The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium

Edited by

Prabhat K. Singh

The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium

Also by Prabhat K. Singh

Literary Criticism

ω *Realism in the Romances of Shakespeare*
ω *Dynamics of Poetry in Fiction*
ω *The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond* (ed.)
ω *A Passage to Shiv K. Kumar*
ω *The Indian English Novel Today* (ed.)

Poetry

ω *So Many Crosses*
ω *The Vermilion Moon*
ω *In the Olive Green*
ω *Lamhe* (Hindi)

Translation into Hindi

ω *Raat Ke Ajnabi: Do Laghu Upanyasa*
(Two novellas of Ruskin Bond – *A Handful of Nuts* and *The Sensualist)*
ω *Mahabharat: Ek Naveen Rupantar*
(Shiv K. Kumar's *The Mahabharata*)

The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium

Edited by

Prabhat K. Singh

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium,
Edited by Prabhat K. Singh

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4951-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4951-7

For
the lovers of the Indian English novel

CONTENTS

PREFACE

I feel privileged to offer this edited volume, *The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium,* containing pieces of academic criticism that explore the various currents and bearings of literary studies in the Indian English novel. These critical responses of the contributors to the emerging trends in novel writing, with reference to individual authors and their works published after the year 2000, are designed to help the readers in formulating a precise impression about the possibilities and limitations of a variety of Indian English novel. Currently, we have women's writing, crime fiction, terror novels, science fiction, campus novels, graphic novels, disability texts, LGBT voices, dalit writing, slumdog narratives, eco-narratives, narratives of myth and fantasy, philosophical novels, historical novels, postcolonial and multicultural narratives, and Diaspora novels. The purpose has been to display the intellectual and emotional texture of this genre by providing an accessible account of the diverse creative tastes and practices of our novelists with a view to both motivating and enabling the readers to draw perspectives and assess their vitality.

Although it is not easy to radically distinguish literary trends and paradigms in a short span of twelve years and some months (2001- April 2013) of the new century, for they are inter-animating in effect, it is quite pertinent to identify the changing face of the contemporary Indian English novel and subject it to critical evaluation. It is with this earnestness that I wish through this book to share views, encourage counter-arguments and visualize the future of our novels in English along with scrutinizing literature, litterateurs and ourselves together. I wish the young minds a robust critical sense for studying a text with discrimination and with judicious adherence to Western or Indian poetics or literary/aesthetic traditions.

The sixteen essays in this critical anthology examine the brisk fecundity and brash buoyancy of the contemporary Indian English novel from disparate points of view. Within the limited space of a modest offering of this kind, it is not possible to explicate and analyze the entire repertoire of its forms, motifs and preoccupations. Nevertheless, the salience of the major trends and generic momentum has been located with the hope that the discussions of views investigated in the texts as well as

the critical perspectives informing them will mark out fruitful paths for future studies. The editorial job has been carried out with this objectivity that the views expressed are those of the individual contributors and with this conviction that literature does not begin or end with us, and a writer or his reader or critic is just a link in the long chain.

I am thankful to Dr Banibrata Mahanta for his sustained interest in this project, and to Dr Rajendra Kumar for his unfailing assistance in organizing the manuscript and preparing a select bibliography useful for those who wish to explore the field further.

Lastly, I owe a great deal to someone, very special, who has been buttressing up all my endeavours.

Varanasi, India **Prabhat K. Singh**

CHAPTER ONE

THE NARRATIVE STRANDS IN THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL: NEEDS, DESIRES AND DIRECTIONS

PRABHAT K. SINGH

I

Indian writing in English, in all probability, originated with the publication of *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, through Several Parts of India* (1794) decades before Thomas Babington Macaulay's famous *Minute* (1835) on law and education introduced the English language to the subcontinent as a liberal and enlightened system of instruction to serve colonial interests. The author, Sake Dean Mahomet (1759-1851) who moved first to Ireland, settled in England and then brought out his autobiographical narrative, the account of an eighteenth century journey through India, may be considered the first Indian writer in English. Such tentative attempts at exploiting English for creative purposes may well be taken as broken starts in that the author of the first Indian novel in English, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, decided to write his later fiction in his mother tongue. However, the steady flowering of the English-language novel in India in the 1930s, further enriched in form and range since the 1980s, has made it a distinguished genre. More positively, some recent novels like Shashi Tharoor's *Riot: A Love Story* (2001), Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Shiv K. Kumar's *Two Mirrors at the Ashram* (2006), Shashi Deshpande's *In the Country of Deceit* (2008), Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2008), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), Khushwant Singh's *The Sunset Club* (2009), Amit Chaudhuri's *The Immortals* (2009), Tabish Khair's *The Thing about Thugs* (2009) and *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the*

Missionary Position (2012), Manu Joseph's *Serious Men* (2010), Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Way to Go* (2010), Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* (2011), Tarun Tejpal's *The Valley of Masks* (2011), Rahul Bhattacharya's *The Sly Company of People Who Care* (2011), Kunal Basu's *The Yellow Emperor's Cure* (2011), Hari Kunzru's *Gods without Men* (2011), Cyrus Mistry's *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer* (2012), to mention a few, confirm the outstanding growth of the Indian English novel as an art form disencumbered of the Western freight.

The Indian novelists inspired by the rich legacy of their culture and history and confronted by the varied realities of life, both gentle and harsh, have been enjoying the liberty of creative exuberance while painting the literary landscapes with remarkable aesthetic prowess and linguistic ingenuity. However, this trajectory is not without streaks of scepticism. To Uma Parameswaran, the Indian English novel seemed 'destined to die'. Way back in 1974, she pronounced in her book, *A Study of Representative Indo-Anglian Novelists*, "I set AD 2000 as the dirge-date for Indo-Anglian literature" (Iyengar 706). Equally prognostic was V. S. Naipaul when he declared [while announcing in October 2004 that *Magic Seeds* (2004), which was a sequel to *Half a Life* (2001), might be his last novel] that he had no faith in the survival of the novel; the novel was dead. But with the passage of time, the constant pursuit of our writers has proved all such postulations or premature obituary notices wrong for the Indian English novel is still pulsating with a rich variety of life and creative fecundity demonstrating the novelists' undimmed faith in the art form. On the other hand, we have also been discoursing upon 'the death of the author', Roland Barthes' post-structuralist stance, but the intricate relationship between the book and the author has been an undeniable truth about creativity. To my mind, it is a matter of shift in critical focus. The writer's voice may be momentarily taken over by the reader's response to the text, but his/her productive muse remains active.

However, the latest threat is a little different for it targets not the author or his art but the form and medium of the art. It is not a theoretical targeting but a material recasting. E-books are invading the territory of their printed brethren. This new generation digital form enriched by internet and graphics no doubt gives widest access to the readers as it flashes at a time on numerous screens of desktops, laptops, palmtops with a mere touch at the keyboard, but it also demands quicker response than the printed text providing lesser opportunity to discover the surplus of meaning. Besides, innumerable readers feel incompatible and uncomfortable with the frequently changing methodology of online reading. To Anita Nair who values the tenth anniversary print version of her book, *Ladies*

Coupe, first published in 2000, more than its e-version, e-reading is a "one dimensional experience" (Nair 5). Certainly, e-books cannot match the reader's feel of a book in hand, a feel that helps the reader enjoy both physical attraction and intimacy. No wonder, John Gilkey, the famous thief of rare books, got away with books worth lakhs of dollars, or Daniel Spiegelman stole rare Medieval and Renaissance English manuscripts and Arabic and Persian manuscripts of the tenth century from Columbia University library that prompted Travis McDate to write *The Book Thief: the True Crimes of Daniel Spiegelman* (2006). A. R. Venkatachalapathy's recent chronicle, *The Province of Books: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu* (2012), though centred on the publications in Tamil language only, gives a fair impression of the long cherished print culture in India. In US and Europe, the bookshops are reported to be under enormous pressure. But in India the scenario is not that bleak, for millions of booklovers of this huge potential market throng the counters because they prefer to relate themselves with printed books even though they are expensive. World Book Fairs in New Delhi and Kolkata, and various National Book Fairs in state capitals, which are but a mix of commerce, culture and socio-political and literary aspirations of our country, are annually attended by a large number of people of all age groups, and more books are being sold (also through online shopping) than ever before. Thousands of publishers are producing nearly one-lakh titles a year in various languages. No doubt, the fall in the reading habit of people who remain glued to the TV, which Shashi Tharoor aptly calls 'the weapon of mass distraction', is a matter of concern, but the spirit of the book scholars and bibliophiles seems to be indomitable.

II

Simultaneously, there has been a wave of fiction writing in our country. Going even by a conservative estimate, there are millions of stories at work in Indian languages, and the contribution of writers writing in English to this huge corpus is sizeable. The monetary aspect of this love for writing is both good and bad – good because it improves the financial status of the hitherto ill-paid writer, and bad because the writer's imagination becomes market-driven subjugating the power of the mind to the power of money. However, it is quite encouraging to find that the Indian English novelists, particularly after the resounding successes of Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga and others, are relatively free from the anxiety of being writers writing in an originally foreign language. This has been possible because this acquired language

has been cultivated in India with industry and care, and, thus, it has become almost a natural medium of our communication and creativity. The nuances of the transition in the socio-cultural realities are being captured quite well by the new intelligentsia. At times, the unimpressed literary editors comment adversely on the mushrooming breed of pulp fiction writers or Page 3 celebrities dabbling in fiction saying that they do have their stories to tell but they lack skilful delineation of experience. But it is an undeniable fact that the Indian English writers are coming out with well deliberated sentences in their works showing awareness of the intricacies of both art and craft. After all, craft is a growing proposition, and the novelist, as Orhan Pamuk rightly believes, cannot imagine all the leaves of the tree of his novel. He has to progress to the trunk and then to the branches for developing a closer and clearer perception of the leaves. Our creative writers' clarity of thought and correctness and conciseness of expression, qualities necessary for full communication of experience and truth, have unified to a commendable extent their language with their literature – language being the dress of the thoughts and literature the thought of the thinking souls. Casualness of tone and randomness of organization, if any, have given way to cohesion of form and content. This, however, does not deny the reader either critical scrutiny of the work or the favourite discourse in classrooms and creative writing workshops on author choosing the word or word adopting the author.

It is not imperative, I think, for the Indian writers writing in English to imitate the finesse of the Western elites. It is, indeed, a weakness rooted partly in the hidden desire to get quick acknowledgement or recognition from the West and partly in the fear that Indian experience may get marginalized if it is not written in English, a global link language, and if it is not written in a manner that appeals to the West. Both Raja Rao and Kamala Das have already emphasized the self-sufficiency and efficacy of our English that has been naturalized in our creative consciousness through centuries of use. It has reinvented itself so competently as to become the language of our dreams and love, a distinction P. Lal underlined all through his life. In addition, this colonial language of global domination has been a language of our anti-colonial resistance. Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Rajagopalachari and many others employed it with felicity to fight back the Empire. So our English today is undoubtedly one of the Indian languages with perceptible resonances of the spirit of Indianness, and its history in India may be called a history of shift from linguistic imperialism to linguistic globalization.

Since literature is primarily self-expression, writing in any language that comes natural, and one feels comfortable in, is respectable. "If that language happens to be English, the creative choice must be respected and one should judge by results rather than by dismal prophecies of what the result must fail to be" (Rajan 109). Turkish writer Elif Shafak, the author of *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), writes in English. Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk writes in Turkish, and he never thought of a situation of not writing in his native language. To him, a second language seems artificial. Caribbean Indian Nobel Prize winner Sir V. S. Naipaul, though he writes in English, has been showing in his novels his concern about the inappropriateness of 'English' education in India. In South African Nobel Prize winner J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace* (1999), even the white man, the chief protagonist whose mother tongue is English, finds it difficult to achieve true and full communication in South Africa through the English language. Therefore, it is obvious that the challenge of communicating an experience successfully – feelingly and with understanding – is common to all writers of all languages, native or non-native. What is important is the linguistic competence of the writer in articulating the experience and its quality.

For the Indian writers, English is as legitimate and relevant as any other Indian language and its literature. They render in English their individual vision without compromise and without disregard to their native languages. In fact, our indigenous languages with their evocative idioms are a great asset to our writers in English. The West may go on pejoratively calling our indigenous languages, our *Bhashas*, 'vernaculars', suggesting inferiority, but they are potential enough to ensure and convey our dignity and cultural identity. Our regional and tribal languages are a vast cultural resource. The only caution needed for the Indian English writers is to avoid indulgence in counter-cultural ways of looking at things so that their vision remains rooted in the soil and they do not suffer from ignorance of the past, particularly while handling the vital issue of cultural conflict or cultural synthesis. And if our English expression in this effort acquires regional tonality, which Rushdie calls 'Chutnified English', it should not be taken as a liability for we are a multilingual nation with 109 'mother tongues', as per the 1971 Census, and our English texts may legitimately have cultural sub-texts. And isn't British English enriched by Irish, Scottish, Scandinavian and other European dialects? Its "cosmopolitan character", as says C. D. Narasimhaiah, consists of "its Celtic imaginativeness, the Scottish vigour, the Saxon concreteness, the Welsh music, and the American brazenness" (Narasimhaiah 8).

So why feel shy if R. K. Narayan's texts have Tamil overtones, Raja Rao's and A. K. Ramanujan's reflect Kannada culture, Bhabani Bhattacharya's have Bengali echoes, V. S. Naipaul's contain West Indies Indian dialect, Jayant Mahapatra's poetry has Oriya music, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) has Malayalam flavour and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) has Bhojpuri sonority (in the folksongs) that echoes louder in the "dham-dhamak-dhamakaoing thunder" in his *River of Smoke* (2011)? These are part of the growing confidence of the Indian writers offering *Bhasha* determiners for authentic rendering of an Indian experience, without Western/English lexical equivalents, without furnishing a glossary. To me, these are parallel to Edward Said's identification of political subtext, Michel Foucault's discovery of power game at the root of every text, and Antonio Gramsci's noticing of hegemony behind all literary texts. This remarkable feature of code switching or code mixing, as we call it, is nothing but English sharing the linguistic diversity of India. I look at it as a promising note, as a mode of resistance against the marginalization of our *Bhasha* literatures – Maithili, Bhojpuri, Dogri, Punjabi, Oriya, Marathi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and the like. Elitism making room for the voice of the masses is a way of joining the purpose of communication with the objective and opportunity of both gaining and imparting a vast resource of knowledge. Our writers are enhancing this communication without losing the grains of our culture, our history, our continuity and our dignity even in the mad rush towards modernity or post-modernity. This helps in promoting a global understanding of Indian realities, and in propagating our indigenous traditions in English language showing our writers' ability to identify with 'others', as Chinua Achebe did in his Nigerian context with success. Orhan Pamuk rightly believes that writing a novel is also managing the emotions of the readers, the others.

Consequently, our readers' choice is not limited today for we have a variety of engaging narratives, canonical and counter canonical, traditional and innovative, literary and commercial. We have women's writing, crime fiction, terror novels, science fiction, campus novels, animal novels, graphic novels, disability texts, LGBT voices, dalit writing, slumdog narratives, eco-narratives, children's writing, narratives of myth and fantasy, philosophical novels, historical novels, postcolonial and multicultural narratives, and Diaspora novels – all presenting new structures of feeling, at times disturbing, in their portrayal of human predicament. This categorization is chiefly for identifying the central burden of the texts and their literary aura, and not for compartmentalizing literature for there cannot be sharp dividing lines between science fiction

and historical fiction, women's writing and eco-narratives. Fictional writings cannot be pigeonholed with fixities in critical readings, nor can trends in writing be shackled in time and space. The first decade of the twenty-first century has come to a close and we have entered the second. It is time to look into the substance, texture and structure of this art form for articulating the defining features of our contemporary novel so rich and diverse in interest and so well set in varying locales by our suitably gifted writers.

III

The novels that contextualize gender related issues and articulate the power of the gender draw our attention quite magnetically. Women writers are fearlessly giving full and candid expression to female consciousness and experiences exploring the secret spaces of women and the difficult terrains of their lives, their love and betrayal, melancholy and anger (at times bursting defiantly into 'slut walks' for social protest). They are also interrogating and refuting the notion of woman as a possession or as a mere instrument of procreation. Since they have identified the oppression of woman as a naturalized condition in the narratives of the past, their contemporary narratives are aimed at redefining the state of the woman in the new contexts of Arthshastra and Kamasutra.

Shashi Deshpande has been untiringly progressing with her brand India emphasis on the golden mean of feminism in her novels. In *Moving On* (2004), the discovery of the past from father's diary leads the female protagonist to a harmonious companionship in the present. Nostalgia reconciled with reality gives momentum to life. In *In the Country of Deceit* (2008), life stumbles between love and betrayal, between adultery producing guilt and inability to secure happiness in marriage recounting mother's suffering and death after father's suicide. Deshpande shows how women become victims of deceit and self-deceit. In addition, her novella, *Ships That Pass* (2012), is her latest 'meditation on the nature of love and marriage'. Deshpande's concern with the representation of women in the society and their condition has led her to explore female consciousness in such a manner as to show women's evolution towards an awakened conscience eventually leading to their enrichment. Self-introspection and self-discovery help Deshpande's female characters in realizing their veiled inner strength.

Manju Kapur looks into the matrix of pains and passions of the housewives of middle class Indian families with her awareness of the women's existential concerns in *A Married Woman* (2002), of the tension

between tradition and modernity in *Home* (2006) and of the difficulties faced by the women in the alien world in *The Immigrant* (2008). Jaishree Misra weaves in her emotive prose an Osbornean tale of a wife-husband relationship with a daughter as its third determiner in *A Scandalous Secret* (2011). This reminds us of Shilpi Somaya Gowda's novel, *Secret Daughter* (2010). Mridula Koshy's debut novel, *Not Only the Things that Happened* (2012), internationally titled as *Lost Boy*, is a grim narrative of abandonment and despair. Meher Pestonji portrays in her novel, *Parvez* (2003), the interpersonal relationships and dilemmas of a Parsi woman who liberates herself from her past. Githa Hariharan writes in a delightful prose with precision, subtlety and touches of humour, and her novels are invariably taken as works of power-politics in some or the other way. In her recent novel, *In Times of Siege* (2003), she has shown through her probing into the trials and tribulations of a working class life how the political perception of her academic protagonist takes shape under the spell of a younger woman. Sensual passions in this novel negotiate with socio-political exigencies. Between the contesting currents of history and mythology, the novel also questions as to who owns the past and how one can make it one's present.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni re-tells *The Mahabharata* from a woman's point of view in *The Palace of Illusions* (2008). Sunetra Gupta, essentially cosmopolitan and deeply concerned about the moral and emotional dislocations across time and space, depicts in her resonating prose the condition of women, their dreams and deaths, in a typical postcolonial style in her novels. Her *So Good in Black* (2009), a character-driven literary fiction exploring 'the market of ethical imperialism', is a little wider in concern. Through her protagonist, a fashionable industrialist who donates chalk-mixed milk to the starving children, she points to the moral turpitude of the institutionalized power that drives the present-day market. Namita Devidayal's *Aftertaste* (2010) reflects on the ethics and morality of business-minded people to whom only money, not love, matters. Manjul Bajaj fictionalizes the burning social issue of honour killing of the young lovers and the ostracization of their families in her novel, *Come, Before Evening Falls* (2009). Namita Gokhale's *Priya in Incredible Indyaa* (2011) is a satiric comedy parodying the lifestyle of the metropolitan elites. After her intense engagement with the problem of female foeticide in her Costa Book Award-winning first novel, *Witness the Night* (2010), Kishwar Desai has sharpened her character, Simran Singh's investigative gaze further in *Origins of Love* (2012) which exposes the whole nexus of surrogacy, now a global proxy industry equipped with stem cells. Mamang Dai gives forceful expression to the realities of the

Northeast mixed with its myths, oral histories and traditions in her *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *Stupid Cupid* (2009). Pensam, meaning 'in-between', symbolizes the hidden spaces in the Adi tribe's heart where a secret garden grows in spite of the violence lurking behind the serene hills of Arunanchal Pradesh. The Cardiff (Wales)-based novelist of Meghalaya, Daisy Hasan's *The To-Let House* (2010), though it is a postcolonial Diaspora novel, tries to locate meaning and identity in the ethnic and political unrest in Shillong. And Jahnavi Barua's *Rebirth* (2011) is a psychological novel with the Assamese traditions and the river Brahmaputra as resilient cultural icons in the face of politics and globalization. These quality productions invalidate all denigrating comments on the women writers and their writing. They are in no way casual scribblers or impoverished talents scribbling what V. S. Naipaul calls 'feminine tosh' on domestic themes. On the contrary, they are conscious artists mapping life, with maturity, on the scales of instinct, emotion and intellect in the contemporary world.

Of the young generation chick-lit giving a titillating tinge to the new age writing, Madhuri Banerjee's *Losing My Virginity and Other Dumb Ideas* (2011), Ismita Tandon Dhankher's *Love on the Rocks* (2011), Rajoshree Chakraborti's *Baloonists* (2010) and Swati Kaushal's *A Piece of Cake* (2011) are brutally honest and bold romantic narratives of love, sensuality and corporate intrigue. K. R. Indira's forthcoming book, *Women's Kamasutra*, originally written in Malayalam and published as *Straina Kamasutra*, though it is not a novel, deserves a mention in this context for it assertively talks of the desirability of males for a female based on a survey on women with 50 questions. It, thus, counterbalances the male-dominated view of sex as found in Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* (expatiated in English by Yashodhara Acharya and published by Richard Burton in 1833), or in the Pawan K. Verma and Sandhya Mirchandani-written *Kamasutra: The Art of Making Love to a Woman* (2007).

The Indian crime fiction, detective novel and science fiction, though they are not so developed as other genres, are also making room for themselves on the bookshelves. We may not have a home-grown Agatha Christie or Fredrick Forsythe, Arthur Conan Doyle or Isaac Asimov so far, but we certainly have some highly promising signatures. Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2007) is a novel of epical dimension about the organized crime world of the modern-day Mumbai, whose female face may be seen in S. Hussain Zaidi and Jane Borges' non-fiction, *Mafia Queens of Mumbai* (2011). K. Srilata's *Table of Four* (2009), Vish Puri's debut novel, *The Case of the Missing Servant* (2010), Ashok Banker's *Blood Red Sari* (2010), the first book of *The Kali Quartet*, a feminist series

full of wild imagery, romance and passionate adventure, Aruna Gill's *The Indus Intercept* (2012), and Kalpana Swaminathan's *The Secret Gardener* (2013) are acknowledged detective and psychological thrillers. Ashwin Sanghi's *The Krishna Key* (2012) is an anthropological thriller. Swati Kaushal's *Drop Dead: A Niki Marwah Mystery* (2012) and Madhumita Bhattacharya's *The Masala Murder* (2012) introduce women's point of view of violence and crime mixed with food and romance. Anu Kumar's *It Takes a Murder* (2012) is another dark narrative of love, loss and fury framed around the political happenings in the 1980s. Arvind Nayar's debut novel, *Operation Karakoram* (2005), is perhaps the first authentic replication of espionage and political conspiracy in the backdrop of 1995 India-Pakistan diplomatic relations. Exploring the gaps in the colonial narratives about Indian thugs, Tabish Khair has created a glamourous crime story, partly Victorian in setting, in his *The Thing about Thugs* (2009). Jeet Thayil's DSC Prize-winning debut novel, *Narcopolis* (2011), which has Baudelairean shades of *Artificial Paradises: Opium and Hashish* (1860), pans along the bloodstream of the drug addicts in the opium dens and brothels of Mumbai of the late 1970s and traces the nineteenth century history of this poisonous trade. Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* (2009) gives sordid glimpses of Gujarat riots with odours of hate and betrayal emanating from shared living. Peggy Mohan's *The Youngest Suspect* (2012) is also a grim tale about the Godhara massacre.

I think, the necessity now is to study the compromise of the crime fiction with the technologies and its impact on the crime graph of society because crime fiction has now grown from the grotesque to the menacingly dangerous. It has now graduated into terror novel having merciless mass killing and war against nation-state as its favourite stuff, like Shashi Warrier's *The Homecoming* (2008) that shows the impact of insurgency in Kashmir, or Omair Ahmad's *Jimmy the Terrorist* (2010) that gives a look into a terrorist's psyche. Journalist Abhisar Sharma's *The Edge of the Machete* (2012) has been written in the backdrop of Taliban's terrorist activities in Khyber (Pakistan), and former Army Officer Mukul Deva's *The Dust Will Never Settle* (2012) is about terror-strikes in Jerusalem. Concurrently, the fight against fundamentalism or totalitarianism has also been portrayed in a symbolic manner. Neel Kamal Puri's *Remember to Forget* (2012) is an attempt to recover from the sad memory of the separatist Khalistan movement, and Mainak Dhar's *Zombiestan* (2012) shows how the Taliban terrorists turned biting zombies (by inhaling toxic chemicals) can be countered or escaped. Tabish Khair's *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position* (2012) shows

how the immigrants pattern and push their love and life amid fears of Islamist intolerance following the Prophet's cartoon controversy in Denmark. Mixed with irreverent humour, the novel is an acerbic but healthy satire on orthodoxy and fanaticism. In Timeri N. Murari's recent novel, *The Taliban Cricket Club* (2012), the game of cricket has been used as a metaphor for orderliness, moral principles and healthy fellow feeling – all contrasting the brutal image of the Taliban. With an Indian counterpart in its cross-border love story, the objective of securing emancipation from the coercive authority of forces apathetic to democratic liberalism has been made clear. The novel hints at the possibility of change in attitude and culture. Maybe, the Alex Strick van Linschoten *et al*-edited forthcoming book, *The Poetry of the Taliban*, which contains English translations of Pashto love poems by the terrorists, will voice, if not banned, the repressed lyricism of the ultras and strengthen Timeri N. Murari's hope of transformation.

Payal Dhar's science fiction trilogy – *A Shadow on Eternity* (2006), *The Key to Chaos* (2007) and *The Timeless Land* (2009) – takes the reader on an adventurous expedition to 'a surrealistic or hyper-realistic land' where the protagonist, enthused by her sense of duty and sacrifice, faces stiff resistance in her attempt to gain control over the 'sands' of 'time'. Suchitra Mathur discovers the politics of gender in science fiction with reference to three works – a short story, 'Sultana's Dream' (1905), by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a play, *Harvest* (1996), by Manjula Padmanabhan, and a novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), by Amitav Ghosh.

IV

A rapidly flourishing sub-genre of fictional writing is the 'campus novel' that may trace its literary ancestry in R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August: An Indian Story* (1988). The life and activities in educational institutions form the content of this type of novel which has so far been chiefly urban and written by students rather than teachers. Interspersed with irony and humour, intellectual flare and emotional overbearing, these tales of dreams and disappointments, intrigues and manipulations, love and longing, friendship and rivalry, curiosity and casualness, career concerns and job worries have rocked the new generation readers who identify themselves with the narratives quite temperamentally. The strength of this new age pop fiction lies in its directness of the experience recorded and the lightheartedness of its reading, even if the plot or the sub-plot is a little

complex. Chetan Bhagat may be called the present leader of this school of fiction writers for it was his *five point someone* (2004) which set the tone of this sub-genre high, and also made possible a grand box-office hit, 'Three Idiots'. Other subsequent publications are Abhijit Bhaduri's *Mediocre but Arrogant* (2005), an expanded image of MBA set in a management institute of Jamshedpur, and its sequel, *Married but Available* (2008), a search for inspiration within the corporate world to achieve self-actualization. Tushar Raheja's *Anything for You*, *Ma'am* (2006) is a love story of an IITian, and Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions, Nor Garlic* (2006) is a hilarious Wodehousean satire on the academic life of an English department. Amitabha Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007), an IITian's sensitive account of the difficulties in chasing a goal, and Harshdeep Jolly's *Everything You Desire: A Journey through IIM* (2007) are also notable works. Soma Das's *Sumthing of a Mocktale* (2007), a sketch of JNU's jeans-jhola-kurta culture, Kausik Sircar's *Three Makes a Crowd* (2007), an account of hostel life and escapades of the students of a military college, and Ritesh Sharma and Neeraj Pahlajani's *Joker in the Pack* (2007), an irreverent view of life at IIMs, are further additions. Karan Bajaj's *Keep Off the Grass* (2008) is about a banker, and Mainak Dhar's *Funda of Mixology* (2008) shows how life gives lessons that IIM curriculums cannot. Sachin Garg's *A Sunny Shady Life* (2010) is an icy love story of a student of Delhi College of Engineering. Siddharth Chowdhury's *Day Scholar* (2010) is a coming-of-age tale set in a Delhi boys' hostel, and Chetan Bhagat's *Revolution 2020* (2011) is a story of love, ambition and corruption partially set in BHU, Varanasi. Satyajit Sarna's *The Angel's Share* (2012) runs through the dark zones of the campus life in the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bangalore. It has love, sex, drug, dance, betrayal and death as its components. The campus novel, I think, will acquire a different dignity altogether the day it prefers to be a serious narrative, instead of being an easy-breezy read, the day it chooses to portray, for example, a dreamy ideal protagonist shattered and silenced by the society he dreams for. The case of Satyendra Dubey, the brilliant IITian whistleblower against corruption whose cruel dismissal from the world left all well-meaning people in everlasting pain, for instance, may be a respectable choice.

There are also novels about adolescent school students. Sandeep Chakravarti's *Tin Fish* (2005) delves into the psyche of a teenager in Mayo College boarding school, and Anirban Bose's *Bombay Rains Bombay Girls* (2008) reveals the protagonist's mind in the making in the milieu of a medical school. Swati Kaushal's young adult novel, *A Girl Like Me* (2008), and Revathi Suresh's debut novel, *Jobless, Clueless,*

Reckless (2013), are non-didactic narratives dealing with teenage exuberance and angst amid complexities of relationships. Subham Basu's *Glian, the Son of Nature* (2007) is more an animal novel than a campus novel for it overwhelmingly reflects the writer's love of wild life. Nilanjana Roy's debut novel, *The Wildings* (2012), portrays quite imaginatively an urban animal world hanging around a clan of cats in the Nizamuddin area of Delhi.

The emergence of graphic novel, which is a kind of parallel narrative with complimentary text and illustration, is also a heartening feature. Ashok Banker's *Prince of Ayodhya* (2003), Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor* (2004), *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* (2007) and *The Harappa Files* (2011), Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008), which has a gay/lesbian theme, and Gautam Bhatiya's *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* (2010) are highly evocative path-breaking graphic novels that demand a change in the reader's response. They are thrilling and subtle at the same time as they handle both comic and serious issues using the communicative techniques of cartoon and painting. This new generation novel recreates ancient classics, biographies and mythologies in such a fashion as to give contemporary realities a formidable backdrop and cultural heritage. Ashok Banker with his Anglo-Indian Christian upbringing and orientation of mind has tried to transport his readers back to the ancient times and places through a series of graphic narratives underlining the indispensable love and humanitarianism in the tales from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the Indian chronicles. Srividya Natarajan's *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* (2012) is a novel with graphic illustrations by Aparajita Ninan. In future, we may have digital graphic novels.

Incapacitated humanity with painful and limited freedom is the chief metaphor for disability. And to explore this metaphor in literature, 'disability studies' has emerged as a nascent branch of critical enquiry for now we have narratives addressing the issues of the disabled ones, whom we prefer to call differently able ones. A variety of autism or learning disabilities of individuals is progressively occupying the creative imagination of our writers (also film/TV-serial makers: 'Black', 'Tare Zamin Par', and 'Antara' are unforgettable productions in the visual media). Prominent among them are Dyslexia (difficulty in reading words), Dysgraphia (difficulty in writing), Dyscalculia (difficulty with Mathematics), Dysphasia/Aphasia (difficulty with language), Dyspraxia (disorder in sensory integration or difficulty with fine motor skills), Auditory Processing Disorder (difficulty in recognizing and interpreting sounds) and Visual Processing Disorder (difficulty in interpreting images

of visual information). New writers are extending the disability concerns of their predecessors such as Firdaus Kanga, who portrayed wheelchair-confined tiny Brit with his bones as brittle as glass in *Trying to Grow* (1991), and Vikram Seth who handled the stone deafness of Julia, the pianist, in *An Equal Music* (1999). Susmita Bagchi, for example, has written *Children of a Better God* (2010) which is a touching tale of agony and courage of the disabled teenagers. In Hari Kunzru's novel, *Gods without Men* (2011), too, an autistic child is central to all searches. Muscular dystrophy has been a big bane in a child's growth and education. Palsy-stricken Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* (2011), though it is an autobiography, gives an authentic account of a spastic's battle for control over voluntary muscles. Very recently, a visually challenged teenager, Viswanath Venkat Dasari, has fictionalized Indian and Egyptian myths in his *Pharaoh and the King* (2011). In this context, it is heartening to hear now that core courses in this area of concern are being formulated (perhaps IGNOU is taking the lead) to be introduced in the university curricula.

Mental disorder is another area of human concern that poses a challenge in narratology. Pramila Balasundaram has handled this challenge quite successfully. Writing with considerable emotional sensitivity, she has given us a novel, *Sunny's Story* (2005), exclusively addressed to mental disorder. Jerry Pinto's debut novel, *Em and the Big Hoom* (2012), is another notable success. It is a family drama of a mentally sick mother, an understanding father and a mystified but intrigued son in between whose cognitive brilliance as narrator makes the tale a discerning psychological masterpiece.

V

The lesbian and gay novels as narratives of social change resisting their subaltern status have rocked the traditional mindset. Being narcissistic and controversial, having trans-disciplinary perspectives – legal, social, cultural, moral and psychological, they offer alternative structures of feeling about sexuality or trans-sexuality. In their nurturing of human impulses of a different kind, which is but a way of retrieving the unacknowledged self by breaking the taboos and mastering the trepidations, they leave their readers discoursing upon the question – Is it virility gone astray or is it as natural as bisexuality? Queer as they are, they deal with the notion of sexual non-conformity and probe into the grey areas of human relationship. Suniti Namjoshi's *The Conservations of Cow* (1985), which expounds diasporic lesbianism or feminist socialism with a

misogynistic lesbian character in the centre, and the Khushwant Singh and Shobha De-edited *Uncertain Liaisons: Sex, Strife and Togetherness in Urban India* (1993) are significant past studies in sexuality and companionship. They show the attitudinal change in men and women and the resultant change in the narrative logic of realistic novel. Of the recent writings, Abha Dawesar's *Babyji* (2005) is a lesbian novel about a 16-year-young Brahmin girl's sexual adventures with a classmate and two older women. It revives to our memory both Ishmat Chugtai's *The Quilt and Other Stories* (1944), the English translation of Urdu *Lihaaf* (1942) in which the sexually starved protagonist shares bed with the maidservant, and Shobha De's *Strange Obsession* (1992) where the gorgeous supermodel, Amrita, meets disastrous consequences in her relationship with Minx. In Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman,* too, lesbianism is an alternative mode of sexual relationship.

Narratives exploring the veiled domains of gay-sexuality have also come up with force. Himself a gay, R. Raj Rao's *The Boyfriend* (2003), one of the pioneer gay novels in India, and *Hostel Room 131* (2010) show his continued drive for alternative literature. Mayur Patel's *Vivek and I* (2010) unravels a school teacher's infatuation for his student, and Mahesh Natrajan's *Pink Sheep* (2010) deals with a series of confrontations between instinctual radicalism and rational conservatism. The latest addition to this type is Ghalib Shiraz Dhalla's *The Exiles* (2011) which is about a homosexual man's extramarital affairs and his wife's resultant confusion, shame and suffering. All the three characters live their individual exiles.

In other literary genres also, there are works that have established a parallel trend of addressing the sexual longings and dilemmas of individuals authentically. For instance, the Hoshang Merchant-edited *Yaraana: Gay Writing from South Asia* (1999) is a book of poems and stories of same sex love, which in India he finds different from that in the West. Rahul Mehta's authentic gay fiction, *Quarantine* (2010), which has other concerns also (besides seeking answer to the fundamental questions about identity and dislocation – Who am I? Why am I here?), and which reminds us of Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* (1944), is a collection of finely crafted stories. Parvati Sharma's *The Dead Camel and Other Stories of Love* (2010) is a highly sensuous lesbian text. The Minal Hijratwala-edited *Out! Stories from the New Queer India* (2012) is a notable queer text. A. Revathi's *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010) where the feelings of a girl are embodied in a boy, whose life makes an anthropological study, is the English translation (by V. Geetha) of a eunuch's autobiography originally written in Tamil. In yet another art form, painting, gay painters like Balbir Krishan and others painting nude

males, despite social excommunication and volatile public reaction, are holding their brush rather firmly. Besides, the LGBT community gives expression to its struggle for identity, equality and dignity through various gatherings. At Koovagam in Tamil Nadu, the transgender people re-enact in May-June every year the marriage of Mohini, Lord Krishna's transformed self, with Aravan, the son of Prince Arjuna, and her subsequent widowhood in the *Mahabharata.* In the US, the community annually holds its Pride March in June in which the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, New York City (SALGA-NYC) is a major participant.

Thus, the writings, paintings and protest marches echoing the LGBT voices show how the lesbian, the gay, the bi-sexual and the transgender people standing between private choice and public bewilderment are agitated in their private life and tormented by public questions sounding gender apartheid. Being segregated from the mainstream, they face severe derision and ridicule of the society declaring them as perverts. Nevertheless, the LGBT text writers are pushing this genre ahead with a great thrust to show that what matters is not the gender or sex but the state of mind, the happiness and sharing in togetherness. And the repealing of the Article 377 of the IPC on July 12, 2009 decriminalizing same gender consensual sex has proved to be a shot in their arm, which may be further boosted by the 'Draft National Youth Policy 2012' of the Ministry of Youth Affairs intended to make suitable policy intervention in the matter. The struggle of the members of the LGBT community for recognition of their self-sufficiency, though it is not free from the question of procreativity and the danger of STDs, has increased the cultural and aesthetic activism of the creative writers and other artists. The HIV/AIDS narratives, a literary genre of Afro-American origin in the 1980s, have added bio-political and techno-scientific dimensions to the lesbian and gay novels in the current wake of globalization. Dr Sunil Vaid's *Mortal Cure: A Novel* (2007), like Siddharth Dube's non-fiction, *Sex, Lies and AIDS* (2001), or Mahesh Dattani's play, *A Different Season* (2005), or the Negar Akhavi-edited collection of ethnographic reportage and fiction, *AIDS Sutra: Untold Stories from India* (2008), is a search for the remedy for this physical and emotional stigma. It is time to examine and assess, both carefully and comprehensively, the legitimacy of providing space to such alternative literatures in the academic domain.

VI

The dalit writing of protest against the subalternity of the dalit is another literary movement in spate from the 1980s. It emphasizes the necessity of a change in the popular perception about this sociological issue through the portrayal of the psychodynamics of a dalit's life. From Mulk Raj Anand's classic novel, *Untouchable* (1935), to Cyrus Mistry's *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer* (2012) [Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2010) in between], one may find the dalit perspectives of life in eventful narrations. The Mahars, whose age-old social responsibility in Shankarrao Kharat's story, 'A Corpse in the Well' (1994), is to dispose of the carcasses, and the Khandhias, who bear corpses to the Parsi Tower of Silence in Mistry's *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer,* are fated to receive similar inhuman treatment. Call them Harijan or Antyaja or Panchama or Paravan or Pariah, they are all untouchable outcastes sharing the fate of the marginalized. Noticeably, the manifestations of social disparity and the ramifications of man's cruelty to man also form the content of Mistry's first novel, *The Radiance of Ashes* (2006 in India). Luxman Gaikwad's *The Branded* (1998), the English translation (by P. A. Kolharkar) of his Marathi autobiographical novel, *Uchalya* (1987), which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award, is a notable work of this brand of the past. Tamil dalit novelist, Bama Faustina's works that tell of indignities suffered by the social outcastes, whose younger generation occasionally indulges in acts of defiance, are now available in English translation. She shares the pains of the downtrodden creatively and thus tries to give a shape to their history and fate. Lakshmi Holmstrom has translated her *Karukku* (2000), which inspired Revathi to write her autobiography. The first dalit woman writer, P. Sivakami's portrayal of tribal women as concubines in her novel, *The Grip of Change* (2006), originally written in Tamil, is a protest against the dalitization of female body through sexual subjugation by the men, both upper caste and dalit. *The Araya Woman* (2010) is the English translation by Catherine Thankamma of the first South Indian tribal novelist, Narayan's anthropological debut novel, *Kocharethi*. Srividya Natarajan's *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* (2012) is another notable novel that tells the story of the famous social reformer of Maharashtra who worked for women's education and the rights of the shudras.

The dalit literature has also gained energy from the socio-political stand of the Ambedkar-Phule-ideology-inspired neo-Buddhists as reflected

in the different dalit narratives, other than novels, looking for the answer to several questions implied in the struggle of the dalit community. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2003), translated by Arun Prabha Mukherjee, is a highly significant dalit narrative. Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004), translated from Marathi by Alok Mukherjee, is a key to the understanding of the dalit consciousness in the perspectives of Ambedkarism, Marxism and African American literature. The K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu-edited *No Alphabet in Sight: New Dalit Writing from South India, Dossier 1: Tamil and Malayalam* (2011), which covers 21 Tamil and 23 Malayalam writers, is 'an archival work' presenting almost an alternative history of our *Bhasha* literatures. The Ravi Kumar and R. Azhagarsan-edited *The Oxford Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing* (2012) presents a historical and political landscape of dalit writing through a mutually reinforcing mix of literary genres – poems, short stories, plays, excerpts from novels, biographies, autobiographies, speeches and articles. In addition, D. R. Nagaraj's contribution to dalit literature and criticism is unforgettable.

