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# The True Place of Writing in Education

Sonia Paul & Celine E.

Communicative competence in English is a prerequisite for professional success in the modern world, with English accepted as the language for international communication. As a result, developing communicative competence in students receives much attention in the higher education sector around the world. In India, apart from the fact that higher education is wholly transacted in English, in recent decades efforts have been stepped up to equip students with the required level of linguistic proficiency in English to aid communicative competence. However, communicative competence is usually equated with speaking competence, and writing competence is not given due importance in the scheme of affairs.

Educators contend that education involves a fair amount of writing, in the form of assignments and examinations, and this would develop communicative competence in writing. But academic writing is often mere memorization and reproduction than self-generated expression of what is understood. Consequently, writing competence shows very little improvement by the time the student completes the educational programme.

Strong writing skills in English are an indispensable part of the young professional's repertoire today, both in terms of career prospects and advancement. The good writer at the workplace is rewarded with more opportunities, while the bad writer may eventually be eased out of the system, unless the organization or the individual redresses the issue. Yet, there is very little acknowledgement of the importance of developing writing skills in the students, while avenues to develop speaking competence abound.

It is a known adage that *'People who write well are more likely to get what they want than people who write badly'*. But writing remains one of the least preferred academic skills anyone would want to devote their

time to. The only time that writing becomes important in academic life is when one has to appear for an examination, and even there the student may get by with reproduction of memorized passages or key terms. In fact, writing remains secondary to speaking, and though it is a crucial factor in academic and professional success, it is a skill which gets overlooked more often than not by the majority.

The main reason for this attitude is the long standing debate on the supremacy of speech over writing, which has raged in the linguistic circles for long. Proponents of this view advocate that speech evolved first and writing later; there are languages without a written code; and that man learns to speak before he learns to write, as the main arguments in their support. In fact, the etymology of the word 'language' adds weight to this argument. The English word 'language' is derived from the Latin word 'lingua', through the French 'langue', which means 'tongue'. Conversely, 'tongue' is an archaic, Anglo-Saxon word for 'language', and the usage still abounds in phrases like 'foreign tongue', 'native tongue' etc. However, the obvious differences between speech and writing also merit consideration (Harris 4, Crystal, 92-95):

1. Spoken language is often inexplicit. The speakers can refer to the people, objects and soon in the shared environment by pointing with gestures or by using 'pointing' words; whereas writers do not share an immediate environment with their readers, and have to make explicit references to people and objects, in order to ensure their writing can be interpreted on its own.
2. Speakers can check whether they are being understood by looking at the listener's expression, by asking or by being directly prompted. Writers have no means of knowing once the text is finished whether the readers will understand the message; they need to anticipate potential misunderstandings and appropriate levels of shared knowledge.
3. In conversations, including telephonic conversations, speakers are encouraged by 'listener markers' such as '*mm...*' and '*yes*', and in live conversations by gestures. The writers on the other

hand have to find ways of motivating themselves to continue creating a text.

4. The interactive nature of conversation requires a great deal of maneuvering, which would not be found in writing. There are special ways of opening a conversation (*Excuse me..., Guess what..., I say...*); of checking that the listener is following (*Are you with me?... Let me put it in another way...*); of changing a topic (*That reminds me..., By the way..., Where was I ?...*); and ending (*Nice talking to you...*). Such strategies are replaced by the conventions of organization of a text (prefaces, summaries, indexes, sub-headings and cross referencing) in writing.
5. Speaking by its very nature is usually spontaneous; therefore speakers may not have the time to plan out what they want to say, and their grammar maybe faulty, often containing rephrasing and repetition. But speakers can also backtrack and fill in information that may have been omitted. Precise sequence is not a prerequisite of effective oral communication. On the other hand, writers have to plan in order to achieve both a sequence and a selection that will lead to effective communication.
6. The vocabulary of everyday speech tends to be informal, and more limited than in writing. The incidence of slang, taboo, or empty nonsense words is higher. A writer makes a greater use of vocabulary, and can afford to ponder a while, and look up a word in the dictionary before using it.
7. Speech makes use of a wide range of tones of voice which are difficult to convey in writing (except for maybe by using typographical effects and punctuation marks). Writing on the other hand, has its own graphic features like color, capitalization etc. Vocal sound effects can never be satisfactorily captured in writing, nor can written effects such as train timetables, graphs and formulae be easily spoken.

At the same time, discourse analysts have come down heavily on the idea that writing is free-standing, whereas speech is context-

dependent. They point out that the transcript of a piece of natural conversation may have references which cannot be deciphered without contextual knowledge or visual information, thus making it 'context-dependent'; at the same time, a broadcast lecture on radio may be explicit, highly structured and self-contained, thereby being 'free-standing'.

While upholding this contention, it is still fairly certain that written language is generally considered more permanent and formal than speech. Written language is also accorded a special status, being used to make something legally binding (contracts), or to provide a means of identity or authority (sacred literature of religions). Its formality also implies that it is likely to be used to provide the standard which society values. Ironically, our speech is often found wanting when judged by the standards of the written language.

Taking all this into account, language teaching becomes a task of momentous proportions because it involves the honing of these two different skills at the same time – along with their counterparts reading and listening. Very often, we focus on one or the other, may be mistakenly assuming that if one is taken care of the other will improve on its own. But this is hardly the case.

Research findings of studies carried out on stroke victims with aphasia, by researchers at John Hopkins University, Rice University and Columbia University, have concluded that writing and speaking are supported by different parts of the brain. They point out that this difference is not restricted to the motor control in the hand and mouth, but is equally applicable to the mechanics of word construction. This means that people with brain damage who cannot speak correctly may still be capable of writing correctly and vice-versa, depending on which part of the brain is damaged and which is not. This finding adds a new dimension to the question of whether catering to speaking competence will address the issue of developing writing competence. It reiterates that these skills need to be developed separately, and developing one will not automatically develop the other. This should prove to be food for thought for educators from school level onwards,

and should also influence our language teaching policy and methodology.

Writing has many benefits, one of the leading ones would be that it can create clarity; conversely, it must be acknowledged that an ill-written text could also create total chaos. Writing helps us to understand material better and retain it in memory longer; it helps us in seeing connections and generating new ideas; it enables us to clarify and evaluate thoughts better; it facilitates easier problem solving; and it helps us to communicate effectively.

The practice of sound writing skills is crucial in building up the repository of information in all domains, information being mainly stored as written texts. The written form also facilitates easy access and retrieval of information, not to mention comprehension. The wisdom of the ages has been handed down to us in writing, and hence it is high time writing is accorded its true place in education.

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# The *Kulastri* and the *Ganika* in Sanskrit Literature

Priya Jose K.

The creator first created recklessness, and then women in imitation of it; by nature nothing is too bad for them to do. Surely this being they call woman is created of nectar and poison, for when she is attached to one she is nectar and when estranged she is indeed poison. Who can see through a woman with loving face secretly planning crime? A wicked woman is like a lotus-bed with its flowers expanded and an alligator concealed in it. But now and then there falls from heaven, urging on a host of virtues, a good woman that brings praise to her husband, like the pure light of the sun. But another, of evil augury, attached to strangers, not free from inordinate desires, wicked, bearing the poison of aversion, slays her husband like a female snake (*Ocean* 141) laments Gomukha, a character in *The Ocean of Story*, popularly known as the *Kathasaritsagara*.

The ornate narrative prose in Sanskrit is generally divided into *katha* and *akhyayika*. Though the poeticians have laid out different rules regarding these two types, they can be classified under the broad category of prose romance. Originally *katha* was composed for the entertainment of common people while *akhyayika* was for the elite (Bhattacharjee 118). According to Indira Viswanathan Peterson the *katha* is “the literary version of the Indian folk tale; it differs from the myths and stories of gods, seers and heroes found in the epics and Puranōas in subject matter and ethos” (111). She defines the *katha* romance as “a picaresque tale wherein the adventures of human or superhuman protagonists are narrated, the primary purpose of the narration being the entertainment of the audience” (112).

A close reading of the *katha* literature reveals the fact that in these stories the identity of a woman is determined by whether she is married or has chosen the profession of a courtesan, thereby electing to offer

her body to the customer who is willing to pay the price. Within the family her powers of reproduction as a procreator and outside it, her capacity to provide sexual entertainment defines her. We have two types of women the *Kulastri* (wife) and the *Ganika* (prostitute).

Manu states that on the wife alone depend duties like: “. . . (the due performance of) religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and oneself” (sic) ( 332). Marriage is the turning point in the life of a woman. Her life can be divided into two stages: before marriage in her paternal home, and after marriage, which is life in the home of her husband with his family. It is very rarely that we find a woman going back to her natal home after marriage. The queens Vasavadatta and Padmavati visit the kingdom of their parents only once after marriage and that too in connection with King Udayana’s conquests. Moreover women who visit their natal home and stay there for some time are showed as forming amorous connections with strangers (*Ocean* 187). There is very little reference to the life of women before marriage in these stories.

The beauty of women is held as the reason for men straying. The story of Suryaprabha is an example. He is engaged in a hoary battle but still finds time to get married time and again to various beauties. The pressure of war does not deter him from amorous pursuits. But one night, the sadness of losing his dear ones in battle prompts him to retire in solitude rejecting the society of his wives. This makes one of his wives to remark that “if he were to obtain a new beauty he would that instant forget his grief” (*Ocean* 73). This leads to a discussion among his wives about the insatiable desire of their husband for new wives. Manovati, one of the wives offers an explanation:

The good qualities of lovely women are different, varying with their native land, their beauty, their age, their gestures and their accomplishments; no one woman possesses all good qualities. The women of Karnata, of Latòda, of Saurashtra and Madhyadesa please by the peculiar behaviour of their various countries. Some fair ones captivate by their faces like an autumn moon, others by their breasts full and firm like golden ewers, and others by their limbs, charming

from their beauty. One has limbs yellow as gold, another is dark like a *priyangu*, another, being red and white, captivates the eyes as soon as seen. One is of budding beauty, another of full-developed youth, another is agreeable on account of her maturity, and distinguished by increasing coquetry. One looks lovely when smiling, another is charming even in anger, another charms with gait resembling that of an elephant, another with swan like motion. One, when she prattles, irrigates the ears with nectar; another is naturally beautiful when she looks at one with graceful contraction of the eye-brows. One charms by dancing, another pleases by singing, and another fair one attracts by being able to play on the lyre and other instruments. One is distinguished for good temper, another is remarkable for artfulness, another enjoys good fortune from being able to understand her husband's mind. But to sum up, others possess other particular merits; so every lovely woman has some peculiar good point, but of all the women in the three worlds none possesses all possible virtues. So kings, having made up their minds to experience all kinds of fascinations, though they have captured many wives for themselves, are forever seizing new ones. (*Ocean* 73-74)

Manovati's explanation mirrors patriarchal justification and endorsement of men's sexual appetite and desire for variety. It is in conformity with the dominant patriarchal discourse. Where man is the ruler, male as well as family honour is linked to premarital virginity and sex is sanctioned only within marriage or concubinage. A woman who has sex with a man other than her husband is termed an adulteress and she has to face the dire consequences of her actions. The punishment includes banishment, cutting off of ears and nose. Ramprasad Das Gupta regards adultery as "an offence against morality and family life or rather against matrimonial rights" (157). He notes that law givers like Manu, Visònu, Bròhaspati and Katyayana prescribe death penalty for women while YajnBavalkya and Kautòilya, lay down that such a woman shall have her ears and nose cut off (159). The punishment meted out to the male partner of the adulterous woman does not involve corporal punishment (*Ocean* 2: 86-88).

But in a polygamous society the notion of a man being unfaithful to a woman does not exist. The reproductive function of the female body, which is motherhood, is given prime importance in illicit relationships. So it is glorified within the bonds of marriage. But female sexuality is viewed as something dangerous that has to be controlled and regulated. Deviant women always posed a threat to dominant patriarchal modes of thought. Unnamed fears about the fickle mind of even so-called virtuous women permeate patriarchal society and there are many stories about them. The assumption is that women are fickle by nature and that they cannot remain constant at any cost. They can go to any great length to take a lover. A brahmana's wife takes a cowherd as a lover and introduces him into her house disguised as a woman (*Ocean* 5: 148). A leper is made the paramour of a merchant's wife locked in a cellar (*Ocean* 5: 149). Even a virtuous queen like Kalyanavati falls prey to inherent fickleness when she falls in love with a common man. But she recovers her senses before she walks "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire" (Mac.2.3.18). She says to her confidante: "Curse on my unstable mind, or rather curse on women, who are like flies that leave camphor and haste to impurity!" (*Ocean* 24) "It is possible that once in a way a man may be so wicked. But females are, as a rule, always such everywhere" answers King Trivikramasena to a question put forward by the Vetalas as to who is the worst, male or female (*Ocean* 6: 190). Such a broad generalised condemnation is recurrent in ancient texts.

There are two polar images of women, one; angelic, chaste and obedient and the other, deceitful and treacherous. By formulating two such opposing ideals the patriarchal society is trying to mould women into the desirable category of the chaste, obedient angel while trying to exclude and ward off the bad woman. Idioms like "though a husband is wicked, a good wife does not alter her feelings towards him" and "Good women have no pleasure of their own; to them their husband's pleasure is pleasure" are used to endorse the ideal (*Ocean* 186; 221). Manu says "though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife"(sic) (Buhler 196). Good women are a rarity while bad women flourish aplenty.

While women in general are unfaithful and fickle, greed is added to her attributes if she happens to be a courtesan. “Providence has created in this world that fair and frail type of woman, the courtesan, to steal the wealth and life of rich young men, blinded with the intoxication of youth” (*Ocean* 5: 5). The stories which caution against the wiles of the courtesan are many. It is said: “a courtesan desires wealth, and not even if she feels love does she become attached without it, for when providence framed suitors he bestowed greed on these women” (*Ocean* 3: 209).

*Dhurvavitòasamvada*, a Bhana play written towards the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century by Isavaradatta makes a comparison between the courtesan and a woman more ordinary by employing the analogy of a chariot and a bullock cart (Kaul 264). What is interesting in this analogy is that both, while being useful to man in that they serve the basic purpose of transportation, differ in the style and comfort quotient.

Sternbach notes that there are about 250 synonyms for the word “prostitute” in Sanskrit literary works (25). Sexuality that is authorised by society enjoys a privileged position. *Ganikas* were an indispensable part of ancient Indian society. They possessed admirable qualities. In the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* the terms *ganika* and *vesya* are both used to designate a prostitute. Vatsyayana mentions a list of sixty four subsidiary branches of learning in chapter 3 of the first book of *Kamasutra* (Tripathi 95-97). Sternbach classifies the sixty-four arts into eleven main groups, that is general education, domestic science, toilet, dressing, music and dancing, fine arts, physical culture, games, art of entertaining, professional training and pet animals (29). According to Vatsyayana, a courtesan who is endowed with good character, beauty, and certain qualities and who distinguishes herself in these arts, receives the title of a *ganika* and achieves a high position among the people. She is approached with a request to teach these arts to princes and princesses. Vatsyayana also encourages any woman who desires to captivate her husband even if he is maintaining a harem of thousands of women to learn these arts (95). He adds that “such a woman (if by misfortune) is separated from her husband or is in dire straits or

is forced to go to another country, she can live happily by means of these arts” (97).

Kautõilya considers the *ganika* to be a kind of government servant and talks about superintendents who took care of them. The duties of the *ganika* as mentioned by him in the *Arthasastra* were waiting at the door, assisting in the play of dice, and supplying betel for chewing, carrying the royal umbrella, the golden pitcher, the fan, stools or footrests and attending to the comforts of the king seated on his royal throne and helping him ascend the chariot (334). This proves that the profession of a *ganika* enjoyed social sanction.

A lot of effort went into the making of a *ganika*. Tawney quotes extensively from Dandin’s *Dasakumaracarita* of the sixth century to show how all female accomplishments were to be found in a courtesan. The courtesan’s mother remarks:

From the earliest childhood I have bestowed the greatest care upon her, doing everything in my power to promote her health and beauty. As soon as she was old enough I had her carefully instructed in the arts of dancing, acting, playing on musical instruments, singing, painting, preparing perfumes and flowers, in writing and conversation and even to some extent in grammar, logic and philosophy. She was taught to play various games with skill and dexterity, how to dress well and show herself off to the greatest advantage in public; I hired persons to go about praising her skill and beauty, and to applaud her when she performed in public and I did many things to promote her success and to secure for her liberal remuneration. (*Ocean* 235)

Sanskrit literary works abound in instances of daughters of prostitutes who became prostitutes themselves. The statement in Damodaragupta’s *Kuttanimata*, that “only daughters are praiseworthy; shame upon those who rejoice in the birth of a son” (qtd. in Sternbach 31) goes against the patriarchal grain of medieval Indian society.

Shonaleekha Kaul avers that the *ganika* appears to represent “a combination of the cultural/intellectual with the sexual.” This

combination is publicly praiseworthy and respectable in the city. She goes on to observe that “the *ganika* represents the harnessing of the concerns of civilization and culture in the service of the instincts of nature and vice versa. Culture seems to negotiate nature (sexual desire) into a form that is socially acceptable” (265). The *ganika* is perceived as mercenary and deceptive, yet desirable and sought after. She is coveted, but only covertly. She is culturally accomplished and celebrated but socially degraded. In the types of the *ganòika* and the *kulastri* that we come across in medieval Sanskrit texts irony is at play. The courtesan who is a public woman is not accused of chasing after men while the *kulastri* is always to be guarded against any misconduct. *Dhurtavitasamvada* states: “males not being easily accessible to them, married women may run after anyone, whoever he might be. But courtesans do not hanker after all men” (qtd. in Kaul 270). It is patriarchal irony that is visibly played out.

Sanskrit literature is full of the recurrent motif of women beholding any special or mundane affair of the city, which usually takes place on the royal road, through the windows, balconies, and terraces of their houses. They are invariably shown crowding these narrow openings. While they can be a part of such happenings only from the limited space of their houses, the courtesans are actively taking part in it. They are on the royal road dancing, that is right in the middle of all action. The *kulastri* is denied the opportunity of public exposure to ensure her state of being rightless while the courtesan has free access to public spaces and events but she has to pay the price of exposure as her basic right of privacy is undermined. She encounters moral stigma and reproach. The outer world is played up against the inner world. The woman occupying the inside of the house, the protected space, as well as the public woman placed outside is equally without rights.

But this distinction of the inside and the outside is breached by daring women. *Kavyas* contain many instances of high-born women indulging in illicit love relationships with outsiders deep within the bedroom or high atop the terrace or the *antahpurah* edifice, or flirting with and seducing men on the streets from their terraces.

Patriarchy has laid down a code of conduct for the wife and the courtesan and they function within limits set by the society. A courtesan is, by definition, greedy and cannot form lasting relationships. A wife, on the other hand, is meant to be eternally faithful to her husband. Surprisingly, the majority of the wives that we come across in these stories are only too eager to form extra marital alliances. This seems to endorse the notion that women are by nature fickle but a close reading reveals faithful courtesans and wives while fidelity to the wife is the rarest of rare cases when it comes to men.

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# Criminals of Perception: Narrative Expiation in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*

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Edgar Lawrence Doctorow (1931 - 2015), the dominant voice of contemporary American Fiction, is no more. He has brought out novels, collection of stories and essays which dwelt on, in Don DeLillo's words, "the reach of American possibility, in which plain lives take on the cadences of history" ("The Bravery of E. L. Doctorow" 1). From *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960), the story of the destruction, construction and re-destruction of a western frontier town to *Andrews Brain* (2014), which explores roots of evil among other things, Doctorow has steadily mounted an assault on the idea of American Self and fermented his fiction with a heady mixture of the historical and the 'real'. This article looks at one of his prominent novels, *The Book of Daniel*, to expand on the creative dynamics of his challenge of history through fictional art.

In 1971 Doctorow's seminal piece of fiction, *The Book of Daniel*, came out. Here the novelist turns to history and fictionalises one of the landmark political events of the American past— the Rosenberg case. The novel depicts the struggle of the Isaacson children, children of the fictionalised Rossenbergs, to come to terms with themselves, their past and their parents. Though it has become an obsession for the writer to explore the American past in his subsequent novels, nothing he ever did afterwards aspires to the same literary height and similar creative fervour. If critical attention is drawn to Doctorow by his *The Book of Daniel*, it is *Ragtime* (1975) which has ensured the real arrival of the novelist in the popular conscience. *Ragtime* the winner of National Book Critics Circle Award for 1976, tells the story of three families against the backdrop of the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century America. In his next novel *Loon Lake* (1980) he again dwells on his, by now, favourite exercise of fictionally revising the American history. It portrays Joe's initiatory journey in the background of the depression American of the 1930s. *Billy Bathgate* (1989) is a bildungsroman of kinds. Adding

one more to Doctorow's little heroes, the novel depicts Billy's initiation years and his involvement with the notorious New York criminal Dutch Shultz.

For Doctorow, aesthetic and ethics mother each other and the abiding passion of his fiction is the indeterminate intercourse between the two. The narrator—witnesses of his fiction are all seen indulging in a course of ethical enquiry in which their examination of the traumatic past leads to the genesis of a fictional text. More often than not what begins as an attempted act of moral investigation crests as an exercise in imaginative reconstruction. Because, for Doctorow, “presumptions of form tend to control presumptions of thought” (“Language of Theatre” 637), and “moral values are inescapably aesthetic” (Trenner 25). The enlightenment that bursts up on his leading characters is of a dubious kind as it only illuminates the dreary slippage of narrative and existence. The imposition of the supposedly ethical on the presumably aesthetic and vice versa manifests itself as not a constructive principle, but an abiding problematic. This discovery attests the intense subjectivity of experience and innate contradictions that ensue between the aesthetic and the ethic. Subsequently it results “in a way of thought recognising that art and literature cannot escape the contingencies of the world” (Vieira 356), just as the world cannot escape the impingement of the fictional. Hence, Doctorow's fiction depicts the contradiction and fissures of existence which attempt to approximate art.

