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Postmemory and Identity Formation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

Israk Zahan Papia

Saleem Sinai—the narrator of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*—is born at the exact moment of India's independence on 15 August 1947. By virtue of being born at that precise moment, he becomes one of the “midnight's children,” bestowed with a magical power that allows him to penetrate people's minds, read their thoughts and share their memories—a gift he comes upon while going through a punishment given by his mother. Contrary to his expectations, the gift is appreciated by no one in his family; rather, its revelation brings his father's wrath upon him for blasphemy as Saleem has proclaimed to having prophetic power. Forced to keep this discovery strictly to himself, he finds out that the bits and pieces of memories and thoughts he happens to know have had a powerful and lasting impact on his psyche. “An excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours” has been “jostling and shoving” inside him (4). “I am a swallower of lives,” he says, “to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well” (4).

All the bits of lives he swallows are accumulated partly by living close to these people, some come with his magical power, and some others are derived from sheer snooping. Saleem inherits his predecessors' memories just as people inherit property, which shapes his identity to a large extent. Marianne Hirsch has termed these inherited and second generation memories as “postmemories.” According to Hirsch, “[P]ostmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (103). Postmemories can be transmitted to the

second generation in myriad ways—from photographs to private or collective reminiscences, behavioral patterns (usually disturbed ones) and personal agonies, such as the prolonged depression of the survivors. Descendants of survivors come across these second-hand memories as they grow up in a particular family, community or society. As a result of this, postmemory—much like their own memories—influences their lives so profoundly as to be constitutive of their consciousness, psychic pattern and identity. The “post” prefix in the term indicates more than merely a temporal belatedness or spatial distance; instead, like the “post” in “post structuralism,” “postmodernism” or “post colonialism,” it suggests the critical distance regarding inter- and trans-generational transmission of memory and its relationship with the “resonant after effects of trauma” (Hirsch 106). Eugene L. Arva says in this regard, “Traumatization by witnessing does not necessarily require one’s physical presence at, or direct exposure to, an extreme event, spatially or temporally; what matters is the feeling incurred by experiencing the event in one way or another: through oral accounts, written narratives, or audiovisual media,” and, therefore, he claims that “vicarious traumatization is not always solely the result of reading a trauma narrative but also—and more important from a literary-artistic perspective—the cause for writing one” (2-3). In this account, postmemory has a huge significance as far as the creative process of the second generation artists is concerned. As a second generation author writing on the violent history of Indian subcontinent, Rushdie himself, like his narrator, owes largely to postmemory for his historical awareness.

To write about events which are marked by extreme anxiety, fear and violence or to articulate the inarticulable, a certain type of imagination is required. This is reflected in the narration of traumatic events in Rushdie’s novel. The

author has made use of magical realistic narrative, avoiding any direct description of violent events. His oblique treatment of events, one that departs from traditional realism, evidences the postmemorial dimension of his novel. To quote Arva, “Because of the shocking impact on psyche, a limit experience cannot usually be assimilated and sorted as narrative memory by consciousness, remaining confined to its limits as a latent traumatic memory” (4). The narrative, therefore, gets inflicted with unreliability. The narrator of *Midnight’s Children* repeatedly suspects that his oral and written accounts will be doubted. Despite being an extremely authoritative narrator, Saleem gets several historical facts wrong in his narration. As an illustration, Mahatma Gandhi dies on a wrong date in the novel. However, Saleem is absolutely unapologetic about this historical mistake and insists that in *his* history, Gandhiji will continue to die on a wrong date. This underlines the unreliability of an individual’s perception of history. In Susan Kaiser’s account of her visit to Buenos Aires, she describes how the memories of terror rushed in with old photos, letters, notebooks and toys from her childhood while she was cleaning her family’s old residence: “My memories keep coming back. It is time to close that place. I am editing my past, carefully deciding what stays and what goes”(2). Therefore, truth, in the case of a traumatic event, is highly subjective: “Memory’s truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else’s version more than his own” (Rushdie 292). The concept of memory as subjective and impressionistic is clearly consistent with the narrative unreliability of Rushdie’s novel. Also, the way Kaiser believes an individual’s memory edits history is akin to Rushdie’s signature style of “chutnification,” a magical realistic stylistic technique that

exaggerates some elements of history while subverting others.

Transmission of memories forms a sort of living connection between generations. As can be seen in *Midnight's Children*, without being biologically connected to his grandfather Adam Aziz, Saleem inherits his most exclusive physical and characteristic features—his nose, his skepticism towards God and vulnerability towards women. Women—Mary Pereira, Evie Burns, Jamila Singer, Parvati-the-witch and Padma—have always been the ones to change his life. Women have “fixed” him, he says, but “perhaps they were never central—perhaps the place which they should have filled, the hole in the centre of me which was my inheritance from my grandfather Adam Aziz, was occupied for too long by my voices” (266). But, perhaps the most curious inheritance of all is his grandfather’s nose. To Adam Aziz it gives intuitive power (any discomfort in his nose portends an imminent calamity), and to Saleem it has given the most powerful magic of midnight’s children—the power of elaborate telepathy. Not from his grandfather alone, Saleem inherits personality traits from a multitude of people. Nadir Khan’s confused thinking and an inability to act have leaked into him, making him a helpless and passive sufferer of tragedies. Hit by a silver spittoon—the wedding gift of Nadir Khan and Amina—, he suffers a tragic loss of memory during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan; his slate of memory is wiped clean, so to speak. The spittoon acts as the only connection between pre- and post-65 lives of Saleem. It is the only physical object he clings to and would not be separated from in any situation. From Mian Abdullah, he leaks the disease of optimism into him (with which Adam Aziz was infected in his time, again establishing a connection with his ancestors). Despite the repeated warnings of Soumitra the time-traveler, and Shiva’s stubborn pull towards the darker side of reality, Saleem sticks to his pursuit of meaning and

purpose with the Midnight's Children Conference (MCC)—an association he founds with the gifted children born between the midnight and morning of 15 August 1947. Infected by the “optimism of youth,” (317) which is the most pernicious form of the same disease that infected his grandfather, he refuses to see the darker side of things until the MCC is annihilated and their purpose destroyed before it is found.

Although all the memories that Saleem swallows are not intergenerational in nature (some are contemporary, even simultaneous), *functionally* they are similar to post memory. He may not be physically present at the moment but assimilates other people's experiences all the same. What is more, the memories transmitted from others have an underside to them as far as identity construction is concerned. Saleem's post memories are often concurrent with shame, guilt, a sense of helpless responsibility and a desire to fix things. Since the time he is a child, Saleem's father's high expectations put a heavy burden on him, which most likely is the reason for his constant search for meaning and purpose. Parental expectations, epitomized in Mary Pereira's rather innocent song “Anything you want to be...” (173), intensifies Saleem's sense of failure when his pursuit for purpose leads nowhere, taking a heavy toll on his identity formation. The great exploits his father and nanny envision for him seem realizable once he chances upon his telepathic gift for the first time. That proves, however, sheer naivety on his part. His blasphemous announcement of hearing voices is chastised heavily, and he is bound to conceal his power like a secret sin afterwards with grave implications to his personality development. It causes an enormous amount of confusion in his head: so many voices, so much information and yet an obligation to keep all this a secret. It ruins all the childhood pleasures stemming from surprises, such as the trip to the Aarey Milk colony which his parents try to keep

secret from him, the treasure hunt or the unwrapping of birthday presents. The thoughts, sights and information his power brings to him do not end here, nor do they remain innocent. This catapults him into a premature adulthood and disturbs the process of gradual formation of identity. Peeking into his father's head, for example, he finds him undressing his secretary Alice or Fernanda in his imagination. Before he gets time to recover from the shock of his very own father having such thoughts, he has to lie (with the scary prospect of getting caught) when his amused father inquires about his befuddled look. In his mother's thoughts, he finds a forbidden name—Nadir. Even in sleep, he cannot avoid seeing what he has seen in his grandfather's dream: a crumbling old man in the center of whom there is an irreparable hole. "I tell you," he says, "when a boy gets inside grown up thoughts they can really mess him up completely" (236). This may have been implied by Eva Hoffman when she says that within close proximity, like the familial space, memories emanate "a chaos of emotion" (9).

Saleem's identity is characterized by a chaos of other people's experiences, memories and emotions on the one hand, and his growth is influenced by an urge for a meaningful translation of his and other midnight's children's talents into action on the other. As discussed before, he is irremediably infected with optimism disease, which has instilled in him a sense of responsibility for his country. When he asks for suggestions from the other midnight's children, they come up with all sorts of ideas, ranging from those with altruistic to selfish intents, but Saleem becomes somewhat paralyzed with indecision. At a much mature age comes his confession, "[A] I though we found it very easy to be brilliant, we were always confused about being good" (277). He blames himself for not being heroic, yet takes upon himself the burden of teaching his perfidious mother a lesson. Also, he takes the trouble of cutting the newspaper

and pasting it in a note to send it to Commander Sabarmati, which eventually leads to the most popular crime of India of that time: the murder of Lila Sabarmati and Homi Catrack. When he mulls in retrospect over what he and other midnight's children have done with their talents, he is quite harsh in self-judgment:

Despite the many vital uses to which his abilities could have been put by his impoverished, underdeveloped country, he chose to conceal his talents, frittering them away on inconsequential voyeurism and petty cheating. This behaviour—not, I confess, the behaviour of a hero—was the direct result of a confusion in his mind, which invariably muddled up morality—the desire to do what is right—and popularity—the rather more dubious desire to do what is approved of. Fearing parental ostracism, he suppressed the news of his transformation; seeking parental congratulations, he abused his talents at school. This flaw in his character can partially be excused on the grounds of his tender years; but only partially. Confused thinking was to bedevil much of his career. (238)

Fragmentation of identity is one of the major consequences of the traumatic transmission of memory. Although post memory functions like an individual's memory in its own right, it is not the same as memory; rather, post memory is made up of the tissues of other people's experiences. However, it can also colonize and overshadow one's own memories, thereby having an extremely negative impact on an individual's construction of identity. Rushdie illustrates this with Saleem's physical fragmentation at the metaphorical level. By the age of thirty one, Saleem believes that cracks, holes and fractures start appearing in his body. Earlier, he inherits a hole from his grandfather, loses a big chunk of hair where hair would

never grow again and a joint of his finger, his sinuses are operated upon, that results in the loss of his magical power and, finally, he is castrated. He repeatedly asserts that he is disintegrating into 630 million tiny particles, which is the same number as the inhabitants of India when the novel ends in 1978.

Bodily mutilation and fragmentation of Saleem Sinai is, in fact, the metaphorical fragmentation of his own self and that of his country. His fragmentation starts earlier, even long before his birth, with a hole in the center of his grandfather's body, one that Saleem later inherits. Other than that inherited hole, Saleem's bodily mutilation begins in his Geography class. His teacher Emil Zagallo punishes him, pulling his hair, comparing his face with the map of the Indian subcontinent and saying mockingly, "These stains... are Pakistan! Thees birthmark on the right ear is the East Wing, and thees horrible stained left cheek, the West! Remember, stupid boys: Pakistanees a stain on the face of India" (321). Saleem loses a big chunk of hair to Emil Zagallo, an event shortly followed by another violent incident of losing one joint of his finger in a fight with a couple of school boys. The latter mutilation reveals both his biological identity and, eventually, Mary Pereira's crime (referring at the same time to the secessionist movements in Kashmir and the east wing of Pakistan). The fact that Saleem's blood group does not match either of his parents proves that he is not their biological child, which casts doubts on his identity for the very first time. Later on, Mary Pereira confirms these doubts and admits to swapping babies at the midnight of their birth as a private revolutionary act. Though Saleem suffers multiple bodily injuries that lead ultimately to his identity crisis from an early age, the most decisive assault on his identity takes place in 1965 during the war between India and Pakistan when he is thrown to the ground by the blast on his way home and hit in the head by the silver spittoon. This wipes out his memory as well as his

identity altogether, and he is “stripped of past present memory time shame and love” (477).

As the aromas of different food ingredient leak into one-another, so do people and their memories—personal and socio-political. In the discussion above, Saleem’s postmemories—derived through his magical gift—have been demonstrated to have a profound impact on his identity formation. His power of telepathy, which is his most potent source of experiencing other people’s lives, has more negative effects than positive ones in his personality development. Not only does post memory cause enormous confusion in his head, ruining his childhood with adult thoughts and emotions, it also puts the burden of pursuing meaning and purpose on Saleem. On top of that, his own memory gets colonized by other people’s memories, as a consequence of which fractures and fissures appear in his body, illustrating a metaphorical fragmentation of self and identity. “Handcuffed” to his country from the very moment of his birth (3), Saleem’s life with its many vicissitudes allegorizes the ups and downs in the history of India. *Midnight’s Children*, therefore, explores a long stretch of subcontinental history through the complex dynamic of an individual’s memory.

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Narrative Indirection and Representational Crisis in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*

Khan Touseef Osman

A detailed and “faithful” description of violence in fiction or any other medium often runs the risk of becoming a voyeuristic spectacle, a tendency about which the anthropologist Valentine Daniel comments, “Accounts of violence . . . are vulnerable to taking on a prurient form” (4). It is of crucial significance, therefore, to discover the means by which the description of violence arouses empathy rather than interest. The challenge for an oral historian or a fiction writer consists in the mode of representation that may unwittingly slip into pornographic depiction of traumatic events. However, there is a basic difference between an oral testimony of trauma and its fictional rendition. Bearing witness to atrocity involves transformation of the mnemonic fracture of trauma into narrative memory and its complex narrativization in language, a medium inadequate for conveying the horror of overwhelming limit experiences. Bearing witness, therefore, goes through at least two levels of distortion: firstly, the gap that trauma leaves in memory needs to be filled in with a surrogate conception of the event; and secondly, when the surrogate invention is expressed in language, it being an elaborate social system of codes as a communicative medium, the traumatic event is translated and codified in terms of the social discourse. Therefore, oral narratives of trauma are always-already tainted with some degree of distortion. This poses a crucial challenge to attempts of legal resolution of atrocities or efforts of documentation of trauma in the form of oral histories. Recent enthusiasm in archiving traumatic histories takes these factors into account, so that users of the archives can be made aware of their limitations.

Literary representations of trauma, especially in fictions, have been considered rather successful in depicting, interpreting and analyzing limit experiences than official or subaltern historiography. Fiction bears witness to partition trauma in that the medium has the resources to portray real characters in real situations and the way a massive socio-political upheaval affects the society as well as individuals living within it. Unlike any other linguistic exercise, literature, especially fiction, is able to accommodate mnemonic, cognitive and linguistic breakdowns. This often enables fiction to represent events and their mnemonic and linguistic expressions as fragmentary. The fractures fiction can contain parallels the fractures in the traumatized psyche, thereby communicating a sense of how it is to encounter a bewilderingly violent event.

Again, unlike journalistic writings or academic histories, the individual does not get reduced to a tiny part of the statistical data about the murdered or the dislocated in fiction. Fictional representation, therefore, allows to display the human dimension of massive traumatic events without running the risk of presenting a faceless mass. The referentiality of fiction to the real event is obviously indirect because, even though fiction might draw on real events, it does not have the obligation to correspond to the objective truth. It is referential to the extent that it can produce a reality that might well be the reality of the event being represented.

There is, as discussed above, a risk in the graphic description of horror since such a description often ends up making the pain into a consumable product. Much writing on the Partition, particularly in regional languages of India and Pakistan, represented the enormous human tragedy as a spectacle. This pornographic tendency is especially noticeable in works claiming to be realistic. Realistic fiction,

too, sometimes exploits the indirect mode of representation as does Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. This novel is particularly unique in the sense that in the midst of the stunning silence by creative artists about the large-scale atrocity of the Partition, Singh offers an oblique treatment of violence in the novel nine years after the event. This was by no means an easy task considering the closeness of the Partition in time with the writing of his novel. There was every possibility of Singh writing fiction daubed with blood on every page, which, fortunately, is not the case.

Since the present article makes use of the narrative practice of realism, it is imperative to explore this concept before moving on to the textual analysis of *Train to Pakistan*. At the crux of realism, there is the representational outlook that the external world can be *replicated* in language or any other artistic medium in a mimetic manner. Mostly a nineteenth century phenomenon, realistic literary and artistic works rely on minute detailing of characters, objects and events, preferably from the perspective of an omniscient narrator so as to open a window to the *real* world with a view to analyzing the world as it is or was. Realism has had significant formal and thematic consequences for fiction; as Bran Nicol succinctly puts it with dietary metaphors, "A realist novel is often described as presenting us with a 'slice of life', as if the text has cut out a particular segment of reality—either in the past or the present—and served it to us so we can taste life as it is or was in some other place than our own" (18). These "slices of life" can be tasted in the works of Dickens and George Eliot in England, Balzac and Flaubert in France and Tolstoy in Russia.

Published nine years after the Partition, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a novel worth analyzing as it deals with the problems of the representation of trauma through realistic means. It is both a success and failure in

this respect—success because of Singh’s oblique treatment of the human tragedy of the Partition and failure for not being able to avoid delineating violence as spectacle. Especially for a realistic historical novel, *Train to Pakistan* is very reluctant in a direct representation of the harrowing events associated with the Partition. In 1956, when the scars of the event had not healed and continued hurting in the collective memory of the Indian subcontinent, Singh’s oblique description of the sea-changes in social life brought about by violence in a sleepy village on the Punjab border is indeed surprising. This is because the sheer enormity of the event and the subsequent bewilderment it caused to creative artists were very likely to give way to a detailed, literal and “faithful” depiction of partition trauma. The major horrific events—the killing of two trainloads of people coming from Pakistan, localities being massacred and people as well as cattle thrown into the river—all happen beyond the direct gaze of the readers, and their aftermaths are only detailed and, that too, not very graphically. Rituparna Roy aptly comments:

...in *Train to Pakistan* the violence that erupted at the time of the Partition is represented in a very unusual way. There is no detailed description in the novel of the train journey undertaken by the refugees—in terms of neither the practical difficulties faced nor the dangers involved. More importantly, we are also not shown the violence happening; for there is not even a reported description of the incidents in the novel. We are just informed about the end result of the violence: the trainloads of corpses that arrive at Mano Majra. What is detailed by Khushwant Singh is the aftermath of the violence, that is, how the trainloads of the dead are successively disposed of; how it changes everything in the village; and how another similar event is prevented from happening. (36)

When the first “ghost train” pulls into Mano Majra station, villagers never get to have a look at the unbearable horror of the sight of around fifteen hundred corpses (81). Their experience of the event consists in watching flames and fumes from their rooftops. Subsequently, on another occasion as well, they only see a mass grave being dug and stretchers emptied into it. No direct confrontation of the villagers and the horrific sights is recorded in the novel, and whatever little of it is rendered to the readers is through the eyes of Hukum Chand, the magistrate and deputy commissioner of the district. Though they already know in the back of their minds what the cargo is all about, villagers even refrain from making any direct reference to it. A conversation among the villagers goes like this:

‘I have heard,’ said Imam Baksh, slowly combing his beard with his fingers, ‘that there have been many incidents with trains.’

The word ‘incident’ aroused an uneasy feeling in the audience. ‘Yes, lots of incidents have been heard of,’ Meet Singh agreed after a while. (85)

And, then the lambardar addressing a Sikh audience regarding their Muslim neighbors and the threat to their lives posed by refugees states:

‘We have to decide what we are to do now. These refugees who have turned up at the temple may do something which will bring a bad name on the village.’

The reference to ‘something’ changed the mood of the meeting. (131)

Just as the indistinct evocations of “incident” and “something” in the two conversations quoted above

demonstrate how indirect references can arouse “uneasy feeling” or change “the mood of the meeting,” oblique representation of violence in the novel inspires, in the Lacapran sense, the “feel” of the event in the readers (Introduction).

Despite its iconic status in the canon of partition literature, *Train to Pakistan* is a fairly mediocre work of art. No character is adequately developed, except for the one of Hukum Chand, because “...Singh’s intention here is not the individualization of characters but the foregrounding of events” (Roy 45). Readers are allowed insights into an individual’s encounter with a hugely bewildering traumatic event through Hukum Chand’s character. On the day the first “ghost train” shows up, when the magistrate returns from his unpleasant responsibility of disposing of the corpses, he is weary of a “fatigue” that is “not physical,” but psychological (89). Here Singh drops a hint that he is not going to explore the physical and direct implications of partition trauma, but deal with it at the psychological level, which can at best be metaphorically represented. The symbolism involving two geckos fighting and scampering for a moth in the ceiling is just one instance where Hukum Chand’s psychological turmoil finds an expression. The numbness that always follows trauma is what his traumatic encounter produces in him: “The sight of so many dead had at first produced a cold numbness. Within a couple of hours, all his emotions were dead, and he watched corpses of men and women and children being dragged out, with as little interest as if they had been trunks and bedding” (89). With his “jaded nerves,” the possibility of detailed representation of the horrific sight is eliminated (91). His description of the still alive old peasant dying before him reads like one given by a person not in complete grip of his senses. The horror of the present recalls the horror of his past that has always refused to leave him; the images of his aunt dying in his

childhood as a consequence of giving birth to a dead child return. Though this childhood trauma never completely leaves him, he manages to come to terms with it by his frequent visits to the cremation ground in his youth that help him develop an approach of “phlegmatic resignation” towards death. As a result, he gets over his fear of immediate death with a profound awareness of “ultimate dissolution” (92). Hukum Chand’s resorting to ideas, such as the impermanence of life, to imbue human sufferings with meaning, is in keeping with Sukeshi Kamra’s concept of epiphany (182). The moments of epiphany, in her formulation, are those not characterized by an insistent re-enactment of the past, but by the survivors’ investing traumatic events with meaning (183). However, even this epiphanic realization does not prepare Hukum Chand for what he is to encounter at the arrival of the train from Pakistan: “He could not square a massacre with a philosophical belief in the inevitability of death. It bewildered and frightened him by its violence and its magnitude” (92). The scale of violence of the Partition is such, therefore, that even a deep understanding of the transience of life does not help to hold one’s moorings of reality. Joining Hukum Chand’s present with his personal traumatic history, Singh conveys the enormity of the horror, and all this is done not by detailing the gruesome violence of the scene, but through a careful manipulation of symbolism and comparison of the present with the past.

Khushwant Singh explores the cultural dimension of the trauma as well, particularly in the congregated sleeping arrangement of Sikhs in their temple, who are the witnesses or bystanders of Muslims’ dislocation from the village. Their silent acquiescence to letting Muslim’s leave in the fear of refugee attacks implicates them in the trauma of the perpetrator. The two trainloads of corpses, the sight of the Sutlej river flowing with bodies of human beings as well as

cattle and the overnight reduction of the population of the village almost by half permanently upset their social formation. In the company of each other in the Sikh temple, they suffer nightmares and try unconsciously to find a collective redemption from their trauma. However, their guilt-ridden complicity is turned into a collective victimizing energy by the educated Sikh youth, who insults them of being impotent until they are roused to prove him wrong. They do not understand that they are proceeding towards a re-enactment of trauma and plan the massacre of the train containing Muslims bound for Pakistan. The plan is foiled by Badmash Juggut Singh in the redemptive conclusion of the novel, so the re-enactment of the victimizing trauma, though losing for the time being to the individual free will of Juggut Singh, remains open as a possibility for the future; Singh's representation does not require it to happen in the present for its repeatability. Though humanity is demonstrated to triumph for once, there is no assurance for its triumph in the days to come, casting doubts on the redemptive hope of the conclusion.

The cynical undertone of the whole novel establishes itself as the ideological foundation of *Train to Pakistan*. Khushwant Singh's attitude in it is emphatically negative as he would not leave much space for optimism to flourish. The present age, frequently referred to as *kalyug* in the novel, evokes the Hindu belief in determinism and the inevitable collapse of human civilization. It is, as Karel Werner states, "the fourth (present) age in the *Puranic* world history, often called the dark age.... It started, according to *Puranic* reckoning, in 3102 B.C. with the mythical destructive battle on the *Kuruksetra*" (57; italics mine). This is a particularly disturbing aspect of Singh's novel as it considers violence as an integral part of the machinery of the universe. His elaborate description of the revolution of seasons illustrates the destructive capacity of natural forces, such as rain, sun,

wind, storm and lightening. Environmental violence goes along with human brutality in *Train to Pakistan*, their combined destruction symbolized in the floodwater containing numerous corpses (150-152). Singh also traces communal rivalry through the history of the subcontinent that includes three Sikh gurus' being killed by Muslims. In the present crisis between Sikhs and Muslims, it is always possible to invoke the collective memory of victimization in the past, resulting in the determination to avenge it in the present. That is exactly how the Sikh villagers are turned against their neighbors by the agitators.

Also, in the social formation of South Asia, there is a huge gender imbalance that often results in violence. Actually, shedding of blood seems to form the crux of the man-woman relationship evident in matrimonial advertisements in the newspapers, invariably asking for virgin girls that Iqbal reads for his amusement in the prison (76). Violence is embedded in the relationship to such an extent that women are hegemonized into believing pain to be integrally associated with pleasure, as when Jugga makes love to Noor on forcibly and she gives in to his "brute force" like a "willing victim" (Kaul15-16) or when Sundari, the daughter of Hukum Chand's orderly, does not take off her lacquer bangles so that they can be smashed during the first love-making with her husband, a ritual of violence that is supposed to ward off bad luck (Singh 186). No wonder, then, that the villagers—irrespective of caste and creed—offer a prayer to the village *deo*, a phallic statue (2-3) that Ralph J. Crane considers to be "a straightforward symbol of power" (188). Thus, violence is synonymous with manhood and lack of it with impotence; in other words, men need to behave violently in order to prove their manhood. That is how Sikh villagers are enraged by the youth (rather a teenage boy) against their Muslim neighbors when they are called

“eunuchs” and “impotent” for their not inflicting pain upon the other community (155-156).