In brief, the dalit literature in India, somewhat like the black literature in America, deals with the location of the dalit in our caste-ridden society and their fight for self-respect and dignity, politico-cultural equality and socio-economic justice. It is, basically, a reaction against the Brahminical view of life, the Vedic foundations of social structure. But two negative features of this fight are noticeable. Firstly, the allegations are so common in nature and substance that they sound mandatory promoting a culture of controversy and sentimentality for gaining political capital. The ritualistic accusations look melting in the co-sharing of power politics. And, secondly, the response to the given situation is so ambivalent that it becomes self-defeating. Initially, they differentiated between the dalit writing by a dalit and that by a non-dalit. They labelled the works of even Premchand, Phanishwar Nath Renu, Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi as 'discourse(s) of pity'. But of late, a parallel structure within the community of dalit writers has evolved. Now the writing of US-based Narendra Jadhav, for instance, is not accepted as a representative document for the simple reason that the writer has become an elite settled in his dreamland. His English language proficiency and Western experience have become a hindrance, a disqualification. This, by implication, both vindicates and interrogates Alok Mukherjee's stand that "English education for the Dalits in India … alone can empower and emancipate the historically disenfranchised Dalits" (*'The Gift of English': English Education and the Formation of Alternative Hegemonies in India*) because emancipation also involves elitism. Then does it not suggest that

every dalit who receives English education ceases to be a dalit, because English is a mantra of elitism? In addition, is the egalitarian system of our higher education that advocates for equal right and opportunity responsible for this, because it overlooks the fact that not everybody is equally eligible for this equal opportunity? There may be dissenting responses to these questions, but at least this much is clearly perceptible that a kind of *varna vyavastha* is working out its pattern within the frame of the dalit community. Bama has addressed (with apparent discomfiture because she does not relish others' handling of the dalit's fate, a non-pluralistic hegemonic posture) this problem of inequality and hatred, rivalry and vengeance among different dalit communities in her novel, *Vanmam* (*Vendetta* 2008), translated by Malini Sheshadri. This sad reality, I believe, has emerged because the identity of a dalit has moved from the centre to the periphery of its own orbit. It has acquired associational meaning in the contemporary sociological frame making concerned ones think as to who is a dalit, anyway, and what are the positive aspects and frontiers of dalit literature. After all, there is no denying the fact that a corrupt elite or a corrupt dalit both are equally condemnable and dangerous for a civil society. Ostracization of the dalit by the dalit is also not uncommon. And one may not be a dalit necessarily by birth, like Phiroze Elchidana, son of the Head Priest of a Zoroastrian Fire Temple but a Khandhia by choice in *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer*. He is capable of drafting in English the 'ultimatum' and the 'charter of demands' of the Union of Corpse Bearers. Phiroze's love for Sepideh, a Khandhia's daughter who he marries, helps him transcend all barriers of the living and the dead. In Vaidehi's *Vasudeva's Family* (2013), the English version of her Kannada novel, *Asprushyaru* (1980), also the evils of caste hierarchy have been exposed through the inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin and a woman of the lowly Korago community.

Not all narratives of the poor and the underprivileged can be straitjacketed in 'dalit literature'. Some of them may be better called 'slumdog narrative', which is a broader nomenclature inclusive of all underdogs, dalit or non-dalit. Delhi slum project, 'Hole in the Wall'-inspired Vikas Swarup's novel, *Q & A* (2005), later published as *Slumdog Millionaire*, which turned into the Oscar winning film, 'Slumdog Millionaire' (2008), is chiefly about the possibilities and limitations of a street orphan's intellectual evolution. The protagonist's name, Ram Mohammad Thomas, projects a synthesized identity of the destitute children of three religious sections of Indian society. Kavery Nambisan's *The Story That Must Not Be Told* (2008) is a truly slumdog novel from a surgeon's pen. It is a journey into the interiors of a Chennai slum,

ironically named 'Sitara', where the dwellers' aspirations are betrayed by life. The novel shows how Bharat, the indigenous self, and India, the postcolonial product, deny each other's identity as 'the affluent elites in their comfort zones' make themselves immune from the stark realities of life and society around.

VII

The anthropological realities are also intertwined with ecological concerns. The Biblical origin of eco-narratives may be located in the Garden of Eden. However, their later literary identity makes them offshoots of the American Transcendentalism of Emerson [*Nature* (1836)], Thoreau [*Walden* (1845)] and Fuller [*Summer on the Lakes During 1843* (1994)] and the British Romanticism of Gray [*Elegy* (1751)], Wordsworth [*The Prelude* (1850), though started in 1798] and his school. Eco-narratives reveal the innate relationship between literature and physical environment. Nature here is an anthropomorphic construct, a term that validates, in a way, the human with reference to the non-human. Unfortunately, nature today is being gobbled up by culture. Perhaps, it is this suffering that engages eco-writers and eco-feminists to identify human experiences with nature in their art. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2007) is a remarkably insightful anthropological eco-narrative showing a wider vision of humanity. Life and living are encapsulated here in the rhythms of the river. Situating man, animal and nature in a shared environment, Ghosh combines their fate together and gives a new treatment to the idea of conservation. He draws the reader's attention to both the flora and fauna of Sundarbans (which is constantly devastated by deforestation as well as other forms of ecocide) and the condition of the marginalized section of society living in that ecosphere. Their life is no better than that of the animals, though they are armed with theological beliefs. They struggle to survive in the wilderness. Man, animal and nature thus reinforce each other's predicament. This co-existential sharing lends a new dimension to the concept of multiculturalism and intertwines anthropocentrism with ecocentrism as "human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell 7). Sree Vatsan's *Countryside Album* (2007) offers exotic sights of the picturesque Malabar and the traditions of the region that lend authenticity to the narration. Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills* (2010) unfolds a classic story of love, longing and desperation in the misty landscapes of Coorg. And in *Gods without Men* (2011), Hari Kunzru discovers the affiliation of the landscape of California desert, the birthplace of both spiritual traditions and military experimentations, with

metaphysical truths and explores man's communion with the unknown. Music and mysticism pervade the atmosphere of the novel and the soul-wrenching search for meaning continues inconclusively. Similarly, there is plenty of nature in Indian English children's fiction. It also abounds with animals, both domestic and wild, that teach and delight. Ruskin Bond's eco-narratives are brilliant portrayals of man-animal co-existence in the sylvan serenity of the Himalayas that is fascinating enough to pull, magnetically, the city dwellers out of their nurtured homes.

Of the narratives of myth and fantasy, a genre less explored except in Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), Samit Basu's trilogy, *Game World* (2004-2007), and his superhero novel, *Turbulence* (2010), Ashwin Sanghi's *The Rozabal Line* (2008), and *Chanakya's Chant* (2010) are remarkable. Shiv K. Kumar's *The Mahabharata* (2011), translated by me into Hindi under the title, *Mahabharata: Ek Naveen Rupantar* (2012), is not just a war-document but also a narrative of complex interpersonal relationships. These are all unforgettable fictionalizations of historical classics and ancient epics. Vayu Naidu's *Sita's Ascent* (2012) and the works of Ashok Banker, too, fall in this category.

Equally close in import is the philosophical novel which, very sadly, seems to be a disappearing variety. With beautiful touches of the sublime, Pawan K. Varma's *When Loss is Gain* (2012) is the lone refreshing piece (amidst the multiple forms of the contemporary novel) that seems to be extending the great tradition of Raja Rao. The novel anchors the readers of this sick hurry world to the tenets of Hinduism and Buddhism and shows a path of moral and spiritual emancipation through the dichotomy of *dukkha* and *ananda*. Punctuated heavily by the verses of Kabir, Khusro, Ghalib, Basavanna and Bulla Shah, and the citations from Shankaracharya's *Nirvana Shatkam* and *Isha Upanishad,* the narrative of this debut novel inculcates a strong sense of affirmation in life. Basavaraj Naikar's hagiographic narrative, *Light in the House* (2009), is a tribute to the 19th century saint poet, Sharif Saheb of Shisunalaa, popularly known as the 'Kabir of Karnataka' who kindled the light of spirituality in every human being.

VIII

There are novels that show the cultural, historical bonds of the Indians. M. J. Akbar's *Blood Brothers* (2006), which intends to transcend communal barriers, is an 'unsentimental narrative' of three generations of a Bihari Muslim jute mill worker's family in Bengal of the 1970s. The novel is a way to understand the past and the bond of humanity reflecting Gandhi's perception of 'blood brother' as expressed in *Hind Swaraj* or

Indian Home Rule – "What am I to do when a blood-brother is on the point of killing a cow? Am I to kill him, or to fall down at his feet and implore him? If you admit that I should adopt the latter course, I must do the same to my Moslem brother" (Gandhi 43). Siddharth Chowdhury's *Patna Roughcut* (2005) shows how a person and his place are integral to the dynamics of life lived. Amita Kanekar's *A Spoke in the Wheel* (2005) is an interesting account of Indian history vis-à-vis Lord Buddha and the Vedic ritualistic traditions. Tabish Khair carves out a 'secular space', as he claims, in *Filming: A Love Story* (2007) where history and myths are intertwined with the dreams and despair of the Bollywood tinsel world, a subject that Kiran Nagarkar also deals with in *The Extras* (2012), his sequel to *Ravan and Eddie* (1995). K. R. Usha's *A Girl and a River* (2007) is a historical journey back and forth weaving fact and fiction quite successfully. Ameen Merchant's *The Silent Raga* (2008) alternates between the past and the present of the Tamil Brahmin culture with music as its central metaphor, and Padma Viswanathan's *The Toss of a Lemon* (2008) recreates a Brahmin home changing between 1892 and 1957. Navtej Sarna's *The Exile* (2008) narrates the turmoil in the life of Duleep Singh, the last legitimate Maharaja of Punjab who ascended the throne at the age of five in 1839. Jaina Sanga's *Silk Fish Opium* (2012) is a gripping psychological tale written in the backdrop of partition.

Like Ahmed Ali who gave a nostalgic view of Indian life and its fading old order in his *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), Salman Rushdie laments for the secular fabric of Kashmir shattered under 'the crumbling weight of Islamic jihad and military repression' in *Shalimar the Clown* (2006). His imagination runs between the aspirations of the past and the visions of the future. The novels of Amitav Ghosh are replete with authentic flashes and glimpses of the grandeur, tradition and heritage of India and its neighbouring states. That is how history becomes alive in his narrative; the past is both recovered and invented creatively in the manner of Tagore, the manner that one may find elaborated in Amit Chaudhuri's book, *On Tagore* (2012). In both *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke,* we have a whole history of cultural encounters and people's exploitation under the banner of global trade, just another face of the Victorian mission of civilizing the savage.

K. N. Daruwalla comprehends the components of trade, religion and culture in Vasco da Gama's historic expedition to India in his debut novel, *For Pepper and Christ* (2009). L. R. Sharma's initiation into fictional writing, *The Tailor's Needle* (2009), takes the reader to the colonial past of India to show the internal stitching of human relationships. Romesh Gunasekara's *The Prisoner of Paradise* (2012) shows the ugly face of

slavery in the early nineteenth century Mauritius through the eyes of a young Indian girl, Lucy, whose consciousness oscillates between the sentimentality of the British and French colonial masters and the suffering of the Indian indentured slaves. Of the recent past of India, Anees Salim's debut novel, *The Vicks Mango Tree* (2012), ironically reveals the dismal state of democratic liberties during Emergency.

Indu Sundaresan's obsession with Mughal history has flowered into a trilogy – *The Twentieth Wife* (2002), *The Feast of Roses* (2003) and *The Shadow Princess* (2010) – all about Emperor Shah Jahan and his beloved Begum Mumtaz. Kanishka Gupta's sadistic characters make a whole *History of Hate* (2010). Kunal Basu's *The Yellow Emperor's Cure* (2011), his most erotic work so far, chiefly because of its subject, is about the oldest medical history of traditional Chinese remedy for venereal diseases.

In addition, the first Indian English novelist from Nagaland, Easterine Kire Iralu's *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) and *Mari* (2010) are historical novels about the battle between the Nagas and the British forces and about the attempted invasion of India by the Japanese during the Second World War respectively. Interrogating the Naga political ideology in her *Bitter Wormwood* (2012), Kire has tried to humanize the political impulses of her people deeply. Being interested in historicizing religion and politics and being painfully aware of the fading oral narratives of Nagaland, the novelist, now living in Norway, is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the culture, tradition and folktales of the Northeast region through writing. Jaishree Misra's *Rani* (2007), though it also invited controversy and was banned in Uttar Pradesh for containing a gossip about the esteemed Queen's romance with a British officer, is a glowing salute to the patriotic fervour of the brave Queen of Jhansi. Similarly, Basavaraj Naikar's *The Queen of Kittur* (2012) reconstructs the heroic past of Rani Chennamma of the kingdom of Kittur who fought against the East India Company more than three decades before Rani Lakshmibai.

Multiculturalism and globalization, the modern forms of our quintessentially pluralistic vision of *vasudhaiva kutumbkam*, have not only extended the commercial boundaries of our nation but also inspired our writers to diversify our intellectual worth and foster an understanding of other cultures by addressing issues and perspectives of life that concern humanity on a larger scale in the twenty-first century. Corporate novels are addressing these issues. K. R. Usha's *Monkey-man* (2010) deals with the new work culture symbolized by the MNCs and its impact on human relationships. Chetan Bhagat's *one night @ the call centre* (2005) is

another lucid narrative that shows with transparency the problems and mindset of the fast growing global working class whose life has transformed at the cost of blood. But Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, a leading voice of Indian origin, opens her latest book, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), on a little different note for she believes 'it is only capital and data that globalize; all the rest is damage control'. This obviously is a typical Marxist view of globalization rooted in the belief that the idea that capital should be used for social justice is always going to stay, whatever the changes in the power structure. Nevertheless, it does prompt us to think about the non-economic perspectives of everything, including literature, which has gone global.

However, the discourse that has engaged us most persistently has been generated by the Diaspora novels that deal in realistic fashion with cultural clashes, identity crisis, alienation and search for a substitute living which are but the outposts of immigrant odyssey. The novelists of the Indian Diaspora have three locations. Some have settled in the West like V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Chitra Banerjee Diwakaruni; some have returned to India like Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Githa Hariharan, and Shashi Tharoor; and some are shuttling in between like Amit Chaudhuri, Kiran Desai and Tabish Khair. However, all these writers have been grappling in their own ways with the hybrid state of language and experience and exploring the concepts of cultural identity, rootlessness and traditional and familial expectations. This is because each one of them has lived the pains and pleasures of a journey, a pilgrimage, to the alien world taking a route leading them away from their root. Quite naturally, in their shifting cultural boundaries, loneliness and sense of belonging have become their emotional and historical legacies.

Now we hear voices of a different kind of immigrant anxiety. Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) ponders deep on the ideas of race, identity, exile and nationalism against the backdrop of the Gorkha movement of Darjeeling where the young generation is losing the sense of inheritance. The central issue of migration and return has been addressed suggestively by Biju's regaining of India, his home, in his loss of America which was his dreamland but where he was invisible. Desai's concern is free from sentimentality and hypocrisy, and there is admirable historical truthfulness in her narrative that blurs India with Bhutan and Sikkim giving a wider and essentially pluralistic or global perspective to the idea of cultural identity. Her narrative, however, reveals the retention of her own rich inheritance of words and literary culture from her celebrated novelist mother, Anita Desai. Rahul Bhattacharya's Guyana experience

with people disinherited by forced migration offers a sombre view of life in his *The Sly Company of Men Who Care* (2011). The inconspicuous location and the diction of the novel deepen the darkness of displacement and accentuate the grotesqueness of human existence. This reminds us of the plight of the Kashmiri Hindus in Meera Kant's play, *Kaali Barf,* staged at Sri Ram Centre, New Delhi in 2005, in which people evicted and shattered by terrorism languish in endless hope of return. On the other hand, displacement within the boundary of a nation puts forward another face of anxiety, more agonizing and troublesome than the international or intercontinental shift. In Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* (2003), the protagonist, Dr Dam, who, in the aftermath of Partition, settles in the Northeast where the native Mizo, Naga and Khasi tribes stake their claims on the land, is considered a 'Bengali', an 'outsider', an 'Indian'. The novel ends on a note of failure and alienation in return, and questions as to where is the 'home' then. It does not remain a question of historical and cultural root or origin; rather it becomes an existential question. Possibly, the answer lies in the amalgamation of all boundaries – national, historical, cultural – making the world a truly global home where life, totally disencumbered, could be lived with global consciousness free from the pangs and the darkness of displacement. Perhaps, it is with this objective that the child prodigy living amid a host of stereotypes in Nikita Lalwani's novel, *Gifted* (2007), voices the second-generation immigrant angst. Lalwani has turned the Diaspora clichés into a tempting tale.

Therefore, the unrest of the writers of Diaspora novels is now located in the necessity to understand afresh in the right perspective their creative impulses and their identities, both native and global. This is because in their creative capturing of the essence of the 'new times', its cross-cultural or trans-cultural realities, they have not only crossed their socio-cultural and geographical boundaries but also dissolved them to varying extents. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who has given us historically well researched works located in immigrant experiences like *Neela: Victory Song* (2002), *The Vine of Desire* (2002) and *Queen of Dreams* (2004), believes that 'the art of dissolving boundaries is what living is all about'. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak wears a *sari,* a typical Indian glory in threads, that keeps her Indian identity intact, but she claims that she has never been an 'identitarian'. After all, why should one create one's own stereotype about oneself and land in conflict? Tabish Khair asserts that since this literary genre has become truly global, the significance of Diaspora in literature needs to be relocated. All these are efforts to underline the essential hybridity of all writings and the required unselfconsciousness of the writer in the flux of varied cultures. I find in

these assertions echoes of our great Raja Rao's view that "[w]e cannot write only as Indians" for "[w]e have grown to look at the large world as part of us" (Rao 5). No wonder, postcolonial fiction criticism has also worked towards a new poetics of the Indian English novel. Meenakshi Mukherjee's *The Perishable Empire: Essays on Indian Writing in English* (2000), Makarand Paranjape's *Towards a Poetics of the Indian English Novel* (2000), Amit Chaudhuri's *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* (2001), Tabish Khair's *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels* (2001) and his co-authored *Reading Literature Today* (2011), Dieter Riemenschneirder's *The Indian Novel in English: Its Critical Discourse, 1934-2004* (2005), and Priyamvada Gopal's *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* (2009) are dependable critical treatises in this area.

IX

Thus, this quick look at the various forms of the contemporary Indian English novel shows that a noticeable revolutionary change in its substance and texture has taken place alongside its commitment to imagination. Patriotic exclusivism has grown into mixed identities and mythical and historical truths have been juxtaposed with postcolonial realities. Amitav Ghosh has juxtaposed them against Victorian imperialist aristocracy. Multiculturalism and globalization, opposed to ethnocentric and orthodox tendencies, have added vigour to the narratives, and voices, hitherto repressed or in the oblivion, are now audible. There is greater urge to assimilate diverse currents of thoughts and traditions. But at the same time, our contemporary society is also caught in the 'valley of masks' where ideas, ideals and realities clash and crash on the planes of hypocrisy and egoism. Modernist or postmodernist aesthetic has prepared us to look into the qualities of despair and the resonance of solitude recorded in literature, as we know that the world of the cultivated people today is surrounded closely by a world of brutality and horror. Absurdity, cultural and linguistic hybridity, abstraction, fragmentation, ironic parody, mimic subversion, anti-elitism, counter-traditional discourse resisting classification, and Derridean indeterminacy are its salient features.

Hence, this literary genre deserves to be studied with care and sensitivity and with critical precision because our novelists are addressing a variety of issues quite innovatively producing such works of art as are vibrant with the concerns, contradictions and conundrums of our reality today. Indian English novels of the new century draw the attention of the academia especially because they offer an opportunity to look into the

dynamism of fictional creativity from the vantage points of politics, media, sexuality and various other counter-hegemonic or counter-canonical discourses that inform literature today. For critical evaluation, both conventional critical approaches to novel and the radical discursiveness prompted by the spate of re-theorizing of culture and literary productions need to function as complementary parallel tracks. We should not be blind either to the critical pedagogy of the West or to our rich indigenous traditions and perspectives of art and literature. Western critical theories and paradigms are welcome for a global awareness and cross-cultural application, but not at the cost of Indian poetics, aesthetics and culture, for they may be helpful in the extension of knowledge and senses but may not ultimately help in the elevation of consciousness. Our innate faith in the heterogeneity of the cosmic structure and in the liberal humanist and intellectual traditions should remain unshaken.

Works Cited

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj* (1909) or *Indian Home Rule* (1910). Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1938.

Iyengar, K. R. S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1985.

Nair, Vijay. "Deathknell for the bookstore?". *The Hindu*. Literary Review, April 1, 2012.

Narasimhaiah, C. D. *The Swan and the Eagle*. Simla: IIAS, 1969.

Rajan, Balachandra. "Identity and Nationality". *Commonwealth Literature.* (ed.) John Press. London: Heinemann, 1965.

Rao, Raja. 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura*. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks (15th Print), 2000.

CHAPTER TWO

PERFORMANCE AND PROMISE IN THE INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH

GOUR KISHORE DAS

I deem it necessary to negotiate the subject of my paper in due reference to the cultural imperative that subsumes all literary production worth the name. By culture, I specifically mean Indian national culture, which is essentially pluralistic. But times and, indeed, values have changed. So it is reasonable to suppose that more than sixty years of social and political upheaval witnessed after our country's Independence from colonial rule should have had its impact in some ways on India's cultural face. What has been the nature of that impact, specifically on the tradition and evolution of India's literary culture?

Speaking of the Indian novel in English, in particular, one cannot fail to notice that the authors writing today, by and large, focus their attention on the imperially orphaned and challenged situation of a new-born nation. Its pangs as well as aspirations resulting from a new wave of global imperialism catch their attention, rather than the human condition in general, or the universal and metaphysical questions. Their pre-occupations and priorities understandably are their home, their country and the nation, rather than the international scene or larger world issues.

By way of reviewing Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Binnie Kirshenbaum, the author of *An Almost Perfect Moment* (2004), comments, "A nation's tragedies, great and small, are revealed through the hopes and the dreams, the innocence and the arrogance, the love betrayed, and the all too human failings of a superbly realized cast of characters" (Kirshenbaum *web*). Like Kiran Desai, other young authors of our country writing during the first decade of the new millennium have also earned recognition at home and abroad.

Focusing on the accomplishments of Kiran Desai and other writers such as Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Aravind Adiga, Manju Kapur and

Vikas Swarup, this paper is intended to initiate a discussion on some key questions concerning the current Indian writers and their commitment. The social impact, if any, of the Indian novel written in English, as also the 'bhasha' novels, has also been considered in the context of contemporary cultural trends in the country. If nations, as Timothy Brennan remarks, are "imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions" (Brennan 49), how has the 'new' Indian novel in English performed? What promises, if any, does it hold in that specific cultural or/and any other context?

I wish to venture to make a theoretical point for consideration: that is, the novelist today, more often than not, is guided by an aesthetic largely of his own construction, which may broadly be described as postmodern aesthetic. Departing from the traditional as also from what we generally understand as 'modernist' aesthetic of fiction, he moves to a space of his own where no allegiance to a set norm is needed. It is an aesthetic based on an equation between fluid market situations on the one hand, and the author's own volatile ego on the other. The prime object in the author's mind is the market. His work should sell. His aesthetic, accordingly, is the 'aesthetic of the market place', in Joyce's words.

Historicity, objectivity, impersonality, detachment are, by and large, not all that relevant for the contemporary novelist. The success of his narrative in fact depends on his manipulation of history. Distortion, mystification, exaggeration are the strategies he uses to his advantage.

Salman Rushdie in his 'Introduction' to the 2006 edition of *Midnight's Children* writes that his book "is a product of *its moment* in history" (italics mine). Not actual history, as many readers in India take it to be, but a product of 'its moment' in history", i.e. a product in itself of the spirit of the time – the moment. It, indeed, is Rushdie's dazzlingly intelligent *play* with history that accounts for the book's enormous popularity.

Consider, for instance, Salim Sinai's gripping description of the critical situation that surrounds him when he is brought along with other midnight's children as an arch offender to Benares, during the period of the national 'Emergency' under Indira Gandhi's regime.

> I lost something else that day, besides my freedom: bulldozers swallowed a silver spittoon. Deprived of the last object connecting me to my more tangible, historically-verifiable past, I was taken to Benares to face the consequences of my inner, midnight-given life.
>
> Yes, that was where it happened, in the palace of the widows on the shores of the Ganges in the oldest living city in the world, the city which

> was already old when the Buddha was young, Kasi Benares Varanasi, City of Divine Light, home of the Prophetic Book, the horoscope of horoscopes, in which every life, past present future, is already recorded. The goddess Ganga streamed down to earth through Shiva's hair … Benares, the shrine to Shiva-the-god, was where I was brought by hero-Shiva to face my fate. …
>
> Follow the river, past Scindia-ghat on which young gymnasts in white loincloths perform one-armed push-ups, past Manikarnika-ghat, the place of funerals, at which holy fire can be purchased from the keepers of the flame, past floating carcasses of dogs and cows – unfortunates for whom no fire was bought, past Brahmins under straw umbrellas at Dasashwamedh-ghat, dressed in saffron, dispensing blessings … and now it becomes audible, a strange sound, like the baying of distant hounds … follow follow follow the sound, and it takes shape, you understand that it is a mighty, ceaseless wailing, emanating from the blinded windows of a riverside palace: the Widows' Hostel! Once upon a time, it was a maharajah's residence; …
>
> (*MC* 604-5)

Rushdie is a pioneer in his use of the narrative art that came to be known as magic realism, in the novel on India in English. He was followed in that mode by more recent experimenters such as Aravind Adiga and Vikas Swarup. The whimsical, irreverent, ironic, and subversive notes of the narratives of *The White Tiger* and *Slumdog Millionaire* have become more resonant by the deployment of the technique of magic realism. Balram Halwai's and Ram Mohammad Thomas's picaresque adventures could not have been narrated so engagingly otherwise.

> One *fact* [Is it indeed?] about India is,' writes White Tiger to His Excellency the Chinese Premier, ' that you can take almost anything you hear about the country from the prime minister and turn it upside down and then you will have the truth about that thing. Now, you have heard the Ganga called the river of emancipation, and hundreds of American tourists come each year to take photographs of naked *sadhus* at Hardwar or Benares, and our prime minister will no doubt describe it that way to you, and urge you to take a dip in it.
>
> No! – Mr Jiabao, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and *seven* different kinds of industrial acids.
>
> I know *all* about the Ganga, sir – when I was six or seven or eight years old (no one in my village knows his exact age), I went to the holiest spot on the banks of the Ganga – the city of Benares. I remember going down the steps of a downhill road in the holy city of Benares, at the rear of a funeral procession carrying my mother's body to the Ganga.
>
> (*WT* 15)

Aravind Adiga's narrative art is at its best in his minute exposure in *The White Tiger* of contemporary India's cultural slide. The polluted Ganga is seen as a true and vast emblem of the country's pervasive corruption and its wishy-washy cultural profile. The situation reminds us of the old fable, 'The Emperor's New Clothes' in which an ordinary, inconsequential nonentity sees things that everyone else is blind to. In *The White Tiger,* a halwai sees it all looking into the abyss of economic and political mess and spiritual deception that, by and large, youthful, independent India is, while those who are blinded by their ill-got wealth, social position and power are oblivious of the stark reality.

Vikas Swarup's novel, *Slumdog Millionaire,* originally published as *Q & A*, likewise, is brutally honest in its reflection of contemporary India's cultural jigsaw, if not its erasure altogether. The macabre picture of the so-called Juvenile Home in Delhi almost anticipates the Widows' Hostel by the Ganga in *The White Tiger*. And both these accounts remind us of the world in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

Ram Mohammad Thomas has suffered indignities and brutality all through his childhood and youth. Yet in the corner of his heart, he at times feels that it was only the personal that perhaps mattered if little else in Indian culture survived. He knows the truth that but for father Timothy, he would be nowhere. Yet, it is his own fortuitous short bits of sensual life lived in the underworld of criminals and prostitutes that seem to give some meaning to his existence after all.

> A new year has dawned, bringing with it new hopes and new dreams. Nita and I have both turned eighteen – the legal age for marriage. For the first time, I begin to think about the future and to believe I might even have one. With Nita by my side. I stop lending money to people in the outhouse. I need every penny now.
>
> Today is a Friday, and also a night of the full moon, a very rare combination indeed. I persuade Nita not to go to the movies, but instead to come with me to the Taj Mahal. We sit on the marble pedestal late in the evening and wait for the moon to appear beyond the jets of fountains and the rows of dark-green cypresses. First comes a glimmer of silver through the tall trees on our right, as the moon struggles to break free from the cluster of low buildings and foliage, and then, suddenly, it rises majestically in the sky. The curtain of the night is pushed aside and the Taj Mahal stands revealed in all its glory. Nita and I are awestruck. The Taj appears like a vision of paradise, a silvery apparition risen from the Yamuna river. We clasp hands, oblivious to the hordes of foreign tourists who have paid fifty dollars each for the privilege of seeing the Taj by the light of the full moon.

> I gaze at the Taj and then I gaze at Nita. The sterile perfection of the Taj begins to pale in comparison with the flawless beauty of her face. And tears start falling from my eyes as all the love I have bottled up in my heart for eighteen long years comes out in a tumultuous rush. I sense an emotional release like the bursting of a dam, and experience for the first time what Emperor Shahjahan must have felt for Mumtaz Mahal.
>
> (*SM* 311-12)

We realize at this point of a surrealistic fantasy, however, that Ram Mohammad Thomas's onetime dream of an 'epic romance' with Nita, outside of the stifling atmosphere of the brothel, has come full circle only too soon and, like all dreams, it will be lost in no time. And Agra will only be 'the city of death'. Ram Mohammad laments,

> I have a dead body in my room and a blue notebook in my hands. I flip through the pages aimlessly, staring at pencil sketches of a woman who was a heartless mother. …
>
> I do not know how to react to Shankar's death. (*SM* 326)

A life in death is the comment on contemporary India, according to *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The White Tiger*. We may question that interpretation.

Surely, India of the last decade has progressed in some ways. The rate of economic growth has improved. The purchasing power of the people has increased. Women enjoy relatively greater freedom. Literacy figures have risen. Caste and class distinctions are breaking down. Lifestyles of people, by and large, show improvement. Less people are houseless than before. Recreation facilities are better. Longevity has increased. An energized, low-cost multi-media system has given the poor and the under-privileged access to a wide variety of popular entertainment programmes through the television, video, and other resources.

Above everything, communication facilities have registered unprecedented development. With 3G/4G spectrums coming our way, we can aspire to a prosperous period of highly superior communication technology in operation in mobile telecommunications and data-intensive services such as electronic learning, telemedicine etc. that few countries in the world may achieve in the near future. Are all these developments of recent years not additional inputs to India's cultural growth?

We may also ask, is not the phenomenal growth of popular culture in recent years a good compensation against the alleged decline of old classical culture and older values?

The question does lurk in the background to contemporary literary culture. That new technology has made life easier for people and increased their comfort is easy to see. But what is not easy to pronounce is whether people today are less violent, less prejudicial, less intolerant, less in conflict and more in peace within themselves, and with others than before. The cultural discourse on this question touches only the fringes of the new novel, however, without approaching the centre. Let me illustrate the point.

On the domestic front, failure of marriage, violence to the rights of women and children, honour killing and neglect of the elders are common occurrences and we find impassioned narrations of domestic discord in the work of almost every current writer. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* written at the turn of the century (1997), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Manju Kapur's *Home* (2006) are excellent illustrations of how that culture of troubled or broken home, of homelessness, and inhuman destitution is endemic today.

By contrast, there is the glamour and allurement before today's youth of an away-from-it-all, trouble-free life in a foreign country like America or UK despite difference of colour or race. The story in a foreign country is different, as we see it in Kiran Desai's novel.

> "These white people!" said Achootan, a fellow dishwasher, to Biju in the kitchen. "Shit! But at least this country is better than England," he said. "At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief. There they shout at you openly on the street, 'Go back to where you came from.'" He had spent eight years in Canterbury, and he had responded by shouting a line Biju was to hear many times over, for he repeated it several times a week: "Your father came to *my* country and took *my* bread and now I have come to *your* country to get *my* bread back."
>
> Achootan didn't want a green card in the same way as Saeed did. He wanted it in the way of revenge.
>
> (*IL* 134-35)

Rootlessness, migration, vain regret over the loss of one's inheritance, nostalgia for a home different from the one they knew, anxiety over unknown joys and perils of prosperity cloud the contentment, if any, in the mind of masses of young generation women and men in India today, as are portrayed by Aravind Adiga or Kiran Desai or Manju Kapoor. The onset of a hybridized, amorphous culture may hold for them the hope of exciting new spheres of life, though like hybridized wheat or brassica, those may

not prove as nourishing or as abiding and rooted in a local culture of an older generation.

The flourishing, consumerist popular culture, like yellow peas or Bt brinjal, has, no doubt, a ready and an easy appeal. Q. D. Leavis in her influential book, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1939), once lamented that mass culture in the form of television and pop shows was making people buy easy pleasures. The British reading public, according to her, showed less interest in buying books, and mostly borrowed them from libraries, and were losing the good old pleasure of having in their possession eminent classics and other books of their choice. We, in India, who continue to live a colonized life by choice, also show a similarly utilitarian, consumerist cultural trend. Why buy fiction, poetry, literary criticism? Of what value are they, today? Management science, IT, and computer manuals are all that one needs.

Within the periphery of a home of sorts, *a la* Manju Kapur, it is the morning newspaper that bewitches us. Its headlines shape the day for us, not the morning wind or sun. Whether it is the late spring-like short lived romance of a Chandrabhanu and his sometime glamorous socialite fiancée turned enemy *numero uno*, or Sanjna Mirza's beleaguered and fabulous wedding, or the 'sizzling chemistry of Priyanka Chopra's seven marriages' (in the celluloid), to quote the words of the inimitable Internet, the dazzling banners announcing such news, designed by a market-mad media, swoon and drug us through the long hot day. Or it can be cricket. All this is popular culture, for people like it.

Whether situated in metropolitan centres or in rural areas, the culture/literature we seem to be fond of today is what Q. D. Leavis describes as 'easy pleasures'. The tradition of creative diversions and of household arts and crafts, the natural urge and habit of working for the ordering and beautification of home and environment, the daily contact with nature or what is natural – all that seems like vanishing symptoms of a bygone civilization. George Orwell thought that after 1820, there was no decently cut tombstone in the village churchyards in Britain. Rupert Birkin and Ursula Brangwen, the lovers who are engaged to marry in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love,* go to buy a souvenir from a second hand sale and admire the contours of a hand-made chair; it reminds them of the beautiful things that the British artisans once produced with their hand, in Jane Austen's or George Eliot's England.

I think of the exquisite handmade filigree and horn work of Cuttack, and the brass and lacquer crafts of Varanasi, mass produced now, in India or Hong Kong or China, genuine or fake, but enough to go round,

imported and cheap. Same is the situation, by and large, with today's book or magazine culture. Stacks of glossy jacketed imported versions of *Revised Kamasutra,* and of *one night @ the call centre* and other best-sellers adorn the shop windows and sidewalks in our metropolises. The Indian novel in English of the new millennium is not very measly and timeserving, however. The marvellous accomplishments of an Amitav Ghosh and the eminently promising novels of a Manju Kapoor and several young writers stand out by all standards.

Works Cited

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger* (*WT*). HarperCollins India, 2008.

Brennan, Timothy. "The National Longing for Form". *Nation and Narration.* (ed.) Homi K. Bhabha. London: Routledge. pp. 44-70. 1990.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss* (*IL*). New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.

Kirshenbaum, Binnie.
www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/community/asianbooks.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children* (*MC*). London: Vintage, 2006.

Swarup, Vikas. *Slumdog Millionaire* (*SM*). NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

CHAPTER THREE

INDIAN NOVELS IN ENGLISH: NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

MOHAN JHA

I

Since the Indian fiction in English is now nearly 150 years old, it is time we took stock of the situation in this field, of its growth and development, its merits and shortcomings. Obviously, it is not possible to include Indian short stories in English in the frame of this paper; as such, it is only the longer works of fiction – novels – that find place in the present discussion. The views expressed herein are based on a close reading of the text: the approach is both historical and textual, perhaps more textual than historical.

Although it is not very easy to speak of periods in relation to the history of Indian novels in English, yet we may undertake the present study in terms of five phases: the first phase covering a period of 60 years from 1860 to 1920, the second from 1920 to 1950, the third from 1950 to 1975, the fourth from 1975 to 2000, and the last phase spreading out, so far, from 2001 to date. This phase-wise division or distribution of Indian English novels or novelists may be historically convenient, and possibly valid, but in respect of trends, themes, technical variations, or the lives of individual novelists, it may not be a very useful method or strategy, for literature, genuine literature, does not move in a simplistic linear direction. It has its spillovers and throwbacks by way of extension, overlapping and regression, and we have to keep these compelling factors in mind.

II

Whether it is Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife,* published from 1864 onwards in a serialized form in a Calcutta weekly, *The Indian Field*, or Lal Behari Day's *Govinda Samanta*: *Bengal Peasant Life* (1874), or Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindoo Wife* or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876), or Sir Jogendra Singh's *Nur Jahan: Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), to name the more important ones, the novels of the first phase are tales rather than novels, discursive and melodramatic. They deal mostly with adventures and excursions, with personages drawn from history, though the rumblings of nationalist sentiments and the voices of protest against socio-economic exploitation are also audible in some of them. Nevertheless, in spite of all inadequacies, a beginning is, after all, only a beginning, and, so, is welcome.

In the second phase (1920-1950), we have with us, besides others, such acknowledged Indian writers of fiction in English as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. K. S. Venkataramani's two novels – *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot*: *A Novel of New India in the Making* (1932) – are already there projecting the social, political and ideological ferment of the period. Gandhi has arrived. Anand, it is apparent, is committed to realism and necessarily to humanism, and his first three novels, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), more than any other such works, bear clear and ample evidence of his Marxist training and orientation. Nevertheless, in his case, we have to contend with his propagandist zeal, his flamboyance, and with the extravagant use of typical Indian swear-terms and expletives in his books. Both Anand and Narayan were prolific writers; however, while the former's novels cover a large chunk of India, the latter's fictional works are limited to an imaginary place called Malgudi and its close neighbourhood. Naturally, as we go through Narayan's novels from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to, say, *The Painter of Signs* (1976), including, in particular, *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (1962), we find ourselves in a different world, a world peopled by rather odd and eccentric individuals, mostly cranks, swindlers and sycophants. Much has been said about his sense of place, about his art of character-delineation and his "good-humoured irony" (Naik 162), about his "art of resolved limitation and conscientious exploration" so much so that he is said to be "content, like Jane Austen, with his 'little bit of ivory', just so many inches wide" (Iyengar 360). And here is something specific about his art of the comic when it is observed that his "sense of the comic is sustained not by the Dickensian kind of exaggeration but rather, if a

comparison has to be made to enlist understanding and evoke response, the irony of understatement practised by a Jane Austen" (Narasimhaiah 139).

The truth, however, is that R. K. Narayan is a writer who writes his novels in a flat and unstimulating kind of prose, whose novels go without any discernible amplitude of vision, who is basically an adolescent, trying desperately to be an adult, and, if at all, who might have written nursery tales rather than novels or regular short stories. Moreover, attempting to compare Narayan's much-touted irony with Jane Austen's is an absurdity, a negation of critical intelligence, sheer intellectual nullity.

Raja Rao is a different matter. His poetic, evocative prose, with a rhythmic quality of its own, is indeed inimitable, but the moot point is whether his novels, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), in particular, or for that matter, even *Kanthapura* (1938), are novels proper or philosophical disquisitions, mythical fables, or symbolical exercises presented through ramshackle stories. His obsession with Vedanta, with non-dualism (*Advaitvad*), is a meddlesome factor, and perhaps that is why he says repeatedly, and without any equivocation, that he writes only for himself, for his own sake (Rao 118). In any case, Raja Rao is a singular figure in the history of Indian fiction in English. What is of still greater importance is the fact that the theme of East-West encounter has firmly entrenched itself in the novels of this period.

In the next phase (1950-1975), we come across a large number of novelists, the notable ones among them being Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, G. V. Desani, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Attiah Hosain. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala does not find mention here, for she claims she is not an Indian but a European writer (Jhabvala 41). Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao keep on writing even beyond this span of time.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is a novelist for the casual, ordinary reader; his ready-made solutions are cheap and farcical; his theme of integration is mere contrivance, not a chemical compound, only a mechanical mixture, and we do find him lapsing into sentimentality from place to place in his novels. This writer, flaunting his commitment to realism, to the principle of Art for Life's sake, is also pretentious. On being asked why he did not write any partition novel, he came out with the convenient plea that since during the concerned period he was at Nagpur in the erstwhile Central Provinces, far away from the scene of action, he could not find himself in a position to write any such novel (Shimer 6). Did Bhattacharya go to

Ladakh to be able to write his Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel, *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966)? Perhaps, he did not.

Khushwant Singh is a lovable writer chiefly because of his frankness and basic honesty despite his predilection for sex and occasional vulgarity. Even a cursory reading of two of his novels, *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* (1959) and *Delhi* (1990), is enough to substantiate the points. His novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956), the first of its kind in Indo-English fiction, is indeed a remarkable book, for not a single drop of blood falls on the soil of Mano Majra, though the atmosphere of the village is grim, heavy with suspicion and panic. What is still more significant is the fact that Jugga's or Jagat Singh's case is a copy-book example of self-transcendence.

G. V. Desani is just brilliant, a genius, and his *All About H. Hatterr* (1948: revised edition 1972) is a masterstroke of fictional art. Manohar Malgonkar is a gifted storyteller; his protagonists may be looked upon as code characters, courageous, stubborn and unyielding, and his major novels, *Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), evoke an atmosphere that is indeed gripping. However, what is most remarkable about him is the fact that he goes without any ideological commitment as such and that his novels are based largely on relevant details borrowed from history. Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal are serious-minded writers, and it is no surprise that Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) and Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) got the Sahitya Akademi Award. However, it is difficult to understand why after having written *The Foreigner* (1968), and *The Apprentice* (1974), a singularly experimental novel, should Joshi have cared for *The City and the River* (1998), and why at all after his Gandhian novels and *Azadi* should Nahal have written *Sunrise in Fiji* (1978).

