**ISSN 0975-6574**

# English Studies in India

A Refereed Journal of English Literature and Language

Vol.26 January 2018



**Department of English**
University of Kashmir
Srinagar

## Advisory Board

- Professor M L Raina, Professor of English (rtd.), Punjab University, Chandigarh.
- Professor Harish Narang, Professor of English (rtd.), JNU New Delhi.
- Professor Badri Raina, Professor of English (rtd.), University of Delhi.
- Professor T N Dhar, Professor of English (rtd.), University of Kashmir
- Professor Anil Raina, Professor of English, Punjab University, Chandigarh
- Professor Manju Jaidka, Professor of English, Punjab University, Chandigarh
- Professor Imtiaz Hasnain, Department of Linguistis, AMU Aligarh
- Professor Asim Siddiqui, Department of English, AMU Aligarh

**Published By**

Lily Want

Head
Department of English
University of Kashmir
Srinagar 190006

*English Studies in India* is a refereed journal of literature and language published annually by the Department of English, University of Kashmir.

Contributions are welcome which should be addressed to the Head, Department of Department of English, University of Kashmir. Manuscripts submitted should be sent in duplicate, typeset in Word format using Microsoft Office. They can also be emailed at: lilywant@yahoo.com. Articles must follow the style and format given in the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.*

Only research articles are accepted for publication. Unused manuscripts can be returned to the authors if accompanied by stamped and self-addressed envelopes.

The editors or the department are not responsible for any plagiarism, if at all, resorted to by any contributor. A contributor must furnish a certificate to the editor confirming that the article has not been published anywhere else. Views expressed in the articles are of their respective writers and not of the Department.

We do not accept hand written articles that do not follow the recommended style.

Subscription Rate: Rs. 200.00 per annum/issue.

# Contents

## Articles


| | |
|---|---|
| Theorizing Difference in Historiographic Metafiction: An Examination of Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*<br>**Krishnan Unni.P** | 1-12 |
| On the Issue of 'summing up' in Shakespeare: Lateness as a Critical Construct?<br>**Arnab Chatterjee** | 13-23 |
| Man, Woman and the Wild: An Ecocritical Reading of Kira Salak's *The White Mary*<br>**Bibek Adhikary** | 24-36 |
| *The Next Milestone: A Mother's Journal*: A Trajectory of Fortitude and Forbearance<br>**Lily Want** | 37-46 |
| The Decolonization of Feminist Studies and Postcolonial Feminism: Intersections and Divergences<br>**Iffat Maqbool** | 47-56 |
| David Mamet's *The Cryptogram*: Showcasing the Dysfunctional American Family<br>**Masooda Suhaila** | 57-67 |
| Diaspora: Displacement and Cultural Dichotomy<br>**Altaf Ahmad Ganaie** | 68-74 |
| Crossing the Threshold: Women in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*<br>**Tuba Rashid** | 75-87 |
| Agha Shahid Ali: Poet of Multiple Consciousnesses<br>**Aaliya Mushtaq** | 88-98 |
| The Human Body and Mysticism; A Study of Lalla Ded's *Vaakhs*<br>**Jamiel Ahmad** | 99-106 |
| *Time's Arrow*: A Study in Historiographic Metafiction<br>**Insha Mattoo** | 107-123 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Questioning the Archetypes: Exploring Atwood's *Good Bones*<br>**Shaheena Akhter** | 124-137 |
| Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: Hybrid and in-between Spaces<br>**Sayantina Dutta** | 138-147 |
| **Creative Pieces** | |
| Poems **Aaliya Mushtaq Baba** | 148-149 |
| Poems **Abid Ahmad** | 150-151 |
| **Translations** | |
| "The Shadow of Silence"<br>Shabir Magami<br>**Ishrat Bashir** | 152 |
| "Our Love"<br>Shabir Magami<br>**Ishrat Bashir** | 153 |
| "A Whistle"<br>Dr Ali Shariti<br>**Master Showkat Ali** | 154 |
| "Education"<br>Shahzoor Kashmiri<br>**Master Showkat Ali** | 155 |
| *Snippets*<br>Akhter Mohiuddin<br>**Abid Ahmad** | 156-160 |
| "Shadow Beside the Self"<br>Anees Hamdani<br>**Nusrat Jan** | 161-166 |

# Theorizing Difference in Historiographic Metafiction: An Examination of Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*

**Krishnan Unni.P**

Difference is an important theoretical postulation in the histories of Latin America. The literature of the continent is the mix of differences asymmetrically arranged and further, this has posited a new historical jumbling of myths, geographical features and endless other discourses functioning in all narratives seeking a past of the continent and reflecting them in the present. Djlal Kadir in *Questing Fictions*, provides an account of Columbus's journey to America and analyzes how this journey has in it a series of miscalculations both in search of a new land and internally riven contradictions concerned with the motives and aims of the travel. What Columbus carried, Kadir notes are "Plato's mythological Atlantis, and the Biblical Book of Revelation" (*Questing*, 8). Columbus discovered neither India nor Europe's idealized vision of itself in his search. This "error", is a product of the miscalculations of the Spanish empire and in this error lies the hidden motives of colonialism and the future of the empire charted. The Spanish empire in its attempt to plunder, loot and surrender the land was itself getting predicated on this error for centuries. Time and again, in the history of Latin America, we see this error reflected more in narratives which ultimately take the shape of the lost history or the lost continent. What Columbus attempted became later the transfigured journey motif for any itinerant inside Latin America as his/her journey to understand the continent became a myth or an unrecorded history of difference. Difference is not the product of miscalculation; it is the outcome of a past undeniably taken away and the present too difficult to narrate. Latin America defines itself as the mistaken journey, whose end is deferred

because it cannot find the utopia it had hoped to discover in the New World. The history of the continent represents this difference.