Violence in the Indian subcontinent is also a part of its colonial baggage, an inheritance of the extremely oppressive rule by the British. It was in Punjab’s capital Amritsar that the Jaliwanwala Bagh massacre took place, where thousands of people were shot at General Dyer’s command. The former colonial masters formed the principles of armed forces in South Asia that were notorious in inflicting unimaginable violence upon their own people as well as others. This is what governs the attitude towards the prisoners:

He [the sub-inspector] had never known anyone to hold out against physical pain, not one. The pattern of torture had to be carefully chosen. Some succumbed to hunger, others—of the Iqbal type—to the inconvenience of having to defecate in front of the policemen. Some to flies sitting on their faces smeared with treacle, with their hands tied behind them. Some to lack of sleep. In the end they all gave in. (79-80)

Colonial history of oppression combined with the advanced technology of modernity that could be used as much against humanity as in favour of them, had the capacity to produce enormous destruction. Colonizers established the railway networks in the Indian subcontinent for better communication, which were being used to bear cargos of corpses across borders. Singh’s description of the bulldozer brought to dig the mass grave for the second trainload of dead people reads like the depiction of a giant animal:

It began dragging its lower jaw into the ground just outside the station on the Mano Majra Side. It went along, eating up the earth, chewing it, casting it

aside.... Then [after the corpses being piled into the trench] the bulldozer woke up again. It opened its jaws and ate up the earth it had thrown out before and vomited it into the trench till it was level with the ground. (152)

Thus, technological advancements are shown to have ominous capacity for violence. Singh seems to imply that the socio-politico-cultural history of the subcontinent has cumulated into an age—*kalyug* as he calls it referring to the Hindu mythology—that has made the atrocity during the Partition unavoidable. This cynical and deterministic approach to the contemporary political reality makes it impossible for Singh to show any chance for ultimate optimism despite its redemptive end. Jugga's cutting the rope meant for killing the people seated on the roof of the train, one may argue, is an act of free will, not determinism. However, in the Hindu concept of *karma*—one that gives the title of one of the four parts of the novel, *kalyug* being another—man can exercise free will only within the limits of determinism, as Steven J. Rosen states, “[T]here is no human endeavor that can obliterate ... [the binding or fixed] *karma*. Rather, through spiritual practice one may evoke God's mercy, and thus become free” (176). The extremely cynical view of the world could be a consequence of the Partition on creative artists, considering what Singh once said:

The beliefs that I had cherished all my life were shattered. I had believed in the innate goodness of the common man. But the division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country... I had believed that we Indians were peace-loving and non-violent, that we were more concerned with matters of the spirit, while the rest of the world was involved in the pursuit of material things. After the experience of the autumn of

1947, I could no longer subscribe to this view. I became... an angry middle-aged man, who wanted to shout his disenchantment with the world... I decided to try my hand at writing. ("Guest of Honour Talk")

So, in *Train to Pakistan*, Singh shouts his "disenchantment with the world," which remains divested of his pre-partition optimism. His analysis of the partition violence is that many factors—socio-cultural, gender, colonial, etc.—accumulated into the fierce antagonism one felt for the other community in 1947-48. And, it took a huge toll on the creative artist as s/he was no longer able to represent optimism as triumphing over cynicism. However, the inherent unrepresentability of the partition trauma in strictly realistic narrative is what makes Singh choose fiction for bearing witness to the partition trauma. Rituparna Roy says in this regard:

It needs to be noted ... that as an amateur historian, Singh could not but have been conscious of the momentous age of Indian history that he had lived through. This must have prompted him to write fiction, for he probably found fiction to be a better medium than history to reflect on contemporary realities. However, his instincts as a historian, together with his own experiences at the time of the Partition, combined with his budding skills as a fiction writer, all came together to produce *Train to Pakistan*. (34)

At the beginning of this discussion on *Train to Pakistan*, it is argued that the novel is a partial failure with regards to its representation of partition trauma because it often slides into making the tragedy of the Partition into a spectacle. Scholars, such as C. Paul Verghese, have been very critical of this tendency, saying that the novel does not "rise far above the standard of sensational journalism" (119). Priyamvada Gopal also believes that Singh's work "seem[s]"

to exploit rather than interrogate ‘the pornography of violence’” (71). The fact that the sights of corpse-bearing river and trains glues the villagers to their rooftops, who forget to cook for their children and feed the cattle, is an indication that violence tends to become a spectacle (88). Singh’s repeated reference to the incest-like relationship between Hukum Chand and the Muslim prostitute Haseena plays out the everyday tradition of name-calling among villagers by implying that one sleeps with his close female relations, such as mother, daughter or sister. At one point, it ceases to be an alarming prospect for the readers since human beings are always drawn towards the prohibited. Repeated reference to anything beyond the socially validated normalcy makes it less shocking, so the image Hukum Chand sees in Haseena, a girl of his dead daughter’s age gradually becomes acceptable. Also, the concern he shows for the girl to cross the border into Pakistan further strengthens the suspicion whether Hukum Chand has indeed started considering her as his own daughter, even while treating her as a prostitute.

In times of extreme atrocity, violence tends to lose its capacity to shock and is treated lightly or rather ridiculously. For example, in the following conversation between Bhola, the tonga driver, and Jugga, the tragedy of girls’ abduction during the Partition is spoken of in the following manner:

‘Bholeya, I hear a lot of women are being abducted and sold cheap. You could find a wife for yourself.’

‘Why, Sardara, if you can find a Mussulmanni without paying for her, am I impotent that I should have to buy an abducted woman?’ replied Bhola. (73)

This at once reflects the contempt women are treated with and demonstrates how a crime like abduction of women could be considered a normal practice and not shocking at

all. Therefore, comedy is being achieved at the cost of the tragedy that the abducted girls suffer. When somebody's pain becomes a product of readers' consumption, the representation of poignancy fails its tragic implications and slides into pornography.

In the final analysis, *Train to Pakistan* is mostly concerned with the aftermath of violence and how it is embedded in nature, human society, subcontinental communities and the colonial system. It betrays, as discussed above, a certain feeling of cynicism and determinism in the ultimate collapse of human civilization, perhaps owing to Singh's direct experience of partition violence that left his hope and belief in fundamental goodness of human beings shattered. Despite the redemptive conclusion, then, *Train to Pakistan* presents readers with a very bleak worldview. The pitfall of the realistic treatment of partition bloodshed consists in its slipping into pornographic description of violence. As many instances of the novel illustrate, Singh often fails to avoid this narrative problem.

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Language Testing in Practice: Designing and Developing Useful Language Tests for Reading and Writing English in India

Masood Ahmad Malik

The emergence of English as a global lingua franca calls for an effective pedagogy. Apart from being a preferred language for communication, it also facilitates entry into the job market. That is why for “millions of learners around the world, the ability to communicate in English is the passport to economic prosperity, social mobility and educational advancement” (Fulcher 2007). Hence, in addition to quality materials and productive methodology, the teaching of English also requires an effective and comprehensive system of assessment and testing, especially for the non-native speakers, so that the learner’s educational advancement and entry to the job market gets facilitated. The present paper will discuss the contemporary testing scenario in India and offer suggestions for improving its efficacy and utility especially for reading and writing skills.

Testing is an educational activity undertaken to evaluate the performance of students, activities of teachers and the efficacy of curriculum. Testing is not isolated from and unrelated to the learning process but an inseparable part of the whole instructional programme. There is an inter-relationship between the objectives of teaching, the methods and materials employed for teaching and the testing techniques used. The objectives of teaching determine what materials and methods are to be employed and these in turn lead to the testing techniques used, such that they examine the extent to which the objectives are fulfilled by the teaching-learning process. Hence, testing helps the teacher not only in assessing the performance of the learners, but also in judging the effectiveness of the instructional

programme and the extent to which the objectives have been achieved.

Tests are equally important for the learners as they provide them information about how well or how badly they have been performing. The information serves as a motivator for those doing well and identifies the areas of need and attention for the not-so-successful learners. Other stakeholders like parents, academic administrators, subject experts, syllabus designers, materials writers, examiners, and policy makers, all benefit from the results of tests.

A comprehensive system of language testing capable of satisfying all the essentials of validity, reliability and practicability, is still largely a need in the testing of English language in India. Although certain minor changes have been made in the English language curriculum since 1947, not much progress has taken place in the mode of evaluation of English. In spite of the clamour about continuous and comprehensive evaluation, it is the one time final examination that decides what is to be taught and what has been learnt. The annual examinations conducted for testing English language have become a ritual and so far no effort has been made either to change or improve their quality to suit the needs of the society. They are not based on any pre-selected theory of language learning/teaching. These tests have failed to make any positive contribution to the development of teaching programmes.

The failure of the annual examinations to test the language ability of the examinees cannot be seen in isolation. As mentioned earlier, tests are an integral part of a curriculum. Problems arise when testing and teaching are deemed two separate entities. The correlation that exists between testing and teaching is of vital importance for the English language learner and is impossible to analyze either

of them without referring to the other (Heaton). So far as the teaching of English in India is concerned, it is driven by examinations. The teacher slavishly follows the prescribed syllabus by giving lectures on the theme, plot, characterization or imagery in the lesson in the textbook. Only those issues are focused upon which are considered important from the examination point of view. Comprehension questions and a few exercises given at the end of each chapter of the textbooks are discussed in the classroom because these are the questions that usually figure in the question papers for the annual examinations. The paper setters do not set imaginative and resourceful tasks which can test the real language proficiency of the students. “Students typically study for it (annual examination) by cramming answers to likely questions. Such questions and answers can be readily found in ‘guide books’ or ‘crib schools’ for which there has been a flourishing market; or the answers are abstracted from ‘notes’ dictated by teachers in class” (Sheorey 20). Some students even feel that these guide books are more useful for doing well in the examinations than the in-class instruction. The predictable nature of the test in terms of the tasks set in the question papers encourages students to resort to rote learning strategies in order to score better. This strategy of cramming likely questions works successfully for most of the students but defeats the entire purpose for which the test is constructed. While discussing language tests, Popham (300-10) holds professional ethics and educational defensibility as the corner stones of a standard language test. Test preparation violates the professional ethics if it involves unethical norms. Popham states that the educational defensibility is considered intact if no test preparation increases the scores of the students without simultaneously increasing their mastery of the assessment domain tested. Hence test preparation should help learners to improve their

skills but it is misleading if it provides them with tricks to score better regardless of their existing capabilities.

In an Indian classroom most of the teachers give tips (tricks) to the students to improve their scores in the examinations. Even class tests or classroom assessment are used mainly as a rehearsal for the evaluation done at the end of the year rather than being used for diagnostic purposes. Even after getting good scores in the tests students lack the capacity to use English satisfactorily. Hence these annual tests violate educational defensibility as preparation only increases the scores without increasing the testee's command on English language.

Tests can aid both learning and teaching if they assess the skills required by the learner (Heaton, Huges). Tests influence all other aspects of the language teaching methodology and their influence is often referred to as wash back. Many researchers (Alderson and Wall, Bailey 257) believe that the wash back in case of tests can either be positive or negative depending upon the techniques employed for the purpose of testing. A test which does not assess the skills required for day to day communication is likely to have a negative impact on teaching and learning. On the other hand, a test which attempts to assess the skills required for communication positively influences the teaching and learning in the classroom. In other words, it can be said that a test which encourages rote learning not only misleads the students but also derails the entire teaching-learning process. A test constructed to assess the skills acquired by the learner for future communication needs is not only valid but also provides feedback to all stakeholders about the efficacy of the curriculum in place.

Most of the question papers administered for the testing of English in India are constructed in the traditional

fashion. They usually comprise some questions on reading comprehension, writing of essays, paragraphs or reports and isolated discrete items on grammar. Such tests are easy to construct and score, but questions are often raised about their validity and reliability. The question on reading comprehension apparently aims at testing the reading skills of the students. But a close look at the questions that follow the passages reveal that the task demands more writing, hence tests writing rather than reading. While talking about the testing of receptive skills like reading, Doff writes:

- a. Students should not be asked to write too much; otherwise the test will be unfair to students whose comprehension is good but who are bad at writing.
- b. The questions should test comprehension of the main 'message' of the text, so they should focus on main points rather than on individual details.
- c. The students should not be able to guess the correct answer without understanding the text. (259).

Instead of asking questions that demand elaborate written responses, the following types of questions can be asked for the testing of reading skill:

True or false: The advantage of using true or false type questions is that they only test reading comprehension and no writing is involved. Moreover, the teacher can easily think of good true or false questions, which cover the main points of the given passage. Such questions are easy to mark as well. However, the problem with true/false questions is that students can easily guess the answers. As the choice is between 'true' and 'false', chances of their being correct is 50 percent. But the teacher can reduce the chances of guessing by giving three choices: 'true', 'false' and 'don't know'.

Multiple Choice: Like true /false questions, multiple choice questions also test reading comprehension without involving any kind of writing activity. They are also easy to mark and, if designed properly, reduce the chances of guessing the right answer. In spite of being used extensively in formal tests, multiple choice questions have been criticized for various reasons. One of the objections is related to the selection of distractors which are often based on the teacher's intuition and more often than not, do not distract the candidate (Cohen). Further, they are often too easy or confusingly difficult or focus on minor details of the text. Therefore, to administer multiple choice questions successfully the teacher should design distractors that focus on the main message of the text.

Open Ended Questions: So far as the use of open-ended questions for the testing of reading goes, they can serve the purpose only if they demand minimum writing on the part of the students. They are also to be used judiciously; the whole task should not get dominated by them. Although open ended questions are easy for teachers to set, there are problems with their marking. They have often been criticized for the element of subjectivity which can be minimized by designing them in such a way so that they are unambiguous and specific, and demand minimum writing from the students.

Information Transfer: For testing reading comprehension, the use of information transfer questions is often fruitful in assessing whether the student has understood the main points of the passage or not. Instead of answering a question the student has to record information from the given passage in different forms, e.g. by completing a table, labeling a picture, or drawing a diagram. However, such a question may not always tell us whether the examinee has understood the given passage completely or not.

It is to be borne in mind that none of the question types discussed above for the testing of reading comprehension is better or worse than others. In fact, all of them have their advantages and disadvantages. But a balanced use of different question types can help us to check whether the students' reading skill has developed or not.

Though testing language skills is not easy, it is the testing of writing skills which is uniquely difficult. If writing is tested in a controlled way with the help of discrete items like gap-filling, making corrections or close tests, etc., the test may be graded objectively but it would not reflect the way students shall be using writing in the real world. But if writing is tested through open ended items like writing of essays, e-mails, letters etc, the test would reflect the way students shall be using writing in the real world but grading may not be objective in this case. It is, however, generally suggested that beginner's writing skills should be tested indirectly in a controlled way so that they do not have to write connected prose. But at the higher level, especially at tertiary level, writing should be tested in such a way that it allows students to show their competence to write connected prose appropriately. Hesse maintains that, "it's better to have students write than to complete multiple choice exams, if you want to evaluate writing". Hence at tertiary level, writing should be tested through open ended items that reflect the type of writing that the students are required to do in the real world.

One of the problems of language pedagogy in India is that English is treated as a content based subject and the same gets reflected in the tests also. Test items are set in such a way that they tend to measure the ability of the students to remember and reproduce facts and information. This attitude often leads to the construction of open-ended

essay type questions that are predictable. Talking about the commonly identified problems with such questions by evaluation researchers, Pushpa Rama Krishna writes:

- a) The open-endedness of essay type questions can lead to ambiguity of interpretation affecting the validity of the test.
- b) The testee's background and cultural knowledge, imagination and creativity can affect her/his response, although these may not be factors to be tested.
- c) Marks are not determined upon with any precision in relation to the performance level expected.
- d) Subjectivity of evaluation arising partially out of differences in understanding the expectations of the item-writer may result in different approaches from candidates and examiners.
- e) Evaluating scripts is time consuming.
- f) There is a wide range of variability in the results available from different examiners or sometimes from the same examiner over a period of time.
- g) It is not possible to sample the course content adequately in content-based examinations.
- h) The examiner cannot be confident that scripts displaying the same level of ability have been awarded the same marks. (288)

It has been observed that the answer scripts are usually evaluated without reference to any criteria. Different parameters are used by different evaluators for evaluating the answer scripts. For some grammatical accuracy is of paramount importance, some consider ability to think, organize and integrate as important while others give more importance to appropriacy and style. Some evaluators resort to negative marking by counting all the mistakes the student has made and deduct marks for each mistake while others use positive marking by deducting marks only if the sentences were hard to understand. This highly subjective mode of evaluation greatly affects the reliability of the test.

One of the reasons for this wide ranging variability is the absence of any standard scoring procedure that can reduce the inconsistencies in subjective marking of open ended questions. The procedure in the form of well developed and fully defined marking criteria can make the evaluation objective and standard to a great extent. The criteria should be shared with the students so that they know where they stand. The criteria should be qualitative in nature and should assess the student's overall performance in relation to the tasks, strategies and skills which have been used in achieving it. National Knowledge Commission (2007: 10) also recommends that "assessment should be based on proficiency rather than specifying achievement targets that reward mastery of single text acquired through rote learning". Different marking criteria or assessment scales e.g. Carrol 1980, CIEFL 1996, Ramakrishna 2002 etc have been proposed from time to time to make testing objective and purposeful.

Keeping in view the ineffective system of testing used for English in India it is important that measures should be initiated to make it communicative performance based that reflect real life communication. The tests should motivate students to participate in communication and carry out tasks successfully. The tests should not be overloaded with grammar and writing but should include a balance of tasks involving all language skills. Moreover, indirect testing of grammar, which is done frequently in India, should be avoided. Testing should also be used as an on-going research activity, the findings of which should be used for the improvement of ELT pedagogy. There is also an urgent need to organize training programmes for the examiners to orient them with various techniques of testing English language. Additionally, tests should be criterion referenced for pedagogic purpose as it may help teachers to see how

proficient the student has become in the given skill. The biggest drawback of testing English in India is that listening and speaking are totally neglected. To make tests more reliable, all the four skills should be tested. Moreover, class tests and self assessment can be used in the classroom to motivate students and enable them to assume greater responsibility. This can also create a positive washback. Lastly, there should be clear, simple and unambiguous language both in the tasks and instructions so that the testees understand what is expected of them.

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Haider: A Cinematic Staging of “Biopower”

Jamiel Ahmad

This paper attempts a biopolitical study of the condition of ordinary life in Kashmir via the recasting of Shakespearean *Hamlet* into the Hindi film—*Haider*. *Haider* is a 2014 Hindi film directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, which represents the situation of Kashmir. Giving a tabulated outline of the main characters from *Hamlet*, which have been filmed in *Haider*, in the endnotes, this paper builds the argument in two parts. The first part introduces the theoretical field of biopolitics and the theorists engaged in it. And, the second part is based on the study of *Haider*, which highlights the vital role that cinema plays in the present times. By bringing in some insightful arguments by Amy Villarejo, a Film Studies writer, this paper glances at the relevance of Film Studies in our lives. As we know that in the arena of cultural studies a film can be read and a literary text can be seen, so this paper analyses *Haider* as a literary text. Via this study, this paper sums up the factors that give rise to certain power processes which hem in Kashmiri life from all sides.

1

The focal point of the paper is the analysis of this film via a biopolitical angle. By employing Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics, this paper reads *Haider* as a text where life and politics clash with each other, giving rise to a sort of governmentalizing and ‘controlling’ power over life. Biopolitics is an emerging multidisciplinary theoretical field which is giving newer shades to contemporary global issues. The term “biopolitics” has been derived from the Greek words “*bios*” meaning life, and “*polis*” meaning a city-state. So, it is a recombinant term which means life within a state, and designates the interaction between life and politics. But, the main query is what it means in the contemporary

scenario? Biopolitics is a theoretical stance that studies the age-old interaction between human life and politics. Thomas Lemke remarks, “Plural and divergent meanings are undoubtedly evoked when people refer to biopolitics. This is surprising, since it is quite clear what the word signifies. It denotes a politics that deals with life” (*Bio-politics* 1). Though, it seems that this interaction has been a smooth going, but in reality it has been a collision of sorts making the term slippery. The encounter between life and politics in due course of time has complicated the implications. Lemke argues, “But this is where the problems start. What some people take to be a trivial fact (Doesn’t all politics deal with life?) marks a clear-cut criterion of exclusion for others. For the latter, politics is situated beyond biological life” (2). But, alongside this collision various phases of “biopolitics” kept evolving. Leaving the naturalist approaches and the politicist one, contemporary “biopolitics” holds a considerable material for rethought regarding the contemporary world scenario. Inaugurating the fourth lecture of “The Birth of Biopolitics” lecture series, Michel Foucault quotes Berenson, who has said, “God knows I fear the destruction of the world by the atomic bomb, but there is at least one thing I fear as much, and that is the invasion of humanity by the state” (76). These apprehensions of Berenson proved right in the world that followed. In the study at hand, Kashmiri condition is not alien to this argument; Kashmir has been the victim of such a conceptual ‘state’, rather of states. State, as Michel Foucault theorizes, is not simply an institution, but a way which is powerful in conducting the life of its subjects. In the present context, Kashmiri life has been strained by three such ‘states’; India, Pakistan, Kashmir; states which have been instrumental in subjectivizing Kashmiri populace, as depicted in the text.

This study is based on some biopolitical insights borrowed from Michel Foucault, which include

“apparatus” and “bio-power”. A few concepts from Agamben, like “bare life”, “*homo sacer*”, and “state of exception” are also vital to this study. Defining “apparatus”, Clare O’ Farrell writes, “Foucault generally uses this term to indicate the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures, which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body” (Farrell 1). It includes the state apparatuses that subjectivize the populace, and the civilian apparatuses which take the form of an ideology. In the terminology of Louis Althusser, these include “the ideological and the repressive state apparatuses”. Another term employed in this study is “biopower” (or *biopouvoir* in French). It “relates to the practice of modern nation states and their regulation of their subjects through an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and control of populations” (Farrell 1). This term revolves around the intersection between ordinary life and state power.

These Foucauldian thoughts proved to be the food for thought to Agamben, who in his book *Homo Sacer* (translated by Daniel Heller – Roazen, Stanford University Press, 1998) puts forth his biopolitical thought by employing a figure called “*homo sacer*”, who is kept in a “state of exception”. *Homo sacer* “is defined as someone who can be killed, but not sacrificed” (“*Homo Sacer*”, 1). The figure of “*homo sacer*” lives in a state of life which Agamben calls “bare life.” Defining this concept, Thomas Lemke writes that the central binary relationship of the political is not that between friend and enemy but rather the separation of bare life (*zoê*) and political existence (*bios*)—that is, the distinction between natural being and the legal existence of a person (Lemke 54).

Basing his research on Foucault, Agamben traces biopolitics in the contemporary scenario by focusing on a condition where a state is made “a state of exception”, so as

to carry out a biopolitical ‘management’ aimed at the ‘improvement’ of life for the best individuals by cornering the odd ones. In his biopolitical thought, “Agamben notes that a state of exception is created by the modern state where a special or exceptional beings are interned, ghettoized, demarcated within camps, regulated, and sacrificed to produce (paradoxically) the normal legal structures of a state by an implication of the biopolitical order” (3). The life of a human being constrained by the politics of a state and by culture is termed as “bare life”, and the state she/he lives in is called “state of exception”. The term can be defined as:

A state of exception (German: *Ausnahmezustand*) is a concept in the legal theory of Carl Schmitt, similar to a state of emergency, but based in the sovereign’s ability to transcend the rule of law in the name of the public good. This concept is developed in Giorgio Agamben’s book *State of Exception*. It is a state where the sovereign has the power and where law is indefinitely ‘suspended’ without being abrogated. (Agamben 1)

In the Introduction to his book, *Homo Sacer*, to define the relationship between the life of “*homo sacer*” and “state of exception”, Agamben argues:

The protagonist of this book is bare life, that is, the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed yet not sacrificed*, and whose essential function in modern politics we tend to assert. An obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order [*ordinamento*] solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed), has thus offered the key by which not only the sacred texts of sovereignty but also the very codes of political power will unveil their mysteries. (8)

With these biopolitical insights in mind, let's approach the filmic text of *Haider* and try to attempt an objective analysis of the visuals and dialogues therein.

2

Haider is not just an ordinary intriguing film on love and revenge, but offers an insight into the deeper malaise of the Kashmiri society. It is a piece of cinema which represents the violent dimension of Kashmir by incorporating a Kashmiri setting to the Shakespearean play and Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*. Both *Curfewed Night* and *Haider* are texts which employ a new mode of representation; one is a journalistic memoir and the other a piece of cinematic representation. And, there is hardly any doubt in the fact that cinema and media have become a vital part of peoples' life. Exemplifying it is this news item in an Indian newspaper, "After TV actor Digangana Suryavanshi was evicted from Big Boss 9 house, an upset fan from Bangladesh attempted to kill herself" (*Hindustan Times*, 9 Dec. 2015). Regarding this nature of cinema Amy Villarejo writes, "You live amidst cinema, just as a student of economics lives within an economy" (Film Studies: The Basics 9). There is a close interconnectedness between our lives and the cinema and the two have intermingled now. To decode the content of these literary texts is mandatory for researchers of contemporary literature and culture. Lois Tyson argues:

One way to discover what popular-culture productions reveal about the culture that creates them—that is, one way to practice cultural criticism—is to analyze the cultural “messages” these productions send to the members of that culture or, as cultural critics put it, the *cultural work* these productions perform in reflecting, reinforcing, or transforming the values, beliefs, and perceptions of the culture that produces them. (7)

So, it is quite evident that a film is not a mere audio-visual narrative meant for amusement and entertainment only, but a subject of critical study. This critical study is “the pursuit of cinema as an historical hydra, with tentacles reaching into all aspects of our individual and collective lives” (Villarejo 10). Another testimony to this is the recent global popularity of Hindi cinema. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, an Indian film and cultural studies theorist, writes, “Globalization isn’t merely another word for Americanization—and the recent expansion of the Indian entertainment industry proves it. For hundreds of millions of fans around the world, it is Bollywood, based in Mumbai, has become a global industry” (1). So, apart from narrative literary texts, cinematic adaptations suit the literary tastes of contemporary audience better.