Kamala Markandaya's novels, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972) and *Two Virgins* (1973), for instance, deserve only hasty reading. Nayantara Sahgal's novels, for example, *A Time to be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988), may deal, as they do, with the themes of extra-marital relationship and political tussle. And the novelist could have developed these themes or other collateral themes effectively in terms of art, but it is her deep-rooted sense of elitism and her spiky superciliousness that prevent her from doing so. Anita Desai is far different from these two novelists. She is different, for what we find in her novels, *Voices in the City* (1965), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and *Clear Light of*

the Day (1980), to name only a few of them, is an intense exploration of the human psyche, a projection of "the interior landscape of the mind" (Naik 241). Attiah Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is a novel of infectious nostalgia for the lost Muslim aristocracy and culture of Lucknow following Partition. Bharati Mukherji's two novels, *Tiger's Daughter* (1973) and *Wife* (1976), deal chiefly with what is known as the problem of multi-nationality and cross-culturalism.

At this point, we may make a mention of Balachandra Rajan's first novel, *The Dark Dancer* (1959), in which, besides other things, the author, not very successfully though, narrates the concerns and commitments of his protagonist who is in search of his identity as well as of the real spirit of Indian culture.

In this phase, there is a deepening of the theme of East-West encounter, resulting in a sustained and incisive treatment of the psychic state of alienation, rootlessness and loss of identity. As for technique, there is a shift during this period from not-so-complex narratives to monologues, first-person narratives, variations in tenses and other innovative devices.

In the penultimate phase (1975-2000), besides Rama Mehta's Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel, *Inside the Haveli* (1977), which highlights the issue of lack of female education in Rajasthan, we do also come across other far more important novels. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel in verse, and *A Suitable Boy* (1993), a massive novel running into nearly 1400 pages, and Amitav Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) are worth mentioning. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* the Booker Prize-winning novel, is an epoch-making literary phenomenon. It is a political allegory, a curious mix of myth and realism, with Salim Senai as its protagonist who has no distinct identity of his own, and yet he is one who, as the author puts it, is "handcuffed to history". There is another Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, about which all that can be said is that one may, at best, have an amazing kind of love-hate relationship with this book.

Moreover, it is here in this phase that in our readings we are frequented by such terms as 'exile', 'immigrants', 'émigré', 'the outsider-insider', 'the insider-outsider', loneliness', 'aloneness', 'alienation', 'rootedness', 'uprootedness' and 'Diaspora'. However, at this point it is important to mention Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989)

which is a great novel indeed, besides other things, for its parallelistic structure.

In the last phase (2001-2010), we find ourselves in the company of such novels as Kiran Desai's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), yet another Booker Prize-winning novel, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *One Amazing Thing* (2010), Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Weight Loss* (2006), Amit Chaudhuri's *The Immortals* (2009), Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2002), Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002) and *Home* (2006), Shashi Deshpande's *Moving On* (2004) and *In a Country of Deceit* (2010), and, wonderfully enough, Khushwant Singh's *The Sunset Club* (2010). We may as well refer to Chetan Bhagat's *five point someone* (2004), *one night @ the call centre* (2005), *the 3 mistakes of my life* (2008) and *2 States* (2009), books largely autobiographical, may be appetizing, but really inconsequential.

Some of these novels have added to the value, credibility and enduringness of Indian novels in English. It is interesting to find that during this period we are ponderously accosted by such terms as Post-modernism, Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism, Post-feminism, Post-Freudianism, New Historicism, Cross-culturalism, Multi-nationality, Semiotics and Deconstruction. The poor, fragile word, 'globalization', is tossed about in as many ways and on as many levels as could be possible to suit one's convenience.

III

After these random comments, now it is time to make a few suggestions to supplement what has been said earlier. We have been reading, writing about and speaking on American, Canadian, African, Latin American, Australian and European literatures, but, strangely enough, we have been rather indifferent to the literature that has been written and is still being written in our neighbouring countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Afghanistan. We should try earnestly to initiate ourselves into this field too.

Have we ever thought of and discussed what is called Indianness with regard to Indian novels or literature in English? Yes, we have, repeatedly and rather frequently, at seminars, symposia and conferences. This question is never asked in relation to novels or literature written in

native languages, for English is regarded as an alien language, and is naturally the target of this query. What is Indianness? Alternatively, what is Indian sensibility? As we grope for a suitable answer, we find ourselves in a difficult and tricky situation. If asked, a Marxist critic would certainly tell us that Indianness is all myth, all rubbish, and that we should aspire for the victory of the proletariat over the decadent bourgeoisie.

It is true that genuine literature does have its own universal appeal, and yet it has its roots deep into the native soil. Indianness is inextricably linked to Indian culture, and, in its turn, Indian culture is based, apart from other factors, on love or affection, humility or politeness, tolerance or patience, forgiveness or compassion. Those of us who have read Nissim Ezekiel's poem entitled 'Night of the Scorpion' may do well to recall the mother's, an Indian mother's, reaction to the scorpion-biting incident. This Indian mother expresses her feeling of gratefulness to God by crying out that luckily it was she who was stung by the scorpion and that, mercifully enough, her children did not suffer the sting. Therefore, the second suggestion is that Indian novels or literature in English may also be interpreted from the viewpoint of Indianness.

It is common knowledge that as students of literatures in English we have been leaning heavily on Aristotle's 'Mimesis' and 'Catharsis', Longinus's 'Sublime', Dryden's and Pope's and Dr Johnson's 'Correctness' and 'Propriety', Coleridge's 'Fancy' and 'Imagination', Arnold's 'Touchstone', I. A. Richards's 'Protocols', 'Stimulus' and 'Aversion', T. S. Eliot's 'Impersonality' and 'Dissociation of Sensibility', and Empson's 'Ambiguity'. And on the other side of the Atlantic, we have been speaking of Blackmur's 'Gesture', Tate's 'Tension', Brooks's 'Paradox' and Pen Warren's 'Irony', and of the neo-Aristotelians led by J. C. Ransom. But what about Indian poetics, about 'Riti', 'Rasa', 'Dhvani', 'Alankar', 'Vakrokti' and 'Auchitya'? Let us learn these theories and make appropriate use of them in our understanding and interpretation of Indian literary texts in English.

In his book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said, besides other things, makes two important observations. The first one is that the people, living in the area east of the Suez, continue to have a colonial mindset, and the second one is that they still think of themselves as beings inferior to the Westerners. We ought to know the recent developments taking place in the literary field in the West. But it would also be rather proper to say that quite a few of the contemporary critical approaches to literature, such as gender criticism, feminist criticism, ecocriticism, or criticism addressed to

the subaltern and the dalit literature, are utility-centric and should only get the attention they deserve.

The truth is that there are only two stable critical approaches, classical and romantic. By the classical approach, what is meant is an approach based on rules, prescriptions, established criteria or norms, and by the romantic approach what is suggested is the validity of individual response or personal perception. Going by rules or prescriptions may be and is generally a tame affair; but trying to understand and appreciate the text is the litmus test of one's reading ability. Interdisciplinary studies do have their own advantages, but in no case should they be practised at the cost of novels or literature proper. It is our own response to the text that ought to be given precedence over other considerations or criteria.

Works Cited

Iyengar, K. R. S. *Indian Writing in English.* Fifth edition. New Delhi: Sterling, 1985.

Jhabvala, R. P. "Living in India". *London Magazine*. September, 1970. ('I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My husband is Indian, and so are my children. I am not, and less so every year.')

Naik, M. K. *A History of Indian English Literature.* New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

Narasimhaiah, C. D. *The Swan and the Eagle.* Simla: IIAS, 1969.

Rao, D. S. (ed.). *Indian Literature*. vol. xxxi, no. 4, p. 118, July-August, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988. (In the course of an interview conducted by Ranvir Rangra, Raja Rao says, 'I don't care a damn for the readers when I write. I try to say something for myself and if that is interesting to me, it would be interesting to the public. I don't think of the public as such.')

Shimer, D. B. *Bhabani Bhattacharya*. Boston. 1975. ('When I asked Bhattacharya about this curious omission from the work of a socially aware writer, he replied that he and his family lived, through those years, in the shelter of Nagpur.')

CHAPTER FOUR

DALIT WRITINGS: FROM EMPATHY TO AGENCY

SHANKER A. DUTT

As a postcolonial nation recasts itself, rejecting colonial representations with hopes of an egalitarian future, there is the growing awareness that not everything is magically splendid in the postcolonial state. Every power structure creates its margins and certain segments of the population are relegated to such subordinate locations. Nationalism that had been an ally in the anti-colonial resistance, homogenizes into a monolithic mass, to the disadvantage of a new set of marginalized groups. During colonial rule, the indigene, pejoratively referred to as the 'native', was the subaltern. Postcoloniality created its own subalterns. Inferior castes, minority groups, women and dalits became 'others' within the postcolonial nation state.

The phenomena of caste and untouchability evolved over time because of conflicts over land, resources and cultural practices between the people who began arriving in India in the second millennium BCE and the indigenes in city-states and forests. These conflicts produced the *chaturvarna* sociological configuration. The ancient Hindu texts, the *dharmashastras,* inform of the existence of four *varnas* or classes divided according to occupations. The Brahmins were priests; the Kshatriyas, rulers and warriors; the Vaishyas, traders and merchants; and the Shudras, skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled labourers doing menial work. This *varna vyavastha* was primarily a pyramidal class system. Later, these classes became enclosed formations where membership was determined exclusively by birth.

Dr Ambedkar, the author of *Annihilation of Caste*, studied the Vedic texts rationally and systematically re-examining the foundational beliefs of the caste system. In the *Rig Veda,* he found "the myth of origin explaining the genesis of caste, the *Purusha Shukta*. This myth presents the birth of human society as proceeding from the sacrificial dismemberment of the

primordial man, the *Virat Purush"* (Jaffrelot 34). The key idea is that the Brahmins "… themselves were born from the mouth of Brahma, the Kshatriyas from his shoulders, the Vaishyas from his thighs, and the Shudras from his feet. Hence, the Brahmins were the most superior, next came the Kshatriyas and so on. Theories such as this were put forth in the *Rigveda* which was again claimed to be God-made." (Dangle 1992, 235) The rulers implemented subsequent restrictive stipulations coded by the Brahmins in the religious texts. In this way, the institution of religion and that of the state relegated the shudras into socio-cultural bondage leading to untouchability. In order to gain greater efficacy of control, "[t]hey devised a weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the crude and inhuman laws to which we can find no parallel among other nations" (Phule 17-18). Through the doctrine of the four *varnas,* Ambedkar rejected caste as a God-made system. Ambedkar theorized that the practice of untouchablity began after the fierce struggle for dominance between the Brahmins and the Buddhists. The Brahmins started practicing "untouchability against beef-eaters after they themselves stopped animal sacrifice in order to win an ideological battle against the Buddhists" (Mukherji xvi). The Buddhists were preaching against y*agnas* thereby winning over cultivators and traders whose cattle were snatched away for ritual sacrifices without payment.

In order to regain the constituency of the farming and trading classes, the Brahmins not only gave up animal sacrifice but advanced a step ahead of the Buddhists by banning cow slaughter and the consumption of non-vegetarian food altogether. The Gupta kings banned cow slaughter some time in 4 BCE. However, Ambedkar contends that certain sections of the society continued to eat beef and were outside the *chaturvarna* system. "Theoretically speaking, they were not violating the laws against cow slaughter because they ate the flesh of not-slaughtered but dead cows that was their village duty to remove as a service to *savarna* villagers" (Mukherji xvii). Dalit subalternity is therefore not located in the colonial structure with the colonizer-colonized formation but in the caste-based social, cultural, economic and mental structure of the Brahminical social order within the Hindu society. It is characterized by the rigid quotes of spatial segregation making dalits the upper caste Hindu other. Dalit subalternity is more insidiously inhuman than racial subordination because the latter is never legitimized by legislations of the civil society whereas the former is legitimated through religious sanction and social mandate.

> Dalit literature is not simply literature … (it) is associated with a movement to bring about change … it (is) strongly evident that there is no

> established critical theory behind (dalit writings); instead there is a new thinking and a new point of view.
>
> (Dangle 1994, vii-viii)

In the sixties, a poet, Narayan Surve, took up themes of working class issues while the Little Magazine Movement established itself during this period. The short stories of Baburao Bagul were anthologized in *When I had Concealed My Caste***,** a landmark publication in Marathi literature. Arjun Dangle states that critics had hailed it as "[t]he epic of the Dalits while others compared it to the Jazz music of the Blacks. Bagul's stories taught Dalit writers to give creative shape to their experiences and feelings." (Dangle 1994, viii) In 1972, a group of young Marathi writer activists such as Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle and others founded a political organization called 'Dalit Panthers' in expression with the 'Black Panthers' who had militantly struggled for the civil rights of the African Americans in the United States of America. It is at this point in time that the term dalit came to be used and widely accepted as a mark of identity. Subsequently, "[t]he Dalit Panthers led a huge movement" (Limble 2004, 123).

Ambedkar's politics was conspicuously different from the Gandhian ideological and cultural politics that was dominant until Independence. The subsequent dalit movement was a product of the "mental state that believed in the firm rejection of the Gandhian model of tackling the problems of untouchables, and that has shaped the contours of its themes and patterns" (Nagaraj 1). The Gandhian view of the issue of untouchability was, basically, religious and spiritual before his encounter with Ambedkar. As a result, he believed in the liberation from untouchability through "penance and acts of social service by caste Hindus, as opposed to mandated changes in the law. Ambedkar used the language of rights and legislated remedies" (Mukherji xx). Gandhi replaced the term 'Untouchable' with 'Harijan' that was later adopted by the Government of India, the political leaders and the media. Dalits, on the other hand, found it "patronizing and infantilizing" (Mukherji xxii). On the issue of separate electorates, intended for grant by the colonial government, Gandhi went on a fast unto death and Ambedkar, under duress, withdrew his demand and signed the Poona Pact of 1932. While Gandhi viewed the caste system as a purely religious question, an internal one for the Hindu society, the dalit perspective considered it a threat with its irremediable stigma of inferiority, humiliation and insult. D. R. Nagaraj brilliantly interprets that both Ambedkar and Gandhi were transformed by their encounter and may be viewed as "complementary to each other"

(Nagaraj 26), though "the chain of influence was not admitted to by either party" (Guha 34). Babasaheb accepted the primacy of religion in the matter of untouchability. The 1935 Yeola Declaration of Ambedkar that he would not die a Hindu was a recognition of the "legitimacy of the Gandhian mode although rejecting the choice in which the solution was sought" (Guha 35). He embraced Buddhism on 14 October 1956, along with millions of his supporters, just three months before his death.

On the other hand, much to the chagrin of his orthodox followers, Gandhi declared in the November 16, 1935 issue of *Harijan* that the caste system had to be eradicated. He also commented on the restrictions on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage that marked a change from his earlier uncertainties on these issues. One is tempted, at the risk of inaccuracies to theorize that dalit literature written by the non-dalits and those written by the dalits follow this antipodal historiography. However, for the dalit literature to grow and develop, an eclectic ethic is likely to witness the transformation of both.

Tagore realized this many years ago when he created his much acclaimed dance drama, *Chandalika*. Tagore's treatment of untouchability in *Chandalika* is revolutionary because the liberation of Prakriti is not within the structural paradigm of the politics of compassion. In being accepted within the *Sangha, Prakriti*'s journey predates a choice that Ambedkar made in 1956 to seek liberation in Buddhism. Tagore knew that there was no place for casteism in Buddhism. He was aware of its rejection of social inequality and support to egalitarian values. This alternative humanitarian code recasts *Prakriti*'s human dignity.

The dalit writings by the dalit writers have this resilient motivation for agency, not to accept silently but to give voice to resistance and challenge the dominant oppressive discourses. In Shankarrao Kharat's masterly short story, 'A Corpse in the Well', a customary duty for the Mahars to retrieve an abandoned dead body from a village well is narrated. The corpse is guarded throughout the night but the head constable and the village headman grow in impatience because they want the body to be removed forthwith without waiting for the heirs to arrive. When the head constable abuses the narrator's Anna, the narrator questions the "injustice being done to [his] father" who "had not done anything wrong. His only crime was being a Mahar of the village" (Kharat 76). When Anna does eventually attempt to retrieve the bloated corpse, the risk of descending into the well is magnified by the presence of a snake and the upper caste's inhumanity and indifference to the hazardous task: "A storm of thoughts swept through my head about the dangerous, deadly work involved in the

village duty" (Kharat 77). In Avinash Dolas' *The Refugee*, a Mahar, ironically a citizen of this country, resisted violence against a woman as retribution for drawing water from an upper caste well. The upper castes enforce an employment embargo and his own mother pleads with him to leave home. The poignant story contrasts the fate of a Bangladeshi visiting his relatives in Bombay during the political turmoil while a Mahar "remains homeless in his country" (Dolas 220) even after twenty years.

Sharing experiences of trauma, humiliation, inequality, submission, rebellion and hope, and being able to voice these emotions as social experience, are carried through by a significant quality of autobiographical dalit writings. Autobiography as a mode of writing is encouraged on grounds of "authentic experience" to provide, as Valmiki says, "inspiration to our future generations" (Mukherji xxviii). Dalit women writers are represented in the Arjun Dangle-edited *Poisoned Bread***,** an anthology of modern Marathi dalit writings, by Shantabai Kamble's 'Naja Goes to School and Doesn't' and Kumud Pawde's inspirational 'The Story of My Sanskrit'. The first is the story of the discontinuation of school education because of distance and expense: "we knew nobody in Pandharpur … there is no money to study in Pandharpur" and girl's father's helpless sorrow: "that you have to stop school half-way" (Kamble 94). In Kumud Pawde's narrative, her ascending scholarship drew sarcastic verbal by-lines: "these Mahars have really got above themselves" (Pawde 100). With academic mobility, in spite of numerous hurdles, she gains confidence and finally gets an assistant lectureship at a government college. Her appointment is ironically credited to her altered married surname through an inter-caste marriage. The caste of her maiden status designated by her maiden name, Kumud Somkuwar, remains deprived.

The discriminatory *varnashrama dharma,* which naturalized the inferiorization of the Mahars, reduced them to the levels of harnessed cattle used to plough fields: "Just as the farmer pierces his bullock's nose and inserts a string through the nostrils to control it, you have pierced the Mahars' nose with the string of ignorance" (Kamble 56). Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* offers the glimpses of resistance as she implacably confronts a reprehensible social order "flogging us with the whip of pollution" mandated by a religion she terms "selfish" and "worthless" (Kamble 56). Triply marginalized on the counts of caste, gender and poverty, Baby Kamble's resistance emerges from a life of helplessness, limitations and servitude. It is an important emancipatory voice of one excluded from dominant discourses. Bama in *Sangati* scripts the issues of intra-community gender oppression and injustices experienced by Kamble with rare conviction. This Tamil narrative is scripted with the enduring

hope that 'self-confidence' and 'self-respect' despite adversities that are often affiliated to the Church as an ideological apparatus will enable women to "live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment" (Bama ix).

It has often been foregrounded that the scripting of dalit representation by the non-dalits lacks "a visceral impact" (Mukherji ix). "The nature of their literature consists in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by Dalits, in the past and even at present, in the framework of the *varna* system" (Muktibodh 267). Given its sociological matrix, the creative sensibility deeply concerns a dalit perspective and that an "outstanding work of Dalit literature would be born only when Dalit life would present itself from a Dalit point of view" (Muktibodh 267).

In critiquing dalit subalternity and dalit representation in literature, there is the eminent danger of falling into twin traps, one, is to consider the non-dalit category as a homogeneous entity, a view that is complicit in the Brahminical social order; and two, the possibility of limiting the signification of the word dalit and to consider that category as a monolith. Dalit literature is expected to be a declaration of freedom, an agency of liberation from discriminatory practices of race, religion and caste. In the making of Kalua as a heroic protector of the dalitized Deeti, whom he "snatched … from the flames" (Ghosh 177) of the pyre, and a bold retributor who first bears the "crack of the lash" but snatches it "out of the air" and loops it "around Bhyro Singh's ox-like neck" (Ghosh 488-89), and in the building of a subaltern solidarity within the fragile community on board the Ibis in *Sea of Poppies*, Amitav Ghosh reaffirms dalit agency and writes the oppressed back to the centre.

Two textual representations of the dalits by the non-dalit women writers will throw light on the representation and representability of dalit experience by those outside the social formation but able to imaginatively, intellectually and with empathy connect with it: Velutha in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Shanta Rameshwar Rao's Kittu in *Children of God*. In the first, the internationally popular Booker Prize-winning novel, the complicity and hypocrisy of the adult world combines with the brutality and moral perversion of the caste system. After the trauma of losing Sophie Mol, the grieving family has to deal with the relationship between Ammu, the mother of the "Dizygotic" twins (Roy 2), Estha and Rahel, and Velutha, a *paravan* – the Malayalam word for 'untouchable'. The Kochamma family falsely implicates Velutha on charges of attempted sexual violation on Ammu and when she travels to the police station to refute the allegations, he is charged with murder and

kidnapping the children. Velutha dies from police torture, inured into the silence of victimhood. In *Children of God***,** Lakshmi, a dalit woman, narrates the story of the killing of Kittu who goes "into the temple to see the idol of which he had heard and to worship before it" (Rao 3). Being an untouchable who had violated the sanctity of the sacred space, he is subjected to brutality and violence and is set on fire, resulting in his death: "He died a cruel, horrible death. He was bound to a tree and beaten. His clothes were set ablaze. The flames consumed him while he still lived and breathed" (Rao 6). The family breaks up as they try to shed the shackles of caste bondage, and Lakshmi realizes that for the countless despised children of God there is no freedom from the imprisonment of custom.

Rohinton Mistry's naturalistically grim novel, *A Fine Balance,* chronicles a decade in India between the imposition of internal emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 and her assassination in Orwell's apocalyptic year, 1984. The third chapter, 'In a Village by a River', narrates the misfortunes and inhumanities suffered by the dalits: "The chamaars skinned the carcasses, ate the meat, tanned the hide … Dukhi learned to appreciate how dead animals provided his family's livelihood … his skin became impregnated with the odour that was a part of … the leather worker's stink that would not depart even after he had washed and scrubbed in the all-cleansing river" (Mistry 95). His occupation marked Dukhi Mochi's identity. He did not require special education to learn what it was to be a chamaar, an untouchable in village society: "like the filth of dead animals which covered him and his father as they worked, the ethos of the caste system was smeared everywhere" (Mistry 96). The village was located by a small river and the untouchables were "permitted to live in a section downstream from the Brahmins and Landowners" (Mistry 96). The narrative delineates sexual violation of Roopa, Dukhi's wife, a common feature of gender exploitation that occurs with regularity. Hence, Sharankumar Limbale in *The Bastard* writes, "Those who have been given power by religion on account of their high caste and money inherited from ancestors have deemed it their birthright to abuse Dalit honours" (Limbale 1992, 123). Occurrences of physical violence are many as Thakur Premji hits Dukhi across his back several times before he slipped through the gate. "He hobbles home cursing the Thakur and his progeny" (Mistry 105).

The attitude of notional sympathy for the oppressed is the object of authorial denunciation in the use of pejorative vocabulary designated for Pandit Lalluram such as "the waft of Brahmanical flatulency" (Mistry 113) and his patronizing endorsement of the endogamous *chatur varna*. Dukhi hides his impatience for he had not come to hear a lecture on the caste

system. Narrating the visit to Pandit Lalluram to seek redress against corporal punishment meted out to his sons in the school, he says, "when to see the Chit-Pavan Brahmin … Goo-Khavan Brahmin is what he should be called instead" (Mistry 114). Mistry's narrative does not ask for pity or mercy; it voices resistance and seeks liberation.

The spatial segregation of dalit dwellings is a common feature in dalit literature. In *Joothan,* "a little johri, a pond, had created a sort of partition between the Chuharas' dwellings and the village" (Valmiki 1). Abject poverty and spatial restriction combines with segregation as a characteristic of the lives of the slum-dwellers of Bombay. In Daya Pawar's 'Son, Eat Your Fill', the Mahars' living condition at the edge of the metropolis was wretched: "In each little cubby-hole, there were three or four sub-tenants. In between them were partitions made of packing-case wood. In these wooden boxes was their entire world" (Pawar 7). The description of material location is metonymically synonymous with the "graded inequality" (Jaffrelot 36) that describes the home of Anand's dalit protagonist, Bakha: "The outcaste's colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow of both the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the water carriers, the grass cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it" (Anand 11). The description heightens the offensiveness by juxtaposing visual and olfactory images. Anand attempts some degree of peripheral glorification scripting Bakha as 'a bit superior for his job'; 'that he looked 'intelligent', 'sensitive', 'with a sort of dignity that does not belong to an ordinary scavenger who is, as a rule, uncouth and unclean'; it 'gave him a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession'. Would a dalit writer have scripted dalit experience similarly? I doubt it. It seems a Gandhian dalit narrative where dalit identity is a marker that one needs to 'ascend from'. In other words, the solution suggested is organic rather than structural. It is not based on the annihilation of caste, rather on a reform through moral regeneration within existing sociological paradigms. This, however, does not take away from Anand's effort at creating significant space, even nascent resistance, for the articulation of inequality and the desired liberation that is urged.

In Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*, the story of a twelfth century saint-mystic, Basava or Basavanna, is a part of a History lesson that invited the wrath of the Hindu militant orthodoxy in culture and the academia. The treasurer of the twelfth century city of Kalyana was a man

called Basava. He was no ordinary finance minister but a person endowed with rare intellectual passion to question everything that was traditional. He drew around him a rare congregation of mystics and social revolutionaries. "Together they sought to build an inclusive community that included women and the lowest 'polluting castes': *Poets, potters, reformers, washermen, philosophers, prostitutes, learned brahmins, housewives, tanners, ferrymen* (italics mine) – all were a part of the brief burst of Kalyana's glory" (Hariharan 60). All were equal in that they were *veerashaivas*, warriors of Shiva. Together they made poetry, poetry that chased prose; that searched for many faces of truth. There are two significant points made here. One is the use of the dialogic imagination that offers space for multiple voices to co-exist in Basava's search for 'the many faces of truth'. Two, constructing the incongruous catalogue from 'women' to 'ferrymen' is a masterly stylistic manoeuvre in which stylistic equivalence implies a non-hierarchic social equivalence. In other words, in a list of this kind, in a spirit of rare humanity, there is spatial parity for the philosopher and the prostitute as much as the learned Brahmins and the tanners. The 'arboreal' hierarchic order has been, as Deleuze and Guattari would state, altered structurally to conceive a 'rhizome'.

Further, in the narrative, we are told that Basava and many of his followers challenged the caste system, "the iron net that held society so firmly in place; that reduced the common men and women to hopeless captives" (Hariharan 61). Basava's egalitarian dream became a swelling movement, "the makers of mirrors; the skinners of dead animals; the bearers of children", and it threatened to swallow "social conventions and religious ritual", the staple diet of tradition. The culmination of the Basava narrative is an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin girl and a cobbler groom that was condemned and the respective fathers of the couple tortured to death. Violent retaliation by Basava's followers, despite his plea for non-violence, resulted in the destruction of the city. Basava's legacy, inflammable to traditionalists and a model for equality and democracy, is a significant metaphor in dalit studies but rarely acknowledged.

In order that literature is an engine for social change, it is necessary that agency is given to dalits represented in literature, scripting the oppressed as subjects rather than objects of inequality and injustice. Such dalit writings do not glorify victimhood; they enable agency for subaltern resistance. In doing so, this form of writing transcends the seeking of compassion to being literature of liberation. In the politics of inclusion and the formation of an inclusive alliance of the dispossessed, which became the hallmark of Nargaraj's social and literary criticism, lies the future of

dalit representations in literature. This future must include dalit writings within the university courses because the political, the intellectual, the moral and the creative must be fellow-travellers in the quest of equity and justice which is the objective of the development of knowledge.

Works Cited

Anand, M. R. *Untouchable.* New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1970.

Bama. *Sangati*. Tr. Laxmi Holmstrom. New Delhi: OUP, 2005.

Dangle, Arjun. "Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future". *Poisoned Bread*. (ed.) Arjun Dangle. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992.

—. *A Corpse in the Well.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. New Delhi: Orient Longman, (1992), 1994.

Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies.* New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2008.

Dolas, Avinash. 'The Refugee'. *Poisoned Bread.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. *Op. cit.*

Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist among Marxists*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

Hariharan, Githa. *In Times of Siege.* New Delhi: Viking, 2003.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability.* Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005.

Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke.* Tr. Maya Pandit. Chennai: Orient Longman, 2008.

Kamble, Shantabai. 'Naja Goes to School and Doesn't'. *Poisoned Bread.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. *Op. cit.*

Kharat, Shankarrao. 'A Corpse in the Well'. *Poisoned Bread.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. *Op. cit.*

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Tr. Alok Mukherji. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004.

—. 'The Bastard'. *Poisoned Bread.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. *Op. cit.*

Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance.* Noida: Penguin Books in association with Faber and Faber, 2003.

Mukherji, Arun Prabha. Introduction to Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*. Kolkata: Samya, 2003.

Muktibodh, Sharatchandra. 'What is Dalit Literature?'. *Poisoned Bread.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. *Op. cit.*

Nagaraj, D. R. *The Flaming Feet*. Bangalore: South Forum Press in association with ICRA, 1993.

Pawar, Daya. 'Son Eat Your Fill'. *A Corpse in the Well*. (ed.) Arjun Dangle. Bombay: Disha Books, 1992.

Pawde, Kumud. 'The Story of my Sanskrit'. *Poisoned Bread.* (ed.) Arjun Dangle. *Op. cit.*
Phule, Jotiba. Quoted in Gail Omvedt's *Dalit Visions* (Revised edition). New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006.
Rao, Shantarameshwar. *Children of God.* Calcutta: Disha Books, 1976.
Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things.* New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1997.
Valmiki, Om Prakash. *Joothan.* Kolkata: Samya, 2003.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN NO MASTERS' VOICE: READING RECENT INDIAN NOVELS IN ENGLISH

TABISH KHAIR

I

"Obviously our life would have an entirely different aspect if it were told in our dialect," says Zeno, the narrator-protagonist of Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience* (1923). Zeno should not be confused with Italo Svevo, but he does share at least this much with his creator: like the author Svevo, the protagonist-narrator Zeno speaks a dialect that has a difficult and 'inferior' relationship with 'Italian'. Hence, towards the end of his 'confessions', written as part of the psychoanalysis that Zeno is sceptical of, Zeno highlights the difference between a dialect of Italian and 'proper' Italian:

> The doctor puts too much faith also in those damned confessions of mine, which he won't return to me so I can revise them. Good heavens! He studied only medicine and therefore doesn't know what it means to write in Italian for those of us who speak the dialect and cannot write it. A confession in writing is always a lie. With every Tuscan word, we lie! If he knew how, by predilection, we recount all the things for which we have words at hand, and how we avoid those things that would oblige us to turn to the dictionary! This is exactly how we choose, from our life, the episodes to underline. Obviously, our life would have an entirely different aspect if it were told in our dialect.
>
> (Svevo 404)

While nothing Zeno says in his account should be readily believed or disbelieved, Zeno is talking of a problem that, some critics claim, might have resulted in the poor reception of Italo Svevo's own works in Italy. Language is not transparent. It conditions our understanding and narration

of events. If this can be the case between dialects of the same 'language', imagine the extent of the challenge when one writes in a particular language about characters who do not – or who do not only – speak that language?

Unfortunately, to say this in the context of Indian writing in English is to show a red rag to two very different species of bulls. The first, and simpler, species is the language nationalist, who will then usually conflate your discussion of the complexity of English (in India) with a dismissal of English. He – it is often a male – will claim that Indians "should only write in Indian languages", glibly echoing a common colonialist rant despite the fact that English has been around in India for three centuries and is now an "Indian language", though it is a language that has a particular relationship to many Indian realities and to other Indian languages than, say, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu or Bangla.

But to make this ancillary point, while recognizing the place of English in India, is to show a red rag to the other, subtler and more cosmopolitan, species of bull, who would then read it as a dismissal of Indian English writing or an attempt to question the 'authenticity' of Indian English. Some Indian English reactions to my book, *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Indian English Novels,* are an illustration of this. In his entertaining and otherwise very useful history, *Entry from Backside Only: Hazaar Fundas of Indian-English*, for instance, Delhi-based Binoo K. John makes the mistake of suggesting that "Indian-English" in *Babu Fictions* is deployed "in a more pejorative sense to refer to English as it is spoken or written by all Indians, not just [Indian English] authors." Taking it a bit further, Neelam Srivastava, a Lecturer at the University of Newcastle, UK, states that "I critique Tabish Khair's concept of 'Babu English' which defines postcolonial Indian English writing as an inherently elite form of literary expression" (Srivastava 55).

The mistake in all these interpretations is that they conflate my tongue-in-cheek use of 'Babu' as an emblem to designate a social class with the British colonial conception of Indian English as 'Babu English.' Srivastava does it very starkly. She superimposes the term 'Babu English' – used pejoratively by British colonizers to describe 'inauthentic' usage of English by Indians (see, e.g., Malabari in Khair *et al* (ed.), *Other Routes*) – on my discussion of the way Indians who write in English ('Babus') have to cope with the problem of writing in English about a country where not even five percent of the population actually speaks English. 'Babu English' is an entirely different matter from 'Babus and English', and it was the latter that was my concern. My argument in *Babu Fictions* was not

that Indian English writing was simply "elitist" but that English was used as a language of creativity by certain classes – of which only the most privileged are visibly published – and that this factor combined with the different position English occupies in the network of Indian languages to raise some problems and offer some solutions.

In this paper, I return to this issue and stress that it is central to a full appreciation of Indian fiction in English, which is largely lacking till date. I do so by dumping the term 'Babu', which has served its purpose of provoking a debate and revealing, what I had implied, the language-based limits of such a debate. For instance, Indians who see red at my recuperation of 'Babu' read it only (within the limits of English) as a colonial term, often used pejoratively by the British, conveniently forgetting that when they next hail a rickshaw over much of India, the non-Anglophone rickshaw-puller will use 'Babu' – and refer to them as 'Babu', if they are male – as an unalloyed term of respect. 'Babu' is a pre-British term and it is a term of social class and respect in discourses that have not been restrained to those of post-colonial English-language Babuness. A one-sided objection to the usage of 'Babu' as an emblematic term, while necessary within a certain colonialist discursive context, is also at the same time an indication of objector's inability to step beyond that Anglophone and colonial context. In that sense, it indicates the tendency of 'postcolonialism' to circle round and round, inevitably, in the discursive space of 'colonialism' (or, at best, the counter-discursive 'anti-colonialism'), while ignoring the 'pre', 'para' and fully 'post'-colonial.

II

Moving on to the recent Indian novels in English, I feel that it is important to conceptualize the different ways in which English interrelates with other Indian languages and with the realities of Indian writers in recent novels. There is no approved way, not just one right path. There are various options. Some of them can be traced to the kind of traditions that Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Khushwant Singh and Anita Desai have set up – each tradition has its own linguistic and literary characteristics.

For instance, among recent novels, one can distinguish between the writings of, say, Manju Kapur and Siddharth Chowdhury without necessarily attributing more skill or authenticity to either. Both, as I will illustrate below, are interesting and distinctive voices, and there are many such today.

Manju Kapur has a style and broad thematic focus that she has sustained from the time she published her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*, which won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Eurasia in 1988, to her fourth and most recent novel, *The Immigrant*. It has been said of her, and rightly, that few writers have narrated the Indian middle class family with as much nuance and affection.

The Immigrant continues this saga of narration. It tells us about Ananda, an Indian immigrant in Halifax, Canada, who has saved and studied his way to a career as a dentist, and Nina, a thirty-year-old Lecturer in Delhi. It tells us, with quietness and conviction, about Nina's mother, worried about her daughter's marriage prospects, and Ananda's married-in-Canada uncle. It narrates, sometimes directly and sometimes tangentially, Nina's past infatuation with a man who abandoned her, Ananda's failed attempts at sex with women, the meeting and correspondence of Nina and Ananda, and their marriage. With Nina finally joining Ananda in Canada, the novel not only covers some older landmarks of 'immigration narratives' but also engages with the less often narrated matter of infertility and sexual dysfunction among men.

Kapur is good at gently nudging the reader into the heads of her female Indian characters. She manages to do so in *The Immigrant* too. She also provides a complex, if more ironic, portrait of the men in this novel, particularly Ananda with his unacknowledged sexual limitations: "He knew he still had miles to go before he reached his goal of pounding some woman to sexual pulp, but with marriage, he had gained in confidence. One day he might try again with a white woman. He loved his wife, but he didn't want to feel that she was the only one in the world he could have sex with" (*I* 151).

In terms of language, social scope and structure, Kapur takes few risks, and the ones she takes are carefully calibrated. Her subject matter, too, remains within the realm of ordinary middle class experience. Yet her novels are surprisingly engrossing. They are read not only by thousands of ordinary readers, they can also provide much material to literary critics, especially (but not only) from the gender perspective. She is, what literary journalists commonly hail, "a talented storyteller", but unlike some other such 'storytellers', her deceptively simple narratives also engage subtly with issues.

Siddharth Chowdhury's *Patna Roughcut* is a very different kind of novel, but just as readable and admirable. It is set in a different world that is just as much 'India': How does one write about a place where a boy can be beaten to death for stealing a pair of shoes?

In some ways, the answer to a question like that can provide us with working definitions of Indian fiction in English, and its many varieties. For, of course, you can write about the boy in different ways. You can assume a tone of socio-political or moral indignation. You can use that act of mob brutality to open up a subtle space between the point of your narration and the place of the murder, placing yourself on a higher civic or cultural plane by implication. You can turn it into dark humour, satire, even magic realism of the sort where all those contorted, broken bodies seem to be, finally, devoid of any unbearable sensation of pain. And there are surely other options, not all equal, and all equally off-key from a certain perspective – the perspective of the street, bagh or nukkad where the murder actually takes place.

For this place, whether in Patna, mostly the site of Siddharth Chowdhury's debut novel, *Patna Roughcut*, or in Gaya, about hundred kilometres away, where I grew up, might have a different relationship to the act of beating a boy to death, and its significance. In this place, your next-door neighbour is likely to hawk, spit, and shrug his shoulders. The boy might be left bleeding on the street for some official functionary to fulfil his official function. No one – except perhaps a sensitive young child – would lose much sleep over it. Regret might be expressed over the excess of the act or the mess it left behind or even 'the times' we are living through, but it will be the sort of regret that is expressed when Saurav Ganguly or Sachin Tendulkar plays a misjudged stroke and gets out. And yet, the people living in that place are not necessarily illiterate, feudal, insensitive, uncivilized and criminal.

In *Patna Roughcut*, one of the narrators, and the novel's main protagonist, Ritwik, himself only a boy, sees another boy – a Bangladeshi refugee in the days following the war – being beaten to death for stealing a pair of shoes. It is to Chowdhury's credit that the incident is described in a rather low key, even though Ritwik is plunged into delirium partly from the shock of the event he has witnessed. Ritwik, the novel tells us, wants to move away from the window but cannot. Used as he is to occasional violence, fights, beatings, Ritwik, nevertheless, is not used to such casual extremity of violence and, for a moment, does not know what is real and what is not. Chowdhury's narrative brings home the nature of the violence, but it does so from within the space in which that violence takes place: "He knows each one of the perpetrators. These are people he meets each day, boys who sometimes include him in their cricket teams, uncles who buy him comics and chocolates, who come to his house and have food there. The coordinates in his mind shift forever altering the way he looks at things; what frightens him the most is not the fact that he knows them

but that he will know them for the rest of his life. This is what he comes from" (*PR* 103).

You need to come from a place like that to feel the sadness and trauma of Ritwik's realization, and to fully understand his decision, later in the novel (though narrated earlier on as well), to return to Kadam Kuan, Patna, to the various Da*s* and their Charminar smoke, to Old Monk in a Cola bottle. And perhaps you need to come from a place like that to narrate the stories that Chowdhury tells in *Patna Roughcut*.

This is no mean achievement. It is also not without its literary precedents. For instance, both in its humour and in its language *Patna Roughcut* reminds one more of Upamanyu Chatterjee than of Salman Rushdie. Chowdhury feels no need to explain his non-English borrowings or to flaunt them.

However, this is exactly the point I want to make in conclusion. It is the job of the literary critic to draw lines of connections, but these should not make us forget difference. Words like 'postcolonialism' or 'Diaspora' or 'hybridity' may be valid in some global and some Indian contexts; they might also mean something else (or nothing much) in other contexts. It is here that I feel we need to talk about the new crop of novelists in our own voices, which is the only way to do justice to their voices. Let me conclude by illustrating this with a personal account.

Sometimes, I am described as a 'diasporic' writer and compared to writers like Salman Rushdie. I have great admiration for much of what Rushdie has achieved, but I wonder how someone like myself, who studied in Gaya for the first twenty-four years of his life, worked as a lowly staff reporter in Delhi for the next five, and only then moved abroad, can be considered 'diasporic' in the same sense as someone like Rushdie? Does a term like 'diasporic' serve any critical purpose across such miles of evaded difference? This, then, is the gist of this paper. I want to say that such distinctions might escape the notice of global postcolonialist critics, but they should not escape our notice. Our reading of recent Indian English novels should be informed by our perception of our complexities, of similarities and differences seen from our spaces of enunciation.

Works Cited

Chowdhury, Siddharth. *Patna Roughcut* (*PR*). New Delhi: Picador, 2005.

John, Binoo K. *Entry from Backside Only: Hazaar Fundas of Indian-English.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.