In his cardinal essay on the mechanics of fiction, “False Documents,” Doctorow mentions a reference by Walter Benjamin to a period before “fact and fiction became ontologically differentiated” (21):

The fictional writer is recognized to have discovered the secret the politician is born knowing: that good and evil are constructed, that there is no outrage, no monstrosities that cannot be made reasonable and logical and virtuous, and no shining act that can not be turned to disgrace—with language (“False Documents” 21).

The artistic heroes of Doctorow substitute the politicians and their system in deciphering the alternative yet possible truth. As they mine

into the roots of their legacy, it also turns out to be a venture to unearth their cultural genes too. Caught in their own narrative they seek refuge in the hinterland co-occupied by life and art. The narrative quest energises itself into not merely an affidavit of art, as it simultaneously brings into being a critique of the politics too. The “Language of Freedom” digs in to the “Language of Regime” (“False Documents” 17) only to concede the constructedness of the truth it has started out hunting for, the truth which will authenticate personhood of these protagonists.

There are always contingent circumstances but I would say the constant underlying everything is desperation... We are often filled with doubts as to the values of what we’ve done—but beyond that to the form itself, to the trade...is the larger consciousness, if there is such a thing, advanced a quarter of a tenth of a thousandth of a millimeter? (qtd. in Morris, “System of Knowledge” 455).

The statement manifests the stated dilemma of the author. On the one side the author is worried whether his “trade” can constructively contribute to the expansion of the “larger consciousness,” while doubting whether there is anything as such, beyond the subjective realm. Interaction of impulses of this nature evolves into and results in the narrative consciousness, which is nothing but the play of consciousness, consequent to the antagonistic symbiosis of the self and the wor[l]d. The narrative is informed by this paralyzing play of contrary pulls of a consciousness that rocks and wrecks any convincing reification. All the more so since Doctorow preaches the linking of the political and the individual, the social and the artistic. Doctorow seems to conclude that the territory one possesses is ultimately one prescribed by language and so the limits of individuation are those prescribed linguistically. Because language is one of the means with which we (try to) make sense of ourselves, they all explore “to what degree the instrument changes or creates the phenomena it reports” (Trenner 23). In the terms of John Barth, the process and the product always threaten to trade places and the medium becomes the message.

Doctorow has stated that to a great extent his novels are “about writers of one sort or another, all of them are *kunstlerromane*” (qtd.

in Friedl and Schulz 191). They are speculative and hold on to their faith in narrating their past into legitimate lucidity. They undertake a quest for self-knowledge, more often than not akin to romantic flight. These artist/writer characters are urged to composition/creation as a part of the said quest for identity. They are desperate, dissatisfied and deluded since the rationale for writing is often personal/social, not artistic and so their tryst with art is always coincidental. They all narrate either to write away the personal crisis resultant of a social failure or to rid themselves of the legacy of failure they have inherited. Even when the act leads to an epiphanous encounter with creativity, it manifests in such a way that it also presents the limitations of the art(ifice).

All the protagonists of Doctorow under scrutiny are caught in the intersections of the personal and the social, in the coupling of the factual and fictional. "History shares with fiction a mode of mediating the world for the purposes of introducing the meaning, and it is the cultural authority from which they both derive that illuminates these facts" (qtd. in Trenner 24). Mediations of language between the person and his past proceeds to creative levels of interactions, leading to a fusion of "the figures of historian and artist in a single consciousness engaging in a struggle with itself" (Harter and Thompson 24). The explanations which they undertake to redeem their problematised past are one in which the bounds are hazy and shifting just as the voice and the context are often chimerical. History collapses into fiction as an effort is made to authenticate it.

In the critical debates triggered by the publication of the politically significant *The Book of Daniel*, the chief question concerns the ending of it. The question is whether the novel subscribes to the artist vision of Daniel or the political one it begins with. The sharp division among critics (Morris 80) Doctorow is bound to treat as the triumph of his novel since he wanted fiction to acknowledge what he felt to be the inherent ambiguity. The interests of the protagonist- the individual, the aesthetic and the social-progress in an inversely proportional way in the novels. The texts begin by laying signification on the ethical but as it progresses the ethical either gives way to the aesthetic or they fuse in such a way that it becomes hard to comprehend the borders. In one

way or another, all the conclusions of Doctorow's fictional writing have been resolutions of the artistic kind. This has been the fictional device employed by the writer to enlarge the scope of his enquiry from the personal to the social and further to the questions of knowing. The Book of Daniel dwells on the problem against the background of the trial of Rossenbergs in America on charges of spying. The Book of Daniel is involved with the specifically historical episode of the Rosenberg trial and Daniel is caught in the complex labyrinth of self and society, narrative and ideology.

"False Documents," Doctorow's fictional manifesto, refers to the abiding interest criminal trials possess in the historical consciousness:

Criminal trials in the courts of law where society arranges with all its investigative apparatus to apprehend factual reality, using tested rules of evidence and accrued wisdom of our system of laws, declare the guilt or innocence of defendants and come to judgment. Yet the most important trials in our history, those which reverberate in our lives and have most meaning for our future are those in which the judgment is called into question: Scopes, Sacco and Vinzetti, the Rosenbergs. Facts are buried, exhumed, deposed, contradicted, recalled. There is a decision by the jury and, when the historical and prejudicial context of the decision is examined, a subsequent judgment by history. And the trial shimmers forever with just that perplexing ambiguity of a true novel (23).

Till now there is no definitive version of the story which succeeds in bringing out "the truth" of the event and hence, "[a] close and contextualised reading of the Rosenberg story necessarily confronts the politics of writing and reading" (Carmichael xiii). In other words, such criminal trials of standing reputations are those in which there is room for differing perceptions. As Harpham adds, "the undecidability of such trials doesn't merely resemble a novel; it opens up a space that virtually produces the novel, a space in which narrativity takes precedence over referentiality" (82-3).

The hub of Daniel, the protagonist's pursuit of reality is knowing, not the known: a Ph. D scholar writing / attempting to write of/off the

trauma of his dead parents when he is supposed to be doing his thesis. While Blue, the protagonist of his first work, enquires into the root of evil in general, Daniel's investigation is made apparently easier as he is looking into a specific criminal charge, evil of a specified kind. At the bottom Daniel realises and Doctorow illustrates that whatever be the target of the exploration, through the medium of investigation called narrative which tools language, truth can only be approximated. This is because, as the exploration of an art gets spilled into its relatives and subsidiaries, the search for the motive gets stuck in the medium, there by mystifying an already elusive quest.

Central to the understanding of the artistic nature of the thesis of Daniel is the label he uses to depict himself, "criminal of perception" (BD 44). It is a term in which the warring tendencies and impulses of the writer can logically reside, as is pointed out by Harter and Thompson. In addition to that, if the term is to be analysed in terms of the information the novel delivers, it signifies the highly impressionable psyche of Daniel. The agony of Daniel consists of his inability to compose a logical resolution out of the impressions he stores up in him. He is denied the ability to sift the right from the wrong. The desperation that Doctorow feels to be an ally of literary creativity is evident in the struggle of Daniel.

The Principal agony of Daniel in *The Book of Daniel* is in articulating himself. "IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER?" (BD 27), Daniel enquires himself. As he states in connection with his analysis of post-war American situation, the agitation cannot be extinguished immediately, "the mind and the heart cannot be demobilized as quickly as a platoon" (BD 33). This state of alertness in which he continues incapacitates a resolution though it enables a recording, however fragmented it may be. There are many moments in the novel when he dithers, thinking of his decisions to get the matter out of his heart. But he does not want to keep it in his heart as "the only thing worse than telling what happened is to leave it to the imagination" (BD 72). At the end neither suppression nor expression delivers Daniel since the psychic agitation handicaps his ability to differentiate and deliver.

True to his artistic status, Daniel feels imprisoned/governed by images:

I worry about images. Images are what things mean. Take the word image. It connotes soft, sheer flesh shimmering on the air, like the rainbowed slick of a bubble. Image connotes images, multiplicity being an image. Images break with a small ping, their destruction is as wonderful as their being, they are essentially instruments of torture exploding through the individual's calloused capacity to feel powerful, undifferentiated emotions full of longing and dissatisfaction and monumentality. They serve no social purpose (BD 83-4).

Complex, incongruous and bizarre, the quote drives home the dilemma congenital to the artistically inclined activists of Doctorow. Being the bearer of a highly sensitive psyche in which multiple images of heterogeneous kind rain on, he cannot help communicating the torturous potential of images. Images operate in the space opened up between a word and its meanings by virtue of languages' innate polyphony. An image can herald the entry of rhetorical functions of language, sometimes at the expense of the logical ones. As Gayatri Spivak has stated in another context, "there is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity. If we emphasise the logical at the expense of its rhetoricity we remain safe" (359). Daniel can't and he decries the infinity that the images attempt to impose on his mind. Multiplicity besieges him upsetting his quest for definitive knowledge.

The locus of Daniel's narration is not on the known, but the knowing. Yet, it would be more precise to state that the thrust is on the difficulty of knowing. Apart from the inability to feel differentiated emotions, the other root of his suffering is the element of repetition evident in writing as in life. "To write, for Daniel, is to be condemned to return and to repeat; repetition permeates his narrative" (Morris 88). In the sequential nature of language, there is the necessity of return, which Daniel can endure as his is already a return to the American past, digging for the truth he can rely on. Repetition, as in Doctorow's *Ragtime* and *Loon Lake*, assumes many forms in the novel—from those which are indicative of the enraged psyche of Daniel, almost bordering

on the insane, to those that operate, paradoxically, as a structural principle, with methodical jumbled writing in between. For instance Daniel writes as he muses on the definition of “crime and treason”:

IF THIS BE TREASON MAKE THE MOST OF IT!

If this bee is tristante make the most of it

If this be the reason make a mulch of it

If this brie is in season, drink some milk with it

If this bitch is teasing, make her post on it

If this boy is breathing make a ghost of him (BD 184).

It is the discussion of the constitutional definition of crime and treason for which his parents were executed that prompts this statement from him. The progressive disintegration through repetition of a logical utterance reflects not only the agitated psyche of the writer. It also implies the collapse of language under burden of thought. Still repetition can't be helped as Daniel seeks justification of either his parents or the state through any which vent possible. But words either lapse into gibberish or become traps of textuality. Rather than authenticate one's personhood, it only aids the feeling of eternal duplication of the self-sought. It attests the disability of writing. There are instances of repetition which fortify the structural pattern of the novel too. Many of the sudden transitions of the thematic kind, though repetitive, belong to this group.

Om om om omm omm o mom ommmmmm

Ohm ohmm ohm ohm ohmm ohmmmmmm

What is it that you can't see but you can feel

What is it that you can't taste and can't smell and can't  
touch but can feel

Ohm ohm ohm ohm ohm...(BD 242).

This poem follows Daniel's discussion of the apparent motivations of Selig Mindish in betraying Paul and Rochelle, his parents. A passage which debates the guilt and innocence gives way to a passage oscillating between ohm and om—a world of spiritual power and that of electricity.

This incantatory, seemingly obscure limerick refers to the power of the unseen and reflects the incapacity of Daniel to render transparent the schism and unify himself through his narrative.

The multiple endings of the novel are an apt summation of the elusive quest for truth it has been involved in and it once again evidences the principle of repetition. In addition to the admission of the truth of the situation as “equitability of evil” (BD 291), Doctorow makes the structure too a vehicle of the same plurality. A narrative which intends to confront and conquer “the tyranny of meaning” (Carmichael 7), admits the inconclusive nature of the meaning-making language. For Daniel, like for Saul Bellow’s Moses Herzog, “if the unexplained life is not worth living, the explained life is unbearable too” (Herzog 392). He agonisingly perceives that “the speaking subject is a fragmented entity produced by the act of speaking” (Zweig 146). As Harpham puts it:

The search for a narrative mode that will secure the truth has led Daniel to investigate the problematic of meaning in narrative and has brought him to the brink of a disabling conclusion: that the poles of narrative are respectively, monstrous and boring, meaningless and all too meaningful and the narrative is only the crossing of two types of misrepresentations (85).

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# **Towards a Para-theory: Life-writing, ‘Autobiografiction’ and Cultural Memory**

Meera M. Bhagavathy

The history of human thought spins out a sprawling cartography of the metaphysics of ‘life’ and the art/act of writing. Battling in this tumultuous sea of thoughts, life-writing has almost become a metaphysical conceit, the elements “yoked with violence together”. With endlessly proliferating forms of life and their representation, an innovative, accommodative paradigm is imperative to read the fascinating literature that surrounds us. “Life-writing is a contentious term. It covers a wide range of texts and forms. Indeed, its contentiousness arises at least partly because it seems, to some, to cover too many” (321)-thus remarks Marx Saunders in his essay “Life-writing, Cultural Memory and Literary Studies”. The statement instantly brings together one of the consistent debates in the discipline of Life-writing.

The paper attempts to critically engage with Max Saunders’ reflections on the genre of life-writing, its making and unmaking, reading and re-reading and its constant exodus from all de-limiting signifiers. The paper explores the idea of “autobiografiction” put forward by Saunders and its relevance in the arena of contemporary criticism on life-writings. It also tries to give a brief overview of his use of the concept “cultural Memory” in relation to the ever expanding network of life-writing. The aim is to highlight the importance of a more accommodating critical canvas both as a reader, scholar, academic and researcher while confronting concepts which transcend categorization and definitions.

Saunders is admittedly not a well-known figure in the theory circle. However, this is in no way a criterion to position the scholarship of the critic; Saunders’ thought as Peter Nicholls suggests, “earns its volume by the luminosity of its readings”(5). The three main strands of Saunders’s current and projected research, which frequently

intertwine, are the development of Modernist writing; in particular the literary networks associated with Ford Madox Ford, and the relation between Modernism and the First World War; life-writing, with particular emphasis on the relation between auto/biography and fiction from 1870-1930; and literary impressionism and its relation to Modernism.

“Life-writing, Cultural Memory and Literary Studies” (2006) and *Self Impressionism: Life-writing, Autobiografiction and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2012), contain his arterial paradigms on life-writing. Modernism is often characterized as a movement of impersonality; a rejection of auto/biography. But most of the major works of European modernism and postmodernism engage and experiment in very profound and central ways with questions about life-writing. Saunders confronts life-writing in this phase of uncertainty and scepticism and offers an embryo of ideas awaiting animation.

Saunders essay “Life-Writing Cultural Memory and Literal Studies” ingeniously maps the geneology of life writings from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The nineteenth century was the heyday of life-writing. It was followed by a strand of life-writing that celebrated the representative man or woman exemplified in the writings of H.G. Wells and Stuart Mill. The post-war period brought with it new forms of writing and subjects. He traces briefly the various permutation combinations that the genres of auto/biography, history, fiction and testimonials enter into by providing examples of specific texts (Siegfried Sasoon’s *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, 1930) as well as well-known works (such as Boswell’s biography of Jonson could well be Boswell’s autobiography). He clearly identifies a shift from a generic fusion (which was simply that of auto/biography) to that of a generic confusion towards the turn-of-the twentieth century which persists in the twenty first century. The generic confusion does not by any means invalidate the concept of genre.

Saunders finds that four critical schools of thought namely, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism and Poststructuralism intervened consecutively in the fate of this area of study; while psychoanalysis changed the way of interpretation of a life narrative (as analytical case histories), Marxism condemned auto/biographies as propagating

bourgeoisie ideologies and false consciousness when in reality it actually provided access to material to both historians and sociologists on class struggle. While Feminism rehabilitated life-writing by reviving and producing women writings, Structuralism and Poststructuralism did not subscribe to the “tyranny” of the author figure and being paranoid of the fixation of meaning, constantly remained sceptical about the signifiers of such narratives. From Barthes to Foucault, the author figure travelled from a subjective space to that of a discursive space. Both pointed towards a utopian way of reading texts without affiliating to the author.

In the book, *Self Impressionism, Life-writing, Autobiografiction and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2012), Saunders explores the ways in which modern writers from the 1870s to the 1930s experimented with forms of life-writing - biography, autobiography, memoir, diary, journal - increasingly for the purposes of fiction. He identifies a wave of new hybrid forms from the late nineteenth century and uses the term ‘autobiografiction’ - to provide a fresh perspective on the turn-of-the-century literature, and to propose a radically new literary history of Modernism. Saunders offers a taxonomy of the extraordinary variety of experiments with life-writing, demonstrating how they arose in the nineteenth century as the pressures of secularization and psychological theory disturbed the categories of biography and autobiography, in works by authors such as Pater, Ruskin, Proust, ‘Mark Rutherford’, George Gissing, and A. C. Benson. He goes on to look at writers experimenting further with ‘autobiografiction’ as Impressionism turns into Modernism, juxtaposing detailed and vivacious readings of key Modernist texts by Joyce, Stein, Pound, and Woolf, with explorations of the work of other authors - including H. G. Wells, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, and Wyndham Lewis - whose experiments with life-writing forms are no less striking. The book concludes with a consideration of the afterlife of these fascinating experiments in the postmodern literature of Nabokov, Lessing, and Byatt.

Saunders borrowed the term ‘Autobiografiction’ from Stephen Reynolds. He discovered it in a surprisingly early essay of 1906 used

it to describe the literary tendencies of the modernist writings, precisely from 1870-1930. Saunders remarks “autobiography has become the quintessential postmodern genre (if it is a genre, which postmodernism cannot know)...” However, he is well aware of the “radical ambiguity” of the term ‘autobiography’. It can either mean a mode of writing distinct from other forms (drama, poetry, fiction, and so forth) which solely narrate the story of one’s life or it can be used to connote something about other forms. (*Self Impressionism* 4). Saunders genuinely feels that criticism has not adequately described the relations between modernism and life-writing(12); and how the modernist writers engaged with the fictional possibilities of life-writing-forms(11); and he makes a synthesis of autobiography and fiction into ‘autobiografiction’(13). The concept is not a “retrospective imposition of a specialized critical jargon” but expatiates an earlier form of literary hybridization, an exposition that the writers were aware of the generic fusion and metamorphosis (8).

‘Autobiografiction’ is the system of self-representation whereby autobiography and fiction engage themselves in a mutually exclusive yet profoundly interdependent way to produce myriad forms of life narratives. In what seemed to be an attempt to break away from an episteme of great biographies and subjective realities (Victorian period), to an objective aesthetics; from the grammatology of personality to that of impersonality (‘high modernism’), Saunders sees a continuum rather than a fissure, a continuum from Realism to Impressionism through Modernism and Post-modernism. This continuum is the umbilical cord of life-writing.

Saunders ingeniously argues that more than a negation of life-writing, modernism rather, experimented with, returned to it, and engaged with it dialectically in order to assimilate and transform it (*Self Impressionism* 22). The host of literary techniques employed by the modernists to debunk the traditional forms of life-writing such as masks, personae, unreliable narrators, heteronimity, pseudonimity and their engagements with psychoanalysis, can perhaps be understood not as abandoning the enterprise of life-writing altogether, but an inevitable/unconscious attempt to seek new ways of accomplishing the same (24). The critique in itself then becomes its continuum. The “autobiographi-

cal” became a functional element both in terms of the form and the content in the modernist experiments of writing. Auto/biografiction explodes the inherent artifice of subjectivity whereby autobiography began to be shadowed by the alter ego of scepticism (20). Saunders opens us to the astounding variety of auto/biografictions through the analysis of the work of Aesthetes, Social realists, Impressionists, Modernists and the Bloomsbury group. This discourse of personality and impersonality seeping into each other displays a significant performative dimension. The potency of performance is the pulse of Saunders’s paradigm.

The performance itself is not a novelty as it has been theorized much, but that the performing self- the self as always in the making rather than a transcendental made-existed even before the Deconstructionist critique is the underlying idea. He analyses the modernist writing of autobiography as a performance unfolding; “as an interpretative process rather than the delivery of a known quantity, or an instantaneous epiphany” and hence “the life-writing shifts from the quest to record an essence to an attempt to transcribe a performance.”(*Self Impressionism* 515). The concept points to our cognizance of the sense of a ubiquitous role-play in all our existential acts whereby “creativity and fictionality are introduced into the heart of the autobiographical project” (21). Artifice inscribes authenticity. The fact that he traces the rhizomatic resurgence of life-writing through a saga of responses to the same, that modernist experiments in writing “colonize” life-writing, and post-modernism unmistakably thematizes the very act of writing lives and its hermeneutical debates, places the discipline in a shifting epistemological perspective. In fact, auto/biography and auto/biografiction could in themselves be an epistemology.

The ‘gravitational pull’ between autobiography and fiction falls into four phases as he suggests- 1) the nineteenth century which required life-writing to be a testimony test of sincerity and authenticity. 2) the turn of the century which witnessed a proliferation of the fictionalization of the autobiographical. 3) Modernism which out rightly claimed art as immune to the autobio/biographical and 4) the post-modernist splash of the meta-auto/biographical and the meta-fictional (21). The ‘self’

here becomes at once the sceptre and the spectre; the sceptre which initiated a quest soon turns unintelligible and writes itself to become haunting. But this bedazzling image procures its own existence as writers persistently sought new codes and modes to express it.