Haider films the Kashmiri condition by employing characters mainly in contrast to the characters staged in *Hamlet*. The film adapts the play’s famous twists and turns to represent the armed insurgency in the Kashmir of the 1990s. Haider (Hamlet), the protagonist of the film, a poet and scholar returns home at the peak of insurgency to find that his house has been gutted down, his father – Dr. Hilal Meer (King Hamlet) — has disappeared, and his mother — Ghazala Meer (Gertrude) — is in a relationship with his uncle — Khurram Meer (Claudius). The script revolves around Haider, who embarks on a journey to trace his “lost father”, but is dragged into the vortex of his society and ends up getting trapped in the violent unrest of Kashmir.

Haider depicts the stories of a number of characters and events, which depict the horror and chaos in the state of Kashmir. In the film, the “rotten state” of Haider’s family is offset against the chaotic condition of the state, so it moves from the individual crisis towards the larger society. This condition of life and society in Kashmir is thematically linked

to the “rotten state of Denmark” as represented by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. Both the protagonists are victims of the corruption in their families and their states, and also of their dilemma in handling such crisis. In one of his interviews with *The National*, Vishal Bhardwaj, the director of the film says,

The moment you think of that fabled line, ‘something is rotten in the state of Denmark’, You think of Kashmir. In *Haider*, Claudius, Hamlet’s uncle and chief antagonist, is transposed into a Kashmiri lawyer who collaborates in the formation of *Ikhwan*, a counter insurgency militia armed and funded by Indian security forces. In *Curfewed Night*, Basharat Peer recalled that ‘*ikhwan* tortured and killed like modern-day Mongols’. (Samanth 1)

Haider is about a person who realizes that something is “rotten” in his family, his society, and his state. The script of the film is centered on the character of Haider, the conflict enters his house when Dr. Hilal Meer treats one of their militant commanders (Ikhlaq Lateef) for appendicitis. He brings the militant home to perform an appendectomy, meanwhile, Ghazala Meer (who is having an affair with Khurram Meer, her brother-in-law) unintentionally informs him about this incident. The next morning, the couple wake up to an army announcement of a crackdown on the locality. The informer of the army spots a young civilian boy and Dr. Meer. The young village boy is tortured inside a school building and Meer too is taken into custody by the army. The army raids his house and a gun battle starts between the troops and the militants, Dr. Meer and Ghazala are held by army in the courtyard of their house, and the armed forces blow up their house.

Haider, a scholar at Aligarh Muslim University, returns home and meets his childhood sweetheart friend,

Arshia Lone, a journalist, who informs him about the plight of his family. He visits his ruined home, and nostalgically begins to gather things out of the burnt rubbish. Then, he travels towards his uncle's house, where to his utter shock he finds his mother and his uncle living quite happily and comfortably, singing duets and dancing. He begins to suspect "the rotten state of affairs" in his family, and comes across them outside as well. He leaves the place in a fit of rage and anger against his mother and uncle. He finds himself to be a "half son", and begins a searching process to trace his "lost father." Like Haleema's search for her son, Haider starts to look for his lost father and visits police stations, army camps, detention centers, and torture chambers. But he returns defeated and joins the "Association of the Parents' of the Disappeared People", and begins to protest against the system. Haleema struggles and survives with a sense of hope that someday her son will be back and she dies with this hope. Haider also fights against the system with a sense of hope, but when he comes to know about the murder of his father he embraces despair, his hope vanishes and he is frustrated by the circumstances.

The film screens the ruined condition of the life of citizens in the "rotten" state of Kashmir through its protagonist. In the trap of nationalistic ideologies and the instruments of "biopower", Haider loses his career and family. Regarding this disturbed and contested condition of Kashmir, Haider's grandfather laments pathetically,

"Hamara aasmaan kaalay parindo(n) se gira hua hai, kahin kisi choozey ko cheel utha key le jati hai, tou kahin bulbul ko baaz zinda noo(n)ch letey hai(n)" (our sky is full of 'black preying birds'. Somewhere an eagle flies away with a chick. And, somewhere else the *bulbul*'s being torn to death by the vultures.) (sc. 00:50:06-00:50:22)

The politically-inflicted ordinary life in Kashmir is a victim of predatory processes in which a citizen like Haider is caught in the middle. Haider sums up this condition of Kashmir in his “mad-man’s-speech-act” scene, wearing a noose round his neck, as,

UN Council Resolution number 47 of 1948, Article 2 of the Geneva Convention. And, Article 370 of the Indian Constitution bus aik sarwaal uthaata hai, sirf aik—hum hai(n) ke hum nahi(n)?

([...] 370 of the Indian Constitution raise only one question, merely one—do we exist, or do we not ?)

At an individual level, Hamlet describes his mental state as, “to be or not to be”, which reveals the dilemma that he faces as a result of the “rotten state of affairs” in his family and in Denmark. It puts forth the confused condition of Hamlet in taking decisions, but Haider sums up his own condition and the condition of the victimized Kashmiri populace as, “*hum hain ke hum nahin* (Do we exist or do we not?)”. It means that the question of rottenness is open to Haider as an individual and to Kashmir as a state, both of whom have been hemmed in from all sides, and there seems to be no end to this cycle of chaos. Haider goes on to say, “*India Pakistan ney mil kar khela hum sey border border. Ab na humhe chodey Hindustaan, aur na humhe chode Pakistaan.*” (Both India and Pakistan, together, played with Kashmiris the game of borders. Now, neither India leaves us, nor does Pakistan.) (sc. 01:26:41-01:28:40).

To contrast this nightmarish condition of Kashmir with that of the Indian states outside Kashmir, the film depicts a scene in which Haider’s grandfather says to Ghazala Meer, “*Hindustaan ka doosra roop bhi tou usey pata lagay. Jahan na din pey pehre hai(n), na raat pe taaley.*” (Let him

see another face of India. Where, there are no restrictions and imprisonments.) (00:50:29-00:50:38).

In one such instance, the film depicts a scene in which Ghazala Meer argues with her husband (Dr. Hilal Meer) for treating a militant at their home. Representing the ‘role’ of the Indian apparatuses, like troops, in dealing with the people of Kashmir, she anxiously says to her husband, “*Ghar nahi(n), saara garwo(n) jakwaa deingey aap*” (Not only our home, you will let them put the whole village on fire.) (sc. 00:04:47-00:04:53). The film depicts scenes which show that the humanity of a doctor is misinterpreted by the army due to the “rotten state of affairs” in Kashmir.

The role of the army and other security agencies is debated in another scene of the film, wherein Khurram Meer, a lawyer (modeled on Claudius from *Hamlet* and Yusuf from *Curfewed Night*) is shown talking to an old man who is pleading for the release of “his innocent son who has been detained in an army camp”. Khurram says to him:

Kashmir main upar khuda hai aur niche foug. Foug ka jantar hai AFSPA—Armed Forces Special Power Act. [...] Chacha, main kya govannar hoon, nazar uthayi aap ka beta bahar. (In Kashmir, we have God above and army below. The magic-tool of the army is AFSPA—Armed Forces Special Power Act. [...]) Uncle, am I the Governor of the state, that in a single glance I can bring out your son from behind the bars.) (sc.00:34:28-00:34:55)

In the film, there are multiple scenes depicting this condition of Kashmir; in one such scene, Haider says to the two Salmans that he will trace his disappeared father. The ongoing dialogue represents the condition of “bare life” in Kashmir:

Salman 1: *Kahaan? Campoon mein?* (Where? Will you look for him in army camps?)

Salman 2: *Qaidkhaano(n) mein?* (or, in prisons?)

Haider: *Poora Kashmir qaidkhaana hai, mere dost!* (Whole Kashmir is a prison, my friend!). (sc.00:36:28-00:37:13)

While visiting police stations, camps, and detention centers he witnesses “barbed wires”, “processions”, and “violent episodes”, which show the debased state of a citizen’s bare life in Kashmir. Haider keeps on searching for his father in an atmosphere which is totally unresponsive to him, as the system obstructs him at every step. Haider notices the treatment of ordinary life by the political forces that exist in the ruined state of Kashmir. While looking for his father, he comes across a lot of people who have lost their dear ones to state-sponsored custodial disappearances. In an incident, Haider visits an army camp in search of his father, where an army man catches hold of him and throws away the posters of his disappeared father.

In a state where things are not right and the situation is ‘abnormal’, the film, in one of its scenes, screens a top rank army officer, Brigadier T.S.Murthy, who in a meeting with his subordinates and other state police officials orders them:

Gentlemen, Delhi has approved Operation *Bulbul*. Counter insurgency force ko aur mazboot bananay key liye jo bhi chahiye—funds, arms, intelligence— kuch bhi, sab mileyga. Dushman ka dushman hamara dost hai. Is liye koi bhi group ya individual jo Hizb-ul-Mujahideen aur Pakistan key is proxy war key khilaaf hai—surrendered militants, detainees, undertrials—group ka hisaa ban sakte hai(n). *Ikhwan-ul-Mukhbareen*.

[...] To make counter insurgency force stronger, whatever is needed—funds, arms, intelligence—will be provided. Our enemy’s foe is our friend. So, any group, or individual who is against this anti-India proxy war of *Hizb-ul-Mujahideen* and Pakistan— [...] can be a part of this group. *Ikhwan-ul-Mukhbareen.*)

Addressing Pervez Lone, the officer says, “The army will run the operation but your support will be crucial in recruitment and intelligence. Let the *bulbul* start singing. Let’s catch and kill.” (sc. 00:41:10-00:41:54)

This condition of Kashmir is revealed in a scene, in which Haider approaches Pervez Lone to register an FIR against the custodial detention of his father. Pervez Lone warns him:

Sab kuch agar kanoonan hurwa hota tou aaj Kashmir ki ye halat na hoti! Pandit Nehru ne Lal Chowk mein Plebiscite ka waada kia. Hua plebiscite? Plebiscite ko choudo, Plebiscite ki pehli sharat—demilitarization—wo tak poori nahi ki na India ne na Pakistan ne. Do haathi jab ladhte hai na tou gaas hi kuchli jati hai. Fouj se dushmani mat lo beta. Agar tum ne FIR daraj ki tou un key milne ke chances aur kam honge.

(If everything had taken place according to law, then the situation in Kashmir would not have turned so grim. Pandit Nehru promised a Plebiscite in Lal Chowk. Did that happen? Let’s keep plebiscite aside, even the foremost condition of plebiscite—demilitarization—didn’t happen, neither on the part of India nor from Pakistan. Son, when two elephants fight, it is only the grass beneath that is trampled. Don’t mess with the army. If u lodged an FIR, then the chances of finding your father become more minimal.). (sc. 00:44:51-00:45:53)

This representation of Kashmir issue is further extended and addressed in another scene of the film, in which Khurram Meer campaigns during the election process and speaks to the gathering of the people, “*In bachoon ko dekho, in key school army camp ban gaye hain.*” (Look at your children, their schools have turned into army camps.) (00:58:58-00:59:01).

In another such scene, Roohdaar speaks to Haider about his experiences of being with Hilal Meer in various camps and torture chambers of the state. He revealingly says,

Qaid khaan mein jab saari cheekhen, saari aahen galoo(n) mein dafan ho jati thi, tab aik awaz bhilakney hue sanatay se sur mila key raat ke zakhmon pe malham lagaya karti thi. Bulb sooraj ki tarah dehakta tha kothri nou(n) [9] mein. Andhere ko taras jati thi aankhen. Badan pe juve(n) reingti thi aur andar ajgar. Jahanam ka doosra naam hai Mama 2. [...] Fir humhe interrogation key liye dosrey campoon mein beja jane laga. Naye camps, anookhe naam—Boboland, Hotel 6, Maraaz Cinema. [...] Hum sab un key liye boujh ban gaye the, is liye humhe ikhwaniyon ke hawale kar diya gaya. (sc. 01:11:10-01:18:15)

(In prisons, when every shriek and sigh was buried in the throats, at that time a voice mingled with the weeping silence and put balm on the injuries of the night. The bulb emitted sun-like radiations in cell number nine. Our eyes craved darkness. On our bodies lice bred, and inside our mind pythons. Mama 2 is another name of Hell. [...] Then, they moved us to various camps for further interrogation. New camps, unique names—Boboland, Hotel 6, Maraaz Cinema. [...] Now, we were a burden on them, so they handed us over to the *ikhwanis*.)

The ruined condition of ordinary life in Kashmir is exemplified by including a scene of a graveyard of Boniyar, where a number of unidentified graves of people exist. It is in this graveyard, Haider finds the grave of his father who had been taken into custody by the army. The visual shows the number of his grave as “318”.

Representing the “rotten” condition of Kashmir, the film puts forth one of the scenes in which Dr. Hilal Meer is being taken by militants to treat one of their commanders. Hilal Meer warns a top militant commander, Zahoor Hussain, about the critical condition of the militant. He prescribes appendectomy, to which Zahoor Hussain responds: “*Hamari tehreek ka chehra hai doctor sahaab, haspataal le jaaney ka chance nahi le saktey hum.*” (He is the face of our resistance movement doctor sahib; we can’t risk taking him to the hospital) (sc.00:02:30-00:02:40). It is the notion of this ‘resistance movement’, which is pivotal to the processes of Pakistani intervention in Kashmir.

The clash of opposing ideologies is crucial in ruining the state of Kashmir, it is reflected from the words of Ghazala Meer, when she asks her husband, “*Kis taraf hai aap?*” (Which party do you belong to?) (00:05:08-00:08:15). In another scene, the film shows Zahoor Hussain addressing a public gathering during the election process. He mobilizes the masses by saying, “*Yeh democracy nahi, dam ghotney wali cracy hai—dammocracy.*” (This is not democracy, but a life-strangling cracy—‘dammocracy’.) (sc. 00:59:00-00:59:08).

In another scene, Brigadier T.S.Murthy, while addressing the media during the time of elections in Kashmir says, “*Jo teen laakh Kashmiri Pandit apne gharoon se nikale gaye aur ab refugee camps mein reh rahe hai(n), unhe aap disappeared logon mein nahi gine(n) ge?*” (The three lakh Kashmiri Pandits

who were driven out of their homes and are now living in refugee camps, won't you count them among the disappeared persons?). This 'treatment' of Kashmiri life under the shadow of the Pakistani state is represented in the film. Brigadier Murthy also addresses the media:

Main aap logo(n) ko yaad dilana chaahata hoon ki jo muluk aaj gumraah Kashmiri ladkoon ko masoomon key katal ke liye arms aur training de raha hai, usi muluk ne 1948 mein Kabayiloon key baes mein Kashmiriyon ko loota tha, un ki auratoo(n) ko rape kiya tha, bachoon ko kaata tha.

(I want to remind you people that the nation which is providing arms and training to the wayward Kashmiri boys, for the murder of innocent human beings, is the same nation which in the year 1948 invaded Kashmir as Tribals; looted Kashmiris, raped their women, killed their children.) (sc. 00:59:27-01:01:00:18)

The film displays the complexity of life in Kashmir by showing Roohdaar and his comrade named Zahoor Hussain 'guiding' Haider to join their militant outfit to take revenge on his uncle for plotting the death of his father. In this act of vengeance, Haider kills a policeman and the two Salmans. Pervez Lone becomes an unintentional victim of his bullet, Arshia Lone attempts suicide, and Ghazala Meer blows herself up with a suicide bomb-blast. The 'role' of Pakistani discursive processes in 'conducting' the life of Haider is also represented by screening him as a "mad man" (militant). Hamlet feigns madness as a sort of deceit, but Haider feigns madness in the backdrop of the violence and rottenness that inflicts pain on his life and on Kashmir. In a fit of frustration, he decides to join the armed militancy, brings about a lot of bloodshed and turmoil and finally leaves his uncle in a state of indecisiveness.

Among various other factors, the film displays the role of Kashmiri identity in ruining the state of Kashmir. Alluding to Kashmiri nationalism, the film represents one of the scenes, in which Dr. Meer is listening to a nationalistic song, “*Guloo(n) mein rang bharey baad-e-naubahar chaley, chaley bhi aao ki gulshan ka kaar-o-baar chaley.*” (“Like the new breeze of spring that grants blossoms their hue, come forth love, grant the garden leave to go about its business.”ⁱⁱ) (sc. 00:19:08-00:19:36). The film shows many such scenes, where processions in favour of “*azaadi*” (a Kashmir of their own) are held. In the film, there are scenes which screen the protesting voices writing slogans on the walls, “GO INDIA GO BACK”. The role of this Kashmiri factor is further highlighted in one of the scenes, in which Haider as a school-going boy sings, “*Khoon-e-shaheeda(n) rang laya, fateh ka parcham lehraaya, jaago jaago subeh hui, jaago jaago subeh hui.*” (Blood of martyrs has won; the flag of success is unfurled. wake up it is morning. wake up it is morning.) (sc. 00:48:47-00:49:10).

The film depicts the “rotten” condition of life by screening a protest march organized by the members of the “Association of the Parents of Disappeared People”, where a banner reads, “HUM HAIN KE HUM NAHIN” (Do we exist, or don’t we?). The role of Kashmiri nationalistic ideology is quite aptly filmed in the “mad-man’s speech” scene of the film, delivered at *Ganta Ghar* [Clock Tower] in Lal Chowk, Srinagar, which deflates the role of the multiple nationalisms ‘managing’ life in Kashmir. After coming to know about the murder of his father by his uncle, Haider feigns madness to take revenge on his uncle. He returns after visiting his father’s grave at Baramulla, and comes to Srinagar. In the scene, Haider speaks to a crowd of people,

Ab na humhe chodey Hindustaan, ab na humhe chodey Pakistan. Arey koi tou hum se bhi poochey ki hum kya chahte—‘azaadi’. Is paar bhi leingey—‘azaadi’. Us paar bhi leinge—‘azaadi’. Hum le ke—‘azaadi’.

(Now, neither India leaves us, nor Pakistan. O, somebody please ask us what we want—‘azaadi’. Will take from this side—‘azaadi’. On that side too—‘azaadi’. We will surely get it—‘azaadi’.)
(sc.01:28:38-01:28:46)

And, when his uncle approaches him escorted by policemen, Haider changes the tone by saying, “*Saarey jahan sey acha Hindustaan hamara, hum bulbuley hai iski...*”(Best of all in the world is our *Hindustaan*, we are its bulbuls and it is our garden.) (01:28:50-01:28:56). This change in tone represents the repression of the Kashmiri population by the processes of “biopower” in a “rotten state”.

All these scenes, in one way or the other, are testimonies which display the factors that have turned Kashmir into a “rotten state”. Haider becomes a target of the ruined condition of his family, and of the violence and conflict in Kashmir. He finds a magnified image of the rottenness of his individual life in the public life of the Kashmiri people. Like Hamlet, his unstable existence and his indecisiveness leads him to a condition of madness, and he becomes a victim of his fragmented psyche. His madness becomes a sign of resistance and protest, and in this dilemma he opts to take revenge on the system and on his uncle by choosing the path of violence. This decision of Haider proves disastrous, and plays a significant role in turning his family and individual life more “rotten”.

Haider symbolizes the youth of the valley, who in a fit of rage join the armed insurgency to take revenge for the wrong doings inflicted on people due to the siege-culture in

Kashmir. Haider is a figure through which Bhardwaj illustrates how the mess in a person's private life is replicated in the "rotten" society he/she lives in. And living in such a ruined society, where an individual is hemmed in from all sides, is bound to make a person frustrated. The activities of a mad person like Haider symbolize the resistance and protest against the forces responsible for the oppression, but at times acting in a state of rage and madness proves more disastrous. It is illustrated by the fact that Kashmir has lost its most important asset in the form of youth in the last two and a half decades. Two generations of young people have been lost to this "rotten state" of Kashmir, and the generation that is living these days is cynical and alienated.

In *Haider*, the application of the instruments of "biopower" to constrict human life in Kashmir is cinematically represented. In this representation, the role of the state in conducting the life of Kashmiris is important. The film is nationalistically oriented towards the rebuilding of the Indian state, prescribing non-vengeance as the solution to end this destructive process of violence. But it also brings to the screen some of the apparatuses, employed to 'control' the people in Kashmir. The film critiques the use of force, oppression, and suppression in the post-1989 Kashmir. Activities like frisking, crack downs, identity checks, encounters, etc. represent the atmosphere of oppression in the ruined state of Kashmir. The names of detention centres like "Mama 2", "Butcher House", and "Badami Bagh" display the horror attached to the life of a citizen in the "rotten state" of Kashmir.

In the climax, Haider does not take revenge on his uncle because of the clash between his father's words ("take revenge") and his mother's words ("forget revenge"). He experiences a pull on both sides, but throws away his gun,

leaves his uncle, and walks away. A young person, in a rotten state shunning the path of violence, does not live in the past, but even in a state of indecisiveness opts for hope and a better future. After deserting his state, he does not die like Hamlet but gives himself another chance to put things right and to heal the state of its “rotten” condition. Finally, the film puts forth a point of view in the form of “hope” and in the annihilation of notions of “revenge”. Haleema dies with a sense of hope, Peer leaves Kashmir with a ray of optimism, and Haider walks away from the graveyard after forgetting revenge. Hamlet’s indecisiveness ruins his state and takes his life, but Haider’s indecisiveness gives him a second chance to put things right. The filmic text visualises the rottenness in Kashmir clearly but its message is rooted in our ethos that violence is to be shunned because it never solves anything.

End Note

ACTOR	ROLE	CHARACTER (<i>HAMLET</i>)
Shahid Kapoor	Haider	Hamlet
Shraddha Kapoor	Arshia Lone	Ophelia
Tabu	Ghazala Meer	Gertrude
Narendra Jha	Dr. Hilal Meer	King Hamlet
Irfaan Khan	Roohdaar	Ghost (Hamlet)
Kay Kay Menon	Khurram Meer	Claudius(Hamlet’s uncle)
Kulbhushan Kharbanda	Hussain Meer	(Hilal Meer’s father)n/a
Lalit Parimoo	Pervez Lone	Polonius
Ashish Vidyarthi	Brigardier	T. S. Murthy n/a
Aamir Bashir	Liyaqat Lone	(Arshi’s brother) Laertes
Sumit Kaul	Salman 1	Rosencrantz
Rajat Bhagat	Salman 2	Guildenstern
Ashwath Bhatt	Zahoor Hussain	Fortinbras

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Living the Partition: Narratives of Encounter and Representation in the Kashmir Borderland Story

Kusumita Datta

Kashmir as a distinct Partition Narrative

The partition narrative of Kashmir is not about a bygone event but one whose consequences continue to affect and afflict future generations. It lives on as an internalized confrontation between displacement and emplacement. The border as a physical line of political demarcation or an emerging spatial imaginary is always subject to transitions. If partition and border imposition enforces and enables border-crossings, the borderland narrative of Kashmir never seems to complete the journey. Rather it continues to dwell on the site of contestation. Just as Kashmir has resisted forces of divisiveness, it has simultaneously rebutted forces of integration. This paper seeks to locate and define an ‘in-between’ site, where the contestations and contending multiple geographies will be perceived not only in terms of conflict but also a new kind of consensus.

The ‘border’ as a Stage

The border zone in Mirza Waheed’s 2011 novel *The Collaborator* has been called a “no-man’s land”, located in a border village called Nowgam near the Pakistan border. The Valley of yellow flowers is not only stashed with dead bodies but also the living reality of the accountant of the dead, the nineteen year old narrator who is employed to frisk bodies of people who cross borders, for IDs and weapons. This is mostly used by the Indian Army for work of public relations, as photographic evidence with such dead bodies during press releases. For the young narrator, all of it comprises a new

narrative at the border along with enacting a narrative remembrance about the other border boys of the village he has grown up with. This “no-man’s land” is the Line of Control.

First fashioned by the United Nations in 1949 as the Ceasefire Line, it took its present name and shape through the Simla Accord of 1972, and divides various segments of Kashmir. It has divided many single villages, like one called forward Sudpura, rear Sudpura and the remaining 35 houses as part of Pakistan. It situates itself in the fluid space of the stream which flows through Kashir. Dubbed a working boundary and an international border by Pakistan, it has become the site of continual cross-fires and minefields. Beyond the threshold of the border is a new country at one time and a new abyss at the other. It has become not only a horde of dead remains but a new series of transactions in the borderland existence.