Kapur, Manju. *The Immigrant* (*I*). New Delhi: Random House, 2008.

Khair, Tabish *et al* (ed.). *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*. London: Signal Books, 2006. (Co-published with Indiana University Press, USA)

Srivastava, Neelam. "Pidgin English or Pigeon Indian?". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (*JPW*). 43:1, pp. 55-64. 2007.

Svevo, Italo. *Zeno's Conscience*. 1923. Tr. William Weaver. London: Everyman's Library, 2001.

CHAPTER SIX

LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBALIZATION: READING KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

MURARI PRASAD

The mushrooming of neo-liberal political and economic power with the attendant consequences for patterns of global inequality has triggered multiple conversations and new lines of contestation. The rapid penetration of transnational capitalism has spawned increased commercial inter-dependency over the last two decades or so creating a world of "crisscrossed economies", to use Roger Rouse's phrase. The new levels of economic, cultural and technological integration have contributed to a novel form of cosmopolitanism complicit with corporate hegemony or a new phase of deterritorialized Western imperialism with "the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers," as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in their book, *Empire* (2000). In other words, the old inequities have not dissolved despite the enormous interconnecting potential of globalization.

The writers have offered perspectives on the changing nature of capital penetration as well as new divisions between the exploiters and the exploited from diverse locations in their narratives of resistance. In Kiran Desai's novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), the plight of the subalterns disempowered by globalization has been poignantly depicted. Evidently, Desai's less than celebratory slant on globalization is informed by her perception of the lingering age of colonization with its neo-colonial dimensions. She interrogates the popular 'positivist' view of the increased transnational flow as the harbinger of modernity and economic opportunities. Melissa Dennihy extracts the salience of the novel in these words:

> By writing her novel from the perspective of the "shadow class" (which includes […] both Indians living in India and Indian immigrants living in England and America) Desai offers a way for her Western readers to re-think the effects of modernity, globalization, and "multiculturalism" from outside of the Western world; her novel works to shed light not only on the ways in which the very "benefits" of modernity for some are the cause of shame, self-loathing, and solitude for others, but also on the ways in which modernity and globalization both rely upon and, in many ways, replicate the same imperial and colonial processes that so many "positive-minded" modern Western thinkers would like to consider world systems of the past.
>
> (Dennihy 1-2)

Desai takes the legacy of European colonialism in India as her novel's focal point. But she relates the dynamics of decolonization to today's economies, politics, cultures and identities in terms of contemporary global formation, which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their influential study, *Empire*, describe as "a decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (Hardt 117). The 'globalists' or the advocates of 'Empire', like Arjun Appadurai, endorse the newness and the benefits of globalization and argue that the operations of contemporary power go beyond the centre/periphery dynamics and as such are not amenable to an analysis from postcolonial perspectives. On the other hand, the critics of globalization contest its radical potential and point out that the new order has intensified the old inequities and pre-existing asymmetries produced by colonialism. Desai's novel gives place to the colonized in the new international network and advances debates surrounding the idea of globalization. This major strand of the novel's ideological position locates *The Inheritance of Loss* in the realm of global fiction.

Discussing the formative force of global fiction, Paul Jay notes some useful points in the context of postcolonialism and globalization:

> While the processes of globalization have clearly accelerated in the years after World War II, I agree with Roland Robertson and others who insist globalization has a long history coincident with the rise of modernity, colonization, transnational trade, and the development of the nation-state. From this point of view, postcolonialism may mark a break *in* the history of the nation-state, but not a break *from* that history. To be sure, in the earlier phases of globalization, the nation-state linked colonization and capitalism together in the interests of its own expansion, while in its more recent phase, multi-national corporations and the mass media have begun to challenge its power. But such observations don't undermine the basic argument that colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalization are

> historically linked in important ways. They simply suggest how the long history of globalization might be written. With this historical perspective in mind, it becomes very difficult to draw a clear line between postcolonial and global fiction. It is tempting to see global fiction as a contemporary phenomenon, literature that in its principal themes is *post-postcolonial*. (Jay)

Simon Gikandi, too, points out some parallels while referring to the discourses of postcolonialism and globalization:

> […] they have at least two important things in common: they are concerned with explaining forms of social and cultural organization whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, and they seek to provide new vistas for understanding cultural flows that can no longer be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change. (Gikandi 627)

Although postcolonialism is grounded in political and social experience of decolonization, the local tends to flow into the global leading to a postcolonial process of transculturation. The circulation of the local in the global has accelerated the pace of geographical heterogeneity and diasporic mobility. In its turn, the local is no longer in limbo and is being globally inflected. Further, I would argue that colonialism, postcolonialism and globalization are not at odds with one another. They are rather historically linked. However, geographically extensive networks of economic connection in the age of globalization are no longer centred upon large imperial states and have enormously expanded beyond the colonized regions under their control. " The emergence of capitalism", as Anthony Giddens puts Immanuel Wallerstein's theoretical perspectives of globalization [as discussed in *The Modern World-System* (1974)], "ushers in a quite different type of order, for the first time genuinely global in its span and based more on economic than political power – the 'world capitalist economy' […], which has its origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. [It] is integrated through commercial and manufacturing connections, not by a political centre". Giddens further notes that "there exists a multiplicity of political centres, the nation-states" and that "the modern world system is divided into three components, the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery, although where these are located regionally shifts over time" (Giddens 62).

One finds this theoretical position quite cogent for assessing the trajectory of those contemporary Indian novels in English that are embedded in the entrenched disparities of the earlier period of colonial globalization as well as in the "core-periphery" divide following modern

transformations pushed by ongoing transnational flows, cultural hybridity or issues directly connected to contemporary globalization. With the insistent pressure of postcolonial appropriation and transformation in a globalized world, the pattern of cultural representation in contemporary narratives of the nation has shifted the ground. It has moved from the exigencies of nation building to the forces of globalization and their ramifying influences, such as the damaging collision between the cultural autonomy and identity of the decolonized nation-states and the incursions of economic globalization.

The hollowness of neo-liberal globalization animates Desai's narrative as she mediates its impact on subaltern immigrants. As cited in *The Guardian*, 11 October 2006, John Sutherland, chairperson of the 2005 Man Booker judges, said, "Desai's novel registers the multicultural reverberations of the new millennium with the sensitive instrumentality of fiction, as Jhabvala and Rushdie did previous eras … It is a globalized novel for a globalized world" (Ezard *web*). And Hermione Lee, the head judge of the 2006 Booker, considered it "a magnificent novel of humane breadth and wisdom, comic tenderness and powerful political acuteness" (Ezard *web*). *The Inheritance of Loss* captures the eruption of disparate particularities or the convulsive changes of the contemporary moment in poignant scenes of poverty, deprivation, dislocation following immigration, and the undemocratic nature of globalization disadvantageous to the poor and vulnerable masses in the developing countries. The essential narrative delineates the 'core-periphery' contrast.

Set in Kalimpong, a small eastern Himalayan hill station town in India, the novel depicts India's postcolonial stirrings against the colonizer's cartography and the racially wounded characters whose colonial neuroses are closely intertwined with the experiences of an insecure, indigent immigrant struggling to make a gruelling living amid precarious conditions in multicultural America. The two narratives get spliced with the hinge provided by the identical experience of the judge as a young man, alienated by the coldness of Cambridge society in the 1930s, and his cook's son, Biju, working in New York's filthy restaurant and drifting from job to job in the 1980s.We hear about the young judge's crushing solitude:

> For entire days nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless – blue-haired, spotted, faces like collapsing pumpkins – moved over when he sat next to them in the buses, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction that it wasn't even remotely as bad as what *he* had. The young and beautiful were no

> kinder; girls held their noses and giggled, "Phew, he stinks of curry!" (*IL* 39)

The cook's son encounters depressing unevenness and humiliation amidst discrepancies and disempowerment of the first world's globalized economy:

> The green car the green card. The …
>
> Without it he couldn't leave. To leave he wanted a green card. This was the absurdity. How he desired the triumphant After The Green Card Return Home, thirsted for it – to be able to buy a ticket with the air of someone who could return if he wished, or not, if he didn't wish. … He watched the legalized foreigners with envy as they shopped at discount baggage stores for the miraculous, expandable third-world suitcase, accordion-pleated, filled with pockets and zippers to unhook further crannies, the whole structure unfolding into a giant space that could fit in enough to set up an entire life in another country.
>
> Then, of course, there were those who lived and died illegal in America and never saw their families, not for ten years, twenty, thirty, never again.
>
> (*IL* 99)

The retired and crossly gnarled judge, Jemubhai Patel, who studied at Cambridge before getting into the ICS, is now consumed by self-hatred of his Indianness in independent India. Stunted by the colonial encounter, the unrelentingly embittered anglophile judge is out of tune with the decolonized native ethos; his warped and stony psyche makes him an unwanted anachronism in resurgent postcolonial India. He is spending his last years in Cho Oyu, a crumbling hillside bungalow in Kalimpong, with his pet dog, Mutt. His granddaughter, Sai, the child of a Gujarati mother and a Zoroastrian father who is part of Indo-Russian space collaboration in the last days of the old Soviet state, is orphaned when her parents die under the wheels of a bus in Moscow. When Sai comes to stay with her emotionally desiccated grandfather, the cook at Cho Oyu treats her with the warmth and affection that he is unable to give his son, Biju, who is roughing it out far away in America as an illegal immigrant. Scratching around as a desperate, disenfranchised alien, Biju is tenuously connected to the processes of transnational formations in that he clings to the possibilities of prosperity in the 'core' region of globalization even as he shifts from one temporary job to another in the basement kitchens of New York restaurants.

Desai's skilful welding of the material – the Gorkha Movement of the mid-1980s in the Nepalese-dominated hill districts of West Bengal in India and the predicament of nomadic migrants in a first world metropolis

like New York – consolidates the novel's essential point around which the narrative perspectives coalesce. The story gathers coherence from the untidy and frustrating aftermath of British colonialism as well as from a sequel to that in the postcolonial churning which is underwriting the concurrent global modernity. The loss inherited by the variants of dispersed migrants is too complex to be sorted out in the emerging world with a severely limited level-playing field. Sai's brief love affair with a Nepali youth, Gyan, ends in mutual recriminations as the latter joins the group of Nepalese insurgents. When the insurgency in the mountains threatens Sai's new-sprung romance with her handsome tutor, their passion collides with the politics of the region. The cook witnesses India's social hierarchy glaringly transformed: the judge turns out to be a feeble and ossified relic of the colonized native in a postcolonial dispensation. Pitted against the inequities of globalization, Biju, the cook's son, fails to find his feet in New York as a low-end, undocumented service worker and decides to return to India in a disenchanted state only to be robbed of his hard-earned acquisitions by the barbarians in his own backyard – exemplifying the evident divide between the 'core' and the 'periphery'. The novel ends in a dramatic denouement wherein the sweet drabness of home brings its own trauma, shock and deprivation. Desai chronicles the chaos and loss in the wake of colonialism and globalization further down the road in postcolonial India.

In an engaging narrative with shifts in time and brief flashbacks, Desai has made a brilliant attempt at depicting the stratified society in the USA. Biju faces racial apathy and his tribulations suppressed by his transient elation crush him internally. He realizes that the privileges of legal American citizenship are beyond his reach. The cultural segregation determined by economic inequalities is palpable in globalization's variegated spatial attributes.

> Here in America, where every nationality confirmed its stereotype – Biju felt he was entering a warm amniotic bath.
>
> But then it grew cold. This war was not, after all, satisfying; it could never go deep enough, the crick was never cracked, the itch was never scratched; the irritation built on itself, and the combatants itched all the more. […]
>
> The sound of their fight had traveled up the flight of steps and struck a clunky note, and they might upset the balance, perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below. (*IL* 23)

The ethnic particularities stick out even as the boosters of globalization buttress the hegemony of the West. The power imbalance between the

colonizers and the colonized is unresolved. However, the aching quandary accompanying the impulse to immigrate and the ensuing crisis of identity are poignantly underlined in the fragile location of Biju and other denizens of the tenement halls. The intersecting fragments of their disinheritance form the intricate filigree of the novel's intent.

According to Roger Rouse, globalization is a new social order "marked by diasporic identities and fluid communities" (Behdad 65). The diasporic component of Desai's novel suggests, as Susan Koshy puts it, "an increasingly bimodal formation". Koshy goes on to signpost the dichotomous positioning of the two formations:

> In the United States, there has been a noticeable shift after the1980s from an immigrant population comprised mainly of physicians, managers, engineers, and other professionals to a grouping that includes large numbers of low-end service workers including cab drivers, restaurant workers, shop assistants, day-care workers, and news-stand vendors. The Neo-Diaspora foregrounds the internal diversity of the South Asian Diaspora in the older and newer migration movements. (Koshy 7)

Historically, varying economic imperatives of migration seem to have determined the diasporic consciousness of the dispersed population from India. Biju, racially excluded and dodging surveillance, discovers to his cost, that immigrants are a transient and disposable workforce, not potential citizens in the USA. His vulnerable situation underscores undocumented workers' struggle for belonging. The novel asks a disturbing question, as Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate and Chief Economist at the World Bank, does: "Had things really changed since the 'official' ending of colonialism a half century ago?" (Stiglitz 40-41)

Desai engages with the dialectic set in motion by the impact of contemporary globalization and questions the top-down view of development as Biju is ground down by the reality of being a second-class citizen in multicultural America. The rhetoric and momentum of global mélange cannot hide or dissimulate the colonial impairments. In her remarkable novel, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy resists an enthusiastic embrace of globalization and stands her ground as a liberated postcolonial writer. She is concerned about the destabilizing potential of deterritorialized identities being formed under the onslaughts of globally enabled multinational economic agencies. Roy's novel is largely located in India though the lure and traps of transnational corporations in a skewed capitalist system are closely interwoven. She argues in her incisive essays that the forces of globalization are diminishing the dominance of the nation-state. Voracious transnational corporations have spawned a

disadvantaged empire of vulnerable subalterns. Desai, too, is concerned about a hegemonic and hierarchically structured capitalist system in the wake of postmodern globalization without a fair market mechanism for the migrant population. To point out succinctly, Roy is critical, rather a vociferous detractor of globalization; Desai is ambivalent, sometimes sceptical of the conceptualization promulgated by globalists by showing up the impediments to diasporic formations in an increasingly uneven world. Desai's predilection for portraying the non-descript masses of the postcolonial Diaspora as peoples amidst the unsettling experiences of cultural displacement, migration and marginalization is sharply evident where *The Inheritance of Loss* describes the hapless Indian immigrant buckling under despair:

> Biju walked back to the Gandhi café, thinking he was emptying out. Year by year, his life wasn't amounting to anything at all; in a space that should have included family, friends, he was the only one displacing the air. And yet, another part of him had expanded: his self-consciousness, his self-pity – oh the tediousness of it. Clumsy in America, a giant-sized midget, a bigfat-sized helping of small … Shouldn't he return to a life where he might slice his own importance, to where he might relinquish this overrated control over his own destiny and perhaps be subtracted from its determination altogether? He might even experience that greatest luxury of not noticing himself at all. (*IL* 268)

The narrator closely reports on the palpable unevenness, asymmetry and inequality in global relations that is not often acknowledged by the advocates of global transformation. As Jan Pieterse observes, "There is free cheese only in the mousetrap" (Pieterse 111). The global mélange devoid of intercultural osmosis entails redirecting the processes of globalization toward new ends.

As Biju's plane arrives in London, Desai gives sufficient hint of the nexus between colonization and globalization: "The first stop was Heathrow and they crawled out at the far end that hadn't been renovated for the new days of globalization but lingered back in the old age of colonization" (*IL* 285). Surely, disparities and divisions created by colonization persist; the democratizing potential of globalization remains unrealized. "In globalization," as Timothy Brennan notes, "the non-Western world – the former colonies that are still colonies – are assigned the role both as this metaphorical and actual space on a grand scale: an appropriately large middle space in which the unequal exchanges of globalization can be performed as legerdemain" (Brennan 113). The decolonized world operates in a calculated zone of invisibility, from which

it provides the positioning so vital for ensuring the financial and commercial dominance of globalization's main beneficiaries.

However, Desai is not an advocate of the closed world. Her critical assessment of globalization in the novel brings out its neo-colonial dimensions and spatial segregation leading to disenfranchisement among immigrant communities. On the other hand, Biju's terrifying experience of being robbed, almost on his doorstep, indicates that Desai's novel is not rhetoric of rank anti-globalizing protest. The principal brilliance of Kiran Desai's briskly paced and sumptuously written novel lies in her insightful exploration of how colonial vestiges are shaping the dynamics of economic globalization and multiculturalism. "In fact, *The Inheritance of Loss* can be put," as Amitav Kumar notes, "among the handful of representations of our moment – call it globalization, postmodernity, or contemporary conditions – from the viewpoint of its victims" (Kumar *web*). Centuries of colonial subjection have left a trail of inequalities in the subcontinent making it socio-politically too fissured to be healed by corporate globalization. As the novel's plot unfolds, colonialism's copious wounds appear overly stark, rather intractable. Sure enough, Desai is sceptical of the salutary assumptions of consumer-driven multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in that global formations have brought about modernity with its spurious components.

Works Cited

Behdad, Ali. "On Globalization, Again". *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*. (ed.) Ania Loomba *et al*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2006, pp. 62-89.

Brennan, Timothy. "The Economic Image-Function of the Periphery". *Ibid.,* pp. 101-122.

Dennihy, Melissa. "Globalization's Discontents: Reading 'Modernity' from the Shadows". *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai.* (ed.) Sunita Sinha and Bryan Reynolds. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2009. pp. 1-20.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss* (*IL*). New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.

Ezard, John. "First timer beats the odds to take the Booker prize that eluded her mother". *The Guardian*. 11 June 2006 (online). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/oct/11/books.bookerprize2006> (Access: 02-02-2011)

Giddens, Anthony. "Globalizing of modernity". *The Global Transformations Reader*. 2nd Edition. (ed.) David Held and Anthony MacGrew. Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell, 2003. pp. 60-66.

Gikandi, Simon. "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality". *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 100:3 (2001). pp. 627- 658.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. "Globalization as Empire". *The Global Transformations Reader*. 2nd Edition. *Op. cit*. pp. 116-119.

Jay, Paul. "Is Global Fiction Postcolonial?" December 2001, home.comcast.net~jay.paul/fiction.htm-38k> (Access: 02-02-2011)

Koshy, Susan and R. Radhakrishnan (ed.). "Introduction". *Transnational South Asians: The Making of a Neo-Diaspora*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008. pp. 1-41.

Kumar, Amitav. "Congratulations, Kiran Desai". <http://amitavakumar.blogsome.com/2006/10/10/kiran-desai-booker-prize/> (Access: 28-03-2011)

Pieterse, Jan. *Globalization and Culture*: *Global Mélange*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowland & Littlefield, 2004.

Stiglitz, J. E. *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York: Norton, 2003.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IDENTITY FORMATIONS IN *REAR ENTRANCE*

MUNIBA SAMI

Texts rarely embody just one view. The comic vision, reminiscent of the combined humour of R. K. Narsayan and P. G. Wodehouse in *Rear Entrance* (2010), the first novel by David Barun Kumar Thomas, brings into play different ways of seeing without always deciding which is the true or most appropriate. The narrative reveals the manner in which self-identities can operate in many different ways in different circumstances. They have been presented in their multiple, mobile forms accompanied with their own inner tensions often with comic results. But the indulgent ironic perspective makes the reader aware of the complexities and fluidity of identity formations when the cultures of two countries, namely India and Britain, are by the nature of circumstances made to interact with each other in a third country – Belgium. This post-colonial encounter operates at multiple levels in terms of race, class, caste and gender in the post 9/11 timeframe. But the narrative weaves simultaneously yet another form of encounter revealing the problematics of interpersonal relationships defined by class, religion, region, caste and gender of the four main characters, who, apart from being Indians, have very little common in terms of their culture and background. Through these four characters, the novel presents a federal, democratic perspective of a polyphonic India, representing a mosaic of cultures, attitudes and worldviews.

The narrative reveals the self-identity of post-colonial Indians being deeply affected in complex ways by the power and dominance of colonial cultures and their forms of thought and classification. Four Indians, strangers to one another, from different strata of society, from different regions of India (north, south, east and west) without the remotest possibility of their respective circles ever intersecting in their homeland, are brought together at the British Embassy in unfriendly cold Brussels by circumstances and their common need to procure visas to UK. The front door of the Embassy carries a small sign that reads, 'Visa Section, please

use the rear entrance on Rue du President' (*RE* 6). One cannot miss the plural significations of the words 'rear entrance' from which the novel takes its eyebrow-raising title. Designated as the visa section, the rear of the Embassy is meant for visa applicants who are obviously not from the First World countries. Further, the ironic overtones are generated by the manipulation of bureaucratic protocol that often grants visas to the most unlikely applicants, implying back-door entry.

Twenty-eight-year-old Seetha Subramaniam, an English-speaking, middle class Tamil Brahmin and a bright confident systems analyst – software professional, is sent to Brussels by her company commissioned to develop a new software application for a company in Brussels. Brought up in 'steamy' Madras, six months in dreary cold Brussels and no headway with her handsome colleague, Luc, convinces Seetha that she must move on. With the help and manoeuverings of a distant uncle, Mr Iyer, who had immigrated to the UK 40 years earlier and for whom over the years getting "Iyers into Britain had become exciting games of chess" (*RE* 28), she hatches an audacious plan to get into England by pretending to be a writer. While the British government's immigration laws were extremely prohibitive, they for some reason allowed only writers and artists to be granted visas even if they had no job. Seetha's real motive, possibly to migrate to the UK, is not made clear in the book, financial necessity being the least of her reasons given the kind of handsome salary her current Indian employers were giving her and job opportunities a person of her qualifications could have had for the asking.

Having escaped the slums of India, Harish Rawat, an Indian passport holder from Hissar in Haryana, runs a small all night grocery stores in Brussels with his Pakistani business partner, Zulfikar. He has slogged hard in Belgium on a work permit for the past twelve years. In spite of having to support a brood of relatives in India, he has finally managed to save enough money to fulfill a life-long dream: watch a cricket match at Lords in London.

The third character, Amit Trehan, the nephew of the Indian Minister for External Affairs, is a rich man from a wealthy business family. Having graduated from the Harvard Business School, he needs to prove his business acumen to his over-bearing father and win his approval by forging lucrative connections in Europe. At the same time, he has to find a way to launder and siphon back to India the two million dollars his father had stashed abroad decades earlier "in the bad restrictive years of Nehruvian Socialism" (*RE* 31).

Ratnesh, the fourth Indian character, is from the margins of the Indian society. He is a poorly-educated but street-smart, foul-mouthed Berhaiya, a backward community, from Bihar. With former underworld links and having served a jail term in Patna, he had come to Europe five months earlier with just fifty Euros in hand. For the past three months, he has been moving around Europe relentlessly probing for opportunities, weaving exotic stories about his own self, and hoodwinking the less well-off first generation immigrants settled in every country in the Schengen zone. His lonely poverty in Bihar made him develop a jaunty walk as armour which had preserved him through 15 years of hardship and which still keeps him going. But his cocky, alley-cat style, blustering, crude insolent behaviour makes him appear thoroughly unpleasant to those whom he interacts with. He plans to pose as a dalit, the untouchable, who is lower than Berhaiya in the caste hierarchy and is the beneficiary of the Indian government's reservation policies vis-à-vis jobs, loans, education including a law that protects the caste from being abused – a benefit that Berhaiyas are deprived of. He even uses the good-natured Harish to play the caste-conflict card to seek asylum in UK. He manages to get a refugee status attestation from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees with the help of Mabel, a white woman who happened to cross his path. Having bought his heart-wrenching story and being a great champion of the underdog, she had stormed into the deputy commissioner's office accusing him of being a racist and demanding quick action when the papers just would not move. The making of the scene worked. Of course, had he (a non-white) made a scene, the Belgian authorities would have had him deported.

Although Seetha and Amit belong to very different worlds and class, what they have in common is their Anglicized education that helps them occupy position of privilege and in Amit's case, power as well. Their self-interests conflict with those of people who are less privileged, like Ratnesh and Harish, replicating the attitudes of the former colonial ruling class. In addition, we see how even Indian English as a language with its cultural hybridity can still be used as a medium through which a hierarchical structure of power can be perpetuated. Its use certainly indicates a sense of difference and tends to be exclusivist, for a language carries its culture. When Harish with hardly any knowledge of English asks Seetha in Hindi to help him fill up the English visa form, she resents his assumption that being an Indian she must know the Hindi language. Although she has some knowledge of Hindi, she snubs him in English pretending not to understand him because she is Tamil. Multiple factors interact here to account for Seetha's sense of superiority in her rude response: difference

of class, region (the north-south divide) and her English education. But she has the social conscience, the sensitivity and the grace to chide herself and regret her "unpardonable bit of callous, uptight behaviour" (*RE* 15).

On the other hand, Amit driven by market forces is too hard-headed a businessman to have any such social or moral compunction. The novel not only shows how self-identities are perceived but also how power-relations create and construct the identities of the 'other' within a given society. Amit uses English as a weapon to keep Ratnesh, the irrepressible 'subaltern', in his place in his effort to retain the hierarchical power structure of his country even in a foreign land with different value systems when the latter naturally gravitates towards one's own fellow-citizens in a foreign location. But Ratnesh, who knows just a little more English than Harish, continually resists the imposition of the 'subaltern' identity by refusing to remain in the periphery. He is determined to centralize his position. Therefore, the use of the two languages, English and Hindi, by Amit and Ratnesh respectively, subtly represents power struggle between the two as each skillfully negotiates the details of the dubious money-laundering transaction in chapter 10.

In his book, *Identity and Violence,* Amartya Sen says, "When we shift our attention from the notion of *being identical to one* to that of *sharing an identity with others* of a particular group (which is the form the idea of social identity very often takes), the complexity increases further. Indeed, many contemporary political and social issues revolve around conflicting claims of disparate identities involving different groups, since the conception of identity influences, in many different ways, our thoughts and actions" (Sen xii). This is the case with the four above-mentioned characters. They share their identities with one another by virtue of the fact that they are all Indians but their differences are also conspicuously striking as they are equally "robustly plural" (Sen 19). While Amit may share his national identity with the others, he does not share their class or region. Similarly, he 'shares' a Western educational background with only Seetha and not with the other two men. Yet again, Amit shares his identity as an Indian businessman with Harish but not his class. All three men share their identity as North Indians while Seetha is a South Indian. Harish and Ratnesh share their class identity and their non-western educational background. Thus, we see how the conflicting claims of disparate identities increase the complexities in the ways of thinking and shaping one's world-view. This combination of shared as well as disparate identities resulting in shifting identities reveals the author's dexterous handling of character contrasts and complex relationships.

While dealing with the idea of weighing the relative importance of individuals and prioritizing their identities, Sen says, "Also, not all identities need have durable importance. Indeed, sometimes an identity group may have a very fleeting and highly contingent existence" (Sen 25). This observation can be valid in the case of individual identity as well. Identities can never be fixed, for they can change or adapt according to changing social contexts or circumstances. In the novel, Amit's self-identity is a case in point. In India, probably he would never have found the need for the likes of Ratnesh who would have been dismissed "as a petty Paharganj broker" (*RE* 57), or even Harish whom he thinks of disparagingly because he is a petty shopkeeper. However, in foreign Brussels, deprived of his inherited support system back home, Amit is compelled to foreground his Indian identity and allow his privileged status to take a back seat. Although even in Brussels, through his uncle's contact, Amit is provided with some support in the person of Promod Khera, the Commercial Attaché in Brussels, it turns out to be a notional one. Promod Khera fails to facilitate business worth a single Euro to or from India. As Amit had neither the inclination nor the ability to scout business on his own, he is inclined to turn to Ratnesh for two reasons. After weighing the pros and cons, he finds that in business acumen Ratnesh contrasted favourably with Promod Khera. Secondly, Ratnesh might just enable him to make that "critical business foray into Europe" (*RE* 58). Later on, he could always 'jettison' him. When Ratnesh after his first interview with Doug, the British visa officer, suggests having lunch to Amit, Seetha finds "that in Ratnesh's presence, Amit developed quite another persona and seemed to alternate between imitating and patronizing Ratnesh, and in the process became equally unlikable" (*RE* 89). This example serves to illustrate the point as to how expediency can compel one to prioritize one identity over another. It also shows how Ratnesh is able to exploit Amit's situation to subvert both the capitalist ideology (of which Amit is a beneficiary) to his advantage and his 'marginal' identity in positioning himself at par with the Indian industrialist.

Ratnesh's self-identity is fraught perhaps with greater inner tension than that experienced by Seetha who juggles between her cultural, anglicized and professional identities, each competing for attention and priority over the others. But the difference is that while his identity in the European context makes him doubly marginalized, Seetha's self-perceived inferiority as an Indian in the white man's land is a colonial hangover from her country's past. Ratnesh belligerently resists his 'marginal' identity by not only subverting his inherited position in the hierarchical power structure of his home country but also his Third World identity, especially

in two sets of situations in Brussels. One is when he encounters the British visa officer in course of his two interviews using the very rules of the white man as tools to subvert bureaucratic red tape. And the other is when he uses his Third World identity and the racial construct of his coloured identity as weapons to thwart the white authorities by having fun at their expense. He deliberately indulges in a suspicious behaviour (even though he had no intentions of shop-lifting), playing a cat and mouse game with the security guard in a departmental store equipped with elaborate security measures.

The manner in which the English language is used by the Indian characters provides an index to the attitudes and self-images of the speakers. Although fluent in spoken French, Harish's body language betrays his timidity and deferential (very Third World) attitude to Doug, especially as he is unable to communicate in English and needs a French speaking Belgian member of staff to interpret for him to the British visa officer. Ratnesh insolently flaunts his ethnicity in broken English before Doug by insisting on using Indian numerical terminology like the words 'crore' and 'lakhs', terms incomprehensible to Doug, thereby centralizing the dominance of the Indian perspective, secure in the knowledge that his visa form has been flawlessly filled. Both Amit and Seetha, because they can speak in English language fluently and well, tend to see the world through colonial lenses that replicate the colonial attitude to marginalize those who cannot. But the difference between them is that Amit, by virtue of his wealth and superior contacts, acquires a global identity and Seetha, while 'global' in her thinking, is very conscious of her cultural identity reflected in her pride and preoccupation with Indian philosophy. While the English language may have morphed into Indian English in postcolonial India, it continues to carry with it its colonialist's values albeit now in its hybrid form. As John McLeod in his book, *Beginning Postcolonialism,* says, "It is by no means safe to assume that colonization conveniently stops when a colony formally achieves its independence … it is crucial to realize that colonial values do not simply evaporate on the first day of independence" (McLeod 32). Colonialism's representations and values are not so easily dislodged. Stuart Hall in his essay, 'When was "the post-colonial"? Thinking at the Limit', in the book, *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons***,** argues that life after independence in many ways "is characterized by the persistence of many effects of colonization" (Hall 248).

In the novel, Seetha's sartorial preference for wearing a sari for the interview with the British visa officer reflects her need to prioritize her cultural identity over her professional one for two reasons. One is to

convince the British visa officer that she is "a timid Indian, reluctant to change in any way, one who would never dream of immigrating to the West" (*RE* 3), and the other is to assert the superiority of her spiritual inheritance. The two reasons reflect ambivalence, an inner tension within her cultural identity. While the first reason is a matter of strategy, which is a reflection of her intellectual confidence, the second betrays a sense of inferiority in what Partha Chatterjee refers to 'the material domain' of the West. In the context of the emergence of the self-perception of Indian identity during the anti-colonial independence movement, Chatterjee analyses how the national movement created its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before the political struggle by "dividing the world of social institutions and practice into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. Therefore, the greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater is the need to preserve the distinctiveness of one's spiritual culture" (Chatterjee 6).

This is the reactive self-identity that Seetha appears to have inherited from India's colonial past. The colonial undermining of self-confidence had the effect of driving many Indians to look for sources of dignity and pride. She exhibits a penchant for Indian philosophy as (with genuine pride) she expounds on it during the course of her interview with Doug to assert the superiority of the 'spiritual domain'. Nevertheless, one also needs to take into account the context in which she does so. Her eligibility for being granted a visa is her (false) claim to be a philosophical writer. But Seetha's self-perception alternates between confidence and lack of it depending on the context; for instance, her turning away from the 'Thirdness' of Harish's identity, or her anxiety in dressing 'right' for the interview. Yet she chides herself for seeing herself as the 'other'.

Both Amit and Seetha may be seen as examples of what Bhabha in his essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man', describes as "mimic men" who may be anglicized but emphatically are not English. However, differing from both V. S. Naipaul and Fanon in their notion of mimicry, Bhabha argues that these "mimic men" are *not* disempowered slavish individuals required by the British in India but are invested with the power to menace the colonizers. They are faced with the worrying threat of resemblance between the colonizers and the colonized. This threatens to collapse the

Orientalist structure of knowledge in which oppositional distinctions are made. The ambivalent position of the colonized mimic men in relation to the colonizer – 'almost the same but not quite' in Bhaha's view – is a source of anti-colonial resistance. By speaking English, the colonized have not succumbed to the power of the colonizer. On the contrary, they challenge the representations which attempt to fix and define the colonized through colonial stereotyping.

Works Cited

Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments*. New Delhi: OUP, 1994.

Hall, Stuart. 'When was "the post-colonial"? Thinking at the Limit'. *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. (ed.) Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. London: Routledge, 1996.

McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2010.

Sen, Amartya. *Identity and Violence*. New Delhi: Allen Lane, 2006.

Thomas, David Barun Kumar**.** *Rear Entrance (RE)*. Hachette India, 2010.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISABILITY STUDIES AND INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

BANIBRATA MAHANTA

> For many years it has become a mark of commonplace courtesy and intellectual rigor to note occasions when racism, sexism, or class bias creep into discourse. ... Yet there is a strange and really unaccountable silence when the issue of disability is raised: the silence is stranger, too, since so much of the left criticism has devoted itself to the issue of the body, of the social construction of sexuality and gender. Alternative bodies people this discourse: gay, lesbian, hermaphrodite, criminal, medical, and so on. But lurking behind these images of transgression and deviance is a much more transgressive and deviant figure: the disabled body.
>
> (Davis 5)

Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary area of study that emerged in the late twentieth century. Theorists in this area argue that it is the fourth coordinate, after race, class and gender, which is informed by an ideology of thinking under certain historical circumstances. The present paper proposes to scrutinize this contention and to examine the various theoretical models for perceiving disability from the earliest to the current times. This will be followed by a survey and critique of the representations of disability in Indian English novels. In the process, the paper proposes to interrogate and de-familiarize the entrenched binaries and mediate a more responsive terrain in disability studies for the Indian novel in English.

I

The negative sense is so much a part of the social perception of disability that one is hard pressed to communicate this category in any other term apart from 'lack'; dis-, un-, im-, in-, non- are some of the negative prefixes that are commonly used to articulate the sense of lack, loss or failure. In fact, the term, 'disability studies', itself contains the

negative prefix dis- in relation to an able society. Words like handicapped and impaired, too, have the same connotations. It is in the attempt to reconfigure disability both linguistically and mentally that a more neutral word, differently able, is now considered acceptable in regular usage. This is so because the word includes in its purview not just persons with disabilities but all people. For example, one person may be good at sport, another at music. Similarly, one person may be able to climb the stairs, another may not be. Thus, the word talks of differential ability, but does not stigmatize disability. However, the field of study is referred to as disability studies, the acceptability of the usage suggesting, perhaps, that the focus is on the areas that constitute lack/exclusion and on an inquiry into the dynamics of that lack/exclusion. Within this field, it is "the disabled", or in more recent parlance, "people with disabilities" who are recorded and discussed.

Wherever we look around us, we find certain normative markers against which we measure various aspects of life, cerebral and corporeal. Intelligence quotient tests and height-weight quotients help us measure our intellectual and physical growth. Sunday newspaper supplement tests help us calculate and rate ourselves in terms of abilities as diverse as sex drive and emotional competence at the workplace. The fairness meter that is distributed free with a popular brand of fairness cream helps determine the qualitative improvement in complexion. Medical tests resolve whether we fit into the acceptable range of various aspects of health and fitness. Thus, we rate ourselves, in terms of established standards, on a scale from below normal to above average. Even law enforcement agencies use standardized blood alcohol content ratios to determine a legally acceptable level of intoxication, although the level of impairment may vary among individuals with the same blood alcohol content. Human beings perceive bodily function and appearance in terms of a monolithic rendition of normative male/female entity, and they are governed by a desire to fit into the dictates of a norm (which is tenuous, with or without disability), and an unquestioning acceptance of that norm as a controlling principle.

To explore what constitutes disability, one has to understand what constitutes normalcy. As in the case of more politicized terms like race, class and gender, where the conceptualization of these terms shapes the lives of those who are not black/brown, or poor, or female respectively, the construction of the term 'disabled' regulates the term 'normal', as disability and normalcy are part of the same system. And just as the three above mentioned terms are part of a historically constructed ideological discourse, theorists of disability studies argue for the same position. The fact that the term disability has refused to remain linguistically stable

corroborates this view, and substantiates the view that the body and its socially generated interpretations are disposed towards variability over a period, depending upon prevalent ideology.

II

We have many recent voices that express diverse opinions about how to define a "person with a disability", and how persons with disabilities identify themselves. These questions are becoming more and more frequent, as are the responses, largely because of the fact that the issue is now at the forefront of discourses in marginality. The status of people with disabilities is being taken cognizance of, and their status is changing significantly. "Disability" can be defined as "the inability to perform one or more major life activities because of impairment" (Miller and Sammons 26). These impairments may be physical or mental. Governments all over the world have become sensitive to the disabled, and grants are being sanctioned, and plans, laws and policies are being framed in ways that ensure equal access to education, employment, health care, housing and public facilities. However, people with disabilities still have to contend with the challenges of being perceived as "different" and even inferior. These perceptions can affect the self-esteem and body image of a person to a significant level, and one of the objectives of the growing strength of the area is to help society arrive at a more profound understanding of what it means to be a person with a disability.

Scholars in the area agree about the three prominent models for perceiving disability from earliest times to now – the religious or moral model, the medical model and the social model. In the religious model of perception, disabilities are interpreted as having a cause: it could occur due to sins committed, predilection to evil, moral lapses or, occasionally, to test the faith of the individual. Accordingly, social perceptions in this model ranged from shame for the person and his/her family to a sense of being God's chosen one, i.e. being in a special relationship with God. Disability, consequently, was interpreted in between two extremes. It was occasionally comprehended as a misfortune that is visited on the individual, for which there should be a gesture of solidarity to help integrate the person in a culture, the governing idea being one of sympathy. But more often, it was perceived as the manifest example of punishment meted out for sins, equated with the unclean and impure, and led to social ostracization. This led to the disabled person being beset by feelings of guilt and remorse. While mental disabilities like schizophrenia were said to occur due to possession by evil spirits, physical disabilities

were said to be the outward manifestation of punishment for wrongdoings and/or sins. This model was also useful in regulating the behaviour of the adherents of a particular religion against threat of divine retribution.

The religious model was in place from earliest times up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With the onset of industrialization, as doctors and scientists took over from priests as the custodians of social values and curing processes, the medical model replaced the religious model. During this phase, the developments in medical sciences, and the fact that many disabilities have medical origins, led to the growth of the medical model. Disability was explained as a physical or cognitive deficiency that needed to be addressed on the level of the individual, and did not have any link with the individual's social or geographical environments. It further led to the institution of a 'normal' body in terms of an optimum level of human functioning, and medical prognosis and treatment. Besides, rehabilitation services were available in order to help enable persons with disabilities to overcome afflictions and limitations. In effect, what this model implicitly proposed was that there was no place in society for people with disabilities; they could only be accommodated into society after they had been 'cured' through the intervention of medical sciences. Until then, they would be outsiders, confined to a waiting room existence, sometimes doomed to inhabit that space permanently. While the medical model did away with much of the shame and ostracization that were inherent in the religious model, it was beset by the problem of hierarchy – of othering the person with disability, and at its best, permitted a sympathetic and paternalistic engagement with the disabled person. It also led to a different kind of exclusionary attitude. The social model of perceiving disability has in recent years, replaced this model. Even then, the medical model is still employed to assess and quantify a person's dis/ability, to identify his eligibility for various schemes for financial, academic and other benefits.

The social model views disability as a consequence of environmental, social and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from maximum participation in society. Unlike the other two models that locate the problem in the individual, this model premises its argument on the ground that disability is a social construct. The focus shifts from the individual to his environment, and it is held that it is the environment that disables the person. Non-disabled people have constructed the world in majoritarian consensus and in such a way that people with similar abilities can function at ease, while people with unlike abilities, physical and/or cognitive, who are the minority, are faced with a complex of constraints to be disabled. Thus, the view of disabled activists and their organizations is

that disability is something imposed by society over and above their impairments in the way that it unnecessarily segregates and marginalizes people with impairments. The approach has been to depathologize disability and to work towards a sense of community feeling and pride, and also to move away from the charity approach to a civil rights-based system.

In India, policy level consciousness for people with disabilities is a recent phenomenon, and is marked by unevenness and apathy at all levels. There is no planning and effort to address disability as a specific category, and the approach is random and unimaginative. The little headway that has been made in the field is because of the voluntary sector, and that is not much. While the developed world debates over the nuances of disabled existence, in India, people with disabilities struggle with the rudimentary aspects of life.