The question of understanding difference is the question of understanding history itself. Latin American histories share this relationship with other narratives that have similar issues of the mistaken journey of Columbus because the bench mark between history and literature is hardly predicated upon the features of a past which is vibrant enough with stories or a present active enough to perpetuate the past. The natives of the continent with their troubled past could never locate themselves with some fixed historical junctures nor merge themselves with the contemporary global population which tries to give them a voice. Columbus's attempts in 1492 to educate the natives had taken them away from their pristine glory and at the same time the commingled races which sprang up after that could never locate themselves in the annals of the historians. The history of the continent, therefore, positively takes a turn against the way it is told and narrated in various ways. The role of literature in understanding and propagating histories is contentious. The reason for this contestation arises from the twin aspects of perceiving the mode of the narrated versions of this continent and the imaginative and furtive steps to reshape the official and recorded versions of history. The clash between the natives and the groups that have sprang up in the New World, the dislocation of the recorded histories, the geographical and demographical differences and the present thrust on the global demands of Latin America have established a peculiar connection between history writing and literatures in the sense that histories often have turned out to be written as literatures or the narratives have veered toward fictionality to reassert the unstable and unchartered past and issues. Columbus's

mistake, differing from Kadir's ideas about history, one can state is not the only mistake upon which Spain as the empire suffers and the Latin American continent sheds its tears, but one among the many mistakes of historical citations which later permeated into all other narratives of the continent. Reconstruction of Latin American history is therefore the rewriting of literatures- precisely, the literatures with this difference.

Linda Hutcheon in her essay "Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and Intertextuality of History" develops an argument that goes against the grain of consistent readings of history through fiction and history by other means. Historiographic Metafiction, for Hutcheon, seems to be the hallmark of postmodern writing. The way in which histories are interspersed with fictional elements constitutes the difference and a divergent methodology to understand the different times, which were not by any way depicted in the official history writings. Taking cue from Patricia Waugh's idea of "metafiction" and Roland Barthes's notion of the "writerly texts", Hutcheon formulates the opinion: " Historiographic metafiction appears willing to draw upon any signifying practices it can find operative in a society. It wants to challenge those discourses and yet to milk them for all they are worth" ("Historiographic Metafiction", 16). However, a number of late modernist or postmodernist strands work in the congruence of historiographic metafiction such as parody, intertextuality and pastiche. Carlos Fuentes's texts do not take all such elements for the construction of such a historiographic metafiction. The metafictional elements in Fuentes's texts bear the voice of the "supposed history" (a history that perhaps may not have even been written or told, but remains as some kind of belief system) and the "angular history", that is, another history that makes us believe that things would have

happened in such a way. Hence, it is important to examine how these texts fall in the category of historiographic metafiction despite certain intertextual and metafictional elements they contain.

Fuentes in his novels attempts to reconstitute and reconstruct history by imagining, archiving, journeying with characters and mixing up different times and places. More than the question of Mexican identity in the contemporary times, what emerges in his novels is the difficulty to define the Latin American identity. The history of Mexico, in his novels, functions as a structure that attempts to point out toward the hidden histories of Latin America and further the complicated issues of reading these histories in the light of constructing the nations. In *Terra Nostra*, Fuentes attempts to build an argument regarding the history of the continent by engaging his characters and situations in the realm of historical incriminations and the debates of the present. Reading against the grain of accepted historical writing, the history of the continent is imagined by the author with several other tropes and *loci*, which never had any proper relationship with the continent at all. The questions inside history concerned with truth, verifiability, authorship, documentation and recording are challenged by Fuentes with his ideas of time and place. The identity of historical characters is questioned as they are not positioned in one deeply rooted culture or civilization. Further, the occurrences and incidents are fictionalized as the originary is always rendered problematic to us.

*Terra Nostra* is the best example of the violation of official history. In the official history, Philip II is the grandson of Philip I. The Hapsburg dynasty during the reign of Philip I was subject to chaos. Philip II began his reign far from Spain and was at war with the Pope. In June 1559,

Philip married by proxy his child-bride, Elizabeth of Valois, eldest daughter of the King of France. The same year, he returned to Spain and remained in the Iberian peninsula. The Holy office of the Inquisition was formerly introduced into Latin America by a royal edict in 1569. Hubert Herring writes:

Philip II was no more relentless in crushing heresy than his contemporaries, Charles IX and Henry III, on the throne of France. The Holy Office was fully as merciful as John Calvin. The witch hunting, burning, and hanging in Germany, England and New England were not morally superior to the auto dafe of Lima and Mexico with their commitment of Protestants, Jews, and sinful priests to the flames." (*A History of Latin America*, 180). The Spanish church which came to America possessed miraculous powers in converting the primitives to Caholicism.

C.S. Barden in *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* offers an interesting account of the church in Mexico where the priest does not have any problem with the Indians. Burden writes:
In Cuzco, ancient Inca capital, the foundation stones of the temple of Viracocha now support a Christian church. To this day, the church of ten permits the ritual dances of forgotten centuries and finds it neither blasphemous nor incongruous when Indians bring their ancient ceremonies before the high altar" ( 23).

Burden's observation points out that the Christian world can not entirely shake all the pagan beliefs even though they succeeded in converting most of them to Christianity. The king's power over the church increased throughout the colonial period.

In *Terra Nostra*, we come across subversions of history recorded officially. philip II is the son, rather than the grandson of Philip I. Elizabeth, the virgin Queen of England is made Philip's wife. Elizabeth has no sexual relations with her husband, but is portrayed as promiscuous in the text. The historical character Charles V is elided in the text. Both Columbus and Cortez, the discoverer and conqueror of the New World are embodied in a mythic voyager called the Pilgrim. Above all, a series of historical incidents are removed from the text. The new histories are imagined and inserted in the text which function as 'apocryphal histories'. Brian Mc Hale claims that "the apocryphal history either supplements the historical record, claiming to restore what has been lost or suppressed, or it displaces official history altogether: ( *Postmodernist Fiction,* 90). *Terra Nostra*, with its incorporation of such apocryphal histories tries to develop re-imagining the real/ imaginary events set by the historian. The task of the historian, in the context of the apocryphal history making, is to imagine and negate what has already been recorded by his predecessor historians and chroniclers.

