting this opportunity, Dalits are creating a society where the right questions are being asked and the right voices are being heard. Emerging Dalit students are exploring the activism by trying to reinforce their autonomy through academic spaces. Their anti-caste retaliation draws attention to the unfair community representation on campuses while also serving as an example of society. Organizations such as Ambedkar Student Association (HCU), The New Materialists (JNU), and the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle are strong student bodies to address the issues of Dalit students on campus.

Talking about urban India, it is interesting to see how Indian cities are placed today in terms of their cosmopolitan

character and liberating potential to shatter the walls of caste. The structural changes have created new opportunities over the past 30 years but have also revealed another (difficult) side/truth of the cities. While cities still remain the best hope for social mobility for hundreds of marginalized communities, they have not been an unquestionable equalizing force and thus increasingly mirror India's fundamental social and cultural realities, and its entrenched casteist social customs. Earlier, in non-urban areas, a Dalit defying the caste laws would lead to their instant punishment. On the contrary, the same occurrence in the contemporary urban ethos results into a more strategic violence that cuts deep to be impressed for a longer period of life and mixes with the individual's system (Teltumbde 26). Navaria makes a larger point about the urban Dalit dilemma in "Tattoo" where the protagonist named Subhash Kumar Paswan is an Ambedkarite and a government official but abstains from revealing his surname, and becomes cautious about keeping his right arm's *Jai Bhim* tattoo downward while shaking hand. Driven by ticking every box to not feel inferior and inconsequential, Dalit youth wear "Stolen badges"⁷ (Dutt xi) of 'upper caste' identities, try hard to fit the 'standard' type, and are always occupied with narrative battles in their heads just to make up for their Dalitness. Suicides by Dalit students in premier institutions, the tag of being the 'quota students', their being looked down on for availing reservation, casual casteism in campus environments, gauging an individual's status by their surnames, etc give a sense of how caste is present in insidious ways inside urban spaces. A deep look at the ongoing urbanization patterns shows how caste has now recasted itself with a new force, existing in different forms and magnitude. A study by Gayatri Singh, Trina Vithayathli,

and Kanu Charan Pradhanshows that spatial segregation along caste lines is on a consistent rise in urban spaces. Dalits are heavily concentrated within certain geographical areas of cities (mostly unauthorized settlements). This segregation furthers poverty, which in turn, furthers segregation. Cities do not only exhibit a great degree of residential segregation but also seem to offer little in the way of a constructive environment for growth in Dalit localities (Ganguly 52).

Given the ramifications of economic mobility, and Affirmative action⁸, such as the reservation in jobs, education, and the legislature, Dalit networks in cities have developed over many generations. In order to encourage Dalit upliftment, the Government of India primed some special provisions such as ‘Untouchability Offence Act’, 1955, Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1976, Article 15⁹, Article 17¹⁰, which have abolished all the restrictions suffered by these castes and have led to an increase in their organizational power. Dalit consciousness of the members has been increasing to uphold their rights. Current day Dalit activism is borne out of this consciousness. At present, the International Dalit Solidarity Network in Denmark, Dalit Adhikar Network, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Dalit Sangh India, Equality Labs are some of the networks functioning nationally and internationally. Another force, driving convergence could be the fact that these networks facilitate access to the job market for their members and thus support their economic mobility. Breaking caste barriers, Dalit youth today are creating their niche by asserting their identity and problematizing enforced social customs. They follow the historiography (while being critical of the history) and thus find it imperative to look at a number of things, from how the history appears in the Dalit

memory to what Dalit culture celebrates. The Gen Y¹¹ and Gen Z¹² Dalits do not see these support structures as their ultimate achievement, rather see them as the vehicle, attempting to reach to a society that starts to function with its optimal efficiency. In the interim (which could last for several decades), these associations that continue to enterprise for educational, occupational, and lifestyle choices, can be perceived as an effective medium for fostering growth.

With the constantly changing caste implications, the contemporary literary activism against this is also positioned differently. The writers today are not primarily focused on the pain and degraded state, which would demonstrate “the obsessive subjectivism of the writer and the stereotyping of Dalit life” (Teltumbde 137), but are very much interested in showing the Dalit culture, Dalit art and the assertion facet of Dalit lives, or the Dalit energy in all. This transformed literary disposition is apparent in Navaria’s short stories showing friction between multiple centers of power, Kandasamy taking down the stature of ‘sacred’ ideas, writing the characters having a powerful agency and a mind of their own, and Yashica Dutt and Suraj Yengde’s research rooted life narratives. They belong to the moment when they are exploring literary innovation and experimentation, literary styles and forms, artistic tools and resources, without compromising on their activist project. It discusses the rationale of the Dalit monopoly on Dalit literature as Dalit literature is the product of Dalit consciousness that is shaped by their living experiences of pain, and revolt. Secondly, in current woke times when rights and wrongs are being redressed, the literary space of Dalits holds absolute importance. Hence, being Dalit occupies the central stage for the authentic production of this stream of

writing and for the representational subversion that allows them to become the “speaking subjects” (Kumar 84).

The current age is momentous for the study of this unique social structure, identified as caste, which has not only managed to survive; it has flourished in place even almost 75 years after Independence. But the way this hierarchy translates into discrimination has definitely been changed. On the other hand, the Dalit base has been able to nurture a vigorous counteractive ecosystem that both strengthens the Ambedkarite legacy and articulates coherently in the face of power.

Endnotes

¹According to the Purusha Sukta, the entire cosmology is created out of the four parts of Brahma: the Brahmins from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arm, the Vaishyas from his thigh, and the Shudras from his feet.

² Ambedkar describes the Indian society in the semblance of the pyramid of earthen pots, with the top layer of Brahmins, followed by the three other castes. The Dalits being in the bottom-most layer are the most exploited and oppressed.

³The two-feet bronze statue is modeled after the Statue of Liberty, and is seen as the symbol of renaissance for Dalits.

⁴The term refers to the urban Dalit youth, born or brought up around the economic liberalization in 1991, who are well-located in terms of language, education, networking, skill sets, and consciously choose to discuss their identity.

⁵An organisation founded by Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale and Arjun Dangle in 1972, Maharashtra.

⁶The political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton in 1966, Oakland.

⁷The phrase refers to Dalits falsely wearing ‘upper caste’ identities in order to be socially acceptable.

⁸The policy that provides quota, scholarships, grants etc. to the historically disenfranchised, aimed at improving representation.

⁹The article prohibits discrimination based on caste, religion, race, sex, or place of birth with regard to the Indian citizens.

¹⁰The article considers untouchability as a punishable offence.

¹¹It refers to the millennial generation, born between early 1980s to around 1996.

¹² The generation, born between late 1990s to early 2010s.

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Longing for the Land: Nostalgia in Nandita Haksar's “The Exodus Is Not Over”

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Abstract: Northeast region of India has been stifling with a ‘culture of conflict’. The region has witnessed separatist movements, insurgency, communal, inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts. This ensuing violence coupled with difficult geographical terrain and the region’s geographical distance from mainland India has allowed development to knock at its door at a snail’s speed when compared to rest of the Indian states. As a result, northeast youths migrate to the metropolitan cities of India in search of better education, employment, and a prosperous livelihood. This conscious decision to migrate to metropolis however comes at a price for the concrete life of a city makes them long for their homeland and subsequently a sense of nostalgia creeps into their lives. This paper intends to present the struggles of Tangkhul migrant workers in metropolitan cities and highlight the atrocious discrimination and racism faced by them as presented in Nandita Haksar’s book, *The Exodus Is Not Over* (2016). It will then examine the sense of nostalgia and a longing for their ruptured homeland that these migrant workers regularly suffer from while living in metropolitan lands. This ultimately leads to their ghettoization in selected pockets of metropolis so as to be in touch with their native identity, food habits, culture and practices and preserve them in whatever

way they can and this will form the final discussion of the paper.

Keywords: Northeast India, Migration, Migrant Workers, Nostalgia, Homeland

From land afar I have come
Leaving green, blue sky and cool streams all behind
I carry dreams in my heart
And live each day remembering guns and tears. (Haksar, 191)

Northeast region of India has been stifling with a ‘culture of conflict’. Ever since the region’s incorporation into the Indian union, it has been witnessing separatist movements, insurgency, communal, inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts. The on-going violence coupled with difficult geographical terrain and the region’s geographical distance from mainland India has allowed development to knock at its door at a snail’s speed when compared to rest of the Indian states. As a result, northeast youths migrate to the metropolitan cities of India in search of better education, employment, and a prosperous livelihood. “...[M]any young people had nothing to do all day [in Ukhrul],” as Nandita Haksar writes in the book (234). This conscious decision to migrate to metropolis however comes at a price for the concrete life of a city makes them long for their homeland and a sense of nostalgia creeps into their lives; wishing to go back to a “life which was tough but simple” (157). This paper intends to present the struggles of Tangkhul migrant workers, who are generally employed in the service sector but their contribution is hardly acknowledged by society and instead face atrocious discrimination and racism as highlighted in the select text. It will then examine the sense of nostalgia and a longing for their ruptured homeland that

these migrant workers regularly suffer from while living in metropolitan lands. This ultimately leads to their ghettoization in selected pockets of metropolis so as to be in touch with their native identity, food habits, culture and practices and preserve them in whatever way they can and this will form the final discussion of the paper.

Northeast and the Mass Exodus

Northeast India is connected to mainland India by a narrow stretch of land of about twenty-two kilometres through the Siliguri Corridor or Chicken's Neck. As such it is not only geographically distant from mainland India but is also located in an area of high seismic zone with dense forests and difficult land terrain making it difficult to have any presence of heavy industries. Since, northeast is located in the frontiers, the national imaginary of Northeast is one of a distant, alien, backward and violent land. This imaginary gets all the more amplified because of the racially distinct features of the people of Northeast from Indian mainstream. People of Northeast trace their lineage to Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer, and Tai and thus they have Southeast Asian and Southern Chinese roots and are included in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. What we have in Northeast thereby are different tribal and ethnic groups with their distinctive traditions, customs and values. In this context, then it would be very wrong to club the entire people of the region into one homogeneous mass. These tribal and ethnic groups however, have pursued separatist movements, insurgency, communal, inter-community and inter-ethnic conflicts and clashes ever since India's independence and its successive inclusion in the larger India state. Because of the continued violence, the region is

heavily militarised. I have vivid memories of seeing army jawans all over in Guwahati especially while going to my paternal village in Goreswar as it shares border with Bodoland, a violence prone sensitive zone. One has to pass by a heavily fortified military cantonment in Changsari on the way to Goreswar. Violence has been reproduced not only by the secessionist forces and insurgent groups but also by the security forces and AFSPA which has ultimately led to a discord between the people of Northeast and the central government of India. The representation arising from it is thereby, one of violent and exotic-looking anti-national and backward people. In this already tensed atmosphere, there are also instances of extortion, smuggling, human trafficking, drug peddling, illegal mining and exploitation of other natural resources which makes the region unprofitable in terms of investment. Lack of jobs and livelihoods further aggravates the problem thus compelling people of Northeast to migrate to metropolitan cities and escape from a dystopian reality.

Migration from Northeast to the metropolitan concrete cities is a continuing phenomenon. However, migration to Delhi and Bangalore has over the years increased manifold. Delhi in this case offers numerous educational and career opportunities. It houses some of the country's best universities. Both Delhi and Bangalore offer numerous career opportunities. Majority of the Northeast youth are employed in the tertiary sector especially in the hospitality, retail and BPO sectors. Northeast labour especially is in high demand in the BPO industry because of their fluent English. As Duncan McDuie-Ra writes in his book *Northeast Migrants in Delhi*, "For many Northeast migrants the call centre industry offers livelihood opportunities that can't be found at home. Finding work is

relatively easy, and migrants who come to Delhi for other reasons often find themselves working in call centres when their initial plans don't work out" (77). Their heavy presence in the service sector is well documented by Nandita Haksar in her book. One of the central characters of the book, Ngalatim Hongray also known as Atim, who is a Tangkhul, leaves her home in Ukhrul, Manipur and moves to Delhi in October 2005 because "she could not bear the constant deprivation and poverty" (31). Her only dream is to build a house for her family back home in Manipur with a vegetable garden as "Atim decided to find work in Delhi. She had no idea what kind of work, just as long as she could earn and send money back home" (31). A place which was stifling with a 'culture of conflict', which had frequent power cuts and lack of proper livelihood; escaping from this dystopian situation and migrating to a metropolitan city then seems the only best possible option. The grand city lifestyle with its glitz and glamour then, through the eyes of a migrant worker, seems utopic if we juxtapose it with Manipur:

[Atim] had seen such wonderful photographs of Delhi in magazines; the one she remembered most was an advertisement of a posh restaurant with lots of people and a beautiful woman pouring coffee. Her stepsister, Lily, who was looking at the pictures, had told Atim that her daughter, Masowon too worked in a place where she poured coffee for guests. It had sounded so grand. (33)

However, there is still a lingering question as Atim asks Jacinta in the train on their way to Delhi, "Is it safe for us in Delhi?" (35). Atim had heard a story from her friend, Tharayo about a girl from Nagaland being harassed by a group of men in Delhi. In this context then, it is interesting to note that despite

knowing about the lurking dangers in Delhi, Northeast youth still choose to go to Delhi. Perhaps because they have already seen enough in their ruptured and violent-hit homeland leaving them with no option but to migrate to the metropolitan cities to earn money, have a steady livelihood and send money back home to their family, friends and relatives.

The Dawn of Reality for Northeast Migrant Workers

The impending distress and struggle for a newly arrived Northeast migrant youth like Atim, who had high hopes from Delhi is soon going to hit her hard for she feels a “deep disappointment” while driving through the streets of Delhi:

it was so dark and smelly. Finally, when they arrived at Kotla Mubarakpur and the auto turned into a narrow alley, it seemed even darker than Ukhul. They lugged their bags up the steep staircase to a small room on the first floor. The room was bare; there was a fridge but it had nothing in it and they had to go downstairs to buy vegetables and cook their dinner. There was not even a cupboard. Everything was piled on open cement shelves. There were no beds, and the three flopped down on mattresses and slept. This was not the Delhi Atim had dreamed about. (36-37)

The struggles of Northeast migrant workers are further highlighted when Atim lands a job in Delhi and meets her fellow Tangkhul migrant workers. Her first job was at a handicrafts shop in the Metropolitan Hotel in Connaught Place. She then briefly worked in the showroom of an international shoe brand but the experience of working there was torturous and appalling as is reflected in the text

...the timings were really bad; she had to be at the showroom in the morning at ten sharp and could not leave till nine at night. The company did not provide transport, even though they expected her to work till after it was dark. The manager offered to drop her home but she refused because she felt uncomfortable with him. (62)

The manager wanted sexual favours and practically made her life difficult because of her constant refusals: “He would not allow her to sit and made her work in such a way that she found she was standing for twelve hours every day without a break. The staff was not even given a cup of tea” (62). Life of a hostess was not easy; something that Atim soon finds out in her new job at Kainoosh. Besides, standing at the entrance of the restaurant, handling the crowd, attending to phone calls and taking down requests for reservations, she also had to serve at the tables and handle the “innumerable complaints from the guests” (178). The saddest part however, was the way the guests looked through the staff “as if they did not have human feelings. For instance, Atim once came across a diamond earring on the floor; she quickly found the guest’s phone number and informed her. The guest’s husband came rushing back and took the earring without as much as a thank you” (179). She was often ignored by the customers as if she were “of no consequence” (ibid). In this context then question arises whether she was ignored because of class consciousness or because of racism.

Being a migrant worker from Northeast, Atim had to hear sexist remarks from the chef at S 18 Café in the Radisson Hotel in Noida where she was appointed as a hostess. She also witnessed an incident of sexual molestation in Kainoosh, where an electrician accidentally brushed his hand “against

the bum of a Tangkhul waitress who was bending to take out candles from a cupboard. When the bartender asked him what it was like, the electrician replied, ‘Very soft’” (181). Take for instance, the case of Livingstone and his sisters in Bengaluru as Haksar highlights in the book. He heard men passing comments when he went to the market with his sisters. He was advised not to react when “men tried to provoke him” (115). Livingstone was trying hard to survive in this ‘brave new world’ but sense of disillusionment, disappointment and nostalgia already creeps in by now: “Back in Ukhrul I was equal with others, but here I had no rights at all” (115). Incidents like these form one of the many experiences of Northeast migrant workers. They are often called by the derogatory term ‘chinky’ because of their distinctive different features from the Indian mainstream people. In other words, racism defines a Northeast migrant experience. The deep fault lines and fissures within the Indian society thereby stand exposed in the book and put a question mark on the veracity of the concept of ‘Unity in Diversity’.

Conflux of Memory, Nostalgia and Belongingness

Racist experiences coupled with struggling situation at work, life for a Northeast Tangkhul migrant worker becomes extremely difficult; so much so that they long for their ruptured homeland. “Take a last look at the mountains. Later you will miss them,” Jacinta advises Atim when they board their train to Delhi (34). Memory is like travelling back to time mentally; it is a gateway to our past. It is a “means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with. To doubt it is to doubt ourselves, to lose it is to lose ourselves...” (Greene 293). Memory then not only helps

us in reconstructing the past, but good memories also provide solace in times of need and helps in keeping our identity intact. Jacinta's advice to Atim thus serves as a cautionary warning of the struggling and dangerous times that lie ahead. The good memory of the mountains then will comfort Atim in times of distress.

Ukhrul's mountains and its fresh air indeed is what is being missed by Atim the most in Delhi as "In Ukhrul, the entire family had to squeeze into a room slightly larger than the one Atim stayed in by herself. But she missed the fact she could not walk out and breathe fresh mountain air and look at the distant hills under a pure blue sky" (133). This sense of belongingness to one's native place in a faraway other land becomes all the more obvious when Atim's mother, who is visiting her in Delhi, tries to go to the roof of Atim's rented accommodation in search of the mountains: "The mother thought if she climbed to the roof she would get a view of the hills and mountains" (133). People like Atim and Jacinta migrate to Delhi, Bangalore and other metropolitan cities because young people back home in Northeast have nothing to do. The pay in their home state was not good enough like the metropolitan cities: "They wanted to start earning as soon as possible, partly to support their families, but also to taste the freedom that comes with having money. They all came to Delhi with the dream of getting rich quickly" (139). The many glass offices, the shiny shopping malls stand in sharp contrast to the old, dilapidated office buildings of Manipur. It was like being in heaven, as Atim's mother exclaims on her first visit to the Ambience Shopping Mall. But having experiences like these comes at a price for the migrant life in Delhi, Bangalore and other metropolitan cities is not easy. They had to squeeze

in cramped rooms with no proper ventilation and at times they are not even provided a fan. The inhumane conditions, the longing for the paddy fields, greenery, mountains and fresh air further evokes in a sense of nostalgia and ‘longing for the land’

He [Yaokhalek, Atim’s brother who too is living in Delhi and working as a potter] said he was now in touch with his friends through WhatsApp. Sometimes one of them would send a photograph of himself in a paddy field in Ukhrul and Yaokhalek could, for a few minutes, go back to the life he had once known: a life which was tough but simple. (157)

Nostalgia then acts as a key to travel to one’s glorious past which inevitably invokes in one the desire to return home. The million-dollar question however is- ‘Can one actually return or can there be a way to not return and yet live with a sense of belonging to one’s native place?’ In this context, it is quite interesting to know that because of this particular sense of nostalgia and longing for their ruptured homeland, Northeast migrant workers start living in selected pockets of the metropolitan cities that they migrate to. Sense of alienation and insecurity are some of the other reasons that have compelled Northeast migrants to ghettoize themselves in specific parts like Humayunpur, Munirka, GTB Nagar in Delhi and Kalina in Mumbai. In these neighbourhoods, they eat, sleep and shop together and help each other out in times of need and “in times of emergency, illness or death” (218). Interestingly, these ghettoized neighbourhoods have dedicated shops and restaurants catering to the demands of the Northeast migrants. Within this concrete city, they have created a mini Northeast, a home within a house where as Nandita Haksar writes in the

introduction to the book, “one can find shops with vegetables flown in from the Northeast, smoked meats, dry fish, fermented foods such as bamboo shoots, soya beans and the famous ngari (fermented fish)” (3). Restaurants serving spicy Northeast delicacies also find its presence in these neighbourhoods. The need to remain in touch with their native roots, customs and traditions compel them to grow the region’s herbs, chillies and vegetables. Every locality has in fact an organised fellowship of their own where they could gather together for worship, form networks and maintain the traditional ties between them so that they remain connected in a place away from their homeland and preserve their customs and traditions in whatever way they can. Northeast as a region still follows the traditional way of life where bonds with one’s tribe and clan are highly revered. The sense of belonging to one’s native place then remains intact and there is a ‘return’ to one’s homeland albeit in theory without the actual physical return.