In India, we find references to various kinds of disabilities from earliest times. Representations of disability include mythic characters Ashtavakra and Vamana; images of disability are to be found in characters like Shravan Kumar's blind parents, Gandhari's choice of the blindfold and Ekalavya's sacrifice of his thumb, though the list is simultaneously populated with negative stereotypes like Manthara, Shakuni and Dhritarashtra. This is interpreted in terms of the Hindu view of life that holds suffering of any kind as the harvest of *karma*, whether carried over from the previous birth or incurred in this birth, and is also shared by the followers of Buddhism and Sikhism. It is also common in Indian society to equate disability with depravity and illluck. It is a common superstition to avoid meeting a person with disability immediately after waking up, or risk your day being spoilt. Many people also look at disability in others as an excellent opportunity to fulfill religious duties by being engaged in charity towards the person with disability. This explains the large number of people with disabilities, who, faced with an inhospitable society, an apathetic government and lack of opportunities, take recourse to begging. Government policies, too, until recently, had the same approach, looking at disability as a welfare issue. The complexities in the Indian scenario are numerous, and are compounded by issues of marginality in terms of gender, class, caste and region. The majority of the population of people with disabilities lives in rural areas and is not mobile, and is left out in terms of the urban thrust of disability policies like job reservations, travel concessions, special parking facilities, educational facilities and ease of access to institutions, which are utilized by a miniscule section of the population.

III

Therefore, conceptions of disability become a means of relating, interpreting and regulating human life. Reading issues in disability with regard to the Indian English novel presents a few challenges of its own. Disability and disabled people, as constructed and depicted in the Indian English novel by the dominant culture, do offer a close reader a model basis to analyze the reigning ideologies about disability, both in the language and in the genre that serves as a medium to articulate and record, and to shape cultural attitudes. But such attempts are hampered by the lack of a substantial corpus of works dealing with the subject directly and also by the fact that issues that come up in this regard are frequently oblique, dealing with entirely different concerns like nationalism and partition.

The Indian English novel has consistently made use of disability as a versatile metaphor for various portrayals of the nation, its maladies and its weaknesses, particularly in the portrayals of partition and of powerlessness in respect of colonization. The tropes used are primarily those of mutilation and dismemberment. These figural uses of disability originate in facts of bodily difference that are often at a considerable remove from what theorists in the field propose. When the focus is on the representation of human bodies (which are few and far between), they tend to reinforce cultural forms based on the pathetic observer who is incapable of resisting what happens to/around him or her, the achiever who can 'cope' with the normal world, and the attendant cultural attitudes of pity and admiration. What these stories and characters seem to convey, latently, is the sense of unease about disability, the idea that disability is bad, that a disabled body needs to be cured, and that the disabled body can be pitied and/or punished, but never accepted.

Apart from the many partition novels that employ the trope of the disabled body metaphorically, the novels that engage directly with the disabled body are just a handful. Some significant novels which have protagonists with disabilities are Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983), Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* (1986), Firdaus Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1991), Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991) and *A Fine Balance* (1995), Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* (1999), and Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000). Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1989) is an example of a sub-continental novel that engages with the category in a noticeable manner. Baba in Anita Desai's novel is a minor character with some learning deficiency, which is not clearly spelt out in the novel. His presence in the novel is like a channel for the elucidation of cultural tensions between his two sisters,

Bim and Tara. Bim is more at ease in traditional culture, while Tara embodies western values. As Desai grapples with this larger postcolonial concern through Bim and Tara, Baba is a passive figure that does not have a say in the unfolding drama. He is an inconsequential observer. In Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, the author models Sufiya Zinobia on Zia-ul-Haq's hearing-impaired daughter, and she is made the butt of much of Rushdie's satire and ridicule against Pakistan. Her disability is also stereotyped by making her actions violent (and sinister). This novel about Pakistan thus uses Sufiya's disability as a rhetorical trope, and the concerns are centered on the history of postcolonial nationhood to the exclusion of all else.

Alu in *The Circle of Reason* is shown to be uncomfortable with his uncle's object of interest: his misshapen head. But the author's concern is with the issue of critiquing the Enlightenment discourse of Reason and the attendant categories of rationality/irrationality. Alu's self-conscious concern regarding his deformity is a non-issue.

Firdaus Kanga's semi-autobiographical novel, *Trying to Grow,* is perhaps the only work that really looks at the disabled protagonist as an individual and does not fall into the trap of portraying him as a victim or martyr. Brit's story is as much about growing up with disability as it is about how his family grapples with the issue of a disabled son, from birth to adulthood. Depictions of Brit's disability and the issues that his family tackles because of it are sensitively etched, but never maudlin. *Trying to Grow* is the only novel that can be said to have fictionally created what the social model proposes. This is not the case with Tehmul Lungraa in *Such a Long Journey*, or Shankar or the amputated Ishvar in *A Fine Balance,* or the polio-afflicted Dinu in *The Glass Palace*. Tehmul is insensitively used for odd jobs and as a convenient person on whom to transfer evil spells, because, as one of the characters in the novel points out, 'it would not matter to him'. Mistry's nuanced sympathy for Tehmul in the face of social attitudes to the disabled is overridden by more pressing national concerns, like the Emergency in *A Fine Balance*, where political realities dictate turn of the narrative, and characters – able-bodied or disabled – are merely agents. The finely etched character of Julia in Seth's novel does convey the agony of the hearing impaired, but the focus seems more on the redemptive possibilities of art, and the impairment seems more of a convenient narrative device. Dinu's Glass Palace studio gatherings portray him as a heroic figure that has risen above his disabilities, both physical and metaphorical. Lenny in *Ice-Candy Man* is shown to be disabled as long as it propels the story forward. Towards the end, the novel's purpose solved, Sidhwa simply forgets about the matter of Lenny's disability.

Thus, this brief survey of novels dealing directly or incidentally with disabled characters shows three prevalent attitudes corresponding to the three models discussed in the previous section: sympathy and sentimentalism that mark the religious model, the despair/disregard that is characteristic of the medical model, and the celebratory tone and acknowledgement of difference that characterize the social model. This, by and large, seems to suggest that disabled people are missing in the novel and that all characters that populate the novel are able-bodied. This, of course, need not be spelt out as we assume able-bodiedness unless told otherwise. This shared code points to how the perception of ability is imbricated in the very code of our culture. When people with disabilities make their appearance, it is usually a melodramatic device through which the author invokes make their appearance, as a marker of difference, as a handy metaphor for the state of the nation, or in order to direct our gaze in conformity with the very gaze that the social model seeks to challenge.

It is also surprising that a decade into the twenty-first century, novels of substance that talk of disability issues in acknowledgement of social changes in this direction have been few and far between. The novels that come to mind in this regard include Pramila Balasundaram's *Sunny's Story* (2005) and Sushmita Bagchi's *Children of a Better God* (2010), while Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* (2011) is an autobiographical *bildungsroman* that addresses similar issues. All these works have disabled characters as their central protagonists. The important distinction between these three last mentioned works and the novels dealing with disability in the previous century are noteworthy. With the exception of *Trying to Grow*, all novels of the previous century mention disability only in passing, and as part of a larger mosaic of society. The novels of the first decade of this century, however, make disability their exclusive provenance. What is therefore reassuring is the possibility of a progressive trajectory that is in concord with the claims of our cultural progress narratives, and with the claims of generic sophistication in terms of the Indian English novel. At the beginning of the new century in which the presence of an informed point of view about disability is noticeable all around, the presence of the disabled in the Indian English novel, though infrequent, is characterized by new possibilities.

Works Cited

Addlakha, Renu, Stuart Blume, Patrick Devlieger, Osamu Nagase and Myriam Winance. *Disability and Society: A Reader*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009.

Davis, Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*. New York: Verso, 1995.

Hammel, Karen Whalley. *Perspectives on Disability and Rehabilitation: Contesting Assumptions*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006.

Miller, Nancy B. and Catherine C. Sammons. *Everybody's Different: Understanding and Changing our Reactions to Disabilities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks, 1999.

Miles, M. "Glimpses of Disability in the Literature and Cultures of East Asia, South Asia the Middle East and Africa: A Modern and historical bibliography, with some annotation". Internet Publication, 2008. www.independentliving.org/docs7/miles200807.pdf. (Access 30 January 2011)

Stiker, Henri-Jacques. *A History of Disability*. Tr. William Sayers. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

CHAPTER NINE

METAPHOR AS NARRATIVE: READING METAPHORS IN *THE WHITE TIGER*

RAJESH BABU SHARMA

Beardsley was right when he called metaphors "miniature poems" (Beardsley 144). Metaphor has been debated since the inception of knowledge systems. Recently, the debate has been intensified specially by those who contest that metaphor is central to language and language is the origin of "all knowing". The argument in this article is that in any narrative, metaphors themselves acquire the status of mini-narratives. The first part of the article sketches a brief theoretical framework to put forward the thesis of treating metaphors as narratives and the second attempts an analysis of some of the metaphors used in Aravind Adiga's novel, *The White Tiger*.

I

Monika Fludernik in her significant essay, 'The Cage Metaphor: Extending Narratology into Corpus Studies and Opening it to the Analysis of Imagery', points out how the field of metaphor as narrative has remained under-researched. If at all, the focus on metaphor in narratives has been limited only to its role in assigning additional communicative value to the "voice". Fludernik writes:

> Metaphor in narrative is a curiously under-researched topic. In the wake of Roman Jakobson's classic essay, 'Two Aspects of Language' (1956), and David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977), metaphor has predominantly been regarded as a poetic element even when it showed up in fiction, which – so the argument went – it rendered more 'lyrical'. To the extent that metaphor was analyzed in narrative studies, if at all, the main critical effort was expended on ascertaining whether a particular metaphoric expression belonged to the narrator's or a character's language. The question of attribution itself demonstrates that metaphor was seen as a

> feature of style and, therefore, voice rather than as a structural element of narrative. (Fludernik 109)

Is the purpose of metaphor only to add more significance to the voice of the author or the character? Yes, that certainly is the purpose, but that is the role of all figurative expressions in general. Metaphors and other figures of speech are pressed in the service of language to enhance its communicative value. But serious reflections in recent decades over the ontology of metaphor have suggested that metaphors are originary structures in which all cognitions take birth. Narratives are more fluid and free flowing spaces as far as the language usage in fiction is concerned. As narratives in fiction share the tone, colour and space of human (linguistic) world in more natural ways than the discourses in other fields, it is true that language in its metaphoric essence finds the fictional narratives more natural a space for its existence. In narratives, as Fludernik suggests, "metaphors are frequently ruling signifiers of a thematic kind" (Fludernik 122).

> It is in terms of metaphor and/or narratives that our thinking operates, that we explain the world to ourselves. To that extent, the presence of metaphor in narrative texts arguably exploits their explanatory or semiotic potential to the full by enriching it with an additional semiotic framework. However, on the more local level linked with narrative discourse, metaphor often combines with narratives to generate mini-stories of dis-narrated material. (Fludernik 123-124)

Stefan Snaevarr in his book, *Metaphors, Narratives, Emotions: Their Interplay and Impact*, also argues that narratives "… are symbolic structures that contain elements from both metaphors and narratives" (Snaevarr 233). He names the interplay of metaphors and narratives as "metaphoric stories" and "storied metaphors" (Snaevarr 233). Paul Ricoeur has also suggested five common characteristics of metaphors and narratives (Snaevarr 134).

1. Metaphors and narratives synthesize the meaning with the medium.
2. Metaphors and narratives are powerful 'lenses' through which we see and feel the things more intensely.
3. Metaphors and narratives create new meanings in existential sense through linguistic medium.
4. "Narrative re-figuration and metaphoric reference are two sides of the same coin" (Snaevarr 237).

5. "… the narrative discourse is an extended metaphor that shows the world of acting and suffering as being configured." (Venema 105; Snaevarr 238).

Snaevarr divides the theorists of metaphor in three groups: the iconoclasts (Davidson, Searle) who do not consider the role of metaphor of much importance, the interactionists (Richards, Black, Ricoeur) who believe that metaphors make sense or add value to the sense by their interaction between vehicle and topic, and the iconodulists (Nietzsche, Hesse, Lakoff) who claim that all the meaning in language is generated through metaphors, "believing that our lives, thought and cognition are soaked with metaphors" (Snaevarr 30). It is interesting to note here that Snaevarr does not mention Paul de Man or Derrida in the third list of iconodulists. Paul de Man's essay, 'The Epistemology of Metaphor', is perhaps the most radical as it suggests that the origins of the episteme or any human cognition cannot be traced outside the metaphor (de Man 34-50). Even though it is a deconstructive reading of the transcendental values attached to things like gold, light and human, it is a great contribution to the theory of metaphor, suggesting that our epistemic values have origins in linguistic metaphors. This is not the place to go in detail in de Man's theory of metaphor or language. I only argue that even though the iconodulists like Nietzsche or Hesse or Lakoff believe that our worldview, basically, is rooted in metaphors, the illusion of this worldview is suggested by de Man's theory of metaphor in ways that are more radical. The point here for the present purpose is that our thinking, imagination, discourse and narratives have origins in metaphors. If "narrative" can be used as a broad term for human discourse, or meaning making processes, we can safely argue that narratives, basically, are metaphoric in nature. Taking this premise as the base in the next section, some metaphors in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* have been analyzed.

II

The White Tiger is a potential text for studying the metaphors which themselves become the structures of the text. *The White Tiger* itself is a metaphor for Balram Halwai. Since the novelist has woven this metaphor throughout the text, it is of little significance to interpret it outside the text. This metaphor alone makes a text of its own kind. It brings the whole of the novel to life. This metaphor resonates with meanings of all kinds, and the resonance continues as the text moves in time and space. The artistic achievement of Adiga lies in the fact that he could weave the text tight with other metaphors around this ruling metaphor that continues

resonating with newer shades in meanings as other metaphors come in play and in proximity with it. The interplay of other textual and linguistic elements with this metaphor of the White Tiger creates a narrative world that breathes out numerous significations simultaneously. The school inspector comes to inspect the school and asses its teaching standards. He asks the students to answer some questions. He picks Balram and asks:

> 'You, young man, are an intelligent, honest, vivacious fellow in this crowd of thugs and idiots. In any jungle, what is the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along only once in a generation?'
>
> I thought about it and said:
>
> 'The white tiger.'
>
> 'That's what you are, in *this* jungle.'
>
> …
>
> So that's how I became the White Tiger.
>
> (*WT* 35)

The ironic attribution of the qualities of the White Tiger to Balram is made to sneer at the complacent reader. The tone and texture of the novel never allows us to forget the gap between what Balram is and what the thugs and idiots describe him to be. He is neither honest nor vivacious; he is what others are in this area of 'Darkness'. The novelist no doubt succeeds in creating sympathy for Balram and in creating the impressions of wrongs or injustices being done to the Balrams in India. Whatever is done to Balram from the small village in Gaya to Delhi justifies what Balram does to Ashok. The metaphors of injustice that keep accumulating are so intense in communication that the injustice to the White Tiger, Balram, justifies everything that the White Tiger does later, including his killing of his own master. When he is taken out of school to work in a teashop, the other schoolboys laugh at him and the humiliation of the following metaphor is so intense that the reader is never allowed the space to question the deeds of Balram. When Balram, a very young boy, could have become a good learner at school, he is forced to break the coal in the tea shop. The readers are shocked at the jeering of the schoolboys. The scene is worth quoting because the metaphor of White Tiger is juxtaposed with the opposite conditions of enormous humiliation that the Balrams of India are made to suffer.

> 'Harder,' he said, when I hit the coal against the brick. 'Harder, harder.'
>
> Finally I got it right – I broke the coal against the brick. He got up and said, 'Now break every last coal in this bag like that.'
>
> A little later, two boys came … Then two more … I heard giggling.

> 'What is the creature that comes along only once in a generation?' one boy asked loudly.
>
> 'The coal breaker,' another replied.
>
> (*WT* 37)

The White Tiger, turns into a coal breaker. These metaphors play a larger role than what appears. They create the tone of the novel, the tone of the sufferings of the underprivileged, the tone of the injustice, the tone of the justification of all deeds that the Balrams may commit to mitigate the sufferings and humiliations. The other metaphors that are used to describe Balram, later on contribute to this tone that is already created. Balram learns driving, and the metaphor used this time for Balram is coal – "That's like getting coals to make ice …" (*WT* 56).

Initially, three metaphors have been used for Balram Halwai – the White Tiger, the coal breaker and the coal. (When he goes to Delhi, a fourth metaphor is used for him – the country-mouse.) The three metaphors put together read like a sad animal poem of the twenty-first century. One who was rare in his abilities like a white tiger is forced to become a coal breaker, and further, a piece of coal itself. Indeed, these dehumanizing metaphors used for Balram Halwai form the broad narrative structure of the novel. The world of *The White Tiger* is populated with people of raw animalistic pursuits. The upper class as well as the working class is engaged in those actions that confirm the poststructuralist notion of the human self as disoriented, devoid of any big aims of life, succumbing to the immediacy of animalistic needs. This analysis of these initial metaphors, as given here, is the usual way in which such metaphors extend themselves. But this is not the only way these metaphors can be analyzed. There can be unexpected associations of these metaphors on the part of the readers.

The potency of the metaphors is such that their interpretation can be extended into the channels of discontinuities and yet they continue flowing with their signification in these blocked channels. The autonomy of signifier in these times has really proved that metaphors have independent determinations of signification. Referring to Lacan, Madan Sarup says, "… thanks to human beings' metaphoric ability, words convey multiple meanings and we use them to signify something quite different from their concrete meanings. This possibility of signifying something other than what is being said determines language's autonomy from meaning" (Sarup 9). The irony intended by Adiga in calling Balram a White Tiger can also be taken to suggest that it is only a rare animal like Balram that can kill his master without any apparent provocation to do so. The accumulation of the

wrongs done by the class of Ashoks to the class of Balarms is conveyed through such metaphors that it becomes difficult for the readers to stand with Balram in accusing the class of Ashoks. In fact, the picture that is created by the narrative is that of a jungle where ignorant armies of animals clash. The sympathy that Balram gathers from the readers cannot be sustained for long, as we see in the course of the novel that in the world of animals, one animal kills another not just to survive but also to satisfy the greed and ego. It is really a dehumanized world that Adiga creates. The so-called 'beautiful soul' is dead long ago in the world of *The White Tiger*.

Other animal metaphors used in the narrative are also equally significant. In the beginning of the novel, the four landlords are described as the Stork, the Wild Boar, the Raven, and the Buffalo. The Stork's son, Ashok, throughout the novel is referred to as the Mongoose. The picture of a jungle is complete. It is a jungle where these animals are on the prowl. One can imagine the condition of Balram, the Country Mouse, whose masters are the Stork, and the Mongoose. Again, to be on Balram's side, if a Country Mouse has to survive, it has to kill the Mongoose. So what the Country Mouse does is just killing in self-defence. It is a jungle where darkness prevails, where the only way to survive is to kill the other. One can better understand the metaphors as narrative if the four landlords are seen in the text of the novel. I need to quote a long paragraph to see the effect of the animal metaphors in the narrative.

> *The Stork* was a fat man with a fat moustache, thick and curved and pointy at the tips. He owned the river that flowed outside the village, and he took a cut of every catch of fish caught by every fisherman in the river, and a toll from every boatman who crossed the river to come to our village.
>
> His brother was called *Wild Boar*. This fellow owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages. When he passed by women, his car would stop; the windows would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long, and curved, like little tusks.
>
> *The Raven* owned the worst land, which was the dry, rocky hillside around the fort, and took a cut from the goatherds who went up there to graze with their flocks. If they didn't have their money, he liked to dip his beak into their backsides, so they called him the Raven.
>
> *The Buffalo* was the greediest of the lot. He had eaten up the rickshaws and the roads. So if you ran a rickshaw, or used the road, you had to pay him his feed – one-third of whatever you earned no less. (*WT* 24-25, italics mine)

These animals, landlords, are the landlords of the darkness. The village Laxmangarh is described by the metaphor of Darkness. The Darkness inhabited by the animals, the narrative is quite frightening. The juxtapositioning of Darkness and Light does not bring any relief to the reader because the Stork, the Mongoose and the Country Mouse remain the same. The animality and disgust is so much in the novel that the novelist cannot wait for any culminating time in the narrative to narrate the killing. By the end of the narration of the first night, the secret is out that Balram has killed Ashok.

When Balram gets in service of Ashok and Pinky Madam, they come to Laxmangarh, and Balram goes to the Black fort. Black fort is outside the village, from where one can observe the village from a distance. The Black fort, in fact, becomes the Metaphor for distance, distance that distorts the real experience. From the Black fort, the Darkness, Laxmangarh changes its colour and texture for Balram. "Putting my foot on the wall, I looked down on the village from there. My little Laxmangarh. I saw the temple tower, the market, the glistening line of sewage, the landlords' mansions – and my own house, with that dark little cloud outside – the water buffalo. It looked like the most beautiful sight on earth" (*WT* 41-42). The irony prevails so much in the novel that it is difficult to believe that Balram is not ironic in these descriptions.

The other metaphors, like the metaphor of 'Great Socialist', are ironic remarks on the Indian political leaders. This metaphor is in the continuity of the animal metaphors. This metaphor distorts the reality of this leader the other way round. This man is the worst of this lot; he is, in fact, the maker of the Darkness. But he is called the great socialist because that is how Indian democracy describes the corrupt and the criminals in Indian politics. The most devastating metaphor used in this novel is for the Indian voters and democracy. The Indian voters are compared to the eunuchs and democracy to the Kama Sutra. "Like eunuchs discussing the Kama Sutra, the voters discuss the elections in Laxmangarh" (*WT* 98). The school is described as a paradise, which causes discontinuity in the usual metaphoric significance that is associated with the Indian Sarkari schools: "If the Indian village is a paradise, then the school is a paradise within a paradise." (*WT* 32)

The metaphor of chandeliers inhabits the text from the beginning to the end. I wonder if it stands for the hidden desire of Balram to be in light, which itself is a metaphor connoting many things. Maybe, psychologically, Balram has been infected with the darkness of Laxmangarh, and unconsciously he desires to be in the light.

To conclude, *The White Tiger* is a text, the texture and tone of which is structured in metaphors. One way of interpreting this novel could be to look at the potentiality of the metaphors for the structuring of the narrative. It is true that these metaphors need the structure of the narrative to realize their potential as communicative units, but the autonomous existential value that they gather in the space of the narrative sometimes allows them to acquire independent existence and status of mini narratives inside/outside the narrative of the novel.

Works Cited

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger* (*WT*). HarperCollins India, 2008.

Beardsley, Monroe. *Aesthetics.* 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981.

de Man, Paul. *Aesthetic Ideology*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Fludernik, Monika. "The Cage Metaphor: Extending Narratology into Corpus Studies and Opening it to the Analysis of Imagery". *Narratology in the Age of Cross-disciplinary Narrative Research*. (ed.) Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009. pp. 109-128.

Sarup, Madan. *Introductory Guide to Poststructuralism and Postmodernism.* 2nd ed. London: Harvester Wheat Sheaf, 1993.

Snaevarr, Stefan. *Metaphors, Narratives, Emotions.* New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Venema, Henry Issac. *Identifying Selfhood*. NY: State University of New York Press, 2000.

CHAPTER TEN

GLOBALIZATION, YOUNGISTAN AND CHETAN BHAGAT

SUPARNA CHAKRAVARTY

In the acknowledgement of one of his novels, Chetan Bhagat has announced that his motive is to make India read. One may quite assuredly say that India – the urban educated young India – has really been gorging on the four novels that he has penned down in the last few years starting from *five point someone* in 2004. I suppose, this explains the title of this paper that may appear somewhat journalistic in idiom and so a little shocking to the academic circles.

I will not go into the debate of pop culture versus literature and mass culture versus art. I will simply start with the premise that an Indian author has come up with four novels within a span of six years and has been noticed by the public and the reviewers alike. This paper concentrates on two elements. First being how far has the author been successful in giving voice to the anxieties and concerns of a modern, growing young India. The second and more interesting element is the paradigm shift in the narrative mode and use of language that perfectly fits with the so-called popular youth culture.

One can say that 1930 may be considered as the cut-off date for Indian writing in English. During that year, Raja Rao had affirmed that English was not an alien language for us; it had qualified as the language of the intellect and not the language of our emotions. He said, "I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make-up." (Rao 5) He did express the anxieties of an Indian novelist trying to express his culture in English. However, in all these approximately 80 years, this distinction seems to be blurred and no more valid. With the democratization of education and the enthusiastic spread of English learning, the language has shed its colonial hangover

and has gained in its Indian flavour. The urban, modern, globalized young India not only emotes in this language but also dreams in it and, perhaps, the time is not too far when the emerging rural populace will also embrace this language for it is perfectly suited to express the angst of young India. This shift in the way we use English in our day-to-day life is a direct result of globalization. Steadily and gradually, urban India is undoubtedly moving towards a culture where regional identities and nuances of cultural differences are least visible.

> The demands of economy, both national and global, create a thrust towards a homogenization of culture, and in India, the language that can most effectively achieve this is English, which is also the language of upward social mobility.
>
> (Mukherjee *web*)

So if Indian novels written in English have to be analyzed for their element of Indianness, it is from the point of view of what the essence of Indianness is for the young people of India who are increasingly being exposed to different cultures and, naturally, being influenced by them.

India as a nation is passing through trying times. The aspirations of the local and the regional communities are no more suppressed, rather their voices are loud and clear both in literature and in public life. One cannot and should not ignore them. Just opposite to this are the vast majority of educated urban Indians, mostly middle class, whose regional identities have stopped interfering with their daily life. There is a typical city culture shaped by our fast moving, both literally and figuratively, lives. The generation 'X' and the generation 'Y' are the ones that epitomize this culture. Under such circumstances, if the dalit literature expresses Indianness, the novels of Chetan Bhagat also give voice to another side of Indianness, and both are equally representative voices of the idea of India. The above discussion is not a comprehensive one on what constitutes Indianness in its totality. The scope of this paper does not allow a detailed debate on this. It may suffice to say that the protagonists in Chetan Bhagat's novels are truly Indian, and, as an author, he portrays them as they are.

Thematically, the four novels of Chetan Bhagat cannot be clubbed together. But a common objective of critiquing the contemporary society, a take at how to go about life, drives all these narratives. The two novels, *five point someone* and *one night @ the call centre,* essentially deal with the globalized Youngistan and still there is a didactic purpose which is garbed under the satiric mode of narration. The other two novels, *the 3*

mistakes of my life and *2 States,* deal with the young minds and their lives but not without a pronounced voice of a social critic.

Chetan Bhagat's first novel, *five point someone,* is at one end a didactic novel trying to formulate the imperfectness of a seemingly excellent system and, on the other hand, it is about rebellion. The heady rebellion days of the freedom struggle are past perfect for the present generation, X or Y. This rebellion against the system is more in the thought process. Although the author admits that the novel concentrates on an institution, it can be taken as a microcosm of the expanded world of intelligent Indians trying to make something of their lives. As one progresses into the novel, one is hit by the mundane daily existence of the middle class society of India. The only element of fantasy is the occasional 'weird' dreams that penetrate the realistic world of the three young IITians. The ragging of the freshers in the first chapter and the fantasized and idealistic speech of Professor Cherian at the annual convocation in the last may depict the linearity of the narrative, but for the IIT and its Professors, it is a cyclic motion of time that binds them to tradition and 'the System'. The quintessential Indianness is quite evident in the attempt to preserve this tradition and the futile attempt of the five pointers to work through it. Therefore, the novel is a heady mixture of realism and fantasy. It is only when the consequences of skirting the real issues of life hit the three dreamers hard that they come back to accept the system and now work their way through the system by following the norms. Quite an anti-climactic end for the three young men always on the ninth floor of the Institute, both literally and figuratively. It took the real jump from the top of the building for Alok to bring back the realization that life is not a fantasy movie and sacrifices are to be made to survive. This leads us to interpret that the author was penning down a somewhat hilarious and absurd series of adventures in the life of three young men only to work towards a didactic purpose.

The characters in the novel, *five point someone,* have a penchant for committing innumerable mistakes, but the third novel by Chetan Bhagat is entitled *the 3 mistakes of my life*. The story set in Ahmedabad is quite incidental. It could be any other city in India and the tale of grief and pain and suffering would replicate itself exactly in the same manner. Although the novel implicitly talks about the trials and tribulations of the three friends, the social and political background actually imparts it the Indian flavour. The tension of multiculturism, which is an undercurrent occasionally coming on the surface with startling effects and growing religious polarization in our society, has definitely dominated our lives. The violent incidents associated with these polarized ideas have started

affecting the common man on the streets. A major portion of the novel is an attempt to be realistic in depicting how such incidents not only bring miseries in our lives and scar us permanently but that they suddenly rip off the mask of civilization and modernity and show the illogical beast in full control. Under such circumstances, each individual in a society is forced to take sides, and remaining secular and sane in between the whirlpools of such emotions becomes challenging for each human being. The tensions of a multi-cultural society witnessed by modern India are not uncommon in other cultures. The demarcation of the 'other' marginalized ethnic and religious group is a phenomenon world over. In spite of state policies aiming at the creation of all-inclusive societies, globalization and migration have contributed towards increasing these tensions as close proximity ensures regular interaction and so increases the acute recognition of the 'other'. That culture provides one identity and sense of community has been accepted by the sociologists: "culture is a real force" which is very much a part of the social structure and is "a force generating social conflict" (Werbner *web*). The cultural identity generated from religion has deeper roots. But orthodox identification with one's religion gives rise to intolerance and violence. The novel, *the 3 mistakes of my life,* is about the eternal flow of life through the circumstances and the choices we make, but it is also about the relations that dominate our lives and have such potential to control them.

The novel, *one night @ the call centre,* also tries to subtly nudge the generation X to take charge of life and take the real call which will transform it. In the conversations between the employees of the call centre and God – the inner voice is didactic. The use of colloquial language and commonsensical logic makes the novel palatable to the young generation. In addition, the so-called call from the God in the novel does not become a spiritual call; rather it slowly becomes a call to trigger awareness about the real self. This awareness will lead to contentment and happiness in one's life. There is no credit to the author for this idea, but credit must be due to the author for integrating this idea perfectly with the lives of the young people who start with money and end with unhappiness and confusion.

The novel, *2 States,* apparently, is a simplistic narrative where two educated urban Indians in love decide to get married. These two young minds are in perfect harmony although they belong to different parts (states) of India and their different regional identities and cultural differences create trouble. The families and the parents are unable and unwilling to bridge this gap. The tone of the novel is both satiric and humorous but it is a serious comment on the ambiguities and hypocrisies that the young Indians are witnessing today. The traditional culture is a

miniscule part of the lives of these two people in love. But they cannot ignore it and accept the nuances of the 'other' India which is very much there in their backyard. The undeniable close juxtaposition of traditional India and globalized India is succinctly put across in the image of the young groom wearing a translucent, cream-coloured lungi, the veshti, with little Mickey Mouse characters peeping through the fabric. This is a reflection of the reality of modern, urban India.

To all those critics who have eagerly dismissed Chetan Bhagat as just an author who is catering to the mass culture dishing out irrelevant non-literary novels, one can point out that an unprejudiced reading will bring out the dark irony and satire that pervades all the four novels in discussion. One is tempted to consider these novels far more seriously than they appear to be. The narrative mode is of special interest. In the two novels namely *the 3 mistakes of my life* and *one night @ the call centre,* the author separately creates a third person character who then narrates the story from his first person account. The story of *the 3 mistakes of my life* is narrated from Govind's point of view who is in the thick of action and yet at times dissociates himself from the action, steps out of the plot and analyzes the other characters and events. The actor-narrator then manages to have more than one point of view. The narrative dominated by the character-narrator prefers a linearity of action, a direct chronology of events which sometimes makes it too simple, predictable and hence non-literary but there is a circular and rhythmic motion in the whole narrative which is evident only at the end. This narrative mode adopted by the author helps him in speeding up the momentum of the action and hence the reader is glued to the pages from start to finish.

While analyzing the structural aspect of the novels, it may be said that the pace of storytelling is so fast that the events automatically create an easy to follow structural pattern which is suitable for the author's purpose (since the target audience is the fast moving young India). Frank Kermode in his essay, 'Novel and Narrative' refers to Roland Barthes' view on this and says that a text is not supposed to be referred to in a structural model, "but understood as a series of invitations to the reader to *structurate* it" (Kermode 173). The novels in discussion apparently do not challenge the average reader to do so but a discerning critic is free to discover the layers of the narrative, some explicit and others implicit running parallel through the text, and be surprised. The novel, *the 3 mistakes of my life,* could be the story of Govind, but it could also be about the dreams of the talented, budding, cricketer, Ali. The novel is apparently not a love story but then the love interest is very much an integral part of the story. The novel set in contemporary twenty-first century India has

specifically documented historical events (the burning of the Sabarmati Express and the subsequent riots that hit Gujarat), and, by doing so, has successfully blended *Bharat* and globalized India. The excellent storyteller, Chetan Bhagat, has fashioned a narrative with the common material, which is open to different interpretations according to the inclination of the reader.

The main impact of the novels under discussion is their deliberate and conscious use of colloquial language. At times, the use of language appears unimaginative and mundane but then, to the benefit of the author, where is the role of creativity and imagination in modern urban life where everyone is consumed by the passion of being a part of the maddening rat race? The realism is stark and, at times, the reality is difficult to fathom and believe. For instance, the scene of rioting in one area of Ahmedabad in the aftermath of the Godhra train carnage deserves special attention. As one visualizes the sequence-by-sequence, minute-by-minute account of the scene in the bank, there is a surrealistic atmosphere created with the help of *trishuls* and cricket bats and twisted ideation. The eventual death of 'Mama', the epitome of Hindu fanaticism, with the help of a cricket bat verges on the realm of fantasy. The sudden intrusion of fantasy challenges one's sense of disbelief and the careful juxtaposition of Bollywoodish events with the real life is quite innovative, to say the least. This mixture of fantasy and realism has been used as a technique quite often in his novels. In *five point someone* the incident of Operation Pendulum is both absurd and utterly nonsensical. The three young students go about it with great conviction and enthusiasm. By the students' standards, too, the level of absurdity is difficult to accept but without this incident, the great fall to the hard ground of reality would never have happened. The symbolism of planning the misadventure on the terrace of the institute building and then taking a jump, a free fall, from the same place to the ground cannot be missed.

A commonly accepted view is that for novels written in English in India "… the raw material is India, but the target readership … spans countries and continents" (Mukherjee *web*). Chetan Bhagat's singular achievement is that he has written about modern young India for the Indian readers and in Indian English. We have sentences like "Ananya's dad … gave me a translucent cream-coloured lungi. It resembled the bathing dress worn by Mandakini in *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*" (Bhagat 2009, 260). Such suggestive statements abound in the novels. Another remarkable feature is the use of words reflecting the local ambience of the speaker. An example of such usage – "I couldn't help but notice how Cherian was an extremely bad replica of Neha. Like her wax statue had

puffed up first and then begun to melt haphazardly… Instead of Neha's long and beautiful hair, Cherian had a bald spot bigger than Nirula's hamburger" (Bhagat 2004, 139). Reference to Nirula's hamburger and prosaic comments like "Alok had as much idea about romantic gifts as his mother had about cabarets" (Bhagat 2004, 126) are enough to reflect the nuances of the contemporary urban Indian life and taste.

Globalization has unequivocally influenced urban India, particularly the new educated young Indians. "Globalization entails cultural imperialism. Lenchner and Boil (2000) argue that globalization displaces local and folk culture, traditions and languages. The 'great and little traditions' have already lost their identity … Global media has already touched the inner courtyard of the third world countries to make local people global" (Dasgupta and Kiely 52-53).

Hence, in addition to the blurring of the 'local' and the 'regional', the Indian concerns expressed in the novels of Chetan Bhagat are also global concerns. The problem of conflict between different cultures in traditional societies is not peculiar to India only. All developing and emerging societies are experiencing this. Furthermore, the trials and tribulations of young India trying to externalize desires and dreams can again find common ground among the young generations in any other country. Kermode's words are quite suitable in Bhagat's case, "… after all, when we speak of a classic, what we mean is a text that has evaded local and provincial restrictions" (Kermode 173), whose fictional world shows an uncanny similarity with other societies world over.

Works Cited

Bhagat, Chetan. *five point someone*. Delhi: Rupa, 2004.

—. *2 States*. Delhi: Rupa, 2009.

Dasgupta, S. and R. Kiely (ed.). *Globalization and After.* New Delhi: Sage, 2006.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English." *Economic and Political Weekly.* Vol. 28, No. 48 (No. 27, 1993). *web*, March 2010.

Kermode, Frank. "Novel and Narrative". *The Theory of the Novel.* (ed.) John Halperin. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Rao, Raja. 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura*. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks (15th Print), 2000.

Werbner, Pnaina. “The Translocation of Culture: ‘community cohesion’ and the force of multiculturism in history”. *The Sociological Review*. UK: Blackwell, 2005. *web*, Feb. 2011.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WOMEN NOVELISTS IN ENGLISH FROM THE NORTHEAST: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

NAMRATA RATHORE MAHANTA

The act of creation is inextricably linked to the acts of perception and imagination. It finds expression in the creator's unique idiom. When one uses the terms, 'Women', 'Novelists', and 'Northeast', one has to stand face to face with the dichotomies of women/men, novel/other forms of fiction, and Northeast as a distinct homogeneous entity/Mainland India. Each of these carries its own burden of contested/shared spaces in terms of the cultural and political mapping of the land, the narration of the past, the awareness of the present and the dreams of the future. The literature of the 'Northeast' is thus received and measured against one or more of the above-mentioned criteria. The advent of the term, 'Northeast', can be traced back to the 1960s when the political boundaries of the area were redefined and the term, 'Northeast India', came into official use. Sanjoy Hazarika speaks of it with nostalgia:

> It has changed in every way: the shape of the Northeast – or rather its shape on the maps of the world – has been altered with new lines drawn to recognize new political and administrative realities. The names of these units have changed … if these frontiers have changed, so have the attitudes among its people; so have the skylines of its cities and towns. So has the way people talk to each other, the things they talk about and in which they involve themselves and one another.
>
> (Hazarika xv)

Sanjib Baruah terms this process of name-giving as an attempt to establish "a cosmetic federal regional order", an act of "political engineering" that was bound to end in failure given the nature of the ethnic ties which do not "neatly coincide with state boundaries."

> The term Northeast India points to no more than the area's location on India's political map. Such generic place-names are attractive to political engineers because they evoke no historical memory or collective consciousness. … Unlike place-names that evoke cultural or historical meaning, the term Northeast India cannot easily become the emotional focus of a collective political project.
>
> (Baruah 5)

For Mamang Dai, who gave up her career as a civil servant to be a full time writer, the land of the seven-sisters is not fragmented by political boundaries; she sees in it a geographical continuity that constitutes its shared culture:

> True, there are differences… but we also have the land… the whole geographical continuity is there you know, the forests, the mountains, it's all the Eastern Himalayas belt. Ok, Assam doesn't have the big snow mountains but it is the foothills. The big rivers link us; all our rivers drain into Assam and with the landscape comes a common shared culture and a relationship to the land …
>
> (Dai *web*)

While 'Northeast India' is culturally distinctive from 'Mainland India', it shares a greater linguistic and cultural affinity with regions that lie beyond the faultiness of the Indian nation state. Sanjoy Hazarika describes this phenomenon:

> The jungles of Southeast Asia sweep down from Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh across seven other nations – Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea, Malaysia, and Vietnam – spanning political boundaries, irreverential even of physical frontiers. … Here men and women with common origins but different nationalities share a racial, historic, anthropological and linguistic kinship with each other that is more vital than their links with the mainstream political centres, especially at Delhi, Dhaka, and Rangoon.
>
> (Hazarika xvi)

Irrespective of where the writer lives or the language the writer chooses to write in, the literary artist is not exempted from the forces that propel social action. The Northeast writers who write in English are regularly exposed to these pressures. While their choice of language gives them greater visibility in the global literary arena, they have to struggle constantly to keep alive the uniqueness of their work and ideas against the homogenizing gaze of "Mainland India" and fight against being exoticized. The writers, both men and women, have grappled with the

'Northeast' tag in different ways. Poet and author, Aruni Kashyap, dismisses it as an "angry young man":

> It is true that a lot of my writing is a result of very strong rage because when I came to Delhi to study literature in 2004, I didn't know that something called "a North Eastern" existed. It challenged received identities. I grew up as an Assamese. And I grew up as an Indian. … In Delhi I found absolute ignorance about the North-East. Gradually I found that it was because stories from here were not available … to people in so-called mainland India. … It angers me that the whole idea of the North-East is a constructive identity. And it comes because of historical reasons and deep-seated prejudices.
>
> (Kashyap 2)

A literary categorization based on geographical location can never be a marker for excellence or uniqueness and the writers from these regions are justly involved in resisting this tag. However, many writers do concede that the world they present through their writing is totally unknown to the readers outside the region and this novelty contributes to the popularity of their works. In defence of the position of the writer accused of packaging the region as exotic fare, Mamang Dai says:

> It is true that now a lot of publishers are focusing on the northeast. For some reason it has been drawing a lot of attention recently. And the new thing coming out is the oral tradition being written in English or fiction using that kind of backdrop. It is new and fresh and exotic but it doesn't necessarily mean that the writer is insincere because a lot also depends on the writer's own response to his or her own culture.
>
> (Dai *web*)

Urvashi Butalia also agrees that there are certain features common to the writers from this region:

> '… personally I find that much writing from the region has a strong sense of place. I expect that over the years, North-Eastern writers will begin to transcend borders and write about things that may not necessarily be rooted in the North-East, but for the time being it is this that makes the writing so distinct and unique.'
>
> (Butalia *web*)

Vijay Nair also highlights this distinctiveness in his interview with Jahnavi Barua, the author of the novel, *Rebirth*: "She writes in English but the ethos around which her stories unfold brings the Brahmaputra to the reader in all its raging glory and untamed passion" (Nair 2).