The construction of the building El Escorial by Felipe, El Senor (Philip II) is the example of archiving everything and regarding all histories as one. Fuentes portrays Felipe as the authority who has blind eyes not heeding the voice of others. El Escorial is the monument wherein the histories of Palestine, first century of the Roman empire with Tiberius on the island of Capri, Renaissance Venice and Mexico during the times of discovery and conquest are recorded. El Escorial is a monomaniacal center which focuses on both the past and future. Fuentes critiques Felipe II who is concerned with the linear and historical progression of events. Felipe's notions of monarchy and sex are also undermined in the text. When Felipe tells Ludovico "The world is contained here within my palace; that is why I constructed it: a replica

of stone to forever isolate and project me against the snares of everything that multiplies, corrodes, and conquers" (*Terra Nostra*, 613), it reflects as the voice of the monarch who controls the histories of everything in the history of the continent and also the idea of the historian who situates everything inside his text as the ultimate knowledge to be told to the world. Felipe II's notion of the empire, Fuentes implies, is very much the idea of the historian to control the knowledge.

The depiction of three brothers- Don Juan, the Idiot Price, and the Pilgrim also offers a threat against Felipe II's plan to annihilate the future and to enclose all past and present within the confines of the great tomb. The function of the three brothers in the text is to disrupt the king's suppression of the past of cruelties and bloodsheds. The Pilgrim's entry into the new world establishes the dichotomy between the New World and the old, and introduces the New World as a threat to Felipe II's omnipotent power. In the New World, the Pilgrim mixes with different people who bear the power and vitality of the primitives. The ancients from the mountain who supply the 'red grain and white cotton' (*Terra*, 465) refer to the beliefs in the Aztec mythology; wherein the primitives believe that the mountain gods supply them their food. The "Lady of the Butterflies" represents the female Earth Goddess. The Pilgrim's sexual union with the "Lady of the Butterflies" thus signifies the union with a mythic composite. Fuentes incorporates the mythic charatcters with the intention of retaining the power of Indian beliefs and systems. History never seems to recycle here as in the other Latin American masters. While retaining the mythic characters and by incorporating a web of travelers and imaginary characters, Fuentes tries to subvert the attempt to unify everything in the past of the history of Spain and Mexico.

Examining the relationship of history and myth, Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria writes: "Latin American history is narrated in the language of myth because it is always conceived as the history of the other, a history fraught with incest, taboo, and the founding act of naming" (*Myth and Archive*, 21). This "otherness" of Latin American history is implied in *Terra Nostra* in the mythical character of Pilgrim. Pollo Phoibee and Celestina make five in Paris under the mask of Quatzacoatl indicating that the mythical cycle of the old world and the new is completed. The androgyne which survives at the end of the text also serves as an example of this completion. The androgyne is associated with the earth and converts all histories into one. It says, " I am the people of all histories, all I insist one with force, tenderness, cruelty, compassion, brotherhood, life and death- that everything happen instantly, today: my history, neither yesterday or tomorrow" (*Terra*, 840). The assertion of the androgyne implicates the complexities involved in the understanding of the histories of classes and races as it does not belong to any particular time or place in the written history. The androgyne, thus, exists in the breach between the reader's understanding of imperial Spain and Latin American countries. This space occupied by this character toward the end of the text is intended to dissociate the one dimensional historical awareness and poses plurality in the constitution of historical understanding.

Fuentes's notion of archives is intended to critique the constitution of the same in literatures and histories. Archiving in his texts is the act of subverting the official history and its makers by suggesting a series of alternatives. Examining the relationship between archive and writing, Michel Foucault writes: "The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of

statements as unique events" (*The Archaelogy of Knowledge* 129). Fuentes questions the statements and memories in his text by articulating his characters against a plethora of occurrences and narratives. For Ludovico, "the history of Spain has no memory" (*Terra* 608). Valerio Camillo teaches him that "history repeats itself only because we are unaware of the alternate possibility of each historic event: what that event could have been but was not" (*Terra* 646). The use of "mirror" in the text also is indicated to replicate these histories without proper memories and records. In Guzman's words, the "mirror" reflects "a real world…agitating and transforming everything" (*Terra* 171). Later when Don Juan looks at the mirror, he finds his own body reflected as two. He says, "…… when a man dies before the mirror he is in reality two men, and one of them will be buried but the other will remain and continue to walk upon the earth: and that one kneeling there, is that I" ( *Terra* 401). Jacques Derrida recognizes the mirror game as "an identification with the mother" (*On Signs* 237). The psychoanalytic aspect between the reflection of one's image in the mirror is for Derrida an identification of eliding into a separate space of ' otherness' , which carries the mother image into the person. However, in the context of the histories dealt in *Terra Nostra*, the mirror is used as the best archive that resists any other function of the same by writing. For instance, the lives of the Pilgrim, Don Juan and Guzman- though different from one another, are situated in the space of recovering the past of their myths and legends, not as recorded in the archives of Imperial Spain. What Spain is lacking is the memory to archive history. Seen in this light of Spain's construction of the continent and the imposition of religion in Latin America, the mirror image in the text can be seen as an alternative against archive making and the representation of history. The histories of the Jews,

Adamites, Athelite and Cathari heretics suppressed by Felipe II are also getting reflected in the mirror.

Fuentes interestingly blends the mirror with old world. Mirror, in this context, also serves the function of metaphor. The Pilgrim, who is known as the "Smoking Mirror" in the jungle combines the virtues of all ancient races. In the mythical context of the Mexican New World, the Pilgrim functions as the god Quatzacoatl. The god Quatzacoatl in the Aztec mythologies is the symbol of the fusion of the opposites. The Pilgrim's name in the jungle, "The Smoking Mirror" signifies perhaps the anger of the god Quatzacoatl against the colonizers. The colonizers, by destroying the pagan temples, have displaced the ancient beliefs/ worships for the new ones. Fuentes questions this power of transformation of the energies of the colonizer to the natives by articulating the anger and voice of the Pilgrim against all movements in history. What the Pilgrim witnesses are the differences in history which would ever remain as they are without any return to the pristine glory of the natives; on the other hand, the glory of the natives can only be recognized by claiming this difference in history and writing. Fuentes's archival construction, it must be noted, is seriously embedded in the nature of this journey of characters.