Ghettoization: A Desire or Necessity?

Ghettoization no doubt gives in a sense of belongingness to one’s roots in a faraway land thereby helping in preserving one’s identity. However, when it comes to Northeast migrants, ghettoization also becomes necessary because of safety concerns. There have been cases of violence and rape against Northeast men and women in metropolitan cities. Take for instance, the death of Nido Tania, a nineteen-year old Arunachali, who was lynched to death in broad daylight by shopkeepers in Lajpat Nagar. His only fault was that he objected to their mean comments on his hairstyle. Such cases have also been highlighted by Haksar when she vividly describes the death of Atim’s sister. Ramchanphy, Atim’s

nineteen-year old younger sister who had recently come to Delhi was strangled to death by Atim's neighbour, Pushpam Kumar Sinha, a Ph.D research scholar at IIT Delhi. Sinha was frustrated at not "finding a woman to marry" (129) and Ramchanphy too thwarted his advances. The investigating officer's report stated

Ms. Ramchanphy was not responding to his [Pushpam Kumar Sinha] feelings and on 24/10/2009 when she was alone and was cooking something in the kitchen on the gas stove he wanted to talk to her but she refused and started raising an alarm. He strangled her with his hands and subsequently put upper portion of her body over the gas flame and kept there for sometime. Thereafter he threw the body on the kitchen floor and came out. (137)

Incidents like these then compel Northeast migrants to ghettoize themselves in particular places.

Such ghettoization however, also makes them easy targets of racism and violence and makes them all the more isolated from mainstream India. As Duncan McDuie-Ra states, "The norm that migration is necessary and desirable is spreading throughout the region, impacting on notions of belonging, notions of otherness, notions of exclusivity, and notions of place" (45). As a result, migrants from Northeast suffer from a sense of nostalgia and longing for their land because of which they hardly have a sense of belonging to their migrated land. The need of the hour thereby, is assimilation and integration. The geographical distance has been bridged but a proper sensitisation still needs to be done so that there is a sense of engagement on both the sides and a relationship based on trust

and respect for each other's cultures is built and valued. Lastly to sum up, through these migrants' experiences what we have is a new and re-defined concept of nationalism and globalization. The book and its many stories each with its own personal accounts then, is an attempt to highlight the reasons of migration of Northeast youths to metropolitan cities and the various struggles they have to face in order to stay afloat and survive in the 'brave new world'. In the words of Haksar herself, "Their stories are a celebration of the human spirit and its capacity to survive in all conditions" (30). They are the survivors in the truest sense.

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Feminine Sensibilities and Multiculturalism in Bharati Mukherjee's "Desirable Daughters"

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Abstract: The nineteenth century became a benchmark year in the field of feminism even though work took off from the eighteenth century itself. The need for such a movement came when women began to question, their position in society which was negated by the patriarchal order and the feminine sensibilities that were culturally imposed on them. Keeping abreast this changing scenario brought about by the New Woman this paper intends to explore Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2005) as a feminist text, probing into the life of the protagonist Tara and tracing her journey from India to the U.S. Though the novel is overtly dominant with the theme of belongingness and representation, yet it charts out the making of Tara's consciousness who tries to cope between the oriental orthodox feminine aesthetics and the California inspired liberal moral codes of modern life. Being a Third World Feminist, Mukherjee's preoccupation rests with the daily problems and issues faced by the Indian women in their homeland and abroad highlighting how the immigrating woman is doubly marginalised, first in their own country by the patriarchy and later in the foreign land by expatriation.

Keywords: Diaspora, Feminism, Liberation, Matrimony, Multiculturalism.

“It’s a matter of reading the fault lines. Especially the undiscovered ones.” (Mukherjee 40)

The feminist critics from the past decade have come to acknowledge the importance of space as it is the spatial metaphors which go on to construct the difference in gender. It is through the marked topography that the sensibilities of the genders are demarcated which must accentuate with the notion of culture. The much noted diasporic writer, Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Desirable Daughters* not only unfolds the tribulations that an immigrant has to face in the U.S. but also shows how the various countries expects certain aesthetics from the different genders. The diasporic women faces double marginalisation first in the hands of patriarchy in their own nation and then by expatriation in the migrated land, this idea of marginalisation is akin to the idea of colonisation. Mukherjee throughout her novel continuously weaves the idea of belongingness with the politics of feminism and geography making the plot much convoluted than it would seem if we read it as another diasporic text.

The novel is the story of three sisters, born in the upper class Brahmin family of Calcutta and brought up by the strict codes of grace, elegance and sophistication. The sisters enjoyed a privileged position in the society and were sent to the city’s exclusive schools and colleges, they were known for their beauty, wealth, intelligence and social standing. The three sisters were named after Hindu goddesses, Padma, Parvati and Tara- the first two names were that of Goddess Durga and the third of Goddess Kali, Tara in the Tibetan culture was synonymous for the Goddess who could defy death through wit. The three sisters were born exactly three years apart from each other and shared the same birthday and while quoting a

poem Tara says, “Sisters three are we...as alike as three blossoms on a tree. (But we are not)” (Mukherjee 21). After marriage the eldest and youngest sisters migrate to America while the middle one shifts to Bombay. The idea of status and respectability was so ingrained in them that while recalling their childhood, Tara says, how their father never allowed them to go out alone on the street and that their cars were always accompanied with window shades. Tara felt her life was a long childhood in which their bodies matured but not their behaviour and finally she came to terms with her adulthood after marriage.

Padma was the most outgoing of the three sisters and was audacious enough to have an affair with a Bengali Christian boy, Ronald Dey, the denial of marrying him had frozen her emotionally. Later she confides to Tara how she felt betrayed by her parents when they denied her relationship with Ronald and forbade her from acting in a Bengali film to be directed by Satyajit Ray leading her to clinical depression whereby she found solace in the company of homosexual men. In New Jersey, she became more ethnic in her lifestyle and was the anchor of an Indian show, run by her Indian husband. She was married to a Punjabi man who was a passionate defender of anything related to Bengal, even though he was successful in his yesteryears but was then living off her fame and money. Padma was proud of having come a long way in life all by herself and having lived in three continents but the denials of growing up had hardened her towards her parents. Parvati perfectly played her role of a hostess allowing her middle-class in-laws to stay at their opulent apartment in Bombay for weeks at an end which reminds one of Virginia Wolfe’s Mrs. Dalloway. She was the manager of her household with an entourage of servants to help her out and this Tara

describes in a very humorous tone, calling her sister's life "very stressed out" (211).

The need to be a rebel and break out of the order that they were supposed to maintain finds resonance in Tara, who having divorced her billionaire husband lived in a run-down apartment with her teenage son and volunteered at pre-school. Her lover, Andy- a Hungarian Buddhist carpenter, previously worked in their Silicon Valley home when she was married and had a history of self-transformation, from a bad-boy biker to a yoga instructor and building contractor taught Tara the simpler essences of life. Tara's major reason to divorce Bishwapriya was that she could not fulfil her American life if she was married as when the Communication system on which Bish was working on was about to boom, he became finicky and condescending towards Tara and their son, Rabi. To let herself live on her terms and allow Rabi to breathe at his own pace she moved away from the glamour's of the NRI life and receded into the archetype of a California girl. However, all the dictates of culture and modernity which was fastening Tara to her life disappears when Chris Dey appears claiming to be the son of Ronald and Padma. The title of the novel is significant as there is a clear notion of how the daughters to be socially desirable must abide by the family norms which was first jeopardised by Padma in having an affair with Ronald and later having his child. The desirability which was once a boon of the sisters was further nullified by their married lives, as Padma and Parvati choose their partners, the decisions of which were not seconded by their parents. Padma's husband was a divorced non-Bengali with kids, living off her success and Parvati's in-laws were not from very well to do financial background. Even though Tara married according to her

father's wish yet, her divorce and American lifestyle made her the most reckless, according to the Indian culture and traditional yardstick. The title stands ironic as the etiquette periphery was gravely disturbed by the three sisters who in their childhood had the promise to preserve it. Much like *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), *Desirable Daughters* also starts with a wedding and marriage is one of the leitmotifs of the text. The atrocity faced by women, a gendered subaltern is one of the primary focuses of the novelist as she begins the narrative with the wedding of the tree-bride, later on to become a martyr. The projection of the child marriage at the very onset of the novel shows how Mukherjee disapproves of it giving the child wife enough strength of character to come out at the end as a protector of the freedom-fighters.

Tara Lata, the tree bride is abandoned by her in-laws who blame her for their son's death by a fatal snake bite. Tara's father being a progressive minded Brahmo saves her daughter from a life of woe by getting her married to a tree at the heart of the jungle in Mishtigunj. Tara lived forever in her father's palatial house and later lent out her home for the freedom-fighters, letting them hide there and treating the injured and the wounded revolutionaries. Tara is known for her contribution to the struggle for independence as she had donated her dowry, which was buried underneath the tree to which she was married, to Congress. Years later when Tara Bhattacharya goes to visit her ancestral house she finds the name of *Tara ma*, or 'Mother Tara', inscribed before the house. Marriage seen as an oppressive and confined way of life and exploitation of women in the name of religion and social prestige is debunked in the narrative. Tara considered her story to be an inversion of the tree-bride's more so as Padma chides

her for her divorce and of having become a self-engrossed American. The point of similarity between the tree bride and Tara is that they teach the readers to be liberated from male domination and male dependence, they validate that women can live without men unless the former is given her due respect and social standing. The various customs of patriarchy are heavily attacked in the narrative and Mukherjee points out how marriage become a system of abuse and exploitation rather than any pre-conceived notion of bliss. Caste barriers become such matters of concern that liaison outside the normative order was unthinkable, as a result of which Padma recedes into a state of emotional sterility after her relation with Ronald. Tara married a man she never met but found him convenient as his bloodlines and biography were approved by her family. Mukherjee questions her readers as to how they can give into fate when the needs of a modern woman were beyond the cognitive ability of fate. This advocating for the freedom to choose one's life partner is strongly advocated by the novelist as in *Desirable Daughters* there is irony lurking in the failed arranged marriage of Bish and Tara and a successful love marriage between Auro and Parvati. In *Wife* (1975), Mukherjee also strongly projects the disastrous effect that an imposed marriage can have on the couple.

The break from Indian customs and traditions take an empirical attitude on Tara who explores new avenues in terms of food and clothes. She divorces Bish to be independent while consciously she knew how divorce was a stigma to the Indian system. Tara made one bold step after another, few months after her divorce she was sexually active among Bish's friends later moving into a new house with her lover, Andy. She wanted to fulfil her American life of driving, working, being her own

boss which was not possible while she was Mrs. Bish. Even though the novel is the story of the three sisters yet, Tara is the protagonist as she is more assertive than the rest. She has the urge to widen her horizon and venture into new paths while, Padma and Parvati opt for the middle path yet with much suspicion. Parvati reminds Tara about the archetypal Indian women who had sacrificed their life to save their marriage-Sita, Savitri, Behula and teaches her that marriages are never perfect but Tara through her notions of life goes on to establish feminist perspective over phallocentrism. The novel becomes a tale of conscious building as Tara accepts her son's sexual orientation with maturity even though she is shocked in the beginning.

The question of belongingness looms large for Tara who feels in a state of loneliness after her divorce as she found inner solace with Bish which lacks in Andy and to her instructed mind Bish was her husband- a position no one can alter. Much like Virmati of Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters* (2010) Tara is unable to completely liberate herself as along with a responsibility towards herself she also must fulfil her duties as a mother. The dominance of patriarchy in the native land brings to the women avenues for freedom and self realisation in the diasporic set up however, this transition brings out the changed scenario where the women breaks the hackneyed system of tradition. As a novel of conscious building it also adds onto the psychological journey of Tara who journeys between America and India. The three sisters are completely antithetical to each other where Parvati lives a quiet and sober life with Auro, trying to please her in-laws and keeping a check on her parent's health Tara leads the life of freedom where she is allowed to do as she pleases. Padma

through her role as a ‘multicultural artist’ tries to balance both liberty and culture from a safer zone.

Bharati Mukherjee imbibes the best of Indian and western cultures through her struggle as a practitioner of feminist credo in which the social and legal aspects of marriage are not central to one’s existence in personal and social acceptance, but finds family to be an indispensable social institution. The women characters of Mukherjee are bold and assertive with a strong potential for adaptability as a result of which the sisters can take such a big leap towards their future, almost in a way of providing sustenance, harmony and equilibrium to the entire community. This very leap enables the women to unshackle the patriarchal holdings that were limiting their locomotion, enabling them to liberate themselves from a prejudiced society.

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**Memory, Longing and the Hyphenated Identity:
Revisiting Displacement in Selected Sindhi Narratives of
Partition**

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Abstract: The notion of trauma and violence associated with the partition is complex in design. It brings forth a domain which is non-narratable and cannot be made visible on paper. Partition narratives, however, have time and again portrayed the human dimensions of one of the greatest displacements in the history of both India and Pakistan. They write back as counter-discourses to mainstream versions of partition presented either as narratives of the Freedom Movement or the official records and statistical data. This paper would explore the ideas of memory, longing and hyphenated identity, as reflected in the domain of Sindhi narratives both in works of English and of texts available in English translations from the Sindhi language. Unlike Bengal or Punjab, Sindh was not partitioned physically or geographically but there occurred the immigration of Muslim refugees to the province of Sindh and an exodus of Hindu and Sikh Sindhis out of it. This resulted in a mass displacement of the Sindhi Hindus to India leaving behind their cultural and linguistic identity of being Sindhi. The entire region of Sindh became a part of Pakistan causing a lot of chaos for the victims. The selected body of literature put into context the theme of displacement and the dynamics of a homing desire for one's nation, at the same time complicating the notion of boundary, identity and

belongingness. The partition of India and Pakistan resulted in the displacement of the Sindhi Hindus to different parts of India and abroad. Although it was not a literal partition of Sindh, the notions of hyphenated identities, memories, longing and belongingness are reflected in Sindhi writings owing to the psychological partition where the Sindhis had to leave behind a land that they identified with as a cultural unit.

Keywords: Memory, Identity, Longing, Desire, Roots, Displacement, Assimilation, Partition

Partition literature gives us a brutal depiction of human tragedy and the geographical and psychological division of nation and identity. This paper would intend to analyze the portrayal of partition and its effect on the sense of individual and community identity while constantly trying to solve the quest for religious identity, memory and a longing for home in selected Sindhi narratives. It would attempt to reconstruct and put into perspective the representations and claims of multiple identities in the narratives of Sindhi writers along with the elements of memory and longing. Having lost their identity as a cultural unit was apparently a great loss to a Sindhi. These experiences are articulated differently in Sindhi writings where writers like Popati Hiranandini, Gulzar Ahmed, Gordhan Bharti, Saaz Aggrawal and the like, emphasized more on the themes of nostalgia, lost companionship, the attempt of refugees to build new homes, their alienation etc. than violence with an intension of preserving and handing down Sindhi Cultural and Literary Heritage to the upcoming generations. Such efforts have got birth because of the sense of loss of identity that the Sindhi community felt after being uprooted from their home. Thus, the sense of longing has been identified

as a recurrent theme in Sindhi narratives of partition. Sindhi Hindus were not able to get any land as the land existed within the boundaries of Pakistan after the partition and they crossed these boundaries, which were otherwise rendered invisible as they sought livelihoods in different parts of India and abroad.

Displacement, uprootedness, killings, looting, plunder, genocide, and murder are the cruel words that characterize the unfortunate partition. Such adjectives are well known within the dominant discourse of partition literature and cinematic representation. Apart from violence, another perspective of looking at partition literature is the sense of conflicted identities, memories and longing attached to displacement. This paper would also look into Sindhi short stories woven around the theme of hyphenated identities resulting from the displacement of the Sindhi cultural unit. The writers engaged in the said genre use memory as a tool to recount the experiences and thereby put forward alternative narratives which compliments historical narratives. The Sindhi writers from Pakistan also felt this loss of harmony with their Hindu brothers and use the element of memory to express the same. The aspects of partition that portrays how the victims were affected psychologically find little mention in history. The element of a homing desire is beautifully portrayed by some writers where the complicated trajectories of identities can be analysed.

In the Sindhi short story “The Lost Nation” by Gulzar Ahmed, the author has portrayed the impossibility of separating memory and Geography in the way partition is remembered and intrinsically lived. The character of Abu-al-Hussain narrates his experiences on a trip to Hong Kong from Karachi, where met someone from Sindh. The narrative reflects the role

of memory and longing not only in the psychological domain but also through material objects. The “exotic things” (59) from Sindh like a quilt or flower vase or the mirror studded cap preserved by the characters become the objects of identifying oneself with the land that was once considered to be his motherland. It is through these material objects that the characters lived in their imaginary homelands while being geographically located in Hong Kong. The characters in this story, once inhabitants of Sindh left their homes and came to Hong Kong as a result of the partition.

The motif of the gunny sack remains a potent element of memory where the contents of the sack become instrumental in triggering a sense of belongingness to a place. Here, the whole idea of what constitutes one’s identity as a Sindhi is reflected. In the absence of physical land, these materials become symbols for re-constructing their identity as Sindhis in Hong Kong. Some writers have portrayed sensory experiences as a thread of the essence of belongingness. Like material objects, a sense of taste of a particular food item like the kulfi of Shikarpur or the memory of senses while taking a dip in the Sindhu river etc becomes tools to reconstruct Sindh as a province that the characters cling their identities to. It is through these sensory experiences that a land is remembered and revisited through memory. This problematises the notion of nation and nationhood and what constitutes it is it a sense of homogenous identity or symbols or religions or is the nation something where the people with whom one shares these boundaries constitute it or just some imaginary boundaries?

The sense of memory through material objects is portrayed beautifully by Gulzar Ahmed. On learning that Abul-Hussain was from Karachi, they were so overwhelmed and

referred to Sindh as their *watan*. The characters' longing for their *watan* has been manifested in their treatment of the tourist who was also a victim of the partition and migrated from India to Pakistan:

Of course, I kept reminding them, time and again, that I had gone to Karachi from India during Partition. My life began and ended in Karachi, I had almost nothing to do with Sindh. This didn't stop them from saying, 'Yes, but you are from Karachi, and Karachi is the soul of Sindh. You would be considered a Sindhi, wouldn't you? As far as we are concerned you are from our *watan*!' (57).

Abu-al-Hussain's realisation that "despite staying in Karachi for twenty years, I did not know Sindh" (58) throws light on the ideas of the sense of belongingness. He being migrated from India didn't feel about Sindh the same way as the other people who left Sindh and revived its memory. However, when he looked at the material objects carefully, he "could not help appreciating, for the first time, the subtlety of the embroidery" (59). The differences in the emotional responses of these characters put forth the idea of belongingness emotionally to a land where one cannot belong politically. Abu-al-Hussain was asked by the old man to visit his *watan* when he goes back from Hong Kong and the latter had made an unusual request:

He said, "When you go to Lakhidar, take the road that goes to Begari canal. At the turning, you will see an old house. Knock on the door. I don't know who is staying there now. And yes, you will see a mango tree there. When I planted it, it was a mere plant, but it must now be a tree laden with mangoes. You must knock on the door.

Meet all those who live in that house. And show them how mangoes are eaten in Sindh. Tell them that when there is water in Begari canal, you put the mangoes in an earthen pot and dunk the pot in the flowing waters of the Indus, which cools the mangoes. Meanwhile, you rest under the dense shade of the sarhan trees. After a while, jump into the waters to retrieve the mangoes. You have to eat those mangoes while you are still in the water, and only then will you know the real taste of mangoes.' He continued, 'Putta, you must tell them this because they are new, and they would not know how to enjoy the fruits of Sindh. You must tell them these things (61).