Although there is a very old and rich tradition of novel writing in the languages of the Northeast region, novel writing in English does not have a prolific base. Tripura and Mizoram are yet to figure on the map of the Indian English novel. The convent schools of Shillong have played an important role in positing it as a nucleus for Indian English writing in the region. With publishing houses like Penguin making deliberate efforts to publish writers from this region, recent years have seen the publication of prominent works of fiction in English from the women writers in the Northeast. At present, the writers of the Northeast are an important presence on the Indian literary scene. The ones who write in English are further differentiated on grounds of where they belong to and where they live. For example, Siddharth Deb and Easterine Kire Iralu, who were very much rooted in the regional tradition as writers and as individuals before they relocated themselves elsewhere, are now considered writing from the 'outside.' Thus, one finds that the issues faced by the Indian English writers are not unknown to the writers from the Northeast. Notwithstanding the areas of discontent and the accompanying pressures, the first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of the English novel from the Northeast that is specially marked by the contribution of women writers. Easterine Kire Iralu's *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007) and *Mari* (2010), Mitra Phukan's *The Collector's Wife* (2005), Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) and *Stupid Cupid* (2009), Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006), Anjum Hassan's *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) and *Neti, Neti* (2009), and Jahnavi Barua's *Rebirth* (2011) are some of the prominent works of the decade. Another important point is that Temsula Ao prefers the term 'short fiction' for her work, *These Hills Called Home,* while Mamang Dai speaks of *The Legends of Pensam* as a 'novel'. This alerts us to the fact that these writers are working on new formulations of the genre of the novel.

The women of the Northeast, like the women in the rest of the world, have been at the receiving end of all the experiments done in the name of modernization, governance, autonomy, dissent, rebellion, and struggle for power. With their men joining the underground rebel forces, the women have had to bear the burden of raising the family, and face the onslaughts of the interrogation squads. Paula Banerjee has described this as the burden of "the two patriarchies of rebel and state armed forces" (Banerjee 17). The constant fear of the rebel forces on one hand and of the armed forces on the other has gripped the lives of women. The cracking up of traditional societies, i.e. the breakdown of social order and kinship patterns, has further added to the violence that had taken to pieces the

world, as they had known it. Marginalized in every possible way, the women of these regions have demonstrated an indomitable spirit and agency in coping with the multifaceted violence that surrounds them at all times. Marginalization implies a position of "repressed or subordinated textual meanings … the position of dissident intellectuals and social groups who see themselves at a remove from the normative assumptions and oppressive power structures of mainstream society" (Brooker 152). The margin can also be an enabling position from which mainstream structures can be contested. While various forms of violence constitute the centrepiece of existence, the attempts at restoring peace have been going on from the margins in various ways. Art and literature are part of these efforts. In this context, the Shilllong poets, Robin S. Ngangom and Kynpham S. Nongkyrih, have remarked:

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

During the 'Festival of the Northeast', held at the India Habitat Centre on 28-29 January 2011, writers spoke poignantly about the difficult choices writers make when they represent violence in order to hope for peace. Remembering violence and writing about it is important to them as in the rapidly changing world they see themselves in the role of the village elders whose stories helped the people make a sense of the world they inhabited and their own role in the scheme of things. In a moving preface, "Lest We Forget", to her work, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Temsula Ao writes, "… what the stories are trying to say is that in such conflicts, there are no winners, only victims and the results can be measured only in human terms. … The inheritors of such a history have a tremendous responsibility to sift through the collective experience and make sense of the impact left by the struggle on their lives." (Ao x-xi)

Although it is early to conceptualize a tradition of women's writing from the Northeast, these works have charted two distinct trajectories of engagement with the genre – one that follows the canonical path and the other that experiments with oral traditions of narration and with the structure of the novel itself. The dilemma of the writer who attempts to narrate experiences that are socially, culturally and politically different from the mainstream can be seen as a replay of the anxieties of the earliest Indian writings in English during the era of colonization. Just as the colonial vision of India propelled some writers to reinstate images of the

'orient' through their narratives, and aroused in others the powerful urge to present narratives faithful to distinctive social, cultural and political experiences, these writings from the Northeast are seen negotiating a space of their own between the constructs of a pan-Northeast identity and their indigenous cultural identity. And this is perceived in their engagement not only with the themes but also with their experimentation with the form.

Mitra Phukan's novel, *The Collector's Wife* (2005), attempts to depict the Assam movement but is foregrounded in its reliance on the Northeast stereotype. This causes the writer to play into the matrix of the dominant discourse and adopt an outsider's condescending attitude towards the political movement in Assam. Rukmini, the protagonist of the novel, is the wife of a District Collector. She is also a part-time lecturer in a local college. However, she lives a serene, comfortable and ordered life as a bureaucrat's wife. When she faces disorder and change in the form of student activism, she adopts a condescending and indulgent attitude towards the students whom she perceives as being temporarily overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of youth. The works of Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao stand in contrast to Mitra Phukan's because of the deep insight offered by them into the complex existence of traditional societies. Both these writers have rejected the pan-Northeast discourse and written about distinct regions and distinct tribes. Another common characteristic of Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao is that their stories are a unique amalgam of fiction, myth, legend, history and memory. *Ernie Wombat and the Water Dwellers* and *A Naga Village Remembered* are the two books published by Easterine Kire Iralu in 2003 that show the writer engaging with the insider versus outsider portrayals of the Northeast. *Ernie Wombat and the Water Dwellers* presents the journey of an Australian animal that falls into a water body and finds itself in Nagaland. The unique features of Nagaland are introduced through the first hand experiences of the wombat. In her own words, it is "a fun book" which "introduces Nagaland through the eyes of an Australian animal and we were happy to look at the Nagas and their habits through the uninformed eyes of a newcomer" (Iralu 2006, *web*). The vision of the outsider-newcomer is replaced by the insider's vision in her historical novel, *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), which is also the first novel written in English by a Naga writer. The novel narrates the struggle of a proud Naga village against the forces of colonialism. It describes the strife between the British army and a small Naga village from 1832 to 1880 that culminated in the treaty of Khonoma and paved way for the arrival of a new religion.

In her next novel, *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), Easterine subverts the idea that indigenous societies afforded a better social status for women,

and in doing so, she presents a critique of the Naga society she had valourized in *A Naga Village Remembered*. Easterine's writings, thus, bring out the triple burden of the Naga woman writers writing in English – the anxiety of language, the anxiety of negotiating a gendered pan-Indian and pan-Northeastern identity, and the problem of negotiating a balance between eulogizing the past and giving voice to the lived experience of people.

Easterine's latest novel, *Mari,* tells the story of seventeen-year-old Mari O'Leary against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion of India in 1944. It is also the story of Kohima and its people. Easterine Kire here has written about a "simpler time in a forgotten place that was ravaged by war before it was noticed by the rest of the world." (Kire 2010, *web*)

Anjum Hasan's two novels, *Lunatic in My Head* and *Neti, Neti,* are centred on the character of Sophie Das who is introduced in the first novel as an eight-year-old child who comes to live with an old and alienated grandparent in Shillong, and as a 25-year-old working for an MNC at Bangalore in the second. There is minimum external action in *Lunatic in My Head*. The plot moves on the wings of the thoughts of the character and the landscape is a major presence. In sharp contrast, *Neti, Neti* is set in the whirlwind world of a metropolis. Although Sophie has found an escape from the placid and dull life in the hills, she soon develops a dislike for the fast-paced life of Bangalore. Anjum Hasan has attempted to portray two very different worlds and within each of these two worlds, she has marked areas of contradictions. Thus, the two worlds are presented as imperfect and the quest of the protagonist as unending. Jahnavi Barua's novel, *Rebirth,* published early this year marks a shift in the way the protagonist, Kaberi, is drawn out. Kaberi is everywoman, her turmoil shared by women irrespective of where they come from. Barua in her interview states that one of the reasons why most of her characters, including Kaberi, are restrained, as they walk the "tight rope of desperation and a quiet rebellion", is because she has her moorings in the values of "moderation, restraint and resilience" advocated by the traditional Assamese society. But she quickly adds that "the other reason could be my own philosophy of keeping things simple and minimal, as far as possible." She however admits, "I do believe that coming from that region has partly resulted in my writing being the way it is" (Barua 2).

The literary influences of the women writers from the 'Northeast' are diverse, ranging from Indian literature, to canonical English writers, to contemporary writers in diverse languages, while Temsula Ao and Easterine Kire have been on the Faculty of English Departments in

prominent universities. All these writers have received convent school education. Thus, all of them are familiar with the formulations of the genre they choose to employ. While most of the works use the widely accepted form of the novel, two works exhibit vital engagement between genre and culture, and challenge the dominance of structure within the novel. The first works in fiction by Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao can be seen as experimentations with the genre. *These Hills Called Home* and *The Legends of Pensam* traverse an area between the genres of speech and writing, and the story and the novel. Temsula Ao and Mamang Dai have created narratives that can follow the circular nature of the oral narrative. The village is at the centre, and each narration creates a pattern of relationship between the village and its past and present. The characters that populate the narrative dwell at once in the realm of history and modernity, and negotiate, in their dealings with each other, the questions of identity, unrest and rebellion. The narrative replicates the circularity of the traditional village narratives. These writers in their own distinctive ways have attempted to present the logic of the order of the traditional world to the modern reader. This world has its own coordinates of space and time, its own geographical and cultural space inhabited by specific people and infused with a moral ethos that brings with it certain ways of looking and understanding. In the process of this experimentation, these two writers have not only negotiated the formal features of the novel but have also set up an alternative structure which represents the unique features of the world they seek to portray. In an interview with Subhash N. Jeyan, published in *The Hindu,* Mamang Dai speaks of this process of creating one's own rules:

> Ours is an oral tradition you know, I was trying to meet people and collect and record these oral narratives. You know, the small histories which were getting lost and when you talk to people even small things can trigger these memories off. I had no idea how the book would turn out because it was very difficult to project these stories in English. To negotiate that (difficulty of cultural translation) I conceived of Pensam as a kind of secret garden where there are no rules and where one can do whatever one wants ... (Dai *web*)

The novel as a genre is a literary and cultural category. It came into existence because it fulfilled a contemporary demand, its subsequent development and diversification propelled and actively shaped by social and historical conditions. Genre is inseparable from culture; the early experimentation with the form of the novel follows a predictable path. It is too early to assume that the women novelists of the Northeast writing in English will work upon the genre in order to retain the centrality of the

oral tradition in their narratives. It remains to be seen how the interest shown in the Northeast by the prominent publishing houses casts its impact on the women novelists of the region writing in English.

Works Cited

Ao, Temsula. "Lest We Forget". *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. New Delhi: Penguin-Zubaan, 2006.

Banerjee, Paula. "Underworlds and Borderlands: Women and Borders in Militarized Northeast India". *IIAS Newsletter, 42. Shimla:* IIAS. 2006.

Barua, Jahnavi. "Simple and minimalist". Interview with Vijay Nair. *The Hindu Magazine*. 9 July, 2011.

Baruah, Sanjib. *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India.* 2005. Rpt. New Delhi: OUP, 2007.

Brooker, Peter. *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*. London: Arnold, 2003.

Butalia, Urvashi. Quoted in "Reading the Northeast" by Utpal Borpujari. *utpalborpujari.wordpress.com*. 13 February 2011.Web 15 February 2011.

Dai, Mamang. "Negotiating change with memory". Interview with Subash N. Jeyan. 'Face to Face'. *The Hindu.* 03 January 2010. *Web. thehindu.com*. 01 February 2011.

Hazarika, Sanjoy. "Note From The Author". *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War & Peace From India's Northeast*. 1994. Rev. ed. New Delhi: Penguin, 1995.

Iralu, Easterine Kire. Featured Writer, International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) Writers. Autumn 06, August 2006. Web. www.icorn.org , 15 February, 2011.

Kashyap, Aruni. "Talking of Assam…". Interview with Murali N. Krishnaswamy. 'In Conversation'. *The Hindu.* Sunday Magazine. 28 March 2010.

Kire, Easterine. Featured Writer, International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) Writers. Web. www.icorn.org, November 2010.

Nair, Vijay. "Simple and minimalist". Interview with Jahnavi Barua. *The Hindu Magazine*. 9 July, 2011.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing and Robin S. Ngangom. "Editors' Note". *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast*. Shillong: NEHU, 2003.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE DYSTOPIC VISION OF ARAVIND ADIGA IN HIS NOVELS

NALINI SHYAM KAMIL

Authorial perceptions of reality can be mimetic, both high and low. The high mimetic characterizes stately thoughts of noble and lofty minds. The low mimetic generates ironic satire, sardonic humour and a host of negative emotions and feelings with their locus in the subjectivity that we call expressive consciousness. Dystopias reveal malformations or disintegrations not only of the realities perceived but also of the individual's perception of such realities. Malformation, therefore, begets dystopia as dystopia begets malformation. Both of them complement and supplement each other in a certain totality of negative signification that seems to celebrate nihilism as a new *avatar* of the contemporary reality.

Indian culture and literary traditions have been spread across thousands of years and the narrative art of the connoisseurs has always been trying to locate the element of the sublime that alone leads to salvation. The champions of the realistic mode of narration do not evoke the sublime; they, on the contrary, project the bizarre, the haphazard and the dissipated that give us dystopic visions of a loss of belief in ourselves. Such narratives celebrate the death of God as a positive cultural evolute. It is in the light of these facts that this paper, 'The Dystopic Vision of Aravind Adiga in His Novels', aims to present a critique of Adiga's novels, *The White Tiger* and *Between the Assassinations,* where the novelist portrays India as a dystopic country.

Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize-winning first novel, *The White Tiger* (2008), earned him both widespread popularity and varied criticism. Deirdre Donahue says, "Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is one of the most powerful books I've read in decades. No hyperbole. This debut novel from an Indian journalist living in Mumbai hit me like a kick to the head ... This is an amazing and angry novel about injustice and power" (Donahue

3). In the *New York Times* Book Review, Akash Kapoor comments, "*The White Tiger* is a penetrating piece of social commentary, attuned to the inequalities that persist despite India's new prosperity. It correctly identifies – and deflates – middle class India's collective euphoria. But Adiga, a former correspondent for *Time* magazine is less successful as a novelist" (Kapoor 2). And Neel Mukherjee is of the opinion that "*The White Tiger* is an excoriating piece of work … stripping away the veneer of 'India Rising'" (Mukherjee 2).

Adiga depicts India as a dystopic country, unpleasant and unhygienic, showing ominous tendencies of the present social, political, and moral life. By describing the socio-political and economic condition of India, the novelist tries to establish the fact that postmodern India has become so much degraded and depraved that it no longer remains a country worth living in. He finds China as a utopia in contrast. The novel is written in epistolary form, like the novels of Richardson, facilitating dramatic mode of direct communication between the reader and the character. This epistolary method individuates the character and the characteristics of the time and the relationships of people. It carries a sense of urgency because all letters have to be read and replied to, besides being understood. Letters can also take the form of folklore, a mythology and a legend. They can unfold the history of a country, as do the letters of Jawaharlal Nehru to Indira Gandhi, or those of Mahatma Gandhi to various persons. In literature, the epistolary form comes closer to the episodic structure. Time is divided into phases and movements that acquire an existential status of their own. Such forms must end in revelation even though of a dystopic kind if utopias are not available.

Writing letters to Chinese Premier, Mr Wen Jiabao, in the novel, the narrator, Balram Halwai, shares with him the story of his personal struggle. Having come to know that Mr Jiabao is coming to Bangalore next week to meet some Indian entrepreneurs to know about the story of their 'success from their own lips', he describes contemporary India as a degenerated and dystopic country. The narrator considers the Chinese superior to Indians in every respect and depicts India as an unhygienic country:

> … you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect, except that you don't have entrepreneurs. And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, *does* have entrepreneurs.
>
> (*WT* 4)

He ridicules the Indian political leaders, particularly the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, through their caricatures and describes their facade, hypocrisy and artificiality:

> … in keeping with international protocol, the prime minister and foreign minister of my country will meet you at the airport with garlands, small take-home sandalwood statues of Gandhi, and a booklet full of information about India's past, present, and future.
>
> (*WT* 4-5)

The narrator has deep deference for the people of China for their love of freedom and individual liberty: "… you Chinese are great lovers of freedom and individual liberty. The British tried to make you their servants, but you never let them do it. I admire that, Mr Premier." (*WT* 5)

Balram describes the truth about Bangalore through his experiences at different stages of his life. Balram Halwai alias Munna, the son of a rickshaw-puller, Vikram Halwai, reveals how he was named Balram. His parents had not given him any name. His teacher named him Balram. Invariably, the narrator hints at the poverty and illiteracy of the downtrodden that have neither awareness nor time to name their children and to take care of them. The novelist comments: "… what kind of place is it where people forget to name their children?" (*WT* 14)

Not allowed to complete school education, Balram calls himself 'half-baked' like many others in the country with only a smattering of all sorts of knowledge. However, the school Inspector praised him as a 'white tiger', "'… the rarest of animals, the creature that only comes along once in a generation'" (*WT* 35). The school Inspector promises to arrange a scholarship and proper schooling for him. But his family takes him out of the school and puts him to work at a tea shop.

Adiga points out the grim reality of Indian villages. In outright condemnation, Laxmangarh, Balram Halwai's birth-place, is introduced not as a "typical Indian village paradise" but as "a place of darkness". The sordidness of Laxmangarh represents the life of penury and morbidity in the villages of India. Here "families of pigs are sniffing through sewage – the upper body of each animal is dry, with long hairs that are matted together into spines; the lower half of the body is peat-black and glistening from sewage" (*WT* 20). Throughout the novel, Balram presents himself as a person "born and raised in darkness". He is of the opinion, "India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India – the black river" (*WT* 14).

In the *Vedas* and the *Puranas,* the Ganga is called "the river of emancipation" and resurrection, the "daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. … [H]undreds of American tourists come each year to take photographs of naked *sadhus* at Hardwar or Benaras" (*WT* 15). But the river has now become dirty and polluted. She has lost her redeeming power. Everything dies into this "black mud." Lamenting over this condition, Balram advises Mr Jiabao not to dip in the Ganga, "Mr Jiabao, I urge you not to dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids" (*WT* 15).

As the son of a rickshaw-puller, Balram Halwai describes the miserable life of the Indian rickshaw-pullers. He is the representative of the poor, downtrodden and exploited section of the society. He believes that the government of India does not like that the foreigners should know about the wretched condition of the rickshaw-pullers. Rickshaws are, therefore, not allowed in the posh areas of Delhi "where foreigners might see them and gape" (*WT* 27). One can see them in Old Delhi or Nizamuddin where the road is "full of them – thin, sticklike men, leaning forward from the seat of a bicycle, as they pedal along a carriage bearing a pyramid of middle-class flesh – some fat man with his fat wife and all their shopping bags and groceries" (*WT* 27).

In a reminiscent mood, Balaram describes his school days. A government programme gave everybody free food – "three *rotis*, yellow *daal* and pickles at lunchtime" (*WT* 33). But he never ever saw rotis or yellow daal or pickles. The school teacher had stolen his lunch money and nobody blamed him for his dishonesty. People in the village knew that they would have done the same in his position. Some were even proud of him, for having got away with it so cleanly. Lacking in moral character, these teachers are so much involved in materialistic affairs that they have become unmindful of their duties and have lost human values. Shamelessly, they try to legitimize their corrupt practices:

> The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money – he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months. He was going to undertake a Gandhian protest to retrieve his missing wages – he was going to do nothing in class until his pay cheque arrived in the mail. Yet he was terrified of losing his job, because though the pay of any government job in India is poor, the incidental advantages are numerous.
>
> (*WT* 33)

The narrator compares the contemporary India with the ancient India. He finds the past fascinating and enticing. It was a glorious land where Lord Buddha received his enlightenment. The river Ganga gave life to plants, animals and human beings. People were proud that they were born in India. Now things are totally changed. There is topsy-turvidom everywhere in India. The present India has lost her glory and cultural heritage. There is perversion and grotesqueness all around here.

Balram further criticizes the Indian police and the legal system. There is total lawlessness, chaos and anarchy in every sphere of life. Describing the life in Delhi where bribery is rampant, he says, "The main thing to know about Delhi is that the roads are good, and the people are bad. The police are *totally* rotten. If they see you without a seat belt, you'll have to bribe them a hundred rupees" (*WT* 124). People have been living a suffocating life in cities like Delhi. Thousands of people are nameless and homeless here. They live on the footpath. Their life is worse than that of an animal. The narrator describes their wretched condition:

> – you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them.
>
> (*WT* 119-120)

Filth, dirt and pollution of the city have made the life of the people unhealthy and unhygienic. Balram Halwai says, "… the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man's life. Of course, those in the cars don't have to breathe the outside air" (*WT* 134). All the ugly features of a big city – noise, pollution, traffic rush, industrial sewage and the like – have been presented with a merciless candour:

> Rush hour in Delhi. Cars, scooters, motorbikes, auto-rickshaws, black taxis, jostling for space on the road. The pollution is so bad that the men on the motorbikes and scooters have a handkerchief wrapped around their faces – each time you stop at a red light, you see a row of men with black glasses and masks on their faces, as if the whole city were out on a bank heist that morning.
>
> (*WT* 133)

The narrator highlights social disparity and economic inequality. The contemporary society is divided into two classes – 'Haves' and 'Have-nots'. Some 'eat' and some 'get eaten up'. Poverty is the root cause of human suffering and predicament. It gives birth to illiteracy and exploitation. The rich always exploit the poor and the downtrodden. "[I]n

the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat – or get eaten up" (*WT* 64).

The novelist also mocks at the modern political leaders who are selfish. They simply play with the emotions and sentiments of the innocent and illiterate people of the country who are unable to recognize their masqueraded selves. The novelist states that there are three main diseases of the country, "… typhoid, cholera, and election fever. This last one is the worst; …" (*WT* 98)

Adiga's second novel, *Between the Assassinations* (2008), refers to the period between Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi's in 1991. The novel deals with the life of Kittur, a microcosm of India, situated in between Goa and Calicut on the south-western coast.

Containing several stories of diverse nature, the novel fictionalizes events and characters in an impressive and interesting manner. The events of seven years have been described in seven days. 'Day One: The Train Station' reveals the agony of Ziauddin, a young Muslim boy, who, after a great struggle, gets a job in the shop of Ramanna Shetty, " 'For Muslims like us, it's bad. The Hindus don't give us jobs; they don't give us respect. I speak from experience …'" (*BA* 15). Ziauddin develops orthodoxy in due course of time. When Ramanna Shetty shouts at him and his companions to come into the temple, he states unhesitatingly, "'I'm a *Muslim*, I can't go in'" (*BA* 6). One morning, Ziauddin is charged with stealing a samosa. Holding him by the collar of his shirt and dragging him in front of the customers, Ramanna Shetty said, "'Tell me the truth – you son of a bald woman. Did you steal it? Tell me the truth this time, and I might give you another chance'" (*BA* 8).

'Day Two: The Bunder' presents Abbasi who runs a textile factory in the Bunder area around the port which has the highest crime rate in Kittur. "In 1987, riots broke out near the Dargah between Hindus and Muslims, and the Bunder was shut down for six days" (*BA* 24). Abbasi's sense of courtesy and his good manners acquire touches of sarcasm and parody in the context of corruption that was rampant in contemporary India. There was no end to it in sight. When he had to reopen his shirt factory, he had had to pay off:

> The electricity man; the water board man; half the income tax department of Kittur; half the excise department of Kittur; six different officials of the telephone board; a land tax official of the Kittur City Corporation; a sanitary inspector of the Karnataka State Health Board; a health inspector of the Karnataka State Sanitation Board; a delegation of the All India

> Small Factory Workers' Union; delegations of the Kittur Congress Party, the Kittur BJP, the Kittur Communist Party, the Kittur Muslim League.
>
> (*BA* 28-29)

The novelist finds post-Independence India at the top in corruption. In "'black-marketing, counterfeiting, and corruption, we are the world champions. If they were included in the Olympic Games, India would always win gold, silver and bronze in those three'" (*BA* 31), reads a *Times of India* report. The officials are expert in taking bribe. With a fawning smile, Abbasi presents shirts to the officers who accept "without a word, the lean fellow looking at the big one for approval before snatching his gift" (*BA* 36).

'Day Two (Afternoon): Lighthouse Hill' presents the tragedy of a dalit bookseller named Xerox who is selling copies of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in violation of the concerned law of the Republic of India. In "Day Two (Continued): Our School", Adiga describes that the youth in post-Independence India are devoid of human values, "'The youth of this country have gone to hell and will ruin the names of their fathers and grandfathers!'" (*BA* 53)

Another character, Shankara, son of a Brahmin father and a low caste Hoyka mother, is not treated properly in the society. Shankara considers Christianity better than Hinduism. "There was a time when he had thought about converting to Christianity; among Christians there are no castes. Every man was judged by what he had done with his life" (*BA* 57). Through Shankara the novelist expresses his indignation against the caste system that still operates in India:

> 'I have burst a bomb to end the 5000-year-old caste system … I have burst a bomb to show that a man should not be judged, as I have been, merely by the accident of his birth.'
>
> (*BA* 59)

He further says, "Caste is a fiction, would it vanish like smoke; …" (*BA* 69) Shankara is infuriated at being addressed as a low-caste man. He retorts, "We are 90 per cent of this town! We are the majority!" If the Brahmins "hit us, we will hit them back! If they shame us, we will –" (*BA* 71).

In "Day Two (Evening): Lighthouse Hill", the headmaster of St. Alfonso Junior and Middle School for Boys depicts the degeneration in contemporary India:

> Once India had been ruled by three foreigners: England, France, and Portugal. Now their place was taken by three native-born thugs: Betrayal, Bungling, and Backstabbing. 'The problem is here –' he tapped his ribs. 'There is a beast inside us.'
>
> (*BA* 104)

'Day Three: Angel Talkies' also describes corruption, riots and crime prevalent in the nation. Here people indulge in unlawful and beastly pleasures. Gururaj tells the editor-in-chief in the novel,

> ' … You're not only saying that the police force is rotten, but also that the judiciary is corrupt. The judge will call you for Contempt of Court. You will be arrested – even if what you are saying is true. …'
>
> (*BA* 128)

'Day Four: The Cool-Water Well Junction' recounts the life and character of Ramchandran who makes his little daughter Soumya do filthy errands for him. 'Day Five (Evening): The Cathedral of Our Lady of Valencia' describes that "[w]e Indians have forgotten everything about our own civilization" (*BA* 196).

In 'Day Six: The Sultan's Battery', Adiga presents Ratnakar Shetty, a Sexologist, a typical quack, selling bottles full of white pills to those afflicted by venereal diseases. The narrator finds everything falling apart in this country since Mrs. Gandhi was shot. "'Buses are coming late. Trains are coming late. Everything's falling apart. We'll have to hand this country back to the British or the Muslims or the Russians or someone" (*BA* 231). Through Mr Shirthadi, Adiga recounts the sense of ingratitude and disobedience growing in the children towards their old parents: "He spoke passionately about the ingratitude of today's children, and said he sometimes wished he had stayed childless" (*BA* 245).

And in 'Day Seven: Salt Market Village', Adiga presents comrade Thimma, the communist, and his disciple, Murali, who are central to the story. When an old woman cites the view of her husband – "… if the Communists ruled the earth there would be no hardships for the poor" – Thimma observes, "The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Maoist) is not the party of the poor – it is the party of the proletariat" (*BA* 255). Murali thinks, "The old, bad India of caste and class privilege – the India of child marriage; of ill-treated widows; of exploited subalterns – it had to be overthrown" (*BA* 267).

Through comrade Thimma, Adiga blames Gandhi and Nehru for misguiding the youth:

> A whole generation of young men, deluded by Gandhianism, wasting their lives by running around organizing free eye clinics for the poor and distributing books for rural libraries, instead of seducing those young widows and unmarried girls. That old man in his loincloth had turned them mad. Like Gandhi you had to withhold all your lusts.
>
> (*BA* 277)

He thinks, "… intelligence has no place in Indian life" (*BA* 279). The novelist also draws the attention of the people towards the rapid industrialization and consequent deforestation that is depriving people of the bliss of Nature.

Thus, Adiga has described the socio-political and economic realities of India in a journalistic style. Both of his novels, as one finds, terribly fail to serve the function of a genuine literary text. They may please and entertain the readers, particularly the superficial ones, for a while but not for a long time. They remain soulless and aesthetically poor. One does not find any words of wisdom while reading his novels. There is only sordidness and grotesqueness. His depiction of India in no way helps acquaint the readers with the spiritual content of India that has more than 5000 years of living history and scriptural tradition. T.S. Eliot, the eminent modern English poet, not only describes the futility and anarchy of contemporary civilization but also suggests measures and remedies which can turn the modern waste land into a fertile world. He finds the spiritual salvation of modern humanity in the Upanishadic truths.

However, the evils described in the novels such as corruption, violence, poverty, starvation, bribery, counterfeiting, terrorism, exploitation of the poor and the underdog, expand the locales of the novels for their worldwide presence. Pearl S. Buck in her book, *The Good Earth,* has also pungently described the hideousness and grotesqueness of the life of China. But, ironically enough, Adiga considers China a utopian country. His protagonist, Balaram, is quite lyrical about China. It may be said that Adiga's perception is inverted for it creates an impression that puerility and dissipatedness have inflicted upon his creativity resulting into a sordid picture of Indian culture and tradition that has been ideal. One feels that Adiga's novels take his readers to a world of realities that project a dystopic vision of life. This may please the Western minds that often look eagerly for the squalors of life in India, but not all.

Works Cited

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger* (*WT*). HarperCollins India, 2008.
—. *Between the Assassinations* (*BA*). London: Picador, 2008.
Donahue, Deirdre. *USA Today.* http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/India/adigas.tm.ecc. 27/09-2010.
Kapoor, Akash. *New York Times.* Book Review. *Ibid.: web* source.
Mukherjee, Neel. *The Telegraph*. *Ibid.*: *web* source.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

KEKI N. DARUWALLA'S *FOR PEPPER AND CHRIST*: A METAPHORICAL CRITIQUE ON MEDIEVAL WORLD AND BELIEFS

RAJENDRA KUMAR

History offers a chain of events and characters wrapped in mystery, for we have merely facts and data to rely upon. And mere facts seem helpless to satiate our innate curiosity for the past. They fail to catch and recreate the intricacies of thoughts and feelings of the people who lived centuries ago. But the mute past becomes more interesting and revealing when a creative writer chooses to look into the seeds of time and give voice to history in a recorded narrative. He puts his creative zeal into the events and characters of the time that come to the fore and surprise us with more scintillating facets of life.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed the publication of several historical works of fiction by the Indian writers writing in English. Indu Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife* (2002), Kunal Basu's *The Miniaturist* (2004), Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) and Omair Ahmad's *The Storyteller's Tale* (2009) are some of the notable ones that draw our attention towards the factual-cum-fictional pre-colonial time in Indian history. To this list, Keki N. Daruwalla's debut novel, *For Pepper and Christ* (2009), should arguably be included.

Daruwalla, the eminent Indian English poet and former IPS officer, has covered in his novel a vast historical canvas running across the three continents (Europe, Africa and Asia) from Lisbon to Cairo to Mozambique and Milind to Calicut. The storyline is the epic journey of Vasco da Gama in search of pepper and the legendary Christian King of the East, Prester John. Daruwalla has conveyed the essence of the time-munched events of

the past through the voices of the three narrators in the novel – Brother Figueiro, a member of da Gama's fleet, Taufiq, the young disciple of the legendary Arab navigator and cartographer, Ibn Majid, who guides the Portuguese fleet from Milind to Calicut, and the 'obtrusive narrator' who covers the Cairo part of the story. The narrative is set in the medieval times when discovering new Christian lands, slave trade and search for gold and spices were at the hub of the interests of the Portuguese. This corresponds with the phase in world history when globalization and multiculturalism began to step in as transformatory mechanisms and communicative dynamics. Globalization, a socio-economic term, is "a continuous process through which different societies, economies, traditions and cultures integrate with each other on a scale through the means of communication and interchange of ideas" (*Web* A). And multiculturalism is "the appreciation, acceptance or promotion of multiple ethnic cultures, applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighbourhoods, cities or nations" (*Web* B). The discoveries of new lands by the European explorers like Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Amerigo Vespucci *et al* also sought the possibilities for culture amalgam. The Western hallucination of breeding megalomaniac consciousness led them to the coastline of Calicut with the intension of trade in spice, that is, pepper. Madhusree Chatterjee in her review of the novel remarks: "… during the end of the 15th and 16th century, … the world was truly becoming global, feels award-winning poet and short story writer Keki N. Daruwalla" (Chatterjee *Web*).

The title of the novel, *For Pepper and Christ*, itself contains two polar images revealing the paradox of life's realities in the medieval world – materialism and spiritualism, i.e. trade and religion. It reflects the compact vision of the novelist. The 'pepper', which symbolizes the Indian heritage of spice trade, was in great demand in European markets and was sold there at exorbitant prices. In the fifteenth century, Portugal was a poor but ambitious country, and it is almost a universal truth that "the poor need to have more ambitions than the rich" (*PC* 1). Through the spies and the maps, the Portuguese came to know that there was no land obstacle between Africa and India. The search for the land of 'pepper' resultantly brought the three continents into the compact global context. Thus, 'pepper' in the novel becomes the metaphor of trade and commerce, and connotes globalized consciousness of the Portuguese that set Vasco da Gama on his epic journey to India.

Giving voice and sensation to da Gama's purpose behind his first voyage to India, Daruwalla writes, "Whether it is trade or discovering

lands or people, charting new routes, or whipping the infidel, all are equally important" (*PC* 17). But, since spice trade cannot be entertained as their sole motivation, he writes: "Portuguese souls also … hungered for the glory of the true faith and for Prester John" (*PC* 2). Here comes into play the second metaphor, 'Christ'. The Portuguese also set out to explore the kingdom of the legendary Christian King, Prester John, somewhere near India. So their voyage is ironically symbolic of a step towards multiculturalism. In their growing hunger for Christian lands, they unconsciously sought the assistance of a Muslim pilot, Taufiq, a pagan to them, and reached Calicut mistaking it for a Christian land, a local Goddess for Virgin Mary, and Krishna for a colloquial term for Christ – all reflecting their ignorance of Hinduism and the Hindu mythology. Unknown to the world and to da Gama's fleet, the three major faiths and continents thus come to a multicultural and global confluence and reach a new strand of faith in compromise and co-existence through trade and cultural exchanges. In spite of much ethnic disparities, Cairo, "the meeting place of Muslim and Copt, Mamluk and Ottoman, slave and Amir" (*PC* 27), and Calicut, where the Hindus and the Muslims (from the Arab countries) residing in cultural harmony, were thriving remarkably in a cultural construct/synthesis. Both cities represented Africa and Asia where social, psychological and linguistic factors practically united the people of different ethnic and religious groups.

The three major characters in the novel, though they do not have much historical relevance, are fictionally relevant to the life's basic realities that ran across the three continents in the late fifteenth century. Brother Figueiro, Taufiq and Ehtesham embody the metaphors of religion, leadership and art respectively. Yet they are in tussle with ethnic morality and felt reality. They carry a burden of past and present, belief and disbelief, fact and fiction. Unlike the three Magi in T. S. Eliot's poetry, who reach the destination of Birth and Rebirth, Faith and Knowledge after renunciation and long-suffering, these three characters in the novel could hardly move out of the tussle they were caught in. They also put their lives at stake and renounce everything for touching the ever-gleaming horizon of true faith and true knowledge. However, some raw facts of the medieval era devour them and their beliefs. Though they reach the metamorphic stage, yet their past and guilt haunt them like the Furies in T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1939). Through the personal observations and experiences of these characters, the reader can peep into the seeds of time sown by humanity five centuries ago.

Brother Figueiro, a fervent missionary, who is on his mission to baptize the heathen and the savage lands, is the first narrator to step in. His

vision of life runs between Lisbon, the land, and Christianity, the faith. To him, the Crusades are the purgatory approaches to set the earth free from the unbelievers and adapt it to True Faith, i.e. Christianity. But the life on the sea is different from that in Lisbon, for the sea is the metaphor of unfathomable mysteries of life: "All seas have their own secrets, their hidden if not clandestine currents, and each island, each estuary has its shoals" (*PC* 10). When da Gama's fleet reaches the African coasts of Mombassa and Milind (now, Milindi), the missionary's experience here is a bit strange, which he names "the great 'onlooker saga'" (*PC* 8). He reflects upon the local inhabitants as follows:

> One pitied them – their contact with all that is civilized and cultured had been so minimal. Those forsaken by the Lord need sympathy. Is it their fault that they have never partaken of the sacrament, or that their children die unbaptized, in sum that they have been kept away from the true faith?
> (*PC* 8-9)

His minimal vision of life hinders his prudence and common sense and disallows him to be empathetic to them and to humanity. At certain coastal lines (Mombassa, Mozambique and Milind), the Portuguese confront hostilities and intrigues, but they are well trained in treating these unruly forces and well versed in putting the living pieces of humanity in chains. They are acclaimed to be good in slave trade.

There is a polarity of ideas between the missionary and da Gama concerning the marine expedition. While conversing with da Gama, Brother Figueiro reveals his disapproval of spice trade, "My understanding was that trade was a façade. The main intention was to circle Africa and strike at the infidel kingdoms. We should have come for war, to strike at the unbeliever from the south …" (*PC* 16). But, da Gama's practical approach seems to have broader scope for its durability in the medieval era: "We are on a voyage to open up the seas" (*PC* 15). "Neither sailors nor soldiers can fight on empty stomachs. If you want fleets and armadas, you need gold. And the only way to get at gold is through commerce" (*PC* 17).

This early stage of globalization, though it seems raw and undernourished, is practically true of its kind. After the conversation, the missionary's mind is surged with doubts: "Was India really our destination? Did we need a pilot to this land? Or was the paradise kingdom of Prester John beckoning us?" (*PC* 19) His glorified illusion for the legendary Christian kingdom continues to haunt his consciousness. But all his Christian belief and idealism seem to have been shattered on reaching

Calicut: "There was no news of Prester John. … It looks like a dream" (*PC* 215).

The missionary's belief that all Africans are infidels undergoes a change, for the king of Milind "had nothing against Christians" (*PC* 23). His first voyage to Calicut in 1498 was transforming and revealing causing colossal change in him. His second voyage in 1502 is commercial. In his words, "If previously we had set out for trade, this time it seemed vengeance. … Trade and gold seemed to be the driving force… At each port, it was gold we were after" (*PC* 316). During the second voyage, what happens on the ship, *Mirim,* was never expected. The ship carrying about seven hundred men, women and children returning from their annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca is primed with explosives and given to fire, and all men and women are mercilessly slain. Those who jump into the sea, including women, are speared: "The sea turned the colour of wine." (*PC* 320). During all this stomach-churning butchering, the missionary notices the reaction of Taufiq: "Horror, shame and anger were all scripted on his face" (*PC* 320).

Taufiq, the second narrator, is the son of a seaman. After his mother's death, both father and son had seen much loss and ruin. Taufiq's father was his mentor who taught him much of life and of sea, as he knew the *Khaleej* (gulf) and the Red Sea "'the way one knows one's mother'" (*PC* 72). Taufiq twice voyaged to the west and south coast of Hindustan with him where the former was "mixed up between Arabic and Gujarati and a smattering of the Malabari language" (*PC* 73). It was a good lesson for the young boy to study the sea and the lives across the continent. Taufiq's stay in Cairo with his mother's uncle, Uthman Asturlabi, for his formal studies did not offer him any charm. It was like Ulysses' Ithaca where only stony dwellers could survive. He shares his memory of the past with Ehtesham and Murad in a poetically epigrammatic style:

> You can share your dreams with people, but not memory. … There are some things you don't speak of and they remain in your blood or in the darkest moss-covered corners of your dreams. Memory is one such, and childhood – both have survived in your blood.
>
> (*PC* 69)

Cairo causes monotony and apathy in him. Taufiq misses the sea, the boat, the salt in the air and the sight of another boat in the remote sea – all that inspired a different feel in him: "It is the salt air I wish to feel on my cheek." (*PC* 77) However, the Nile could not provide him that prospect

and depth of experience. The imaginative force in Taufiq gives weight and poetic nuance to his speech that has been well manoeuvred by the novelist.

Taufiq's meeting with the legendary Ibn Majid combines the passion of the youth with the experience of the old. Taufiq grows old with Ibn Majid, "the greatest sea-man of his times, what the West would have called a Renaissance man, poet, astronomer, navigator all rolled into one" (*PC* 27), who teaches him the minuteness of navigation, the importance of winds, stars and maps for a natural seaman. Sharing his horrendous experiences of Zanj (Africa), Majid asks Taufiq: "'Are you excited about going to Zanj? It is not the healthiest of places. No one dies a natural death in Africa, you know?'" (*PC* 117) He quotes al Baruni, an Arab historian: "'The Zanj is so barbarous that they have no notion of natural death. For them, each death is suspicious if a man has not been killed by a weapon'" (*PC* 117). On his voyage to Sidon and Tyre with Majid, Taufiq learns the fundamentals of navigation and gets the air of multiculturalism and early stage of globalization. In two weeks, he comes to know more about the world than he has picked up in a lifetime. The two places become symbols of cultural and global confluence: "Through the voyage and his stay at Tyre and later at Sidon, Taufiq finds himself rubbing shoulders with Jews and Copts, Venetians and Florentines" (*PC* 131).