Since Latin American history is fundamentally constructed by internalizing the differences, the theorization of these differences can occur by appropriating histories and other characters in literatures. Fuentes shows this in *Terra Nostra* by conceiving other characters from the Latin American masters and duly acknowledges what Foucault would say about the text that "the frontiers of a book are never clear cut….. it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is node within a

network" ( *Archaelogy*, 23). *Terra Nostra* has several similarities with Don Quixote. The vision of Cervantes as the chronicler attached to the court of Felipe II is drawn from Cervantes's masterpiece. The fate of the chronicler is described and imagined by Julian. The death of the chronicler in the battle of Lapanto parodies Don Quixote's death. The Chronicler's final story is that of "a battered battle, an insect lining overturned on its hare armor- plated back, waving its numerous legs" (*Terra*, 280). This story resembles Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. In the final section of *Terra Nostra*, Buendia and Oliveria appear- two characters who figure in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and in Julio Cortazar's *Hopscotch*. Both Buendia and Oliveria, in the original texts in which they figure in break all historical conventions and transcend time. Fuentes by incorporating these characters into his text also breaks the conventions of a historical novel and highlights how history can paradoy not only situations and incidents but characters from other literary texts as well.

**Works Cited**


Burden, C.S. *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* U.S.: Duke University Press, 1930. Print.

Derrida, Jacques qtd *On Signs*. Ed. Blonsky, Marshall U.S.: JHU Press, 1985. Print.

Echevarria, Roberto Gonzalez *Myth and Archive*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.

Foucault, Michel *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock, 1979. Print.

Fuentes, Carlos *Myself With Others*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1988. Print.

…. *Terra Nostra*. Trans. Margaret Sayers Peden London: Penguin, 1978. Print. *The Campaign*. Trans. Alfred Mac Adam. London: Picador, 1991. Print.

Herring, Huber. *A History of Latin America*: *From the Beginnings to the Present*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda "*Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History*". http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_3553.pdf

Kadir, Djlal *Questing Fictions*: *Latin America's Family Romance* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, Print.

McHale, Brian *Postmodernist Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Menton, Seymour *Latin America's New Historical Novel*. Texas: Texas University Press, 1992. Print.

# On the Issue of 'summing up' in Shakespeare: Lateness as a Critical Construct? [1]

**Arnab Chatterjee**

The idea of late writing, in recent times, has gained ground in critical circles and has opened up challenging vistas of critical investigation when it comes to the analysis of canonical writers and their texts. While there is always a tendency to divide a writer's work in into (late) stages (McMullan 2; Gibson 13), it has to be understood that in a writer like William Shakespeare, this 'strategy' may not always have its desired end, and that ill-health and the problems associated with old age may not always produce the serenity of "ripeness is all" (Said 7). Problems are seen to emerge especially when a writer's work does not show well-defined stages, and especially when there are questions about its placement in a chronological time-frame. This seems to be quite true for the bard's plays. While plays like *Love's Labour Lost, The Merchant of Venice* and *Henry VI Part II* fall within what is called his tragi-comedies (with the exception of the last play that is a history play), a play like *The Tempest* has garnered enough critical attention to 'compete' for the last play of Shakespeare entirely written by himself. While plays like Cardenio have been entirely lost for any competent analysis vis-à-vis the idea of late writing, certain recurrent literary tropes in *The Tempest* tend to show an undeniable affinity with the 'idea' that it is the last play attempted by him.

Coupled with this critical investigation of the notion of 'lateness' is the sociological-cultural parameter of gerontology that goes into the analysis of the writer's own biological fact of ageing along with the 'act' of literary composition. Cultural gerontology has its roots in the Islamic tradition of medical practitioners like Avicenna's *The*

*Canon of Medicine* (1025 A.D.), in which, recommendations were given for the care of the aged and included dietary requirements. Similarly, the Arab physician Ibn-Al-Zazzar also provided practical remedies in his writings that deal with the problem of aches, sleep disorders, problems in retention et al. By the time of the Industrial revolution, societal care system for the aged emerged, and with the increase in the life expectancy of humans, elderly care emerged as an issue.

By the 1940s, gerontology had developed and people like James Birren felt that this emerging field needed to re-organize itself and clearly define its own tenets. In 1945, The Gerontological Society of America was founded and two decades later, Birren was appointed as a founding director of the first full-fledged academic institution solely devoted to the study of this process of ageing, called Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Centre. Commenting on the wide-scale abuse and mistreatment of the elderly in America, Robert Neill Butler wrote the Pulitzer-prize winning book *Why Survive? Being Old in America* (1975). Later, gerontology, from strictly being a medical endeavor, began to take in the cultural aspects of ageing. One strand that seems to emerge is that ageing has been taken to be a part and parcel of the life-process, and different cultures have responded variously to this phenomenon. While old men are affected by the environment in which they live, they also, in turn, seem to influence the same. Gerontology is an interdisciplinary fare that engages cultural studies, sociology, criminology, social sciences, anthropology and the like and seeks to see the overall process of ageing not only in terms of biological determinants, but also sees it embedded within the complex matrix of societal practices and the discourses surrounding it. Many social scientists and gerontologists have tried to generate competing discourses surrounding the overall

process of ageing and what it really *means* for the person in particular and the society at large. While there have been attempts to *accoun*t for the phenomenon of ageing with recourse to hard-core biology and social theory, there has been an increasing thrust to engage in areas where there is an increasing interface of gerontology with literature. While old age may be sometimes be considered a positive factor when it comes to the 'maturity' of works penned down by a writer, there are also opposing and equally competing viewpoints not to support the case. Thus, there would always remain a fine line between the concept of lateness of works within a viable time-frame and lateness as an ideological, heuristic, critical construct (McMullan 5).

Much critical discourse surrounds what have come to be regarded as the 'last' plays of William Shakespeare with recourse to staging, theatricality, their masque-like quality and stagecraft (Yates 12; Scott 1). To this group belong plays like *Timon of Athens, A Winter's Tale, Cymbeline,* and *The Tempest.* Perhaps, among all, *The Tempest* has gathered most attention as being the last of the bard's play chiefly because of the fact that it was the final play solely composed by Shakespeare. The action of the half-duke, half-magician Prospero in throwing away his magic wand in the Epilogue, frequent allusions to the Globe theatre as the "globe" wherein such actions like those in the play are accomplished and brought to a speedy and satisfying conclusion, and the action of the rightful Duke in forgiving all, including Caliban, whom he announces as his own have led critics to discern traces of compassion and even resignation that creeps with old age in general. In this context, the words of Lytton Strachey seem noteworthy:

> Is it not thus, then, that we should imagine him in the last years of his life? Half enchanted by visions

> of beauty and loveliness, and half bored to death; on the one side inspired by a soaring fancy to the singing of the ethereal songs, and on the other urged by a general disgust to burst occasionally through his torpor into bitter and violent speech? If we are to learn anything of his mind from his last works, it is surely this (134-35).