In this regard it is important to define the status of the border and the people therein. With the divergent claims of India, Pakistan and China, the LOC is described by Ananya Jahanara Kabir as a ‘border that is not quite a border’ (Kabir 8). She goes on to explain its ‘chronic presence-in-absence’ as implicating its geographic peripheries. Thus an understanding of the border issue in Kashmir is to take into account the liminal status of the nation-state itself, not in terms of its own being but in terms of its peripheral existence. Between the official line as a visible trace of Partition and the occluded trace of the ‘epistemic murk’, is located the liminal nature of the border. Insofar as the border refuses to stably define itself, it demonstrates a demographic disturbance. Insofar as the border residents inhabit this site, they need to be granted a definition and stability amidst this demographic disturbance. Marie-Christine Fourny, analysing the concept of the ‘mobile border’, defines ‘the process of passage as a stage in

itself (Fourny 5). Attempts have been made at strategic levels to make the very issue of the borders irrelevant by allowing permeability across the Line of Control, which have, in turn been challenged by further escalation of separatist conflict. A 2016 report presents border residents who are reluctant to shift to camps, preferring to stay back at their homes to tend to their crops (*Indian Express* 2016). In both instances the border works as a liminal site, where both erasure and existence facilitate permissibility and distinction simultaneously. Fourny writes that it thus relates less to racial mixing and hybridity than to forms of a-territoriality, like Foucault's heterotopia. Existing at the edge of the nation-state, the borders of Kashmir should facilitate the new site of resolution and imbue dignity to its residents rather than make them a part of the refugee population. The existential metaphors in Ajay Raina's documentary and the transactional metaphors in Waheed's novel give due credence to the borderland existence as a rite of passage.

III. Border as Transaction and Rite of Passage in *The Collaborator*

In *The Collaborator* the narrator's father does not leave the village which he has helped built. However the young boy must become a handler of the dead infiltrators, not only because of Captain Kadian's insistence but also because they are left alone. For years these members of the gujjar community have had nothing to do with other Kashmiris who, they feel, have the leisure to participate in political movements. Yet the site with its contested geopolitical status appropriately posits a protagonist whose very being swings between nomadic living and settled existence. This contrarian, yet not quite oppositional stance, is required to critique the rhetoric of militancy or its false enmeshing in propaganda narratives. In deflecting emotional pressure from more autobiographical possibilities centred on Srinagar

and the Kashmir Valley, Waheed also avoids the propagandist counterposing of Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims stalling the peace process. The metaphors of existence and transactions only enable it further.

In allowing Captain Kadian to employ him as an accountant of the dead, with his “corpse-land etiquette”, Waheed makes death and repression a cold business venture, to gain media attention and a senior general’s adulation. Dismembered bodies in this partition narrative are sought to be commemorated through fake IDs as footage for future use. The wretched human remains on the green grass like cracked toys are accepted by the boy as normal. The remembrance of these bodies does not shame him because of death. It shames him because he is alive. Modulating our responses to solitary graves and mass graveyards he has to provide facts and figures, in an instance of normalized obscenity. The very debate over the increasing number of mass graves as mentioned in the Enquiry Report of Unmarked Graves in North Kashmir submitted by the investigating police team to the Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) in July 2011 (the year Waheed’s novel was published) presents the deepening façade beneath more and more facts and figures. In reckoning with the dead, the narrator reckons with the basic conundrums of living – border boys going to Sopore or Srinagar not only to become militants but also to relieve their parents of the shepherd’s yoke or buy them proper homes or become (fake) tourist guides. Embracing exile and death is both a social imperative propelled by economic reasons and a thrill for adventure, full of charisma and mystique.

If you are not chosen to be a part of it all like the narrator, then you become the abandoned one, left to tell the tale of the dead. Foregoing transactional realities of one sort,

you become a participant in another. Remarkably Waheed points out that all of it is not blood and gore. The narrator writes: “What do I smell of? Dead people, soap, hunger, mother’s silence, bad dreams, my fever, lost friends, father’s looks, Kadian’s whiskey, tea?” (45) To explicate the metaphor of death one has to probe all of these transactions of living.

The most worrying thing is its normalization, even trivialization. Sending a few boys to be a part of the movement with which they had hardly concerned themselves, the gujjar community now deals with it as a shame and a game, a serious crime and a cruel sport. As the children organize mock parades carrying guns and disused planks of weathered wood, some mothers giggle from their window perches. Death as a transaction is an interaction in a liminal space where the serious and the non-serious coexist. Death as a transactional metaphor enables us to realize the persistent realities which enforce but then subvert it. To become a militant is as shameful as not to be one, because the paradigms of terrorist uprising and freedom struggle are blurred. To become a tourist guide is to casually ferry boys across the border for new tourist destinations. To give credence to it is propaganda; to challenge it is to deny the basis of living. To choose *and* not to choose seems to be the new dilemma of the living.

‘apour ti yapour’ (Between Border and the Fence. On the Edge of the Map)

The existential metaphor Ajay Raina presents in his 2013 documentary tries to negotiate with this dilemma. Disallowing people to cross the border to visit the shrine of Saint Meetha Baji, the Indian Army has had to deal with accumulated offerings for which they create a shrine with parallel festivities. A mother listens to both her sons calling

the 'azan', the elder son on that side and the younger one on this side. Some villagers in border areas live in their houses from eight in the morning to six in the evening. With looming threat they have to leave their houses for the night at times. Mahapatra writes that displacement and mobilization is both temporary and permanent, occurring due to wars or war scares. This phase of mobility is dependent on ever-changing borderlands. (7) To counter the backlashes of a trauma which is the simultaneous result of paradoxical impulses –uncertainty and stability – one has to invert the paradigms of borderland existence and not merely discard the above attempts at existential transaction.

To internalize and then challenge it is the new dignity of the inhabitants of the mobile border. Raina shows an artist's colour cups for paper mache work kept in a box which contains a photograph of his brother who has crossed over to Pakistan. The border-crossing is a remembered coda which not just stultifies his present but enables a journey forward for the artist. Like the namaz read backwards by the young militant to warn the boys about the approaching army, for Hussain's father, the journey forward is through the tenuous path of inversion. It comes as a warning for all, a culmination, a final defiance even when defeated, like the final burning of all the dead bodies by the young narrator in Waheed's novel. It is a palimpsestic creation with death and grief as its different layers.

Finding Face: A Dialogue of Disjunction

When solidarity is equivalent to societal obligation and assimilation tactics, solitude becomes the path of creative freedom. In the liminal space this site can become one of conscious disjunction. A viewer of Sonia Jabbar and Sheba Chhachhi's photo installation *When the Gun is Raised, Dialogue Stops...Women's Voices from Kashmir*, which gathers

testimonies between 1994 to 2000, comments: “How strange that we start taking things for granted and lose touch with reality and humaneness.”(Butalia xx) Chhachhi herself explains in the photo essay that in the discourses of the terrorists and the freedom fighters the victims are usually female – not only as raped individuals but as the touristic trope of the beautiful ‘Kashmir ki kali’ as part of ‘boy’s talk’ amongst army men and journalists. The photographs in this essay bring the human back into the discourse. Anshul Avijit reports that a screen plastered with paper cuttings, what the artists call “media noise”(Avijit 2000) of the past 50 years, hides the series of distinct tales: Rubeena, a Bengali woman married to a Kashmiri, was raped by the soldiers from the ITBP camp; Benazir, a teenager from Bandipore whose handsome father (“just like Rajesh Khanna”) was killed by the Mujahideen because he used to drink; Jameela, a 26-year-old from Madangaon, justified the killing of her militant husband, but not of the seven innocent men killed along with him. The distinctness of the tales lies more in the accompanying photographs without titles to guide or prejudice us. From a mother with her children and a young son carrying an embellished gun to another women looking at a series of graves – the saga of the woman in Kashmir refuses to be part of an open rebellion but a quiet defiance. In the wrinkles around the eyes which still shine, in the despairing hunt for photographs for disappeared or dead, in the anticipation, in the waiting, in the prayers, the women seek not to be appropriated by the voices of war. Amidst a crowd or alone, from behind the veil, the eyes look straight at the viewer and the face demands recognition and acknowledgement of freedom. Yet as a P T Instructor points out, when the gun is raised dialogue stops, and there remain hardly any who listen to those who do not become news.

Borders and the Buffer State

It is not enough to make 'borders irrelevant' (Chari 2008) as the report commissioned by the Centre for Conflict Mediation and Resolution at the US Institute of Peace states. Rather new borders and affiliations of Kashmir, not only with South Asia but Central Asia need to be recognised. Muhammad Junaid, presently a faculty at the anthropology department in the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York, who has spent more than a decade on fieldwork in Kashmir points that these relations are more pertinent than Kashmir's relation with India and Pakistan in South Asia. In a panel discussion on a 2011 collection of essays by Tariq Ali, Hilal Bhat, Angana P. Chatterji, Habbah Khatun, Pankaj Mishra and Arundhati Roy and Kashmir's right to self-determination, he emphasizes that it modulates the understanding of relations between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir along communal lines when they are more pertinently understood as class and caste struggles, the latter mostly comprising the subaltern class. Junaid stresses that even during India's partition communal tensions did not break out in Kashmir. Thus Kashmir could successfully emerge as a site of conflict resolution as a region surrounded by major nuclear powers like China, India and Pakistan. A narrative of peace could emerge from this present location of immense contestation and turmoil.

Gowhar Fazili writes about the seeking of new affinities beyond de facto borders in order to provide leverage for separateness (Fazili 226). This accommodation is not to be confused with any imposed assimilation. An attempt should be made to perceive the responses of the marginalized communities through an inclusion of border sentiments. There is a need for democracy within the alliances for marginalities. For Kashmir, 'Azadi' has to be redefined and achieved through the notional and substantive

emancipation of all sub-marginalities that constitute it – borders of civil society, gender relations, religious minorities – to enable a confluence of a great civilizational impulse to become the basis of a new buffer state.

Sanjay Kak's 2011 collection of non-fictional texts brings together a massive range of dialogue from the elliptical graphic tale of Malik Sajad to the words of teenaged Kashmiri rap artists like M C Kash. Amidst suppression, voices like that of Harris Khalique (a Pakistani poet) emerge who says that he emblemizes the unresolved business of the Partition. He is not a Kashmiri but Kashmir. (Khalique 2002) In this context Basharat Peer talks about various acts of remembrance of totalitarianism within democracy. In his essay he refers to Arthur Koestler's essay 'On Disbelieving Atrocities' addressed to the untouched, unaffected people walking past events of atrocity (Peer 46). In Waheed's novel, in Raina's documentary, in Chhachhi's photo installation the onus for interpretation is given to the readers and viewers. The protagonists only seek justice, even if they do not know from whom or for what. And they do not get it. The transactional, the existential, the disjunctive, and the non-assimilative metaphors for the present help us begin to perceive the solution that Kashmir could be.

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Sheikh-ul-Alam: Reconciling Self and Society

Wasia

One of the most influential personalities that Kashmiri society produced towards the end of the 14th century was Sheikh Nur-ud-din, a famous saint-poet, also known as Nund Rishi and popularly called Sheikh-ul-Alam. He was born in village Kaimoh, 60 kms from Srinagar. Sheikh-ul-Alam was a mystic of high rank. Like many other mystics, he used poetry to communicate his thoughts. His poems are known as *shruks* in Kashmiri. The Sheikh received no formal education and didn't leave behind any written legacy. However, all his teachings have been orally transmitted.

Sheikh-ul-Alam traces his lineage to various Sufi-Rishi traditions. The Sufi-Rishi tradition was an Islamic mystic movement which upheld the doctrine of asceticism, vegetarianism and celibacy. The Sheikh belonged to the Rishi school of thought. He was, in fact, the founder of this tradition. Rishism was a movement in Kashmir which comprised various mystics living in solitude and striving to attain self-mortification through different ascetic exercises. However, the Sheikh renewed this tradition by taking Rishi philosophy into the public domain and doing away with earlier ways of renunciation. The paper aims at exploring the relationship of the Sheikh with self and society and the way he tried to reconcile the two.

Sheikh-ul-Alam observed the socio-religious condition around him from a very young age. From the very childhood, however, he distanced himself from social bindings. This wasn't guided by any external dictates but was motivated by his inner desire to seek the truth. He disliked worldly trappings and in order to attain peace of

mind and supreme bliss, he sought refuge in a cave at Kaimoh. He says:

Living in backwoods I made my body tremble in
fear
First I made a cave
After removing inner impurities, I made Him reveal
Himself
I turned the cave into my grave
With saffron and camphor I purified my body
My desire for good things I put to sleep in
cave.(Kak 77)

At the age of twenty, he is believed to have expressed his desire to live alone, in complete solitude. For the Sheikh, involvement in family was a useless exercise. He had, therefore, decided to keep away from domestic engagements. His mother along with her daughter-in-law (Sheikh's wife) tried to motivate him but he refused to return. "She (the mother) left no stone unturned to persuade him to come back home...but the entreaties and appeals of the mother cut no ice with him. Like granite, he stood firm on the path he had chosen..."(Parimoo 48). After taking refuge in the cave, he took to various methods of worship. Parimoo writes in this regard:

With unfaltering faith in one God, as the giver of everything and redeemer of mankind, the Sheikh finally left his hearth and home for good, at about the age of thirty-two. He started his penance in a cave, at Kaimoh. Seclusion, night vigils and prayers were among the basic constituents of penance. (47)

The Sheikh would pray all the time in seclusion:

Having thus secluded himself in the cave in the manner of Rishis, the Sheikh combined the daunting series of recitations of God's name with extremes of

asceticism, self-mortification, long fasts, and sexual abstinence. In order to discipline his soul, he followed extreme ascetic practices to free himself from his sensual self. (Khan 101)

According to him, the greatest enemy on the path of God-realization was one's mind. In many of his poems, he referred to it as a horse that needed to be controlled. He continuously prepared himself for the ordeal of spiritual experiences. It was, however, a journey where many stages had to be crossed and Sheikh-ul-Alam started with seclusion. For him, the entire world was nothing but an illusion. So he continuously talked about it as being futile. He says:

O mother, of what avail are thy deeds to me?
I receive whatever God is pleased to give
Wrongly did the illusion attract me to the world
Having renounced home, for whom should I live?
(Parimoo 52)

Through his poems, the Sheikh clearly differentiated between the illusion of worldly life and the truth of God realisation. He had a firm belief that whatever God did was for our own good and that the worldly desires, lust, anger and all other temptations were the enemies that had to be defeated. According to him, life without a spiritual goal wasn't worth living. He believed that the creator and the creation were actually one in essence but it was a difficult task to recognize this. Since all living beings get ensnared in the world of attractions, it becomes difficult to swim across to the shore of immortality and bliss. Therefore, in order to arrive at this ultimate realization persistent effort was needed. This began with mind control and subjugation of the organs of sense which later on led to the disappearance of duality and the Self and self got recognized as one. An individual, therefore, reached the ultimate state of being. He says:

After birth, the body joined with I becomes precious
He who controls the body, his impurities are removed
In the end, it becomes auspicious
He who controls the mind, purifies his nature
For him, the door to the inner sanctuary is open (Kak 119)

Like other mystics, he too suffered moments of weakness, vacillation and despondency. While he was drawn to the spiritual domain on one hand, on the other worldly life drew him to itself. He expresses his despair saying:

To sail by boat or to walk on foot?
If you are in a fix, how can you arrive?
Walk steadily on the straight path
And you won't tire on endless paths
If the earthly chains you cannot break
How can you my soul have inner peace? (Amin 28)

Worldly existence would attract him every now and then and he would look for a higher meaning, a higher self. For him, the higher self was like fragrant sandalwood; a tree that had the capacity to heal and the lower self or ego was like unyielding wood, good for nothing. He found this world as nothing but evil and lamented having taken birth here saying:

The deal struck, here I came to act
But was lost into the thick of the fair
How I was stumped, brainy though I was
What a loss I have suffered taking my birth
here (Amin 62)

Ego was to Sheikh-ul-Alam a petty thing that needed to be controlled and its desires to be channelized properly. Sheikh-ul-Alam believed that the carnal desires, the material tendencies of the lower self led an individual to the path of deceit and corruption. He knew the power of worldly splendour and himself experienced being overpowered by the lower self. The continuous desire for material things pulled

him away from his spiritual aspirations and he knew that it was very difficult to escape the clutches of ego. He talks about his self as the hard side of the apricot tree which in spite of being nursed well never blooms. He finds it difficult to satisfy or control. It is this self that derails and negates the efforts put in by prayers. He says:

O my self, the gnarl of apricot wood!
Even through my nursing you never bloomed
You duped me, swindler, in broad day light!
O you cur! You've never let me be. (Amin 93)

He labels the self as a murderer too, something that demanded of him what he wasn't meant for. He wants to take control of it and to redeem himself. The uncontrolled desires takes him away from one corner to another. He, therefore, connects self to Satan who causes impediments in the path one takes to reach the Supreme. He says:

My ego has caused me confusion
My ego has taken the place of devil
I wish my ego accepted the path of good deeds
My ego has taken the place of hell (Kak 70)

In a verse Sheikh-ul-Alam relates the self to a straw in the eye causing persistent distraction and pain. This self finds delight in the misery of human soul and it is this ego which encourages one towards all evil and wrong doings. There is a constant reiteration of the fact that in order to reach out to the higher self, modesty has to be cultivated. There is a persistent address to the inner self by Sheikh-ul-Alam that gets expressed through his verses. In order to keep the material desires in control, he reflected on life and its changing stages. He used various metaphors to illustrate the progression of life. In a poem, he compares the progression from youth to old age with the passing of

seasons from spring to winter. Spring brings with it beauty and bloom but it then passes into winter. He says:

Stained with impurity is my fair body
The bird has slipped out of the garden
The hot summer has turned into mid-winter
Drained of warmth is my body
Old age has wasted me slowly
Bad deeds have I piled up—how will I rise?
I am lost—who can I ask for help? (Kak 71)

In another of his verse, he compares his soul to a bird and his body to a cage. Upon death, the soul leaves the body which gets reduced to dust and mixes further with dust. He says:

When the parrot escapes, the cage will remain
Gently will they lament for me
My body will wither away
Great God! Absolve me of sins (Kak 73)

For him, however, the reality of death was more complex than merely exiting the door of life. The actual destination lay in the domain of the Supreme. So, in his verses he talks about his desires, how they got him involved in sinful deeds; there is a constant effort from his side to mend his ways for he finds that the real solace lies in worshipping God. He says:

My ego is like a poker for shoveling out hot coal
Every moment it asks for more
My body is too weak to remember God
Remember God I must
As a transient guest I have come to the world...(Kak 74)

Sheikh-ul-Alam's verses also embody the conflict that goes on between faith and doubt. Material desires and worldly splendour take hold of an individual and it is a difficult task to let go off its holds. It becomes evident from Sheikh-ul-Alam's poetry that there was a deep desire

burning in his heart for spiritual attainment. He would often introspect and take note of his derailed self. There is a note of reprimand found in his verses:

Alas! What shall I do? My body has been pining away
Too heavy my sins; how may I be buoyant?
Sweet and dainty dishes have turned poisonous
I am consumed with fire; whom shall I blame? (Parimoo 69)

Sheikh-ul-Alam constantly expressed the despair that he was beset with through his poems. He knew his limitations as a human soul and also that it was very important to keep oneself immune and away from all sins. He says:

If you repent, you will cross the worldly river
Repentance is the ferry boat at this time
Hey self, without repentance how will you ascend there?
Here it is cold and no warmth (Kak 148)

After taking control over the carnal self, Sheikh-ul-Alam found the ultimate truth. He understood the essence of his existence. So, he found God as an ever existing presence. He says:

He who is here is also there
He is omnipresent
He is the soldier and he is the chariot
Himself hidden—He is omnipotent (Kak 92)

The Sheikh had an unflinching faith in the oneness of God. He saw Him as the giver and redeemer of all. For him, God was one and embedded in all things. There was a continuous unity that pervaded everywhere and through his verses, the Sheikh explained the same:

Were you to grasp His Oneness, where would you be?
The splendour of His Oneness is welling up everywhere
Your reason and reflection won't help you in this—
Is there one, dear, who can drink up that ocean? (Amin 4)

From these verse, it can be inferred that there is a unity that surrounds everything and every being. It is a glorified unity that requires a lot of efforts to make itself comprehensive and the biggest obstacle to this realization is one's ego or the lower self. Sheikh-ul-Alam had dedicated his whole life to the Almighty. He believed in cultivating the sprit setting up a spiritual goal and then towards working it. Once the path was identified, one could undertake the journey and reach the Supreme abode. For him, religion was a bond between the creator and his creatures. His was a strongly personal spiritual experience. The Supreme was superior to all the other things. It was His will, His support and His everlasting presence which helped him withstand the tough times. He talks about Him as the matchless merchant who showers numerous gifts upon His believers. In fact, he saw God as the inspiring spirit enabling him to cherish existence and the ecstasies of life. For him, Lord was a panacea for all illness. He saw Him as the blooming spirit of his life. With His presence and blessings, he believed the venom would turn sweet.

The Rishi tradition underscored the local ethos, emphasized the oneness of God and preached vegetarianism. Self-denial, non-attachment, and purity of life were the basic tenets of Rishi philosophy. Khan writes in this regard:

Nuruddin...renewed the Rishi tradition by doing away with the ways of renunciation of the Hindu ascetics. This view is substantiated by the fact that even during the life time of Nuruddin and many years after his death when the Rishi movement was in full swing there were ascetics among the Brahmans of Kashmir who enjoyed considerable popularity among the unlettered masses. Such men were attracted to the fold of Nuruddin since they seem to have perceived little difference between the goals pursued by them

and by Muslim Rishis. Thus the Rishi movement though essentially characterized by elements of social protest also provided the cover under which the surviving remnants of the conquered Hindu ascetic tradition could continue to exist in Islam. (38)

The direction of attention inwards by withdrawing from the external world in order to open up the inner life and facing the austerities and hardships are important aspects of this mystic journey and these nearly exist in all mystic traditions. Nur-ud-din made Islam comprehensible to the masses. His verses served the important job of imparting knowledge of religion and God to people. Sheikh-ul-Alam's verses are embedded with the themes of death, mortality, union with God, world as a community, non-violence and universal love. Through his verses, he urged people to cultivate primary human qualities like those of submission, compassion and dedication. He used straight and simple language to preach these values. He critiqued the caste system and the orthodox customs and worked for the freedom of society from the clutches of conventions. In spite of being a mystic, he taught people the true values of humanity. In one of his verses, he addresses people saying:

Don't rub your body—the soap will not clean it
The rosary staff and the patched robe
These tricks will not lead you to Him
Renounce desires, my dear and become a servant
Only then will you grasp the real teaching
Ashamed you will be there otherwise (Kak 136)

He would address the masses directing them to shed off the garbs of hypocrisy and shun false practices, ostentatious activities and conventions.

Another important thing that Sheikh-ul-Alam emphasized upon was that people needed to cultivate good hearts and always be ready to help others. He was, in

addition to a mystic, a great humanist. Through his poems, he left larger than life lessons to be learnt for all generations to come. For him, nothing could equate the spirit of goodness. Sheikh-ul-Alam constantly reinforced the doctrine of truthfulness, honesty and righteousness. In order to receive supreme bliss, it was important to cultivate purity. He says in a poem:

Will diamonds be found in marshy lands?
Will birds chirp when caught in meshes?
Will the narcissus bloom in the midst of a desert?
Will pearls be available in glassware stalls?(Amin 37)

From the above poem, it is clear that for Sheikh-ul-Alam, good deeds and a kind heart could never go waste. In fact, one of the primary conditions of worship is to have a pure heart, always ready for the service of people. Only good deeds could take a person to heaven and grant him ultimate bliss. He taught his disciples to surrender to the Divine will. He preached his religion in terms of his relationship with God which was established through love. He preferred solitude to interaction with worldly people but he did engage in helping people who sought his guidance. He was always ready to help and stand by anyone in need. The Rishi movement, therefore, was not only “an ideology but a way of life characterized by selfless service to fellow humans and belief in dignity of life” (Kak 16).