The absence of any kind of hatred or any other negative emotion is beautifully portrayed in the above passage. A desire to build some sense of connection with the land of the past through an external factor, in this case, the character of Abu-al-Hussain is portrayed. Also, there is an acknowledgement of the other side of the situation that since the inhabitants are "new" they would not know to enjoy the fruits of Sindh and hence the old man acted as a tool for cultural assimilation while simultaneously presenting his homing desire for Sindh. The detailed instruction also portrays his deep-rooted sense of belongingness to Sindh and it is through the tool of memory that the old man was also reviving those moments of the past at the same time aware of the impossibility of returning.

Benedict Anderson defines nationalism as an "imagined community. The term "nation: in this manner has a hypnotic hold on its people who "imagine" themselves to be one, disregardless of other potential differences. In his essay "Imagined Communities" he writes that a nation is an imagined community, socially created by people on common grounds

of history, language and culture. Thus, the nation becomes an ideological construct for people belonging to a common socio-cultural setting and practising common sentiments. The term 'nation' in this manner has a hypnotic hold on its people who "imagine" themselves to be one, disregard of other potential differences:

...it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited

and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will

never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations (Anderson 6-7).

Anderson's definition of the "imagined communities" could not hold the Sindhi cultural unit as one and the Sindhi Hindus were dislocated and uprooted from their own land. Also, the entire sense of identity of being a Sindhi Hindu is different from other identities of many victims of partition owing to the fact that the entire region of Sindh went to Pakistan. The sense of national identity gets problematised because there is no Sindh in India post-partition unlike Bengal and Punjab. Their cultural and linguistic identity is still attached to a land which is now a part of Pakistan. So when it comes to imagining a common ground of history, language and culture the entire region of Sindh suffered. Practising common sentiments of being Indian prior to the partition became disrupted. Because post migration from Sindh, the Sindhi

Hindus didn't find a common ground for sharing their cultural identity outside Sindh. Thus, one of the consequences of partition is the eternal homing desire of the migrated people or the unwanted refugees that have been repeatedly displaced in this genre. The partition shattered the personal, social, professional and economic lives of the people and gave birth to a sense of rootlessness and fragmented identity.

A number of Sindhi short stories have focussed on the lives of the Sindhi Hindus after they left Sindh, their way of life, and their struggles to build everything from scratch and start a new life. *Sindhi Short Stories* is a collection of short stories by Sindhi writers compiled by Holaram Hasija and translated by Prof. Dr. Shree Israney and it reflects a number of narratives portraying the lives of the Sindhi people after the partition. Interestingly, most of the writers have not even mentioned the partition or the violence. The landscape and cityscapes of a majority of the stories feature Bombay, Ahmedabad, etc. portraying the assimilation of Sindhi Hindus in different parts of India and the kind of occupation they took up for their livelihood.

The experiences of longing and yearning however have been portrayed by a few writers like Holaram Hasija 'Hans', Popati Hiranandani and Dr Narain Bharati. In the short story "The Claim" Dr Bharati narrates the incident of Sindhi Hindus going to the government offices to claim for the compensation of the properties that were left behind in Sindh. The characters came to the government office putting claims describing the nature of the properties and other details like the area of land etc. The protagonist Joharmal's claim was however not the reimbursement of material property, "...We have left our world, our honour, our friendships; everything of ours is left there.

When will the God have mercy on us that we shall again inhabit our homes” (137).

When asked for proof and the details of his land left behind in Sindh, Pakistan his prompt answer was:

“I am after all a Sindhi. Is it not a sufficient proof...I have left all Sindh in Pakistan. I am now putting in the claim that the whole Sind should be given back to him. The proof of it is that Joharmal is Sindhi, his language is Sindhi and his culture is Sindhi” (138,139).

Here, the attachment to one’s cultural and linguistic identity before a sense of national identity is expressed. Cultural identity has dominated one’s national identity resulting in multiplicity in identities and its fragmentation because apart from the culture and linguistical aspects, Sindh also constituted the geographical land as the people fondly remember the land, the Sukkur and the Sindhu river and also the people they shared the land with:

“...If you are thinking that I don’t remember Sindh or I am forgetting it, then my dear sir, you are wrong. Never entertain such ideas. Every one of our nerves is replete with memories of Sind. I am Sindhi and Sind is mine. I have a right to put in a claim for it. We hear the Punjabis got Punjab, Bengalees got Bengal, then what crime have we committed that we did not get our Sindh” (139).

This emotional outburst of Joharmal, expresses the unique experiences rather turmoil of the Sindhi Hindus after the partition. They were completely left to their own devices to survive without a land they can call their own. It is not only the land that these people yearn for but also long-lost

friendships as portrayed by the character of Joharmal where he fondly remembers his friends Rajab, Ramzan and Mahboob.

In another short story, “The Yearning,” HolaramHasija, along with a longing portrays a kind of mental conflict when confronted with the question of returning to Sindh and the relation of the Second generation Sindhi people after partition who were born outside Sindh. These second-generation people would have already assimilated to the culture, land and customs of the land where they were born in. And thus there remains a gap between them and Sindhi identity. They might not even know of Sindh, might not even speak the language or associate themselves with its cultural traits. It is only through second-hand experiences handed out to them by the first generation that they can imagine Sindh. The story features some children in a school in Panchgani discussing what place they would visit during their vacation and every child praised their own state and talked about its customs, rituals and traditions, sports, festivals etc. Nirmal the son of Prof Kamal was not able to imagine anything. Through the character of Nirmal, the writer portrays the conflicts of the second-generation Sindhis after the partition who didn’t experience Sindh like the first generation. Maybe that is the reason that when Nirmal was asked if he would go to Sindh, he replied that he will go to Bombay. But the thought of where Sindh has remained in his mind. The innocence of a child’s mind, obscure of the feelings of yearning or longing has been displayed in this story as the child innocently asks his father, “Papa, where is our Sind? I shall also go to Sind” (96).

The innocent quest from the son inflicted an emotional response from Prof Kamal and chaos inside his heart and mind found a way through his tears:

Professor Kamal was confused. What answer could he give? Seeing the dew drops in the eyes of his father, Nirmal was confounded. He went running to his mother, “Mummy...Mummy! Papa is crying.” His mother rebuked him. “Naughty boy! Let our enemies cry! Why should he cry?”... (96).

The story ends with simplicity and the readers were not provided with what the father had replied. But the narrator did portray the chaos and confusion regarding one’s sense of belongingness to a piece of land with a specific cultural and linguistic identity. The absence of the land makes a stranger out of the people in the new land. This is rightly put forward by Popati Hiranandani in “Another Time, Another Place” as, “We have become strangers on our own land and without your own land you are considered strangers on your land” (228).

Hiranandani portrays the reunion of two friends Taju and Guno. Taju came to visit Guno from Sindh. Taju had brought “rain-soaked fragrant clay for brother Guno” from the land of Sindh and Guno inhaled a long deep breath. Sind is not only the land but also its taste, smell and other sensory experiences is what is reflected in many short stories of that region. Guno’s anguish and search for his Sind is portrayed along with his inner turmoil. A sense of anxiety and restlessness is portrayed as Guno found it difficult to settle anywhere and he wanders aimlessly trying to find a cure from his separation of Sind. A lover of Sind, in a frantic search for Sind in other places is narrated by his wife:

God knows what hypochondria is there in his mind or restlessness in his body, that he does not get settled down at one place! If he goes to Gandhidham and eats green

vegetables, he would say, “What a taste of Sind; let us settle down here.” If he goes to Jodhpur and gets the pickles of unripe berry, he would say, “Let me purchase a small house here!” (225).

This status of being a non-stop wanderer with no definite destination along with the longing and changing identities portrays the chaos and inner conflicts of the Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi diasporas scattered across the globe.

“The Uprooted” and “The Refugee” portrays aspects of the hyphenated identities of the Sindhi people, and the conflicts regarding would the new “Hindustan accept them us as its own “(131). The Sindi identity is what remains as people do not care about other group identities of being a Hyderabad, Uttradh or Shikarpuri; they were all Sindi who were uprooted and now have a new identity as Topadas realised, “he would now be called refugee” (129). Both these stories portrays issues and conflict of identity of being a Sindhi vis a vis a refugee in different manners. Saaz Aggarwal’s *Sindh: Stories From A Vanished Homeland* gives glimpses of the elements of Sindhi identities pre and post partition. The stories in this collection talk about how Sindhis have assimilated into other cultures while also portraying the yearning for one’s land. “But We Were One People” features a poem by Sadhu Vaswani:

I look towards my land of birth
I feel miserable while I am away from it.

I remember the trees and dark blue clouds
And the waves of the Sindhu
How can I forget the bye-lanes
Of the villagers of my native land?

I came here and I learnt many languages
I have met many men
But I am not able to express
The innermost feelings of my heart.

Oh! How I long to meet the people of my land
The people were so poor and yet so innocent
The people of my beloved land! (168).

This poem aptly highlights the yearning, longing and desire to be united with one's native homeland. The "remembrance" is where memory plays a potent role in the recollection of the essence of the land and its people. The poet is not only remembering the material aspects like the lanes and tress or the clouds but also his innocent villagers, as the identity of being a Sindhi is not limited to the physical land but also the people and culture and practises. Hence the turmoil is represented by many characters who yearn to be one with their homeland. This longing is not understood by the second generation as portrayed in other narratives. The concept of language also becomes a problematic notion within partition narratives. The narratives were not only expressing the longing and memory but also preserving the Sindhi language. A number of these stories are translated into English. Sindhi writers are claiming their language and preserving it for future generations. Many of these stories revolve around some Sindhi proverbs and words, a technique to assert one's linguistic identity. In the story "Oxen" the narrator exchanged his oxen with Khairuddin Punjabi and kept instructing him to make furrows inside the soil through these words, "Khabesadyeandarbaahir per ta aa" (145) but the oxen couldn't understand the Sindhi words. The narrator felt cheated and physically abused the oxen and returned it back to its original owner only to realise

“if without a language this is what happens to a beast, Allah only knows what happens to humans” (146). This highlights the situation of one’s identity as connected to one’s language apart from the land which makes it more complicated when the land and language do not exist in one domain.

To conclude, the ideas of memory, longing and hyphenated identity, as reflected in the domain of Sindhi narratives both in works of English and of texts available in English translations from the Sindhi language are aptly portrayed as alternative discourses of partition literature. The paper has tried to put into perspective the notions of memory and longing and the problematic notions of multiple identities as portrayed by the Sindhi writers in their narrative while constantly revisiting the human dimension of partition narratives. Unlike Bengal or Punjab, Sindh was not partitioned physically or geographically but there occurred the immigration of Muslim refugees to the province of Sindh and an exodus of Hindu and Sikh Sindhis out of it. The literary response although evoked similar responses like that of Bengal and Punjab when it comes to terms of displacement also portrayed a unique dimension of longing and desire for a land which is no longer politically available.

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Social Mobility and Class/Caste Dynamics in Contemporary IWE Crime Novel: “The White Tiger” in Context

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Abstract: The evolution of the genre of crime fiction has been inherently influenced by various socio-political elements such as space, social hierarchy, and class/caste distinctions. In the postcolonial capitalist economy, the aspirations for vertical social mobility and contrastingly the lack of opportunity for such a movement for certain factions of the people has been one of the key rationales of the fissures dividing the society into different classes. Quite evidently so in developing modern nation states like India where concerns of caste, ethnicity, and identity are contested every day. Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) presents a similar narrative where the protagonist’s predisposed disadvantageous position in the society and his aspirations to inhabit the cosmopolitan privileged space, eventually leads him towards the path of crime and corruption. The proposed paper will attempt to explore the dynamics of class and caste represented in contemporary Indian English crime fiction with a close textual analysis of the primary text and will try to situate the issues in the larger frameworks of the crime fiction genre.

Keywords: Crime Fiction, IWE, Social Mobility, Space, Class/Caste

Crime, as a subject of creative literary expression, deals with certain fundamental ideas of morality, ethics and social justice. Scholars of crime fiction have charted out patterns and frameworks where these texts are intrinsically connected to the prevailing social order, either questioning or sustaining it. John Scaggs in his seminal work, *Crime Fiction* has mapped the historical development of the genre and commented extensively on how the genre has always dealt with the social dynamics of the time (46-49). Scaggs cites the works of canonical writers of the genre such as Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allen Poe to exhibit how the detective figure has always strived to maintain the status quo from the threat and consequence of the crime committed. Arguing in a similar vein Peter Messent in *The Crime Fiction Handbook* adds another dimension to the discourse where the role of the society, race, class also come into play in the narratives of crime fiction to expose a plethora of socio-cultural issues (“The Politics of Crime Fiction” 11-26). One of the factors of the immense popularity of these texts could be the fact that they were successful in assuaging the fear of the upper middle class reading public against any kind of disruption of the established social stratifications. The mind of the criminal has fascinated the readers as much as the figure of the detective and the pursuit to detection has. The historiography of the genre of crime fiction has seen the ever changing focal concern of its texts, from methodologies of detection to the pursuit of the criminal. However, with the growing field of modern psychology, behavioral science and the analogous socio-political existence of humankind, the figure of the criminal and his/her mind has many a times sought the centre stage. Taking the various stages of development of the genre as well the theoretical framework

of crime fiction studies as an entry point, the present paper is an attempt to situate the primary text *The White Tiger* (2008) in the larger tradition of the genre while simultaneously studying the excesses of the text that spill beyond its formulaic structure.

There is a flourishing tradition of crime writing, detective fiction and the mystery genre in India written in English as well as the numerous Indian languages, evidently since the nineteenth century. The postcolonial lived reality coupled with the postmodern literary preoccupations have significantly influenced the many facets associated with the genre and has contributed towards a renewed interest in it in contemporary times. It is worthwhile to mention here that most of the crime and mystery writings in India seem to inevitably deal, allegorically at least, with the political situation of the land. In the postcolonial capitalist economy, the aspirations for vertical social mobility and contrastingly the lack of opportunity for such a movement for certain factions of the people has been one of the key rationales of the fissures dividing the society into different classes. Quite evidently so in developing modern nation state like India where concerns of caste, ethnicity, and identity are contested every day. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) presents a similar narrative where the protagonist's predisposed disadvantageous position in the society and his aspirations to inhabit the cosmopolitan privileged space, eventually pushes him towards the path of crime and corruption. Arguably *The White Tiger* isn't overtly a novel about crime, in the sense that it differs from the structure of a typical murder mystery or detective fiction. The readers are made aware of the identity of the murderer in the initial pages of the novel and the narrative is structured around the

making of the murderer, rather than the act of detection. The psyche and circumstances of the protagonist that lead him towards the ultimate crime forms the core of the text and much like Dr. James Sheppard in Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the murderer Balram Halwai has the narratorial voice. There are different forms of crime and murder that occur in the text, a few are presented in vivid detail and some are just mentioned in the passing. The victims of the lower class remain a statistics, just like in the real world, inconsequential and a footnote to the Balram Halwai success story.

Written in the convention of an epistolary novel, *The White Tiger* documents the journey of its protagonist-narrator Balram Halwai. Balram is a self proclaimed entrepreneur and he is writing to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, although the letters serve more as a means of cathartic confession rather than actual communication. However, why he admired and chose to write to the Chinese Premier is debatable and from his seemingly "half baked" perspectives China was the embodiment of a socialist land of equal opportunities, and a space where monopoly of power and wealth is not allowed to exist (Adiga 10). The narrative is strewn with snippets of worldly wisdom and business savvy that Balram has picked up along his way of becoming a successful entrepreneur. His first letter to the Chinese premier is interspersed with sentences from the wanted poster circulated by the police, bearing his description; a description for which he wanted several editorial interventions to better represent himself. The narrative of the novel reveals the name of the murderer-protagonist Balram Halwai in the beginning itself. In India the name represents and reveals a lot of information and social background. One's name carries the legacy of caste, socio-historical background

and corresponding family occupations. Balram's family had lost the family occupation of sweet-making. His father was a rickshaw puller and Balram saw his own liberation in being a driver away from his village and the greedy family matriarch, his grandmother Kusum. Balram had to face queries demanding to reveal his caste identity in every step of his career, right from the early training days to become a driver till his most sought after job in the city with the family of the landlords. Evidently the caste hierarchies and privileges also aid in perpetuating class divisions in the long run, as portrayed in the novel with the families of landlords and workers. The central motif of crime in the novel can arguably be discussed in the light of race, caste and class hierarchies and discrimination in the country. Commenting on the racialised identity created for the migrant labourers of the third world P. K. Nayar argues that there is a distinct divide between the experiences of a cosmopolitan writer romanticizing the idea of trans-nationality and the minority who are ghettoised even within the benevolent praxis of cosmopolitanism. Nayar acknowledges, cosmopolitanism "is a matter of class" (183). The colonial repressive mechanisms based on racial discrimination have been replaced by caste/class hierarchies in the post-colonial socio-economic structure of the society. Balram's fate is pre-determined by his caste identity as he speaks about his surname Halwai, "That's my caste – my destiny. Everyone in the Darkness who hears that name knows all about me at once" (Adiga 63). The legacy of world order of Raj and its white masters are reasserted by feudalism of the provinces. In a way the neo-liberal cosmopolitan space of the nation was confined to the few elites who exploited their socio-historical position of privilege.

Among all the neo-liberal debates about unity and modernity, caste remained an aspect of the Indian society which could not be wished away immediately given its historical, empirical and religious underpinnings. In “The Nation and its Outcastes” Partha Chatterjee draws out the contesting nationalist claims to caste as well as arguments to explicate its continuing existence in the country, “By explaining the innumerable instances of caste practices as ideological manifestations of a premodern social formation, it seems to condemn virtually the entire corpus of traditional cultural institutions in India, both elite and popular” (173). Chatterjee charts out the problematics involved with the argument of completely negating the idea of caste and of the contesting argument which reasserts the idea of caste as a requirement of “stable and harmonious social order” (174). Chatterjee goes on to discuss in detail what he terms the “synthetic theory of caste” and how in the postcolonial re-imagining of the state the edifice of the nation has replaced religion as the anchor to caste distinctions with communities claiming it in the form of constitutional identity (175, 198). These deliberations of caste dynamics in the nation in the post-colonial period inform the nature of the cosmopolitanism that the people of the country are witnessing. In the novel, Balram comments on the ever evolving nature of privilege and the emerging centrality of class hierarchy in the power structure like this “. . . in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies” (*The White Tiger* 64). It is evident that the resources and benefits of the globalised economy and the cosmopolitan rhetoric of world citizenship devoid of national constraints are for the privileged few in India. Here in come the issues of

the rural-urban divide and the centre-province dialectics of emergent cosmopolitanisms of the nation flashed out in the novel in discussion.

Balram, the protagonist-narrator of *The White Tiger* establishes in the initial pages of the book that he is an entrepreneur and the unique trait of the booming Indian economy is its growing number of entrepreneurs. Balram's ambitions to be a part of the global economy in a city like Bangalore thriving with multinational companies and global investment, reflects the aspirations of the youth in the country. He supplements his lack of formal education and decent upbringing with robust self assurance and street smarts to enter the competitive world of entrepreneurship. His adopted persona can be understood in terms of a cosmopolitan self fashioning, "we entrepreneurs- have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now", "I don't just swear and curse. I am a man of action and change", "I no longer watch Hindi films- on principle" (Adiga 4-5, 8). The entire novel is strewn with many such self-proclaimed disciplines and philosophies of life required to be successful in cosmopolitan India. For Balram being a part of the globalised economy of Bangalore will provide him with the agency denied by his caste and class background. From Balram's experience it becomes evident that,

The caste system makes it impossible to move beyond existing hierarchies, which are further solidified by the advent of capitalism as there are really only two casts: big belly or none. What is different in the new system is that someone who used to be an untouchable can now become a big belly. (Doangün 87)

The Mysteries of the Cities: Urban Crime Fiction in the Nineteenth Century (2012) by Stephen Knight looks at the emergence of city centric literature of crime and mystery. The growing divide between the close knit community existence of the villages and the increasingly industrialized cities marked a time where unlawful activities among the common people were on the rise, stemming from the desire to rise above class hierarchies. The lonely dark roads of the cities as well as the extreme social divide between the rich and the poor provided the writers with ample material to create their stories of crime and mystery. This corpus of city based mystery writing was hugely popular across the British, European and American literary scene in the 19th century. Knight writes how these early writings have significantly influenced the later crime novel genre. This correlation between the cities and the narratives of crime is exhibited in numerous IWE crime novels, including Adiga's. Balram's desire to transcend the caste barriers motivates him towards achieving the status of the affluent elite. Apart from the caste based social hierarchy, space also becomes an integral part of Balram's self expression. The swanky malls, bars and roads without potholes are aspirational for him, and his gradual descent into moral corruption stems partly from the desire to occupy these spaces. In popular crime novels based in India these cosmopolitan spaces play a pivotal role. As Balram grows, climbs upward out of his geographical location and moves across the cities, small to the megalopolises his identity goes through a constant change. We can see these changes through the spaces he journeys across such as Gaya, Dhanbad, Delhi and eventually Bangalore, the city of entrepreneurs. These urban spaces with their anonymity and indifference provide allows Balram to wash away his caste markers and move upward in class hierarchy.