While Lytton Strachey's comments inevitably hint at the concept of mature years vis-à-vis the composition of this play, there are ample situations in the play as well that point out that the bard was indeed bidding adieu to his art of dramatic composition. C. Scott in an insightful article called "Reading Strange Matter: Shakespeare's Last Plays and the Book of Revelation" points out that in the act of Prospero throwing away his books that he had once prized above his dukedom, the play offers a "meta-text" in the form of the author relinquishing his past positions and his script (158).

> This is also evident when Prospero, the bard's 'alter-ego'(McMullan 4) himself says:
> Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have's mine own,
> Which is most faint.
> ……
> In this bare island by your spell,
> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands (5.1.1-10).

In *The Tempest*, what we get to see is an outwardly stern but inwardly gentle father fondly looking at his daughter and his would-be son-in-law playing chess, that symbolizes, inter alia., the intricacies of life that Prospero has hitherto known. But, what is noteworthy is that while there has been an inclination to view this play as the final one in the Shakespearean canon, it, in many ways, naturally progresses

from the previous plays that fall within this list (Foakes 144-45). Coupled with this 'problem' of placing the bard's plays within a viable, chronological timeframe , is the idea of old age and the efforts at countering such a phenomenon in sovereigns like Elizabeth I (1533-1603). The early Tudor period centered around such narratives of old age versus the efforts at countering the same in monarchs that seem to have given a new impetus to writers in this early modern era to pen texts that contain potential to be read with recourse to cultural gerontology. Kazuyo Yamaguchi in an interesting article called "*On An Allegorical Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I in Old Age:* Its Reversed Meaning" is keen to show how the monarch's portraits, in the absence of any court painter (11),eventually got re-painted at the hands of the later monarchs who may have asserted their own influences. While it is well-known that she suffered physically during last days, the official "Rainbow" portrait is basically a "panegyric" for her accomplishments, though X-Ray suggests that a portrait called *The Portrait of Elizabeth with the Serpent* published by the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2010 originally portrayed a serpent, that was probably replaced by a rose (12). As Yamagachi points out, the serpent not only conjured up notions of Original Sin and the Fall, but also those of wisdom, discretion and wise judgment (12), that naturally comes with old age. This analysis fits well with the achievements of Elizabeth I, who initially inherited a bankrupt nation and made it into a flowering of the Renaissance, but also made her reign overtly authoritarian, despotic and tyrannous.

Such resistance to cultural configurations of ageing in Renaissance England may have prompted writers like Shakespeare to depict texts with respect to the concepts of growing old that problematize the idea of lateness both as a chronological, time-bound construct and also as a critical

idea in itself. However, as Edward Dowden is careful to point out:

> The essential prerequisite of such a study was a scheme of the chronological succession of Shakespeare's plays which could be accepted as trustworthy in the main. But for such a study, it is fortunately not necessary that we should in every case determine how play followed play. It would for many reasons be important and interesting to ascertain the date at which each work of Shakespeare came into existence; but as a fact this has not been accomplished, and we may safely say that it never will be accomplished. (378)

*The Tempest* seems to have a critical history of being considered the bard's last play, chiefly because of the fact that Prospero has often been taken to be the mouthpiece of the bard, who, while bidding farewell to the island in which he lived is actually Shakespeare himself who is bidding adieu to the London stage to spend the last days of his life as a gentleman farmer with his daughters. Since such analogies have been found, coupled with the fact that the overall mood of gaiety and forgiveness in the play would have *only* come with declining years. Here, we have an example of lateness as a critical construct: a play with such a mood could have *only* been the output of declining years and a maturity that comes along with old age. However, if such a criterion be considered the hallmark of late style, then such mood of frivolity and merriment is also rife in an 'early' play like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96), though the dating of Shakespeare's early plays too is a largely speculative matter, and we need to look to topical allusions (Foakes 1). Belonging to the earlier of romantic comedies of the bard, the play ends with marriages, just as in *The Tempest*, we too have the hint of marriage, both in the beginning (the

marriage of Claribel) and in the end. Realistic as well as supranatural characters play their appointed roles both in this 'early' play, as well as in *The Tempest.* While Prospero bids adieu to his magic and considers life but a dream, Puck too seems to have a somewhat similar opinion:

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended:
> That you have but slumbered here
> While these visions did appear;
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding but a dream, (5.1.401-406)

Gordon McMullan in *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death* (2008) points out that it is difficult to pinpoint where exactly 'late style' is a product of artistic sensibilities within a writer and where it is "the product of forces beyond the artist's control" (45). He further points out:

The true late stylist, then, for Neumann, is typified by his detachment from the world and is thus able to lift himself beyond convention: as a result, the artistic style he produces is one of abstraction, of a freedom from the concrete—a language, finally, of myth.(36)

If late style is defined in accordance with such parameters, then *The Tempest* definitely qualifies for a 'late' play. While Prospero orders Ariel to aid him in producing visions to the shipwrecked characters, he somehow remains detached from the effect that is being produced, being both the magician as well as the rightful duke who would not entertain revenge for its own sake. On the other hand, Antonio, Alonso and the comic characters Stephano and Trinculo are totally absorbed in the magical spectacle that is

shown. Even Miranda and Caliban are not spared from the recent developments that accrue from the tempest—while Caliban takes the duo to be alien beings who are fit to be worshipped and adored, Miranda exclaims at the "brave new world" that harbours such people within itself. If "freedom from the concrete" be one of the manifestations of a late work, then this is a characteristic quality of not only *The Tempest*, but also of *A Midsummer Night Dream*, wherein fairies, elves and other supernatural entities play their part much in the line with the former. That what has been presented on stage is nothing more than a "dream" is an assertion not only of Prospero, but also that of Puck, as we have seen. Yet, even though this idea of being a late play is open to much critical debate and is a troubled terrain, the comments of R.A. Foakes seem pertinent in the case of a play like *The Tempest*:

Although *The Tempest* has much in common with *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, and has often been interpreted as a kind of 'necessary development' from them, it is also in many ways a new departure as a play. Thematic resemblances between these plays have been charted … *The Tempest* has its own distinctive structure, sets up its own peculiar pattern of expectations, and demands to be asserted as a unique work of art in its own right. (144-45)

Shakespeare started his dramatic career with tragi-comedies but his plays like *The Tempest* seem to subordinate his overtly tragic pattern and, according to Prof. E.M.W. Tillyard, may be seen as his greatest achievement. Actual life events from the bard point out that he was in good spirits at the end of his life, that was cut short abruptly. Though the Bubonic Plague of 1609 ravaged much of London and the staging of plays was a difficult enterprise, Shakespeare continued to write, though not at such a pace as he had

earlier done. Although the 'tempest' of the play may be a slight allusion to the tempestuous events of those troubled years, and the bard seems to have eschewed his tragic temper seen in the four great cycles of tragedies with recourse to magic and sorcery, but, again:

To treat of magic, or the magical atmosphere, in Shakespeare one ought to include *all* the plays, for such an atmosphere is *certainly present* in his earlier periods. In the Last Plays this atmosphere becomes very strong indeed and, moreover, it becomes more clearly associated with the great traditions of Renaissance magic—magic as an intellectual system of the universe, foreshadowing science,…(Yates 87; emphases added)

To conclude, there remains considerable difficulty when it comes to placing the plays of William Shakespeare within a chronological time-frame. Though his 'last' plays were published in the First Folio of 1623, much debate surrounds when it comes to classifying them as 'last' plays. As it has already been shown, there exists a fine line between what may be considered a last play chronologically, and what may be deemed so with respect to lateness as a critical construct. Such "shapes of lateness" are often deliberate attempts on the critical front and may not always coincide with the chronological placement of a play. This is, perhaps, nowhere true than in the case of "summing up" in the works of the bard.

**Works Cited**


Butler, Robert Neill. *Why Survive? Being Old in America.* 1975. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. Print.

Dowden, Edward. *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art.* 13th ed. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner& Co., 1906. Print.

Foakes, R.A. *Shakespeare: the dark comedies to the last plays.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. Print.

_____ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*By William Shakespeare. New Delhi: CUP, 2007. 1-41. Print.First South Asian edition in 1997.

McMullan, Gordon. *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in Proximity of Death.* Cambridge,UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

Gibson, Matthew. "Magical Romanticism: Yeats' absorption of romantic writers into fin-de-siecle Movements." "Plenary Session."13-24.Web. 14 Aug. 2016. http://ler.letras.up.pt/uploads/ficheiros/5476.pdf

Scott, Charlotte. "Reading Strange Matter: Shakespeare's Last Plays and The Book of Revelation." Andrew Powers, ed. *Late Shakespeare: 1608-1613.*Cambridge: Cambridge University P, 2012.158-171. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest.*Eds. Peter Hume and William H. Sherman. London; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004. Print.

Tillyard, E.M.W. *Shakespeare's Last Plays*.1938. London: Chatto and Windus, 1968. Print.

Yamaguchi, Kazuyo. "On *An Allegorical Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I in Old Age:* Its Reversed Meaning." (2012):11-20. Web. 22Sep.2016.http://www.mcn.ac.jp/hpdata/_images/Media/campus/kiyou16_P11-P20.pdf

Yates, Frances A. *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975. Print.

# Man, Woman and the Wild: An Ecocritical Reading of Kira Salak's *The White Mary*

**Bibek Adhikary**

> Not to the deaf we sing; the forests answer all.
>
> —Virgil (*Eclogue* 10.8)

Since times immemorial, literature has portrayed myriad encounters between humans and the physical environment. Notwithstanding its emergence in the late nineteenth century, it is only in the 1960s that the modern environmentalist movement gave rise to a rich array of fictional and nonfictional writings concerned with humans' changing relationship with the natural world. And it is only since the 1990s that critics began to use the term "ecocriticism" to denote the study of the relationship between literature and environment. In its present parlance, ecocriticism is most commonly used to "refer to environmentally oriented study of literature and (less commonly) other expressive media" (Buell et al. 2). Ecocritics are compelled to study the "relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 17) as they tend to analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. It is "any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function … of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other)" (Estok 16-17).

The first-wave ecocriticism of the 1990s tended to equate environment with nature; to focus on the literary interpretation of the planet in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as a means of evoking and promoting contact with it, to

value nature preservation and human attachment to a place at a local-communitarian or bioregional level and to affirm an ecocentric or biocentric ethics. The second-wave, in the new millennium, is, more or less, seen dealing with literatures pertaining to the metropolis and industrialization, favouring "a socio-centric rather than bio-centric and/or individual-experience-oriented ethics and aesthetics and laying particular emphasis on environmental justice concerns." (Buell et al. 4) Literature-environment Studies, through both these major phases of its development, has made significant contributions to the understanding of a number of genres like environmental nonfiction or nature writing; the poetic form and its technique; drama/ theatre; and "narrative scholarship"- an experimental prose form that blends autobiographical writing with formal analysis. The present paper shall focus on a text that falls within this left category of Literature-environment Studies. The objective of the paper is to re-visit the American writer, adventurer, and journalist Kira Salak's (1971- ) debut and only novel *The White Mary* (2008), which can at once be termed as one of the "ecologically situated narratives" and "self-life-writings" (Kam 351-352) and an experimental text that describes the writer's journey through the wilderness of Papua New Guinea in search of a human heart. An attempt will also be made to highlight the therapeutic role and influence of the wilderness on the two characters of the novel and to show how the texture of the novel is characterised by the novelst's autobiographical impulses as well as her sociopolitical reflections on the natural world.