The relevance here is the nature of the taxonomy of forms of life writing that Saunders puts forward. The taxonomy may be delineated in two ways. On one hand a temporal classification which analyses the different time-frames in the genesis of 'autobiografiction' and thereby gives the very impetus to life-writing forms. And the other on the basis of the epistemological meanderings that seemingly rejected the aesthetics of life-writing but in reality embraced it through alternate 'regimes of truth'. This two fold taxonomy enabled him to project that time frame in literary history, precisely the pre-modernist and modernist itself as being under-theorized in life-writing. Saunders also seems to suggest that any critique or even a genuine understanding of the critical purview regarding life narratives should include these temporal networks. They should not be reduced to any theory of innocent ignorance or as a product of the episteme, but rather a struggle, an "effect", of an amazed articulation and interpretation of what they confronted.

Though in the outset Saunders states his methodology as primarily formalist, his reflections are highly metaphysical in nature. His meditations fall into three inter-connected strands. Firstly, the crucial distinction he makes between autobiography and the autobiographical- the former denoting the form and the latter denoting the nature of autobiography. It is the latter which actually is filtered through the shifting epistemes. Secondly he identifies the 'autobiographical' as profoundly paradoxical and a schizophrenic term (*Self Impressionism* 522). Thirdly he argues "autobiografiction" to be a system which locks both auto/biography and fiction together in order to keep them apart. A meta-performative mode of indulgence from the autobiographical, in which both autobiography and fiction travel towards and away from each other on their frontiers emerges from his readings. Autobiography and fiction are not two separate spatial entities but dynamic; 'autobiografiction', therefore, is a movement (*Self Impressionism* 526).

Max Saunders effectively drives home this idea of the inseparability of fiction and auto/biography by using the phrase ‘parallax gap’ coined by Žižek. It metaphorically describes the relationship between ‘two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible’ (526). With a similar theoretical vein he argues that “auto/biografiction is the effect of this two-way traffic: a parallax shift from auto/biography to fiction, and back again.” (527). In short, auto/biografiction is not the target towards which auto/biography moves, or eventually becomes, but it is the motion itself. ‘Autobiografiction’ is not a “border country” but the action of border crossing, the present participle (527).

Another concept which has paramount significance in the critical oeuvre of Saunders is the idea of cultural memory and its connection with life-writing. In his essay “Life-Writing Cultural Memory and Literal Studies” Saunders delineates life-writing as a source of cultural memory rather than reading them for authentic subjective experiences and the nuances of selfhood and identity. He argues that life-writing is one form which perpetually contests the generic distinctions and therefore such an approach towards it will make room for a larger canvas which may accommodate more concepts and modes of writing. The aim of the essay is not to suggest in any way to consider life narratives as memory texts for historical facts, but to advocate a reading of life-writings as both products and sources of culture and memory.

The benefit of such an analysis is that it provided him with a missing link that the historical and the critical perspectives bypassed-memory. Saunders drives home the point that any act of writing, be it subjective, objective, historical, critical, or personal, precludes the act of memorizing; the operational metaphor here is that of remembering. If auto/biography is a mode of reading as Paul de Man argues (53), or the concept of criticism as autobiography as Wilde suggests in the preface to the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it could very well be a mode of remembering as well. The connection between culture and memory is a paradox, one of mutual migration and conceptual overlapping (Eryll 7). This understanding gave rise to the concept of “cultural memory” which is a ceaseless interplay of different levels of

memory (social, individual, medial, material) and different mediations of culture (social, political, individual, historical) (Eryll 12).

Memory Studies on the other hand is recent, it had its inception in the early twentieth century (Nunning and Eryll 1). A collaborative research approach which takes into account the intersections of both these fields of enquiry can make substantial contribution towards literary studies too. But these interstices should not be studied without the profound understanding of even the smallest nuances of culture. The approach from the vantage point of memory is indeed a leap which would enable us to comprehend and reason out the complexities of generic fusions and their myriad *modus operandi*. It is time we do not treat life-writings naively as first hand narratives.

Life-writings according to him could include any literary texts- a poem, a fiction, a play and even the unpublished materials such as diaries, memoirs and testimonials. The point is to read them as literary texts, filtered through the sieve of cultural memory. Such a critique favours and fosters both literary studies and culture studies. Thus he reasons for an interdisciplinary approach to study concepts and their myriad forms which are and would be multidisciplinary by nature.

The cultural memory approach is a critical saviour of life-writing in its dwindling status, tossed between the anti-foundational and foundational theoretical approaches. Saunders writes,

One advantage of the concept of cultural memory is its ability to hedge its bets on this contest, since it is concerned not with actual events but their cultural repercussions; not with actual memories but with memories as representations, and with representations of memories. (“Life-Writing” 328)

Although a renaissance was discernible both in practice and criticism of Life-writing in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, it did not include cultural memory studies.

Saunders’s conclusion is an exhortation to break away from the compartments of generic distinctions but at the same time accommodating more forms of life narratives into the theoretical framework of

cultural memory which actually creates such possibilities. He calls for a theoretical consolidation of the output of this approach as “auto/biotheory”(329). which may actually question the hierarchy of texts and move towards an inclusive strategy. In short, the author is concerned with those literary works which are most obviously concerned with cultural memory: letters, diaries, auto/biographies, memoirs, etc. However, he also suggests that life-writing can extend beyond these genres and that individual and collective memories can be found in almost all literary and non-literary texts.

The dissemination of the self, which resists vehemently to be reduced to a unified whole, has impressed its myriad forms in all kinds of writing. It has effectively challenged the monopoly of a single subject as the criteria for the genre of life-writing which invites different modes of writing into the canopy of the term ‘Life-writing’. Such a reconstruction of life narratives was possible when writing was conceived of as products and producers of cultural memory.

Saunders’s attempt to push the boundaries of the genre is admirable. The pivotal point he tries to make here is the inter-textuality of life-writing and the inter-textuality of memory. Under this umbrella term, prison memoirs, personal diaries, testimonials, paintings, graffiti, tattoos, cartoons and many more textual sites of memory converge. Memory which is both individual and collective, inevitably overlaps and seen in this way, Saunders’s assertion that life-writing in the post-modern eon seems to preserve the Emersonian concept of “individual universalism” seems right (“Life-writing” 325).

Max Saunders’s works out his arguments using the logic of an insightful unsettling. He constantly problematizes his arguments as they progress but provides his own brilliant insights into such problems and comes up with the advantages of such unsettling. For instance, he writes,

Saunders traces the various phases of life-writing through a historical dimension and then syntagmatically places it with the theoretical paradigms which were mutually responsible for the viewpoints generated on the discipline of life-writing. Such a genealogical mapping provided him with conclusions which placed the future of the

study also in a syntagmatic plane which is inviting rather than rebelling or displacing. Thus, by taking into cognizance the concept of cultural memory in our reading of life narratives, our conclusions do not in any manner produce a counter-perspective (that is to say, a counter memory or a counter life history) but a para-perspective which ensues para-memories and enables us to document lives that existed or exist simultaneously which need diverse approaches for their enquiry. Saunders critical thought highlights the diversity of approaches that contemporary theory must address and accept.

What is remarkable is the fact that in spite of his accommodating critique, he is still able to take a strong position with regard to the study of life-writing and cultural memory. Saunders elucidates that the position of Life-writing studies should be placed in the framework of Cultural Studies and Memory Studies. This obviously calls for an indigenous aesthetic to be developed within a particular culture and not subscribe to generalizations. The theoretical ramifications of this understanding are crucial for India, because of its cultural diversity. Also, such studies have to account for the dynamics of both culture and memory. 'Life-writing in India' would be a prospective venture if we take into the commonalities within the various cultures in the country and describe it as Indian culture. For instance, ancient Indian culture did not believe in the notion of the self. The Hindu scriptures preached the complete self-surrender to God. Anonymity was a favourite of the writers of this period. These writings are also part of life-writing but they do not foreground any individual subject but highlight 'life' in its various aspects (the hymns and the Vedic scriptures).

Of course Max Saunders writes from the Western cultural and theoretical context. But his essay is significant for the numerous pointers it carries for literary critics and theorists alike. Saunders initiates an enquiry, a critical phase of thinking, which may be called "cultural remembering". Placing life-writing in the network of culture and memory is not to place it as the next theoretical canon, instead, it is a critical trigger which should hopefully initiate some game changing responses from theoreticians across the world. The point is not to apply or adopt the critical thought put forward by him, but to actually adapt

the paradigm to the specificities of culture, history and modes of remembering; to use it as a road map, and explore our own paths and even modes of travel in research.

If we place Max Saunders in the current theoretical and academic scenario, it would be clear that he is not only not seminal but also poorly acknowledged by critics. His significance lies not in the thought paradigm that it suggests, but by the fact that it can stimulate varied and breakthrough theoretical ramifications for future studies in the area. Where many feet tread, it becomes a path. The paper calls for many scholarly feet to tread upon the insightful triggers activated by Saunders's speculations and pave diverse pathways to diverse destinations. Because, what the present systems of knowledge need is parallel radiating researches than those which converge to a master theory.

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# **“Womanhood”: Images in Post 9/11 Afghan Fictional Narratives**

Dona Elizabeth Sam

There has always been an existing monolithic homogeneity for the category of Muslim women/Afghan women, most often erasing their religious, ethnic, class and educational differences. Post 9/11 contributed to this in amplifying the conditions of Afghan women and thus becoming an intriguing topic for the West. Rescuing the Afghan women, being one of the major justifications for war against Afghanistan, there emerged a time when, gradually the whole world reduced the Afghan women to be encompassed by a single piece of clothing, the burqa. With much introspection, proving contrary, some authors have presented kaleidoscopic women characters; diverse, flexible and hybrid.

As an Iranian/German film-maker, Siba Shakib provides an insight into the lives of women in Afghanistan through her *Samira and Samir* (2005). Shakib's narrative, not providing any specific time frame, except for the fact that it is a time of destruction and war, presents the day to day life of a commander's family. Samira, the protagonist of the story is born as the daughter of a brave commander and his wife Daria in a land where the first born is valued only if it is a male. Samira's birth is looked upon with much dismay by her commander father and thus she is brought up as a son; concealing her identity to the world. With no rightful heir to his inheritance and position in the mountains, the commander finds peace in bringing up his daughter as Samir (instead of Samira). Shakib, in her narrative, presents a tribal mountainous area where men rule and women obey. With the commander's death, Samir(Samira) becomes the head of the family and follows her father's steps, riding horses, fighting and shooting. In considering the author's representation, it is striking how Samira is portrayed to be courageous and bold only in the false identity that she procures. Samira's disguise entitles her to believe in her strength, the right to fight other men and also support her mother. This allows for one's contemplation of whether

she would have exercised this freedom if she were brought up in her true identity. Shakib's depiction of Samira highlights the fact that the women of Afghanistan are competent when circumstances demand. Though they are widely viewed as the colonised in all respects, it is discernible that women are nevertheless capable of proving themselves. Interestingly, it is this created identity which serves as the means for Samira's emancipation; saving herself from danger. The narrative is also suggestive of the fact that other women of the tribe believe in the necessity of a man for a woman's survival. It is exemplified by a woman of the community who suggests marriage for Daria after her husband's death. Daria, as depicted in the narrative is one who is seen performing the household duties and not stepping out. Her initiation in any act is obstructed by her husband's thoughts. At instances in the novel, Shakib through the dialogues of the women characters expose their lack of confidence in themselves which has led to their loss of individuality wherein they cease to exist. The disparaging lines in the narrative become revelatory of the consciousness that the women have of their own plight. Yet, one does not come across cases of aggression or resentment against men in the narrative.

Gol-Sar, the other female character in the narrative becomes an embodiment of the idealised femininity. She celebrates her passion for the opposite gender and finds in Samir something she has never known before. Unlike the other women, she expresses her desire to Samir and playfully engages in a physical relationship with him. Despite the social consequences that a woman like her would have to face, she does not restrain herself. Rather the desire to savour the companionship of Samir grows in her. Although the narrative records a society as one which even dreads education for women, eventually a need to progress is observed in Daria and Gol-Sar who take initiative in tutoring young girls (implying their reception of education and capability of educating). The liberty granted to the young women who came to attend the classes was incomprehensible to them. They were still weighed down by their scarves which symbolises their compliance to the social order that has been prevailing. The new taste of freedom finds a place in the lives of these young women. What one notices here is how patriarchy has been deeply rooted into the social system; thereby making it difficult

for women to accommodate a difference. Knowingly or unknowingly they have come to terms with what has been prevailing. Samira wanting to retain her false identity and sexuality was soon confronted with her affection for Bashir. Eventually, this love compels her to reveal her identity and there exists an evident pride which she takes in revealing her true 'self'.

Samira, though having transformed herself into Samir, does not give up own her valour and dignity. She does not wish to be subdued and therefore abandons her veil, finding it too restrictive. In the village she is said to behave like a man (274). Everyone becomes amused by her bravery and the manner in which she handles her stallion. Finally, the narrative portrays a liberation of the real self of Samira: She has been in the real game, beaten a hundred and more men, she knows there is nothing, nothing, that she cannot achieve. Samira knows she has pushed open the door within her (276).

There is an unprecedented victory of a woman which in turn is only faced by the chastisement of her husband. The culmination of the narrative illustrates Samira's withdrawal from acting like a man. Instead she shows the desire to be 'a real woman'. She turns silent and does not wear a gun in public. The pressures which underpin her as a woman, forces her silent inclination to the world of patriarchy wherein she becomes subjected to the choices of a man. Hence, it remains that Shakib's rendition of women especially Samira, in the novel becomes quite elusive.

*The Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil* (2008) by Deborah Rodriguez is a memoir which narrates the 'beauty adventures' of 'crazy Debbie' from 2002 to 2006. As a hairdresser from Holland, Michigan, she tries her hand in music, religion and work as a prison guard. All of this culminates in her desire to carry on humanitarian projects for the Third World. Belonging to what is termed as the post 9/11 era, it is visible that the book presents before the world an unflinching experience of an American woman who in ways become the 'Saviour' of many Afghan women who come to her beauty school. Having started the beauty school at Kabul, Debbie as described by herself was endowed with the gift of befriending Afghan women.

Married to a jealous and abusive preacher and a mother of two, she records her travel experience along with her establishment of a beauty school to assist in professionally training women to earn their livelihoods in post-Taliban Afghanistan. During her years of stay in Kabul, she befriends a large number of Afghani women, provides an abode for abused women, marries Samer Mohammad Abdul Khan and graduates two batches of Afghan woman hairdressers.

Though presenting a Third world nation, it is seen that the memoir is filled with Debbie's endeavours as a beautician in ways which she adorns herself as the sole rescuer of these Afghani women. The accounts of different women are very many within the text, but not withstanding the fact that the major part of the narrative comprises of her own occupation in a country which proved itself to be hostile to her, initially. Rodriguez presents before her readers a self which is endearing, making her accommodative in a world which ill treats women. The autobiographical elements within the memoir accounts for a closer scrutiny as she claims her hand in helping a bride fake her virginity on her wedding night, saves the beauty school from a governmental takeover, punches a man who fondles her in the market and ends up marrying a man who she has known only for twenty days though they do not speak the same language and in spite of the fact that he already has a wife and seven children in Saudi Arabia.

In presenting characters like Nahida, the rhetoric of liberating women in a Third world country conceals the oppression that women face in the West and hence a reassurance of their own freedom. Rodriguez, is in fact abused and mistreated in her homeland by her husband just as Nahida is in Afghanistan. Nahida is scarred from her husband's beatings and is tormented by his first wife which in a way evokes sympathy in the minds of the readers. Eventually she forces her husband into divorce and begins a beauty school of her own. It is perceptible that these incidents resonate with the events in the narrator's life. The narrative through the words of the narrator suggests the 'difficulty of being a woman in Afghanistan' and she manifests it through characters like Robina and her sisters. Not only does the narrator explicate the hardship of an Afghan girl like Robina in Iran

but also the differences that the women had among each other; the other women looking down on Robina and her sisters for having lived alone and dated a Western man. Rodriguez's narrative technique utilizes itself to present before the world another world (Afghanistan) which needs the hands of 'Saviours' like herself. The text exemplifies the paternalistic stance towards Afghan women and builds sympathy for them.

The French- Afghan writer Atiq Rahimi, in the year 2008, published *The Patience Stone*, another novel which depicts the life of an unnamed woman. Despite the very simple plot that Rahimi presents before the readers, the narrative holds within itself multiple layers of meaning. Set in Afghanistan, the war ridden land, the action of the story is confined to a single room where an unnamed woman (the protagonist) tends to her husband who is a state of coma. The unnamed husband who lies in his state of coma owes his predicament to 'honour'. Having been shot in a trivial brawl, he lies motionless in this single room, attended by the protagonist, day and night. A mother of two, she is depicted as a woman who performs all her duties as a wife and mother. Centring around the words of this woman, the narrative gains momentum in the expression of her emotions. Not only does this narrative tell the story of this single woman but also of the very many who are in the same slot in Afghanistan. Rahimi has successfully captured the spirit of millions of women through the words and actions of a single woman. Khaled Hosseini in his introduction to this text states that: Women are the most beleaguered members of Afghan society... What pours out of her (the protagonist) is not only a brave and shocking confession, but a savage indictment of war, the brutality of men, and the religious, marital, and cultural norms that continually assault Afghan women (5).

Interestingly, it may be perceived that Rahimi's depiction of the woman renders her to be the embodiment of two main phases, namely, the phase of service followed by a phase of opposition/reaction and words. Initially, one witnesses in her, a woman of service and devotion. She stays by her husband's side attending to his needs and always indulging in prayer. Not only is she devout in her prayers, but also

is a devout wife. Continuously stroking his face, she wipes his eyes and attends to all his needs. She takes heed in owing her complete self in the service of her master, husband. Once she even retorts to asking his permission to leave the house, to be reminded by the truth that it is of no use. Though he lies motionless, the woman's respect and obedience seems to stay unchanged. There is a strong desire for him to come back to life. Notwithstanding the fact that she is troubled in spirit and mind, she takes little care of herself. As a true devotee, she loses herself in the process of her service to those around her. Quite often this is what occurs to women of all ages and nations; who become vessels of pain and suffering. The times that she is summoned by her children are very few in the text and becomes suggestive of her unquestionable devotion to her husband; although it begins to produce a change eventually in the narration. This leads to the second phase of the woman's self; the woman capable of opposition and reaction through her words. As the indomitable service for her husband continues, she starts communicating with him. The husband subsequently transforms into the woman's *sang-e-sabur*, the patient stone which listens to everything she has to say. [Sang-e sabur, in Persian folklore is the name of a black magic stone which absorbs the plight of those who confide in it. As per belief, the day it explodes with the weight of its pain will be the Apocalypse]. Being the patience stone, the husband listens to all her frustrations, anxieties, desires, pain, joy and even her deepest secrets. Rahimi's narrative with the words of the woman become extremely powerful that one sees within her the emotions of all women. Though she questions her motive in speaking out, she does not cease to speak. The agency of the woman in the narrative is mainly portrayed through her words which become a weapon, displaying a simple yet resolute method of level of resistance. Everything which was hitherto concealed seems to emerge from her mouth without much hesitation. She posits herself as the one who suffers and the one who cries distinctly expressing her sexuality with vivid descriptions of her sexual desires and the emotions during the initial stages of their marriage. The language employed by Rahimi in giving voice to the woman is direct and overt. Except for a tinge of self introspectiveness, there is no visible remorse or regret for the words

she speaks. The ten years of her marriage went by without her expressing herself and she confesses that it was only after his state of coma that she began sharing her life with him. The woman's existence was not valued much and she was voiceless; incapable of communicating what she intended to or desired to. She compares her previous state of affairs with the present and reveals her existing right to talk due to the absence of her husband's voice: Now I can do anything I want with you. I can talk to you about anything without being interrupted, or blamed (37). Its noteworthy how the silence of a man becomes requisite for a woman's free expression; hitherto overpowered by the single dominant male voice. Women often being denied speech, in this narrative, the act of confession becomes a relief for the woman. Following the stream of consciousness technique, the narrative is a monologue which delves deep into a woman's heart. Her words revealing itself (like the unveiling of her self), which was formerly bound by the words of her husband. There is a strong sense of catharsis which overwhelms her after her revelation. Intensely believing in her own voice, she becomes that Afghan woman who finds her own identity through words and emotions, declining to be captivated by the development of their identities by 'others' -framed by family, community and religious beliefs.

As an Afghan born American novelist, Khaled Hosseini is one of the major writers who has been depicting Afghanistan in all its glory and obscurity. *And the Mountains Echoed* (2014), the third novel of Khaled Hosseini captures the essence of familial bonds and the devastation of separation in Afghanistan. The narrative beginning with the Fall of 1952 from the life of Abdullah and Pari, the two children of Saboor culminates in the Winter of 2010 with Pari's understanding of her adoption. Hosseini skilfully employs multiple narratives in the novel with different voices narrating different stories; all connected by the story of Abdullah and Paris. As an impoverished farmer, Saboor, is forced to give up his three year old daughter Pari to a wealthy family comprising of Suleiman Wahdati and his half-French wife, Nila. Their inability to have children drives them to adopt Pari (the step-daughter of their chauffeur's sister). This decision of Saboor plunges Abdullah into complete devastation as he was the one who raised her after the

death of their mother. The intense bond between the brother and the sister is evident with respect to Abdullah's dismay at having lost his sister for ever. Hosseini illustrates how war and its aftermath transforms the lives of many, and the existence of love and one's yearning to live. Though the narrative presents a very large number of characters, it is visible that each character experiences some form of transformation, not only because of the time frame but also because of their society. The narrative does not completely devote itself to the voice of the female characters as explicated in the above mentioned narratives. Nevertheless, the women characters in Hosseini have their own stories to tell, each one from a different walk of life; delineating their experiences. In the narrative, one witnesses the presence of multiple women characters which does not follow any linear method of depiction. Rather each woman's story stands apart giving rise to one's understanding of the different socio-cultural circumstances.