The repeated metaphor of darkness and light in *The White Tiger* reflects the racial divide and prejudices historically ideologically embedded in the protagonist's psyche. He longs to inhabit his master Ashok's aristocratic features and desires intimacy with the light skinned call girls. For Balram the physical markers of his downtrodden caste identity become hindrance on his path of self-making. Sara D. Schotland discusses how the novel depicts a postcolonial-neoliberal India with the added baggage of neo-colonial class hierarchy aided by the traditional formulations of caste. The conflict now is between the affluent feudal aristocracy and the landless impoverished labour class. Schotland formulates Balram's initial infatuation and imitation of Ashok with the idea of "mimicry" suggested by Homi Bhabha, where the colonized oppressed shifts his identity to insolently imitate the colonizer and in the process disintegrates the colonizer's authority (10). This ambiguous relationship reflected through the interactions of Mr. Ashok and Balram forms the core of the satire that Adiga intends to project. Schotland furthers the argument of reading the novel as a narrative of neo-colonial oppression and reads the final act of murder as "revolutionary violence" (2). Ashok symbolizes the feudal and neo-colonial regime of oppression for Balram and his murder provides him with a sense of agency, "*White Tiger* illustrates Fanon's theory that violence is a cleansing force that frees the colonized from their inferiority complex and gives them a measure of self-respect. The resentment that has built up from oppression finds an outlet in rage and rebellion" (12).

Balram's justifications of his crime present a distorted or dystopian picture of social justice. His unprivileged social status did contribute to the systemic oppression of him and

his family, and he saw his escape only through violence. The image and metaphor of the “rooster coop” aptly portrays the glaring inequality of the Indian society, where a faction of the people hardwired into accepting their bleak fate as a result of years of systemic oppression (Adiga, *The White Tiger* 175). *The White Tiger* faced scathing criticism for its portrayal of the class disparities, the eventual horrific crime elucidated in graphic details committed as vindication of such inequalities. Many derided Adiga’s representation of such inequalities as inauthentic for its lack of lived experience. The authorial gaze here, given the novelist’s western educated privileged background, was accused of being cosmopolitan misappropriation. The cosmopolitan identity of Adiga makes him an “outsider” and unqualified write about to the gritty reality of nation of his birth (Kevin Rushby qtd. in Shoobie 103). In an interview with Stuart Jeffries in *The Guardian*, Adiga put forward his rationale behind the subject of his novel,

At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. That’s what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That’s what I’m trying to do – it’s not an attack on the country, it’s about the greater process of self-examination. (“Roars of Anger”)

Adiga stresses the need to go beyond one’s lived reality while writing fiction and concedes how despite possessing a “cosmopolitan” resumé...he lives in a tiny flat in the bustling city of Mumbai whose roar of swarming crowds and cars shakes his windows days and nights” (Shoobie 104). Alan

Davis in his review of the novel terms it as “richly researched” which is the need of the hour for contemporary Indian English fiction (169). Part of the criticism levied against the novel seems to be arising from the fact that not only did it win the prestigious ‘The Man Booker’ prize, but also it was a bestselling novel. These much coveted attention from critics and reading public alike has given legitimacy to the popular crime novel genre in IWE and has bridged the long standing lacuna between the high brow and popular literature.

The White Tiger experiments with the genre of crime fiction in a way that is relevant to the time and space that Adiga chooses for his narrative. Rather than the traditional ‘whodunit’ format or focusing on the ‘how’, Adiga’s novel looks for the ‘why’; and thereby locates the text in the social reality of the land. Manav Ratti in his illuminating essay on the novel writes “For Adiga, the novel demonstrates Balram’s rise into social mobility, and thus, in a sense, out of subalternism, with Balram valuing entrepreneurship as one of the signs of his resistance, heroism, and even “goodness” in the wake of class and caste oppression” (“Justice, subalternism” 230). Adiga’s novel inhabits a curious place amid the familiar tropes of a crime novel and a text dealing with the ideas of cosmopolitan hybrid identity and the possibility of casteless urbanity as well as social mobility.

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Interrogating Caste and Gender: An Intersectional Reading of Kausalya Baisantri's "Dohra Abhishaap" (1999)

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Abstract: Mainstream Indian feminism and Dalit politics have, over a period of time, proved to be insufficient in foregrounding issues related to Dalit women. In both theoretical positions, prominence is accorded to 'gender' and 'caste' as unrelated or discordant categories. The location and politics of Dalit women get either erased or accommodated by the presence of Dalit men and upper caste women. The paper will investigate the *testimonio* of Hindi Dalit women writer Kaushalya Baisantri in order to examine the relevance of intersectionality and Dalit feminist standpoint as a theoretical framework to study this lack of agency that Dalit women deal with. Dalit feminist standpoint doesn't prioritise the identity of being a Dalit woman, rather it is an awareness about the oppression based on caste and gender. Positionality gains prominence over identity in Dalit feminism. The intersectional framework identifies 'Dalit woman' as an identity different from 'woman' and 'Dalit'. Kaushalya Baisantri's *Dohra Abhishaap* (1999) begins with a sense of self-doubt and questioning in the process of writing the narrative of her life. There is a direct admission of the fact that her son, brother, and husband might get angry and outraged with the fact that she has decided to talk about the anguish of a Dalit woman's coping with both caste and patriarchy. Baisantri's choice of writing in Hindi instead of

Marathi, which is her mother tongue, is a political choice that she makes as there was a dearth of Dalit women's autobiographies in Hindi. This points to the sense of collective in the Dalit identity. Women want to reclaim their space by ensuring that no Dalit women's voice is unheard and unaccounted for.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Caste, Gender, Autobiography/ testimonio, Dalit Patriarchy

Mainstream Indian feminism has, over a period of time, proved to be insufficient in talking/ representing/ foregrounding issues related to Dalit women. A considerable point of discomfort that Indian feminism faces is the fact that feminists who are from the privileged caste are spearheading to represent or speak for “all” women. The modern present-day theory of gender is inadequate since the category ‘women’ cannot be homogenised especially in the Indian context. It has been criticised for almost an erasure of the caste question. So much so that it has been denounced for subjugating women from Dalit communities. As a first critic of the hegemony of Brahminism, Jotibarao Phule in the late nineteenth century emphasised the need for education for all oppressed by the caste system including women. Phule foregrounded knowledge and labour as two intersecting factors that create a composite aggregation of hegemonic power relations. He viewed gender and caste as entangled with class and economic disparity which works as a fundamental factor in the subjugation of Dalit women. Critics like Gopal Guru and Sharmila Rege have spoken against the caste-privileged feminists by accusing them of imposing the caste question onto Dalit women alone. Rege in one of her seminal essays ‘Dalit Women talk Differently’

opines that the overarching narrative of modernity and gender hides the complicity of high caste women in class privilege and foregrounds their desire to fight against traditions and the struggle to be 'modern'. She goes on to say that violence subjected on the bodies of women is also differentiated on the basis of caste. The upper caste women go through violence inside their homes and within the family. On the other hand, due to lack of education and material resources, Dalit women are subjected to violence in the public sphere with atrocities like rape and other forms of sexual violence. She enumerates the social reforms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that took place for women during colonial rule as only catering to reforms in upper caste Hindu traditions based on religious texts. The reform debate was mostly for upper caste women and tried to solve the 'woman question'. Caste system legitimised the control over sexuality and labour of upper caste women, lower caste women were made available for both sexual and social labour. Rege lists various characteristics of the caste system: a) operates on the principle of hierarchy and difference, b) the caste system outlined the civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different castes, c) it restricted the choice of occupation, and the last d) women as gateways to the caste system.

Therefore, a need arises to interrogate and reanalyse Indian feminism from a Dalit point of view. What is required is a redefinition of Indian feminism by interrogating the aspects of social location and gender politics from a Dalit point of view. The need to talk about the experiences of Dalit women arose in the 1990s. The issue of "difference" that Dalit women emphasised received more traction with the rise of autonomous Dalit women's organisations like the NFDW (National

Federation of Dalit Women). They decided to assume the responsibility of self-representation and began to question the very words and images that the dominant discourse used to define their identity. During this resistance, a new culture with its emblems, iconography, and festivities evolved. The Mandir-Mandal politics of the 1990s was a key event that paved way for a new set of identity for Dalit women where they sought difference from upper caste women's movement. Ambedkar saw women as gateways to caste system. He believed that an end to endogamy is imperative to a casteless society. He also spoke about giving up on the markers of inferiority. He underlies the fact that the caste system is maintained by controlling the sexuality of women. By foregrounding the subordination of women by caste, we can argue that Ambedkar's theory underlined the double axis through which Dalit women are marginalized. Inspired by Ambedkar's perspective of analysing caste as graded inequalities, Uma Chakravarty in her book *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* talks about graded patriarchies instead of overlapping patriarchies, within the framework of Brahmanical patriarchy. As Gail Omvedt in *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* puts it, Dalit women have the greatest interest in dismantling Brahmanical patriarchy which works intrinsically within the caste system. In order to counter these narratives, emerged the Dalit feminist standpoint, which marks the 'difference' with which Dalit women express themselves. The difference lies in its investment in social location, experience, and history.

Taking insight from the philosophy of Phule and Ambedkar, Dalit autobiography/ 'testimonios' emerged as a powerful instrument of resistance for Dalit women. According to Pramod Nayar, Dalit autobiographies must be viewed as

“testimonios,” or “atrocities narratives that capture pain and tactics of survival,” in his article “Bama’s Karukku: Dalit Autobiography as Testimonio”. He defines “testimonios” as a narrative that is of the marginalised, of the underprivileged. For the benefit of a larger community, it is a communal document that represents the voice of one who witnesses. The author, who is referred to as the “speaking subaltern subject,” expresses the lived reality of both herself and other marginalised people. This genre gave Dalit women new opportunities to create a story that explained their experiences as marginalised identities due to both gender and caste. Sharmila Rege in *Writing Caste/Writing Gender* foregrounds the fact that Dalit Life Narratives are ‘testimonios’ that speak for both the community and individual, in the process fight caste oppression. The intention of a ‘testimonio’ is not about its literary value rather it explicitly deals with the oppression of a group or a community. Therefore, Rege defines ‘testimonios’ as a genre that was historically created by Dalit life narratives. Within this narrative, Rege writes, “individual seeks affirmation in a collective mode.” This analysis of the self and the larger community is of greater value in Dalit women testimonios, since they bring in the problematics of gender and dismantle the monolithic concept of Dalit community being only about Dalit men. There are two major deletions/gaps present in the critical commentary and interpretation of texts, namely, gender in Dalit politics and caste in mainstream Indian feminism.

Rege argues that an additive approach to studying Dalit feminism doesn’t work. She says that adding an axis of caste to an already existing axis of gender exhibits that gender can be separated from caste, and there is some form of oppression

that is 'common' to all. She emphasises the inseparability of caste and gender. Once we acknowledge the 'difference' in Dalit women's standpoint vis-à-vis mainstream Indian feminism, there arises anxiety over who Dalit feminists are. Do we associate it with an identity which is based on experience or do we look at it from position-based politics? Anandita Pan in *Mapping Dalit Feminism* attempts to answer that by placing Rege's concept of Dalit feminism not as an essentialist category, but rather as a constructed category. Dalit feminist standpoint is not about being a Dalit woman but as awareness about the oppression based on caste and gender. Positionality gains prominence over identity in Dalit feminism. Within this category of Dalit women's expression, the Hindi heartland presented a very dismal picture. As Sarah Beth foregrounds in her essay, *Narrating Dalit womanhood and the aesthetics of autobiography*, Dalit men's autobiographies predominated the arena and even in their narratives, women are almost entirely absent. They make an appearance as characters of relatively low or no significance. The cultural nuances of the Dalit community as presented in these texts are also problematic. Dalit autobiographies written by men "exposes the hierarchical nature of the Dalit counterpublic in North India" (Basu 58). It is believed that the representation of Dalit women has to be thought about as an independent concept rather than placing it within the rubric of Dalit writings.

Dohra Abhishaap(1999) by Kausalya Baisantri is one such attempt to foreground a self-contained representation of Dalit life by a Dalit women writer. She dedicates the book to her parents, who fought poverty, superstitions, and caste discrimination to ensure that their daughters become educated

to live an independent life. The book is therefore an endeavour of a collective, of all the sisters as well as the community. In the introduction to her autobiography/ *testimonio*, Baisantri foregrounds three significant motifs in her narrative. These are Dalit patriarchy, the choice of Hindi as her language of expression and not Marathi, her mother tongue, and her lived reality as a Dalit woman. In her introduction, she laments the fact that she took a lot of time in chronicling her life narrative, but it is an act of resistance and reclamation that was possible because of other women inspiring her to document her life. She considers this act of writing as not only conferring her agency but also will prove to be a source of inspiration for young Dalit women. There is an attempt to express the anguish at what society does to people of underprivileged caste and women.

As the title suggests, it is the ‘dohra’ or two kinds of curse, namely gender and caste, and not as additives. It has to be read as two different categories of oppression. The narrative articulates the stifling nature of the two axes of oppression: being a Dalit and being a woman. Baisantri constructs a broad political statement with her *testimonio*. Baisantri’s narrative spans three generations of strong-willed women beginning with her grandmother, then her mother, and herself. She documents stories of her fiercely independent “aaji” (grandmother in Marathi) who despite strong opposition from all quarters lived life on her terms. These stories are recounted and they are incorporated as a legacy to be internalised and taken forward. These narratives also function as markers of collective identities of women in the family across generations. An immensely emotional and impactful scene is when her mother oils the hair of all her daughters. As her mother recounts her

mother's and her struggles, tears start to flow and all the sisters cried along. Baisantri narrates, (15). (Ma's eyes began to brim with tears as she combed our hair. Tears welled up in our eyes seeing Ma cry. She calmed down and said that she missed her mother. She would often remember her mother and cry). Baisantri's *testimonio* describes the oppression faced by the Dalit community because of caste hierarchy, and then she goes on to exhibit the brutality and cruelty of Dalit men, especially her grandfather and husband. Baisantri's marriage, unlike that of her parents, is marred by mental and physical abuse and there are silences that need to be problematized. She moves out of her marital home forty years after her marriage after fighting a vicious separation battle and ensuring alimony. As she says in the Introduction, (7). (My husband never appreciated my worth. Rather, daily quarreling and abuse forced me to walk out of my house and sue him).

The narrative opens with the writer narrating a typical day in their lives. As a family, they share both happiness and torments inflicted on them because of their caste. This forms the basis of her sustenance throughout her life. It touches upon the family's varied activities, delineating an activity in the household chores with each member. The details are a way of representing not just Baisantri's cultural "difference" but also as an indicator of her political stance of producing Dalit counterpublics. The language that Baisantri uses is colloquial Hindi interspersed with expressions from Dalit vocabulary, with words such as "asparshiya", "apmaan", and "jagriti" to name a few. This narrative gets its credibility as it is the voice of a young girl who along with her sisters stands witness to it and it is narrated by a woman who is now lettered and enlightened to put it in perspective. An important trope in caste

literature is that of the principle of “purity” and “pollution” especially in terms of food habits as practiced by the Dalit community. In a very seminal text, *Dalit Literature and Criticism*, Raj Kumar states that this principle is “primarily an invention of the upper castes to keep the lower castes under their control.” Very early in the narrative, Baisantri recounts how she was denied water in her school as well as in her friend’s house. As a young girl in school, she recalls many instances where she felt distraught and ashamed of the contents of her tiffin as compared to the food of upper caste brahmin girls. She says, (41) (I felt ashamed opening my lousy tiffin and exposing its contents in front of them). There is a perpetual unease in her about the fear of her caste identity being made public in school. (41). (There was an incessant dread about others finding out that I belonged to a lower caste). This also makes her more vulnerable and she has no friends to share this with. These markers of her “untouchable” identity, such as food, and clothes, made her feel menial to her peers. She also lies about her father’s profession, which was that of collecting garbage, amongst her schoolmates. The constant fear and shame associated with the caste identity getting revealed is described as, (44). (All of us kept a watch all around in hope that nobody finds out that our father is a ragman).

A significant feature that runs across this narrative is the emphasis on educating girls. The narration is heavily influenced by the philosophies of Babasaheb Ambedkar especially his call on educating Dalit women and girls. The book chronicles how Baisantri’s parents, especially her mother, commit themselves to educate their daughters, irrespective of what her own community, upper caste society, and the larger world think about it. A very poignant moment is when her

father requests the headmistress of their school to waive off their fees, and he puts his forehead close to the teacher's feet as he isn't allowed to touch them. She recounts, (47). (Baba stooped closer to the headmistress' feet, but dared not touch them as we were "untouchables") The rise in the family's living conditions, the effort to educate their daughters, and an attitude toward ensuring progress in their lives, is met with a lot of hostility and displeasure by not just upper castes, but also neighbours and relatives. The improvement and growth in their circumstances, an outcome of education, is not tolerated by people of their own community. The animosity makes the neighbours throw stones at them and the girls' character and integrity are put to question. It leads to their family being shunned and excluded from the community. Apart from her own father, the only other man idealised by Baisantri is Babasaheb Ambedkar. She depicts how he gave them the courage and strength to fight the oppressive caste structure. It was Ambedkar who (81)." (enlightened the untouchables that they are human beings too, the country belongs to them and they have every right to live a dignified life).

The narrative becomes not just about her life rather it is representative of the trials of Dalit women in general. Baisantri's expression of her life events is representative of the fact that there needs to be authentic documentation of what women at the margins endure not just at the hands of upper caste men and women but also their own men. Baisantri, through her book, attempts to demonstrate how Dalit identity and gender intersect and creates a web of oppression for her and other women of her community. As against male-authored autobiographies, this text looks at the domestic sphere as a complicated space and territory where we see Dalit women

execute their daily struggles. Solidarity among women, intergenerational support, emphasis on the home-family-community dynamics. She consciously travels beyond it, to the political. A story about women who collaborate and support each other and have the potential to re-vision their lives in a more egalitarian world.

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Deploying the Poststructuralist Arguments in Rushdie's "The Prophet's Hair"

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Abstract: The deconstruction of designs that enable the illustration of mythopoetic practise of globalised human existence is how authors like Rushdie goes directly to the core of the connection between space inside the house and the rest of the world: the inversion of course (sens) and implications (sens) in his proceedings to emerge through. Rushdie fabricates an English-Indian work of fiction at its core, but endeavors to exhibit on a global scale of the repulsions related with strict religious energy, and the havoc it causes. By using an empowering composite method, textual fluidity in East West contextualizes the subject position of multivalent literary motifs functioning alongside historically contingent, unstable, and prone to change. This paper was developed with the idea of providing us, a variety of interpretive options for connecting not only with the language's fluidity but also with the historical dynamics of Rushdie's characters' identities, which encompass culture and race in the East West, especially the saga "The Prophet's Hair." The way Rushdie communicates, religion becomes medieval. It transforms into a vengeful old man who keeps his three daughters under an archaic system of tradition and obedient, filial submission, or an imam who indoctrinates young people with hatred, or an ancient holy object ("The Prophet's Hair") whose removal causes untold numbers of

fatalities. Rushdie is intrigued by attempts to halt and even reverse history since he is subconsciously aware that Islam is ancient and will strangle the new due to its inherent antiquity conclusively propagating Derrida's deviation of absolutism.