Known as the gutsiest woman adventurer of our day, Kira Salak has travelled to some of the world's most inhospitable places in the teeth of fierce opposition from her detractors. In one of her interaction with the National Geographic, Salak stated, "I get a lot of raised eyebrows

from the men but on my trip down the Niger River, the village women crowded on the shore and raised their hands in a cheer. They yelled out, 'Femme forte' [strong woman] and cheered for me as I paddled by." Salak is heard repeatedly saying that she finds travelling and writing about dangerous places rewarding for its potential to improve the world: "I've sought out countries that are dangerous in order to reveal situations no one else is covering, like slavery in Timbuktu and genocide in eastern Congo. These tragedies are very emotionally difficult to witness, but if by shedding light on them I can improve even one person's life, I feel it's worth the risk." In an interview with Bernadette Mac Donald she confessed that "…for me these trips are about inner journey as much as external journey". As a 20-year-old, she successfully completed her expedition through most of Africa, including a stop in Mozambique during a civil war. And Salak, now 46, subsequently penned her account of being the first woman to cross Papua New Guinea in 2001 in *Four Corners: A Journey into the Heart of Papua New Guinea* which was followed by *The Cruelest Journey: Six Hundred Miles to Timbuktu* (2004), her description of a 600-mile solo kayak trip on the Niger River in West Africa. The work is written in the first person narrative and chronicles her journey to Papua New Guinea as was first recorded in her travelogue *Four Corners: A Journey into the Heart of Papua New Guinea*. According to Salak, she started writing at the age of six. After the death of her brother Marc, in 2005, Salak took a year off from her magazine work to write her first novel *The White Mary*. In an interview, she described the experience in the following words:

> I wrote the entire book not long after my brother died. It was like an obsession. I lived in a tiny basement apartment in Columbia, Missouri, unemployed for a year. I didn't tell anyone what I

> was doing. It was a very private experience. I almost feel that the book wasn't so much written by me, but channeled through me.
>
> (Finkel)

Thus it is in the wilderness that the wound of Salak, both metaphorical and physical, gets healed. And to be precise it is an experience that she retells as fiction in *The White Mary*. In fact the book is a result of two of her back to back visits: one to the remotest jungle of the Papua New Guinea, and the other to the Congo during a period of intense violence. She went here because she felt that the Western press wasn't providing adequate coverage. She says:

> I saw the worst that human beings could do to each other, an endless parade of barbarism, I would see an 80-year-old woman with her arms chopped off, and children shot to death. I saw that day after day, hundreds of those situations. My emotions just turned off. It was too much too handle.
> (Trachtenberg)

In the novel the fictionalised account is about Marika Vecera, a thirty-four-year-old journalist, who can easily be identified with the novelist herself. Vecera has been cutting her way through swamps and forests, encountering insects, snakes, and the native population in the jungle of Papua New Guinea for three months searching for her idol, Robert Lewis — a legendary Pulitzer winning journalist and writer who, like Marika, spent most of his life covering the most brutal, war-torn countries in the world. While most of the world believes him dead, drowned off the coast of Malaysia, Marika is following a thin lead suggesting that Lewis faked his death and instead has left the world behind him to walk into the jungle. The shaman Tobo tells her that a man

matching Lewis's description was seen near Walwasi Mountain, a long journey on foot deeper into the jungle. Tobo at first refuses to guide her there, but he finally relents when men from the Baku tribe force him to take her and hand her payment over to them. It is important to mention here that they blame Tobo's witchcraft for a relative's death, and he owes them a "payback" to avoid war between their tribes. Tobo and the villagers only refer to Marika as "wait meri"- the local pidgin English word for white woman. While she travels, Marika recalls the beginning of her last relationship with a psychology student, Seb, at Boston University studying Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The disturbing and devastating experience about the war-torn country of Congo of the narrator as well as of her idol is rendered here through the nostalgic experiences of the former. Back to the present, in Papua New Guinea, the Baku men ambush Tobo and Marika, nearly kill her with a machete, sink their canoe, and take all of Marika's money and her passport. Tobo and Marika are forced to go to the Krit village to look for help, even though Tobo believes that the Krit people are "followed by death" (Salak 119). When Marika asks in the village for news of Lewis, she finds that a white man passing through their village left a gift with a boy there—Lewis's Pulitzer Prize medal. Tobo hopes that Marika will want to turn back but she is encouraged by the evidence that Lewis could have been there, and Tobo begins to worry that the gods have set him the inescapable duty of taking her to Lewis. In the middle of the difficult trek through the jungle, Marika gets sick with malaria and Tobo heals her by summoning a spirit which appears to Marika as a cloud of moths. They finally reach Walwasi village and find Lewis, who has been hiding there under the name of Mr. Parker. He also seems to have lost his mind, and is not happy that someone has followed him into the jungle—at first, he only screams at Marika to get out of the village. She has nowhere

to go, and being too ill to travel, she has to stay with Lewis as an unwelcome guest. Finding through her reaction that she has more experience and depth than he had credited her with, he finally tells her about the trauma that made him flee from the world. He tells her about the injustices, egotism, intolerance, conservation of everyday life and his inability to cope up with it and his ultimate decision to take refuge in Walwasi, in the lap of wilderness where he can find healing from the disturbing experience of the rest of the world. The story ends with Marika's preparation to leave Papua New Guinea for her homeland with the decision not to reveal Lewis's identity to anyone, and with a significant note from Lewis "Marika, I'm going to a new place and will be gone when you read this. Don't look for me. Love, R" (Salak 350). Her idol, in the end, departs deeper into the tropical wilderness for a secure life not to "let God win" and thus is in search of protection of the mother earth far away from the evils of the earth's actual existing condition. Ecology and Life writing are two distinct fields that do not frequently come together; One being a scientific study of natural life system, the other a literary genre; one dealing with nature, the other with humans; one using the scientific approval, the other a humanistic one, and yet Simon Estok assumes, "it is virtually impossible to separate the writing of subjectivities from the writing of Nature". By juxtaposing these two seemingly polarized fields, Kira Salak here aspired to address the dichotomy and inseparability of these two disciplines and adhered to the critical opinion of the coalescence of nature writing and life writing. Keeping in mind the reciprocal relationship between conceptions of nature and modes of storytelling, Salak here focuses on the interaction of the human mind with the physical world. And in this respect, the ecocritical narrative becomes a distinct type of writing which can be considered as the ecobiographical or eco-autobiographical writing, as a large

portion of the narrative is directly drawn from the real life adventures of its author. Farr and Snyder define ecobiography as:

> A life-story constructed according to a pattern divined internally through the Self's interaction with the external environment, especially Nature, the multiple exchanges between which (re)present a kind of ecosystem of the Self. All the various voices of the Self, conscious or unconscious, plus the environment within which and against which they speak, comprise the dynamic network of that Self's ecosystem. (198)