Thus, after introspecting and recognizing his true self, the Sheikh bade farewell to the life of seclusion and started a new phase as a cultural practitioner, religious preacher and social reformer. There is a transition in the life of the Sheikh. Khan writes in this regard:

Nuruddin’s religious career falls into three main stages: the first is that of an orphan struggling to take out his mundane existence; the second is that of an ascetic who withdraws himself from the worldly

affairs in order to know the religious truth; and in the third and final stage, he gives up the life of a recluse to advocate ethics of a dynamic and positive nature...this division helps us to perceive in a clearer light the shifts and changes which are natural to the evolution of the career of a mystic such as Nuruddin. (97)

Sheikh-ul-Alam emerged as a missionary, too, who travelled throughout the valley and preached and propagated Islam. Along with many other companions, he toured the valley and established various centres across the valley to preach Islam. He is, therefore, remembered not only as a Sufi but also as a preacher in Kashmir. He, like Lal Ded and many other saints, used poetry as the medium of expression as mentioned earlier. He communicated his thoughts, feelings and also talked about his mystic experiences through his poems. Poetry was, therefore, not only a medium of expression but also a means to reach out to the masses and convey or impress upon them varied lessons of life. His poetry was the manifestation of his prolonged meditations, his faith in the Supreme Lord, his devotion to Him, his humanism and various other socio-religious concepts. All his verses are symbolic expressions of his spiritual experience and his lessons are conveyed through an artistic use of language couched in metaphors drawn from everyday life in the guise of flowers, animals, birds, rivers and other entities of Nature. "Sheikh Nuruddin's poetry reveals a language that flows effortlessly and it is a succinct demonstration that he had instilled into his mind...translated his thoughts into his mother tongue of which he was a unique master" (Tak 29). He situated Islam in a regional setting to embrace all communities and commoners into the same setting. He transcended nearly all the barriers—social as well as cultural. He subsisted on wild vegetables, preferred *vopalhaakh* to dishes, wore ragged clothes, used kangri and survived in the ordinary domain. He preached religious

cordiality, human love and also social, cultural and religious tolerance. He says:

What qualities hast thou found in the world?
To allow thy body a free, loose rope
The Muslamaan and Hindu sail in the same boat
Have thy play and let's go home (Parimoo 90)

He addressed himself to the task of reforming the society and became a socio-religious missionary, preaching through his poems. The Sheikh valued all sections of the society. He talked about the manual labour of agriculturists as man's divinely ordained task in the world. "He admired the idyllic quality of rural life as against the corruption and artificiality of urban civilization"(Fayaz 10). He took metaphors from peasant life and elevated various aspects of their work to symbolize spiritual activity. He says:

The plough share is thy bath and ablution; perform them well
The yoke is thy conscience; abandon the thoughts of family or tribe
Tilling the land is reading the Quran, read it correctly
One who celebrates the Gongal, will surely celebrate the Krav (Parimoo 193)

Through the vernacular medium, the Sheikh taught the unlettered masses the fundamentals of religion and humanity. He believed in the oneness of all and through his poems preached to all communities— Hindu as well as Muslim. He ridiculed the caste-centric orientations of Brahmans saying:

One'skval doesn't change one's complexion or status
On one's temples, no badge or family is stamped
(beware), lest the thought of family should benumb thy limbs
Mind thou thine deeds; otherwise kval signifies nothing
(Parimoo 157)

In the same way, Muslims who were proud of their class/clan and considered themselves noble were also targeted by the Sheikh. He also attacked the clergy or the *ulemas* who in the name of religion exploited people. Fayaz writes in this regard:

It was a matter of great concern for Sheikh Nuruddin that strikingly against the principle of social brotherhood as preached by Islam, a section of Muslim ulema had fallen victim to worldly greed. It was to eradicate the negative impact of the worldly ulemas and the worldly sufis that forced Sheikh Nuruddin to come out into the field and encounter their activities and mundane mentality.(12)

The Sheikh wanted to preach true religion to people that stood for classless and casteless society, free of any discords whether at the social or the religious level. He did not believe in any social distinctions on the basis of religion or power. He knew how people exploited the illiterate masses in the name of religion. He critiqued the mullahs who had made it a profession to recite the Quran and gain material wealth. He says:

Those who pretend to be learned great
Easily get mixed up with devil himself
Penitence is the medicine bringing recovery
Without repentance thou loosest the way (Parimoo 241)

The Sheikh stressed the need for creating a congenial and friendly environment, devoid of any division, bias or distrust. His verses are emblematic of his belief in universal brotherhood and religious unity. He didn't address a particular class or group of people but mankind at large. He advocated total surrender before God and compassion for all creatures. Wherever he went, he ridiculed the oppressive forces and associated himself with the downtrodden and underprivileged. His tour across the valley, therefore, had a

socio-ethical connotation. During his tour, he witnessed social injustice, feudal oppression and general discontent among masses.

Through his poetic compositions, the Sheikh gave expression to people's sentiments. Gauhar writes that human exploitation and domination had resulted in great socio-economic divisions and this has been a trend since ages. The oppression has always caused agitations, devastations and wars. The era of the Sheikh was no exception to this. The Sheikh voiced such events through his poems. He says:

Demands were raised but denied
The denied demands were imposed by force
Some people had to die while agitating their demands
Some were dynamic in their demands but were made
to be static
Some were given but later the domain was snatched
from them (Gauhar 242)

The Sheikh voiced such injustices and represented the collective sentiment and genuine aspirations of the people making them believe that they were not all alone in their struggle against injustice and oppression. Fayaz opines:

In medieval feudal structure, the worst hit at the hands of landed elite was no other category than fleeced peasantry...the Sheikh during the cave days had come to know about the feudal oppression, as the rural folk, who visited the cave to seek the aid and blessings of saint often complained against the inhuman treatment by the agents of feudal chiefs. The valley wide tour offered innumerable opportunities to the saint to witness appalling heights of feudal atrocities. (91)

Upon seeing the injustices, the Sheikh expressed himself strongly. All the happenings left a grave impact on

his mind and he would every now and then ponder over social injustices and imbalances:

The cunning enjoy luxuries and the pious are paupers
Such imbibed black scars can hardly be washed
There (in such environ) the pig is safer, the deer is
blind
Though we may use nectar to wash
The falcon is caged, the crow soars freely in high
heavens (259)

Undertaking the valley tour marked a turning point in the Sheikh's socio-religious career. After isolation and alienation, he emerged as a socially conscious individual who through his poetry established a direct connection with the masses living across the valley. The experiences that he gathered upon interacting with varied sections of the society found expression in his poems. His open contact with everyone gave him chance to understand the nature of his society. He got to know about all the forces that had a role in shaping the behaviour and mental make-up of people.

Another important contribution of Sheikh-ul-Alam was the admittance of rural girls within the fold of Rishi order in a patriarchal era. This was a time when the entire socio-cultural landscape of Kashmir was dominated by men and Kashmiri women didn't enjoy much freedom. Sheikh-ul-Alam, at that time, opened schools for girls and also admitted many women to his Rishi cult. "So great was the influence of the Rishi's social role on the consciousness of the people that even women joined their ranks with a view to building up a healthy society" (Khan 230).

Sheikh-ul-Alam accepted everyone irrespective of colour, caste, creed or gender. What he was against was the hypocrisy of the people claiming to be custodians of religion. So, throughout his life, he made it a priority to make people

understand real religion and for this purpose, he used common poetic language. He journeyed from seclusion to society and through his poetry reconciled the self and society. It is the ever-relevant ethos contained in his poems that grants him a significant place in the consciousness of masses. His poetry expresses the culture of a great civilization in a local setting and also portrays the quality of the human spirit that flourished within it. His poetry enriches the individual as well as the world at large and has thus, attained immortality and everlasting relevance.

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Literature as a Site of Memory: Reading History, Memory and Identity in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle* and *Silent House*.

Nasir Faried Butt

Memory and history are important factors that make our identity. After Maurice Halbwachs introduced the idea of “collective memory,” which refers to the storehouse of shared memory in the individuals of a group or society, memory studies which gained an impetus in the late twentieth century, foregrounded the fact that individuals as well as communities derive their sense of identity from history and shared memory. This paper attempts to analyse memory and history in the making of identity in Turkish literature, especially in Orhan Pamuk's novels, *The White Castle* and *Silent House*. The paper will analyse how Pamuk remakes and reinvents the torn Turkish identity by narrativising the abandoned Ottoman history and memory. His works thus become what Pierre Nora calls '*lieux de memoire*' “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself.” Such sites include texts, ceremonies, monuments and other forms of art from the past. There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *mieux de memoire*, real environments of memory” (Nora 7).

Turkey has experienced a major shift in culture and history after the birth of the Republic in 1923 which was marked by a shift from centuries old Ottoman culture towards a more or less Westernised one. This has created a problematic situation in Turkish identity which oscillates between the Ottoman identity and the modernized/Westernised one. This shift and oscillation has also had a deep impact on Turkish literature. The old Ottoman tradition and culture saw a sudden change which Pierre Nora calls “a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of break with the past is bound up

with the sense that memory has been torn-but torn in a way as to pose the problem of embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (7). With the establishment of the new republic of Turkey, the real memory, which is social and unviolated has been overtaken by official history which is “how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies are propelled by change organise the past.” State institutions were formed in Turkey to “produce and popularize a usable past”. These organizations (like the TTTH or Committee for the Study of Turkish History and TTK or Turkish Historical Society) “popularized state sponsored historical narratives” (Cinar 18-21). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, known as the father of the Turkish Republic, denounced the multi-ethnic character of Ottoman culture and held it responsible for the disintegration of the empire. The new Kemalist regime therefore undertook “an extensive history-writing project that could erase the Ottoman legacy” (Cinar 17). However, the rejection of Islamic tradition of the Ottoman culture was a reaction against the ‘Orientalist stereotyping’ of the Turks by the West. Atatürk and his aides were “disturbed by the inferior representation of Turks in Western historiography and social sciences” (Cinar 17). Atatürk therefore abolished all that was ‘Ottoman’ and hence in Kemalist terms, backward. Most importantly, the script of Turkish language, which was formerly Arabic and Persian, was abolished in favour of Roman script. Literature and public speeches in local languages, especially Kurdish, were outlawed. In the words of Erdag Goknar, “The literary and cultural effects of the Ottoman legacy on the Republic were severe, as can be gauged by the initial Republican response to it in the form of a concerted cultural revolution to diminish and erase traditional forms of class, religion, identity, and cultural practice” (95). The cultural memory and the tradition of Turkey, it may be said, has remained “nothing more than sifted and sorted historical traces” as against the official Kemalist history, which is a “dictatorial

memory—a memory without the past that ceaselessly reinvents the tradition” (Nora 8).

Many modern Turkish writers have taken to using literature and art as *Leslieux de memoire* (sites of memory) to challenge the engineered history of Turkification under the Kemalist modernisation project. Orhan Pamuk is representative of such subversive writers who has taken to digging up the Ottoman past and invoking the lost cultural memory. Pamuk explores in his novels the many ‘collective memories’ that have been erased by the Kemalist grand narrative and by the “acceleration of history” which is “an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into the historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear” (Nora7). Pamuk in his novels retrieves the Ottoman legacy by setting his plot in the Ottoman era and juxtaposing it with contemporary Anatolia.

In *Silent House*, although Faruk lives in Kemalist era, he is not satisfied with the official history propagated by the State. He excavates the archives and digs out the actual Ottoman history. Faruk keenly studies history and checks the inconsistencies in the events narrated and the actual records of the events in the government decrees and archives. He looks for historical records but what he finds at the District office at Gebze are “forgotten decrees, deed registers, court records, all in boxes and registers piled up on a top of one another collecting dust” (*Silent House* 82). Faruk tells the history he has read in the archives to his friends, but they are not willing to believe there could be any such history, for they have been fed with the official account of their history. When he shows an old book of Turkish history, his friends reject it saying: “No, it was impossible that documents for such an undertaking could exist in

Gebze! I was silent while they proved that there couldn't be archives in Gebze" (*Silent House* 83).

There is no denying the fact that the Turkish Republic of Kemalist era took up the grand project of rewriting and narrativising of standardized history in an attempt to reshape modern Turkish identity. However, Pamuk goes against such turkification which was based on selective narrativisation of standardized history. He also uses the same strategy of rewriting history and narrativising it through his fiction. To achieve his purpose, Pamuk goes back to the Ottoman era and delves into the spaces of the past to trace the Turkish identity through both time and space because, as an act of making identity, "most social groups . . . engrave their form in some way upon the soil and retrieve their collective remembrances within the spatial framework thus defined" (Halbwachs 14). Faruk, in *Silent House*, studies the day-to-day life account of Turkey of the seventeenth century. He recounts that, "Ignoring the fact that the stories had to have some use, I was copying a huge mass of figures and words related to meat. . . . For the first time I felt I could really envision that twenty-third of Recep 1028, which the West had lived as the 6th of July 1619 and I was quite pleased" (*Silent House* 85).

In *The White Castle*, Pamuk uses historical metafiction by presenting before the reader a novel that emerges as a story in a story that relies on the "slippage of multiple narratives and narratives to establish its metahistorical themes and plot" (*The White Castle* 34). The novel tells the story of an Ottoman lord called *hoja* and a captured Venetian sailor, his look alike. The master and his Venetian slave live together for dozens of years and, at the end, exchange their identities. At the end of the novel, the reader wonders whether the Venetian slave is a mere work of imagination or the *hoja*. The novel is in the form of a seventeenth century

manuscript written in old Turkish with Arabic and Persian script. Faruk Darvinoglu, the fictional author of the preface of the novel, finds the manuscript in the 1980's in an official archive in Gezbe, steals the historical manuscript from the governor's archive and tries to translate his nation's history in order to make sense of the present. Faruk tirelessly tries to find the "author of my story" (2). His search for the author and inability to track down the author suggests Pamuk's endeavour to trace the Turkish identity in the old Ottoman text that serves as a site of memory. Faruk talks about ". . . its symbolic value, its fundamental relevance to our contemporary realities, how through this tale I had come to understand our own times . . ." (3). Pamuk employs postmodern techniques like metafiction, intertextuality and multiple fragmented narratives in his fiction to reconstruct history by juxtaposing historical settings and plots with the post Kemalist and contemporary life of Turkey. He deconstructs official history considering what Linda Hutcheon calls "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" in an attempt to "rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (Hutcheon 5). By "identifying the constructed nature of history and identity," Pamuk employs metafiction "to question the authority of master narratives such as nationalism, secularism, and modernity (Goknar 35).

The historical text that Faruk Darvinoglu in *The White Castle* finds reads as metafiction. The credibility of the Old Ottoman narrator's story is dubious as the narrator at the end of the story himself asserts:

The story I told seems not to have been made-up but actually lived, it was as if someone else were softly whispering all these words to me, the sentences slowly following one another in sequence: 'We were sailing from Venice to Naples when the Turkish fleet appeared.' (*The White Castle* 138)

Also, it becomes quite confusing as to who the narrator of the story is : the master, Hoja or the Venetian slave. Moreover, it appears that Hoja himself has made both the narrators. Also, Faruk of *Silent House* is in fact the intertextual translator of *The White Castle*. In other words, both the novels have same character, namely Faruk who in one is the translator of the old manuscript and in the other, the historian.

In *Silent House*, Pamuk deals with the family saga of the Darvinoglus. Three siblings come to pay a week long annual summer visit to their grandmother at Istanbul. The grandmother is lost in the past and is always brooding over it. She lives alone in a mansion with her dwarf servant, Recep who happens to be her husband's illegitimate son. Faruk Darvinoglu is a fatso drunkard who excavates the Ottoman history and tries to make sense of the history by analyzing the past events written in the old manuscripts. The novel is in the form of interior monologues of different characters/narrators. Each narrator/character offers his/her own perspective on history, religion, progress, nation and socio-cultural life of Turkey. Through the nostalgic interior monologues and broodings of the grandmother, we know about her dead husband Dr Salahettin who was interested in secular sciences. He used to mock at the religious backwardness of the Turkish people and believed that only science governs the universe and that God does not exist.

Silent House is set against the backdrop of clashes between the cultural binaries that emerged during the infancy of the Turkish Republic. Kemalist political discourse in Turkey during the first half of the twentieth century was more or less inclined to Europeanize the cultural and social structure. It has now paved way for "a more or less Western-style political party whose historic mission is to take Turkey

into Europe, and it is backed by the people!”(Pamuk, “Two Souls” 10) The social and cultural transformation and changing regimes from time to time has had serious effect on the identity and beliefs of the people. Pamuk states in an interview that Turkey has seen many “authoritarian politicians trying to impose one soul on Turkey, one way of life or mode of being. Some wanted to impose Western secularism by military means; some wanted Turkey to be eternally traditional and Islamic” (Pamuk, “Two Souls” 11). Criticizing radical westernization Pamuk also notes that during the making of a new republic, there was a great deal of “radical will to modernize the country, a will to invent a new nation.” Mustafa Kemal and the whole “Turkish establishment decided to forget Islam, traditional culture, traditional dress, traditional language and traditional literature. It was all buried” (Pamuk, “Turkey’s Divided Character” 21).

In *Silent House* the grandmother laments over the loss of old traditions and the cultural alterations commissioned by Kemalist regime. In one of her broodings she reflects:

Muslims were required to wear the same hat instead of *fez*. . . The year . . . wouldn’t be called 1345 anymore but 1926, by the Christian calendar. . . . The newspaper had, in addition to the Christian hats on the Muslim heads, Christian letters under the pictures. . . . When I read the family name he’d chosen, written on a piece of paper they proudly put in front of me, I didn’t wonder: it seemed a mockery that made my hair stand on end. I was disgusted to think how this ugly name Darvinoglu [Son of Darwin], would one day be carved on my tombstone. (*Silent House* 104-105)

Pamuk goes against the altered and standardized history texts which in the words of Jan Assman,

“objectivised memories” that can be stored and transmitted through generations. These objectivised memories comprise the ‘cultural memory’ whose cultivation help a society to make its self image (132). But Pamuk provides a parallel cultural memory which relies on the common stories of the past rather than the engineered and standardized texts. As Assman maintains, “one group remembers the past in fear of deviating from its model; the next for the fear of repeating the past”. Pamuk and writers like him remember the Ottoman past for fear of deviating from it. They choose the setting, style and theme of Ottoman past to remember and identify with the Ottoman Turkish culture as opposed to the Kemalists who remember it for fear of repeating it. In both his novels, Pamuk chooses settings and characters from seventeenth and eighteenth century Turkey juxtaposed with contemporary times. Pamuk endeavors to resurrect the Ottoman history and Ottoman language in his literary works.

Pamuk’s novels use ‘Ottomanesque’ theme alluding to “medieval and early modern writing [that] underscores the multivalences enabled through a synchronic approach to literary history” (Goknar 97-98). Although *Silent House* is a realistic novel, *The White Castle* is a postmodern saga. *Silent House* records the disintegration of Darvinoglu family as a result of changes brought about by the new Republican state. The novel is based on the shift from Ottoman Turkey to twentieth century republic. On the other hand *The White Castle* is a reassessment of an Ottoman historical manuscript found in an archive. Metin, in *Silent House* is a failure who aspires to go to the West and start a better life there, whereas his sister Nilgun dies because of her Left-wing connections. Hassan, a right wing nationalist ruins his life working for nothing with his fellow idealists. The Grandmother dies brooding and reminiscing the Ottoman culture and tradition. She laments the loss of what was old

and traditional. She lives in an old mansion alone and abandoned. She visits the graves of her husband, her son and her daughter-in-law and keeps on admonishing her dead husband for his modern and Westernised attitude. She also laments on the effects of modernisation exercised by the new regime. She reads newspapers “to see if someone she knows has died; not some young agitator but some old person who has died in bed. Sometimes she would get annoyed complaining that ever since Ataturk everyone take a new name it was chaos (*Silent House* 58). It is her memory of the Ottoman which offers a stark contrast to the new made up Turkishness.

Pamuk feels deep *huzun*, the melancholy, that is everywhere in Istanbul. The word ‘huzun’ carries a theological understanding of the “place of loss and grief” or melancholy. Pamuk feels a halo of melancholy overwhelms the architecture, the streets, the culture and the very city of Istanbul which are “the sites of memory.” This sense of grief leads Pamuk to go back to Ottoman past, dig out the roots of modern Turkish culture. Grandmother in the *Silent House* feels *huzun* as she sees everything changed around her; everything that was traditional giving place to the foreign and new. She feels the loss of Ottoman values, the traditional way of dressing, family names and way of life (104-105). Memory plays an important role in Pamuk’s works. He uses memory to discover the past, and also to expose the inconsistencies of history and its reliability. For example in *The White Castle*, Faruk finds an old historic manuscript and tries to translate it. He reads the manuscript in one room and writes in another room depending on his memory, on what is left of the story in his mind. Faruk, therefore incorporates in his translated edition of the historical account of the seventeenth century his own interpretations and fictitious incidents. Grandmother in *Silent House* cherishes the old memories and is always brooding over the past years, right

from her days of primary education through her marriage, child bearing and old age. It is her memory that throws light on the society the Darvinoglu family has been living in. On the other hand the hoja in *The White Castle* tells his story of life through memory and keeps on reflecting on his experiences with his lookalike through forty or so long years. His story tells much about the 17th century Ottoman culture and life.

In both the novels Pamuk draws on memory and culture of the ottoman Turkey and tries to re-establish the lost historical and cultural values. He tells his stories in the backdrop of Ottoman culture and presents them in juxtaposition with the contemporary socio-cultural set up. Pamuk has tried to reconstruct the cultural memory as against the official one. Pamuk uses the same strategy to reinvent the Ottoman memory as the new republican elites who used manufactured memory and installed it in the people through text books and other media. Pamuk provides a parallel cultural memory which relies on common stories and memories of the Ottoman past rather than the engineered and standardized texts. To Pamuk, Turkish identity is not purely as projected and engineered by the Kemalist project; it is rather a complex one, having deep roots in Ottoman culture and not merely in the post republican Anatolia. Pamuk therefore rejects monolithic Turkishness and discredits the state motivated organicist history that manipulates the past for political purposes. He reinvents history to challenge the official cultural/collective memory and provide a parallel/alternative history. Pamuk uses intertextuality and fragmented and doubtful narratives to suggest the reliability of history per se. Pamuk's technique goes in line with E.H. Carr's challenge to and doubt on history who believes that historians selectively choose which past incidents have to be recorded as historical facts. For Carr historical facts are not like

. . . fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast . . . ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use—these factors being of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch. (Carr 9)

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Racio-ethnic Tensions in *Midnight's Children*

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Midnight's Children is Salman Rushdie's second and most famous novel. It won him the Booker Prize for fiction, and in 1993 the Booker of Bookers, in 2008--the best novel to win the Booker Prize for fiction in the award's twenty five year history. In this novel, he uses an innovative narrative technique and presents British Indian history through the story of Pickle-factory worker, Saleem Sinai. The title *Midnight's Children* is very mysterious, as Saleem Sinai is one of the 1,001 children born around or on the midnight of 15 August 1947, the Indian Independence Day. The novel is one of the great post-colonial and postmodern texts. It marks a distinct turn in Indian fiction in English and a break with the tradition where a different version of India is perceived and written about.

The novel's long breathless sentences, compound words, its sense of urgency verbalized by incomplete sentences, represent the national consciousness. There is a presence of Hindi, Urdu, Arabic words, and their translation in English. The different features--allegory, bildungsroman, self-conscious metafiction--all ultimately preserve the thought patterns of the novel. The different narrative strands complement each other, because self, nation, history and imagination are intimately related.

In the long colonial history, human beings of the world are broadly categorized by Europeans into two groups--the white race and the coloured race. This binary construct has been analyzed in detail by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*. He has studied the sources of these clashes between the two races. On the basis of this categorization, a

series of imaginary perceptions and mythical interpretations about both the races have been constructed.

In *Midnight's Children*, we find the reflection of British India, tracing her transition from bondage under the Britain to the sovereignty of independent India. There are various illustrations in the novel that indicate the preconceptions, biased approach and clashes between these two races. We observe the experiences of people of the Orient, either in India with the British people or abroad with foreigners. In the very beginning of the novel, we find Aadam Aziz, a German returned Kashmiri doctor whose ideology and identity have been deeply influenced by foreign values. He suffers from anxiety of rootlessness and becomes a 'liminal' figure, i.e. a character with no fixed identity. 'Heidelberg', a medical bag from Germany, becomes a symbol of Aziz's transformed nature. His attitude clearly reflects that he has been affected by European Orientalist tendency. Saleem says:

Heidelberg, in which, along with medicine and politics, he (Aadam Aziz) learned that India—like radium has been 'discovered' by Europeans; even Oscar (his friend) was filled with admiration for Vasco Da Gama, and this was what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was, somehow, the invention of their ancestors. (Rushdie 6).

Europeans have been belittling the non-Europeans since generations. In this practice, the West has made the East its subject of study. It holds the Eastern races as inferior who look to Europe for their advancement. This is done by the production of knowledge that gives the Orientalists the right to define the East.

Moreover, Frantz O. Fanon talks of colonial 'workshop' that has been prepared by Europeans where the Orient minds are moulded to be subordinate and feel grateful to their masters. Aziz has gone through that 'workshop'. He starts to reflect the European ideology; everybody around him observes this change in him. Saleem talks of scepticism in Aziz's mind. Aziz was a very inquisitive character, his visit abroad has made him psychologically uncertain about some of his ethnic and religious beliefs. Saleem remarks: "But it was no good, he was caught in the strange middle ground trapped between belief and disbelief, and this was the only charade after all. . ." (Rushdie 7). Rushdie uncovers the tension in the psyche of both the Indians and the British. Characters from both the sides have a cynical approach towards one another. Indians feel that these aliens are dangerous and can damage their institutions and beliefs. The author's depiction of Aziz helps to encompass the experiences and feelings of the foreign returned. Tai, the boatman and other fisherwomen who used to chat with Aziz, now feel alienated from him. In Aziz, Rushdie presents the modern citizen of the then Kashmir. The 'Heidelberg' that Aziz carries with him is the symbol of Europe. To Tai, a traditional Kashmiri, this bag appears strange:

To the Ferryman, the bag represents Abroad; it is alien thing, the invader, progress. And yes, it has indeed taken possession of the young doctor's mind; yes, it contains knives and cures for cholera and malaria and small pox; and yes, it sits between doctor and boatman, and has made them antagonists (Rushdie 19).

Aziz is considered quasi-alien in his own community rather in his family, after his return. Aziz wants almost everybody around him to change. At times, he forces his traditional wife to be like the modern Indian woman. In this frenzy, he even sets fire to her 'purdah-veils'. But his wife is

so adamantly attached to her traditional values that Aziz can hardly change her. One day, when Aziz asks Naseem to move a little, she shrieks and responds in a threatening tone to this modern Kashmiri: "My God what have I married? I know you European-returned men. You find terrible women and then you try to make us girls be like them! Listen Doctor Sahib, husband or no husband, I am not any . . . Bad word woman" (Rushdie 38).

Despite this antagonism at home, Aziz is fond of his foreign friends. When one of them, Ilsen Luben, wife of Oscar Lubin, comes to Kashmir and gets drowned in the Dal Lake. Aziz is very angry with Tai and blames him for the accident. Tai responds to it in an overt racial tone: "He blames me, only imagine! Brings his loose Europeans here and tells me, it is my fault when they jump into the lake" (Rushdie 33)! In this conflictual interracial relationship, the Easterners see the Westerners as strange, unpredictable and dangerous for native ethnic structure. They think that Europeans have no concern for ethics and other beliefs that are central to Eastern societies.