The narrative witnesses only one female character, Pari who persists from the beginning to the end. Tracing her life from the age of three when she is given away to Nila, one sees in the narrative, Pari, a young girl growing up in a village of Afghanistan and then moving to different parts of the world. A feeble child, brought up in the love and protection of her brother she is torn apart by her separation. Though Abdullah's sense of loss was immense, in Pari there is a change that takes away her pain. The new world that is introduced to her at Nila's house becomes quite alluring to her. Through her character, Hosseini constructs a woman capable of transforming herself from the life she once had in a war-torn land. One does not see Pari regretting the occurrences but experiencing a life she would never have even dreamed of. On the contrary, it allows for a thought that a woman's escape from Afghanistan was needed for the better prospects in life. Not knowing anything of her past, eventually Pari becomes curious about her family. In Pari, Hosseini captures the spirit of a woman's longing for her mother land and her family from which she was uprooted. Her life in France and then in the United States does not take away her yearning. In the voice of young Pari (which is rendered in the last two sections of the narrative), the reunion of Abdullah and his sister is revealed. Young Pari is depicted as one who is brought up in her father's faith. The

narrative becomes suggestive of her attachment to her father and her subsequent dependency. Her world being centred on the life of her ill father, is not what she wished for. Strikingly, one finds a submissiveness in her and therefore her anxiety of freedom. The constant restriction which was imposed on her by her father curbed her individuality; creating in her an identity that was made by her father and not her true self. Here, Hosseini pictures Pari as a young compliant daughter.

Nila (Mrs.Wahdati) becomes the other major female character in the narrative. Her upbringing describes her to be a forward woman. Hosseini brings out in her a woman of poise, living in Kabul, not bound by any men in her life. The freedom and liberty that she enjoys in her life showcases the other side of Afghanistan, where women are capable of basking in their wealth. Does war affect only the impoverished ones? She does not even feel the necessity to take care of her husband who is becomes ill, rather she departs for Paris along with her daughter, Pari. Hosseini does not create in Nila, an image of a devout wife or a devout mother. In the end she withdraws from life, committing suicide. Nila, thus becomes a symbol of failure in the novel. From not being able to give birth to a child of her own to her ultimate addiction to alcohol, one sees in her a wayward life. The other minor characters that make their place in the narrative are Parwana (the stepmother of Pari and Abudullah) and her sister Masooma. Hosseini's depiction of these two women are completely contrary to those of Nila and Pari. Parwana and Masooma, having built their lives from humble beginnings are shown to be those belonging to the striving class of women. Their lives symbolises the women who are bound by the familial duties of the household. As elucidated above, Hosseini through his novel brings to life women who are embodiments of varying characteristics and circumstances. He does not completely depict the submissive kind nor does he depict the rebellious kind. Who is the quintessential Afghan women here, is she the quilt wracked Parwana? Or is she the dramatic Kabul socialite turned Parisian poetress? Or is she the war-maimed Roshnai or Pari?

From an analysis of these four narratives, it is evident that Afghan women are depicted not entirely as those suppressed by the weight of

their veil or the social situations which limit their agency. Although a large share of women who are illustrated in these novels accept their subservient social status, very few of them take effort in changing their societal roles. Some are forced to be in disguise while others take pride in their Afghan (Muslim) identity which is often defined in terms of their relationship with men. There tends to be a dependency on men inherent in most of the women, which either creates the necessity of disguise or a total dismantling of the system which allows for the free will of women in a nation like Afghanistan. Strikingly, one finds a disparity between public identification and the individual sense of the self of these Afghan women characters in the 9/11 era, unceasingly questioning their belonging and existence.

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# **Traumatizing Ground Zero: Analyzing Post 9/11 Comedies as Ideological Apparatuses**

Mohammed Shafeeq M.

The shockwave that followed the twin tower attacks in September 2001 was indeed traumatizing to the world in general and the white man in particular. This trauma, however, has been exploited and carried on to higher altitudes by certain forces with a clear agenda in nurturing and establishing a new oriental perspective. The western notion of looking down on the east, exposed theoretically by Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism", was expected to take a positive turn with the advent of Postcolonial Studies. The truth, however, happened to be different—with the passage of time, the white man tried establishing the notion of the orient with double force by employing new strategies that were used till then for meeting other purposes.

One such strategy is the motion picture, Hollywood to be precise. It is used as a mode of entertainment on the peripheral while having tacit intentions beneath. The concept is not new, and has been on the run from time the cinematic illusions have started appearing before the human eyes. The strategies however have changed over the years, more evidently in the post 9/11 film world. A distorted and ambiguous stereotyping of the east, the Islamic community in general and the Arabs in particular have become a tool for film making for a number of script writers and directors—a typecasting that was prevalent even in the 1900's but gaining more momentum in the post September attacks on the World Trade Centre after which the notion of terrorism has given the directors a key to grab attention of the western viewer.

Since Hollywood motion pictures nearly reach everyone around the globe, it is of primary importance to analyze some of the various means by which film becomes an ideology, in the Marxist sense of the term, and serves to deliver hidden ideas and viewpoints that are internalized by the viewer thereby leading to a normalization of the image of the

East which is catered to them by the western world of illusionary Cinema.

Ideologically it has been foregrounded that entertainment is one among the best modes of psychological conditioning for the very reason that a normal man's senses are down when he is entertained. Since entertainment leaves man disarmed of all logical reasoning, he is vulnerable to psychological conditioning at the time. If this is true then it so happens that dangerous form of conditioning is possible if the same man, whose senses are down, is fed with messages sugar coated with laughter. He is prone to accepting the reality presented before him without reason or questioning, especially regarding things which he has no firsthand experience of. Slavok Zizek, in his famous work *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, says that the scenario of the WTC collapse repeats the climactic scenes of big catastrophe productions issued by an ideological state apparatus: hollywood.

The September attacks, like the wrecking of the Titanic, foreground the stuff of which popular fantasies are made and the lesson of psychoanalysis: we should not mistake reality for fiction, the fake passion for the Real being the ultimate stratagem to avoid facing up to reality. (Waugh 296)

One such reality that the film world has created, nurtured and distributed is the image of the Muslim world which has directly led to the establishment of the notion of Islamophobia as a reality. The paper tries to analyse how such an ideology underlines most of the post 9/11 comedy movies in Hollywood whereby an Islamophobic traumatizing outlook is created and institutionalized through the use of laughter, especially in seeing the Arab community in general and Muslims in particular as springing from terroristic circumstances. As Edward Said appropriately denotes, this notion of the Muslims, especially the Arabs is not different from the anti-semitic views:

“Not accidentally, I indicate that Orientalism and modern anti-Semitism have common roots... The transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target was made smoothly, since the figure was essentially the same.”(286)

This propagation of ideology directly through movies is exemplified by movies such as *The Sheik* (1921), *The Mummy* (1932), *Cairo* (1942), *The Steel Lady* (1953), *Exodus* (1960), *The Black Stallion* (1979), *Protocol* (1984), *The Delta Force* (1986), *Ernest In the Army* (1997), and *Rules of Engagement* (2000), all of which came prior to the September 11 attacks.

A different tactic that Hollywood has employed post 9/11 to normalize the notion of the east, particularly the Arab Muslim, is to incorporate humour in dealing with terrorism based themes, whereby making the message at once innocent and tacit to recognize. The paper intends to analyze, by taking into account the popular Hollywood comedy *The Dictator* to delineate how humour is employed by the western film maker in order to institutionilize the notion of Islamophobia as something normal and one that has to be instigated in the society for a better and safe life. A similar movie, *You don't Mess with the Zohan*, is also taken up for study.

If entertainment is an ideology, then it so happens that humor in entertainment is one of the most dangerous forms of ideological conditioning. This is because when fed with laughter, the viewer tends to develop a problem free mentality, swallowing all that's catered before him, making him feel at ease and as part of a community, bound by the ability to share and enjoy laughter and humour.

*The Dictator* (2012), directed by Larry Charles and starring Sacha Baron Cohen is a slapstick Hollywood comedy that has for its butt of ridicule the ever-despised Middle Eastern dictators, especially Gaddafi and Saddam Hussain. The title of the movie is a direct allusion to one of the greatest hits of Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* which was a contemporary mockery of Hitler and Mussolini, but *The Dictator* seems to be an anti-thesis of what chaplin had tried to do. It deals with Admiral General Haffaz Aladeen, a childish dictator, misogynist, anti-western and anti Semitic despot, the ruler of the fictional Republic of Wadiya, visiting the United States to address the council at the UN headquarters. He is said to have involved in sponsoring *Al-Qaeda* and giving shelter to Osama Bin Laden and is working on developing nuclear weapons to attack Israel.

The intention of the movie seems to mock dictatorship and hail democracy but closer analysis would reveal the normalization with respect to the Arab-Muslim stereotype proliferated since Sept 11, 2001, which happened to be an agenda in imparting Islamophobia. The very introduction of Aladeen is pro oriental—his identity rests on his long beard and is presented to us as having born with it right from the womb. Shortly after arriving in America, Aladeen is kidnapped by a hitman hired by his deceitful uncle Tamir, who then replaces Aladeen with an idiotic political double called Efawadh, the intention of which is to get him to sign a document thereby authenticating Wadiya as a democracy and opening the country's oil fields to Chinese and other nations.

Aladeen is stripped off of his terrifying and lecherous identity once the hitman shaves off his beard in an attempt to assassinate him; Aladeen is no more recognizable in the public, nobody fears him, no one is afraid to befriend him. This seemingly funny-at-first idea, which succeeds in making the average movie-goer laugh doesn't come without negative implications. A thought over this for a while and you have the implicit message—it is the beard that is to be feared!

Wandering through New York, Aladeen encounters Zoey, an activist who offers him a job at her alternative lifestyle co-op shop. Aladeen refuses the offer and encounters “Nuclear” Nadal, the former chief of Wadiya's nuclear weapons program, whom Aladeen thought he had previously executed over an argument about the warhead's shape. Aladeen follows him to New York's “Little Wadiya” which is populated by refugees from his country, and meets him in *Death to Aladeen Restaurant*, run by and visited by numerous people whom Aladeen had personally ordered executed.

This is another instance where the Arabic names are used as a tool for laughing at the Middle-east culture. One of the persons from the restaurant asks what Aladeen's name is and it ends up in a comic situation where he tries to make up fake names from different sign boards around him in a tone which makes it appear like an Arab name.

Aladeen strikes a closer bond with Zoey and later falls in love after he sees her get angry. However, Aladeen's relationship with Zoey is jilted

when he reveals his real identity which makes her proclaim that she cannot love a man who was so brutal to his own people. Towards the climax, Aladeen, with the help of nuclear Nadal manages to get a beard from a corpse and regains his identity whereby succeeding to infiltrate into the hotel where his double is living and hence taking back his position as supreme general. At the moment of the signing of agreement for democracy, he tears up Tamir's document in front of the UN delegation, and gives out an emotional speech that upholds the merits of dictatorship, an incident reminiscent of a situation in the Chaplin movie. But, on noticing Zoey in the hallway, he reveals his affection towards her. Above all he takes an oath to make his country a democracy because he knew that is what Zoey would want him to do. The ending of the movie shows Aladeen getting married to Zoey which also comes with another comic realization that Zoey is actually a Jew and that throughout the film he was depicted as a tyrant bent upon destroying Israel.

The film's writers point out that Aladeen is a character created at making fun of despotism and dictatorship and not to criticize Arabian or Islamic culture. They argue that nowhere in the movie is Aladeen described as a Muslim. Co-writer David Mandel claimed that technically speaking, the dictator is North African and he is not Muslim. He denies any mention of Muslims, or Muslim humour.

This exactly is the point under focus—the film makers deny any explicit representations of the oriental Arab culture. However it is evident that the movie has been scripted in such a way as to expose the tyrants of the Middle-east by liberally encompassing anti-Muslim stereotypes into the script—the Arab culture is presented as uncivilized, violence-prone and demeaning regarding their attitude towards women.

Moreover the Arab people are represented as mere camel-riders and Jew haters. The plot largely dwells on unsophisticated and one dimensional anti-Muslim and anti-Arab portrayals combined with crude sexual imagery to sell ideology through entertainment to the masses.

Right from the beginning of Aladeen's introduction we are presented with an Arabic music in the background which makes it seem

that the movie will be set on clear orientalist prejudices. Numerous examples of similar sort that laugh at the Arab culture, leading to an ethnic stereotyping, can be foregrounded from the movie. One such is the over use of the terrorist and *Al-Qaeda* jokes so much that it could almost reach a point of standardization that Arabs and Middle Eastern people spring out from aggressive, terrorist circumstances.

A direct representation of the Islamophobic western community happens in a scene where Aladeen and nuclear Nadal take a tour over Manhattan in a helicopter. The western couple on the opposite side gets terrified upon hearing the incomprehensible (presumably Arabic) conversation between their fellow passengers. The only words the Americans comprehend are “Empire State Building” and Statue of Liberty and the Arab speakers’ exploding gestures are misinterpreted as a scheme to destroy these landmarks (the audience however understands from the subtitles that they are actually praising the great things New York has to offer them and commending inoffensively about the fireworks).

All the instances help instigate a notion of an Arabian urge for violence and many critics believe that scenes of the kind would encourage rather than dissuade Islamophobia. Aladeen’s palace, situated in the middle of the desert, resembles the golden Taj Mahal like domes and pillars of the palace of Aladdin of the Arabian tales. The barbaric attitude of Arabian men towards females further cements the orientalist perspectives in the minds of the spectators. For instance when Zoey tells Aladeen about a rape center he responds by saying:

You have a rape center here? Great, I’ll bring my raping shoes.

The film’s mention about the ancient barbaric Arab practice of aborting girl children is something that has been wiped out in the Arab culture hundreds of years ago. But when Aladdin helps a woman give birth he reports to her the bad news that it is a girl and asks for the garbage bin so that it can be disposed of, the same concept of which is articulated before the credits roll where we see Zoey revealing that she is pregnant. He asks her—

So are we going to have a boy or...an abortion?

If Arabs are going to be mocked for the purpose of profit, and if Cohen truly had the goal of satire, it would've been more appropriate if the characters were played by Arabs. The fact that the director is Jewish is frustrating as well. All these instances point to the fact that the film media have been employed with tacit intentions in mind which have been successfully kicked off with sugar coated laughter. *The Dictator*, it seems, is not laughing at dictators; it is laughing at the supposed facets of Arab culture—brutality and stupidity—which the viewers tend to believe and relate with Arabs as a whole.

All the above notions of ideological conditioning seems to be apparently true of *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*, a 2008 released hollywood comedy flick featuring Adam Sandler as an Israeli Mossad agent, a counter terrorist, who fakes his death to realize his dream of becoming a hairdresser in New York. Directed by Dennis Dugan, the movie presents, through humour, the long nurtured Israel-Palestine hatred. The movie seems to ridicule the Israeli protagonist on the periphery by making him appear naïve and at the same time lovable, during which the indirect, distorted and debased view of the Palestinian Arabs are missed out by the viewers. The villain is the Phantom, the Islamic Jihad terrorist, is both *Hezbollah* and Palestinian in the movie, who is informed of Zohan's appearance by a Palestinian cab driver through the Hezbollah hot line. To add to all this, Zohan, the Israelite, falls in love with the Palestinian lady salon owner. The movie winds up in the usual 'We are all one' humanitarian line.

Ridiculing the language, culture and supposed way of life of the Middle easterners, whereby institutionalizing the notion of the 'Other' with the help of humour is then again implicit throughout this movie, exemplified by instances such as the "area code scene", wars fought for silly reasons such as killing of a goat etc.

A close scrutiny of the comic genre in some of the post 9/11 hollywood movies would thus expose an apparent tendency of the white man towards exploiting laughter as an ideological tool in dispersing and sustaining the post 9/11 trauma and as a result normalizing

terrorism and Arab culture as something complementary thereby helping concretize the notion of Islamophobia.

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# Shuffle me again: Re-reading Robert Coover's "Heart Suit"

Tania Mary Vivera

In postmodernist literature, it is almost impossible to construct an ordered and complete novelistic world as it would exclude vast realms of knowledge and creation that is contained within the fluid proliferations of the text. According to Spanos (1972), postmodernist literature refuses "to fulfill causally oriented expectations, to create fictions . . . with beginnings, middles, and ends" (148); it subverts and disintegrates the plot and attempts "to dislodge the tranquilized individual from the domesticated, the scientifically charted and organized familiarity of the totalized world . . ." (155). Postmodernism resists the concept of authority; fluctuating semiotically with terms like process, becoming, play, slippage, fluidity, dissemination and the like, challenging the notion of stability in narrative structure by borrowing metaphors from the semantic field of movement. In short, as Currie (1998) observes, postmodernists retreated from treating narratives "... as buildings, as solid objects in the world, towards the view that narratives were narratological inventions construable in an almost infinite number of ways. The shift from coherence to complexity was part of this broad departure from the view of narratives as stable structures (3).

In post modern novels, meaning is the result of interaction; it is not discovered as a given in a text, but it is created in an interactional process between reader and text. As Hassan (1986) points out a "postmodern text . . .invites performance; it wants to be written, revised, answered, acted out and are often preoccupied with the quest for understanding the self, finding a grasp of one's place in the world." The reality of fictional world and real world are concocted to the point of a scrambled medley with boundaries that are indecipherably garbled and treacherously slithery. Diverse, avant-garde movements like Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E etc. emerged with

postmodern dissonance at its core and these writers at times imitated the melancholy librarians of Babel, writing poetry by drawing lots or by rolling dice, in order to explore the aesthetic potential of the unpredictable and the capricious sensibility of the unexpected coincidence. As Canadian experimental poet, Christian Bök (2006) notes, “the act of writing nevertheless finds itself traversed, inevitably and invariably, by the entropic dyslalia of chance-driven phenomena (mistakes, blunders, ruptures, hiatuses, glitches, etc.) forces of both semiotic atomization and semantic dissipation, threatening always to relegate language to a dissonant continuum of chaos and noise.” (26)

Alternations in modes and techniques of reading and writing have highlighted the inimitability of literary expressions that toggle the disarray of reader choices with the systematic conventions of paper-based formats and print publishing. Works of shuffle literature are books that are meant to be shuffled and read entire; they are typically presented as unbound pages of the stereotypical book, open to rearrangement, structurally evoking aspects of the traditional book while cognitively susceptible to vacillation in text meaning composition and reader reception. Furthermore, the authors of shuffle literature sometimes explicitly reinforce the idea that the re-ordering opens uncharted territory in sense making and changes the nature of the world, the future and its comprehension. This latent arbitrariness rearranges the discourse processes of memory, random association, and cognition with potentiality for yet unknown wisdom.

Shuffle literature utilizes aleatory techniques of writing that circumvent the lyrical fetters in order to interrogate the linguistic volatility in the poetic values of referentiality and expressiveness, of intentionality and productiveness. “Aleatory” refers to writing or any composition of music, sculpture and painting, achieved by some random means, by exposing the artistic creation to chance or accident. Aleatory work is dependent on fortuitous randomness. However, the process of creation involves random events produced through a set of rules, rather than mere raw spontaneity. Experimental writers are intrigued by aleatory writing as it promises liberation from tradition and they hope to unburden words from their predictable meanings and conventional

associations. Baudrillard remarks in *Fatal Strategies* (1990) that “[c]hance itself is a special effect; it assumes in imagination the perfection of the accident,” and ironically this “accidental thing is more meaningful [...] than intelligible connections.” (149). Chances enchant us far more than ordinary events that have arisen predictably from an expected cause, and are profoundly oracular in their messages. Likewise, Christian Bök (2006) remarks, “Aleatory writing almost evokes the mystique of an oracular ceremony—but one in which the curious diviner cannot pose any queries.” (31)

Aleatory writing strives to provide an anarchistic alternative to the ideological constraints enforced by the economy of language and it traverses the yet unexplored potential within the history of poetics. aleatory writers avow that such random liberation in creating a work of art is a sovereign necessity that unleashes the words from the restraining need to mean. Chance opens up novel streams of thought that are otherwise inaccessible to conscious, voluntary intention. Nevertheless, aleatoric techniques used by creative artists are more premeditated than accidental. Opportunities for chance are created to account for a certain method in the randomness. The fortitudinous chances are governed by rules just as in a game.

Jorge Luis Borges, renowned for his playful, postmodern fiction, merges the capriciousness of chance and the autocracy of rules when he adduces literature as a game perpetually endeavoring to break the rules. Borges (1943) states “Literature is a game with tacit conventions; to violate them partially or totally is one of the many joys (one of the many obligations) of the game, whose limits are unknown”. Literature with its intrinsic quality of subverting its own conventions has time and again, undergone structural experiments, for the entertainment and enlightenment of both the reader and the writer. According to Peter Hutchinson (1983), authors contest playful sensibilities in the reader by confronting them with contests involving either/both the author and reader, or narrator and narratee. This playful agenda challenges readers to be an active player in the reading process, solve puzzles; comprehend parallel worlds through allegories, metaphors or intertextualities and follow multiple narrative voices to reconstruct the storyworld. This is

akin to the digital gameworlds about which Daphne Dragona (2010) remarks “Artists working in the field are playing with the rules, rather than playing by rules; they modify or negate instructions, structures, aesthetics and norms, seeing contemporary gameworlds as a reflection of the contemporary digital realm.” (27)

A classic example of shuffled aleatory writing with ludic features is Robert Coover’s short fiction “Heart Suit”. Heart Suit was first included in the elaborately boxed literary serial *McSweeney’s 16*. It was published again in *A Child Again* (2005), a collection of short fiction by Robert Coover published by McSweeney’s. “Heart Suit”, presented as a set of fifteen cards is included in a sleeve on the book’s back cover. It is printed on fifteen cards that has text on one side, but are backed and cornered like playing cards. There is a “title” card, deuce through ace, and a joker. The instructions, which appear on the title card, direct that the “middle” thirteen cards be read in any order, but to conclude with the joker. The rank of the cards and the text of the story constitute only numbers and letters and can be referenced only as such. The tale, so shuffled, is the story of the theft of the tarts in the Court of Hearts. It involves the inquisition, investigation and slandering associated with the theft and concludes with the interchangeable meting out of punishment.