Keywords: Textuality, Mythopoetic, Historiography, Poststructuralism

Any literary work, besides the meeting of two domains, is majorly concerned with liberating a text of domination by any sort. One such participation, Rushdie's work existed within his own conditions of reproduction granting freedom from repressive systems and authoritarian history. This system grasps singularity in perspective as a mode of consciousness. The dual situational placement of Rushdie being born on the cusp of Indian independence, British Indian Identity, and exploring characters of history blended with fiction and magic justified his employment of textual fluidity. Rushdie undermines the dichotomous separation between East and West and portrays the globe as a complex web of interconnected systems. Textual purity does not represent in the assumptions of accepting, refuting, or even challenging the contradiction implicit in traditional myths. Rather, Rushdie's analysis intervened as his works, short fiction East West in particular pervade in making literature more uncertain, indeterminant, banking upon less real and more elusive, devoid of constraints of absolutism. This kind of inquiry influences the reader's mind leaving scope for innovation, creativity and inventions in the interpolation of the past which has existed from times immemorial. The dynamics in his accounts rephrased the registers used frequently by their modern incarnations, reconstructing being replaced by construct and

imagine, invent, creating new transpositions of poststructuralist perspective. Louis Markos records this complex mingling of history and myth as:

Myths are derived from natives or civilizations to work as a foundation in the cultural and literary making. They engage in common purposes, subjects and images referred to as archetypes to escape the existing tyrannies (Markos 222).

Derrida's unique approach to dealing with the issue of the traditional and emotional nature of our classifications and plans of understanding may effectively resolve an academic deadlock, at least for those who might provide sorts of verifiable comprehension. Derrida correctly recognises that such institutions don't exist, but he then makes the mistake that distinguishes him as a conventional powerful, as John Searle has argued. The true mistake made by the old-style powerful was not their belief in supernatural establishments but rather their belief that these establishments were fundamental in some sense and that this foundation had been lost, compromised, or subverted (Habermas 194-9). Consequentially, we may say that Postmodernism's antagonism toward 'stupendouslytotalizing theories' has been employed by Rushdie to explore fable-like characters of real history progressing towards modernity. Textual fluidity in *East West* contextualizes the subject position of multivalent literary motifs working alongside historically contingent, unstable, and given to change by employing an empowering composite strategy. This notion was set in motion to offer us multiple interpretive possibilities for identifying with just the fluidity of language but the question of historical dynamics of his characters' identity encapsulating culture and race in East-West.

Rushdie, investigating his own duality, was born in 1947, on the brink of Indian Independence, British Indian identity with those of East West binaries begins here. Blending history with fiction and magic (Chaubey 10). Indian Muslim Family's holy relic descends into madness of fable-like authors attitude which moralises about the impending perils of fanaticism. The reversal of direction (sens) and meanings (sens) continues to go in and come out which tempts Rushdie, and other authors, go right to the heart of the interactive space inside the house and the outside world, through the deconstructions of designs facilitating the depiction of mythopoetic practice of globalized human existence. Rushdie's story "The Prophet's Hair" draws on the spirit of bringing on a remarkable parallel between Hashim's and Smeagol's corruption through the ring as in *Lord of the Rings*. It works as an interface between literature and the philosophy of Eastern ideology that is indicative of the obsession with sacred objects to the point of insanity further strengthened by the short story "At the Auction of....". The disappearance of hair, in the story from the work *The Prophet's Hair*, from Hazrat Bal Mosque, a religiously defined object, brings forth Rushdie's deconstruction of eastern absolutes dealing with blind veneration of Prophet Muhammed. The real incident had occurred at Srinagar in 1963, and Rushdie adheres to the episode playfully to fabricate his fiction.

Based on the Islamic legend of Muhammad's hair being stolen, "The Prophet's Hair", similar to "The Monkey's Paw" by W.W. Jacobs, explicates that those who hold the hair relic may either experience marvellous or devastating occurrences whenever they come into contact with it. Hashim, the protagonist and hero, stumbles over the hair coincidentally. In the same way as to other people, one's belongings convey that

possessiveness and covetousness towards acquiring more, the equivalent is experienced by Hashim. He develops into a devout faker, who pretends to be retaining it for Islamic purposes in addition to becoming a haughty rich man. Atta, his son, steals the hairpiece knowing it will kill his father and makes an unsuccessful attempt to return it to the mosque. The artefact needs to be returned, and Hashim's daughter Huma employs a thief to do it. Atta mistakenly blows their cover, allowing Hashim to capture them, and when he realises his daughter is in the back, he beats Huma nearly to death.

Nevertheless, despite all the excitement, the robber escapes with the hairpiece. At last, the thief is caught, shot, and the artefact got back to its legitimate spot in the Mosque; However, the cheat's four crippled children and visually impaired spouse become relieved from the artefact's presence, "But before our story can properly be concluded, it is necessary to record that when the four sons of the dead Sheikh awake on the morning of his death...they found that a miracle had occurred...they were all sound of limb and strong of wind...although her husband was dead she had regained her sight so that it was possible for her to spend her last days gazing once more upon the beauties of the valley of Kashmir" (3012).

One component of "postmodernism," which has witnessed the renegotiation of cultural worth, is the mixing of popular literary culture. We no longer judge a piece of art as good or awful based solely on its medium, such as an oil painting, a symphony, or a comic book or pop song. Rushdie skilfully and cheerfully employs "high" and "popular" cultures in all of his works, alluding to the ideas and emulating the styles of earlier and more contemporary cultural forms through amiable pastiche rather than sour parody. Rushdie writes

outside of the high/popular limits despite his seeming love for the “great” literatures of Britain and India, just like Shakespeare or Dickens did before him. (Parody is a replica that purposefully exaggerates features of a work, a method, or a style, usually for comic or satirical effect). *Panchtantra* or Aesop’s stories (often for humorous or sarcastic effect These writings’ ongoing popularity is due to the numerous spaces between the lines, which allow the reader to draw conclusions that may or may not agree with the general tone of the story. Essay about “Censorship” using Annabel Patterson’s “Aesopian writing” narrative technique (905). The author, who spent several years in hiding after being compelled to do so, is truly interested in two worlds: the contemporary, secular West and the Islamic East, which is frequently highly conventional and traditionalist. As a result, the collection’s title, *East, West*, was derived from this.

Rushdie uses an occurrence that is said to have occurred in the 1960s to relate the story in “The Prophet’s Hair.” Numerous people’s lives are impacted by the finding of a vial containing a hair from the head of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The humorous and, by the end, fast-paced, almost slapstick sequence of events represents a number of diametrically opposed groups, including parents and children, husbands and wives, the wealthy and the poor, the religious and the secular, the law-abiding and the lawless, the young and the old. Because family conflicts are among the most emotional and intimate that most people experience, characters frequently find themselves in conflict with others around them. People frequently strive to define themselves and their roles in the relationships by fighting with those closest to them. Printed in 1994, the novel might be viewed as Rushdie’s

method of refusing to be intimidated by religious authorities when he was still in hiding. Character can however be revealed by tangible items, such as belongings or attire. In “The Prophet’s Hair,” Hashim’s list of objects demonstrates both his materialistic character and how disconnected he is from his cultural roots. A lovely yet sinister tale that makes you consider morals and the purpose of religion. Rushdie’s criticism on class and religion is further deepened by its sarcasm and irony. Its mythological magical realism capitalises on each situation’s absurdity while yet making it relevant to readers’ lives. Its play on religion is conveyed through the effects of finding a cure through the stolen holy object. Both believers and non-believers have consequences. An allegory about the detrimental effects of religion on families that uses situational comedy to make a point about class, religion, and the frailty of human existence.

Hashim isn’t religious at the start of the narrative. Although he declares that he is “not a pious man,” he places a high value on “living honourably in the world.” He doesn’t practise any religion, yet he believes in moral responsibility. However, Hashim is not what most people consider noble because he charges an extraordinarily high interest rate of 71%. He defends this standard by claiming that by teaching the underprivileged the value of money, they will be cured of their problems or fever of borrowing rather continuous borrowing. Even though Hashim claims to be assisting the needy, what he actually does is cause them to become more indebted. Rushdie uses a wide range of genres, styles, structures, and tactics to ironically play with Western perceptions of the East. Ultimately, he weakens the reader’s preconceptions about the Orient and shows that reality cannot be forced into absolutism

by dismantling established ideas. In his collection of critical essays “Imaginary Homelands” we affirm his assertion as “writing is, of all the arts, the one best fitted to confronting absolutes of all types” (Beck 357). Nothing is “holy” anymore, therefore many of his stories can be seen as an attempt to subvert and deconstruct the centuries of Eastern and Western cultures, criticising the absolute ideas and weak points of institutions in the process (Beck 360). It is abundantly obvious from this analysis and dismantling of conventional representations that all worlds are inextricably linked and cannot be viewed as competing entities.

Rushdie makes fun of both religious adherents who seek personal gain from their religion and those who are driven by material gain. Overall, the tale serves as a fantastic parable about how those who utilise religion should do so for their own selfish ends; he teaches us to live with an open mind and a modest attitude. But if we give in to our jealous urges, there will be consequences. The theme of “The Prophet’s Hair” is that piety belongs to the holy men and not to the regular people, and that moderation is still the right course of conduct in daily life. While writing an English-Indian work, Rushdie hopes to depict the dangers of religious fervour and the destruction it produces on a global scale. Concluded thus, the way Rushdie communicates, religion becomes medieval. It transforms into a vengeful old man who keeps his three daughters under an archaic system of tradition and obedient, filial submission, or an imam who indoctrinates young people with hatred, or an ancient holy object (“The Prophet’s Hair”) whose removal causes untold numbers of fatalities. Rushdie is intrigued by attempts to halt and even reverse history since he is subconsciously aware that Islam is ancient and will strangle the new due to its inherent antiquity.

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The Consensus of Raga and Hybrid Memoir in AmitChaudhuri's "Finding the Raga": An Analytical Study

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Abstract: Amit Chaudhuri's latest, *Finding the Raga* (2021) is a text of the confluence of two art forms: literature and music. Sprawling into an inter-disciplinary expanse, the text encapsulates the bildungsroman writer's journey in to the world of music 'to find raga'. Chaudhuri's musical journey was not at all a turbulent one, instead during its literary expression, he, as a writer proves to be a patient teacher who familiarizes his readers with the lexicon of Hindustani classical music, providing meaningful glimpses of various khayals and raga. Thus, the paper attempts to posit Chaudhuri's *Finding the Raga* as a hybrid memoir; as a non-fictional text which shall claim the inter-relatedness of the two art forms, music and literature and would also suggest the need of a separate methodology to understand the emerging interdisciplinary genre.

Keywords: Music, Literature, Raga, hybrid memoir, North Indian Classical music.

'Alaap' (Introduction):

Although literature and music are completely two different art forms but they are successful in influencing each other so often. The confluence of literature and music has

allowed famous writers like Rabindranath Tagore and William Blake to experiment with their works. Writer of seven novels, four nonfictions, several edited anthologies, Amit Chaudhuri is a poet, essayist, singer, performer and Professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia, also teaches at Ashoka University, India as a Professor of Creative Writing. In September 2020, he was elected as an Honorary Fellow of the Modern Language Association but he has been less recognized for his musical activities in comparison to his literary works.

Music has approved a fine blend of the reading of culture with a literary sense, but the question of language arises, whether there is a need of a specific literary language to understand music. In this regard, Stephen Benson's titular term, 'literary music' has emphasized the need of a literary language to express music which was further summarized by Anthony Gritten, in his review, 'Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction by Stephen Benson.'

Literary music refers in the first instance to the self-evident fact that such music [as written about in literature] is by definition literary, a music made by the narrative in which it occurs. (Gritten 100)

In *Finding the Raga*, Chaudhuri at the age of eighteen or nineteen had "discovered Hopkins and the tone of sonnet, of subdued imprecation to do with beloved's unfairness" (Chaudhuri 95). which had reminded him of the bhakti poetry, leading him in finding similarities between Hopkins and Tulsidas. Situating similarities between poetry and music are not only to Chaudhuri himself, for this has been a topic of critical discussion in the article, 'Literature and Music:

Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching at The Open University', by Correa et al. where they have claimed that "music offers a vocabulary that denotes effects of language that are difficult or impossible to articulate as meaning" (Correa et al. 52), but they have found that music and poetry are "sister arts since antiquity" (Correa et al. 50).

In his *Finding the Raga*, Chaudhuri says that, "The Indian Classical musician is a comparativist" (Chaudhuri 150) who not only "test notes in relation to each other in a raga, (but) he hears extensions of that relationship in his surroundings" (Chaudhuri 150). This calls in for Lawrence Kramer's views upon the possibility of artistic exchanges among the two forms, music and literature, through comparative studies and regarding it, he says that "The field of comparative studies in music and literature is still struggling to be born, or perhaps even to be conceived" (Kramer 159). He has marked the recent interest in musicologists which have taken in literary criticism as largely methodological, and thus, "the literary field has developed over the past few decades into a methodological gold mine, and the proper object of musical criticism is, after all music" (Kramer 159).

Amit Chaudhuri's *Finding the Raga* (2021) is not only an autobiographical account of Amit Chaudhuri's musical interests, but it also proves to be a hybrid memoir. Taking a multi-disciplinary cue, the paper examines the text by conducting research to analyze the musicological connection with literature.

Finding the Raga through Hybrid Memoir:

The Janus-headed 'literature-music' combo approves of the existence of the influence of music upon literature and

vice-versa. Amit Chaudhuri's *Finding the Raga* is a specimen of approval that writing about music through one's personal experience can be equally be inventive and a deep-felt sensory journey at the same time. The author has chosen to share his growth years with the readers to showcase the parallel musical journey. Ananya Vajpeyi (who was a moderator during the conversation) had commented upon the text, *Finding the Raga* during a conversation (Prof. Ashis Nandy with Amit Chaudhuri) that,

The book really defies our expectation of genre, it is equally a memoir about growing up and growing in a certain kind of music, it is a set of notes by a musician and somebody who has formally studies and understood both the history of music as well as the practice of different kinds of music, it is a book that can equally speak to specialists to people who are formally trained in the languages of different kinds of music. (Nandy 00:4:45-5:21)

But, apart from being an exploration tale of his musical journey, Amit Chaudhuri's *Finding the Raga* is not just a memoir, but a hybrid memoir. There is a basic difference a 'memoir' and a 'hybrid memoir.' A radical feminist American critic, journalist, essayist, and memoirist, Vivian Gornick in her 'Why Memoir Now?' says that "Thirty years ago, people who thought they had a story to tell sat down to write a novel. Today they sit down to write a memoir" (Gornick 5). A memoir is a narrative based on the author's personal memories and it involves self-discovery, self-creation and self-exploration. Melissa Williamson had described "Memoir is part of a larger genre: creative nonfiction. Creative nonfiction is about a true based event in reality" (Williamson 20).

When Gornick had pointed out the differences between memoir and fiction, Judith Barrington in *Writing the Memoir* finds “the roots of the memoir lie in the realm of personal essay, the modern literary memoir also have many of the characteristics of fiction” (Barrington 22). Barrington has found out the memoir being a hybrid one because “the memoirist keeps her reader engaged by being an adept story teller” (Barrington 22) and as because a memoir keeps, “moving both backward and forward in time, re-creating believable dialogue, switching back and forth between scene and summary, and controlling the pace and tension of the story” (Barrington 22) hence it becomes a “kind of hybrid form with elements of both fiction and essay, in which the author’s voice, musing conversationally on a true story, is all important” (Barrington 22).

Deviating from a traditional memoir, the hybrid memoir proves to be more engaging than just being a personal record of piled up incidents of the writer’s life. Catering a high level of creativity, a hybrid memoir has a universal appeal as it blends memory and history which can be resonated in larger ways than a traditional memoir. Judith Barrington finds memoirs as an evolving genre and in her book *Writing the Memoir*, she had opined:

The contemporary memoir includes retrospection as an essential part of the story. Your reader has to be willing to be both entertained by the story itself and interested in how you now, looking back on it, understand it. (Barrington 21)

A memoir can be a bildungsroman in which the writer who positions himself or herself as the center of the plot will

allow the readers to see the gradual growth. In his article, ‘Memory, fact, Imagination, research: Hybrid Personality’, Michael Steinberg posits memoir as a “hybrid genre” and talks about the role play of memory and imagination for the writing of a hybrid memoir:

So then, we’re back to my original claim that memoir is indeed a hybrid genre. Which means that the narrator’s personal story—which evolves out of memory and imagination—and the research and reportage—are both, in one way or another, the necessary raw materials that the writer still has to organize and craft into a coherent narrative. (Steinberg)

Amit Chaudhuri recalls from his memory, how he had grown up getting life lessons from the books and films that he had read or watched that “life was about gathering experience, and consequently becoming wise” (Chaudhuri 98). When he was out of school, doing A level he had “began to become aware of the raga and its relationship to the present moment” (Chaudhuri 98). Amit Chaudhuri had visualized the world through the sounds and tried to understand life with his knowledge of classical music. *Finding the Raga* confirms to be a hybrid memoir as it operates through the writer’s psychological, philosophical, and scientific perspectives which are working underneath. The metrics of a hybrid memoir involves the mental ability of the reader to trace of the functions of explicit or implicit memory.

Robert Atwan contributes an essay, ‘Of Memoir and Memory’, where he points out the decreasing popularity of memoirs since its inception. The genre has faced “dismissive attitude largely centered on two leading questions asked of

memoirs: the degree of an author's truthfulness and the extent of his or her self-absorption, a complaint normally referred to pejoratively as "narcissism" (Atwan 10). He, thus, forwards a strategic turn for a better understanding of memoir. According to him, "The more we know about memory— from psychological, philosophical, and scientific perspectives—the better we can understand the complex art of memoir" (Atwan 12). But, *Finding the Raga* had introduced Amit's personal journey into the North Indian classical music, including the author's bildungsroman journey from "point of entries" to the "returning to the raga" which can be resonated by any amateur singer who has just stepped into the world of music, tripping over, struggling to find balance and to get the proper tune.

'Point of Entries'

Barrington had debarred from replicating the whole life in a memoir, instead suggested to showcase only selected life events of the memoir writers. Chaudhuri's *Finding the Raga* is all about his "point of entry" to the North Indian Classical Music up to "the return to raga". In, *Writing the Memoir*, Judith Barrington finds,

Rather than simply telling a story from her life, the memoirist both tells the story and muses upon it, trying to unravel what it means in the light of her current knowledge. (Barrington20)

Amit Chaudhuri does not present before his readers mere a story of his musical journey, but through the discreet episodes, as a memoirist he has been trying to present his musings of life to form an organized whole. The "point of entry" (Chaudhuri 13) that he often talks about the events in his life

which had brought him close to the North Indian classical music. The first was his music teacher's (Govind Prasad Jaipurwale) arrival in his life. Gradually, the other "points of entry" (Chaudhuri 15) were the introduction to the "Marathi programmes on TV" (Chaudhuri 15) and was able to understand the world of "Marathi-sangeetnatak or music theatre".

At a very tender age, Chaudhuri had started to compose music and perform in front of an audience which was usually "unheard of" (Chaudhuri 60). And his struggle "to find the raga" (Chaudhuri 60) thus continued, but when he was "listening to von Karajan's Beethoven" (Chaudhuri 30) along with so, he had also started to "grapple with Indian classical music...I (he) realized that the raga's relationship to the world was different from Western music's. Standing between conflicting points of reference, I (he) had to navigate my (his) way" (Chaudhuri 30).

Judith Barrington takes her time to talk about the necessary introspection and looking back at one's life in a memoir in her book *Writing the Memoir*. She finds,

The contemporary memoir includes retrospection as an essential part of the story. Your reader has to be willing to be both entertained by the story itself and interested in how you now, looking back on it, understand it. (Barrington 21)

Chaudhuri's *Finding the Raga* is an introspection of his struggle to "comprehend raga and tala" (Chaudhuri 62) and as he was trying to discipline his voice throughout, it was Govindji's observation: "He sings in tune" (Chaudhuri 62) which had assured Amit's existence and kept him moving on in the vast world of Indian classical music.