No doubt, Europeans are considered materialists, unethical and are looked down upon by the Indians but there are occasions when one cannot help praising them for their adventures and advancements. Aziz falls for this charismatic character of Europe. He appreciates secular ideas of Europe at the cost of some fundamental norms of his own race. He practises German medicine and has praise for Germans. Once, going to Ram Ram Seth, Amina, finds a white man begging in the slum which shocks her. Saleem remarks, "Because, he was white, and begging was not for white people. . ." (Rushdie 106). It indicates the Orientalist strategy that creates a myth about European superiority. This myth of superiority, according to Said, has been initiated and consolidated for centuries by the Orientalists.

The Europeans incorporated certain elements from their own culture onto their colonies and tried to glorify them. Consequently, native culture is replaced by the foreign one. The colonial cum imperialist policies work through changes in the institutions of the colonized like education, administration, politics, art, and architecture.

In the novel, we find that William Methwold--the owner of the Methwold Estate--is said to be the original descendent of one of the colonizers in the East India Company. He possesses a building comprised of four uniformed compartments, built in the British style. He has even named them after the palaces of Europe as Versailles Villa, Buckingham Villa, Escorial Villa and Sans Souci. By giving them English names, he wants to retain British culture. When the power shifts from the British regime to India's independent governance, Methwold wants to sell his Estate but under certain strict conditions. He wants to keep the English culture in the Estate alive as long as possible. And wants his customers to live in it without moving any article. This makes evident the colonizers' desire to set their art, architecture, and life-style as a standard for Indians to follow and perpetuate.

William Methwold as the stereotypical Orientalist, has a derogatory attitude towards non-Europeans (Indians). He thinks that they cannot govern their country without the proper guidance of the British. This was also a hot debate between Indian freedom fighters like Gandhi and the British during the freedom struggle. The Orientalist approach is nourished by the advancements in India brought about by Britain. William Methwold's comments to Ahmad Sinai about British governance serve as an example:

'Bad business, Mr. Sinai,' Methwold sips his Scotch amid cacti and roses, 'Never seen the like. Hundreds

of years of decent government, then suddenly, up and off. You'll admit we weren't all bad: built your roads. Schools, railway trains, parliamentary system, all worthwhile things. Taj Mahal was falling down until an English man bothered to see to it. And now, suddenly, independence. Seventy days to get out. I'm dead against it myself, but what's to be done?' (Rushdie 126-27)

The above statement is an open claim of the colonizers who feel they are the agents and saviours of the enlightenment. By changing the native institutions, they project themselves as indispensable and capable servants of humanity but beneath all this they have selfish motives and material goals.

Media also acts as a great tool of colonial or post-colonial oppression. In the novel, the first feature film, in which Hanif's wife Pia acted with Nayyar, named as *The Lovers of Kashmir* is an example of the Western influence on Indian culture and theatre. After half an hour of the movie, Pia and Nayyar start to kiss other things and exchange these things. Saleem narrates, "Pia kissed an apple, sensuously, with all the rich fullness of her painted lips; then passed it to Nayyar; who planted, upon its face, a virilely passionate mouth. This was the birth of what came to be known as the indirect kiss. . ." (Rushdie 195-96). This shows the imperialist policy of incorporating Western fashions in the societies of the Indian subcontinent. Indian way of expressing love with shyness is replaced with Western bold lovemaking. Here lies the shift in the behavioural ideals of the native.

The interracial conflicts become more apparent, when Indians feel disturbed by their confrontation with European culture. They cannot adjust in the alien lifestyle offered to them. They, no doubt, adhere to some foreign ways but poke

fun at various ideas of the Europeans. Ahmad Sinai, one of the customers of Methwold Estate, no doubt follows the conditions laid down by Methwold, but mocks the British while addressing his wife, "You have looked in the bathrooms? No water near the pot. I never believed but it's true, my God, they wipe their bottoms with paper only!" (Rushdie 127). The behavioural differences surface from this statement. Further, Methwold says that his ancestor from his very childhood had plans of constructing Bombay city. Fanon draws attention to the colonizer's attempt at effacing precolonial history. This is a sort of colonial conspiracy and Ahmad Sinai questions this imperialistic policy. He considers Methwold 'a little eccentric' and asks a rhetorical question, "With our ancient civilization, can we not be as civilized as he" (Rushdie 131)? This means that our past, buried in ignorance and under the forces of Orientalism, can be rethought for our bright present.

Persisting with the myth of Europeans as saviours who have to impress the minds of the natives with their heroism there occurs in the novel a disruption in fresh water supply of Bombay near the Methwold Estate. In order to rescue the natives from disaster, an English girl Evie Burnes comes with a gun and shoots dead many cats. By shooting them, she pretends to be the saviour of the community. Her Orientalist attitude is narrated by Saleem "We saw Evie Burnes appears from the direction of Versailles Villa kitchens; she was blowing the smoke away from the barrel of gun. 'You Indians c'n thank your stars you got me around,' Evie declared, 'or you'd just've got eaten by these cats!" (Rushdie 312). Most of the times, this myth of supremacy is directly embraced by natives. But here the case is different. Brass Monkey, Saleem's sister, who loves birds and animals, is angry about this act and hates the English lady for it. Here, also emerges the post-colonial spirit when natives question the so-called master's actions. By these illustrations,

we are able to say that there is a constant tension between the Orientals and the Occidentals in the novel.

The word *ethnicity* is from the Greek word *ethos* that means moral attitude or the particular belief and ideal that is shared by any group. Ethnicity of any group of people means their sharing of common language, religion, culture and ideology that sometimes indicates their identical heredity or ancestral background. It is sometimes related to specific geographic region. The understanding of ethnicity in the post-colonial perspective is to study how conflicts arise out of these differences. And often, the colonizers with certain colonial policies manipulate these ethnic differences for their own benefits.

In *Midnight's Children*, there are many events that reflect ethnic tendencies, whether partial or impartial. By adhering to certain behaviours, ideals and values, characters reflect their relation to a particular ideology. And somehow, colonialism puts them in situations which are at odds with their own ethnic sphere. Some tend to adopt the alien culture as in the case of Aadam Aziz, and some try to assert their ethnic identity against foreign influence as in the case of Naseem Aziz. Thus, the native-alien encounter is viewed as a ground for a test, recognition and reflection of one's ethnicity.

In Amritsar, Aziz, commenting on the ongoing movement of Indian freedom struggle, talks of the passing of 'Rowlatt Act' as a mistake. He highlights some ethnic traits of Indians. He defines Indians as brave and valiant, hence disobedient to the British. Aziz is caught in ambivalence, unable to decide who to side with. He remembers Tai's devotion to his culture. Saleem says:

Tai once said: 'Kashmiris are different. Cowards for instances. Put a gun in a Kashmiri's hand and it will

have to go off by itself - he'll never dare to pull the trigger. We are not like Indians, always making battles,' Aziz with Tai in his head, does not feel Indian; Kashmir, after all, is not, strictly speaking, a part of the Empire but an independent princely state. (Rushdie 37-38)

In the above statement, we find Tai as a traditional voice of Kashmir who considers Indians as brave, battle fighters, and Kashmiris as naive and cowards. Besides, he points to the intractable conflict of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Most of the conflicts spring from disharmony in ethnicity.

Naseem, Aadam Aziz's wife, is from Kashmir. She is not ready to compromise on her ethnic code and conduct. Even when forced by her husband, she is not ready to leave *purdah* and 'walk half-naked' among men outside. She finds it immoral to shed the veil off her body. Besides, she is strictly conservative even for her children; and is called 'Reverend Mother' later in the novel by Saleem, the narrator. This title connotes the sacredness of woman. Reverend Mother is not ready to accept change, she categorically disapproves of her actress daughter-in-law, Pia. She comments about her son Hanif: "To marry an actress, what's its name, my son has made his bed in the gutter, soon, what's its name, she will be making him drink alcohol and also eat some pig" (Rushdie, 336). Thus, Naseem embraces conventional Kashmiri Muslim ethnicity.

The conventional and innocent followers of religion are exploited to breed communal hostility. At one point in the novel, Naseem takes a *maulvi* ('religious tutor') for her children. Instead of teaching them the standard morality of Islam, he actually poisons their mind with hatred. Aziz rebukes Naseem for this ignorance and says to her, "He was teaching them to hate, wife. He tells them to hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what

other vegetarians. Will you have hateful children, woman" (Rushdie 50-51)? This shows how religion is abused to cause ethnic rivalry. Besides, a gang named 'The Ravana Gang' exercises violence as a fanatic anti-Muslim group, during the governance crisis in India, just after the attainment of independence. Its activists threaten Muslims either to pay them 'security money' or to handover their property and vacate from their home. It is an example of ethnic rivalry. Saleem writes about the gang, "That it sent men out, at the dead of the night, to paint slogans on the walls, both old and new cities: NO PARTITION OR ELSE PERDITION! MUSLIMS ARE THE JEWS OF ASIA! And so forth." (Rushdie 93). In another incident, we are told about a film, *Gai-walla*, in which Dev is the hero. His heroic act is highlighted when he protects cows from a person who is taking them to the slaughter house as cows are considered sacred in the Hindu community. This also shows ethnic differences that are projected through media. Rushdie once said in an interview that "fundamentalists of all the religions are the fundamental evils in the world." (Terror is Glamour)

Later in the novel, we find Lifafa Das, a Hindu 'peepshow wallah' about to be lynched in Muslim community for no wrong and a Muslim lady Amina rescues him. It happens when a customer, enraged by Lifafa Das's statement, threatens him for entering into the Muslim community. On the basis of ethnic difference, he is abused by so-called Muslims as the 'violators of our daughters', 'rapist', etc. He is chased and attacked by a group of people. Representative of the integral culture of India, Amina mockingly says to this fanatic group: "Wah, Wah,' she applauded the crowd. 'What heroes! Heroes, I swear absolutely! Only fifty of you against this terrible monster of a fellow. Allah, you make my eyes shine with pride'" (Rushdie 100). In an ironic tone, she lashes out against this inhuman attempt of violence based on ethnic discrimination.

Warning the mob not to attack this Hindu, she even goes to the extreme of sacrificing her child's life and herself to save a stranger. At another occasion, after the announcement of Mahatma's death in the theatre, Hanif murmurs to others: "If a Muslim did this thing there will be hell to pay" (Rushdie, 196). It points to the high tension that is born out of ethnic rivalry. This sort of rivalry can obviously lead to the disintegration of any nation. Other side of the rivalry is that people, under ethnic relativism, boast about the superiority of their ancestry. Ahmad Sinai is driven by self-importance, takes pride in creating his fictional ancestry by calling himself the descendant of "Mughal blood as a matter of fact" (Rushdie, 147). There are various examples that show how ethnic tendencies play a major role to create differences that ultimately lead to conflicts and contradictions.

Salman Rushdie says that there is need to think about the deliberate sociological cracks constituted by some extremist forces in the Indian subcontinent. Discussing memory's truth against the colonizers version of it, Rushdie writes in *Imaginary Homelands*: "[R]edescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it" (14). The re-awakening of the common masses who make the backbone of the society is the immediate and the urgent step in the smooth execution of social exchange.

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An Argumentative Indian: Arundhati Roy, Journalist and Creative Writer

Javeed Ahmad Dar

Arundhati Roy is known for her argumentative and persuasive writing style and becomes more so in her non-fiction by adopting new techniques and methods. Her fiction has attracted her readers towards her non-fiction. Her non-fiction is politically charged and blunt in its treatment of current issues. Boldly she defies set norms of political systems, democracy and religious dogmas. Her political activism has led critics to reject her non-fiction as a part of her literary domain. But she shows no interest in the politics of dividing writing into literary or non-literary slots; she only believes that a writer has an important role to play in society.

Roy's non-fiction reveals the characteristics of the reporter of a newspaper than that of a creative writer. Roy takes into account the traditional journalism pyramid structure which insisted on fact based reports in order to bring the truth to surface. However some journalists reversed this tradition and started writing in a new form of writing called literary journalism or creative nonfiction which is defined as "the genre that takes the techniques of fiction and applies them to non-fiction. The narrative forms require deep reporting and appreciation for storytelling, a departure from the structural convention of daily news and an imaginative use of language" (Nieman Foundation 2013). However, this departure in the field of journalism was criticized for its vagueness, associated with fiction writing as it overshadows the main focus on facts in journalism.

Roy seems to adopt this basic strand of facts and figures of journalistic writing for her prose. She challenges the discourse of literary and non-literary writing by making social responsibility first and foremost. She shocks her readers by relying on numbers and surveys to make her arguments mathematical and rational. In this way she emerges as a gross reporter in the pursuit of reality in the age of mass media.

However, to label Roy as a mere journalistic reporter is superficial when one analyses her oeuvre from the critical perspective of the use of imagination, language and understanding of contemporary social and political reality. There is a strong voice rather voices underneath Roy's works that destroys appearances and then dissolves, diffuses, dissipates only to recreate a world view which is real, brutally factual and imaginatively charming. Her fictional work *The God of Small Things* has been appreciated internationally, making her critics admire her as a creative writer. She reacts strongly to her critics for their double standards labeling her as a political activist for her non-fiction and a creative writer for her fiction. She considers her fiction equally political in the treatment of its themes. In an interview with Barsamian she says:

I don't see a great difference between *The God of Small Things* and my work of nonfiction. As I keep saying, fiction is truth. I think fiction is the truest thing there ever was. My whole effort now is to remove that distinction. The writer is the midwife of understanding. It is very important for me to tell politics like a story, to make it real." (Barsamian)

This enables us to see that the most recurrent themes in Roy's non-fiction (marginalization, untouchability/

paravan, gender politics and social prejudice) are also at the centre of *The God of Small Things*. The novel displays social exploitation in the form of caste system where upper Brahman class like the big politicians enjoy privilege and power. Velutha, one of the main characters, a paravan is shown to bear the brunt of being from low caste throughout the novel. He is mistreated all the time in the factory and exploited economically, given lower wages as compared to other workers of upper caste. Mama Chi, an upper class woman cultivates hatred in her grandchildren against paravans by reacting against them. She cannot tolerate paravan footprints on her floor.

Sensitive to the gender politics Roy reveals the doubly marginalized position of women in Indian society. Ammu is a divorced Syrian Christian woman: a symbol of modern Sati system which existed in India. She is not burnt alive with her dead husband like in the past but after the divorce she is disqualified from any right to pursue happiness. She is reduced to a nonentity. The love affair between Velutha and Ammu is condemned by the whole society that ends with the tragedy of Velutha in the police station where he is beaten to death and Ammu's silent death in the quarters as a rejected being in the society. Roy uses vivid and emotive language to criticize fake encounters. The working of the police is shown to be controlled and directed by corrupt politicians of whom Velutha becomes a victim. His death is called God of Loss. The way Velutha is labeled a criminal parallels the victims of the Parliament attack, charges Roy challenged in her essay "And His Life Should Become Extinct".

Roy gives ample space in her fiction to socio-political issues the way she gives in her non-fiction but she differs

only in her use of language, making it appropriate to the demands of each genre. She emerges as a creative writer in her treatment of language and imagination. Hence the division of writer and reporter in Roy's literary domain lies only in the use of language rather than in the themes and issues she deals with.

Furthermore, in *The God of Small Things* she takes liberties with the English language. using words from Malayalam like *veshyas*, *mundu*, *chi chi poach* and phrases like Ruchi Lokathinde Rajava. Likewise, she uses urdu words *inqillab zindabad Thozhilati ekta zindabad* and Malayalam folklore songs. Besides, the novel is also characterized by the use of slang, extensive use of similes and metaphors, deliberate uses of clauses of concession. All these innovations with language enhance the linguistic richness of her novel and show her excellence as a creative writer. It creates a subjective understanding of reality where the writer dominates the reporter. She further uses brackets and capital letters extensively and italicizes words along with the fragmented sentences to violate and subvert regular grammatical rules and syntax in order to create meaning within the context rather than use objective language of facts and figures.

However, on close reading she also takes the stance of a reporter. She foregrounds her journalistic writing qualities by keeping a reporter at the center of her writer self. Her creative use of diction enables her not to fall in any particular domain of writing. For example the oppression of Velutha in the police station is revealed by Inspector Mathew dialogues that are crafted like a reporter's language to create reality in black and white:

The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered; one had pierced his left lung which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breathes bright red, fresh and fresh and frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and haemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. (Roy 1997:310)

Such use of language shows the working of law and enforcement agencies and the helplessness of common people within the system. Furthermore, the use of brackets extensively in the novel also serves the purpose of emphasizing. For example:(Whom nobody recognized), (4) (a funeral junkie? a latent necrophiliac?) (5) (and Sophie Mol's) (5) (more or less) (9) (after the last time she came back to Ayemenem ..shouting) (15). Roy uses this style to give focus, to let words stand separately from the rest of the narrative, so that they can create a deep effect upon the reader. It becomes a highly creative style where selection of linguistic devices like words and brackets on one hand develops a subjective meaning when seen within the context but on the another hand becomes clear and objective when seen in isolation. Likewise, there is a lot of repetition of words, reversal of the order of letters in certain words, phrases and sentences, while certain words are deliberately spelt wrong.

Similarly, her prose in nonfiction is simple, vivid and candid; it is less ambiguous and more transparent. An idealist, she does not problematize issues, rather offers viable solutions, to negotiate with what appears to be mystifying and opaque. She depicts the picture of people in such a way that her sentences recreate the situation in the reader's mind.

Her diction is charged, provocative and moving. Her emotional outburst and anger against the threat of an impending nuclear holocaust in the following passage is a fine example of making personal what looks remote and distant:

The bomb isn't in your backyard. It is in your body. And mine. *Nobody*, no nation, no government, no man, no god, has the right to put it there. We are radioactive already, and the war hasn't even begun. So stand up and say something. Never mind if it has been said before. Speak up on your own behalf. Take it very personally. (Roy 2001: 12)

She does not use the English language as a readymade garment, rather recreates it by letting the dynamics of her native sensibility work through it as spontaneously as possible. She mixes Urdu and Hindi utterances with English sentences without any explanatory notes or bracketed meaning. Visalakshi Memon describes this multilingual tendency in her essay as “typical of a new style in Indo-Anglian writing”. As adherence to Queen’s English is no more the norm, she praises Chomsky by using the Urdu phrase *Chomsky zindabad*. While criticizing the exploitation of the poor by big corporations, she sarcastically says, *mera bharat mahaan*.

She has stoutly and wittily defended herself from her critics on many issues ranging from her involvement in socio-political and economic affairs to her style of expression. Bishnu Priya advocates her cause and points out that her hyperbolic style is a merit in her nonfiction. Her diverse political, moral, social and religious viewpoints have generated enough controversial heat but most critical

opinions are however appreciative of the rhetorical power and originality of her language. Gillian Beer, a distinguished professor of English at Cambridge, comments that Roy's language skills reflect 'extraordinary linguistic inventiveness'. Likewise Jason Cowley appreciates her "verbal exuberance". Though her stylistic inversions or deviations from the Standard English have angered many critics for her unconventionality, Mallikarjun Patil says that "Roy has enriched the English language but as a standard-bearer or trend-setter will mislead our future writers as well as language users".

Her use of irony, parody, personification and parallelism along with graphological sentences and heavy punctuation marks has added a new and novel dimension to Indian English prose writing. At her hand these devices become emotive in highlighting the plight of the subaltern. The main concerns of her writing may or may not be new but the way of articulating them is altogether new and original. She uses titles of her essays so brilliantly that they arrest our attention instantly. There is an urgency at work which prepares one to commit and sympathize with her concerns.

Thus, such a creative use of language by Roy refutes the claims made in the beginning of this paper that her nonfiction writing is altogether journalistic in nature. Her creative use of language in her nonfiction surpasses traditional journalistic style based on facts and figures. She develops a new style which reflects the characteristics of both writer and reporter. She shifts from a writer to a reporter and vice versa according to the needs and requirements of the issues confronting society. She adopts

these changing roles as an artist only to highlight the importance of the social responsibilities of artists. Roy's essays are multi-voiced in the sense that she explores alternative perspectives in them by using multiple genres written from different points of view to augment her point. Genres like dialogues, reports, satire, and parody are incorporated into the traditional essay style.

Position of Writer/Reporter

Roy ponders on the role of art and assigns the artist the duty to articulate arguments against oppression. The task of writers is to adopt a moral stance so that they play a productive role in society. As a writer cannot separate himself from his socio-political environment, he/she should awaken the conscience of the masses to bring about a positive change. Her views on art are clearly shown in her essay "The ladies have feelings, so shall we leave it to experts?":

Rule one for a writer, as far as I'm concerned, is that there are no rules. And rule two (since rule one was made to be broken) is that there are no excuses for bad art. Painters, writers, actors, dancers, singers, film makers, musicians-they are meant to fly, to push at frontiers, to worry the edges of human imagination, to conjure beauty from the most unexpected things, to find magic in places where others never thought to look... a good or great writer may refuse to accept any responsibility or morality that society wishes to impose on him/her. Yet the best and greatest of them know that if they abused this hard won freedom, it can lead to bad art. There is an intricate web of morality, rigour and responsibility that art, that writing itself, imposes on a writer. (Roy *Algebra* 191)

According to Roy, in the modern world quick communication and information dissemination play a crucial role in all spheres of the life of a society: personal, social, political and economic. Roy discusses two types of media in her essays: print and electronic. Print media includes a host of publications dailies, weeklies and monthlies which give information about events and provide suggestions and comments by well-learned men. Roy thinks that the written media is the most suitable weapon for intellectuals to use against the empire. She says that in order to stand united against the propaganda of the empire the masses should be supplied with facts and figures through this form of media to expose political hogwash. Its great advantage lies in spreading news, knowledge and information through the length and breadth of the world. In her essays Roy tells us that there is ample space in it for presenting counter-arguments against false information. She uses it superbly by providing astonishing facts and figures which have resulted in changing the opinions of civil societies about the basic functioning of democracy.

While talking about the importance of the electronic media, she includes news channels, radio, facebook, and twitter. She thinks it is inalienable from governance and is a pillar of democracy in the contemporary world. It is more important than print media because of its audio-visual effects on the minds of people. Access to true and authentic information is essential to the health of democracy for two important reasons. First, it ensures that citizens are made responsible by putting before them choices instead of acting out of ignorance or misinformation; second, it checks how elected representatives uphold their promises with the people and the oath of offices. It also acts as a mediator

between the state and civil society. In times of crisis electronic media reveals reality without hiding or providing any biased information. In a democratic society it holds a respectable position and if corrupted then, according to Roy, there is no chance of having any basis for vindicating human rights in any democracy.

Roy also stresses in her essays that the electronic media has the capacity and power to affect all functional areas of democracy and governance. It can keep a check on judiciary, report on court proceedings and promote a legal environment suitable for freedom of the press. It can, in some cases, help in delivering speedy justice to the victims of law and judiciary by highlighting the loopholes and corruption within such institutions. It can build pressure on an elected government, influence its decisions to make them favourable for the common people or the betterment of the country.

In order to promote and maintain real democracy, media should enjoy its own independence so that it works as a tool for social change. From Roy's point of view, if public interest is not served, then there is no difference between mute spectators of a game and media in a democracy. It should enable credible and diverse voices to contribute to authentic outlets. Such outlets can enable citizens to have access to information for making informed decisions for equitable growth in society. When such demands are not fulfilled, people are automatically alienated from what is happening around them. By representing a plurality of voices media can help in doing away with malpractices and scandals which affect the common man drastically.

While discussing it in her numerous articles and

essays she observes that the electronic media can help in setting public agenda and create conducive conditions for the healthy growth of a democracy. William G Davis presents a similar view in his book *The Media's Role in Society: A Statesmen's View* (1994). He calls it the fourth estate. This phrase refers to the profession of journalism and was derived from the old English idea of three estates: the lords spiritual, the lords temporal and the House of Commons. But the idea that media is the fourth estate rests on its function as a guardian of public interest and a watchdog of the activities of the government. It is therefore an important component of modern democracy. Similarly, Knowlton Nash states:

... there are all kinds of power centres in any democracy, the judiciary, the government mandarins, the elected representatives, the establishment, the business community and the unions but what binds them all together is the media. (402)

It is only through media that a government can communicate with the governed masses. Seen as the fourth power, it serves as a connecting link between different power centres within a democracy.

Another important function which media can perform is to set trends or agenda to determine what we think and worry about. A perfect example of this is given by Bernard Cohen in his book *The Press and Foreign Policy* in which he says that the press “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (Cohen 1963: 15). Thus media affects public agenda which in turn affects policy and policy-makers, to obtain desired goals. In this way, media works as an instrument of social change. It

sets a nations agenda, focuses public attention on certain key public issues and create either confusion or remove misunderstanding.

Roy states that by using information as a source of power, media enables us to build national and international opinion. It not only develops mass awareness but also helps in military operations. It can boost the morale of troops by showing the common people supporting their cause. In this sense it can be used as an active weapon against the enemy, especially in the context of information warfare. This is the most sensitive role it plays and if not properly handled it can even legitimate killing of common people in certain cases.