This paper studies the characteristics of the ludic narrative “Heart Suit” with reference to its aleatory and associative cognitive intricacies and endeavors to augment Hutchinson’s (1983) view that all literature or indeed all texts contain play in some respect in that “they tease, frustrate and deny information, make suggestions [and] above all... challenge the reader.”(13). Here, functional ludo-narrativism propogated by Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) is expanded to combine ludic and cognitive narrative analysis, to illustrate how aspects of gameworld and storyworld work together to design and reform the reader’s cognitive and metacognitive experiences.

“Heart Suit” narrates the story of the theft of king’s favorite tarts and his investigation to find the culprit. The eight suspects are the Cook, the Flautist, the Jester, the Viceroy, the Knave of Hearts, the Lord High

Chamberlain, the Royal Chaplain, and the White Knight. The King, considering the theft as an assault upon the kingdom, announces: "Someone will hang for this!" ("Heart Suit", Title card). The search for the thief, and its outcome, is determined by reader's shuffling. The thirteen cards that the reader is instructed to shuffle start and end mid-sentence with ellipses. The cards end with the name of one of the suspects and begin with a sentence lacking a subject. Thus the shuffling molds the narrative plot and determines which information the reader gets about which characters; it also determines the guilty thief at the end with either of the eight suspects being a probable candidate. As the reader finds out in the process of reading, the queen is engaged in romances with more or less all of them. The queen's dalliances are described in the first part of the text of each card. The subject of the act is dependent on the shuffled sequence. The text of the second part of the card is dedicated to providing some personal information about one or more of the characters, who are named so that shuffling is inconsequential. The beginning of the story refers to a traditional, anonymous verse published in 1782:

The Queen of Hearts she made some tarts all on a summer's day;  
The Knave of Hearts he stole the tarts and took them clean away.  
The King of Hearts called for the tarts and beat the Knave full sore  
The Knave of Hearts brought back the tarts and vowed he'd steal  
no more.

"Heart Suit" is an aleatory narrative structured as a card game that is playful and entertaining in its composition. Shuffling and reading "Heart Suit" is a social game which involves the reader and the characters. The game world and the story world merge to experiment with metafictionality and metaludicity required to simultaneously read and play the game of chance. This ludic literature combines structural narrative techniques with self critical game design in order to explore the affordances and limitations of rules, challenges, risks, goal drivenness, and other ludic structures. It uses wide range of ludic strategies to different degrees of salience and entails the faculty of cognitive ludicity, proposed by Astrid Ensslin in *Literary Gaming* (2014). According to her,

cognitive ludicity involves “cognitive reading strategies such as solving puzzles or whodunit riddles, engaging in intertextual association, and mapping allegorical meaning into one’s own reality.” (12)

The cognitive ludic interface functionally erases certainty and interrupts conventional usability. The randomness and irrationality of the text project false impressions of readers’ freedom. For narrative continuation, the author frustrates the reader expectations and consequently, the reader inadvertently experiences aleatoric fallacy or the illusion of complete randomness that plays with the reader’s assumed freedom. Although the reader seems empowered by the text to participate in the narrative, it turns out to be an illusory impression and the readers literally lose some sense of participatory control over the text because of its aleatory nature. This illusion of control is explicated when the King of Hearts is informed “Not to have full knowledge of these events and to be able to act upon it, Sire, suggests to others a certain infirmity, and indeed, though your wisdom regarding this state of affairs is not to be questioned, you no longer seem to be the author of any significant actions” (“Heart Suit”, J). The cognitive inadequacies faced by the power entrusted reader is expounded by the King’s statement “The thief seems to be known, but he (the King) does not know it. He must act but for all his power cannot. Knowledge may be power, but power is not knowledge.” (“Heart Suit”, J)

Baudrillard (1990) suggests that we expect order to arise out of the chaos of choices. Resisting chaos amounts to a desperate conflict. The King caught up in the labyrinth of uncertainty briefly rises above it extradiegetically, “In an effort to get an overview of the maze in hopes of escaping it or finding its mysterious core, he rose briefly above it.” (“Heart Suit”,5), but his attempt is thwarted by a disturbing cognitive illusion of his unproven suspicions.

However, chance provides a solid alibi, absolving the readers of any responsibility for the accidents that befall in the storyworld, even though the readers suspect that, at some fatal level, they have somehow willed these disasters into existence. The consequences of chance are disastrous to the storyworld and the characters are anxious of its outcome.

“Certainty and theft are not at issue here” the king replies gravely. “it’s more profound than that..” (“Heart Suit”,4). The King suspects that,

“Actions are known..., but actors are interchangeable, the perpetrators’ varied and manifold motivations best understood as a collective one, a swarm of intent, from which can be snared only a faint glimmering of a general truth. Poisoned tarts exist here. Theft does. All is not well. Someone’s life, perhaps his own, is in danger (“Heart Suit”, 8).

At one point the King realizes that he is just part of a game; a game of chance and capriciousness, not guided by rationale but whimsical and arbitrary in its very structure.

“He is in a terribly agitated state, having discovered, he cries, that his kingdom is a house of cards, utterly without foundations, infested with duplicity and indeterminacy, where nothing can be known and everything that happens seems to be happening under the table... There seems to be no simple answer, no easy way to navigate these mazy truths. Even the rules which he so dutifully upholds seem ever mutable, subject to whimsy and arbitrary choice. All of which has drawn sharp jibes from the White Knight. “This is not a kingdom,” he has said, “it’s a bloody children’s playroom!” (“Heart Suit”, 2).

Here the narrative is equated to a game with the rules not in tandem. The characters in the storyworld metacognize the nature of their existence and their fate at the hands of the reader. “The condemned man complains that he has not been given a fair deal, the cards were clearly stacked against him, he feels like the butt of a bad joke” (“Heart Suit”, Joker)

But in the very end of the story, another tray of tarts, baked by the Queen for the King, is stolen. The new theft requires the cards to be reshuffled where the known is reset to the unknown, the end to the beginning, and the dead to the undead. The King thwarts the queen’s statement of his wisdom gained through the experience,

“But surely you know everything already,” says the queen. “I know nothing!” cries the King. “Round up the suspects and send them shuffling through here again! This is not over! Justice must be done!” (“Heart Suit”, Joker)

Writing by means of an aleatory shuffling protocol essentially fulfills the dream of Deleuze presented in *The Logic of Sense* (1990). He imagines an ideal game of chance, one whose rules are themselves subject repeatedly to chance, resulting in an aimless outcome so futile that we have no choice but to dismiss the game as a nonsensical dissipation of time itself. The cycle of disillusionment begins afresh when the King announces to reshuffle the cards and it is a never ending disillusionment. Here, the storyworld and the gameworld are caught in the vicious cycle of shuffling aleatoricism. The King is trapped in,

[a]n infinite and exitless maze together with all the primary suspects in the matter of stolen tarts. The missing tarts were said to be either at the center of the maze or outside it altogether, if not both at once—but where could “outside infinity” be? “Where,” asked the Royal Chaplain in reply, “could the center of infinity be?” (“Heart Suit”, 5).

The readers are trapped in the game of cards and the game of tarts along with the characters and the only escape is a simultaneous metacognitive awakening from the gameworld and the storyworld. It is similar to the outcry made by Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll 1865):

“You’re nothing but a pack of cards!.. At this the whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her: she gave a little scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the bank, with her head in the lap of her sister, who was gently brushing away some dead leaves that had fluttered down from the trees upon her face.”

The reader of *Heart Suit* willingly participates in the game of chances, forever ready to reshuffle his/her thoughts to enjoy each of the never ending surprises as if for the first time. The post modern

writer no longer creates a literary work in order to transmit a lyrical meaning; but is meticulous in faithfully documenting the contingent outcome. The writer merely records the linguistic fallout from a discharge of random forces otherwise hence, “the reader can no longer judge the piece for the stateliness of its expression, but must rather judge the work for the uncanniness of its production. No longer can the reader ask: “How expressive or how persuasive is this composition?”- instead, the reader must ask: “How surprising or how disturbing is this coincidence?” (Bok 2006). As Donna Haraway (1991) states, a post modern reader thus reads “for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries, and for responsibility in their construction.” (50).

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# Smelling the Apocalypse: Knowledge and the Popular Cinema

Arunkumar K. K.

Cultural studies is the study of culture, more particularly, the study of contemporary culture. Cultural studies first appeared in the intellectual circles with the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Use of Literacy* (1957) concentrating on the subjectivity, which studied culture in relation to individual lives breaking with *objectivism* and *positivism*. *The Use of Literacy* describes the working class life in post-war Britain through Hoggart's experiences and how the changes affected the individual lives. Another important work which laid the stones of cultural studies was Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* which looked at the life in Britain in a critical point of view. Williams looks at the consequence of the coupling between *Culture* and *Society*, where Culture was perceived as a way of life. Williams notes that it is through this coupling, between culture and society, that modern culture acquires its meaning, energy and capacity. At this point cultural studies was an engaged form of analysis which tried to analyse the unequally structured societies and tried to advocate that culture is not an abbreviation of high culture.

Cultural studies came out in the 50's out of Leavianism, named after F. R Leavis, which attempted to re-organize the *cultural capital*. From the initial stages they started advocating that culture is not a *leisure* activity and it is a mature state where individuals are made with a concrete and balanced sense of life. This perception began to change when the sense of life came from the pleasure and stance offered by mass culture. Cultural studies came out of this Leavianism through Hoggart and Williams. In the initial stages Hoggart and Williams started claiming that the canonical texts are richer than mass culture and the contemporary culture should be measured in terms of its capacity to deepen and widen experiences. Later cultural studies which followed Hoggart's and William's text developed in two ways: first, the old notion of culture as a way of life gave way a new way of analysis and second,

the attention moved away from the locally produced to the organized forms- what Adorno and Horkheimer calls as the *Culture Industry*.

By 60's E. P Thompson in *The Making of English Working Class* tries to analyse the identity of the English working class, as the time had a very strong political and Marxist perceptions. The old proletarian identity was disintegrating and a politics based on strong working class identity was constituting itself by this time, it is from here the political function of cultural studies came into play. The 70's culture began to be regarded as a form of *hegemony*, the term which came out of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony analysed culture within the invisible relations of the dominant culture evolving from the coercions with the subaltern cultures. It is with Gramsci, the struggle between the hegemonic and the oppressed began to be analysed and the question of social formations through compromises began to be solved. Hardt and Negri extended this aspect of hegemony through their work *Empire* and analysed the coercions and effects of culture which lead to political transformation and historical change. For them, Empire is a new era for which the current paradigms of analysis are no longer adequate and it wants/represents a new form of rule.

.... one which replaces the sovereignty of the nation state with a decentred and deterritorizing apparatus of a rule that progressively incorporates the entire global within it open, frontiers expanding

... The power of Empire and mechanisms of imperial sovereignty can be understood only when confronted on the most general scale, in globality. (Hardt and Negri, 66)

Within Hardt and Negri the cultural analysis had a strong affinity towards Marxism, Marxism became a critical material analysis which took social change as its object, and therefore formed by and within the social changes. The problematization of hegemony/power was taken up seriously with the Foucauldian discourses. In Foucault, governmentality was producing docile and conforming citizens through educational systems. Foucauldian discourses could be considered as a critique of culture's hegemonic effects, where culture is broken down into semiotic

messages of signifying *practises / discourses*, which were distributed by institutions and media.

Structuralism, which emerged by the mid 70's supported by the notions of Jacques Lacan started analysing individuals as constructions of ideology. Ideology, according to Althusser, means a set of discourses and images which constitute the most widespread knowledge and values. Ideology is required so that the state and capitalism can reproduce themselves without the threat of revolution. Hoggart's and William's claim for *neutrality* was considered false by this time, because it protects the exploitative relations of production necessary for capitalism. Dominant ideology turned into a political system open to any change which was seemingly natural and universal. Individual becomes sucked into ideology so easily because it helps them to make sense of the world and to enter into the symbolic order and and ascribe power to themselves. Individuals see themselves mirrored in dominant ideology and identify it as a way of taking the father s place in fear of castration. Ideology provides false resolution to private and familiar tensions finally made possible that no symbolic structure can offer final meaning.

Ideology later gave way to polysemy in which a particular signifier always has one meaning in an effect of differences within a large system. Hybridisation developed out of polysemy, where cultural identity becomes the central question. By the latter 70's there emerged the *new-rights* and from there onwards French theory began to orient towards *culture of difference*. Cultural practise by and large is disengaged with the social and political struggles and critic of the day.

While starting the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1963 at the University of Birmingham, Hall puts the objective as to produce *organic intellectuals* and for that cultural studies must work on two fronts at the same time: At the very forefront of intellectual theoretical work in order to understand fully cultural, political, social, economic complexities of the present world.

It is equally crucial for the academy to be seriously engaged with the real world outside the world of academy.

By working at these forefronts Hall wants cultural studies to point out the political social changes and its realities at its highest. By 70's the political project of Marxism was strengthening and the whole journals throughout Europe addressed the question of violence. By mid-70 the concept of *hegemony* and *intellectual layman* came into the field of cultural studies and from there onwards intellectual products of cultural studies started addressing the academics. Lacan and Foucault started influencing cultural studies by this time. Lacanian *Othering* was used by the theorists to analyse the process of marginalization and Foucauldian *power discourse* was also taken up. Foucauldian power discourse changed the whole theoretical grounds of cultural studies.

Feminism in 70's showed the way to politicize the academic work and they showed how theoretically energized discourse generated in one area could raise political stances for the discipline as a whole. Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gunbar, Elaine Showalter, bell hooks and Helene Cixous were looking at how women's difference is constituted in language itself and how they became language's other. The political project of *identity* and *subjectivity* was taken up by the post-structuralist feminist school between 70's and 80's. The political project of subjectivity became much problematized with the Queer identities within sexual preference through Judith Butler's works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*. These analyses of gender was scribed within the social roles and performativity.

Edward Said, by the latter half of 70's took up the political project of performativity within the colonial context with his celebrated text *Orientalism*. Said introduced French theory to literary scholars of the time and was offering a politically infected readings of the European texts about the orient. The idea of the orient within the occident was constituted within the knowledge, power and imperialist discourses. In this way theories between 70's and 80's gave a political dimension to the paradigm called cultural studies.

Contemporary cultural studies centres on the question of identity and tries to make representations of the marginalized and oppressed. But the present discourse of cultural studies doesn't constitute a group,

movement or school in the way Birmingham school was. There is no unity in the theories like as of Birmingham School and the contemporary theories are often conflicting and contradictory in approach, objects and style. What the new contemporary studies have is a very fluid, flexible and spatially diffuse approach involving often conflicting and contradictory theories. The crisis and fading out of the global left politics may be a reason for the death of theory.

It is in this neo-liberal situation, the marketization of universities took place. The neo-liberal governments started competing each other cutting all public expenditures except that on education. Reductions took place in funding leading universities to find their own funds which led to profound changes in the system and syllabi of the universities. This reduction of funds made universities find funds from external sources other than the state. The rise of the new economy, the corporate transformation of the state and the systems, had passed on to the universities and led to the death of theories. This transformation of the intellectual spaces, which led to complete economic transactions, created creative industries and public intellectuals. One who is able to write reader-friendly articles for the press and in the virtual, became a cultural theorist in this context.

Cultural studies is really important to the extent to which it is able to ally itself to the social, political movements and movements external to the academy and not to be the one where the creative industries, cultural entrepreneurship and public intellectuals find a happy space within the dominant culture. Due to the constant lack of funding from the state and the corporatisation of the university, the academic publishing industry started getting monopolized. With the death of Jacques Derrida in 2004, the death of theory was complete and a new generation emerged on the scene.

Theory, then, came to be a system of thought frequently concerned with examining and testing the founding ideas, narratives. Theory declined because of the absence of political left and with the rise of a new corporate economy. From 1990-2000, there was an anti-political moralism which made a move towards self-reflexivity of theory and it

returned with a concern for real politics. Politics and political theory of this time remained open to the complexities of a situation including the real, practical, empirical, political and historic complexities. What we have to do in this context to invent/re-invent new forms of politics. Slavoj Zizek looks at cultural studies in this context as: “Critical studies functions as a discourse which pretends to be critically self-reflexive, revealing a predominant power relation while in reality it obfuscates its own mode of participating them.” (Zizek 44)

The post-theoretical sense of political urgency started invading cultural studies over the course of 90’s and early 2000’s which increased in parallel to the political protests which happened in parallel with Seattle and 9/11. The absence of the left and theory problematized the whole discourse and even the post-structuralist debates.

Post-structuralist debates was of great assistance to cultural studies, where it analysed the problems and paradoxes in its complicated relationship to politics and the political. The monopolization of the academics and knowledge provided an alternative politics of critique resulting in a complicated relation between politics and the political. Post-structuralism on this side was concerned too much with theory and texts and not with the practical political issues. Theoretical grounds never asked the question of how real-world politics can be engaged, if it was there it could have developed into a dominant discourse. Here the central question of this paper arises, how the bridge between the practise of cultural studies and Marxism demolished? Why contemporary cultural studies was not able to take up the political project of the Birmingham school? How has the event of 9/11 influenced/changed the political dimensions of cultural studies?

As said earlier corporate systems started manipulating the academics and academics started to be bounded by the requirements imposed on them by the universities and neo-liberal governments that guide them. Importance was given to commercialization by the government systems and academics made partnership with industry, or in other way, it got monopolized - which was part of the government schemes to put academic research in service of emerging knowledge

economy. It is at this time *Sage* and *Routledge* started monopolizing the discipline of cultural studies. By the early 2000's Birmingham Centre was shut down by the University of Birmingham in order to the institutional constraints and stress of the neo-liberal market systems. The post-Birmingham school is made of theorists like Neil Badmington, Caroline Basset, Dave Boothroyd, Paul Bowman, Jeremy Gilbert, Julian Murphet, Brett Neilson, Gregory T Seighworth, Imre Szeman, Jeremy Valentine, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, J Macgregor and Joanna Zylińska who are still unnoticed within the discipline of cultural studies. What we have now is the extensions of post-structuralist theories, mainly Deconstruction by Jacques Derrida, philosophy of Deleuze, democratic post-Marxism by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Bio-politics by Giorgio Agamben, Hegelian Lacanism by Slavoj Žižek and ethical philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou.

By the end of 90's cultural studies became an interdisciplinary field in which perspectives from different disciplines can be selectively drawn to examine the relations of culture and power. The political framework of Birmingham school has always been focused on deconstructing the relations of power in all cultural contexts and configurations. Cultural studies has always tried to be on the side of the subaltern and the marginalized and this political project started fading out in the beginning of the 2000's. The desire to align intellectual work with progressive social change has been foundational for Stuart Hall and Birmingham Centre from the 1970's and now it is disengaged with the social and political realities today. The *critical theory* has long been faded out and what we now have is a political dimension manipulated by the neo-liberal systems and the U.S after the event of 9/11.

Birmingham centre was closed by the university on the eve of 9/11 event and it was not of a direct result of the event. The event has become part of the world history and the whole world was astonished when the twin towers was blew down by an aeroplane pulling the whole U.S into *trauma*. Trauma, is important as it, results in a phenomenon which allows us to reproduce the process of uncovering, creating a desire to know what is fundamental to all knowledge. Cultural trauma, on the other side, occurs when members of a whole group feel they have been

subjected to a drastic event that leaves several marks upon their group consciousness marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in a fundamental way. Immediately after the event of 9/11, what the U.S had is a set of *Conspiracy theories* which analysed the planning and execution of the attack. Conspiracy theories wanted to analyse whether there was participation of the U.S governmental systems in these attacks. This attack and the conspiracy theories which followed it, made radical changes in the foreign policies of the U.S. The Islamic culture, all over the world, started to be demonized by the hegemonic orders put down by the U.S and from here started the war against terrorism, which was to get out of the fear created by the 9/11 attack. This culture of fear was the result of the trauma created by the attack, which I would call the *Apocalypse of Trauma* and from there onwards the U.S has tried to create their own space within the world order. The monopolization of the whole industries, knowledge systems and even the academics was justified by the *war against terrorism*. The event of 9/11, thus became a justification for the whole acts they did after 2001.

The link between war against terrorism and Hollywood occurred when the Pentagon decided to seek the help of the film industry in finding out the real cause of the attack. By October 2011 specialist directors in catastrophe movies had been established at the investigation, with the aim of imaging possible scenes for terrorist attacks and how to fight them. The event of 9/11 was a catastrophe for them, as the unexpected had happened and they were trying to get out of this and here the Hollywood was functioning as an ideological state apparatus. With this apparatus the U.S tried to get out from the gaze centred on them after the event of 9/11 and the desire to go further compelled them to strengthen these devices. The modern project of freedom became a false appearance, whose truth is embodied by subjects who lost their subjectivity in immersion to the neo-liberal systems, where the totalitarian witnessed the fact that the political project of modernity and cultural studies remained unfinished.