‘Return to Raga’

Chaudhuri finds the musical turn, responsible for the meaningful change in his life, quite parallel to Michael MadhusudanDutt’s (Indo Anglian writer of Pre-Independent India) literary journey. Chaudhuri says that “after 1860, Dutt had turned to Bengali writings, similarly he (Amit Chaudhuri) too “never sang a rock song till the end in Bombay, in 1978” (Chaudhuri 142). The text remains as witness to Chaudhuri’s mission to find the definition of ‘raga’. Starting with an ‘alaap’ (introduction), meandering through and through, the text, heads towards a closure, to the final ‘return to raga’ which is quintessential for Chaudhuri’s individual growth and development, along with the text’s development.

I began to go home frequently. Just as I spent the bare minimum of time at University College London...But I wasn’t going home to save money. I was going home to see my parents. I was going home to resume unconstrained riyaz with Girdharji and Hazarilalji; to get my guru, always hard-pressed for time, to teach me new bandishes; to return the raga (this had become important to me) to the milieu it was used to. (Chaudhuri 145)

The return to raga was not that easy for Chaudhuri because understanding raga is a complex process even for the music practitioners as every raga is specific to time and performance. The question, “why finding the Raga?” (Baxi 00:2:31-2:32) was posed to Chaudhuri by Vibhaker Baxi in an interview had been an existential question on the perspective of Amit’s life which is intricately related to music and to it Chaudhuri had answered that at the outset, he had thought of naming the book as ‘alaap’ which means introduction,

I have named the first chapter of the book ‘alaap’ like ‘alaap’ in Khayal...it takes a long time in khayal but alaap means introduction and I was interested in how much time an introduction takes in the genre called Khayal. (Baxi 00:3:44-4:22)

As a hybrid memoir, the text remains as an ‘alaap’ (introduction) for the readers to understand his entry to the world of Indian Classical music and along with it, the text remains as an introductory musicological text where the readers would find Chaudhuri’s dealing with the process of his learning of Hindustani Khayal as his attempts to capture the essence of a raga, with all the details and nuances and then to bring down to his readers as the way it is.

Conclusion

Vivian Gornick had rightly said, “What happened to the writer is not what matters; what matters is the large sense that the writer is able to make of what happened” (Gornick 5). After a long sojourn in experimental music, in *Finding the Raga* AmitChaudhuri looks at the structure of Indian classical music. Moreover, he continues to give an extensive account of the ragas and their historical origins according to their groupings, called the thaats, and ragas. Amit Chaudhuri’s book *Finding the Raga* is a part guide to Indian music and part memoir of Chaudhuri’s life that witnesses the metamorphosis in AmitChaudhuri’s life and speaks up before the world about the transformation. As a hybrid memoir, the text responds to the growth and transformation in the writer’s life, which occurs parallelly; Amit’s growing into a matured individual is parallel to his liking of guitar and pop music in his teens and the gradual inclination to his full found love, Hindustani classical music.

Chaudhuri's 'literary music(al) alaap' has definitely stirred up quite a discussion in academia as it has initiated an engaging dialogue between literature and music, calling in for interdisciplinary approaches.

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A Study of Literary Cartography in Arvind Adiga's "The White Tiger"

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Abstract: Among the varying elements scrutinized in a novel, the prominent one - Space, is seldom acknowledged. It is interesting to see how spaces advertently and inadvertently influence the characters and vice versa, thereby impacting the outcome of the novel. The objective of this project is to study such spaces - both conspicuous and inconspicuous in Arvind Adiga's debut novel, 'The White Tiger'. The novel, published in 2008, offers a glimpse into India's class struggle as well as examines the issues of religion, caste, freedom, corruption and poverty in India.

This paper aims to study the novel in the light of spatiality. It begins with an introduction to the theory and its aspects according to various thinkers, in a linear fashion. Next, the author's function as a mapmaker is evaluated. Finally, the role and the essence of each of the spaces in the novel is analysed.

Keywords: Space, Spatiality, Mapmaker, Post-modern Indian Literature, Arvind Adiga

Literary Cartography

There are different aspects of spatial practices in literature designed to reveal new ways to make sense of the world. While

examining Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953), Robert Tally Jr. argues that the relationship between the individual and author in the world, that the literary work claims to represent, is spatial. "In order to know a place, one maps it, but one also reads it and narrates it" (Tally Jr. 51). The French historian Francois Hartog, in his comprehensive study of Herodotus' *Histories*, observes that the narrative is a product of the 'surveyor' and the work of a rhapsode, meaning a 'weaver' in its etymological sense, the one who weaves different parts into a whole (48). Thus, for Hartog, the narrator of these texts becomes a surveyor of the space simultaneously, a rhapsode 'who sews these spaces into a new unity, and a bard who ultimately "invents" the world so surveyed and stitched together' (Tally Jr. 48). According to this view, narrative is a form of worldmaking. Cartography is the science or practice of drawing maps. According to this view, narrative thus becomes a form of world-making.

The narrators or writers examine the territory as they weave together different elements, which can include bits of other narratives, 'descriptions of people or places, images derived from first-hand observation as well as secondary reports, legends, myths, and inventions of the imagination' (48). The narrator, thus, ends up inventing or discovering the world present in the narrative, which outlines a world in the manner of a map. The literary cartography of one narrative can contribute to further survey, or future narrative maps. The term Literary Cartography is not limited to narrative works. A poetry or non-narrative work could also be viewed as a map. Thus, the idea of a narrative and a plot becomes spatial.

The literary cartography is a method of giving form to the world. Turchi, a professor of creative writing, in his *Maps*

of the Imagination, demonstrates how literary and cartographic practices blend to form literary cartography. In an attempt to show how the creative writer's work is a form of mapmaking, he lists five categories: 'selection and omission; conventions (adherences to and departure from); inclusion and order; shape, or matters of form; and the balance of intuition and intention' (qtd. in Tally Jr. 50). Pavel Medvedev in *The Formal Method of Literary Scholarship*, says that the writer arranges 'life as he sees it onto the plane of the work' (qtd. in Tally Jr. 59). The phrase 'representation of reality' could be the goals of both literature and cartography, provided that they represent reality figuratively. The Hungarian philosopher and literary critic Georg Lukacs, in his *The Theory of the Novel*, in the light of Hegelian standpoint, puts it that - the novel, which is a representative literary form, symbolizes fragmentation and open-endedness. According to him, the aim of the novel is to 'uncover and construct the concealed totality in life' (qtd. in Tally Jr. 62).

Literary Geography

A novel comes into being at the hands of a reader. 'The critical reader becomes a kind of geographer who actively interprets the literary map in such a way as to present new, sometimes hitherto unforeseen mappings' (Tally Jr. 79). Tally Jr. cites the example of Italo Calvino's observation of Paris for a better understanding of Literary Geography. According to him, for a person who have not seen or been to Paris, it becomes a city imagined through books and also an imaginary space that is interpreted. Thus, literary geography involves 'the means by which the texts represent or map spaces and places' and 'implies a form of reading that focuses attention

on space and spatiality in the texts under consideration' (Tally Jr. 80).

Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), a French philosopher, in his *The Poetics of Space*, focused more on the domestic spaces such as the rooms, the cellar, the attic, the corners and the furniture. His primary concern was the “poetic image” and dealt with the question of ‘how readers can grasp the poetic image in its reality when it would seem that only the poet has access to the actual experience of the image’ (114). In his words, ‘the reader of poems is asked to consider an image not as an object and even less as the substitute for an object, but to seize its specific reality’ (qtd. in Tally Jr. 114). The poetic space or the space of imagination was his primary concern.

Literary Cartography and Literary Geography in The White Tiger

In Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, the author as a mapmaker can be analysed, where he tries to portray the reality of India, Delhi, Bangalore, through the character Balram. The novel is written in epistolary form. The epistolary form can add realism to the story (“Epistolary Novel”). The story is said through a series of letters written to the Chinese Premier by Balram. The representation of reality figuratively could be the goal of literary cartography. In this manner, the novel, written in an epistolary form can be bid as a work inching closer to reality. A writer strives to be a mapmaker by presenting a work, by mapping out a world, of which readers make sense and this ‘world’ becomes a space, which is further interpreted. But the work here is half done. The novel once it reaches its reader, comes to life and it is the reader that makes sense of the mapped work, the produced world, and the spaces presented. In

the novel, the protagonist Balram claims to know the truth, specially the ‘reality’ of every place and the actual working of his world. This chapter analyses the world, the map that Adiga presents through the character Balram, in a linear manner. It is interesting to see the portrayal of the river Ganga in the novel. Ganga is known to the world as the holy river of the Hindus. The river is worshipped as a goddess and treated as an entity of emancipation. It is considered as a purifying river, whose water is used for various holy practices and rituals. But, the river is represented as a black river, the river of Death (“Ganges”). Further, Balram tries to express the intensity of poverty, the reality of ‘half the population’ (Adiga 15) of India, whether it’s their appearance or source of living, the caste system, the prejudices - all through a series of letters written to the Chinese Premier.

He tries to offer a glimpse of the ‘reality’ of India, of which he claims to know, throughout out the novel along with that of Delhi and Bangalore. He puts forth an India which is divided into two - Darkness and Light and that of a demographically divided India. Similarly, Delhi as a space is expressed through the eyes of Balram can be analysed in the same manner. Delhi, the capital of India is addressed as ‘a crazy city’ (Adiga 118), where houses are not in a chronological order, either alphabetically or numerically. The capital, a centre of national importance, is shown in dichotomy: one that of the privileged and the other that of the less privileged. There are instances where Adiga, through Balram and other characters, tries to map a world for the readers; a world, where everything is in chaos. Mukesh tries to calm down Ashok regarding the income tax blunder by stating that the legal system in India can be manipulated for their own benefits by saying:

‘This is India, not America. There’s always a way out here’ ‘That’s how Delhi works.’ (Adiga 121)

Thus, it makes the readers believe that everything can be taken for granted and that the system is quite weak in India. And this is because the work, *The White Tiger*, can be studied as a space, where a world mapped out by the author is presented to the reader. The author has tried to present various places to make the mapped world appear authentic - the way of life in the cities, the mention of particulars of Delhi such as the Defence Colony, Vasant Kunj, Aurangzeb Road, House of Parliament etc.

Another truth that Balram claims is the life and fate of a driver in Delhi. When he is framed for a crime that the wife of his employer committed, and is asked to plead guilty, without letting him have any say whatsoever, Balram is shocked and frightened for his future. It is then portrayed as the norm in Delhi, where the jails are full of drivers, who take blame for their middle class masters. He also elaborates how traditionally servants behave when their masters are not around. The further reading of the plot reveals how Balram committed the crime in Delhi and escaped to Bangalore. He lives under a new identity of Ashok, his former employer whom he had murdered. Throughout the novel, it is shown how Balram escapes the law, how he manipulates everyone around him and how he claims to know each of the cities inside out. The way he bribes the police in Bangalore to cover to one of his employees’ blunder of running over an innocent man show how everything is possible in India and that how can one switch identities and live on the brink of an immoral life, without ever getting caught. The novel also shows the class struggle, the inequality and the dichotomy of life in rural and urban areas.

All these mentions, especially with claims as such by the characters, map a world through which the readers gather and discern the aforementioned world mapped out to them. The novel garnered mixed reactions. The reactions varied from a mother being worried about the creation of a negative image of India in her daughter's head to arguments whether the novel is intelligible or not. Khushwant Singh in review, praised Adiga's book as highly readable but at the same time termed it as 'dark, one-sided picture of India' (Kalyan). Adiga's *The White Tiger* can evoke different reactions and experiences in foreign and Indian readers. For a native reader who have only seen, heard and read about Delhi, the Ganges or Bangalore, the novel would be surprising. For a foreigner, this novel will aid in reinforcing the stereotypes and induce a 'particular' image of India. This is possible when a work of literature is considered as a space and then subsequently studied. Literature does have the benefit of being a real or fictionalized form of events and it is here that the literary cartography and literary geography comes in handy.

Spaces: Its Production, Manifestations and Roles

Henri Lefebvre in his *The Production of Space* (1991; originally published in 1974), puts forth that space 'was both a product and productive', which Foucault further elaborated - space produces us. (Tally Jr. 120). The school is one such space in the novel.

'If the Indian village is a paradise, then the school is a paradise within a paradise' (Adiga 32). The school is where the protagonist gets his name, identity and a glimpse of his future; where Munna becomes Balram Halwai. He gets the name from his teacher on the first day of his school when he is

asked to mention his name for the purpose of registration. He says that his name is Munna, which just means 'boy'. On being asked the reason for the lack of a proper name he cites the reason of his mom being ill all the time and his father, a rickshaw-puller, being always busy. The teacher then took upon his hands to name him and christens him as Balram. Further, the school inspector on his surprise visit, lines up students and asks them to read from the board and is impressed by Balram as compared to others, who couldn't even read a single word. The inspector addresses him as the White Tiger.

Thus, the school becomes a place where he gets his multiple identities; a space where 'Balram' is born, where he realizes his strength due to the allusion to the White Tiger. If he had remained unnamed or unmentioned, he may have ended up with the fate as same as that of the other children of his class. It is the inspector's words, that he is as rare as the white tiger that comes only once in a generation, which might have hinted or at least aided his conviction that he is destined to get out of 'Darkness'.

This incident in the school stayed in the back of his mind and the traces of it is seen in his email id - boss@whitetiger-technologydrivers.com, given at the end of his letter to Mr. Jiabao, the Chinese Premier. It is the school as a space, that produces 'Balram Halwai' who further went on to murder his employer, climbing the ladder of the class system, for he wanted to know what it meant not to be a servant even if it was just for a day or an hour or a minute (Adiga 321).

The Railway station in the novel is another space that plays a crucial role in being a space of realization. After the idea of killing Ashok sprouts inside the head of Balram, he

visits the railway station to contemplate upon his decision. The visit is sort of an appeal and a search for some answer through divine intervention or otherwise. While he is at the station, he notices people lying on the floor, which he foresees as his future if he is to abandon his decision. The “people” here can refer to those who are from the ‘Darkness’, the underprivileged; the ones who are at the bottom of the social class. He thought that if he is to hold back on his decision, he would end up being one of those people lying on the floor of the station. So, the railway station can be seen as a speculative space that shows his doomed future. When he inserts coin in the weighing machine at the station, he gets a chit, a fortune-telling chit, along with the weight printed on it. The chit reads ‘Respect for the law is the first command of the gods’ (Adiga 248). Hence the station can also be seen as a space of prediction, prevention and warning of the dire consequences that could happen if he is to implement his decision. Yet, he goes back and in the course of events executes his decision and returns to the same station to board the train for his final escape. The station could have been a catalyst in giving Balram the final courage by acting as a space of realization and speculation.

Balram is a chauffeur-turned-entrepreneur in the novel. As a chauffeur, he gets a chance to visit all of the royal places in Delhi and all the places of national importance. It is inside the car that he becomes aware of the obligation and duties of his caste, his place in the society. The car becomes the space where he is enlightened, and has epiphanies about a variety of things, whether it is the life of the rich, the life of the poor in the streets; the politics of the country through the conversations between the landlords, the politicians etc. The car is addressed as a dark egg in the novel. When Balram and his employer are

once stuck in a traffic jam on the way to Gurgaon, he notices the dim lighted pavements on either side of the traffic with people waiting for buses and people with nowhere to go. He identifies these people as those from the 'Darkness'. Thus, he discerns his worth and place and simultaneously theirs, which sidelines him from those of the 'Darkness', like two separate cities – all of these reinforced by the car as a space.

Since he is a chauffeur, Most of Balram's narrative involves the car as a space. It is in this space he contemplates about the murder; commits the crime and finally escapes to the station; where he develops a conscious, that of a subaltern and aspires to climb up the social class.

It is with the help of the car as a space that Balram learns that a master can decide the fate of a servant, especially after the accident at the hands of Ashok's wife. The car also becomes a space where he gets better judgement of the characters. He is mocked by Pinky for his English pronunciations and scorned by the other members of the landlord's family. Ashok, on the other hand, is shown as someone who has a humanistic disposition towards Balram. The various conversations and instances that takes place in the car reinforces this belief. It is with the help of the car as a space that Balram learns a master can decide the fate of a servant, especially after the accident at the hands of Ashok's wife. The car is also a space where Balram comes to know of the amount of trust and pity that his employer Ashok has on him.

Balram's treatment of the car also makes it a sacred space. The way he treats, desires and looks after it makes the car a personified space. The Black Fort acts as a space and an important symbol where Balram sheds off his ignorance. The

fort is shown inaccessible with a pond and a hill standing in its way. Both, Balram and his mother stands at the edge of the pond gazing at the inaccessible fort, for which they are scorned at, by his granny. This action or event shows their aspiration to escape the 'Darkness' and their cursed lives. Once Balram after storming off from his house after a fight, wades his way through the pond and the hill and reaches the ramparts of the fort. Upon reaching there, he sees everything – the plains, his village Laxmangarh, the little tributary of the Ganga, but Balram, scathed in anger can only see ruins and laments his birth, the class system, the inequality, his whole unjust life and curses God instead of being grateful. Hence, the Black Fort which was supposed to be the place for seeking answers, liberation and choosing a different path ends up being a dystopian space for Balram. Since the story is narrated through Balram and keeping the objective perspectives aside, it can be said that the fort becomes a dystopian, depressing space where he is resentful about the world and the life in it.

In the novel, Delhi is described as the capital of not one but two countries – two Indias. It is described as an under-developed end, filled with rickshaws, old stone building, and Muslims – things that are out of focus from the modern world. Balram visits Old Delhi just as he visited the railway station to contemplate about his ultimate decision. (Adiga 251)

Thus, Old Delhi too becomes a speculative space where he sees a future self, if he were to step back from his decision. Further, he enters the great second-hand book market of Darya Ganj. This market manifests as a space of knowledge and revelation for Balram. The market is that of books ranging from technology to philosophy, all collected at once space. Balram scans through various Urdu books when finally a book

seller, a Muslim, stops him and asks him whether he can read Urdu. Acting upon his own will, the book-seller opens a book and reads a verse, which sounds like a divine intervention. Without being even asked for or about the verse, he dismisses Balram by saying that it's called poetry, nothing else. The space with the old bookseller in it acts as a potent space, as if acting upon some divine inspiration. It was as if Balram ended up finding an answer without seeking particularly for one.

Heterotopias in The White Tiger

Michel Foucault in his '*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*' puts forth the concept of heterotopia and six principles to elaborate it, along with their characteristics. There are few spaces in the novel that constitute as heterotopias. This section aims to identify and articulate such spaces in the novel. Once, on a routine period of waiting at the mall, Balram hears a commotion, where the guard at the mall was not letting a man in just because he had worn sandals instead of shoes. Shoes were symbolic of being privileged and thus a direct entry into the mall. The man does not budge at all and instead questions the guard and almost gets hit by him. After the incident, Balram goes to the local market that evening and buys a white T-shirt with a small word in English at the centre akin to Mr Ashok's T-shirt. He does so to gain entry into the mall. He dresses up the next day along with a pair of black shoes and enters the mall through the rear entrance instead of the front because of the fear of being stopped or getting caught by the guards.

The fifth principle of heterotopia dictates that a heterotopic space is not accessible and the individual has to 'submit to rites and purification' and must have 'certain

permission and make certain gestures' (Foucault 7). Hence, the mall becomes a heterotopia for Balram and most likely the people of his social class, where he resorted to gestures and rituals like getting a new set of clothes and thus looking like his rich employer, to gain access to the mall.

Bangalore can be interpreted as another such heterotopia. Balram kills his master and escapes to Bangalore. It is the crime that gains him an access to Bangalore. If he wouldn't have done it, then he possibly couldn't have seen Bangalore in his life, as he would have stayed a driver in Delhi for the rest of his life, without climbing up the social class. So, the crime committed becomes that ritual and gesture that gives him access to Bangalore. It can also be seen as a space where the servant becomes the master. Balram who was a servant in Delhi, becomes a master, an entrepreneur with his own set of employees, in Bangalore.