Taufiq is forced to join the fleet of da Gama in Milind where the latter captured the moors and demanded the king to provide him a guide to India. While leaving Taufiq to guide the Portuguese, Ibn Majid's love for India and its synthesizing reinforcement is revealed in his beseeching appeal to da Gama: "'Everybody robs India. Be frugal in your thefts'" (*PC* 200). Thus, in the voyage to India, there emerges a synthesis of three major faiths – Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Taufiq, the Muslim guide, embarks upon the Christian fleet to guide the explorers to Calicut, the coastline of Hindustan that was yet latent to the Portuguese knowledge. To Brother Figueiro, India is 'a land of magic and mirages' while Taufiq finds it to be his ultimate destination where he could live in peace with his beloved, Samina, the daughter of Shakoor, a sea trader of Calicut. In India, Taufiq finds a contrast between the *milieu* of Calicut and that of Cairo. During his stay in Lisbon, Taufiq reflects upon the people in Calicut: "I was 'discovering' the people in Calicut, the way the Purtugali people had 'discovered' India. I had discovered their friendliness and informality …" (*PC* 267). He notices that the Indian *milieu* has reached acculturation; the Hindus and the Muslims are rubbing shoulders, sharing their cultures, cults and beliefs. The women are quite open in their manner and candid in exchanging their thoughts and ideas with men. Though he has to return with da Gama, for da Gama's meeting with Zamorin (the king of Calicut,

also known as Samudriya Raja) has been infructuous, the memories of Samina haunt him even in the foreign land and make a permanent abode in his heart. The second voyage to Calicut has been a heart-rending experience for Taufiq because of the brutal affair of the ship, *Miri* (as Taufiq pronounces it), and the bombardments at Calicut making him feel guilty for bringing the Portuguese to the coastline of Hindustan:

> The thought that I had brought these cruel barbarians to the Malabar coast started haunting me now. … The disaster of *Miri* would not have occurred. It is a heavy burden on the soul, to have spawned history, and such a terrible one at that.
>
> (*PC* 323)

Ehtesham ul Haq, whose portion is mostly told by the 'obtrusive narrator', a zealous youth from Asyut (Egypt) and a friend to Taufiq and Murad, was deeply interested in painting. But it was forbidden in Islam, for only Allah creates and man should not dare replicate His creation. Ehtesham's aspirations bring him to Cairo where his reckless and deviant life catches the attention of the Mamluk authorities. When questioned by Muhtasib, the dreaded Inspector of weights and measures and the regulator of morals in the city, Ehtesham poeticizes his urge for art:

> 'Sir, the dyes are not important. It is the urge that is significant; to turn line into image, … The joy of it comes from not just creating something but also seeing in your creation what you want to see. …'
>
> (*PC* 33)

But the threats from the officer and later from the Mamluk ruler, Ali Hasan Zulm, put this sensitive man's life in a chaotic situation. However, his meeting with the legendary figure, Abu Khalil, the chronicler and historian of Arab culture, nourishes his sensibility that reflects in the depth of his art and knowledge. Khalil's recollections over the Arab history and the Crusades free the artist's soul from the ethnic shackles:

> 'A crusade was a cosmos in itself – belief versus unbelief, good versus evil, Allah versus Iblis, depending on which side you were on. … But Christ preached love, the crusades preached murder. … They took us for heathens, we took them for Kafirs. Of course, both sides faced blood and perfidy, fire and famine. Only death was common. …'
>
> (*PC* 60)

Keki N. Daruwalla here displays his poetic manoeuvring of metaphor and paradox for enriching the image of the Crusade. The poetic eloquence and counterbalancing of paradoxical imagery lyrically articulate Khalil's

universal wisdom and cadence of thought. His vast knowledge of the world history makes him a living legend: "Ehtesham told his friends later that hearing the old man talk was like listening to a national heritage" (*PC* 55).

After his marriage with Zainab, Abu Khalil's niece, Ehtesham's urge for painting is restricted to calligraphy, the quotations from the *Quran* and printing. So he seeks the patronage of the Abbot, a kafir to Islam, under the Coptic Church where his art reaches full fruition and leaves its eternal signs on the church wall. This breaking of the shackles of ethnic morality gives a multicultural dimension, which has been well wrought out by Daruwalla in this novel. Free from any guilt, Ehtesham says, "'This has been a happy year. I did what I feel I was born for. I painted. I have never had such a feeling of fulfillment before'" (*PC* 280). But painting the Church secretly (even his wife does not know it) does not save him. Forced to abandon Cairo and his wife, Ehtesham escapes just in time leading a nomadic life. And later, via Alexandria and the Indian Ocean, he too reaches Calicut.

Thus, the three characters – Brother Figueiro, Taufiq and Ehtesham – symbolizing religion, leadership and art respectively were the needs of the medieval world to curb the uncurbed forces of time. The chaotic destinies of these symbolic characters undergo transcendental change. In the concluding part of the novel, the missionary succeeds in saving the lives of ten children of the Muslim pilgrims from the ship, *Mirim,* which was set on fire by the men of Vasco da Gama. Taufiq's guilty self, after the two voyages and the horrendous affairs, seeks refuge in Samina's arms in the Indian *milieu*. Ehtesham escapes Ali Hasan Zulm's wrath in Cairo and reaches Calicut where his tormented self experiences coziness and relief. The three thus transcend cultural and ethnic differences and synthesize themselves into multicultural *milieus* and globalized contexts. Their ethnicity is overpowered by their situational morality. They come to learn that compromise and co-existability ooze out of experience and faith in humanity.

The language of this novel is highly poetic and evocative. Prabhat K. Singh believes that prose melts into poetry at points of intensity in fictional narratives:

> … even the barest of prose fiction can reflect rich qualities of poetry … Both in prose and verse, an artist can achieve the intensity and density of poetry. … A novelist writing in prose can also create the effects of poetry by using suitable techniques of expression. He can make his novel a

> fountain overflowing with waters of wisdom and delight. He can connect his prose with passion and thus enable his novel to work as poem.
>
> (Singh ix)

This means that when such moments seek expression, the novelist takes recourse of the various poetic devices – simile, metaphor, counterpointing of ideas, rhythm and the like. K. N. Daruwalla has done it quite precisely. The poetic narration of the recorded past takes the reader beyond verbal structuralism. A dynamic feature of Daruwalla's prose is that each character, whether legendary, historical or common, has been equipped with a different style of speech that amply bears his experiences, emotiveness, vision, belief and disbelief. The poet in Daruwalla also surfaces through certain speeches, dialogues and descriptions having poetic imagery, cadence of thought, self-oriented proverbial sentences and universality of human experience. His figurative sentences reflect the gleams of worldly wisdom, and dreams and memories reverberate in them taking the narrative to poetic heights.

The three legendary figures in the novel speak precisely and in a poetically charged language. Their thoughts and experiences speak more than their words convey. For instance, while explaining the maps to Taufiq, Ibn Majid says, "… how it is through maps that oceans know where they slosh and mutter to themselves and winds get to know their own names as they whine over the seas" (*PC* 118). The personified and onomatopoeic geometrical imagery has been deftly pen-crafted to narrate the legendry human efforts on the seas. Majid's utterance to Taufiq on human dream and voyage, "If dreams didn't blow on the seas there wouldn't be any voyages, Son" (*PC* 119), is highly poetic. Daruwalla handles the experiences of Ibn Majid through select metaphors and geometrical imagery showing the imaginative realm of his characters. The diction suits the character's situational criterion. Tahir Ibn Illyas, a Sheykh and a Sufi, addressing Ehtesham, for instance, reflects upon dreams:

> 'Dreams are not something a young man must get lost in. Yet, if the young don't dream, who will? The old only dream of the past. The young have everything to dream about – … The old dream of love with regret, the young with hope. The young will not know, until it is too late, that love can also be a desert. …'
>
> (*PC* 41)

The counterbalancing of antithetical abstractions and input of rhetorical question and metaphor render brevity, sublimity and universality to his

speech. The poetic intensity is also enriched by the use of expansive tripartite allegorical imagery focusing on the medieval world.

To sum up, in its tripartite symbolic structure, the novel encompasses the three major continents flourishing in their civilization, ethnicity and religious faith. The novel is set in the three principal medieval cities – Lisbon, Cairo and Calicut – that represent the three major continents – Europe, Africa and Asia respectively. The three cities pursue the three major faiths – Christianity, Islam and Hinduism respectively – that are woven into a complex narrative fabric. They share, knowingly or unknowingly, their customs, values and beliefs with different ethnic groups. The three men of power – the Abbot, the Muhtasib and the Zamorin respectively – have safeguarded the three major faiths. The novel becomes far more historically relevant with the three legendary figures – Vasco da Gama, Abu Khalil and Ibn Majid – whose massive experiences of life gleam through their proverbial and figurative expressions. They make their presence felt through their narratives soaked in historical truths and values. Besides, the novel also centres round the lives of Brother Figuerio, Taufiq and Ehtesham who symbolize three major areas of human transaction – religion, leadership and art respectively. The intricate weaving of these metaphors in this novel is not an intentional projection, but a spontaneous gift of creativity showing the novelist's insight into the cross-cultural perspectives of medieval history and faith.

Works Cited

Chatterjee, Madhusree. Indo-Asian News Service. New Delhi. May 11, 2009. Weblink: http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print/409777.aspx

Daruwalla, Keki N. *For Pepper and Christ* (*PC*). New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.

Singh, Prabhat K. *Dynamics of Poetry in Fiction*. New Delhi: Pencraft Publications, 1994.

Web A: http://business.mapsofindia.com/globalization/history.html

Web B: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/multiculturalism

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DAVID DAVIDAR'S *THE SOLITUDE OF EMPERORS*: THE POLITICS OF RELIGION AND THE RELIGION OF POLITICS IN THE POSTCOLONIAL NATION-STATE

ROSITTA JOSEPH VALIYAMATTAM

> No State can be civilized except a secular State.
>
> (Nehru 240)

David Davidar's second novel, *The Solitude of Emperors* (2007), is a poignant chronicle of the lethal mixing of religion and politics in contemporary India. The issue of religious fundamentalism is the central concern of the novel. A typical twenty-first century Indian English novel, it casts a look, both introspective and retrospective, at the collective life of the nation in the last decade of the twentieth century. This existential story of a journalist battling the 1992-93 Mumbai riots becomes an authentic, objective chronicle of the political, socio-cultural and economic history of India in the early 1990s. Davidar portrays with finesse the intricate intertwining of personal and national destinies in post-Independence India.

The personal life of Vijay, the protagonist, emerges as a living symbol of the psyche of a nation that has been deeply scarred by communal divide and tension. He exposes the Indian political machinery that creates divisions of religion, culture and class for political gains. The novel raises important questions regarding our future and our ideals as a nation, regarding the relationship between journalism and fiction, and regarding the fictionalization of national history in postcolonial narratives. It contributes to the complex, vital corpus of postcolonial discourse on 'the nation'. It reveals how the imperial mechanism continues to operate at the hands of the ruling elite, how 'fragile' the concept of nation is, and how

the seeds of communal hatred sown by colonial masters continue to flourish in the post-colonial set-up, challenging the secular, democratic ideals of the nation-state. This novel becomes yet another testimony of the heroic battle of the ordinary Indians against the neo-colonial forces of the State in a time of extraordinary transformation.

The nation in postcolonial theory has been perceived in different ways. Edward Said's canonical text, *Orientalism* (1978), speaks of the impression of European imperial powers. The concept of the 'nation'/'nation-state' is yet another European idea imposed on the subconscious of the colonized, another example of how knowledge was controlled by colonizers to subdue natives. In fact, "colonialism" and "imperialism" were forms of "European nationalism" (Gandhi 115). This European concept was subjected to "premature universalization and used by "nationalists engaged in anti-imperialist struggles to inspire the people of the colonies to fight for freedom" (Deshpande 49).

In India, the onslaught of European ideas led to the rise of two forms of Hinduism – a broad-based liberal "Gandhian" and an extremist "Hindu nationalism", "never to be reconciled" (Nandy 59). Here, the imposition of the European model of a homogenous nation is impossible, because unlike Europe and America, India is not a melting pot but a salad-bowl of cultures – several distinct nations or cultures within one state. "India's destiny is to remain national, federal and multi-cultural" (Oommen 222). With the common goals of the freedom struggle fading away, our nationalism has degenerated into fascism today. In the words of Arundhati Roy, "Fascism has come to India after the dreams that fuelled the Freedom Struggle have been frittered away, like so much loose change" (Roy 2009, xviii).

Scholars now question the very idea of nation and, like Amartya Sen and many others, call for a return to Tagore's idea of a pluralistic broad-based nationalism. In the field of post-colonial theory, some scholars like Spivak, Nairn and Miller believe that the nation-state is a failed idea in the developing world, while others like Neil Lazarus, Aijaz Ahmed and Benita Parry call for a return to the dynamic spirit of the anti-colonial nationalist struggles. In brief, modern postcolonial theory dreams of a new, humane, broad definition of nationalism free from western economic and cultural controls, giving voice to the suppressed subaltern communities.

The Indian English novel has always reflected the story of the Indian nation. The post-1980 writers, after Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* have expressed and deconstructed national realities in new ways. "Caught betwixt the forces of western corporate globalization and anti-western

extremist movements, the writer becomes merely an instrument to express the paradoxes of a nation that is too complex … to be portrayed accurately" (Baral 71-72).

Davidar's novels grapple with the vastness and complexity of India and her history. *The Solitude of Emperors* is a call for a return to the true spirit of secularism via the ancient pluralistic heritage of India and the fundamentals of the national movement. It exhorts the new generation to return to a life of depth and contemplation and thereby cultivate a taste for tolerance and mutual understanding. As the writer puts it, "We do not know what to do with one of our most precious resources, solitude, and so we fill it with clutter" (*SE* 204).

The focus of the novel is on the complex relationship between the individual and the society, between the ordinary citizen and the all-powerful nation-state, between the life of the commoners and the vast, powerful current of history that is often cruel to the earthlings. The novel opens with the following lines: "They are the invisible ones, the ones who were too small, weak, poor or slow to escape the onrush of history. No obituaries mark their passing, no memorials honour their name and we don't remember them because in our eyes they never existed. Yet we ignore them at our peril, if only because their fate today could be ours tomorrow; history is an insatiable tyrant" (*SE* 3).

The plot unfolds with Vijay paying homage to Noah, his deceased friend, in a strange way. He visits cemeteries in the different parts of the world at nightfall, drinks and smokes, plays music, and keeps company with the dead. The ritual ends with his reading aloud of the last chapter of the book he has written – a book about the life and death of Noah. A journalist by profession, Vijay knows about the difficulty in writing a detached account of a loved one. He confesses: "I am of the school that believes a journalist should never become part of the story he is covering, and the only time I broke that rule, the consequences were disastrous and signalled the beginning of the end of my career" (*SE* 6).

However, Davidar's story succeeds in convincing the reader of its impartial recording of the history of the subaltern, the invisible, and the oppressed. As the author clarifies: "I should say at this point that I am aware that this account is different from the version put out by the police and the government commission of inquiry that investigated his death; in my defence all I can say is that nobody else recorded the witness of the dead" (*SE* 5).

The actual story begins in K – a small town in Tamil Nadu, the place of Vijay's birth. This stereotypical small South Indian town, where

tradition and modernity symbolized by a temple and a hospital exist side by side, frustrates Vijay because of the lack of opportunities and its orthodox, superstitious, caste-ridden communities. Being the son of parents who had boldly married for love, crossing the caste barrier, rebellion comes natural to him. His professor father inculcates in him an interest in newspapers. Vijay's big chance to escape to Bombay in the 1990s comes unexpectedly when the family servant, Raju, is recruited by a Hindu right-wing organization during the Ayodhya temple movement. Communalism has finally reached even the remotest, most peaceful towns. Encouraged by his father, Vijay writes an article about the increasing power of sectarian politicians and sends it to *The Indian Secularist*, founded and edited by Rustom Sorabjee. This leads to his being employed as a journalist by this small Bombay magazine, dedicated to preserving the secular fabric of India by fighting communal forces.

The Indian Secularist becomes a symbol of the enlightened, conscientious, law-abiding Indian citizen waging a war on the unscrupulous, power-hungry politicians and religious leaders. Rustom Sorabjee, whose independent stance during the bleak days of the Emergency had helped the magazine scale the peak of popularity, feels that the communal hatred of the 1990s is the worst ever since the Partition in 1947. Sorabjee is a strong believer in truth and human values and does not reject religion completely. Vijay falls in love with the enormous energy of Bombay, with his colleagues at the office of *The Indian Secularist,* and appreciates the greatness and diversity of religions in India. However, his idyllic life soon ends as he is caught up in violent riots that rip through the city, a reflection of the upsurge of fundamentalism everywhere in the country. As Vijay puts it, "I and all the other inhabitants of the city were about to see our world rearranged in a way that would drive everything but fear from our minds" (*SE* 41).

Bombay turns into a city of fear as the Babri Masjid is demolished on 6 December, 1992. *The Indian Secularist* terms it the fourth greatest tragedy to befall independent India since the partition riots, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and the 1984 massacre of Sikhs in Delhi. As Shashi Tharoor writes in his book, *India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond*, "In the early 1990s, India's political culture underwent a change … It was a change in the dominant ethos of the country, in the attitudes of mind that define what it means to be Indian" (Tharoor 52). Gurcharan Das says in his *India Unbound*, "The once liberal city began to turn into an ugly, disturbing shrine city called Mumbai with a malicious political identity" (Das 255). Vijay, the journalist reports: "Immediately, a long comet's tail of violence swung across the country

and tens of thousands of lives were affected. ... This time, the riots were different. ... no one was spared in an orgy of violence that was unlike anything the city had ever seen. To make matters worse, with some exceptions, the police either looked the other way or even encouraged the rioters. People had been killed in the past, often as a result of religious bigotry, but it was in December 1992 that Bombay lost its way" (*SE* 43). Vijay gets too involved in reporting the riots. He witnesses horrible scenes of murder and arson. One night, as he roams the streets infested with bloodthirsty goons, he witnesses a Muslim being beheaded by a group of young Hindu fundamentalists. He is spared only because he is wearing a sacred thread. The incident scars Vijay's mind permanently.

The Indian Secularist contributes actively in restoring the peace and ensuring that the dead were not forgotten. However, this determination is rudely jolted by the bomb blasts planned by the Muslim underworld in retaliation for the massacre of Muslims during the riots. Vijay despairs at the endless cycle of mindless violence, which threatens the very existence of India. However, Mr Sorabjee vows to keep spreading the message of secularism: "... if there is even one person left in the country to whom our message will make a difference, that person is the reason we will keep going" (*SE* 59). Finally, a fragile peace is restored in the city as even the venal politicians and criminals are gripped with fear.

Through Vijay, Davidar chronicles the fate of the city, "… how one of India's most secular cities had been destroyed from within" (*SE* 59). He records: "But Bombay would never be the same again. It was broken, its industriousness and resilience a sham, a thin veil that covered the deep-seated fear and suspicion that had taken hold of its inhabitants. … Bombay would live and die on its streets, its crowded bazaars and mohallas, and even as they went about their daily lives, its millions watched and wondered if they would be expected to sacrifice themselves for their city" (*SE* 59). Davidar's recording of the nuances of history seems to be uncannily and eerily correct, as eminent social historians like Bipan Chandra and Ashis Nandy echo similar sentiments.

The riots in Bombay mark a turning point in Vijay's destiny. He is sent by Mr Sorabjee to Meham, a small town in the Nilgiris to recover. The riots also mark a turning point in Mr Sorabjee's life, for he writes a textbook for the youngsters, *The Solitude of Emperors*: *Why Ashoka, Akbar and Gandhi Matter to Us Today?* Vijay is asked to review the manuscript while on holiday at Meham.

Mr Sorabjee's book, in fact, is the mouthpiece of Davidar's philosophy of secularism inspired by some of Amartya Sen's views in

Identity and Violence and *The Argumentative Indian*. Mr Sorabjee's book has five chapters. The first chapter, "The Need for Emperors", analyses how deeply Indians of all religions believe in their Gods. However, in times of crisis, people start worshipping the gods of war and violence. When large sections of the population suffer from poverty and insecurity, even as a select few are blessed with unimaginable riches, the politicians and rabble-rousers take advantage of the have-nots. They inflame the passions of those who are frustrated with life. They promise security in the name of religion. And men, instead of battling their real enemies, poverty and corruption, turn upon each other. We, therefore, need true leaders, men of true faith, who will lead us out of this darkness. Only three men in Indian history have been able to fulfil this role in the past, men who were deeply religious yet secular – "Ashoka, the Emperor of Renunciation; Akbar, the Emperor of Faith; and Gandhi, the Emperor of Truth" (*SE* 79).

The second chapter, "Samraat Ashoka: Emperor of Renunciation", gives a splendid description of the empire, the rule and the army of Ashoka. The terrible Kalinga war, which led to unimaginable bloodshed, aroused compassion in Ashoka who embraced Buddhism and devoted himself to the care of his kingdom. He issued edicts exhorting each citizen neither to glorify his own religion nor to condemn the religion of others, but to learn about and honour all religions. The chapter concludes with the line: "Ashoka was a man well ahead of his time, and our need is for someone like him who will be the perfect antidote to the savage generals of God who dominate our country today" (*SE* 100). Ashoka stands in sharp contrast to the power-hungry Indian politicians of the 1990s who allowed the Ayodhya-Babri dispute to escalate.

The third chapter, "Shahenshah Akbar: Emperor of Faith", gives a bird's-eye view of the glorious reign and achievements of Akbar, who ascended the throne at the age of fourteen. Though a Muslim, he took a great interest in learning about other faiths. He established the Ibadat Khana for inter-religious dialogue and a syncretic religion 'Din-i-Ilahi'. As an Emperor of Faith, he was both a man of God and a ruler of men. Amartya Sen has rightly emphasized the fact that the roots of Indian secularism go back to the traditions of harmonious inter-religious "dialogue" and "public reasoning" and debate promoted "by two of the greatest of Indian emperors, Ashoka and Akbar" (Sen 17-18).

The fourth chapter, "Mahatma Gandhi: Emperor of Truth", shows how his message is forgotten and his legacy is mocked at. He was not born to greatness but he could command millions. He was unambiguous about the need for India to be a tolerant, non-sectarian, multifaceted and

harmoniously plural society. He said, "In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India" (*SE* 169). He was a pious Hindu who worshipped the Truth. Ahimsa and Satyagraha were his weapons.

The fifth and concluding chapter, "The Solitude of Emperors", deals with the need for solitude in contemporary life. It presents true solitude as the solution to the problem of religious fundamentalism and violence plaguing India. Great men like Gandhi, Akbar and Ashoka were men of solitude. They derived spiritual strength from their inner lives, their deep learning, and their vividly felt experiences. The crises in their lives were the turning points that forced them to introspect, to gain new wisdom in solitude. Often, we squander away our most precious resource, 'solitude'. Mr Sorabjee exhorts the students, the young, to learn deeply, to inhale the genius of India, to learn about her beauty and her amazing diversity. He also says, "At the same time, do not neglect to absorb the poverty and violence and savagery and injustice of this country of extremes. Experience the despair of the coalminer in Dhanbad, where the very land is on fire, understand the hopelessness of the marginal cotton farmer in Andhra Pradesh, mourn with the widow of the Sikh garage owner who witnessed her husband being burnt alive in the Delhi riots of 1984. Let their pain become yours" (*SE* 210). From this realization should come the love of solitude; and subsequently, from this solitude, love, courage, conviction, passion and energy to uplift and reform the nation. Thus, secularism is placed by the novelist firmly within the Indian tradition through this book within a book, a manuscript within a novel.

Two dramas unfold simultaneously in the breathtakingly beautiful hill-station of Meham – one, the reading of Mr Sorabjee's manuscript and the other the communal disturbances surrounding the shrine, 'The Tower of God'. The prominent citizens of the town include mostly retired army officers, like Brigadier Sharma, retired scientists and civil servants whose lives revolve around the local clubs, gardens and the cultivation of exotic flowers. On the highest peak in Meham stands an ancient shrine of a Christian martyr, visited by people of all faiths. Called 'The Tower of God', this miraculous shrine is usually inaccessible due to rough weather and the risky climb to a height of several thousand feet on slippery stone steps. Vijay's idyllic holiday in Meham leads him to meet Noah, a strange figure, a poor, solitary young man who lives in the local graveyard with a pariah dog named Godless. Noah spends all his time in the company of the dead. The son of the local pastor, Noah, had committed the grave sin of falling in love with Maya, the daughter of Brigadier Sharma. This led to his ostracization from the local society. Wandering through different

cities, perhaps even abroad, Noah becomes a man of letters, a wonderful poet, a man of refined cultural taste, and a charmer of beautiful women. However, Meham calls him back and he returns to become the keeper of the local graveyard. He is already estranged from his parents who are victims of blind faith. Now, all his concern is with cultivating a wild garden of the loveliest flowers in the graveyard and living in the company of the dead. This is one version of Noah's life story. According to another version, Vijay is told that Noah was a penniless vagabond, an orphan who had never stepped out of Meham and was brought up by a pastor. Whatever the truth may be, Noah becomes a symbol of the eternal rebel, the mocker of the elite class, the friend of the poor, the unbelieving yet humane philosopher, and the spirit of Meham.

Even as Noah and Vijay become close friends, communal trouble starts brewing in Meham. Led by Rajan, a local BJP leader, right-wing organizations start claiming that the Tower of God was actually an ancient Shiva temple, which was stealthily usurped by the Christians. Aware of Rajan's plans to gain political mileage by creating riots in Meham, Vijay sets out on a mission to preserve the secular fabric of the town. Taking Noah's help, he approaches the local government officials, the police and the influential citizens of the town. But his pleas fall on deaf ears and his warnings are taken rather lightly. Finally, he interviews Rajan, the Bombay businessman turned politician who claims to be a philanthropist. However, Vijay's probing questions reveal that Rajan is a man filled with frustration and anger, whose sole aim in life is to avenge the humiliation of his family by the rich and the upper-caste years ago. His wrath has found outlet in religious fundamentalism. Rajan, thus, becomes a symbol of the dangerously rotten political culture in contemporary India. As Shashi Tharoor puts it in his Preface to the 2007 edition of *India:From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond*, "It is one of the ironies of India's muddled march into the twenty-first century that it has a technologically inspired vision of the future and yet appears shackled to the dogmas of the past" (Tharoor xxv). Speaking of the communal political culture in India, Arundhati Roy writes, "In every case, the Congress sowed the seed and the BJP has swept in to reap the hideous harvest" (Roy 2002, 276).

However, Vijay finds that he is losing his battle. Rajan plans a big rally and a communal riot to take over the shrine. With the connivance of the police and the local administration, a plan to massacre the pilgrims slowly takes shape. On the opposite side stands Brother Ahimas, the caretaker of the shrine whose name, perhaps, is a clever twist of the word, Ahimsa. A man of God, Ahimas, is unperturbed and does not want to organize any resistance or seek protection, because he is reconciled to the

will of God. Helpless, Vijay turns to Noah and persuades him to 'do' something to save the sanctity of Meham. But reluctant Noah refuses.

However, on that fateful day of the feast at the shrine, Noah ascends the Tower of God and lies in wait for Rajan. Even as Rajan ascends the steep, slippery stone steps to the shrine in rainy weather, planning, secretly, to install a lingam at the shrine, Noah confronts him. Both of them wrestle and fall to their death in the deep, rocky valley below.

Noah, thus, becomes a martyr for the cause of secularism. His sacrifice averts the massacre of the innocents in the name of religion and prevents communal hatred from taking root in Meham. Noah's sacrifice goes unrecognized, but Vijay is a witness to the truth. Thus, Noah, who is regarded as a good-for-nothing fellow, becomes the unknown saviour of Meham, a symbol of the true spirit and resilience of the ordinary Indians battling the monstrous forces unleashed by the political machinery of the neo-colonial State.

The peculiar ending of the novel, with restored peace and harmony, reminds one of R. K. Narayan's visions of good and evil in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Rajan, who threatens the peace of the small town, is like Vasu, the power-hungry giant in Narayan's novel. Vijay's helplessness reminds one of the helplessness of Nataraj, Narayan's protagonist. Just like Vasu, Rajan meets a tragic, ironic end. Evil destroys itself in both cases. However, in Davidar's novel, as in a Shakespearean tragedy, good is destroyed along with the evil.

Davidar is able to portray with equal finesse the vast canvas of national events and the minute details of the inner life of his protagonists. The character of Noah, the ever rebellious, mysterious, charming, romantic young man who dies for a noble cause, is a masterpiece. The character of Mr Rustom Sorabjee is also etched painstakingly. Vijay, the journalist-narrator, is an endearing figure, though, at times, he seems a mere shadow, a voice that transmits the author's views. Davidar evokes a poetic feel with his simple, lucid language. His words and phrases stamp on the mind a lasting impression of the sights, sounds and smells of the India he describes. The *Time* magazine rightly describes him as 'A master storyteller'.

Thus, *The Solitude of Emperors* is one of those rare contemporary novels that have clear directions and ideals at their core. It challenges us to confront ourselves in solitude and to become actively involved in preserving the harmony of a divided nation. It is crucial to recognize the dangers of narrow-minded nationalism. Indeed, a partition of the soul of India would be worse than the partition of 1947. Arundhati Roy rightly

says, "It's disturbing to see how neatly nationalism dovetails into fascism… Can we not find it in ourselves to belong to an ancient civilization instead of to just a recent nation? To love 'a land' instead of just patrolling a territory?" (Roy 2002, 285).

Works Cited

Baral, K. C. "Imaging India: Nation and Narration". *Rethinking Indian English Literature*. (ed.) U. M. Nanavati and Prafulla C. Kar. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2000.

Das, Gurcharan. "New Money". *India Unbound: From Independence to the Global Information Age*. 2000. New Delhi: Penguin, 2002.

Davidar, David. *The Solitude of Emperors* (*SE*). New Delhi: Penguin/Vinking, 2007.

Deshpande, Satish. "The Nation as an Imagined Economy". *Contemporary India: A Sociological View*. 2003. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.

Gandhi, Leela. "Imagining community: the question of nationalism". *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction.* 1998. New Delhi: OUP, 2002.

Nandy, Ashis *et al.* "Creating a Nationality". *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self.* 1995. Oxford: OUP, 1998.

Nehru, Jawaharlal. "Communal Menace in Independent India". *Jawaharlal Nehru on Communalism*. 1965. (ed.) Nand Lal Gupta. Gurgaon: Hope India, 2006.

Oommen, T. K. "Introduction towards the Future: Indian Society, Nation-State and Civilization". *Crisis and Contention in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Sage, 2005.

Roy, Arundhati. "Democracy: Who's She When She's At Home?" *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. 2001. New Delhi: Penguin, 2002.

—. "Introduction: Democracy's Failing Light". *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*. New Delhi: Penguin-Hamish Hamilton, 2009.

Sen, Amartya. "The Indian Identity". *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*. London: Penguin, 2005.

Tharoor, Shashi. "Unity, Diversity and other Contradictions: From the Milk Miracle to the Malayali Miracle". *India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond*. 1997. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.

—. Preface to the 2007 edition of *India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond*.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A TRYST WITH NEMESIS: THE ELEMENT OF THE ABSURD IN UPAMANYU CHATTERJEE'S *WEIGHT LOSS*

ANURAG MOHANTY

Absurdity is the negation of rationality, or the failure of rationality to discover a *raison dêtre* for human existence, or the absence of any comprehensible rational order in the universe. It is an antithesis to any effort to carve out a meaningful niche for man in the cosmic scheme. It defies both human reason and faith that make tall claims about penetrating the mystery of existence. Consequently, absurdism is a spontaneous refutation of the value system founded upon the rational and the religious worldviews. The absurd hero is the incarnation of this profound sense of absurdity. The theme of absurdity needs a thorough investigation as far as the loss of meaning experienced by a social outsider is a refreshing motif for Indian English fiction.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *Weight Loss* treats absurdity, a theme that has been implicit in his earlier novels, as a leitmotif, not simply as one of the themes in the saga of an uprooted Anglicized soul. It is imperative to find out whether Bhola, the protagonist of the novel, is an absurd hero in the real sense of the term. The methodology of this paper consists in a comparative assessment of European and Chatterjee's versions of absurdism in order to highlight the unique Indian texture of the latter.

Upamanyu Chatterjee does not have the legacy of any Indian writer that he can fall back on in respect of absurdity as a theme. The postcolonial socio-political situation in India is the launching pad for Chatterjee's absurd heroes. Bhola's emergence as an absurd hero is rooted in the discrepancies that beset our socio-cultural and political ventures towards the reconstruction of a 'glorious nation'. He is a hypersensitive Bengali Brahmin boy brought up in an upper middle class family and caught in circumstances that awaken him to the utter meaninglessness of

human cultural superstructure quite early in his life. He becomes aware of the vacuity of human relationships, of the human pretensions, of the various social mores lacking in any logical grounding, and of the inherent absurdity of life. He is always irked by the perpetuation of social inequality, exploitation and marginalization of various groups as cultural outcasts using pompous myths validated by different religious scriptures that establish rigid standards of aesthetics, behavioural patterns and sexuality. The outcome is a comic self-contradiction resulting in total estrangement and a feeling of total disenchantment with the existing order. The logical consequence is a bold effort to redefine oneself and re-orient one's life-project. In such a situation, Bhola undertakes to discover the prospects of his life in a semi-nihilistic manner.

The concept of the absurd and the possible modalities of the absurd hero, as found in Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus,* do fit in with Bhola's life-style and his mode of thinking. The three major traits of the absurd hero are rejection of help from a higher power, acceptance of the absurd situation, and rejection of suicide. Of these, Bhola meets the first two and rejects the third as he makes a determined effort to continue living in this absurd world until he finds that retiring into the world of death would be as good an idea as living. He does seek a little help from the higher power, but it is from a god of his own making, not the conventional unreasonably hallowed god. Bhola conforms to the basic idea of an absurd hero in that he discovers the irrationality concealed behind all rational constructions. He reconciles himself to the feeling of absurdity without trying to overcome it. He does not attempt to reconcile human reason and the irrational universe. He argues that the absurd is our fundamental relation with the world. This is because when we seek the reason and meaning of our existence, we encounter the absurd. Either we try to put blinkers on our eyes regarding the fact of absurdity or we decide to confront this harsh truth and 'trans-value' our values and reconstruct our lives.

Bhola remains perpetually in a state of ennui, for he finds the constitution of the universe very irrational where one gets no answers to one's queries, no distinct definitions of right or wrong, good or bad. In such a condition, any choice is a good choice. So one could set one's own standards of ethics and live by one's own choices. The novelist presents this crucial aspect of his worldview as follows:

> Right and wrong, good and bad, were like the right and left hands of the buffoon Lancelot Gobbo in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, all the

> time beckoning to Bhola from either side, making him swivel his head this way and that, non-stop, in his efforts to decide what course to follow.
>
> (*WL* 330)

This mental state places the existential burden of choice on Bhola and he chooses to explore the meaning of his existence in sexual debauchery. It gives him a release from his angst. It is rather his answer to the world. However, the choice of his sexual partners, male or female, is totally rooted in his own sexual constitution. He is a bisexual male, and has no compunction about his choice. As for Bhola's choice of the class of people for his sexual relationships, it is backed by his intellectual leanings. Bhola always recognizes two separate worlds in the society – the world of the elite and the world of the commoner (he, of course, later realizes that it was a blatantly wrong notion to conceive of the world neatly split into two homogenous divisions with disparate traits). Of the two, he always lurches towards the commoners because he is disgusted with the materialism and hypocrisy of the nobility and because he feels that he can relate himself authentically only with the people of the lower order and enjoy uninhibited sexual togetherness. He does not court the men and women of the upper class with decent smelling, neat and clean bodies. He prefers paid sex with the stinking body frames of the servant class. This is not only Bhola's social choice but also his intellectual compatibility reflecting his concept of beauty and ugliness. Human society and culture have laid down a large number of taboos for sexual conduct. Bhola flouts these norms and attempts to assert his animal freedom. Bhola is an existentialist individual who authentically and unhesitatingly dares acknowledge the polymorphic sexual proclivity of his body and who has the courage of his conviction.

Bhola's sexuality is not aimed at realizing a sublime state of life; rather it is an end in itself. Civilized sexuality is always a means for a good life, a good family, or a good society. But Bhola was alien to any kind of conventional goodness. He could not find a flawless moral order to conform to. The novelist does not explain this approach of Bhola towards sexuality. One possible explanation is that it was only by sexual involvement devoid of reciprocal passion, and intimacy born out of it, that he could bear the absurdity of his existence. Any kind of commitment would land him in illusions while he wanted to remain free from illusions. He also believes that sex is glorified so much because many thinkers are unable to acknowledge, "something so good was at the same time so base, so basic and so fleeting" (*WL* 326). Hence, for Bhola, sexuality is simply a mode of existence, a haphazard response to absurdity at the heart of the

human situation. He grows up into a pragmatic challenge to the established cultural norms, mores and stereotypes.

Bhola appears to have absurdist tendencies right from his adolescence. He had a thoroughly alienated childhood, whether from his father, whom he found distant in temperament, or his stepmother, who appeared impassive to him. His school days were equally soul-destroying. He was enraged by the repugnant treatment of the students by his near sadist physical education teacher, Anthony, and his another teacher, Miss Jeremiah, who discriminated students on the basis of their financial status. Bhola's reaction is always in sexual terms. He imagines them all as sexual objects and this supposedly perverse imagination unburdens his mind of his seething resentment. Bhola gradually turns into a sexual freak by eyeing his own servant Gopinath as a potential sexual partner, by his short *tête-à-tête* with some eunuchs and a monk. They become a means for shedding his existential angst.

After his consciousness assumes a full-blown sexual orientation, Bhola chooses two other potential sexual partners, Moti and his wife Titli, the vegetable vendors neither beautiful nor young nor sensuous by any standards. Their presence could only repel the other mortals of the class. But for Bhola, they are both attractive and provocative. Nourishing his subverted aesthetics, Bhola weaves a world of sexual fantasy around them, which persists throughout his life culminating in his self-destruction, a psychological release:

> Creating in this manner, in bits and pieces, an epic fantasy and making it swell with his longing for all sorts of odd people – divesting himself completely in it of all the indispensable comfort that one takes for granted – a home nest, the cocoon of the family, school, companions – and replacing it with a hard, harsh and hysterically sexual imagined life – that too, though Bhola didn't recognize for years, was a weight loss programme since it helped him to lessen the load of the lumber in his head. Living would have been insupportable without the therapeutic outlet that it provided.
>
> (*WL* 33)

His obsession for Moti and Titli makes him leave his birth-place in hot pursuit of these two. He himself admits that it was a perfectly absurd decision. Pursuing education or searching Moti or Titli was just a pretext for living out his absurdity. However, like a perfect absurd hero, he neither regrets nor repents, neither laments nor reviews his commitment to sexual indulgences, which was a way of living out absurdity, not a way out of absurdity. On the contrary, he creates a new convention of sexual

relationship pushing the distinction between good and bad to the background. Sexual satisfaction is the end and any means is a good means so long as it serves the purpose. He strikes with Moti a homosexual liaison, which he calls 'love'. But Moti accepts it due to poverty, as he never derived any sexual pleasure out of this liaison. Bhola, too, used to feel a kind of repulsion towards Moti after any sexual union but within a few days, he used to regain his desire. In addition, at intervals, rather alternately, he swings towards Titli without any scruples haunting his conscience. Bhola's affair with Titli verges on the absurd because she is unable to appreciate Bhola's ponderous theorizations about sex based on his reading of various scriptures and so many other sources. Bhola expects her to shed all her inhibitions and engage herself in a primitive type of sexual union with him. But Titli, full of coquettish gestures, offers herself to Bhola (whom she respects because he belongs to an upper caste and class) for mere pecuniary gain. All the while, she retains a profound loving attachment to her husband. Thus, sexuality assumes absurdity because Bhola also realizes that in spite of a decade-long affair, there was no intimacy in his relationships.

Thus, Bhola's relationships acquire ironical overtones. It is elite attempting to bridge the gap between the socially divided classes. He moves to the other part of the divide and identifies himself completely with the proletariat, even though it is through a paid sexual relationship, while there is a proletariat who comes to terms with a kind of historic relationship with the bourgeois, in which the latter exploits the former in exchange of some monetary benefits. The other irony involved in it is that Bhola, in spite of all his subversive attempts, does not do away altogether with his elitist baggage and, at points, he is too preoccupied with his exploration of the sexual realm to notice the resulting exploitation of his *objects of study*. Using Bruce King's idea of *micro-nationalism* (King 3), we can call it a form of *micro-exploitation* in an extended crusade against *macro-exploitation*. Thus, Bhola, like Fanon's "native intellectual" (McLeod 84), identifies himself with the proletariat to wage a battle against the various exploitative methods used by the bourgeoisie but fails to save himself from committing the very mistake which Fanon cautions the native intellectual against. He makes the entire battle an individual endeavour and not a collective action. This individuality results in the distancing from and exploitation of the very group that was supposed to be elevated.

Bhola's sexual adventure-cum-exploration turns into a new liaison with Mrs Manchanda, his landlady on the hills, a widow and mother of a young boy. In this relationship, Bhola undergoes a change. From

passionate bisexual erotic adventure (with Moti and Titli), he swings to equally passionate involvement with an attractive woman. Instead of the malodorous bodies of the lower class people and their low-brow Hindi, he now grows fond of Mrs Manchanda's aromatic body and her polished Hindi. It is no longer a unipolar activity, which uses financial means to achieve a sexual union. Now, the unpaid sex with Mrs Manchanda was a truly human relationship, not the relationship between a man and an object. Bhola gains a new sense of fulfilment in this relationship, which becomes a milestone in his existential journey.

Bhola's experiments also bring him to his marriage with Kamala. Here he swings to the other side of the 'divide' by giving 'the normal way of living' a try. He compares his own "shrivelled up and wry" (*WL* 220) existence with Kamala's mode of living that was "more complete and rested" (*WL* 220). He feels that his life is lacking in some very essential characteristics preventing him from living a 'normal' life like others. Marriage is a normative institution and Bhola's alignment towards it, even for a short while, is evidence enough of a fundamental transmutation of his semi-nihilistic attitude. But such ethereal reality is not meant for Bhola who very soon swings back to the purely profane pole of living. For his licentious explorations in sexual wilderness, Kamala was not the ideal partner as it was not possible to engage Kamala in the kind of sport he had with Titli, with whom he experimented and checked the authenticity of all his knowledge about sexuality. He realizes that marriage is not a license for legal sexuality; it is something more sublime, a higher zone where a man is actuated by noble impulses.