The cinema produced since 2001 started advocating for a politics and resistance against the event of 9/11. Cinema starting from *Captain*

*America: The First Avenger* released in 2011 to 2013 released *Olympus Has Fallen*, started advocating their ideology of neo-liberalism and their political project of imperialism. Mere life, as Agamben says, is no longer the ultimate terrain of politics and the messianic attitude of awaiting to the end of the time becomes the central part of mere life. The articulation of mere life to a bio-political order made a sense of administering and regulating the whole bare lives. This sense of articulation is made through the popular cinema produced from America. The monopolization of knowledge, cinema and academy made the new politics of imperialism in an American way. The questions we have here are; How has Che-guvera became the brand ambassador of revolution? How did Bob Marley became a mere smoker of weed? Why is Marx a ghost, while we talk about the modern neoliberal order?

Here, what we have is an infected mode of academics, which is very monopolistic and imperialistic. Cultural studies in one way or the other had lost its way from the commitment to represent the marginalized and theoretical positions of Marxism. The question we have is, why the catastrophes presented in American popular cinema is centred within the landscape of America, for e.g. *The Day After Tomorrow*, *I Am Legend*, *Battleship*, *Pacific Rim*, *Oblivion* etc. Why Hollywood Cinema wants to police the whole system through their characters like *Wolverine*, *Spider-man*, and *Avengers* etc.? These narratives and characters came out of the trauma which the U.S suffered after the event of 9/11 and they carry the ideology which sustains their dominance over Europe and others. This *Apocalypse of Trauma* is the outcome of the fear the U.S has and we don't smell anything against this order of knowledge and academics. What we have is a silence of subjugation and consumption towards the whole things which are fed to us. The next step that the U.S is doing is funding each and every projects in the developing countries in the Asian region, which is a silent invasion of the economy. In this way the catastrophe which happened in the U.S has produced a new system, within and outside the landscape. Cultural studies on the other side is not able to understand/analyse these new systems and is silent towards the demand against the new mode of academics, even the theorists of the present times are part of this new academics.

The shift of power from the Europe to America has problematized the knowledge and knowledge had become problematic. Knowledge of the Middle-East and Asian countries became much dangerous. The barbaric nature of the East had turned into a demonized one by this time and this perceptions is replicated by the paradigm of Cultural Studies, except a few extensions of the Post-structuralist schools.

What we must have here is a project similar to the one which was done by Walter Benjamin, to construct/reconstruct a paradigm which would analyse the modern system of governance. Cultural studies, here should be able to read/re-read the readings of the reading and try to avoid the interventions of theory and emancipation to certification.

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# ***The Krishna Key: Unlocking and Retrieving the History and Culture of India***

Aiswarya R. Rao

*The Krishna Key* is a thriller by Ashwin Sanghi narrated in a similar style as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* – a murder thriller that progresses with clues to unfold the mystery behind it. If Dan Brown deals with the well known search for The Holy Grail, Sanghi looks for the Alchemist's Stone or the Philosopher's Stone.

Leaving aside the much sought for Philosopher's stone, *The Krishna Key* provides a close reading of ancient Indian scriptures and vedic literature trying revive the classical literature by giving scientific evidence in it. The novel tries to rewrite our past by digging out the untold and not-so-popular history of India. This paper tries to read *The Krishna Key* as a work of historiography and as a literature invoking nationalism, by reviving our ancient literature and history.

Ravi Mohan Saini, the protagonist who is a historian is accused of murdering one of his mentors. This leads him to unfolding the truth behind the crime. Saini details the historical accounts of *The Mahabharata*, the being of Krishna, Vedic Maths and so on. The novel identifies India as a nation of vast culture and history and decolonizes India from the stereotypical hold of the West. The author tries to break all the stereotyped notions about India and places India in a space entirely different from the definition attributed to it by the colonial regime. Decolonization is the undoing of colonialism and its effects. It seeks freedom from colonial forms of thinking, a freedom to revive and rejuvenate native forms of knowledge. It involves a close examination of historical processes. *The Krishna Key* is not only destroying the normal beliefs of the world about our myths and history, but also redefining our country in terms of our indigenous, ancient vedic scriptures and literature. According to Dr. Pramod K Nayar,

...nationalist literature sought to define a native identity different from European constructions of the same. The main purpose was to raise a national consciousness. This meant constructing images of a tribe/region's history, glorifying its pasts, reviving myths, and rejuvenating pride in its cultural forms. (*Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* 41)

The book speaks mainly of the historicity of ancient Indian literatures and their validity. For this, a minute study of our past, a study of our cultural history is a must. Sanghi does this by studying *The Mahabharata* and other ancient Indian literatures as historical records rather than works of fiction. Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* expresses the nation's ambivalent emergence so:

What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being. (19)

Sanghi through *The Krishna Key* says that most of the ancient literatures were actual historical events. Like many archaeologists namely Jason Colavito, Childress or Erich Von Daniken he too believes that the great war of Kurukshetra was not merely a writer's imagination. There is scientific proof which substantiate that such a war had taken place some time in the past.

For example, in the *Mahabharata* it is said that Sage Vyasa met Dhritarashtra on the eve of the great war and warned him about the bad planetary omens he had seen. One of the omens was a conjunction of Saturn with Aldebaran, another was a retrograde Mars before reaching Antares and the third was a lunar eclipse near Pleiades. Professor Narahari Achar, an archaeologist and historian made a path-breaking discovery in this area. He found that all the three above mentioned phenomenon had taken place simultaneously only once in history and that was in 3067 BCE. He believes that the Kurukshetra War took place then.

Sanghi does not just stop with Achar's historical study but also establishes a Greek connection to *The Mahabharata*.

Hence we must look outside *the Mahabharata* to see if any other sources can corroborate this date. Let's not rely on Indian sources and instead turn to Greek references. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya, made the first written reference to Krishna. In his account, Krishna is called Heracles... Megasthenes goes on to describe their main city, Methora. Any guesses where Methora was? Mathura! Exclaimed Priya. (*The Krishna Key* 12)

*The Krishna Key* encompasses and studies most of our ancient Indian literature like the *Surya Siddhanta*, *Baudhayana Sulbhasutra*, astrology, vedic scriptures, takes a peek into the *Upanishads*, our great epics and other works. He argues that our ancient literatures have answer to all the questions in the world. It is worthy to mention that the great writer as T S Eliot and a great scientist like Albert Einstein found that our ancient literature, especially, *The Mahabharata* contained answers to most of the questions that troubled human minds. But even after being the origin of many path-breaking discoveries why is India still portrayed as secondary to western countries? This is because of the stereotypical representation of India by the colonial regime. Even if colonies have died out and the colonial regime has left, the effect of the rule still exists. The indigenous culture and history of India was definitely destroyed and manipulated purposefully by the colonial rule in order to enslave us forever.

In Wole Soyinka's play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, the king's horseman accuses the Englishman thus: "You stole from me my first born, sent him to your own country so you could turn him into something in your own image." This mirrors the fate of the ancient literature of India.

According to Dr. Pramod K Nayar:

A central feature of colonialism was its ability to generate convincing images of itself. Projecting itself as superior and benevolent, as Edward Said has shown colonial self-representation managed to convince the native culture that this image was true and authentic. (45)

*The Krishna Key* throws light on how scientific processes were given magical terms in our ancient literature. For example, when there was a need to build Dwaraka, extra land was taken from the ocean by asking permission from it. This process is now known as land-reclamation in engineering and is a complex task. Similarly, an ancient ritual of preserving a small portion of the umbilical cord in a *taviju raksha*, is very much scientifically relevant today because it is now an acclaimed fact that preserving stem cells is a prudent step to save the child's life in emergency situations.

Sanghi also discusses biotechnology, *Charakasamhita*, *Susruta Samhita* and the field of medicine and surgery as postulated by Charaka and Susruta; Geometry which evolved from the Sanskrit word, *Jyamiti* in which the Pythagorean Theorem was established 500 years before Pythagoras stated it; the decimal system, the concept of zero, and infinity, Vedic Maths and its importance in the world, the binary system and the Swastika and its explanations. The novel is an in-depth study of the vast contributions of India to the world. This is achieved through an extensive study of ancient Indian literature.

A main mention is made about the invention of atomic bomb by Oppenheimer. There are some people who believe that the first atomic bomb was not found by Oppenheimer but it was first executed in *The Mahabharata*. Even when Oppenheimer himself was asked about how he felt after having exploded the first atomic bomb on earth, he had replied that "it probably wasn't the first atomic bomb, but the first atomic bomb in modern times." He is also said to have quoted the Gita after witnessing the first successful test of the bomb in 1945. Apparently he said – 'I have become death, the destroyer of the worlds.'" Even the description of an atomic bomb and the Brahmastra in *Mahabharata* is similar:

The unknown weapon is radiant lightning, a devastating messenger of death, which turned all to ashes – a single projectile charged with all the power of the Universe. An incandescent column of smoke and flame as bright as a thousand suns rose in all its splendor, a perpendicular explosion with its billowing smoke

clouds; the cloud of smoke rising after its first explosion formed into expanding round circles like the opening of giant parasols. The corpses were so burned as to be unrecognizable. Hair and nails fell out, pottery broke without apparent cause, and birds turned white. In a very short time, food became poisonous. The lightning subsided and turned into fine ash. (*The Mahabharata : Mausala Parva* 121)

According to Jason Colavito, an American author and archeologist, an ancient Indian epic was said to describe a single projectile charged with all the power of the universe. An incandescent column of smoke and flame as bright as ten thousand suns rose in all its splendor. To believers, these sound like eyewitness accounts of nuclear bombs being dropped from above. To skeptics, these sound like imaginative interpretations of the equivalent of prehistoric science fiction.

Sanghi in all his historical discourses tries to analyze the representation of India in the world. To the world, it is as if there is no history of India before Columbus. The post colonial need for retrieving the native past and its history arises at this point. Wole Soyinka sums up the postcolonial project of past retrieval thus:

For a people to develop, they must have constant recourse to their own history. To deny them the existence of this therefore has a purpose, for it makes them neutered objects on whose tabula rasa, the clean slate of the mind, the text of the master race – cultural, economic, religious and so on – can be inscribed. (114)

*The Krishna Key* takes us back to the era of Indus valley civilization. According to the west, Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization. The Aryan invasion of India is believed to be a myth, again another history put forth by the colonial regime which they wanted us to believe. Sanghi through his book argues: “we keep referring to Mesopotamia as the cradle of civilization... It was India! It was the drying up of Saraswati that took our people and our culture there.” To establish this idea, Stephen Knapp in his *Death of the Aryan Invasion Theory*, says so:

One of the major reasons why a consideration of the idea of an Aryan invasion into India is prevalent among some Western researchers is because of their misinterpretation of the *Vedas*, deliberate or otherwise, that suggests the Aryans were a nomadic people...the Aryan invasion theory was created to make it appear that Indian culture and philosophy was dependent on the previous developments in Europe, thereby justifying the need for colonial rule...This was also the purpose of the study of Sanskrit...We also have to remember that many of the Indus sites, like Kalibangan, were close to the region of the old Sarasvati River. Some Hindu scholars are actually preferring to rename the Indus Valley culture as the Indus-Sarasvati culture because the Sarasvati was a prominent river and very important at the time. For example, the Sarasvati River is glowingly praised in the *Rig-veda*. However, the Sarasvati River stopped flowing and later dried up. Recent scientific studies calculate that the river stopped flowing as early as around 8000 B.C. It dried up near the end of the Indus Valley civilization, at least by 1900 B.C. This was no doubt one reason why these cities were abandoned. This also means that if the Vedic people came after the Indus Valley culture, they could not have known of the Sarasvati River. This is further evidence that the *Vedas* were from many years before the time of the Indus Valley society and were not brought into the region by some invasion. (*Death of the Aryan Invasion Theory* 12)

Thus, *The Krishna Key* is an account of ancient Indian literature of the Vedic times, a valid note on the famous temples of India and their histories, and a fine work on reviving our past, our literature and our history. "European anthropologists and archaeologists collected, stored and interpreted materials from indigenous pasts in museums and controlled all history-writing about the indigenous people. And now, the indigenous people seek to regain control over skeletal remains, material artefacts, and art objects from their past so that they can narrate their own histories." Pramod K Nayar's argument is well authenticated in Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* where he tries to revive our history through our ancient literature – that very same literature which gave

an identity to the land of India. Sanghi also tries to displace the perception of the world; he represents India for its rich Vedic literature through his work. After all, representations are closely bound with the formation of identity.

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# The Statement of Identity in the Selected Poems of Kamala Das: An Analysis

Babitha B. Nair

Kamala Das has always been true to herself in expressing her thoughts and feelings. The courage she exhibited in framing poems with autobiographical elements was immense. Female writers of her time were reluctant to talk about their inner feelings and women were denied of equality with men in the society. Jaydipsinh Dodiya observes: “Kamala Das has craved out a place for herself; she is assertive, bold and frank. She tears apart the hollowness of the Indian society where hypocrisy and paradox co-exist”(8). She was so determined that she could divulge the mental agony, anguish and yearnings of traditional Indian women of her time through her poems. She raised her voice against the patriarchal society with her powerful language. She wanted to free the ordinary Indian women from the iron grips of patriarchal society. She says: “A poet’s raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality” (88).

*An Introduction*, an autobiographical poem that appeared in her anthology *Summer in Calcutta* in 1965, talks about the plight of an ordinary Indian woman who strives to assert her identity. It deals with social and gender prejudices, dominance and male superiority. As a teenage girl she struggled hard to establish her identity. The narrator of the poem tries to wage a literary war with the male chauvinists. The subjective stance of the poem makes it much more assertive. The repetitive use of *I* in her poems signify her unique language to assert her identity. She attacks the male dominated society for their supremacy over women. She says:

I don't know politics but I know the names  
Of those in power, and can repeat them like  
Days of week, or names of months, beginning with Nehru.  
I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,

I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one. (119)

The majority of her poems depict rebellion against the regulations of society. Kamala Das was labelled as a literary rebel who strived to eradicate the social injustices against women. She tried to balance the rhythm of life by accepting different faces imposed by the society but reacted against the strict norms advocated by patriarchy relating to her writing style. She was the true representative of the female group who needed liberty and equality in the post independent India. Women during her time had their own needs and ambitions which they tried to acquire by standing inside the circle drawn by the male sect. She employed the confessional mode to transport her thoughts and perceptions about female liberty. Her treatment of varied themes enabled her to portray the destiny of typical Indian female society. She struggled hard to adapt with her mental agony and express her *self* through her works very overtly. She undertook the task of writing as a solace to express her distress.

*Decendants* (1967) is a collection of poems and “The Looking Glass” is a poem in this collection. It is a thought provoking lyric which opens up the theme of love but tries to show the underlying meaning in the existence of women and her reliance on her partner. Women have surrendered their femininity and gifted him everything to show that she is a woman. The poet strives to express her identity as a woman through her powerful lyric. She says:

Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,  
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your  
Endless female hungers. (33)

The poem “The Sunshine Cat” she unfolds the dejection she feels throughout her life due to the physical relationship with her husband and her male lovers.

In “The Sunshine Cat” Kamala Das speaks of the injustice meted out to women where again the dominant motif is suffering. She believes that the society is hostile to women and that they are humiliated in all possible ways. (299)

She craves for eternal love and affection from her family and society. “The cat” in the poem signifies her feminine existence on this earth. She longs for love from her husband which he fails to give to her. She calls him “selfish” and a “coward” and attempts to be his true sexual partner by asserting her womanhood. But her husband is a mere watcher of her sexual encounter with other lovers. She says:

They did this to her, the men who know her, the man  
She loved, who loved her not enough, being selfish  
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor  
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher, ... (121)

Kamala Das’s experience of love and marriage becomes traumatic and further intensifies the identity crisis in her feminine self. The poem, “The Sunshine Cat,” invokes a vision of this self:

Noticed that the cat of sunshine was only a  
Line, a half-thin line, and in the evening when  
He returned to take her out, she was a cold and  
Half dead woman, now of no use at all to men. (121)

Indian society during Kamala Das’s time was conservative in its thoughts and deeds. Her undisguised expressions shocked the ordinary readers of India. She dared to talk about her private life and emotions. *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* appeared in 1973.

The title- piece, “The Old Playhouse,” tells us that love is perhaps no more than a way of learning about one’s self or the completion of one’s own personality. (14)

The poem “The Old Playhouse” pictured the authority of man and the subjugation of women. She says:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her  
 In the long summer of your love so that she would forget  
 Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but  
 Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless  
 Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge  
 Of yet another man that I came to you but to learn  
 What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but every  
 Lesson you gave was about yourself. (1)

The male dominated society never paid attention to the longings of women. She analyses the situation from a subjective point of view and voices her disappointing nuptial relationship with her better half. She imagines herself as a *swallow* and her partner is a *captor* who tries to domesticate and control her. She strains herself to exhibit her womanliness with the help of her powerful language. She came to her husband's home to frame her personality and identity. But he wants her to forget about her own persona and the freedom she enjoyed before marriage.

Kamala Das's short poem "The Freaks" is highly subjective and expresses the strong desire to be one with her partner. But she finds him very passive in evoking sexual passion in her. She realizes the failure she has encountered in her life after getting married to him. She depicts the unhappiness and failure in her nuptial relationship. She is full of energy and "flamboyant lust." She says:

... Who can  
 Help us who has lived so long  
 And have failed in love? The heart,  
 An empty cistern, waiting  
 Through long hours, fills itself  
 With coiling snakes of silence ...  
 I am freak. It's only  
 To save my face, I flaunt, at  
 Times, a grand, flamboyant lust. (11)

She uses words with much precision to create a new style and excellence in poetry. Her female figures try to break the chains imposed by patriarchy. The speaker of the poem is a lady who yearns for true love. She hesitates to follow the path paved by the male sect. She yearns for a liberated society and culture.

“The Prisoner” is a poem that depicts Kamala Das’s pursuit of identity. She draws a comparison between the prisoner and a woman. They are involved in erotic activity. While the former wants to escape from the limits of prison and the latter desires to learn the “trappings” of her lover’s body. The poet says:

As the convict studies  
 His prison’s geography  
 I study the trappings  
 Of your body, dear love  
 For I must some day find  
 An escape from its snare. (38)

The overt treatment of the theme of sexual relationship between the poet and her lover presents beauty and vitality to Kamala Das’s poems. The lady who is in search of unconditional love in her poems exhibit a powerful identity. She is capable of imparting love and affection to her lovers not forcefully but willingly. Her poems reflect her feminine sensibility and expression of identity. She depicts the longings and expectations of women through her poems. Her male characters are the symbol of domination and brutality. She exhorts women around the world to express their own self to battle against the patriarchal society.

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# **Individual Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner***

Divya Sugathan

The study of trauma and trauma narratives leads us to examine the consequences of social, historical and political phenomena on the human psyche. It reveals the interconnections between the public and the private, the social and the physiological. Novels of trauma are also indicative of basic human issues such as the relation between life and death, the meaning and quality of existence, physical and psychological survival, how people understand and cope with loss and self-diminishment and the nature of bonds and disconnections among the people.

Until the latter half of the 19th century, the term trauma was synonymous with a physical wound or bodily injury. It was the publication of the essay *On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena* (1893) by Freud and Breuer that gave new dimensions to trauma as a mental phenomenon. Trauma thus became much more than a physical wound. Stress, pain, and shocks are all extremely distressing to the emotional well-being of human beings. Psychological trauma, however, is a violent injury caused to the human psyche as a result of witnessing or experiencing overwhelming events that the mind cannot understand at the time of its occurrence.

Traumatic reactions occur when the mind realizes that action is of no use and that the victim is caught in a situation from which there is no escape. In such a situation the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized and each component of the ordinary response to danger tends to persist in an altered or exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over. Trauma thus creates profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition and memory. Traumatic events are frightening, novel experiences that are not easily integrated into the conscious mind. They

are stored in the unconscious as behavioural symptoms, nightmares, images and memory fragments that constantly invade the conscious mind. Traumatic events involve a certain paradox - the most direct seeing of an overwhelming event occurs as an absolute inability to know it. This collapse of understanding is at the heart of the traumatic experience. Trauma is an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after. Trauma survivors live with not memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion.

The Afghan American writer Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul in 1965. His father was a diplomat for Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry and his mother was a teacher. While Hosseini's father was assigned in Paris, the family received news of the communist coup and the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Hosseini's father secretly arranged political asylum for himself and his family in the United States, where they eventually shifted. Hosseini, who continued his studies in the U.S, became a medical practitioner. He returned to Kabul in 2003, spending two weeks visiting the sites of his childhood. He came back in 2007 as a Goodwill Envoy to the United Nations Refugee Agency. This time he travelled more widely, visited various refugee camps to learn at first-hand about the current conditions and outlook of fellow Afghans whose lives had been ravaged by years of war, violence and turmoil.

Hosseini started working on *The Kite Runner* in 2001. When he was two-thirds through the book, the September 11 attacks occurred. Hosseini considered abandoning the novel believing that with such dire news spreading about Afghanistan, his depiction of his childhood Kabul would not resonate with the world. However, his wife suggested that he now had the opportunity to put a human face on the Afghan people. With this encouragement, he went on to publish the book in 2003. In the same year, a number of nonfiction books about Afghanistan also came out but *The Kite Runner* gained attention for providing a different perspective of the country and its people. *The Kite Runner* that begins in the 1970s offers a different picture of Afghanistan, an Afghanistan which is not ravaged by the mania of religious extremism and war. However, together with the beauty and culture of the Afghanistan of

his childhood, Hosseini also looks at its societal failings, including its religious divisions and ethnic discrimination. In 2007, the novel was adapted into a movie by the same name.