The analysis of spaces mentioned in this chapter shows how space can influence the characters. All the spaces appear to be conspiring together to influence Balram to execute his 'plan'. However, it is not necessary that the spaces alone are responsible for it to have happened. Balram could have led a different life, concentrating only on the 'good' and the 'beautiful', which he could never see or one can say, never chose to see. When he was at the station contemplating whether to go back and fetch Dharam, he sees a little boy 'having the time of his life, playing with the water and splashing it' and the boy's fatigued parents, the homeless man and woman, 'covered in filth...gazing blankly at a distance' (Adiga 287).

To conclude, one can argue that he could have quit after the incident, where he was asked to go to the jail for his master,

and done some other work given his competency and brains. At the same time, it is evident that he did try his best to concentrate on the finer things that life could offer. When he was at the railway station previously, contemplating whether or not to commit the crime, he sees a woman lying on the floor. The woman had no luggage and had a one-rupee note stuffed into her cleavage. If he had concentrated on such deeper, finer aspects of life, the railway station could have become a space of liberation and bliss and the plot could have swerved in a different path altogether. Hence, it can be said that spaces can influence the characters and vice versa.

Conclusion

The objective of the paper was to map out spaces, beginning with the novel itself to every other discernible space in the novel. The project also aimed at demonstrating how spaces influence the characters and vice versa. With regards to Spatiality, much has already been done upon Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The project can be useful in mapping out and discerning the spaces that influence the characters and ultimately, the outcome of the plot, of the novel. The novel itself was studied as a map, as a space using the methods of literary cartography and literary geography. The project will aid in understanding the subtle spaces and the spaces that the characters form around them - all of which affects the plot of the novel.

Spatiality is a recent theory and has brighter scope in the future, primarily because the element of 'space' is overlooked in a novel. It would be interesting to re-read and re-interpret the classics through the lens of spatiality. Maybe Iago in *Othello* might have acted according to the influence of the

spaces that surrounded him or maybe the characters in R.K. Narayan's Malgudi would act differently if placed in a different space or maybe Malgudi could either be shown as a utopian or a dystopian space.

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Climate Crisis and the Predicament of Being: A Study of Select Works by Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract : Amitav Ghosh is one the most significant voices of our times. His writings encompass several genres across places and spaces. While one of his early works *The Shadow Lines* (1988) highlights the futility of borders and boundaries emphasizing the partition history. His other fictional work such as *The Hungry Tide* (2004) located in the Sundarbans of Bengal talks about the ever-shifting nature of borders while pointing towards the mangrove forest that forms the foundational part of the region. The paper will look at the climate crisis through Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) while drawing references from *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), and *The Living Mountain: a Fable for Our Times* (2022).

Keywords: Climate Crisis, Places, Spaces, Humanity, Culture

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh is one the most significant voices of our times. His writings encompass several genres across places and spaces. While one of his early works *The Shadow Lines* (1988) highlights the futility of borders and boundaries emphasizing the partition history. His other fictional work such

as *The Hungry Tide* (2004) located in the Sundarbans of Bengal talks about the ever-shifting nature of borders while pointing towards the mangrove forest that forms the foundational part of the region. Today, Sundarbans is at the cusp of destruction because of climate change. On the other hand, Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000) moves through the rubber plantations of Malaysia, the streets of Rangoon, the teak forest of Burma and the rise and fall of the British Empire. In his later works such as *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), *Gun Island* (2019), *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), and *The Living Mountain: a Fable for Our Times* (2022), Ghosh maintains that the history of climate crisis needs to be read in relation to the history of imperialism and colonialism. The empires, blinded by power and greed, caused an enormous amount of ecological destruction in several colonies. The oeuvre of Ghosh's writings encapsulates personal stories with the history of the land and resources, violence, displacement, global histories, and the saga of the empires. Antoinette Burton in "Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below" remarks about the freedom the artists and novelists exercise while documenting history and culture while historians feel restricted in doing the same. Burton points out that Amitav Ghosh is a historian in his own right (71). Ghosh has been documenting the sociocultural, economic, political, as well as ecological concerns of our times. While historians acknowledge that novels can be a significant source of information, however, when it comes to citing the source then it becomes rather challenging for historians to cite a fictional work. While documenting history can be rigid at times, the novels act as a site of methodological possibility as novels do not have to

follow a particular sequence while documenting a historical event (73). Burton goes on to mention that novels provide a lens to look at world history from below, something which Ghosh attempts to do through his writings (75).

The paper will look at the climate crisis through Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) while drawing references from *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), and *The Living Mountain: a Fable for Our Times* (2022). The paper will look at the impact of capitalism when it comes to the climate crisis. The paper will also peep into how the domain of art and literature can create a discourse around the conundrum humanity is facing at present.

Climate Crisis and the Need for a Dialogue

The Journal of Asian Studies, *Round Table on Ghosh's The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, brings together historians Julia Adeney Thomas, Prasannan Parthasarathi, Rob Linrothe, Fa-ti Fan and Kenneth Pomeranz along with Amitav Ghosh to have a dialogue on the climate crisis while inviting responses from all the participants. Rob Linrothe in his response talks about his own experience with the remote parts of the Himalayas. He talks about the Zaskar Valley of Ladakh and how the climate has impacted the region. The inhabitants of the Valley can experience the change and dread what the future may hold for them as the ecological change will affect the Zangskari culture and livelihood (941). Linrothe highlights further that we are blinded by our own vision, therefore, the incapability to be able to see, feel, taste, and touch climate change. In such a scenario, the voice of Amitav Ghosh is meaningful as he argues that it is about time

to represent climate change until it is too late (944). Ghosh in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* remarks that the future generation will hold the leader and politicians accountable for the world that is falling apart because of the climate crisis. However, they may also hold the artists and writers equally responsible for the same (181). While the world continues to be governed by the idea of free market and capital, the scholars of climate studies are raising the questions such as; what is the meaning of development and growth? Is growth equivalent to establishing avenues that produce the possibility of multiplying wealth? Have industrialisation and urbanisation alienated people into treating the planet as a source that can be exploited without a check? What happens when the great derangement takes place? Do institutions and nation-states take note of the changes that are taking place? It is important to understand any event of crisis concerning the process of history formation. Does history or historical narratives acknowledge nature and the planet as active agents of meaning-making when it comes to the question of history and its construction? Historian, Dipesh Chakravarty in his seminal work *The Crisis of Civilization: Exploring Global and Planetary Histories* (2018) mentions how historians while documenting history completely overlooked nature. In his chapter "The Climate of History: Four Theses", Chakravarty argues that the human being is no more the biological agent but it has become the geological agent (206). The actions of human civilisation are having a severe impact on the planet. While humans have treated the planet to meet their greed, it is disconcerting how the world still rotates around the capital and the free market. Chakravarty goes on to point out the beginning of the new geological era, one in which

humans form the environment of the planet and this era is addressed as Anthropocene (209). While conversations are taking place around the idea of the Anthropocene, it is equally important to talk about the terminology ‘capitalocene’. Chakravarty further points out that one cannot ignore the fact that climate change has to do with the history of capital (212). Jason W. Moore, in his work, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2016) raises the question of “how do humans fit within the web of life?” and how various institutions, establishments, empires, states, urban landscapes, free markets, etc. have affected planetary life (2). Moore goes on to argue that capitalism poses severe violence on both nature and humans. However, capitalism has managed to thrive because it includes violence as a part of a bigger repertoire of policies that “put nature to work” (5). As far as the sphere of capitalocene is concerned, Moore proposes that capitalocene does not represent alone capitalism as a social or economic system, rather it delineates capitalism as a process to organise the resources of nature. Moore uses the term ‘capitalist world-ecology’, which may point out how nature is objectified for profit (6). Furthermore, it is about time to think about the “new ontological politics” and the re-distribution of wealth and capital. Perhaps, it is time to ponder over the new conception of wealth and how to deal with the same ensuring the collective sustainable growth of humans and the larger social fabric. Moreover, when one talks about the re-distribution of wealth then it has a direct relation with the policies of the nation-states. At present, when nation-states are competing with each other concerning the issue of power and hegemony, then, the question of de-growth does not get enough attention (10).

Climate Crisis and the Question of Capital

As far as the issue of the marketplace is concerned, Ghosh begins with how humans are manipulated by a pattern of desire created by the market. The pattern controls and directs the common mass and their understanding of culture (14). Ghosh states that the climate crisis is directly linked with the crisis of culture and thus imagination (*The Great Derangement*12). As far as the domain of culture is concerned, Raymond Williams in his seminal work *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* talks about five keywords; Industry, Democracy, Class, Art, and Culture. The meaning of these terms went through change over time because of social, political, and economic institutions. For instance, the word ‘industry’ and its usage changed during the period of the Industrial Revolution. While the Industrial Revolution’ expanded through the 18th and 19th centuries, similarly, the word ‘industry’ now stood for manufacturing and productive institutions (xi). The climate crisis has a direct link with the institutions of production. The primary aim of such institutions is to create the desire for consumption and this desire, as pointed out by Ghosh, is linked with capitalism.

Reflecting upon the question of crisis concerning culture, Ghosh argues that the understanding of culture is interconnected with the histories of imperialism and capitalism and these histories have shaped the world in such a way that certain expressions of consumption and production are termed as normal (*The Great Derangement*13). Moreover, when the domain of art and literature goes into the mode of concealment, thereby, distracting people from identifying the realities of the current world, then it gives birth to the era of Great Derangement (15). The word ‘derangement’ may stand for disorder, irrationality, imbalance, etc. The scholars of climate

studies have been pointing toward the climate imbalance that prevails today, however, the institutions and establishments are not paying any heed to this narrative because it does not align with their policies concerning capital. As far as the temporal order of modernity is concerned, one could argue that groups located at the centre were always closer to experiencing the changes that indicate a progression towards the future. However, Ghosh points out, the temporal order of modernity has been reversed by climate change. The people and nationsthat are located at the margins are going to be the first ones to experience the destructive future (*The Great Derangement* 84). While the West often talks about the carbon economy of the developing world, it forgets to highlight the years of uncontrollable exploitation of resources that the West indulged with. It is a fact that the history of climate crisis emanates from the empires of imperialism and colonialism. Ghosh in *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* talks about the arrival of the Dutchmen to the Banda Islands, the Indonesian province of Maluku and how the natives were massacred by the Dutch colonisers to be able to take control of the highly-priced Nutmeg. This massacre resulted in the loss of language and culture of the natives as well as the ecology of the islands. Ghosh asks, how it feels when you come across someone who has all the power to bring your world to an end (*The Nutmeg's Curse*15). The colonisers of the West did the same with colonies across Asia and Africa. Ghosh elaborates further, For the Bandanese, the landscapes of their islands did not alone produce mace and nutmeg. Rather it was a land that united humans with plants, animals, events, stories, and histories (*The Nutmeg's Curse* 58). On the other hand, the industrial society always saw land as a commodity.

It had to be used in a way so that continuous revenue could be generated. For instance, Ghosh points out that European intervention brought ecological imbalance in the Americas. The European settlers in these parts started to till the land as per the European idea of productive land. The natural land was seen as wild and a sheer waste of resources. It was by planting and changing the nature of the land, the European settlers started to claim the land (89). However, the land was neither unproductive nor wild (*The Nutmeg's Curse*90). The hegemonic behaviour of the West is embedded in the history of imperialism and colonialism. While the world continues to talk about climate change, it is about time to point out the carbon footprint of military forces (*The Nutmeg's Curse*168). The militarisation of the world is a serious threat to the planet. Intriguingly, emissions related to the military never find a space in international climate negotiations (*The Nutmeg's Curse*200). Ghosh observes that capitalist trade and industry cannot subsist without access to political power and the military (*The Great Derangement*146). The first step to moving towards restoring the planet shall be the de-militarisation of the nation-states, however, this is a distant possibility. At present, the world is highly uncertain, the borders are getting more stringent, there is a refugee crisis, minorities are struggling for their survival, several civil wars are going on and many nations continue to invest an enormous part of their GDP in buying weapons of warfare in the name of safety and security. The issue of security needs to be discussed concerning the carbon economy. Ghosh goes on to establish the fact that some of the machineries of the carbon economy were first adopted by England, one of the leading colonial powers. The adoption of the technologies of the carbon economy may have initiated the onset of the climate

crisis (*The Great Derangement*148). Furthermore, Roy Scranton in his chapter “Carbon Politics” published in *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*(2015) talks about the Agriculture Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Great Acceleration. Scranton argues the Industrial Revolution gave rise to state nationalism, mass social democracy, and industrial capitalism which added to the crisis. On the other hand, the era of great acceleration made the industrial societies shift from coal to oil and gas. This shift meant further decay of the climate (38-39).

While the rich countries continue to contribute to global emissions, it is the poor nations that are most exposed to vulnerability because of the environmental crisis. Ghosh remarks, it is not the middle classes or the political elites of the global south that shall face the consequences of the present climate emergency, it is rather the disempowered and the poor who going to be at the forefront of any disaster (*The Great Derangement*199). While discussing the economic systems Ghosh remembers Guy Deboard who observed that economic systems were not only founded in isolation but were designed to produce isolation. It is the nature of isolation that ends up creating lost individuals who surrender to the demands of the market. The lost individuals view times as something that needs to be capitalised upon, thereby, a signifier of constant progression (*The Great Derangement*106). Ghosh also argues that we are in an era where the body of a nation can no longer be defined by a territorialised human population (193). It is about time to think of non-humans as equal shareholders when it comes to the planet. Ghosh raises the question concerning the place of non-humans in the modern novel. He asks why our ‘serious literature’ does not talk about the climate crisis

and other species (non-human) that are fast disappearing. Ghosh states when humans were changing the atmosphere of the environment because of their carbon footprint, the writings and literary expressions centred on humans and as far as the representation of the non-humans was concerned, it was written in 'outhouses or marginalised genres such as fantasy and science fiction (*The Great Derangement*88). Writings that talked about the non-humans were not taken up seriously. The exclusion and marginalisation of non-human narratives and expressions intersect with the marginalisation of the planet. While, at present, there is a lot more visibility of the climate crisis in the public domain, climate activists are not sure about how certain the big corporations and the nation-states are about the environmental crisis. Western countries do not want to cut down on carbon emissions as it is interrelated with production which is further associated with the economic growth of the nations. Moreover, Ghosh reasons, if the powerful countries were to cut down on their carbon emissions, it would lead to the redistribution of global power (191). The countries that enjoy and exercise control and hegemony would never want to compromise on the power they hold on to.

As writers, artists, intellectuals, and activists are raising the question of global warming, many believe climate change is a hoax and it is a part of a conspiracy or propaganda to destabilise the world. It is a fact that humans, at present, are living in the age of post-truth. It is the era where emotions take over rationality and any narrative of substance and concern gets transformed into a fabricated account. When the act to preserve the planet is seen as an act of publicity by some, then, it is time for a serious intervention. Simon Kerr in his seminal essay, "Climate, Culture and Music: Coping in the

Anthropocene” argues that when everything fails then perhaps it is the art that can save the world. Kerr talks about nature in relation to the European enlightenment. He hints that the project of enlightenment has been a failure as it believed in conquering nature. Moreover, nature was seen as a threat by humans because they did not know much about it and neither could they control it (173). Kerr suggests that humans need new stories to respond to climate change and the creation of new stories and narratives means cultural change (174). Furthermore, stories may help humans in making sense of science as well as the social, economic, and environmental contexts. Stories may decide what we observe, how much we observe something, and how to experience climate change (177). To notice the need of the environment, humans need to break away from the pattern of desire that blinds them as proposed by Ghosh. Kerr elucidates that when uncertainty becomes the new normal then art can offer an alternative to knowing the unknown. Art can allow us to reflect and look back on our actions. Moreover, art can dismantle preconceived notions and open humans to new avenues and new ideas. Furthermore, artists’ imagination may create narratives that may make humans wonder about who they are and what they are becoming in the Anthropocene (181).

Conclusion

As far as the question of art is concerned, Ghosh in *The Living Mountain: a Fable for Our Times* writes the story of Mahaparat, the great mountain. Written as a part of a dream, the mountain shall thrive and remain alive as long as stories are communicated about it, and people continue to sing about it (7). Ghosh goes on to write that soon, the Anthropoi (the

outsiders/settlers/colonisers) get to know about the great mountain and what it imparts. As a result, the Anthropoi want to control the resources of the mountain. Moreover, the Anthropoi imprison the natives (addressed as Varvaroi) and forbid all ceremonies, songs, dances, and stories (16). The restriction on stories and songs acts as a signifier of ecological and civilisational devastation. The Anthropoi believed that their ideas were universal, as they knew how to make use of the mountain, unlike the ignorant natives who treated the mountain as sacred (26). At the end, when the mountain is on the pedestal of destruction, it is the stories and songs that can undo the damage (34). Thus, the need to return to art if we are to make sense of the world. What Ghosh echoes in his work are also pointed out by Jeffrey D. Sachs in “The Deeping Crisis: Failure to act on threats to global sustainability brings the world closer to disaster”. Sachs argues that pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, species extinction, deforestation, ocean acidification, etc. are causing a major threat to the Planet (32). On the other hand, Sagatom Saha and Brody Viney in “How Climate Change Could Spark the Next Financial Crisis” maintain, that developing countries are going to be at the receiving end of the crisis in the future (205). While there are ample accounts to highlight the predicament of our times, however, we need narratives of hope and solidarity to be able to remain optimistic about the future. German historian Christof Mauch in “Slow Hope” maintains that what we need today are histories and stories of transformation and change that talk about the ecological alarm as well as slow hope. Humans need to remember that they are dependent on the planet and they must preserve it for their survival (37).

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Review

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing. *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2007

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Being a part of the postmodern society, we naturally try to cling to the idea of apparent existence by focusing our attention on our cultures, rituals, and languages and creating a sense of belonging within a fluidic whirlpool of reality. But, still, our social identities are being hybridized continuously giving us little chance to find the base of our existence. This problem with the mainstream societal construct can be, to some extent, countered by the tendency for the preservation of cultural identities as it is seen among the tribal communities throughout the whole world. India is a rich hub of indigenous and tribal identities along with their cultural heritage. Starting from Santhals, Mundas, Gonds, Bhils, Aarayans, and Jarawas to Khasis, Garos, and Nagas, our country is holding a wide-ranging diversified existence of ethnic people. When we are talking about their identities, they are continually being preserved through their folktales, myths, languages & rituals. Now, for the continuation of those cultures, literary preservation is extremely important. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, in his book *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*, has tried to compile and preserve the folktales from the Khasi community in the North-Eastern part of India. Dr. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, belonging to the Khasi tribe from the state of Meghalaya, is a bilingual translator, poet, and writer. His

ability to use both Khasi and English as mediums of literary expression has enabled him to project his tribal ethnocultural ideologies to the rest of the world. His book, *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*, is a well-knit compilation of some major Khasi folktales revealing the socio-cultural milieu of the tribe. The Khasis are an ethno-tribal group of Austro-Asiatic origin from Meghalaya, one of the North-Eastern states of India. But they are not confined to Meghalaya; a significant number of Khasi population can be seen in the state of Assam in India and some hilly regions of Bangladesh. Being a tribe, the Khasi culture is enriched with a multidimensional flavor of cultural ingenuity. But, as Khasis myths and folktales are oral in nature by origin, no proper scripts were there to preserve them. Reverend Thomas Jones, a member of the Calvinist Church of Wales, is known as the 'Father of the Khasi alphabet'. Thomas Jones used the Roman script to project the Khasi language in 1842. But the language was first written by a British Missionary named William Carey in the early 19th Century using the Bengali alphabets. It can be said that efforts were made to sustain the Khasi culture through its folktales in literary forms from the colonial era in India. Dr. Nongkynrih is one of those translators who tried to give the Khasi culture a universal approach by translating the myths and legends into the English language. In 1920, Mrs. Rafy published her collection of Khasi legends entitled *Folk-tales of the Khasis* under Macmillan Publication, London. Dr. Nongkynrih's collection, under Penguin Books publication, is far more detailed and chronological. The translation itself is simple and fast-moving with lots of colloquial terms directly connected to Khasi belief. Being a representative of the community, he has been able to successfully reveal the emotions and feelings

of his tribe attached to the folktales. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih has used his experience as a Khais to highlight all the details very carefully, whereas other translators failed to catch the emotional shiftings and driftings of the community as they tried to express the folktales from their own third-person imaginative point of view.