However, Roy castigates media at both national and international levels for frequently showing bias and lack of seriousness. She points out that it is largely owned by wealthy individuals and big corporates. They buy media for their personal interests and use it to enhance their corporate greed. More or less, it works as a vibrant organ of the empire of big corporates whose primary goal is to earn as much profit as possible and conduct itself like other corporations when it comes to corrupting the world or domestic politics. Like other corporations, mass media demands the same preferential treatment and has the same desire to grow without bounds. There is a nexus between big corporates and powerful media houses which take care of each other's interests. For example, Fox Corporation Limited was the twelfth largest donor to the Bush campaign and CNN is owned by the parent company, Time Warner. It is well said that the freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own it. So bias, interest, freedom and other concerns have, Roy thinks, to be balanced for the emergence of a just society.

Herman and Chomsky in their book *Manufacturing Consent* support Roy's view by pointing out that the US media serves elite interests and subdues democracy. This is done by portraying the world in such a way that the perspective of the political elite becomes acceptable. They generate public consent for the acceptance of US foreign policies and make it difficult for public to have access to information which is important to counter-balance the interests of the elite. They select and reward those who see the world in a similar way. Those who try to bring forth unfriendly facts usually do not have to be censored because most of the times they are not even perceived to exist.

Media reliance on revenue coming from advertisements introduces a further constraint between mass media and interests of the business class. This greed shapes media display content in order to appeal to rich audiences in whom the advertisers are most interested. So critical and controversial programming is limited because advertisers avoid complexities and controversies that affect the buying mood. Hence money not only talks but also silences. The agenda and framing of news reports on US foreign policy do not therefore deviate from those set by US commercials and the political elite. Manipulation of news media output is controlled by several factors: corporate, advertising, sourcing, and ideology. In this connection, Chomsky says:

The size, ownership and profit orientation of mass media and their shared common interests with other major corporations like banks and governments create a clash of interest between media's supposed role as a watchdog of the elite and the interests of that elite. (555)

Roy looks at global media as a propagandistic machine of the empire which indoctrinates viewers, readers and listeners alike. It legitimises the crimes committed by it. She gives the example of American media and states that unfortunately most US citizens get carried away by fraudulent reports on NBC, ABC, CNN and other corporations. According to her, the role of international media was exposed during American invasion on Iraq. Media analysts say that Iraq war was fought at two levels, one in the battle field by the soldiers and another in the media rooms by reporters and journalists. In this war media manufactured the consent by propagating that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The indoctrination process had been at work since the UN had sent its investigators to Iraq to inspect the possibility of Saddam possessing WMD. Even though the inspectors did not find anything there, yet the US media found a story which they could “break” for more than three years. About a survey conducted by *The New York Times* and *CBS news* she says that “42% of the American public believe that Saddam Hussain is directly responsible for September 11 Attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon” (*Times* 6). National media is also criticized by Roy in her essay “Peace is War” for neglecting its responsibility. She believes that it is obsessed with three C’s: Cricket, Celebrity and Crime. Apart from this, there is nothing on Indian media channels.

Intellectuals’ Responsibilities

Along with defining the role of media, Roy impresses upon intellectuals to look into the policies and affairs of the empire. They can prepare a front against its ill-designs. The common people are generally unable to realize the actual

repercussions of the policies which are followed by the empire. They need a guide to set them on the right path. Intellectuals can analyze the actions of governments in terms of motives as they are not expressed in the official propaganda. Since the common people are swept away by superficial details, they can lay bare the hidden truths of the empire and simplify its functioning for the naive. The masters of the empire know that the common people are ignorant and can only help in its evil designs. Roy observes that decisions about state affairs should not be left to “the experts” of the empire, rather its pretention of being the best decision-making body should be deconstructed. In this way she becomes the representative of what Edward Said once said, “There has been no major revolution in modern history without intellectuals; conversely there has been no major counter-revolutionary movement without intellectuals” (Said 10). This can be done by keeping a watchful eye on happenings around the world. As intellectuals are capable of comprehending what otherwise remains masked in pious rhetoric, they can usher in desired changes needed for public good.

In this connection, Roy stands out as an intellectual of the mass movement. She not only exposes the ill designs of the empire but also ponders over the causes through which it succeeds in fulfilling its interests. Her role as an intellectual is clearly vindicated when she joined the dam movements in India like the NBA (*Narmada Bachao Andholan*). As a result, its negative effects were highlighted not only at the national level but also at the international level. She analysed the official claims about dams and brought them under her intellectual scrutiny and showed how the nexus between mainstream politicians and big corporates had benefited them by using the slogan of “progress”. The credit of

exposing the ill-effects of nuclear blasts in India also goes to the intellectuals of this country. According to Roy, the Indian government used nuclear blasts as a tool to hide its own failure and diverted attention of the people from actual needs as they were made to see this act as proud achievement of the nation. Politicians eulogized this act so much that any one who criticised it was a traitor and an anti-national

Roy praises intellectuals like Chomsky in her essay, “Loneliness of Chomsky” for exposing the war policies of the American government. She believes that Chomsky revealed the real motives and reasons behind the Vietnam War and accordingly fixed responsibility. The Pentagon papers were carefully prepared but were supposed to have leaked, which provided the United States with a theoretical justification for political and military action in Vietnam War from 1945 to 1971. This essay reveals how real planning took place and the common people did not know the real motives of this war. Chomsky explained the internal planning and decision-making process within the US government. Being an honest intellectual, he exposes their real intentions. Similarly, the official bombing of Cambodia in response to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front was only an excuse to attack Vietnam. Chomsky shows that the official claims were nonsense and the real reason of these bombings was to destroy and to suppress communist insurgencies. According to Roy, such insights come to us from the intellectuals of a society and help in uncovering the hidden designs of the empire.

Role of Educational Institutions

For Roy intellectuals and universities can work together to generate awareness among the common people

about their plight. However, it is ironical that they generally delude themselves in believing that they maintain a neutral and critical position. Roy believes that intellectuals and universities should not be commodified like corporations producing industrial commodities. Since a university cannot free itself from the inequalities of the society in which it exists, it is dependent on the values that are upheld in that society and should perform its role accordingly.

Despite several drawbacks, universities have always played a positive role in relation to society. However, such institutions can contribute to a free society only when they overcome the temptation to conform to the prevailing ideology and the existing structures of power. Roy assigns a responsible role to the intellectuals working in universities as they can conduct radical inquiries into what ails a society. Such research must focus on changing the choices and personal commitments of individuals in the interest of the society and the collective good. They should raise questions against any form of injustice, corruption and other socio-economic malpractices. In this way, intellectuals can help in creating ideal institutions and broaden the scope of non-violent resistance to suppression and exploitation.

While highlighting the functions of universities, Roy wants them to incorporate those texts into the main syllabi that can create awareness on the part of the students about the prevailing conditions. These texts should reveal the ugly face of poverty of damned countries, particularly the exploitation of cheap labour, human trafficking and castigate over-luxurious life-styles of the elite of the world. They must be informative rather than symbolic. Such an attempt can bring about a radical change in youth that will be instrumental in achieving 'revolution through evolution'. As

students form an integral part of intellectualism, they may serve as an active force in bringing about changes which intellectuals envision. Paul Ricoeur, while stressing the importance of French Student's Rebellion in 1968 said that it was their cultural revolution that questioned their world, the conception of life underlying political and economic structures and formation of human relations. As a model this rebellion struck at three main roots of injustice: first, it attacked capitalism and its clever agenda in deluding men by its own unjust commitment to quantitative well-being. Second, it opposed bureaucracy because it placed men in the role of slaves in relation to the hierarchy of power structures. Finally, it attacked the nihilism of a society whose aim was its own cancerous growth. It is through these efforts that a just social order can be achieved. As an important institution, a university can help form social attitudes, develop organizational skills, analyse and transmit knowledge. It becomes a potential base for social change. It can lessen restraints and open up alternatives. All this and more is possible if there is intellectual commitment and empathy within the university.

Role of Social Activism

Another important aspect of positive social change which Arundhati Roy appreciates and preaches in her essay "When Saints Go Marching Out" is social activism based on non-violent means. She gives a great deal of space to social activism in her essays and projects it as an effective weapon to confront the empire. She elaborates that in order to make this world a peaceful place, the need of the hour is to stand up against the might of the empire with bare hands and march on the streets in every city and shout 'freedom for all,

peace for all'. By giving the examples of Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther and Nelson Mandela as icons of non-violent movements, she wants us to stand for truth and justice and not just celebrate their birthdays and conduct seminars in their names. The real homage to these great saints is to show courage, fearlessness and consistency in confronting the empire.

In her essays “Ahimsa” and “In memory of Shankar Guha Niyogi” she talks about the heart-wrenching stories of the activists whose hunger strikes stretched over a month. She admires them for raising their voice against corporate greed, thereby setting an example for those who wanted to be the voice of the voiceless. But she also knows that non-violent resistance is not enough for changing the empire, but it is better to raise voice rather than to bear everything like cowards. She says:

We can expose empire and their allies for the cowardly baby killer, water prisoners, and pusillanimous long distance bombers that they are. We can reinvent civil disobedience in a million different ways of becoming a collective pain in the ass.
(Roy *An Ordinary* 85)

She clearly suggests that social activists should open new and multiple fronts of non-violent resistance to expose and counter socio-political injustice. She also pleads for violent resistance whenever and wherever necessary, though her argument is conditional and contextual in nature. In an interview she was once questioned about the armed struggle of Maoists and she categorically refused the words ‘violence’ and ‘terrorists’ to be associated with them. She argues that the people of Chhattisgarh cannot be called as terrorists

because they were unwilling to come out of the jungle, their estate. Accordingly to her, after independence the Indian constitution actually perpetuated the colonial law, and decreed that tribal lands belonged to the forest department. It is a criminalization of the indigenous people and their way of life. Once labelled a Maoist terrorist, he can be shot at sight. In her anthology *Broken Republic* (2011) she says that forms of protest can vary from place to place and writes:

So Gandhian forms of protest in the cities are required. I mean I have nothing against it. I mean just because it is a gandhian protest does not mean protesting for the right cause or asking for the right things. But is a very effective theatre, as Gandhi ji himself showed. But I think it needs an audience and it needs a middle class, a sympathetic middle otherwise if people go on a hunger fast in the Bhatti mines or some other obscure place, then who cares? You need the media, you need the middle class. And you need an audience. (Roy 76-77)

Roy also pleads for violent resistance on the condition that if the authorities of the Empire pay a deaf ear to the plea of the suppressed. She talks about it in her latest essay “Walking with the Comrades” which created a wave of unrest in the different parts of the country. The Maoists were banned for being the biggest internal security threat and in 2004 when the ban was lifted, a million people attended their rally in Warangal, Andhra Pradesh. It is evident that theirs is a mass movement supported by people. According to Roy, they have emerged from despair as they have been living under sub-human conditions. Even after sixty years of so-called independence, they have no access to proper education, healthcare or legal aid. Instead of fulfilling

their basic necessities, they have been exploited by the corporal empire. In 2008 a group of experts appointed by the Planning Commission submitted a report called 'Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas'. It said that the Maoist movement has to be recognised as a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and *adivasis* who do not even have the right to own property. The media is also hostile to this movement as the press reports released by the Maoists against different acquisitions and their basic problems were ignored by national media. This vicious process has led to their socio-political alienation. As they have established a form of governance of their own called *Gram Swaraj*, Roy thinks it is a viable system which they have developed over the years. She acknowledges that they have certainly created an alternative, if not for others, at least for themselves.

Roy insists that the basic role of different agencies and institutions is to stand against the empire, she stresses upon sincerity and commitment in order to win the battle against material exploitation, political hegemony, economic inequality and social injustice.

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The Famished Road: A Coalescence of Conflicting Polarities

Insha Mattoo

One of the leading African writers, Ben Okri has explored various genres of literature—poetry, short story and novel. As a postcolonial writer, he has experimented with different styles and literary forms. However, most of his novels are seen dealing with the oral tradition especially that of Yoruba. Okri not only creates voices by bringing into limelight the plight of the weakest sections of African society but also critiques the prevalence of violence and corruption in modern African society. He also explores the ongoing tussle between native (indigenous) and foreign traditions and the effects thereof in postcolonial Africa. Since these postcolonial issues have been time and again dealt with by many postcolonial writers, one wonders whether Ben Okri explores a new theme. However, one sees his originality seeping through not so much in the thematic content as in his form and techniques. One notices that Ben Okri's work demonstrates a remarkable sense of formal experimentation and each work progressively depicts his creative exploration of variegated literary styles and traditions.

The Famished Road demonstrates his brilliant ability to mix the techniques of modernism and realism as well as African oral tradition. Like most modern novels, it too is narrated in the first person. Postcolonial writers often use this technique to lend authenticity to their colonial experience. The act of writing seems to become a kind of catharsis and a site for an exploration of self and redefinition of identity. Azaro narrates to us his experiences of the mortal and the spirit world and his encounters with the spirits. Okri uses the stream of consciousness technique to present those surrealistic events without compromising with the portrayal of actual Nigerian life. He shows Azaro and his family struggling because of poverty, politics and debts. Okri

describes the adventure of Azaro, an Akibu spirit child who is an incarnation of both the spiritual and earthly realm. An Akibu is a child who has to make a hard choice between the mundane and the spirit worlds. An Akibu is also a child who is born to a woman having undergone miscarriages a number of times or has had children who died at a young age. The child who finally survives is called Akibu because he is believed to have reincarnated as the dead ones or else is believed to be the same spirit child that tried to be born as other children. Such spirits who are reluctant to be born are called Akibu. So the parents, in order to persuade Akibu to choose earthly life, perform various rituals. In *The Famished Road*, Azaro juggles between the two worlds and states:

I had no idea whether these images belonged to this life, or to a previous one, or to one that was yet to come, or even if they were merely the host of images that invades the mind of all children. (8)

Due to his schizophrenic nature Azaro progresses both through earthly and spiritual realms for his social and metaphysical progress. Okri includes mythical journeys and African rituals and reworks the African oral story telling tradition in Standard English using only a few words from the native language. Okri employs his narrative strategy effectively thereby minimizing the significance of colonial destruction of African cultures and society and draws attention to their survival. Although Okri is fully aware of the destruction that colonialism continues to cause to traditional African societies yet he totally negates the claim that colonialism can ever conquer the African spirit. His characters stand unshaken before the harrowing effects of colonialism. This is rendered through the characters of Azaro and his father. Azaro chooses to live and opts for earthly life over the spirit world; similarly Azaro's father defeats multiple colonial and neo-colonial aggressors in a

series of mythic battles that mix solemnity with folklore bravado. Azaro's mother has perseverance and courage that makes her shoulder the responsibility of her family. Then there is another spirit child called Ade. Unlike Azaro, he chooses the spirit world over his mortal existence. There is also a young photographer in the novel who being harassed by political violence fades into background and is rarely seen carrying out his task of taking photographs. His unending journey from one place to another continues. Azaro has a strange affection for the photographer who suddenly arrives at Azaro's home one evening and then leaves unexpectedly in the morning. Azaro describes his affinity with the photographer in the following words:

In the morning he was gone. I felt sad that he wasn't there. He had taken pictures of everyone except himself. And after a while I forgot what he looked like. I remembered him only as a glass cabinet and a flashing camera. The only name I had for him was Photographer. He left a written message to dad to say he was leaving and to thank us for our help. Dad was pleased with the letter and on some happy nights we sat up and talked about many things and many people, but we were fondest of the photographer. And it was because of our fondness that I was sure that some day we would see him again. (Okri 306)

Okri sides with characters who maintain their spiritual perspectives in spite of hard and difficult times. Azaro hears voices that call out to him and at times entice him. Notwithstanding an empty stomach and the beatings from his father, the spirit voices lull him into luxurious dreams of the spirit world but Azaro remains resolute in not returning to the spirit world. Azaro thus becomes the analogue for a resolute Africa that cannot be overpowered and subjugated by wealthy and powerful colonizers:

As I fought through it I became conscious that the crowd was actively preventing my entry. I was completely encompassed by witches and wizards. One of them smiled at me and revealed her dazzling white teeth. A tall witch looked down at me. She was very pretty indeed and had an almost royal bearing. Then she got out a pair of glasses and put them on. Her eyes looked monstrous. She laughed. She put her hand on my shoulders. It brushed against my face. Her hand was so cold in that the heated place that I came close to fainting with a shock. The witches and wizards closed in on me. (Okri 477)

By presenting Azaro as a spirit child whom the spirit world constantly and frequently entices, scares or overpowers, Okri presents the colonizers unending quest for power and determination to spread their culture and dominance over Africa. Likewise Azaro's resolve and determined effort to remain in the mortal world represents all those Africans who refused to come under the colonial rule. Azaro's father too tries defeating neo-colonial aggressors:

They didn't seem to mind my presence. I stayed silently in the corner and watched them calling Dad's spirit back from the land of the Fighting Ghosts. All through the night they called Dad's public and secret names in the strangest voices. All through the night they performed their numinous rituals, singing the saddest songs, weaving threnodies from his names, chanting incantations that altered the spaces in the room, that increased the sepia tinted shadows, that made cobwebs writhe and flow as if they had become black ancient liquids. (Okri 462)

All the characters fight spiritual and worldly battles. Azaro is seen fighting battles with the spirits. His father also fights and emerges a winner after fighting a battle with the

green leopard. His mother fights a battle in her own way with the world, her poverty and creditors. These spiritual and worldly battles which the characters fight are a symbolic representation of Africa fighting with outsiders as well as insiders.

The Famished Road also talks about politics, poverty and corruption. But Okri also shows a picture of the rich African tradition and the past. What distinguishes Okri's *The Famished Road* from his other novels is his use of magic realism. Okri adopts a visionary tone to present before us the two worlds of Africa. He is able to present everyday realities in such a way that the real beauty of the book lies in its narration which is dream-like and yet so real. The novel opens beautifully:

IN THE BEGINNING there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry. In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. (Okri 3)

It dovetails magic and reality beautifully in order to depict the deeper reality. Okri succeeds in presenting poverty-ridden Africa, where Azaro's parents struggle hard to survive. Trapped in the labyrinth of life, they witness poverty and the harrowing effects of dirty politics:

Mum prayed for simple things that made me weep while the darkness flowered in our room. She prayed for food. She prayed for dad to get well. She prayed for good place to live. She prayed for more life and for sufferings to bear lovely fruits. And she prayed for me. (Okri 566)

Azaro's mother is like any other woman craving for simple things of life-shelter, food and clothes. Okri presents the sordid life lived by poor people in Africa and though his characters are ordinary there is something extraordinary about them. Through Azaro's mother, Okri presents the plight of women in Africa and their determination to face the challenges posed by a newly independent state. Azaro's mother confronts the challenges of the post independent nation successfully and protects her family hawkishly.

Through the character of Madame Koto, Okri depicts the mysterious, dark and traditional side of Africa. There is something mysterious and magical about Madame Koto and her pepper soup seems to cast a spell upon her customers. Through her Okri brings alive the oral culture of Africa and it is in her bar that Azaro has most of his encounters with the spirits:

The compound women came out with chairs and plaited their hair and gossiped. It was from them that I first heard the rumours about Madame Koto. The Women talked quite crisply about our association with her. They talked and kept eyeing me maliciously. They said of Madame koto that she had buried three husbands and seven children and that she was a witch who ate her babies when they were still in her womb. They said that she was the real reason why the children in area didn't grow, why they were always ill, why the men never got any promotions, and why the women in the area suffered miscarriages. They said that she was a bewitcher of husbands and seducer of young boys and a poisoner of children. They said that she had a charmed beard and that she plucked one hair out every day and dropped it into the palm-wine she sold and into the pepper soup she made so that man would spend all their money in her bar and not care about their starving families. (Okri 118)

Critics too have found Madame Koto interesting; Quayson comments:

At Madame Koto's bar spirits enter who have misshapen heads 'like tubers in yam,' or eyes not properly coordinated. Azaro is often amazed at their deformities. Another set are thoroughly grotesque in their constitution. Such are the three-headed spirit and a spirit Azaro encounters in the forest described as 'a creative ugly and magnificent like pre-historic dragon, with the body of elephant and face of warthog'. (581)

Okri throughout presents the mysterious, magical side of Africa that takes us to the beginnings of African history. He not only brings back to life the pre-colonial African culture but also shows Africa moving towards a new world where colonialism has paved way for a new Africa with cars, electricity and other modern gadgets:

The first unusual thing was that cables connected to her rooftop now brought electricity. Illiterate crowds gathered in front of the bar to see this new wonder. They saw the cables, the wires, the pylons in the distance, but they did not see the famed electricity. Those who went into the bar, out of curiosity, came outmystified. They couldn't understand how you could have a light brighter than lamps, sealed in glass. (Okri 427)

Okri presents a realistic picture of present-day African life. He shows how politicians lull simple and naive people into false dreams of a future with better roads, buildings, education and electricity for their own vested interests:

VOTE FOR US. WE ARE THE PARTY OF THE RICH, FRIENDS OF THE POOR. . .'

'The poor have no friends, 'someone in the crowd said.
'Only rats.'

‘IF YOU VOTE FOR US. . .’

‘. . . we are finished,’ someone added.

‘. . . WE WILL FEED YOUR CHILDREN. . .’

‘. . . lies.’

‘. . . AND WE WILL BRING YOU GOOD ROADS. . .’

’

‘. . . which the rain will turn into gutters!’

‘. . . AND WE WILL BRING ELECTRICITY. . .’

‘. . . so you can see better how to rob us!’

‘. . . AND WE WILL BUILD SCHOOLS. . .’

‘. . . to teach illiteracy!.

‘. . . AND HOSPITALS.

WE WILL MAKE YOU RICH LIKE US.THERE IS
PLENTY FOR EVERYBODY.PLENTY OF FOOD.
PLENTY OF POWER.VOTE FOR UNITY AND
POWER!’. (Okri 145)

Okri shows that the enticing claims of politicians may tempt Africans for a moment but they are not taken in completely. On the contrary, they can stand for themselves which is obvious when Azaro’s father forms his own party. Although Africans are moving towards a new world yet they are connected to their roots and take pride in their identity. In fact, they feel proud to talk about their identity and their African culture:

‘When white people first came to our land,’ she said, as if she were talking to the wind, ‘we had already gone to the moon and all the great stars. In the olden days they used to come and learn from us. My father used to tell me that we taught them how to count. We taught them about the stars. We gave them some of our gods. We shared our knowledge with them. We welcomed them. But they forgot all this. They forgot many things. They forgot that we are all brothers and

sisters and that black people are the ancestors of the human race. (Okri 325)

Okri presents the civilised side of Africa alongside the barbarous side of the whites. He presents the racist approach of the whites:

The second time they came they bought guns. They took our lands, burned our gods, and they carried away many of our people to become slaves across the sea. They are greedy. They want to own the whole world and conquer the sun. Some of them believe they have killed God. Some of them worship machines. They are misusing the powers God gave all of us. They are not all bad. Learn from them, but love the world. (Okri 325)

Africans are shown moving towards a better future but they know their strengths and their rich culture. Okri presents a haunting picture of the rich African past. Amidst a very realistic world, he presents another world through Azaro. Magical elements are blended with realistic elements in such a way that though Azaro looks like any other child, yet there is something magical about him. Okri juxtaposes the magical and realistic elements through his unique narrative technique:

I had no idea whether these images belonged to this life, or to a previous one, or to one that was yet to come, or even if they were merely the host of images that invades the mind of all children. (Okri 8)

Azaro like any other normal child goes to school, is punished, plays and listens to stories and yet he is constantly haunted by voices and it is through these encounters that Okri presents a deeper reality:

Water poured into the sack. I became convinced that I was being taken to an underwater kingdom, where they say certain spirits reside. As I tried to keep the water out

of my mouth, I felt something metallic like a frozen fish banging against my head. It was the pen-knife. I wasted no time in cutting my way out. (Okri 132)

Very often while working in Madame Koto's bar, Azaro has these encounters with spirits. At times, we actually feel as if we are travelling back to ancient and primitive Africa, and are taken into another world through Azaro. Okri presents strange images of half spirits and half humans thereby enhancing the magical elements of the narrative:

Then to my amazement I saw that the old man had two heads. One had good eyes and a gruesome smile of power. The other remained normal. 'Come here, you akibu child, you stubborn spirit-child. You think you are powerful, eh? I am more powerful than you,' the old man said, in a resonant, young man's voice. (Okri 368)

These surrealistic elements are blended with realistic ones to provide a deeper understanding of African ethos and spirit. These images scare Azaro and entice his spirits especially in times of poverty, misery and hunger:

'Your parents are treating you atrociously,' he said. 'Come with me. Your companions are desperate to embrace you. There is truly a wonderful feast awaiting your homecoming. They yearn for your lovely presence. You will be treated like a prince, which is what you are. Human beings don't care. They don't know how to love. They don't know what love is. Look at them. You are dying and all they do is polish their boots. Do they love you? No!'. (Okri 375)

However his resolute decision to remain in this mortal world symbolizes the African spirit which cannot be broken, no matter how trying and hard the situations:

The spirit came in through the shut door and pestered me to follow him. Dad piled up benches to keep the door securely shut. The spirit followed me everywhere, reminded me of promises that were none of his business, pleading, threatening, with a head in front of me all the time, and another head talking always into my ear. The thugs stoned the door. I heard them run round to the back. (Okri 348-49)

These spirits often adopt violent ways to compel Azaro to become part of their world but, they fail to cut off Azaro's ties with the mortal world. Through Azaro's resistance Okri portrays the undying spirit of Africa.