The *Kite Runner* is the story of Amir who is a wealthy Pashtun boy growing up in Kabul prior to the Soviet invasion and his inseparable friendship with Hassan, his Hazara servant. The two boys are raised in the same household almost as brothers. Their friendship shatters when Amir betrays Hassan in a terrible fashion one day in the winter of 1975. Amir stands a mute witness to the rape of Hassan by Assef, a neighbourhood bully. The events that happen on that day have a profound influence on Amir who grows into a guilt ridden man. Unable to be at peace with himself, Amir returns to his war ravaged country to undo his sins.

Amir can be studied as a victim of the individual trauma of witnessing. Bearing witness is not an easy task. It demands courage and responsibility on the part of the witness. A witness to a traumatic event can never remain neutral and has to take sides. It is very tempting to side with the perpetrator, as he is totally undemanding. All that the perpetrator asks of the witness is to remain silent about what he has witnessed. To side with the victim, on the other hand, is a challenge to his mental mettle and moral strength. The victim demands action, engagement and remembering.

The first section of the novel is pivotal in Amir's narration as it explores the causative factors and symptoms of Amir's traumatization. Amir who has a strained relationship with his father experiences the infantile guilt of not having met his father's paternal expectations. As Amir's mother had died giving birth to him, he also feels guilty that he has robbed his father of his wife. A child internalizes his parents' or caretaker's value systems and expectations and automatically feels guilty when he violates the parental or societal norms. This is called *Infantile Guilt*. Amir's experiences the infantile guilt of not having met his father's paternal expectations. As Amir's mother died giving birth to him, he also feels guilty that he has robbed his father of his wife.

Another important facet of Amir's childhood is the inseparable, brotherly bond that he shares with his servant's son, Hassan. However, Amir's feelings towards Hassan are mixed. Though Hassan loves Amir to the verge of adoration, Amir is jealous of Hassan's athletic spirit, innate goodness and inherent braveness. The kite flying tournament of 1975 is pivotal in the narrative. Amir decides to take part and win the tournament so as to prove himself worthy before his father. On the day of the tournament Amir asks Hassan to run the last kite for him. Amir wins the kite tournament and Hassan goes off to run the kite for him. When Hassan does not return after a long time, Amir goes out looking for him. He finds Hassan in an alley being cornered by Assef, the neighbourhood bully and his friends. Assef offers to leave Hassan unharmed if he hands over the kite to him. Hassan, who realizes the value that Amir holds for the kite, refuses this offer. Therefore, he gets brutally raped by Assef. Amir stays long enough to witness the rape, and then runs off fearing his own safety.

*Survivor guilt* is a common experience in people who have lived through or witnessed traumatic events. Amir succumbs to both Existential and Content survivor guilt. Amir is not bereft of the existential survivor guilt over his mistreatment of Hassan, as he realizes that it is the privilege of birth that has earned him this position of power. Having been born as the son of a rich and highly respected Pashtun man, Amir is privileged while Hassan is an illiterate Hazara.

Amir's tragic betrayal and sacrifice of his best friend makes him a victim of content survivor guilt as well. Amir's greatest guilt emerges from his realization that he could have averted Hassan's tragedy if he had intervened or called out for help. However, Amir primarily cares for the kite and stands a mute witness to the rape. This breach of trust and relationship is at the root of Amir's mental agony.

Infantile guilt compounds survivor guilt and makes Amir's mind susceptible for future traumatization. After witnessing the rape, Amir displays all the cardinal symptoms of traumatization like *Hyperarousal*, *Intrusion*, *Constriction*, *Dissociation* and *Re-enactment*. When threatened, the human nervous system gets tensed and excited. This is called

*Hyperarousal*. At the same time the body goes into a state of numbness or immobility, referred to as Constriction. The difference between the inner racing of the nervous system and the outer immobility of the body releases an immense amount of energy that creates a forceful turbulence inside the body. A threatened person must mobilize this energy into some strenuous action. Otherwise the residual energy gets transformed into traumatic symptoms and behaviours. As Amir is unable to use this residual energy in a positive manner, he succumbs to trauma. A person who witnesses a traumatic event feels that he is observing it from outside his body. This split in the self is called *depersonalization*, *dissociation* or *altered state of consciousness*. This altered state of consciousness might be regarded as one of nature's small mercies, a protection against unbearable pain. The witnessing of the event overwhelms Amir so much so that he neither realizes that he had been biting down on his knuckles hard enough to draw blood nor that he had been weeping.

Traumatic memories lack verbal and narrative context. They are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images. Certain images crystallize around a moment of trauma. Amir's narrative abounds in images, memories and dreams that are symptomatic of his trauma. The kite, Hassan's corduroy pants, the look of the sacrificial lamb and blood are predominant images in Amir's narration. Victims of trauma, like Amir, maintain an oath to secrecy and hardly speak of the event. They oscillate between the compulsion to reveal as well as to hide their stories. The revelation is usually hindered by the lack of courage as well as the fear that they might be judged and isolated by their listeners. Trauma impels people to withdraw from close relationships. Amir yearns to avoid the intimacy with Hassan, as every encounter with him reminds him of the rape and his guilt. He therefore devises methods to get rid of Hassan. The trauma also manifests itself physically in Amir. Physical manifestations of Amir's trauma include periods of nervous breaking into explosive rages, reacting with a start to everyday sights and sounds, insomnia and vomiting.

The second section of Amir's narration reiterates the fact that trauma and its impact leave no hiding place intact. Amir's escape to America does not redeem him from his guilt. Despite getting married

and launching a successful career in writing, Amir turns out to be an insomniac constantly troubled by Hassan's memories. This repetitive quality called as *Intrusion* is yet another symptom of trauma. The traumatic event is not experienced or assimilated fully at the time that it occurs, but only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return.

The third section of the narrative where Amir returns to Kabul, explores his recovery process. Healing is not a linear process and the symptoms are at its peak during this period. It is also a challenging process for the trauma survivor as it entails revisiting and re-experiencing the repressed traumatic memories. The knowledge, that Hassan is Amir's half-brother and that he had died trying to protect Amir's house from Taliban encroachment, induces in Amir a greater attachment and responsibility towards him and his orphaned son Sohrab. The mission to save Sohrab from Assef, who has now become a Taliban official, is Amir's attempt to face the ghosts of the past. Amir's confrontation with Assef to rescue Sohrab, in psychiatric terms, can be considered as a *re-enactment* of the original event of 1975 from which he ran away. Traumatized people, like Amir, relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions. They do so because they believe that they can somehow change the outcome of the original traumatic experience. In their attempts to undo the traumatic moment, survivors may even put themselves at great risk. For Amir, rescuing Sohrab from Assef is an act of re-enactment through which he tries to reverse the outcome of his original trauma.

Amir's healing process is complete when he runs the kite for Sohrab during an Afghan picnic in the U.S. As he runs the kite for Sohrab, he erases the lines of discrimination between Hassan and himself. Through Sohrab, he is able to reverse the roles of the kite fighter and kite runner with Hassan. Having given his traumatic experience a proper place in his consciousness, Amir is able to smile unabashedly like how he had twenty six years ago.

*The Kite Runner* is Amir's testimony, which provides him the space to speak out and work through his trauma. It enables him to establish a witness within and outside himself. His testimony also vouches for

the veracity of Hassan's experiences. The story should emanate from Amir as he is bound to respond to the wounded voice of Hassan desperately urging him to divulge his story that had been withheld by Amir for years on end. The narrative thus renders voice to the powerless through the voice of the powerful. Amir's testimony entails with it the pain associated with the act of witnessing and of ending the act of witnessing. *The Kite Runner* focuses on the themes raised by trauma—life and death, sin and redemption, the pain of living, quest for the self and the role of revelation in healing. The novel makes the readers aware of what humans are capable of under extraordinary circumstances. By letting out this knowledge, he guides and not paralyzes his readers. It urges us to reconsider our myths regarding the world and humanity and attend carefully to the psychological wounds of others.

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# The Feudal Nation and the Oscillations of Indian Modernity

Sajin P. J.

Nation, one of the most problematic entities invented by human beings, trounces the generalities of all definitions. In all theoretical deductions of the nation—be it the Primordialists, the Modernists or the Ethnicists—several pitfalls can be identified. If it is the perception about national consciousness as evolving throughout the medieval period in the Primordialist argument (Hutchinson, *Modern Nationalism* 3), it is the conception of ethnicity as the central premise for the emergence of nation in the Ethnicist argument (Hutchinson, *Modern Nationalism* 7). Fixation of the national strictly within the modernist paradigm also defeats the nation's real self. India is the best instance for this aberration.

In India, nationalism emerged in response to colonialism and feudalism. It was actually a product of anti-colonial and anti-feudal awakening. Even while accepting modernity in some fields, the Indian nation was critical of colonial modernity and its attendant industrialisation. So Gandhi could easily travel in a third class train compartment—mobility offered by modernity—to “understand” India and simultaneously advocate the boycott of foreign clothes—product of industrialisation—to save India! This ambivalence can be seen throughout the history of Indian nation. It is all the more evident in matters relating to caste and the feudal prejudices shared by the nation. The new Indian nation supposed to be emerged after the neo-liberal economic policies of the 1990s is not an exception to this. This essay, by analysing the nation's use of old and worn out feudal prejudices to domesticate the revolutionary potential of the people on the margins of society and also by discussing the continuing pull of the repressive and regressive logic of the village on the imagination of the new nation, tries to delineate the contours of this innocent looking yet conniving plot of ambivalence holding the Indian nation together.

Akash Kapur, one of the prominent figures in contemporary Indian English writing, hails from Tamil Nadu. In the 90s, he moved to the United States for higher studies and stayed there till 2003 with the same conviction shared by most of the NRIs abroad that their nation is progressing and that its “shining” is visible even from a distance. So when he returned from America in 2003, felt the projections of new India to be true in every sense. The glitter and the gleam made him think that he is in another America. He found what was going on in India “exciting, even intoxicating” (*India Becoming* 4). But it took only a little while for him to realize the fact that the “the much talked-about glory of today’s India is deeply uncertain” (Drèze and Sen 1). His travels across Tamil Nadu collected in the book *India Becoming: A Journey Through A Changing Landscape* reveal how the 1990s economic policies affect the southern regions of the country. It is a telling account of the realities (often harsh realities) of New India.

What makes Kapur’s book relevant to this study is its depiction of the feudal ambivalences of the new Indian nation. People often believe that the era of feudalism in India ended for good way back in the early twentieth century and that the nation has embraced a new social order built upon democratic principles. This perception is both true and false at the same time. It is true in the sense that the country opted for democracy for administrative and bureaucratic purposes after Independence. But the perception fails when it comes to the persisting influence of feudal nostalgia in the imaginings of the nation even in the twenty-first century. Globalization has made no change to this attitude; on the contrary, it has reinforced the feeling of feudal nostalgia with unprecedented force. The undue importance given to self-pride, the contradictory, yet confluent, feelings of arrogance and generosity arising from extreme self-pride and the lamenting of the lost possessions are some of the feudal traits the new nation still embodies in its national psyche.

The lamenting of the lost possessions degrades the present and the future alike by attributing an unnecessary glory to the past. It helps the feudalist to conceal the regressive and casteist nature of the past. But curiously enough, a particular situation that exists in modern India

bans the feudalist from behaving like a full-fledged feudalist. Multitudes of democratic struggles organized by the margins of society, especially by the Dalits, Adivasis, women and the minorities, have an important role to play in creating this situation. They have effected drastic changes in social understanding. As a result, the feudalists have an extra burden of convincing at least themselves that they are not feudalists but democrats. At the same time, they are not able to reject the nostalgia. This pushes them into a self-contradictory position which in turn affects their own idea of the nation.

Sathy, a feudal landowner Kapur befriends in Molasur, is the living example of this ambivalence. The chapter on Sathy is titled “Golden Times” which readily reminds the reader of the bygone days. Bygone days are not of course golden for all people in India. So, attributing a nostalgic flavour to it cancels the real life experiences of a large section of the society. But that is not a problem for the feudal nation Sathy represents, for it is built on an imagination which constantly feeds on nostalgia. Sathy has a peculiar weakness for the past. It acts as the emotional backdrop on which he constructs his identity. His nostalgia is revealed in the first few paragraphs of “Golden Times.” Here Sathy tells Kapur about his horse rides from the mountains along with his father. His father used to take a gun with him, with which he would shoot in the air to announce their arrival. Hearing this, their cook would warm up the food. It is the loss of this old feudal order where the land owners occupy the pivotal position that Sathy laments.

Walking beside an irrigation channel, Sathy continues to complain about people polluting it. He complains that “People don’t care anymore . . . . Before, there was respect, there was decency. Now all that’s gone. Who knows what people believe in any more?” (Kapur, *India Becoming* 14). On the periphery, Sathy sounds like a true environmentalist. But a closer analysis of his remarks will reveal that there is something more to his love for nature. His comparison of people polluting the water body with the “loss of respect” is evocative. It is not out of place to argue that his love for nature actually sprouts from the angst that the upper caste people feel about the lower caste people occupying the spaces kept as their private property in the past. As respect and decency

have deep roots within the power structures manoeuvred by a subject, here they mean submission to the undemocratic powers owned by the zamindar. His anxiety about the loss of respect and superiority weakens Sathy's concerns for nature and society and reveals the feudalist ambivalence of the new nation.

Not only Sathy but other characters in *India Becoming* are also caught up in the ambivalences of the feudal nation. Das, the Dalit real estate broker whom Sathy introduces to Kapur, is another example. When Kapur first meets Das, he is standing outside Sathy's house soaking in the rain. When asked why he hadn't gone in, Das looks at Sathy for permission to speak. Given permission, Das tells Kapur that he has to respect the feelings of the old people in Sathy's house (Kapur, *India Becoming* 29).

This is an interesting response. Das is hinting at the burden of caste his people bears on their shoulders. Money does not make any change in their social status. It is the caste-ridden feudalist order existing in Sathy's house that prevents Das from entering his house. The correct answer to Akash Kapur's question as to why Das had not gone into the house of Sathy should have to be a direct and poignant attack on the casteist mentality of Sathy's elders. But Das fails to do that. Quite interestingly, he gives a more "sophisticated" and also an indirect answer, that too after seeking the permission of the landlord, Sathy. The indirectness of Das's behaviour, his ill fate of taking permission of an upper-caste person before voicing his opinions and the compulsion he feels to make his responses more sophisticated even when they are reactions against the age old oppression he and his men are subjected to, reveal a great deal on the feudalist nature of the new India.

This indirectness and sophistication are feudal constructs the Dalits are forced to carry even in the new India. Only a small number of the Dalit communities benefit from the neo-liberal policies opted by the nation after the 1990s. But Das's life indicates that even those beneficiaries are trapped inside the feudal logic of the new nation and, along with their fellow members, are also denied subjectivity in the new

nation. It is this denial of subjectivity that Ambedkar addressed while he criticised the uplifting mission of the “Harijans” proposed by Gandhi in 1932. By enacting the role of a saviour the feudal nation in fact cancels all attempts by the Dalits for subjectivity and thereby traps them within a fake sense of belonging. Sathy’s house is an epitome of the feudal nation. Das and others from the margins of society are not permitted to enter it. But Das feels excited about Sathy coming to his house. He considers it a miracle. It is unbelievable for him to see himself sitting beside Sathy and drinking water from the same bottle (Kapur, *India Becoming* 34). Apart from creating this fake sense of belongingness, Sathy and the feudal nation are not at all ready to forswear their supremacy. They are ready to show some leniency to the Dalits like permitting them to enter their house and eating with them because the feudal nation needs people like Das.

Women are always victims of the nation because nations are forever constructed “by the male” and “for the male.” The feudalist logic of the slave/master relationship of the patriarchal nation victimises the female in order to justify its authority. All the female characters in *India Becoming* are victims of this inverted logic. Taming the revolutionary power of the female body is one of the main tasks of the feudal/patriarchal nation.

Kapur’s friend Selvi, whom he meets at Sholinganallur near Chennai, is trapped by this ideology and even while it curtails her freedom and questions her identity, she fails to understand it. In Selvi’s case, the nation uses her own family as an agent of torture. It entangles Selvi in her responsibilities towards the family, towards her father, and thereby tames her into an obedient subject of the feudal nation.

Since Selvi is from an ordinary village, in her case the city acts as the “other” against which the village imagines itself. Her imagination and aspirations are restricted by the ethical framework of the village. The conflict between the village and the city is very common in the narratives of the Indian nation. Gandhi’s famous comment about the soul of India resting in its villages points to the importance of the villages in the scheme of things in the early years of the nation

formation. Ambedkar's protests can be seen as struggles against village because he was able to understand the casteist nature of this romantic space. But it was Gandhi's romanticism rather than Ambedkar's reason that got currency in the imagination of the Indian nation. Even in a metropolis Selvi continues to be romantic about the village which hinders her self. She is caught between the economic exigencies and ethical exclusions of both the neo-liberal nation and the feudal nation.

Banu, Sathy's wife, is also a victim of the conflict between the city and the village. She too is ultimately defeated by the new nation in her fight against its feudalist values. Banu is from the city. It is after her husband finds it difficult to adjust with the life in Chennai that she decides to move to the village. Her fight with the village and its culture begins with this decision. In her case patriarchy employs the family as a tool for restricting both her body and her imagination. The feudal nation uses this exploitative institution to tame its women so that people like Banu and Selvi with their non-traditional imaginations would not dare to touch the dominant patriarchal structure. It asks of them unwanted loyalty towards family and children from which men are exempted. It is the woman's femininity, purity, submissiveness, mothering and caretaking instincts, compassion, and morality that are invoked by the nation in extolling its honour. So Banu desperately needs to be at home and wants to be a "pakka wife" (Kapur, *India Becoming* 99).

Thus all the characters in *India Becoming* manifest the oscillations of Indian modernity to its core. They all are trapped inside the reverted logic of the feudal nation. The economic reforms, even when effected some peripheral changes, is a failure as far as the mental outlook is concerned. This is primarily because of the ambivalence that went into the understanding and appreciation of modernity by the Indian middle class.

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# Elements of Folk in Kathakali: A Hair Splitting Argument

Athira Nandan

Kathakali is a play of meanings like any other text. We all know about the four kinds of *abhinayas* or ways of expressions- *angikam*, *vachikam*, *aharyam* and *satwikam* through which meaning is conveyed in Kathakali performances. Similar elements are present in other art forms and in the so called 'folk' art forms also but no other art form seems to have used all those possibilities to its maximum even to the extent of manipulating the structure to subvert itself.

This subversion which *Natyasastra* may call excess *Lokadharmi* (popular element) which stands at loggerheads with *Natyadharmi* (classical element) is something which invites serious study. How far is the folk element in Kathakali representative of the existing folk stereotypes is the question addressed here. Does gender performance in Kathakali vary with such change in cultural contexts?

## **Structural Levels: Lyrics, Gestures, Rhythm, dress code, make up, and fillers**

The representative nature of the folk elements in Kathakali is different when compared to folk characters in other folk dances. When we analyse structural levels there is no necessary tampering of stereotypical notions.

The lyrics used while presenting folk characters in Kathakali like *Mannan*, *Mannathi*, *Malayan*, *Malayathi*, *Kattalan* are more of a colloquial kind. Expressions like '*edi*' are common in such exchanges which the high seriousness of most other characters in Kathakali cannot afford to perform.

Other levels of semiotics, Mudras (hand gestures) also seem to go beyond the frame work of a 'proper' performance. The above

mentioned characters are allowed show hand gestures which are considered as not as stylized as other mudras according to the system of Kathakali. Kathakali has a definite system of signs on the basis of *Hashtalakshana deepika* which is highly stylized version of ordinary sign languages we use in our day to day exchanges. At this point when you do a discourse analysis of Kathakali you find that the grammar of Kathakali is thus questioned and subverted.

The rhythm used for some folk characters like *vridha* in *Kuchelavritam* is different – ‘*thom tha thinthaka*’. They are not supposed to enter with ‘*kitathaki tham*’, which is a marker of entrance for characters of high profile like *Arjuna* or *Brahmana*. This brings back us our notion of stereotypes where a slave enters while his master makes his entrance.

The dress code for lower classes often stands outside the standardized forms used for other characters *Pacha*, *kathi*, *thadi*, *minukku*. *Kari* seems to be an exception but again a kind of reinforcing the stereotypical idea of black being abominal and lacking all the positive qualities. Characters like, *mannan*, *mannathi*, *asari*, *vridha* follow a direct representation style as far as their dress code is concerned.

A performance is structurally complete when the body movements and facial expressions other than what is demanded by the songs and dialogues also seem to be in harmony with the nature of the character being performed. They also help in defining the character. Bali ( the Monkey king) can make faces while Rama (a human king) cannot. The folk characters also have a variety of fillers of their own. Kattala makes a voice ‘poo pooy’ which acts as a marker of his nature of an ordinary hunter.

### **Semiotic Level**

At some points there seems to be a creation of stereotypes on the basis of gender, class and caste. If we take the case of *Kattala* he is a representative of the *Nishada* community a hunter by profession. He is not supposed to have the ethics of a civilized man. He can take liberties. In the context of the story in which he figures, *Nalarcharita*, he can approach any woman without any prick of conscience.

Again if we consider the characters like *Surpanakha* or *Nakrathundi* we find them overtly expressing their desire for some handsome men. They when placed against characters like *Damayanti* are indecent women who are not born in good families. No woman hailing from a good family is supposed to disclose her innermost secrets. This code of conduct does not apply for women like *simhika*. Even when they can emerge as beautiful ladies or *lalithas* using their magical powers they cannot be ideal, desirable women since they break such code of conduct.