The book starts with the 'Prelude' highlighting the importance of the Khasi people as storytellers. It also clarifies the importance of their God, U Blei, in giving shape to the Khasi community, at the same time how the attachment of the Khasis with their natural surroundings has enabled them to give structural integrity to their social construction. The first story, 'The Seven Clans', deals with the creation of the world out of emptiness. Ramew, the guardian spirit of Earth, and her husband, Basa, were the only two deities created by U Blei. Eventually, Earth was populated with the Sun and the Moon and later with animals and humans. The first story illustrates the rise of the seven human clans and their punishment by U Blei for being corrupted. The Divine Tree, Lum Sohpet Bneng, and Mount of Heaven's Naval have been represented as connecting ladders between Earth and Heaven. Man's corruption has been challenged by the Tree of Gloom or Diengiei and its guardian, the Tiger. Folktales like 'The Lost Manuscript', explore God's doctrine to men. The majority of the myths deal with animal and landscape images and symbols to highlight the connection between the Khasis and their surroundings. Stories like 'The Animal Dance Festival' reveal the purity of the animal world and its influence over the society of man. 'Luri Lura: The Animal Fair', 'The Peacock and the Sun', 'The Death of Lapalang, the Stag' explore some particular animal myths and the representations of those animals in

human society. The Khasis have always respected the physical natural landscapes around them as something divine- places associated with gods and deities. The story of 'Ren and the River Nymph' deals with man's connection with the river whereas 'The Fight between Kyllang and Symper' projects the real physical existence of the two said mountains. 'Ka Nam and the Tiger' and 'Ka Likai' are two folktales where man's emotional connection to nature, and how man's happiness and sorrow are symbolically attached to nature, have been portrayed. *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*, with all its folktales deals with the fact how the Khasis came into existence from the bosom of Nature or U Blei and how their lives are intrinsically intertwined with the environment they live in. Dr. Nongkynrih has retold the age-old stories in English in such a simple and lucid way that it can be easily annotated that the Khasi people have a biocentric outlook toward nature rather than anthropocentric. To him, Khasi stories always start with 'When man and beasts and stones and trees spoke as one...' (Nongkynrih, Preludes, viii) indicating the harmonious biophilic existence of the community. The translator's approach can be also perceived from the perspective of critical posthumanism. It 'calls attention to the ways in which the machine and the organic body and the human and other life forms are now more or less seamlessly articulated, mutually dependent and co-evolving' (Nayar, 19). For example, in the story of 'The Purple Crest', men and animals together were trying to appease the Sun-goddess to protect the world from everlasting darkness. It indicates the fact that man is inside of nature, not outside of it. The very first tale in the book, 'The Seven Clans', deals with the idea in a very integrated way. The unique representation that man or animal cannot maintain

the world individually and alone, but they need each other's support and coexistence, is the crucial core of the folktale. Both men and animals failed to rule the world harmoniously and suffered. Man's anti-God stance and anthropocentric behavior have been shown further in-

“But it is not in Man to be content with happiness alone. Like everything else in this world, he is essentially two-edged, capable at once of great good and great evil.” (Nongkynrih, 5)

Man's rampant exploitation of God's resources and violation of God's doctrine has resulted in the closure of 'the Golden Ladder to Heaven through Sohpet Bneng' and the rise of 'Diengiei' or the 'Tree of Gloom'. Moreover, the tiger has been appointed as the guardian of the 'Tree of Gloom'. The tiger is the symbol of God's wrath and it can be compared with William Blake's symbol of tiger in his poem 'The Tyger' -

“Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?” (Blake, 92)

Thus the tiger has become not only a representation of God's wrath but also a manifestation of nature's revenge on corrupted humankind. A criticism against anthropocentrism can be found in the tale 'The Animal Dance Festival'. The story deals with the arrangement and execution of a festival only for the animals by the Shakyllia (a little bird), the Diengkhied (a porcupine) and the Risang (a squirrel). It is noteworthy to see that in that successful festival, the Monkey and the Owl have been marked as spots of ridicule only because of their human connections. The Monkey or Ka Shrieh, the biological ancestor of mankind, and her gang created a nuisance throughout the whole festival. The Owl or Ka Dkhoh

has been ridiculed by other animals as she imitated the human maidens:

“In all that confusion it was ridiculous to see Ka Dkhoh, the Owl, imitating the maidens of the human race, shuffling through the sand, trying to look dignified, and staring into space.” (Nongkynrih, 23)

The whole animal dance festival along with the Monkey and the Owl can be interpreted as a biocentric reaction against man-centric anthropocentrism. But not all the tales are dealing with the division between man and nature. Some stories are biophilic in nature too. Stories like ‘Ren and the River Nymph’ and ‘The Legend of Ka Pahsyntiew’ have highlighted the inherent desire of human beings to assimilate within nature. Particularly, in the story ‘Ren and the River Nymph’, Ren, the fisherman, falls in love with a river nymph or a deity of the river and vice versa. But as the deity cannot withstand human malice, she decides to return to her natural habitat, the river. Ren also decides to join his beloved in the watery abode. In the story, the broom can be interpreted as a symbol of human malice and broken promise and Ren’s decision can be seen as a man’s desire for assimilation into nature. This biophilic tendency has been perfectly portrayed in the folktale. Tales like these throughout the book have created a hive-like structure to formulate the identity of the Khasi tribe. This translated book of Dr. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is a well-balanced and well-formulated account of the Khasi folktales aiming to preserve their tribal existence. At the same time, the book can become a collective source of eco-ethnic elements found in any tribal community to emphasize ecocritical ideology for general readers and researchers alike.

Easterine, Kire. The Journey of the Stone. Barkweaver Publishers, 2021.

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A notable quality of many Northeast writers is their ability to incorporate the method of story-telling as a narrative style. Once again, Easterine Kire accomplishes this in her latest book *Journey of the Stone* (2021), as she artistically narrates the story of the spirit world and introduces readers to the mysteries and the marvels that characterize Naga tradition, beliefs and practices. The novel is a sequel to Kire's award-winning novel *When the River Sleeps* (2014), which won her the Hindu Prize for Fiction in 2015. The book is divided into forty-four chapters where each chapter is titled with an object, character or place related to the supernatural. The story does not necessarily have powerful political or social agenda like *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) but it rightly establishes Easterine Kire as the custodian and preserver of Naga culture as it documents the rich supernatural beliefs that inform the lived reality of the people.

Drawing from a rich legacy of Naga oral tradition, Kire tells the story of Villie, the Guardian of the Forest who occupies a liminal space between the spirit and the mortal world. Through the eyes of Villie, readers are introduced to the complexities, structures and mysteries that make up the spirit world and the world of the living. Kire paints these two worlds in such a way that certain parallels are drawn where the same

hierarchies and the struggle for power and survival become common aspects of both worlds. In many ways, the spirit world can be seen as a mirror reflection of reality, especially in terms of values and morals. Apart from offering insightful accounts of the supernatural beliefs and practices that make up Naga cultural tradition, Kire also provides insights into the domestic life of the Tenyimia Nagas- their process of courtship, the function of age- group houses, their economic activities, etc.

The novel opens with the death of Villie, a former hunter and the Guardian of the Forest and how he found himself in a “very unusual situation” where he has become “half- spirit, half-man” (15). However, he is told by the village seer that his mortality highly depended on his morality and he could only transform into his physical human form only to serve virtuous purposes. Like how readers follow Villie in his quest for the mystical river and the stone in *When the River Sleeps*, the reader follows Villie on his adventures as he explores the spirit world where he encounters different types of spirits, fantastical creatures, magical places and dark forces which are hidden from mortal eyes. After a brief visit to his village, Villie continues to explore the spirit world and seeks answers from the spirits and creatures that he encountered. His acquired knowledge about the spirits and their different characteristics enabled him to understand the tragedies and strange incidents he had experienced as a human being. For instance, Villie realized that the enchanting girls he met at the Tuesday Market were the river spirit and that it was the Great Dark who is responsible for the death of a girl he once loved. Hence, the narrative is not merely a celebration of Naga folklore and beliefs but a way of validating these beliefs.

In the narrative, the mysterious and magical are blended into the lived reality of the people and not presented as something far removed from the human experience. For instance, the construction of the *kharu* or the village gate largely involves instruction from the spirits and among the many beliefs surrounding the *kharu*, young women are permitted to grow out their hair only after they declare their marriage to the *kharu*. The villagers believed the gate to be “full of spiritual protection” (35), shielding the village from evil spirits. Kire validates this kind of belief as Villie sees, through his spirit eyes, the “a gaggle of spirits assembled outside [the gate]” (34). By interweaving the real and the magical, Kire presents the supernatural as something that enhances and enriches the lived reality. As Villie encounters different types of spirits, supernatural creatures like weretigers and changelings, Kire offers interesting accounts on how these spirits and creatures came into existence and how they are linked to the world of the living. Villie roams around far and wide in the spirit world seeking answers for the many things which he could not understand when he was alive. In chapter 39, during the battle of the heavenlies, Villie asked Alebu, his spirit companion why the spirits hated humans so much even though human beings are weaker in terms of strength and power. Alebu replied that the spirits envy humans because their weakness and frailty have earned them the love and protection of the “Creator- deity”. Here, Kire artistically highlights the beauty of being human in spite of our limitations, weakness and flaws.

In *Journey of the Stone*, Kire brilliantly interweaves the ordinary and the extraordinary, the magical and the real. The demarcating line between these two worlds are almost non-

existent, thus highlighting the fact that the two realms are interdependent. She paints the supernatural as crucial aspects of the lived reality that does not necessarily require concrete physical evidence in order to be accepted as the truth because it is seen, heard and felt by the living. By situating her protagonist in the world between the dead and the living, Kire establishes a connection between the spirit and physical world, thus asserting that the supernatural is also part of our lived experience. Villie's liminal state also highlights the fragility of human life, the power of faith and the human capacity to do good. Kire, then, rightly fulfils Villie's purpose- "to rescue those who are blinded and deceived"- as she provides the lens through which readers may perceive and understand the historical and cultural context in which traditional and supernatural beliefs are embraced and accepted.

Translation

Buda Kirisani
(Originally written in Odia by Durga Madhab Mishra)

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He is thinking.

Buda Kirisani.

A half-burnt cigarette at the ear, a cone of *siali* leaf in the mouth – when sucked in the dark, it emits red fire.

Someone is beating the drum at a distance and the sound of *dung-dunga* is overheard.

Chaita Parab, the spring festival in March-April.

“Oh! Today is Chaita Parab.”

After the Chaita Parab of that day, fourteen other Chaita Parabs have passed in Buda Kirisani’s life like the blink of an eye. Somebody has engraved the Chaita Parab of that day on his bony frame. Every Chaita Parab freezes that frame and emanates a few drops of blood from his body.

When the young Buda Kirisani was not married, he had the strength of an elephant. Nobody could match his strength in the entire forest area. He used to pace from Khairaput to Pindajungar village and come back without resting anywhere – a distance of seventeen miles – as if he was going to the nearby pond for a call of nature.

Buda Kirisani laughs. He looks at his weak bony wrinkled chest and laughs in his sadness. Oh! How loudly the drum beats, ~~and the~~ the *dung-dunga* perfectly matches the beat. Whatever blood remains in his body multiplies fourfold. In his white haired body, there is madness for burnt cultivation. In front of his house the fire lurks beneath the ashes. He doesn't have the strength to take out the ashes. Who is there? Who is there with him? True, he has nobody now.

Buda Kirisani takes a deep breath.

Oh! It's unbearable. Life has become useless. He coughs. Fresh red blood comes out.

"If Lachchami (tribal form of Lakshmi) were there today...", he thinks. Like a torn rope, the veins in his neck release water droplets and they run to the corner of his eyes. He tries to suck the smoke – but meanwhile it extinguishes.

This happened fourteen years ago. Pindajungar to Khairaput is a distance of seventeen miles. He had taken Dangar Jamanu's *Kaudi* (to be translated here in brackets) to Khairaput. It was already twilight when he returned. He wore a dazzling coin on his ear – his payment for bringing it so far. Buda Kirisani would return that day. That day was Chaita Parab.

The Pinda forest on the mountain would resound with laughter. And the four hand red cloth of the women would slip off with their stomach-aching laughter when they danced to the beat.

How could he stay in Khairaput on this big festival day?
Impossible.

In his absence Soma would play the drum dung-dunga. Did he even know playing anything? Buda Kirisani would have to teach him for seventeen years. He had no strength in his body. He became breathless like a pregnant woman after playing the instrument for one hour only.

Buda was walking. The close association of trees had created darkness ahead of him. Forest and darkness blended together as if a student of class three had painted black and blue in patches. Buda Kirisani didn't notice that. If he didn't reach Pindajungar, his village, would he be called a man?

He would go – Surely go.

“Oh mother! Oh mother! *Baria . . . baria...baria.*”

“What happened?”

Something breathlessly came and embraced Buda's body.

Darkness was enhancing.

Buda could not see clearly.

“Who is that?”

“I ... baria.....baria.....Ah...Ah.....”

“Who are you?”

Something dark rushed from the bushes.

“Ah...Ah.....Ah....”

Somebody was shrieking and tightly embracing Buda. Buda's muscles tightened and his blood boiled in excitement. Oh, it's too dark!

From his right arm he took his bow and an arrow from his back and took aim in the blink of an eye. The arrow hurried

towards the dark animal amidst darkness. He could not go further.

Then Buda burnt a stick and started walking further. He was sweating profusely.

The arrow had hit the target. How gigantic were the teeth of that animal. It could have ground four men in a moment. Buda pulled the arrow which had pierced the neck of the animal. Warm blood gushed like stream.

Buda looked at his back.

Who was this?

Lachchami, Lachchami.

Bead necklaces were hanging from her neck through her cleavage. Red, blue, yellow – there were necklaces of all colours. To both sides lie her breasts – strong and well developed. One and a half hand span red cloth covered her waist. Youth was overflowing from her every limb.

Buda made her stand with both her arms. Pitcher of water was lying nearby. He brought water with the folds of his hands and sprinkled on Lachchami's face. He wetted his *gamcha* (a little cloth) and wiped her eyes and nose with it. He blew air into her ears. Lachchami opened her eyes.

“Oh....*baria*....*baria*...”

She fainted again. Once more he sprinkled water and she gained consciousness. She rose and tightly hugged Buda. Buda lifted her and left. The flow of blood from the pierced body of the animal had not ceased.

Baria was dead.

There was wave (a ripple?) of blood on Lachchami's lips and gratitude and shame in her eyes.

"Where have you been *dhangri*, young woman?"

"I had gone to fill water."

"Why did you go alone?"

What would Lachchami say? The danger was already over. She smiled slowly and softly.

Buda Kirisani wiped the sweat of his strong arms and looked at Lachchami for a moment. He asked, "I will go to Pindajungar. Will you go with me woman?"

Lachchami felt a lightning rush in her body. Her face brimmed with redness. Lachchami knew the reason behind the question. This question comes in the life of a tribal young woman once and the tribal man wants a direct answer then and there. There is no scope for answers like "I will think and tell," "I will tell after two days," or "I will ask my father and tell." The man does not listen to such answers and goes his way. Many young women come in the way of a man. He does not pine for one. The tribal woman knows it and knows it well.

She looked at Buda Kirisani for a full moment. Buda Kirisani – he had shining full cheeks and unspoken sparkle in his eyes. He was wearing aluminium bangles on arms, traditional necklace, *gamcha* on head with a tin frame, shining white plastic belt bought from Dumuriput market on his waist, red *koupin*, bamboo-bow on right shoulder, and iron-edged arrows on the back.

Warm blood was still flowing from *baria's* body. Lachchami rushed into Buda's arms. Her youth and beauty

faded before Buda's body. The branch of Pulang tree was burning more furiously. Buda Kirisani held Lachchami – his Lachchami – in his hands. What's this? Buda was crying. Tear streamed from his eyes and all the impurities of the eyes flew (flowed down?) with it.

Mahuri, the musical pipe, was heard more loudly. The sounds of *dhhol* and *dung-dunga* deafened the ears. The night was coming to an end. The young women of the village had become tired by continuous dancing. The moon had faded behind the hills of Pindajungar. Everyone looked tired – the effect of wine was almost over.

The piper Mahuria blew the mahuri. Everyone turned to look at Buda and Lachchami. All the young men and women crowded around them in excitement like flood in Giri river. Everybody understood that Buda Kirisani had brought a *dangri* (young woman) from Khairpat. Selli was warming the dhol near the fire. He started beating it. Buda snatched the dungdunga from Somasisa's hands and started playing. He extended the fan made of peacock's feathers to Lachchami's hand. How can one forget the way Lachchami danced with that peacock fan in hand that day? She was singing and with it overflowed her intense desire, the flood of youth.

Country liquor was cooked. Chicken was arranged and pig was brought from the lane. Goddess Mahuli looked red with sacrificial blood. The Goddess smiled.

“Baba.”

Buda Kirisani looks around. Oh! Perhaps little Lachchami is calling. Lachchami is a four years old child. With walking

stick he enters the house and feeds Lachchami with rice water and makes her sleep. After drinking the remaining rice water, Buda goes out.

He remembered the Chaita Parab of the last year. All other people from his village had accompanied him. He had to kill an animal. Then only Chaita Parab would come to an end. Buda went away. Lachchami had fed rice water to her younger daughter and made her sleep. Then she had gone to collect the leaves. She was pregnant by seven months. After climbing the steep hills of Balidangar, Lachchami felt terribly thirsty. She reached the stream and drank water to her heart's content. She fanned herself with a leaf. Oh! How painful. She felt as if somebody was taking everything away from her.

“Issssh....”

There was smell of rotten rice water in the forest. Lachchami sensed something ominous. She looked at either side, held her stomach with both hands, and then moved forward. She had hardly walked two steps...

“Oh mother.”

A tiger jumped from the other side of the mountain. It took Lachchami and went to the top of the hill in a moment. The still forest trembled with the uproar of birds. Lachchami fainted. Ah! Only if were Buda there.

“Hay! Jump down, jump down.”

“Where?”

All the villagers had chased the tiger for two miles. The mountain ended there. The tiger would be caught.

“Buda, the tiger has taken your wife.”

It was a hill with a height of two hundred feet on both sides and the river valley dividing it in the middle. Buda saw that the top of the mountain was at a distance of fifty feet. The tiger was sitting on that top with Lachchami. How will Buda Kirisani reach there? By the time he would cross the distance, Lachchami would be no more. The tiger was playing with the body of Lachchami. Buda felt an unspeakable pain in his chest.

“Lachchami... Lachchami...Oh Lachchami...”

The forest trembled. Perhaps, Lachchami opened her eyes – those two black and scared eyes. The tiger put its front legs on Lachchami’s neck. At that moment Buda’s arrow pierced through the neck of the tiger. Unerring arrow. The tiger fell down hundred feet from the top of the hill with a raucous sound and Lachchami fell with it. The tiger’s head clashed against the rock of the river. The villagers rushed to the spot. The tiger was dead.

Buda brought water in leaf-cup from the river and sprinkled on Lachchami. The tiger’s nail had torn Lachchami’s neck and the veins had come out. Her heart beat could be heard faintly. Selli fanned her with salua leaves. Buda sprinkled more water. Somasisa drove others to let the air come near her.

Lachchami looked at Buda. There was sign of dedication in those big black eyes. She closed her eyes in Buda’s arms in deep contentment and never opened those again. The beating of the heart stopped for ever.

Durga Madhab Mishra (1929-1997), a noted Odia literary figure, was also an Indian

Police Service officer from 1952 and the first Odia to serve as Director General of the Central Industrial Security

Force (CISF). He was an editor, poet, novelist and translator at the sametime. He won the Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award (1982) for his short story collection Nishadara Nishabda Barana (The Silent Exclusion of the Night).

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