Critics have praised Okri for his ability to experiment with new literary forms. Some of them claim that Okri's earlier novels are not as experimental as his later ones. Ayo Mamudu and Abioseh Michael Porter state that "Okri develops unorthodox narrative strategies that attempt to break from the tradition of social realism, which has dominated the African novel ever since it was first used by Achebe" (online). Okri presents an objective picture of Africa. He neither romanticizes Africans nor does he present colonizers as totally bad. While presenting the rich African past, he also presents an Africa which is involved in corruption and oppression. If he presents the positive side of Africa through Azaro, his mother and to some extent through his father, he also shows the ugly side of Africa through politicians and the creditors. They are devoid of basic human sympathy when it comes to their treatment of Azaro's family. They want their money even if it means loss of human life:

She cleaned the room, made a fresh pot of stew, and pounded yam for Dad's dinner. And then, battered by exhaustion, she went to sleep. But the creditors allowed her no rest. In a renewed effort, they kept

turning up outside our room, whispering about money we owed them, exaggerating the amounts to each new gossip monger, and knocking on our door. (Okri 62)

Many critics cite the universal relevance of Okri's writing on political as well as aesthetic grounds comparing him with writers like Achebe. Okri undoubtedly succeeds in flavouring his story with African spices. Although Okri writes in Standard English yet his mention of African foods, yams, pepper soups or Azaro's mother or father narrating stories spiced with African myths conjure up the real Africa. Like other postcolonial writers Okri uses language as a tool to undercut the European canon. In *The Famished Road*, Okri adapts the technique of defamiliarization time and again, that is he uses native words and phrases. Writers like Achebe, and Soyinka also try to nativise the language and resuscitate their own culture. The words used by postcolonial writers are beyond the comprehension of British or non native people who have no option but to go for a detailed study of the culture of that country. In this way they centre their own culture which was marginalized during the colonial reign:

Late at night, Mum made some peppersoup. It was hot and spiced with bitter herbs. It made me feel a little better. Then she poured me a half- tumbler of ogogoro which had turned yellow with marinating roots. 'Dongoyaro,' Mum said, insisting that I drink it all down in one gulp. (Okri 141)

Many critics are of the view that the strength of *The Famished Road* lies less in Azaro's fevered visions than in its sympathetic portrayal of family ties and its naturalistic portrayal of African life (Online). To reduce *The Famished Road* to a simple representation of family ties would not be just. There is no denying the fact that it portrays family ties but it is not Azaro or his family or Okri speaking; on the

contrary it is Africa speaking and adumbrating its values, its culture and the strength of its feminine side. Okri shows Africa moving towards a new dawn, without severing ties with its roots. In a way Okri counterbalances both the past and present of Africa and gives a holistic view of Africa.

Okri presents three worlds in his novel, in a way three eras-- past, present and future. Okri introduces ancient Africa through the mysterious character of Madame Koto, the encounter of Azaro with spirits and the various sacrifices and religious ceremonies. He then presents postcolonial Africa which is struggling with poverty and politics and finally he portrays a futuristic picture where he shows Africa moving towards self attainment, education and independence:

We must be careful. Our lives are changing. Our Gods are silent. Our Ancestors are silent. A great something is going to come from the sky and change the face of earth. We must take an interest in politics. We must become spies on behalf of justice. Human Beings are dreaming of wiping out their fellow human beings from this earth. Rats and frogs understand their destiny. Why not man, eh? (Okri 571)

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Creative Pieces

NIGHT

The Night
wriggled all night
In the invisible chains
That held her firmly.
Blood seeped out
From her eyes
And the sun rose
Writhing
In my bosom.
To an indifferent morning.

PHOENIX

Hovering for ages
Over the waters of life
Preserved in the sunny urn
To quench its perennial thirst
And to have a draught
The Phoenix flew down.
Perching on the sharp brim
Of the urn
His claws caught fire
And within no time
He was ablaze.
A single tear
Trickled down his eyes
And extinguished the flames.
Hues of varied colours
Again blossomed on his wings
And he flew to unknown sands
And saw his dense shadow
Flying along with him.

TRANSLATOR

You translate classics
With ease into
Any language
Spoken and written
On this planet.
Why is it
That you can't understand
The dialect
In which
I have been written.

POEMS

Aaliya Mushtaq Baba

A Room of My Own

They say this is my place
Perhaps, I was born here.
I shall come out,
Just before I die!

Seasons consume me-
Of morning tea,
Of evening bread,
Of lunch and dinner too.

A tired soul am I.
I know not how to write.
I paint signs,
On spilt milk on the floor...

Endlessly I labour...
I do different things a day.
And the same things everyday.
And nothing in a lifetime.

I dwell in the womb of this kitchen
My womb is a kitchen too.
I am a woman
And this a room of my own!

Silence Screams

Chinks chiseled into
The skin of darkness;
I see light
That blinds me...

I shrink within
The sheets of madness;
Whirling around me
Are unspoken words...

Screams get louder,
For no one hears me now.
I am a bird,
Abandoned in wilderness!

The journey inward,
Is the longest one.
Without beginning
Or an end.

Silence...
I speak to bear it.
I speak to translate it.
I speak to silence it!

Dear Kashmir

In the midst of dark mud,
An island of white *sheen*.

Chill that freezes bones,
Of all, us and them.

Wrapped in the blanket of cold,
The fire around,
Cannot melt the ice within!

The land of walking dead,
All isolated.
Inflicting loneliness upon the other!

Our refusal to connect,
Keeps us going...
We belong to none!

Earth covered in forgetful snow... yet,
We know not forgiveness!

Burning envy keeps us warm...
Till we all freeze to death!

Translations

The Query

Rehman Rahi

If you don't mind I would ask you something,
I would never ask, if my conscience did not raise the
queries---

I have got entangled with a hardcore infidel.
When I go near him he becomes an ashen ascetic
And licks his lips

When I hide, he becomes a shadow
And keeps an eye on me.

He visits me at night with his blazing tiger eyes
And in broad daylight

Turns into a black, gaunt snake flicking his tongue ---
Addressing me thus: What makes you so impudent?

You are twining ropes of sand and holding the air in your
arms.

I have known you...you were a frozen mushroom,
You neither impart scent to the air nor are you rooted in
the earth.

This blank cliff of your lifeless being
The simmering summers and the harsh winters
Do not make any difference to it.

I know that the spark of love struck your destiny,
The hillock of your yearning was set ablaze by the tulips,
Your vision grew up in the woods at dawn,
The springs of your thoughts that ran dry are surging
now

You made your way through the dense front wall
And your zealous deer went for a run through the flowery
meadows.

It is good if a rose sprouted through the grave
And auspicious if the flame of love billowed from your
bosom

You give yourself airs as if you touched the Milky Way
And moonlight grew in your barren night.

The sound of spring resonated in your hopeless ways
A jasmine bush blossomed in front of your eyes all of a sudden

Even a droplet of dew seemed to you a warm sunbeam
You were a serene pool and a wave rippled on your surface unwittingly.

Your passion lures you into strutting and seeking attention

Of the world around

Your heart fills with the desire to illumine the hills.

The breeze suggests: Let us disperse the sweet smell of love

The atmosphere hums: Let us play the music and share the secret.

The fragrance of your love blows against me from a distance

And the killing thorn of your grief pricks me from afar.

I admit that you gashed your bosom

You were indifferent

Yet you endured the poisoned arrow of love.

The light that made springs of light

Gush from your breast,

The flame of the same light burned the hinterland of your life.

The voice in which the cuckoo sang on the *chinar*

In the same sound the sun of Doomsday simmered.

The morning suggests that you tear your clothes to shreds

And the evening advises you to commit suicide.

You could extinguish the fire in the heart

After shedding your blood

And turning into *Majnoon* you could laugh at everything.

The least you could do was make someone your bosom friend

And share your pain with,

But man could never mould one into a human being
Nor could anybody ever read one's heart.
In ancient times a wise thinker said:
"Everybody in this world is an unread leaf".

Be that you meet a god
And your heart beat in his breast
But what would you share with him?
And how would you share with him?
It may mitigate your heart's burden
But whirling uneasiness might take you over,
You are in love but don't be a jasmine bush
Which turns into a twig around which it twines.
Watch out! Don't let your heart be tempted
Your secret will be disclosed and spread
As does the scent when a flower blooms
Take care and don't let springs gush from your eyes
And lead poor souls to the waters of life.
If the splendour of beauty satiates your thirsty spirit
Have courage and drink the Red Sea in one single draught
If your lips get wet
Accept you are a tale-bearer
And if the thread of your thoughts slits
Admit you have made allegations against it
If you have to preserve the virtue of love
Take a path that will make you an exemplary beloved
Or else ostentation might capture you in its web
You can neither see beauty
Nor can love trust you.
Whosoever you may approach
He will enquire about your persona
You may come near me
I too may not recognize you.
Seeing me
You may forget to exchange greetings
Turning into an acacia thorn

I will ask you at every step:
Our meeting that took place without any reason
Which you call union,
Has not its very idea and the trail thereof
Been effaced by time?
The burn that you named love
Is it a scar for the blazing face?
The layered dream
That you are embellishing
Is it a slit hem for her?
He in whose soul and spirit
This poison water will spread
If passion for waters of life will not grow in him
What shall he do with his life?
In this stony land
I call blind pebbles rubies and pearls
Your blossoming looks are the spring of my fortune
Foot on a thorn
Is that my being for you?

Translated from the Kashmiri by Majrooh Rashid

An Impression

Rehman Rahi

The rain shower in mid- spring
The apple orchard took on a magical hue
The green turf burst forth in youthful desire
The branches donned the colour of maturity
The breeze rose and sat among the shadows
Silence ensnared the coos of the cuckoo
The stream tinkled its silvery anklets
The petal leapt up and flitted about moth-like
Buzzing, the honey bee whizzed past
Can't tell from where it came and is headed where
The solitary sunray beneath the apple tree
Suckled away at raindrops blissfully unaware
The stray cloud danced across the mountain hem
Solitude opened up its lap of love
Garden Path! Remember those flower-like steps!
Woeful Heart ! Who will heed your throbbing!

Translated from the Kashmiri by Nusrat Jan

After Ten Years
(*dahe weher*)

Rehman Rahi

After Ten Years
Unmindful steps took me again
to the same river bank.
Ten years back the rivulet seemed as deep.
An occasional chirp from the chinar above
broke the silence the same way.
Like a fish jumping up from the quiet waters.
The same acacia-scented breeze carried
the mellowed wine's sting.
Sky—like a wildspring
Moon---like a mermaid.
Unmindful steps took me again
to the same river bank.

Suddenly
the wandering heart found traces
and the eyes lit up.
Yes
from the same porch she had come down
donned in youth.
Yes
from the same street
she had appeared suddenly
beating the pot
with her hennaed hands.
Yes
her flowery feet had caressed the same patch of grass.
Yes
These very stairs had kissed and kept count of her steps.
Yes
it was here, fetching water, that she had answered my glance.
Here, at the same hour, she gave her word and fashioned a
dream.

Ten years
and that moment has kept coming on drunken steps.
Ten years
and the rivulet today seems as deep.
Ten years
and this chinar still sweetens dreams.
Ten years
and her memory still evades that eternal promise
that meeting by the riverside.
I would shout by her grave but she won't hear.
No acacia-scented breeze animates the grave.
Here, the gravestones only grow old
and new lilies bloom.

Translated from the Kashmiri by Mufti Mudasir

Gulrez

Maqbool Shah Kralwari

(Noshlab's lamentations after she wakes up and finds Ajab Malik missing)

With the dawn's break and bulbuls' screams
My dark eyes woke from pleasant dreams.

I thought I had slept in my lover's bosom
The spring breeze induces a sound sleep.

My eyes went searching, but all was gone
The rose, the garden, the bulbul's song.

My love had fled, the rose was plucked
Joy had departed, the heart was branded.

Darkness was staring into my face
Grief had struck, I choked on my tears.

Looked frantically for my rose-cheeked love
Searched hither and thither, right and left.

In vain I searched for his handsome visage
He had gone leaving behind no trace.

I searched for the rose, found a thorn instead
I searched for the treasure, found a snake instead.

With tearful eyes I asked my heart:
'That yester night's union, was that a dream?

That mirth, that joy, was that mere fantasy?"
Fie to that mourning disguised as joy!

I am crazed, my body is scorched
Crying and wailing I sought my love.

O inconstant, cypress-statured love
My idol, my bright and glorious moon.

You put me to sleep and quietly slipped away
And left me to be torn by the pain of separation.

Don't go away, love, my wits are at their edge
Come back, or else I will be a lonely soul.

To sulk and vanish quietly, is that fair?
To hide your heart's stain, is that fair?

My pearl, whose ear have you adorned?
Did not my lament reach you once?

I am a withered flower, O my rose-scented lover!
I am a singed moon, O my moon-faced lover!

My upright frame is cooped like a bow
As if love's arrow has pierced Heemaal.

I am Yusuf's Zulaikha, blinded in love
I am Wamiq's Azra, struck with frenzy.

I am Shireen, calling you in anguish and distress
Would that my lovely Farhad appear once!

My Majnun, my frenzied lover, where have you gone?
Laila's soul carries the pain of unrequited love.

You stole my heart's wealth and went far away
Unfaithful lover, you ravaged my heart.

Dear love, you have set my body ablaze
No more can I bear the fire of separation.

What's annoyed you, why do you jilt me?
Who's the fortunate one you have blessed?

The gust of grief has put out my joy's lamp
I'm shrouded in darkness, show your face once.

Let me have a secret glimpse of your shining moon
Lord of Paradise, just once glimpse of the hour!

I would follow you, but have no clue of the way
This poisoned arrow of separation, who could bear?

I would send a message, but have no trusted friend
O tulip-faced darling, you have left my heart stained.

Whom should I send, who would relate my tale?
Who would reach there, except the night wind?

Come, O scented zephyr of the early morn!
Carry my complaints to that rose-cheeked love.

But first, beat off all dust from your hem
Then go near his door with shuddering limbs.

Knock gently, be careful of his high esteem
Speak softly in a pleasant tone and say this:

"Whom did you leave the poor soul to?
What did you gain leaving her to taunts?"

That you ditched her, she can share with none
She trusted your word and is blighted by betrayal.

Yearning for you, her breast is riddled
You gave her the word you did not keep.

Deserting me was what you had planned.
Is this the way to repay generosity?"

The proud and coquettish one is heart-broken
It is as if a jasmine is fed to the cannon.

I am a snuffed out torch, my youth is blown away
Worn out by unceasing crying, I am reduced to ashes.

I am like firewood in the oven of love
A lush forest blasted by that green cypress.

Autumn overran my newly arrived Spring
My summer was cut short by the early winter's chill.

A moon eclipsed as soon as it waxed full
A bud blasted by snow, a garden by disease.

Like a candle I cry and burn
Like a moth he pays no heed

A jasmine bound by that bumble bee's love
A vivacious bird burning in a pan

A lofty statured fir, now bent like a willow tree
My precious gold changed into worthless brass.

Without him, can I be happy?
Leaving him, can I choose others?

Without him, how can I enjoy a restful sleep?
Away from him, sweet juice is poison to me.

Without the lover, paradise is hell
Ornaments like fetters, throne like a gibbet.

If the lover has ditched you, put on a crown of grief
Think your velvet bed no more than a bed of thorns.

I lost my wits and rent my robes into shreds
Blackened my crystal mansion with mud and ashes.

These were my laments of separation, loud and clear
Come, a blooming jasmine has withered away!

Translated from the Kashmiri by Mufti Mudasir

You Carved a Niche in My Heart
(*Kertham manz wuandas jaay*)

Mahmud Gaami

You carved a niche in my heart
This longing will not wane!

What's my body now?
A blazing pan of love
That chars my anguished heart.
Though reduced to ashes
I uttered no complaint.
This longing will not wane!

These deadly serpentine tresses!
Oh, do not flaunt them so!
Life's hope hinges on you.
This longing will not wane!

To the altar of your godly frame
From head to toe
I will offer nosegays.
Serve you as a slave
Wait on you to catch a glimpse.
This longing will not wane!

From the bows of your arched brows
Shoot not these piercing eyelashes
My heart is stabbed and bleeds.
This longing will not wane!

May you live long
Like Ruma Rishi!
This love too shall abide.
What if I nurture unfulfilled cravings?
This longing will not wane!

Were you to hear my sorry tale
My petition would be granted.
One glimpse of you will soothe my eyes.
This longing will not wane!

My soul is worn out!
Cease this murderous toying.
Salvage me from the frowns of fortune
And redeem my tottering soul.
This longing will not wane!

From the cups of China drink a beverage
You are to die someday.
For what were we born then?
This longing will not wane!

We have not come here to stay
The earth will devour us soon.
And once dead, we will turn to dust
This longing will not wane!

My seething passion brooks no silence
And the pain dwindles not a bit.

Come and play your lute and rebeck.
This longing will not wane!

Ask yourself---what brought us here?
And why Mahmud turned insane?
Slight me not with such heedlessness.
This longing will not wane!

Translated from the Kashmiri by Mufti Mudasir

Poems

Parveen Shakir

Contentment

Now that I have closed upon me
Every door of the city of fidelity
With my own hands
And thrown every key
Into the cold, deep-eyed sea of forgetfulness
How much comfort
This frightening sensation offers!
Far from the steep walls of the dungeon
In the bystreet of an old town
A casement
Shall remain open for me!

Omen

Seven married women and my fortune!
How can the writing of sandalwood
Efface the engravings on a stone
It comes to this
With the emotion of complete righteousness
All have bestowed me with the names of their gods
And it has been learnt
In the journey through forest when evening falls
Names work wonders!

Entrustment

The earth dancing around its primeval axis
And in heaven
The delight of some mysterious whisper pouring
down
As if Northern breeze undulatingly in the body of
green seasons
Has opened up the vein of vision
And now through Love's hollowed palm pours out
fragrance to life!
Some joy out of sight
Comes and touches the soul of existence
The roseated pleasure passing over into the livid
sincerity of blood
Began to kiss my body
Someone offering life, at the same time
Snatches away the soul from the body
This battle between death and life
Extremely immemorial union of elemental life
In the eternal twilight of existence
Water and Fire have come together
Air has bowed before the Earth!

Translated from the Urdu by Imran Ahmad

Who Am I?

Kirshwar Naheed

Selling socks and shoes, that woman I'm not
I'm the one whom you buried alive within the walls
And like the zephyr became unafraid

For you never knew
That stones can never crush a voice.
I'm the one whom you trampled
Beneath the burden of traditions
For you never knew
That light can never fear the terrible darkness.

I'm the one from whose lap you plucked flowers
And put flames and thorns instead
For you never knew
That chains can never tame the fragrance of flowers

I'm the one who on the pretext of modesty
You bought and sold
For you never knew
That *Sohni* can never die braving the river on unbaked
clay pot

I'm the one whom you transacted in marriage
Relieving yourself of the burden
For you never knew
That nations can never rise if minds are enslaved

First you profited a lot on my coyness and modesty
On my motherly affection and loyalty, you profited a lot
Now it's season of blooming flowers in laps and minds
Half-naked on the posters
Selling socks and shoes, that woman I'm not.

Translated from the Urdu by Imran Ahmad

Zero Bridge

Amin Kamil

This. The Zero-Bridge.
Far from the city and its maddening noise.
Settled on this deserted plateau;
Secluded, a naked ascetic!

The erect, uniform poplars
Offering in rows, Eid-nimaz:
For taming of Quraish, the
caravans set forth, in summer
and winter.

The waning moon washes off
the stains,
from the silent white houseboats.
In the watery pools of the *veth*,
powdered silver falls,
dazzling in its brightness.

This is *the* Zero-Bridge.
Zero: a strange dot!
Count is lost in it;
Count emerges from it.
One who hasn't stepped
out of his corridors,
knows not, the pleasures of
an enticing whirlpool:
Looking down from
the seven-storied home,
into the depths!

Look up. The Temple on the hill.
Man! Always placing
the beloved's throne at such heights!
O Shankar, your dread locks,
each day,
light up the dew like stars.

They say, out of this town,
there is a road,
to some unknown city.
Alas! Who will escape the boundary of the self;
Leaping over the high barbed wire!
Who will burn the tree of *Samsaara* :
From each bough oozes milk!
There. That Chinar:
In those leaves,
the moon beams doze.
A feeling grows that the night is ebbing;
The screechy cries of beetles resound.

My forgetful beloved;
Will he be dreaming of me this hour?
In early spring here,
even the fruitless willow sprouts leaflets.

The silent surrounds, though stringless,
resonate.
Each object in harmony;
Matching note to note.
My heart too seems to hum along.

Nature too, inclined to art!
What designs the shadows make!
What are we?
The hues of these designs;
In the heat of the sun,
the pride all gone,
one fades away!

A day will come:
The shadows disappear;
The varied designs fade away;
The river of *samsaara*,
merging into the dot of light;
Far from the maddening noise,
each man,
a Zero-Bridge in himself!

Translated from the Kashmiri by Insha Iftikhar Kashani

The Message

Hari Krishan Koul

It is hard to say whether she really knocked at the door or only I felt it. I came out of my bed and hurriedly put on my clothes. I opened the door and came out.

There she was standing outside my room. She didn't say a word, neither did I ask her anything. The matter was obviously clear that there was nothing to enquire about. Since yesterday I too was somehow prepared for it.

I nodded and followed her to her small room. An earthen lamp was burning in the room and in its faint light I saw Bab's lifeless body had been brought down from the bed and placed on the floor. His eyes were closed but his mouth, which he had sealed all these years, was wide open.

I thought I too should do something, say something. But I couldn't do anything; I had nothing to say. All of a sudden it came to me and I said, "We should place the lamp near Bab's head." She did the same, perhaps she too knew what is to be done on such occasions.

"His mouth is open." She drew my attention to it.

"Why shouldn't it be open?" I replied. "For all these years we waited to hear from him. At the end of the day, he might have opened his mouth to utter what he never dared to express."

"No, that is not the matter." She disagreed. "Bab is still waiting for them. Until they put some drops of water into his mouth he will not close it."

I had not thought that this could be the reason behind Bab's open mouth. But I agreed with her. I was waiting for some excuse to escape from the room. I left her alone with the corpse and headed to convey the message of Bab's death to those who according to her, he was waiting for with his mouth wide open.

In the dark of the night all the roads were deserted. Neither a human nor an animal could be seen. One couldn't even spot a tree or a plant. It seemed that other than darkness and chill, nothing existed. Even the stray dogs that roam on the streets throughout the day had disappeared. So intense was the cold that water dripping from the street taps had turned into icicles. I thought it was good that Bab's death did not bring tears to my eyes; otherwise they too would have frozen and veiled my eyes. No---my sight would have been blurred. Since I had not cried, my eyesight was clear and sharp. It pierced through the blinds of darkness, through windows and doors to show me the naked bodies of those fast asleep in their soft and warm beds. To sleep in soft and warm beddings, with no thought of death is a great comfort; I am not sure who deprived me of it. Who and why? I had lost it myself as I volunteered to deliver the message of Bab's death. To tell the truth - this was an excuse to flee from the open mouthed dead body lying in the faint light of the earthen lamp.

I knew the house where I had to convey the message. It was on the other end of the road. However, after walking a few steps I was confused. The road, that I otherwise knew as straight, branched into two. What should I do now? Which one should I take? Finally I took the decision that anyone in such a situation would take. I made up my mind to walk on the right one first and if I

didn't find my destination I would return and try the left one. True it would get late; but it is better to be late than never. There was one more thing: a long night seems to me more difficult than these long roads and my roaming might end the long night.

The master of the house, his wife and their son--- all the three were happy to see me. Their happiness was evident from their smiling lips which exposed their bright teeth. But I was silent, my face showing displeasure. The brightness of the lights in their drawing room had turned the night into day and such was the heating arrangement that it gave the feeling of a *Hamam*¹. I thought, perhaps I have found the light and warmth that I was craving for. Bab's large sized photograph hung on one wall. I looked at it and the master of the house said, "Whosoever visits us bows in front of Bab's photograph to pay his respects before taking a seat." Without paying any such respect, I sat down and propped myself against a cushion. After a while the lady of the house brought tea and some sweets. I found this untimely but she forced me to eat, saying that it was Bab's gracious gift which should not be declined.

"Whatever I am and whatever is mine--- my house, my wife, my son---all this is because of Bab's blessings, Without Bab we wouldn't exist," said the master of the house, the plate of sweets in his hand. He forced me to take a small piece and stuffed one into his mouth.

It seemed to me that I was swallowing poison rather than tea. How to break the news of Bab's death to these happy souls baffled me! Would it be right to break it, as it might strike the happy family like a bolt from the blue?

Whether right or wrong, a messenger has to pass on the message. Once I finished my tea I stood up and turned Bab's photograph hanging on the wall to hide his face.

"Bab has deserted us." I tried to explain my action.

"Bab never does that. Wherever he may be, he returns to help those who have been rendered helpless." Laughing, he righted Bab's photograph.

I lost my patience and told him right away that Bab had died. For the first time he lost his cool; grabbing my throat he said, "You doomsayer, don't you dare utter dreadful things here. I will kill you."

I fled the spot. I felt as if he was chasing me.

"Have you returned alone?" She stood up once she saw me. I stood in front of her, on the other side of the corpse. "Did they get the message?" she asked.

I didn't answer her. The fact is that once again I was feeling suffocated in the room. I yearned to hold her hand and take her to my room away from the frail corpse and the faint beams of the earthen lamp. I wanted both of us to disappear in the soft and warm bedding and wait for the day when the putrid stench of the decomposing body would itself let the world know about the death. This is what I longed for; the reality of the moment however was that there was nobody around in the dark chilly room but us. Yes, there was a cold and frail corpse between us, its eyes closed but mouth wide open.

Translated from the Kashmiri by Irfan Mohammad Malik

Hamam: A typical Kashmiri Hamam is a room with a hollow base for burning firewood, which provides heat and also ensures supply of hot water through an attached copper tank.

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