In a broader sense this is part of the gender stereotyping of the all-suffering mother, the vamp, the angel and the monster which again in a wider sense is part of a larger social and cultural context. As T.K. Ramachandran has said in his essay on 'Notes on the Making of Feminine Identity' (the text of Kathakali seems to draw a parallel)

the dignified status which women won as an after math of the anti-colonial, anti-feudal struggles like peasant revolts of North Malabar, movement for abolition of purdah system among Namboothiri women got a setback when the same male gaze which consider women as sex object seems to get a front seat in our cultural industry now. Colonial images of women were of fetish and phobia with the archetypal images of the great mother and the whore which is similar to the case of the literature of feudal Kerala. The gothic like figure of Yakshi which sucks men's blood after enchanting them with beauty and charm formed a prominent element in many of such literatures.

### **Ideology at Play**

The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin analyses 'folk humour' in the various texts of medieval world and classifies it into three forms:

1. Ritual spectacles- carnival pageants, comic shows of the market place
2. Comic verbal compositions- parodies both oral and written
3. Various genres of billingsgate- curses, oaths etc.

(Lynne Pearce & Patricia Waugh ed. *Reading Dialogics*, p55)

**The element of carnivalesque** as defined by Bakhtin which he sees as part of the folk wisdom seems to be present in the folk characters presented through the structural framework of Kathakali. Characters like *Vidyujihwan* who is also known as '*Bheeru*' (fearful) from the quality he represents is an ideal specimen. His makeup lacks proportion, costumes are inordinate. He displays to other eccentricities like producing nonsensical gibberish like sounds. He is allowed free speech unlike the dignified characters in Kathakali. Body politic seems to be at play when a grotesque body as opposed against a bodily ideal is made a character to be performed (like Shrek the hero in the Hollywood movie *Shrek*).

The voices he produces helps in the interaction between the audience and performer adding to the meaning making process like the dialogue of Michael Bakhtin. Margaret Trawick uses such a relation in her study of Paraiyar women's Tamil songs mentioned in her article 'Speech and Voices in Tamil Songs'. She is talking about the doubly marginalized women, the untouchable women who are engaged in menial jobs.

not as a rule to maintain the statusquo or commemorate it, but...to effect some kind of change in the singer's situation by moving some particular party in the audience to feel and act differently from before. (Trawick,"Spirits and Voices in Tamil Songs", *American Ethnologist*)

Each character thus represented under the title folk in Kathakali carries a voice which talks of power dynamics in the society. Culture seems to redefine the notions of gender. Ideal masculinities and femininities are not to be seen in the folk cultural context.

**How abject functions in the play:** The gestures of abject women shown in Kathakali like- *surpanakha*, *nakrathundi* or *simhika* especially in their attempt to dress up like beautiful women seem to parody the gestures of any beauty conscious ladies. Even when we feel that they are laughing at themselves it can also be read as a criticism of the general concept of beauty.

*Kattala* in *Nalacharitam* seems to attempt a criticism on the attitude of Brahmin community with the practice of untouchability. When the actor improvises he says that when you are at death peril whether you be a Brahmin or not you will not pause to know the caste status of your rescuer.

**Showing some vigour is** denied for most women characters in Kathakali but *Malayathi* of *Nizhalkuthu* stands out. She raises certain serious issues like can a woman act outside the familial structures and can she have an ideology of her own. She is a folk character more of the representative kind like the ones we see in folk dances. But she is different from most of them because she is not a victim like many of them but a benefactress. She is disgusted with the activities of her husband and reprimands him and shows herself as a character with some mettle. She seems to have an agency unlike most of the women characters in Kathakali- a will to act and a space to perform.

Where do these characters stand if we take the whole text of Kathakali? Is it celebration of the abject and ugly and ogres or sidelining of the same? Whatever it may be problematizing the existing frame work is accomplished by such characters. Another interesting factor is that these folk characters give a wider space for an actor, who performs them unlike the characters like *Dharmaputra* or *Arjuna*. There is more scope for improvisation. Thus one can say that in a broader perspective the presence of folk elements in Kathakali gives a breathing space for an actor who is otherwise strictly bound by the rigid framework of the text.

### **Hair splitting argument**

Hair as part of the costumes used in Kathakali seems to perform a different role compared to the other body parts and body decorations. One crucial thing is that you can use the same hair for both male and female characters in Kathakali. Hair thus seems to make some connections which create further subversions within the structure of text. How far different cultures define their femininities and masculinities according to hair, its structure, shape and beauty is interesting to analyse.

Hair often figures as a significant symbol in the discourses of culture. Long hair has been used for creations of subcultures as we see in the case of Hippie culture. Cutting hair becomes a resistance marker among women who argue for liberation and vindication of rights.

Like the head hair readily serves as a smaller or more easily manipulated surrogate for the body, hence its tendency to appear in symbolic representation as a stand-in for the person....Hair's uses as a marker of various aspects of identity, such as gender, marital status, social rank, and political orientation. (Wilson, Liz. "Hair; Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures by Alf Hiltebeitel; Barbara D Miller." *History of Religions*)

The whole text of *Mahabharatha* is wound by the rhetoric of Draupadi's hair. When it was a cultural violation, a violation against the femininity of Draupadi, what Lakshmana, Jayanta or Arjuna does against surpanakha, Nakratundi or simhika respectively is de-sexing. Alf Hiltebeitel connects Draupadi's cult as a part of a pan-Indian popular tradition.

These images are all traceable to a classical-medieval-'folk' continuum within the public culture of India, and decipherable in the context of a code of women's hair styles. Loose hair or dishevelment is for widows and menstruating women; the triple braid and chignon are for auspicious married women; the 'single braid, a kind of pony tail is for women separated from their husbands. These conventions can be reconstructed from classical Sanskrit and Tamil texts. Even Draupadi's gruesome demands for a rib comb and a garland or hair ribbon of guts have counterparts in public rituals like Dasara, the fall festival of Durga or the iconography of Kali. (Hiltebeitel, Alf. "Hair Like Snakes and Mustached Brides: Crossed Gender in an Indian Folk Cult". *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, 143-144)

Hair is crucial for many cultures as part of their belief systems. The Sikh religion as the name itself suggests (which seems to be having its etymological roots in sikha or hair) stresses on growing long hair.

Growing tits at the back of heads is a practice among some Brahmins also. Shaven heads are offerings for gods in Hindu religion.

Snake is a usual metaphor for hair of women starting with the literal example of Medusa. It is portrayed as a bewitching part of women's body and is something you have to control. These discourses on hair focus on the point that hair often becomes a tool either to conquer or to violate or to make a statement. The discourse on hair is also used as a tool of subversion in Kathakali as part of its folk elements. The case of abominable women trying to beautify themselves is already presented in the beginning of this paper. On one hand we see them showing the plight of their hair all tangled and dirty. As a civilized being you should not have dishevelled hair. The hair here acts as a major symbol of their identity which needs to be combed and controlled to belong to the civilized class. The attempt is farcical and makes one shun his/her false eliticism. Sometimes whole twenty minutes of the performance goes "doing of hair". It is like a performance within the performance.

When *Poothana*, the demoness who comes to kill *Krishna* by an order from King *Kamsa*, *Krishna's* uncle first disguises herself as a beautiful lady, *lalitha*, and when once she reaches the climax of her mission she sheds away her disguise and takes back her usual self. This is usually shown by the entrance of *Kari* on the place of *Poothana*. At times the return of *Poothana's* original self is just a performative disguise. The character appears with dishevelled hair, rubbed off make up and violent cries. A demoness or rakshasi, any uncivilized woman has to have such an appearance. Neatness, beauty, again terms defined by a few, are associated with the upper class.

The polyphonic and heteroglossic nature of a carnival thus becomes part of the folk projections in Kathakali. The cross roads are many and you cannot pin down everything under one title even that of a carnivalesque. More aspects are yet to be analysed and exposed as any other text undergoing reading in the post structuralist context of the present day.

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# **Fugitive: A Movement**

Subhashish Kumar Singh

The Fugitives were based in Nashville<sup>1</sup>, a city which considered itself the Athens of the South, even to the extent of building a concrete reproduction of the Parthenon- full size. They had discussed metaphysics for years before actually founding their magazine, "The Fugitive", in 1922. This concern with metaphysics with poetic production, with literary criticism, and with their location in the South in a period whose driving impulse was "Progress", together essentially define the fugitive. Their work it seems initiated the Southern Renaissance. But they wrote without being at home in a south in transition, feeling no sympathy for the New South and rejecting the Old South. The name of the group accurately expressed its members' alienation. Their self image of the moment included the Neo-romantic posture of the outcast with access to special knowledge. Ransom's unsigned editorial for the first issue of the magazine fixed their social position, with reference to the Southern past, as being in flight from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins<sup>2</sup> of the Old South. Without raising the question of whether the blood in the veins of its editors runs red, they at any rate are not advertising it as blue.

In relation to formal aesthetics, Ransom, "The first modern" among the group; castigated sentimentality whenever it showed its simple head and first set up the Baal of complexities for worship. J.C. Ransom's own poetry "deliberately minor" in the tradition of Donne, Marvell and Yeats has been ranked among the distinguished poetry of the twentieth century. In the nineteen issue of "The Fugitive" from 1922 to 1925, he published 59 poems, a greater number than any of the other 15 members produced. The poem poses the themes that will later be worked through in the prose, for example, the poet versus the man of instinct, art versus reality, love versus lust in "April Treason", the head- body dualism in "Painted Head"; nature versus science, that is 'a most celestial rose' versus 'dreary unbelieving books'. In 'The Rose';

frigid rationality in “spectral lovers”: The unknown ableness of the Universe in ‘Necrological’; or the attack on rationalism or idealism in “Our Two worthies”.....

And this is how the pure Idea  
 Become our perfect Panacea,  
 Both external and internal  
 And supernal and infernal.

In general, the poetry embodies the dualistic structure that characterizes the prose. It is moreover, a sophisticated poetry with philosophical thematic unity and texture derived from exploiting the English languages affinity for noun constructions. But the range is limited, and the compositional purity of classical restraint and irony ultimately makes a static, passive poetry.

Ransom’s first important article on poetics, “Waste land” in 1923, raises significant issues with a neo-romantic coloring. Art is seen as “gently revolutionary” in contributing the free and unpredictable associations discovered for the thing. This becomes a permanent theme. But the artistic work is done by imagination, inspiration and genius. The artist must be non- partisan and yield to “an agent more competent than reason”. This one-sided opposition illuminates an important feature of the bourgeois paradigm- its inability to write partisanship with aesthetic autonomy, and its insistence on excluding partisanship from totality. If all genuine totality is totalization, historically always in the process of being produced, then it presupposes partisanship as its principle of totalization its mode of giving meaning and structure in the construction of a world, whether in philosophy or in art. And this partisanship is not a barrier to objectivity; in fact, it is the condition of objectivity because it is necessary link to future. The position exposes that the fullness Ransom seeks from the gift of art no longer constitutes a criticism of life, but only a criticism of scientific partiality.

The next significant essay, a turning point in the development of Southern Criticism, was “Thoughts on the poetic discontent” written for the Fugitive in June 1925. The article is a rejection of romanticism

and defense of a sophisticated dualism that Ransom calls “irony”. He rejects first the romantic humanist rationalism, the ‘naïve dualism’ of subject and object which expect nature to be capable of being molded by the subjective will materialize in work. The world, Ransom argues, can’t be so controlled. Next he rejects the attempts to seek a mystical community with nature and adopts the Hulmean point of view that there is no such continuity between man and nature. What this sequences of punctured illusion produces – and we should note that the definition involves a motion of the mind for Ransom that it does not later for Brooks- - is a new mature dualism involving “a mellow wisdom which we may call irony”. Irony is the rarest of the states of mind, because it is the most inclusive; the whole mind has been active in arriving as it, both creation and criticism both poetry and science.

We notice that “the whole mind” has been involved in a contradiction; the rejection of the work project of civilization on the grounds of a principled submission to limitation. The position is built on both criticism and passivity; the paradox of right- wing alienation. It is like the writer’s irony that Lukacs calls “a negative mysticism to be found in times without God”. The certainty that the ultimate has been encountered and grasped precisely in the skepticism of self-limitation. In further work Ransom attempted to provide an epistemological and aesthetic foundation for this three stages sequence that reached its climax in ironic dualism. For two years between 1926 and 1928, he worked on a book to be called *The Third Moment*. It was never published, but partly incorporated in other things at the end of the decade, and known otherwise only through his letters to Tate. He argued that experience contains a sequence of three moments; a first moment of concrete pre categorical experience; a second moment of categorization, of conceptualized knowledge aimed towards a pragmatic telos; and a third moment, a mixture which recovers through images, co- existing with concepts, the qualities lost in the second moment. The thrust of Ransom’s formulations is aimed at second moment which he associates with science, technology and instrumental logic—all of which, in his view, serve our animal instinct. This he sees as the dominant pattern in civilization but one he rejects.

We can see in the three moments the methodological roots of a fundamental political instability that builds into the theory the internal condition that make possible a dialectic of accommodation. For the rigid separation and opposition of the sensuous (first moment) and the categorical (second moment), the elimination of all conceptual (second moment) elements from what is considered the world of actual experience (first moment), means in effect, the elimination as well of all linguistic elements and ultimately, the paradoxical reduction of that world to a state which is not human at all. The subject/object differentiation that is the condition for a human historical world is impossible in the absence of all abstraction- here relegated to the second moment. The attempt to duplicate experience in the first two moments in order to distinguish a level of experience free from or prior to the alienation of contemporary consciousness in actual alienated existence, means, effectively, the elimination of historical experience altogether, and collapse of the human world into precisely the pre historical realm of complete biological instinctual domination that Ransom associates with reason and seeks to avoid, the other side of his paradoxical dissolution of historical ontology is that a solution appears available on the purely epistemological level- in the third moment, when sensuousness and reflection meet in the poetic image. In this context, the articulation of the third moment in terms of the axes of inclusion and fullness, that is in terms of a mixture that includes in full all the aspects that were separated into two moments in Ransom's artificial duplication of experience, confines the critique of science to the level of immediacy, and leaves no place for questions regarding the historical alienation of both every day perception and higher- level categorization. Unfortunately, some also referred to Ransom as the Fugitive's editor, thereby irritating several members who had taken pride in the "democracy" that characterized their editorial policy. Editor or not, Ransom by the quality of his work alone would have appeared to detached viewers to be the dominant member of the group. Three others, Alec B. Stevenson, Stanley Johnson, and Jesse Wills, had all from time to time produced individual works of merit, and Merrill Moore, the most prolific of them all, would continue for years to come to produce publishable sonnets at the same rate and the same level of

quality. For Ransom appeared only slightly less dominant in *Fugitives: An Anthology of Verse*, which the group brought out two years after their magazine had ceased publication. This book-length collection contained forty-nine poems previously published in the 'Fugitive but almost as many more that the members had written during the interval, including two of Tate's best "Death of Little Boys" and "Ode to the Confederate Dead". Meanwhile Ransom had published "Chills and Fever" (1924) and "Two Gentlemen in Bonds" (1927), Davidson had written and published two volume of his own "An Outland Piper" (1924) and "The Tall Men" (1927) and Tate was preparing to publish "Stonewall Jackson, The Good Soldier"; "A Narrative" and his first book of poetry, *Mr. Pope and other poems*. For Davidson and Tate, their period of apprenticeship, if it may be called that, was over, and the period of maturation was already well under way.

For Ransom as a poet, the years of the "Fugitives" constituted his period of maturity. He continued to write memorable poems for a time, but the poetry that sustains his reputations as the leading Fugitive appeared in his second and third volume (1924 and 1927). The three volume of selected poetry that followed (1945, 1963, and 1969) contained revised versions of earlier pieces but little new work of enduring significance. Some times it said that Ransom's preoccupation with other matters—agrarianism in 1930s and critical theory there after—diverted his interest or even killed the poet in him.

Tate's production of poems waned after 1950, but with this last comprehensive collection he demonstrated his consistent commitment to modernism, his mastery, and eventual transcendence, of techniques learned early from the work of T.S. Eliot, his respect for him in the face of a chaotic world that he never repudiated, and his abiding belief in the superior power of symbolic language to reflect and explore the complexity of human existence. Above all, he showed that poetry had been the medium in which his deepest convictions—about history, the American South, literature and religion—had been generated. For the average reader, Tate's larger body of work in prose is more accessible.

Moreover, since Ransom blames the wrong of the world on science, his critique remains contained on the epistemological level, and

abrogates the challenge to alienation on the ontological levels of experience. Indeed, the effect of this phenomenology is that, in identifying alienation and loss of quality with a second moment of science and production “as such”, in themselves, Ransom, in seeking restoration of lost quality, rejects not only alienated science and alienated production, but this entire second moment, and in the process, the development of productive forces in human history in general.

The Fugitives had no illusion that the kind of magazine, they were undertaking would survive for much longer than it did. Their primary aim was simply to write good poetry. They had no intention to make their work distinctively Southern, devoid of sentimentality and carefully crafted, with special attention to the logical coherence of substance and trope- poetry.

### Notes

1. A rural city.
2. It is highest in order of caste pyramid.

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# Blackboards, Apologies and Clean Slates

Abhirami Kiran

Brimming tears, quivering lips,  
Restless hands and an aching heart.  
You wonder, wonder, wonder  
About what happened, about what didn't;  
About the 'why', about the 'why not'.  
You stare at that blackboard  
All covered in scribbles- both unruly and neat.  
Scribbles of grief, of worries and woes;  
Scribbles of pain, of loss and an apology denied;  
Scribbles of humour, of fun and jokes;  
Scribbles of moments past and those lost.  
And yet that denied apology stands out  
Oh so dominant; all else dims  
And vision narrows to that one word you need to hear.  
The one word that will erase all grief  
From your blackboard;  
The only word you need to start a clean slate.  
But yet, so often, you wait in vain;  
You wait so hopeful, you wait so long.  
To seek it out may not seem right  
So you wait, wait, wait.  
You see not the other scribbles of joy that clutter your blackboard.  
You focus so hard on that one apology that never comes.  
For what? For someone who realizes nothing?  
For someone oblivious and unconcerned?  
You soon come to terms and you see how life is just  
Blackboards, apologies and clean slates.

# If He May

Ann Mathew

Those eyes fallen into deep abyss,  
Smiled the bits into his love  
Swept neat, the infinitely petite bits remained.  
Could push through a storm, never disdained  
A warrior walking the unfathomable paths,  
dread and dismay.

A lover, willed to part life itself,  
if He may,

A son pledged to hold hands  
wrinkled and grey  
An infant sworn, to eyes that met  
his, "life is worth it all", in bliss  
Great hopes upon those trembling shoulders  
Fretful eyes knew it wouldn't have much holders  
For only a handful were left in light  
Not that, rest were in dark being might.

Slayer of souls rang in silence  
pitched across the land.  
Hunger, kept those hands from giving,  
no soul could stand.  
Made those eyes, veiled in reverence,  
mirror defiance.  
Minds full with affection grew dry,  
awaited menace.

For the uninvited guest conquered  
those souls of ordeal  
Little of nothing would have kept  
the slayer.  
Grant, oh Lord, those eyes vision  
beyond the abyss  
This old soul wish to rest his-  
head not in dismay,  
if He may.

## Book Review

Nazrin K. H.

### **The Shadow of the Crescent Moon**

Author : Fatima Bhutto

Publisher : Penguin Books, India

Year of first publication : 2013

Genre : Fiction/Novel

Number of Pages : 240

Price : INR 499/-

Some pieces of writing never lets you come out of their world. You will be so engrossed in that world, and sometimes you might even feel a sense of belongingness to that world, which might be a utopian one and sometimes the real one which had been in hiding. Fatima Bhutto's *The Shadow Of The Crescent Moon* engulfs you into a 'Real' world which has been almost in hiding, almost invisible to the rest of the Earth's population.

As the blurb reads, Fatima Bhutto's stunning fiction debut begins and ends one rainswept Friday morning in Mir Ali, a small town in the troubled tribal region of Waziristan. Three brothers meet for breakfast. Soon after, the eldest, recently returned from America, hails a taxi to the local mosque. The second brother, a doctor, goes to check in at his hospital. His troubled wife does not join the family that morning for no one knows where Mina goes these days. And the youngest, the idealist, leaves for town on a motorbike. Seated behind him is a beautiful, fragile girl whose world has been overwhelmed by war. Three hours later, their day will end in devastating circumstances. Beautifully written, full of emotion and heartbreak, *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* is an extraordinary novel.

An aura of captivity fills the entire novel. The author has used her extraordinary skills to make the reader hang on to each and every word and page of her novel, yet, at the same time make their fingers itch to flip to the next page and the next. We are made to live the lives of the many at Mir Ali, a small, devastated town in the Pak-Afghan border. I could breathe in the air of fearfulness of what to expect next, the prolonged air of not letting in the bristles of success brush your ear lids.

As *The Telegraph* puts it, '*To read Fatima Bhutto's thought-provoking debut novel is to understand that, sometimes, the ones who pay the price are those from subsequent generations*'. She gets the reader to taste the bitter sorrows of the actions and virtues of the past generations that are sprinkled upon the present. A true critique of devastating reality, Miss Bhutto has been able to paint a clear-cut portrayal of the socio-political (here, socio-political clearly implies a glimpse into the red-tapism co-existent in the Pakistan Politics for years) scenario prevalent in Pakistan. In this novel, betrayal, allegiances, family ties and resilience come head-to-head with love, liberalism, progression and changing ideologies.

I would like to conclude by quoting my favourite line from the novel, 'Freedom meant nothing to this generation. It was easily bartered for convenience'. This novel, thus, falls into the 'must-read' bucket!

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