Subsequently, Bhola's fatherhood (fathering Karuna) provides him the opportunity to discover some meaning in life. This shows that Bhola does not remain a consistent absurdist all through. But he does not also remain in this self-critical phase for too long. It is merely a transitional phase. He slides down again into the old mire.

But Bhola this time commits the mistake of trespassing into somebody else's existential periphery. He engages himself in a highly absurd and morbid action in the clinic of Dr Borkar, the quack, who was to operate upon Moti's penis in order to implant a ring on its foreskin so that he could have perpetual stimulation. The morbidity of this act consists in Borkar's lack of qualification and skill to achieve this questionable target and Bhola's intention of merely increasing his access to Titli. Moti and Titli on their part are impelled by superstition to welcome such an absurd operation. However, Bhola has no reasons to make Moti his guinea pig. It is here that Bhola's assertion of his existential freedom begins to impinge

on our sense of reason. Bhola lapses into introspection when the operation is going on and castigates himself for being in a mess (he *acknowledges* that he *was in a mess!*), but the very next moment he develops a sense of elation for the mess was of his own making. This was *his* own choice, and now he must face the music. As he resigns himself to the predicament in a heroic frame of mind, he appears to be a true absurdist.

Another very vital trait of Bhola's character is his *innocence*, in Camusian terms, of course. This innocence prompted him to take, naively, the world for granted. He presupposed that with the resources at his disposal he could enlist the cooperation of the persons of his inner circle. This happened with him twice – when he encounters Moti after a gap of thirteen years and when he comes across Titli who comes offering herself for menial jobs to his place years after. Bhola, then, was living his reformed way of living with Kamala. When Kamala was in the hospital for the birth of his daughter, Karuna, he meets Moti and revives to his old sport without caring to understand the partner. Moti shoots him with a gun calling him "dirty!" The absurdist thus pays the price.

Earlier also he was appalled by the vile misdeed of Titli who used to extract Karuna's blood for commercial purposes. That, too, was a big price for his innocence and ignorance, for his audacious innovations and for his alleged discovery of new vistas of living. While facing the barrel of Moti's gun, he had made a deal with God that if he somehow escaped death, he would lead a life of goodness, of sublimity:

> … nothing in this world or the next could compare with being alive, with having teetered on and yet not tumbled off the edge. For that, he would have to remember forever to be grateful. ... his eyes had filled with tears.
>
> (*WL* 285)

Bhola's life imparts two lessons. First is that an interpersonal relationship demands much more than innocence. It demands a minimum of sagacity or discernment apart from an understanding of the complexity of that relationship. Second, which he learns at the sight of Kamala's blood in the syringe, is that nobody is perfect in the world, neither the highbrow nor the lowbrow. His notion of seeing the world divided into two neat halves, denigrating one while idealizing the other, was badly flawed. The novelist here seems to be going by the postcolonialist thinker, Homi Bhabha's idea of 'hybridity' and 'ambivalence' (McLeod 48). The plot of the story mitigates the neat division of society into binaries – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – and denotes the failure of any attempt at subverting the

binaries by jumping over to either side of the divide as a mark of revolt, for both sides are characterized by hybridity and ambivalence.

Bhola's existentialist approach to divinity is reflected in the following vivid observation about God:

> For him, godhead was mercurial and defined entirely by one's mood. God was a nice guy on one's good days and an absolute devil on Mondays. He was quite willing to pardon one for one's transgressions and everready to lengthen the rope that He had given out to His children. After each infidelity, each misdemeanour, Bhola's initial panic slowly, as the seconds ticked away, relaxed into relief – yet God has not said a word! – and then mellowed into a belief that the misdeed had never been judged as wrong because God had been with him all the time – perched on his shoulder, as it were, watching him throughout the process of its commitment, even guiding him here and there, or else however could he have enjoyed it so much?
>
> To be nearly killed is the price that one pays for all the fun that one's been having. After all, it could have been worse. One dutifully thanked God that one was still alive.
>
> (*WL* 298)

Although Bhola did not have a religious upbringing, he was not an absolute philistine. From time to time, he devoted himself to religious reflection in order to fathom the mystery of existence. As an absurd hero, he is the god of his own universe doing and undoing things in his own way. However, after the murder attempt on him, his attitude to God changes radically. Realization dawns on him that life is too valuable to be squandered away in wild diversions with such deadly consequences. Life appears to be worth living, and being alive, a great experience in itself. Usually, the discovery of value is a momentous experience for an absurdist or a nihilist. But the novel does not end with a note of reconciliation between the absurdist and the Hindu tradition and worldview as Bhola does not fully accept a divine scheme or Logos in the universe although in the last four years of his life he has definitely changed. Now Karuna, his daughter, keeps haunting him in his dreams like an angel lending a hand to somebody bogged in the morass of absurdity. Bhola has lost the *raison dêtre* for living, for he has realized that neither of the two extremes of life lived was perfect and flawless.

> Bhola had reached that state of depression – a sort of nirvana – when he could bear nobody in the world a grudge, neither the person who shot him nor the person who extracted his infant's blood for sale, nobody. He had

> returned to the mental condition in which impatience is inconceivable and waiting is an end in itself.
>
> (*WL* 364-5)

He longs for getting reunited with his wife and child. But Kamala does not show any interest in his phone call. He sinks into a state of gloomy dejection after this failure to achieve reconciliation. Once the prince of the land of absurdity, he is now a prisoner, a victim, of the same. His irrational games were now like landmines on his path. The absurd hero, according to Camus, asserts his freedom only to the extent that he can act and live without being conditioned by either culture or convention. But Bhola had slightly overdone his assertion of freedom in pursuing his absurdity and had trespassed into the existential periphery of others. Therefore, his sensitive soul realizes that death was a better option than living. He decides to merge into the ultimate absurdity of human existence, a denouement that baffles human reason as a mystery. He commits suicide as effortlessly and nonchalantly as he had played his sexual games. In fact, when the retribution for the latter overtook him seriously, he had resigned himself to his fast approaching doom.

Thus, *Weight Loss* turns out to be the odyssey of a Nietzschean superman who defies everything including natural death, and a work of art that establishes Chatterjee as a major spokesman of the element of the absurd against the socio-cultural backdrop of India.

Works Cited

Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *Weight Loss* (*WL*). New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.

King, Bruce. *West Indian Literature.* Second edition. London: Macmillan, 1995.

MacLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. UK: Manchester University Press, 2000.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ECOTHEOLOGY AND THE NOTION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN *THE HUNGRY TIDE* AND *SEA OF POPPIES*

RICHA

Theology is a doctrine of faith, the construct of God and revelation. Most institutionalized religions proclaim the authority of human beings in an existing hierarchy that begins with God, with human beings, usually designated as Man, as the prized creation for whose needs and purposes the rest of the creation manifests. Hence, the idea of anthropocentric world sustains, consolidates and perpetuates the domination of man over nature. However, nature is self-sustainable, and it teaches a willing learner how to co-exist. It can be observed that people earlier were scared of certain aspects of nature, such as darkness or some carnivorous animals, and so theology represented them as malevolent. Later on, a benevolent picture of nature was formed that ironically gave an authority to the humans to exploit it for their benefit.

Religion is a manifestation of human authority and religious laws guide the majority of the world population. Nature, in such a theology, is given a place that is best suited to human concerns. A remarkable degradation in the natural health of the surrounding shouts of the human incompetence at law making. If ecology is given an equal space in theology then, probably, an inclusive global world can be created, for Nature is equal to all. Amitav Ghosh in his novels, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies,* has tried to show the emergence and existence of an inclusive world and a multicultural society. But it is not the multiculturalism within the political framework of globalization that claims to unite the world together only by re-assuring authorities and hierarchies. It is not about a society connected by the World Wide Web (*www*) rather a multicultural society of the subalterns connected with a responsibility of togetherness. It is a co-existence of the human and the

non-human. Also noticeable is the idea that such a multicultural society exists mainly within a marginalized community which is close to Nature, or more appropriately, which is integrated with Nature and follows it as its religion. To term it 'Ecotheology' would be appropriate. Ecotheology, in this paper, has been used as a non-doctrinaire term that considers all that is created in the world as sacred in an undifferentiated non-hierarchic way supporting all forms of life and, hence, sustainable in perpetuity. In a broad perspective, it looks at the interrelationship of religion and Nature mainly in the context of environmental concerns. The attempt here is to draw out this concept of ecotheology and the notion of multiculturalism in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*.

In *The Hungry Tide*, people in the tide country follow the myth of Bonbibi: "You would think that in a place like this people would pay close attention to the true wonders of the reality around them. But no, they prefer the imaginary miracles of gods and saints" (*HT* 102). This points out how evident reality needs to be mediated through cultural filters, religion being one of them. Hence, these 'gods and saints' bring their followers closer to Nature and teach them how to survive amid the constant threats of wild life. An amalgamation of Hindu image worship and Islamic "calling out of *azan*, the Muslim call to prayer" (*HT* 103), the myth of Bonbibi emphasizes the co-existence of varied religions and also wildlife and human habitation. It is the mythopoeia of the Sundarbans about Ibrahim, Bonbibi, Shah Jangoli, Dokkhin Rai, Dhona and Dukhey. Ibrahim is a saint, a faqir. Bonbibi and Shah Jangoli are his two children who save the forest. Dokkhin Rai is a demon. Once out of greed, Dhona tries to hand over Dukhey, his nephew, to the demon. Dukhey had a firm belief that Bonbibi will come to his rescue, and that happens. Bonbibi and Shah Jangoli saved him. The victorious deity of the forest decides that "one half of the tide country would remain a wilderness; this part of the forest she left to Dokkhin Rai and his demon hordes. The rest she claimed for herself and under her rule this once-forested domain was soon made safe for human settlement" (*HT* 103).

The tide country in the novel exemplifies a multicultural society where the dispossessed people from various origins live together. There is a "lack of any substantive boundary between cultures" (Watson 01), a construct of modern anthropology. The question that Kathleen Kerr raises is, "How should multiculturalism be conceptualized, and in particular, how should curricula in educational institutions reflect it?" (Kerr 382). Ghosh reflects it in its hybridity that is connected with Nature. In the tide country as well as on the Ibis in *Sea of Poppies*, the subaltern group forms a community that does not allow the demarcation of race, caste or gender to

further fragment the already fragmented world of the dispossessed. The tide country emerges as a place for the dispossessed. They come from varied places and find 'home' at Morichjhapi. When intruded by the so-called 'politically rational' authority, they resist shouting their claim on Morichjhapi: "*Morichjhapi Chharbona*" (*HT* 254).

"The interplay between religion and nations' politics is often one of the most perplexing aspects of national cultures" (Edward, William, Kumaran 288). But when it comes to the deprived and the dispossessed, such interplay hardly matters. Survival is the only question confronted by these people. Ghosh presents a diasporic resettlement and attempts to show an organic image of the subaltern India. Nature is often given a subaltern position and human beings often try to tame her as per their benefit and requirement. But in this novel, it is a place where ecology has flourished in its wilderness, and human beings have restored their 'humanness' under the law of the forest "which was that the rich and the greedy would be punished while the poor and righteous were rewarded" (*HT* 105).

People in the tide country find an empathetic relationship with the tigers too. According to the research of Annu Jalais, as mentioned in her *Forest of Tigers*, the Garjontola islanders "saw their past as one where they had had to find a suitable place, fight for it, and 'make it home'" (Jalais 148). These people believe that they share history with the tigers, the "same history of migration" (Jalais 148) and hence the tigers have developed the human quality of compassion. They justify the point of co-existence believing that "if tigers had so willed, they could have chased away the human migrants who had encroached on their forest, but they had not. This point draws attention to the fact that the islanders also see themselves as compassionate" (Jalais 148). They theologize such a co-existence as an instruction of Bonbibi. The Common Property Resources (CPR) remains out of greater market value and consequently remains unmanaged by the state authority. Whenever plans of management are drawn, they end up with the concept of privatization and preservation of these resources: hence, taking them away from the community management of local people and legalizing the overuse and exploitation of these resources. The harmonious co-existence of people and environment is definitely disturbed and the authoritarian domination denies their livelihood the security that they derive from these resources. The subaltern myth of Bonbibi provides an answer to the question of sustainable development for humans and non-humans. Such an ecotheology does not view the world of man as a colonizing agent. "This is an 'agreement'

between non-humans and humans that permits them both to depend on the forest and yet respect the others' needs" (Jalais 73).

It is noteworthy here that Sir Hamilton's experiment in Morichjhapi does not follow the urban bourgeois notion of multiculturalism; it rather works with a vision of inclusive sustainability. It is not the chaotic assembly of varied identities but a peaceful combination of individuals. It does not abide by the Western rule of ecology "which sees humans as being different from animals" (Mondal 177) rather follows the eastern ecological viewpoint that the people of the tide country have trained themselves in co-existence. Jeffery says:

> … the multinational corporation has no cultural links to the forest on which it depends, representing an industrial urban exploitative approach to nature; whereas the hunter-gatherer and subsistence farmer have holistic cultural forms that give value to the trees and the animals in the forest as well as to the human beings who inhabit the forest or its surroundings.
>
> (Jeffery 3)

Such a co-existence exemplifies the idea of 'environmental justice' "based on the recognition of the intrinsic value of 'nature', on seeing humans as part of, rather than owners of, the biotic community …" (Mayhew 178). On the other hand, the can-be-termed "owners of biotic community" interfere and, under the provision of the Forest Preservation Act, disturb the human habitat resulting in chaos and loss.

The novel*, Sea of Poppies,* also exemplifies the possibility of a multicultural existence. Once again, it has been shown among the subalterns on the Ibis during the time of crisis: "All kinds of men are eager to sign up – Brahmins, Ahirs, Chamars, Telis" (*SP* 205). Before the multicultural journey begins, many doubts in terms of religion, caste and superstition occur to these 'girmitiyas'. Some people saw it in terms of religious sacrifice: "Are we being fattened for the slaughter, like goats before 'Id?" (*SP* 204) Kalua, a dalit, found the issue of caste most relevant, "And *Ját* – what about caste?" (*SP* 205) Deeti was reminded of the superstitions associated in *Sea of Poppies* that shows a world without illusionary national boundaries, the borders of the land being with the destination. She blames Kalua: "How could he conceive that she would go to a place which was, for all she knew, inhabited by demons and pishaches, not to speak of all kinds of unnameable beasts?" (*SP* 205) Ultimately, nature in the form of hunger takes over and, no matter what the destination would be, irrespective of caste, race or gender, these people decide to take up the journey on the Ibis with some hope.

The final section, 'Sea', is wiped away by the flowing active sea. Neel thinks that here "… the confusion was deceptive, for even in this teeming, bustling length of silt and water, there were distinct little communities and neighbourhoods" (*SP* 376).

Irrespective of their caste, position in society, race and gender, they live together as a family, having a shared imagination. Although it is known that as soon as they reach their land of hope, Mareech, they have to play the 'girmitiyas', mere puppets in the hands of their masters, yet the positive aspect of solidarity cannot be overlooked. An instance of dalitization is to be perceived in Deeti's willing acceptance of Kalua as her husband. Her pains are not related to the caste of humans rather she suffers for the sake of a fake honour. She was raped on her wedding night, and, hence, preferred a low caste dalit to the high caste culprits and began a new life as 'Aditi' on the Ibis.

Deeti unconsciously includes a bird like image of the Ibis in her shrine along with the people in it. Ibis, therefore, emerges as a religious emblem of inclusive culture. Many images were included in it. Neel is represented "by a few strokes of this [blue] colour that she would make his likeness" (*SP* 41). Azad Naskar (Jodu) in his disfigurement also figures out in the shrine as, "three gently angled slashes in an oval" (*SP* 62). As a true emblem of multiculturalism, Paullette also appears in Deeti's shrine in her unusual tallness, "her arms looked like the fronds of a coconut palm" (*SP* 126). With her numerous nomenclatures and various identities – Paullette, Putli, Puggly, and Putleshwari – she emerges as a global identity. It can be noticed that superstitious beliefs often firm up the ground of religion and the blind obedience of these beliefs confirms one's membership in that particular religious group. Therefore, even a flowing river can be bifurcated into "The two rivers – the holy Ganga and its karma-negating tributary …" (*SP* 192). But without any fear of losing her caste, she undertakes the journey as a pilgrimage attaching religious value to the Ibis. Paullette is least concerned about the issues of caste and class. It is well evident in her deep attachment with Jodu. When it comes to genuine love and affection, she does not care about the man-made demarcations of religion. She accepts without any hypocrisy: "He is the only family I have in this world" (*SP* 149). She practices a caste free existence and, as her father portrays Paullette, she knows the religion of Nature only. She "… has never worshipped at any alter except that of Nature; the trees have been her Scripture and the Earth her Revelation. She haś not known anything but Love, Equality and Freedom:" (*SP* 137).

Through the inclusion of such a character among the pantheon in Deeti's shrine, ecotheology has been introduced leading to the formation of a multicultural community on the Ibis. It is only on the Ibis, Deeti verifies her unconscious instincts to worship them and consciously accepts the Ibis as "the Mother-Father of her new family, a great wooden *mái-báp*, an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties yet to come: here she was, the *Ibis*" (*SP* 356-357).

The subaltern community on the Ibis can be taken as a microcosmic, 'developed' global world. These people are no authority, but when they are left to themselves even as slaves, they put forward an example of a non-chaotic, peaceful and apolitical multicultural society.

Irrespective of their origin, these people are taught by Paullette to live with love, peace and equality. Deeti subscribes, "On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri. From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings – jaház-bhais and jaház-bahens – to each other. There'll be no differences between us" (*SP* 356).

Perceiving it in a theological light, the deity professes the laws of nature. In both the novels, reality is seen through the cultural filters. There is re-formation of reality in a theological framework. In an endeavour to establish multiculturalism in *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*, the former reintroduces the subaltern myth of Bonbibi whereas the latter includes new faces/gods in the already established theology which leads to an elaborate Deeti's shrine, 'Deetiji ka Smriti Mandir' in its sequel, *River of Smoke.* Ghosh, thus, tries to ecotheologize in these novels. And in doing so, he conceptualizes a multicultural existence. These novels represent theology as an alternative to the contemporary corporate greed of ecological exploitation providing space to both the humans and the non-humans.

Works Cited

Edward, F. Bergman, William H. Renwick and T. Vasantha Kumaran. *Introduction to Geography: People, Places and Environment*. Delhi: Pearson Education, 2008.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide* (*HT*). HarperCollins India, 2007.

—. *Sea of Poppies* (*SP*). New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.

Jalais, Annu. *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics & Environment in the Sunderbans.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2010.

Jeffery, Roger (ed.). *The Social Construction of Indian Forest.* New Delhi: Manohar, 1999.

Kerr, Kathleen. "Race, Nation and Ethnicity". *Literary Theory and Criticism.* (ed.) Patricia Waugh. New Delhi: OUP, 2006.

Meyhew, Susan. *Dictionary of Geography.* New Delhi: OUP, 2006.

Mondal, Anshuman A. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers.* New Delhi: Viva Books, 2010.

Watson, C. W. *Multiculturalism.* New Delhi: Viva Books, 2005.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY (2001-2013)

Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
—. *Between the Assassinations*. New Delhi: Picador, 2008.
—. *Last Man in Tower*. New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 2011.
Agarwal, Shilpa. *Haunting Bombay*. New York: Soho Press, 2009.
Ahmad, Omair. *Encounters*. New Delhi: Tara Press, 2006.
—. *The Storyteller's Tale*. 2008. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
—. *Jimmy, the Terrorst*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
Akbar, M. J. *Blood Brothers: A Family Saga*. New Delhi: Roli Books, 2006.
Bagchi, Amitabha. *Above Average*. HarperCollins India, 2007.
—. *The Householder*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Bagchi, Susmita. *Children of a Better God*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
Bajaj, Karan. *Keep off the Grass*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
Bajaj, Manjul. *Come, Before Evening Falls*. Hachette India, 2009.
Bajwa, Rupa. *The Sari Shop*. W. W. Norton USA, 2004.
—. *Tell Me a Story*. Pan Macmillan India, 2012.
Balasundaram, Pramila. *Sunny's Story*. Delhi: ISPCK. 2005.
Baldwin, Shauna Singh. *The Tiger Claw*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
—. *The Selector of Souls*. Knopf Canada, 2012.
Bama, Faustina. *Vanmam: Vendetta*. 2002. (Tr.) Malini Seshadri. New Delhi: OUP, 2008.
Banerjee, Madhuri. *Losing My Virginity and Other Dumb Ideas*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
Banerjee, Sarnath. *Corridor*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.
—. *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.
—. *The Harappa Files*. HarperCollins India, 2011.
Banker, Ashok. *Prince of Ayodhya*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *Siege of Mithila*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *Demons of Chitrakut*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.
—. *Armies of Hanuman*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
—. *King of Ayodhya*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *Vengeance of Ravana*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
—. *Sons of Sita*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
—. *Blood Red Sari*. www.akbebooks.com.2010, HarperCollins India, 2012.

Barua, Jahnavi. *Rebirth*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
Basu, Kunal. *The Opium Clerk*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001.
—. *The Miniaturist*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *Racists*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *The Japanese Wife*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
—. *The Yellow Emperor's Cure*. Pan Macmillan India, 2011.
Basu, Samit. *Turbulence*. Hachette India, 2010.
—. *Terror on the Titanic*. Scholastic India, 2010.
Basu, Shubham. *Glian, the Son of Nature*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2007.
Bhaduri, Abhijit. *Mediocre but Arrogant*. New Dellhi: Indialog, 2005.
—. *Married but Available*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
Bhagat, Chetan. *five point someone*. Delhi: Rupa, 2004.
—. *one night @ the call center*. Delhi: Rupa, 2005.
—. *the 3 mistakes of my life*. Delhi: Rupa, 2008.
—. *2 States*. Delhi: Rupa, 2009.
—. *Revolution 2020*. Delhi: Rupa, 2011.
Bhatia, Gautam. *Lie: A Traditional Tale of Modern India*. Chennai: Westland Books, 2010.
Bhattacharya, Madhumita. *The Masala Murder*. Pan Macmillan, 2012.
Bhattacharya, Rahul. *The Sly Company of People Who Care*. NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011.
Bhattacharya, Soumya. *If I Could Tell You*. Tranquebar Press, 2010.
Bond, Ruskin. *Delhi is not Far.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
—. *The Sensualist* (1996). New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
Bose, Anirban. *Bombay Rains, Bombay Girls*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
Chakraborti, Rajorshi. *Or the Day Seizes You*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *Derangements*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
—. *Balloonists*. Tranquebar Press, 2010.
—. *Mumbai Rollercoaster*. Hachette India, 2011.
Chakravarti, Sudeep. *Tin Fish*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
Chandra, Vikram. *Sacred Games*. HarperCollins India, 2007.
Chandrashekhar, R. *The Goat, the Sofa & Mr Swami*. Hachette India, 2010.
Chatterjee, Upamanyu. *Weight Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *Way to Go*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
Chaudhuri, Amit. *The Immortals*. New Delhi: Picador, 2009.
Chowdhury, Siddharth. *Patna Roughcut*. New Delhi: Picador, 2005.
—. *Day Scholar*. New Delhi: Picador, 2010.
Dai, Mamang. *The Legends of Pensam*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *Stupid Cupid.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
Dalal, Nergis. *Skin Deep*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.

Daruwalla, Keki N. *For Pepper and Christ*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
Das, Soma. *Sumthing of a Mocktale*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2007.
Davidar, David. *The House of Blue Mangoes*. 2002. HarperCollins India, 2003.
—. *The Solitude of Emperors.* New Delhi: Penguin/Vinking, 2007.
—. *Ithaca*. Torronto: McCllelland & Stewart, 2011.
Dawesar, Abha. *Babyji*. New York: Anchor Books, 2005.
—. *That Summer in Paris*. New York: Anchor Books, 2007.
—. *Family Values*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
De, Shobha. *S's Secret* (*Sandhya's Secret*). Popular Prakashan, 2009.
Deb, Siddhartha. *The Point of Return*. 2002. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
—. *Surface*. London: Picador, 2005.
—. *An Outline of the Republic*. Pan Macmillan, 2005.
Desai, Anita. *The Zigzag Way*. Boston, N Y: Houghton Miffin Co., 2004.
—. *The Artist of Disappearance*. Great Britain: Chatto & Windus, 2011.
Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
Desai, Kishwar. *Witness the Night.* HarperCollins India, 2010.
—. *Origins of Love.* NY: Simon & Schuster, 2012.
—. *The Sea of Innocence*. NY: Simon & Schuster, 2013
Desari, Venkat Vishwanath. *Pharaoh and the King*. UK: AuthorHouse, 2011.
Deshpande, Shashi. *Moving On*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.
—. *In the Country of Deceit*. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2008.
—. *Ships That Pass*. Delhi: Rupa, 2012.
Deva, Mukul. *The Dust Will Never Settle*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Devidayal, Namita. *The Music Room*. 2007. New Delhi: Random House, 2009.
—. *Aftertaste*. New Delhi: Random House, 2010.
Dhankher, Ismita Tandon. *Love on the Rocks*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
Dhar, Mainak. *Funda of Mixology*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2008.
—. *Zombiestan*. UK: Duckbill, 2012.
Dhar, Payal. *A Shadow in Eternity*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *The Key of Chaos*. New Delhi: Young Zubaan, 2007.
—. *The Timeless Land*. New Delhi: Young Zubaan, 2009.
Dhalla, Ghalib Shiraz. *Ode to Lata*. Really Great Books, 2002.
—. *The Exiles*. HarperCollins India, 2011. (In US as *The Two Krishnas*. NY: Magnus Books, 2011.)
Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Neela: Victory Song*. American Girl Publishing, 2002.
—. *The Vine of Desire*. Anchor Books, 2002.

—. *Queen of Dreams*. 2004. Wheeler Publishing, 2005.
—. *The Palace of Illusions*. New Delhi: Picador, 2008.
—. *Shadowland*. Roaring Brook Press, 2009.
—. *One Amazing Thing*. Voice/Hyperion Books, 2010.
Doshi, Tishani. *The Pleasure Seekers*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
Dutta, Durjoy. *She Broke Up I Didn't!*. Grapevine India, 2011.
—. and Nikita Singh. *Someone Like You.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2012.
Garg, Sachin. *A Sunny Shady Life*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2010.
Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. HarperCollins India, 2005.
—. *Sea of Poppies.* New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2008.
—. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
Ghosh, Avijit. *Bandicoots in the Moonlight*. Penguin Books, 2008.
Ghosh, Bhaskar. *A Teller of Tales*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012.
Gill, Aruna. *The Indus Intercept*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Gokhale, Namita. *Priya in Incredible Indyaa*. Viking, 2011.
Gowda, Shilpi Somaya. *Secret Daughter*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010.
Gunasekara, Romesh. *The Prisoner of Paradise*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.
Gupta, Kanishka. *History of Hate*. Delhi: Rupa, 2010.
Gupta, Sunetra. *So Good in Black*. 2009. Clockroot Books, 2011.
Hariharan, Githa. *In Times of Siege.* New Delhi: Viking, 2003.
—. *The Winning Tea*. Delhi: Rupa, 2004.
—. *Fugitive Histories*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
Hasan, Daisy. *The To-Let House*. New Delhi: Tara Books, 2010.
Hasan, Anjum. *Lunatic in My Head*. New Delhi: Penguin-Zubaan, 2007.
—. *Neti, Neti*. New Delhi: India Ink-Roli, 2009.
Hassan, Taj. *The Inexplicable Unhappiness of Ramu Hajjam*. Hachette India, 2012.
Irani, Anosh. *The Cripple and the Talimans*. Raincoat Books, 2004.
—. *The Song of Kohunsha*. Anchor Books Canada, 2006.
—. *Dohanu Road*. Doubleday Canada, 2010.
Jha, Raj Kamal. *The Blue Bedspread*. Picador India/ Houghton Miffin, 2001.
—. *If You Are Afraid of Heights*. Picador, 2003.
—. *Fireproof.* New Delhi: Picador, 2007.
Jolly, Harshdeep. *Anything You Desire*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2007.
Joseph, Anjali. *Saraswati Park*. Fourth Estate GB, 2010.
—. *Another Country*. Fourth Estate GB, 2012.
Joseph, Manu. *Serious Men*. HarperCollins Canada, 2010.
—. *The Illicit Happiness of Other People.* HarperCollins India, 2012.

Kakar, Sudhir. *The Seeker*. Massachussetts, Shambhala, 2007. Random House Inc. 2007.
Kallay, Chitra. *The Flat on Malabar Hill*. Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009.
Kanekar, Amita. *A Spoke in the Wheel*. HarperCollins India, 2005.
Kapur, Manju. *A Married Woman*. New Delhi: IndiaInk, 2003.
—. *Home.* New Delhi: Random House, 2006.
—. *The Immigrant*. New Delhi: Random House, 2008.
—. *Custody*. London: Faber & Faber, 2011.
Kaushal, Swati. *A Girl Like Me*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.
—. *A Piece of Cake*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
—. *Drop Dead: A Niki Marwah Mystery*. Hachette India, 2012.
Khair, Tabish. *The Bus Stopped*. London: Picador, 2004.
—. *Filming: A Love Story*. London: Picador, 2007.
—. *The Thing about Thugs*, 2009. HarperCollins India, 2010.
—. *How to Fight Islamist Terror from the Missionary Position*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Kire (Iralu), Easterine. *A Naga Village Remembered.* Kohima: URA Academy, 2003.
—. *A Terrible Matriarchy*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2007.
—. *Mari*. HarperCollins India, 2010.
—. *Bitter Wormwood*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2012.
Koshy, Mridula. *Not Only the Things that Have Happened*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Krishnamurthy, Meera Godbole. *Balancing Act*. New Delhi: Zubaan/Penguin, 2009.
Kumar, Anu. *It Takes a Murder*. Hachette India, 2012.
Kumar, Shiv K. *Two Mirrors at the Ashram*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *The Mahabharata*. HarperCollins India, 2011.
Kunzru, Hari. *The Impressionist*. London: Penguin, 2003.
—. *Transmission*. London: Penguin, 2005.
—. *My Revolutions*. London: Penguin, 2007.
—. *Gods Without Men* London: Penguin, 2011.
Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. 2003. HarperCollins India, 2011.
Lalwani, Nikita. *Gifted*. London: Viking, 2007.
—. *The Village.* New Delhi: Penguin, 2012.
Madhavan, Meenakshi Reddy. *You Are Here*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.
—. *Confessions of a Listmaniac*. New Delhi: Scholastic, 2010.
Mandanna, Sarita. *Tiger Hills*. Penguin Canada, 2011.
Marwah, Anuradha. *Dirty Picture*. New Delhi: Indialog, 2007.
Mehrotra, Palash Krishna. *Eunuch Park*. Penguin Books, 2010.
Mehta, Anupa. *The Waiting Room*. Penguin Books, 2007.

Mehta, Rahul. *Quarantine*. HarperCollins India. 2011.
Mehta, Suketu. *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*. 2004. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012.
Merchant, Ameen. *The Silent Raga*. 2007. HarperCollins India, 2008.
Misra, Jaishree. *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001.
—. *Afterwards*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.
—. *Rani*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.
—. *Secrets and Lies*. HarperCollins India, 2009.
—. *Secrets and Sins*. HarperCollins India, 2010.
—. *A Scandalous Secret*. HarperCollins India, 2011.
Mistry, Cyrus. *The Radiance of Ashes*, Picador, 2006.
—. *Chronicle of a Corpse Bearer,* New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2012.
Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance.* New Delhi: Penguin/Faber and Faber, 2003.
—. *The Scream*. McClelland & Stewart, 2008.
Mohan, Peggy. *The Youngest Suspect*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Mukherjee, Neel. *Past Continuous*. New Delhi: Picador, 2008. (As *A Life Apart*. UK: Constable and Robinson, 2008.)
Murari, Timeri N. *The Taliban Cricket Club*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2012.
Nagarkar, Kiran. *God's Little Soldier*. HarperCollins India, 2006.
—. *The Extras*. Fourth Estate/HarperCollins India, 2012.
Nagarkar, Sudeep. *Few Things Left Unsaid*. New Delhi: Random House, 2011.
—. *That's the Way We Met*. New Delhi: Random House, 2012.
Naidu, Vayu. *Sita's Ascent*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012.
Naikar, Basavaraj. *Light in the House*. New Delhi: Authors Press, 2009.
—. *The Queen of Kittur*. Bangalore: Kanva, 2012.
Naipaul, V. S. *Half a Life*, New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 2001.
—. *Magic Seeds*. 2004. Pan Macmillan, 2012.
Nair, Anita. *Ladies Coupe*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001.
—. *Mistress*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
—. *Lessons in Forgetting*. HarperCollins India, 2010.
Nambisan, Kaveri. *On Wings of Butterflies*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2002.
—. *The Truth (Almost) about Bharat*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2002.
—. *The Hills of Angheri*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005.
—. *The Story That Must Not Be Told*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.
Natarajan, Mahesh. *Pink Sheep*. New Delhi: Gyan Books, 2010.
Natarajan, Srividya. *No Onions, Nor Garlic*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.

—. *A Gardener in the Wasteland*. Navayana Publications, 2011.
Nayar, Arvind. *Operation Karakoram*. Delhi: Rupa, 2005.
Pande, Mrinal. *My Own Witness*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001.
Patel, Mayur. *Vivek and I*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
Patil, Amruta. *Kari*. HarperCollins India, 2008.
Paul, Sharad. *Cool Cut*. New Delhi: Picador, 2007. (Pan Macmillan UK, 2007.)
—. *To Kill a Snow Dragonfly*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Pestonji, Meher. *Parvez*. HarperCollins India, 2002.
—. *Sadak Chhap*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005
Phukan, Mitra. *The Collector's Wife*. New Delhi: Penguin/Zubaan, 2005.
—. *A Monsoon of Music*. New Delhi: Penguin/Zubaan, 2011.
Pinto, Jerry. *Em and the Big Hoom*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2012.
Puri, Neel Kamal. *Remember to Forget*. Delhi: Rupa, 2012.
Puri, Vish. *The Case of the Missing Servant*. UK: Random House, 2010.
Raheja, Tushar. *Anything for You, Ma'am*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2006.
Rai, Dipika. *Someone Else's Garden*. HarperCollins, 2011.
Rao, K. V. Arjun. *Third Best*. Hachette India, 2011.
Rajashree. *Trust Me*. Delhi: Rupa, 2006.
Ramchandran, Malathi. *The Wheel Turned*. Delhi: Pushtak Mahal, 2010.
Rao, R. Raj. *The Boyfriend*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *Hotel Room 131*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
Roy, Nilanjana. *The Wildings*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2012.
Rushdie, Salman. *Shalimar the Clown.* London: Jonathan Cape, 2005.
—. *The Enchantress of Florence*. Randome House/Vintage Books, 2008.
Salim, Anees. *The Vicks Mango Tree*. HarpaerCollins India, 2012.
Sanga, Jaina. *Silk Fish Opium*. Tranquebar, Westland, 2012.
Sanghi, Ashwin. *The Rozabal Line*. 2007. Westland India, 2008.
—. *Chanakya's Chant*. Westland India, 2010.
—. *The Krishna Key*. Westland India, 2012.
Sarna, Navtej. *We Weren't Lovers Like That*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *The Exile*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.
Sarna, Satyajit. *The Angel's Share*. HarperCollins India, 2012.
Sealy, Irwin Allan. *The Brainfever Bird*. London: Picador, 2003.
—. *Red: An Alphabet*. London: Picador, 2006.
Sharma, Abhisar. *The Edge of the Machete*. New Delhi: Westland, 2012.
Sharma, Lakshmi Raj. *The Tailor's Needle*. London: Picnic, 2009.
Sharma, Ritesh and Neeraj Pahlajani. *Joker in the Pack*. Orient Paperbacks, 2007.
Shekhar, Arjun. *A Flawed God*. Hachette India, 2011.

Shenoy, Preeti. *Life Is What You Make It.* New Delhi: Srishti, 2011.
—. *Tea For Two and a Piece of Cake*. New Delhi: Random House, 2012.
Sikdar, Sunanda. *A Life Long Ago*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2012.
Singh, Jaspreet. *Chef*. 2008. London: Bloomsbury, 2011.
Singh, Khushwant. *Burial at Sea*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.
—. *The Sunset Club*. New Delhi: Viking, 2009.
Singh, Krishan Pratap. *Young Turks*. Hachette India, 2010.
—. *Delhi Durbar*. Hachette India, 2010.
Singh, Preeti. *Flirting with Fate*. Mahaveer Publishers, 2012.
Singh, Ravinder. *I Too Had A Love Story*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2009.
—. *Can Love Happen Twice?* New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
Sinha, Indra. *The Death of Mr Love*. HarperCollins, 2004.
—. *Animal's People*. Simon & Schuster, 2009.
Sinha, Tuhin A. *Of Love and Politics*. Hachette India, 2010.
Sircar, Kausik. *Three Makes a Crowd*. New Delhi: Srishti, 2007.
Sivakami, P. *The Grip of Change*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006.
Srilata, K. *Table for Four*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.
Subramanian, Nirupama. *Keep the Change.* HarperCollins India, 2010.
—. *Intermission.* HarperCollins India, 2012.
Subramanian, Ravi. *If God Was the Banker*. Delhi: Rupa, 2007.
Sundaresan, Indu. *The Twentieth Wife*. Washington Square Press, 2003.
—. *The Feast of Roses*. Washington Square Press, 2004.
—. *The Splendor of Silence*. Atria Books, 2006.
—. *The Shadow Princess*. Atria Books, 2010.
Surendran, C. P. *An Iron Harvest*. New Delhi: IndiaInk/Roli, 2006.
—. *Lost and Found*. HarperCollins India, 2010.
Suresh, Revathi. *Jobless, Clueless, Reckless*. UK: Duckbill, 2013.
Suri, Manil. *The Death of Vishnu*. USA: W W Norton, 2001.
—. *The Age of Shiva*. USA: W W Norton, 2008.
Swaminathan, Kalpana. *Ambrosia for Afters*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *Bougainvillea House*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
—. *The Page 3 Murders*. New Delhi: IndiaInk, 2006.
—. *The Gardener's Song*. New Delhi: IndiaInk, 2007.
—. *Venus Crossing*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
—. *The Monochrome Madonna*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
—. *The Secret Gardener*. UK: Penguin, 2013.
Swarup, Vikas. *Q & A / Slumdog Millionaire.* NY: Simon & Schuster, 2005.
—. *Six Suspects*. New Delhi: Random House, 2008.
—. *The Accidental Apprentice*. Simon & Schuster India, 2013.
Tejpal, Tarun. *The Alchemy of Desire*. New Delhi: Picador, 2006.

—. *The Story of My Assassins*. HarperCollins India, 2009.
—. *The Valley of Masks*. New Delhi: Fourth Estate, 2011.
Tharoor, Shashi. *Riot*. New York: Arcade, 2001.
Thayil, Jeet. *Narcopolis*. London: Faber & Faber, 2012.
Thomas, David Barun Kumar**.** *Rear Entrance*. Hachette India, 2010.
Tripathi, Amish. *The Immortals of Meluha*. Westland India, 2010.
—. *The Secret of the Nagas*. Westland India, 2011.
Umrigar, Thrity. *Bombay Times*. New Delhi: Picador, 2001.
—. *The Space Between Us*. William Morrow, 2006.
—. *If Today Be Sweet*. 2007. HaperCollins, 2008.
—. *The Weight of Heaven*. 2009. HarperCollins, 2010.
—. *The World We Found*. HarperCollins, 2012.
Usha, K. R. *The Chosen*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2003.
—. *A Girl and a River*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.
—. *Monkey-man*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2010.
Vachani, Nilita. *Homespun*. Penguin Books, 2005.
Vaid, Sunil. *Mortal Cure*. New Delhi: Har Anand, 2008.
Vaidehi. *Vasudeva's Family*. New Delhi: OUP, 2012.
Valmiki, Om Prakash. *Joothan.* Kolkata: Samya, 2003.
Vakil, Ardashir. *One Day*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2009.
Vatsan, Sree. *Countryside Album*. Delhi: Sanbun, 2007.
Vishwanathan, Padma. *The Toss of a Lemon*. Random House Canada, 2008.
Warrier, Shashi. *The Homecoming*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.
Wazid, Andaleeb. *Kite Strings*. Cedar Books, 2010.
—. *Blinkers Off*. Delhi: Rupa, 2001.

CONTRIBUTORS

Prabhat K. Singh, Professor, Department of English and Other Foreign Languages, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi (UP)

Gour Kishore Das, Retired Professor and Head, Department of English, Delhi University, Delhi and Former Vice-Chancellor, Utkal University, Bhubaneshwar (Orissa)

Mohan Jha, Retired Professor and Head, Department of English, B. R. A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur (Bihar)

Shanker A. Dutt, Professor, Department of English, Patna University, Patna (Bihar)

Tabish Khair, Associate Professor, Department of English, Aarhas University, Denmark

Murari Prasad, Associate Professor and Head, Department of English, D. S. College, Katihar (Bihar)

Muniba Sami, Associate Professor, Department of English, Patna University, Patna (Bihar)

Banibrata Mahanta, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of English, B. H. U., Varanasi (UP)

Rajesh Babu Sharma, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of English, Lucknow University, Lucknow (UP)

Suparna Chakravarty, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Heritage Institute of Technology, Kolkata (WB)

Namrata Rathore Mahanta, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of English, Mahila Mahavidyalaya, B. H. U., Varanasi (UP)

Nalini Shyam Kamil, Assistant Professor, Department of English, M. G. Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi (UP)

Rajendra Kumar, Lecturer, Department of English, A. V. I. College, Bihara Bazar, Basti (UP)

Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam, JRF, Department of English, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam (AP)

Anurag Mohanty, Research Scholar, Department of English, B. H. U., Varanasi (UP)

Richa, Research Scholar, Department of English, B. H. U., Varanasi (UP)