The narrative of the novel can also be raised to the status of 'egodocument', an idea that refers to autobiographical writing, such as memoirs, diaries, letters and travel accounts. The term was coined around 1955 by the historian Jacques Presser, who defined egodocuments as writings in which the 'I', the writer, is continuously present in the text as the writing and describing subject. Though the writer is not present in the novel yet we can easily identify the narrator Marika with the novelist Kira. In fact the narrator here, can be termed as the alter ego of the novelist.
In the theoretical discourse of ecocriticsm, wild or the wilderness plays a very significant role. Greg Gerrard in his introductory book on *Ecocriticism* opines:

> The idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism… Wilderness has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and

> humility. The wilderness question is also central to ecocriticism's challenge to the status quo of literary and cultural studies, in that it does not share the predominantly social concerns of the traditional humanities.(59)

In *The White Mary,* wilderness has a serious role to play. In fact it is this natural wilderness which acts as the source of healing to its protagonists. And this healing process is modelled on the opinion put forwarded by Tanya Y. Kam that "life writing shows how travel into the wilderness can be therapeutic to the self during periods of malaise and alienation" (352). The presence of dense wilderness and this process of healing are very clearly reflected right from the opening chapter of the novel. In fact, the delineation of the black waters of Elobi Coceli in the beginning of the novel explicitly suggests the mental state of the novelist, a person who recently lost her beloved brother, a person with a diseased soul and stagnant state:

> The black waters of Elobi Creek show no sign of a current. It is another dead waterway, Marika tells herself, one that will breed only mosquitoes and crocodiles. Another waterway that somehow reflects—in the darkness of the water, in its stillness —all of her failings. These waters, this breathless heat, seem to be waiting for a response from her, a call to action. But she has no answers. And if she's to be honest with herself, she never had any. Things will unravel. They will fall apart.
>
> (Salak 4)

In the subsequent chapters, the process of unravelling can easily be perceived:

> They've been paddling for days across swamps, through mangroves. The whole time, the sun blazes in a sky without clouds. Marika finds the heat nearly unbearable. She hangs her

billum bag over her head to try to protect her face. She slathers clay on her exposed skin, though sweat soon melts it from her body. The sunlight burns her relentlessly, cruelly, and her only means of cooling off is to continually throw water on her clothes. But now a change: they enter a stream. Trees arc overhead, providing blessed shade as the swampland gives way to forest. Everything grows dim, the sun losing its dominion to giant fern trees and hardwoods which block out the sky. Marika still hasn't seen any people, nor any trace of human passage, since leaving Krit village. She imagines herself and Tobo as First Man and Woman. All around them is unmolested jungle, resounding with bird calls and insect wails. Cockatoos and hornbills watch her fearlessly from the trees. Flocks of green and red parrots materialize from the forest only to resettle themselves and disappear again. The world has come alive with resplendent, surreal hues: neon-colored damselflies, butterflies with giant wings of blue satin. It is a glimmering, sultry place, everything reaching tentacles out, overtaking and wrapping and fondling. (Salak 180)

Marika gradually gets the light she desires, she finds the shade, the comfort and the harmony in her journey both at physical and metaphorical levels. Though towards the end of the novel Marika, even after meeting her ideal Robert, loses him as he disappears in the wilderness leaving behind a note that reads: "Marika, I'm going to a new place and will be gone when you read this. Don't look for me. Love, R". (Salak 350) Robert, after grappling with sorrow, loss, tragedy, decides to make a separate peace, far from the madding crowd, in the wilderness after bidding goodbye to all those who are in direct connection with the conflict-ridden world. He believes that "spirituality has failed him". He seeks refuge in the wilderness, having turned his face against a proto-capitalist culture of getting and spending. Marika, his self-proclaimed disciple, thus becomes a true bridge between the two worlds –one where we all live and

draw our sustenance from or our civilized world, and the world of the wilderness, the primitive abode where Robert gets his ultimate peace. In the writer's own words "When Marika cries for Lewis in the book, she is really crying for all people. She is crying for humanity's suffering" (Salak 356), as if she fears the total abolition of the whole humanity in the wilderness. Finally Marika decides "to fly to the U.S.", "She will know where to go." (Salak 351) which echoes the statement made by Tanya Y. Kam "The natural world does not beckon equally to all readers, but, for some, solitude and distance from the everyday routines is the prescription back to emotional stability and positive selfhood." In the course of the novel the readers can perceive Marika's or the novelist's increased confidence and independence which allow her to acquire an emotional equilibrium. Readers observe her normalization process: this shift from a depressed proto-junkie to a thoughtful, well-adjusted woman who has properly grieved the loss of her ideal.

**Works Cited:**

Buell, Lawrence, Ursula K. Heise, and Karen Thornber. "Literature and Environment". *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36.1 (2011): 417-440. Web.

"Center for the Study of Egodocuments and History." *Egodocument.net*. Web. 14 Nov. 2017.

Estok, Simon C. *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Farr, Cecilia Konchar and Phillip A. Snyder. "From Walden Pond to the Great Salt Lake: Ecobiography and Engendered Species Acts in Refuge and Walden." *Tending the Garden: Essays on Mormon Literature*. Eds. Lavinia Fielding Anderson, Eugene England. Salt Lake City: Signature, 1996. 197–211. Print.

Finkel, Michael. "Kira Salak: The White Mary - National Geographic Adventure Magazine." *Adventure.nationalgeographic.com*. N.p., 2008. Web. 16 Dec. 2017.

---. *Kira Salak: Here There Be Monsters*. 2008. in person.

---. *The White Mary*. 1st ed. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2008. Print.

Gerrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Kam, Tanya Y. "Forests of the Self: Life Writing and 'Wild' Wanderings". *Life Writing* 13.3 (2015): 351-371. Web.

Salak, Kira. *Four Corners: A Journey into the Heart of Papua New Guinea*. Washington: National Geographic, 2004. Print.

----------. Here Thove
----------. The White Money
Interview----------

---. Interview by Bernadette MacDonald. *Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity*. 15 Apr. 2016, https://wn.com/kira_salak_interviewed_by_bernadette_macdonald. Accessed 24 Dec. 2016.

---. *Kira Salak: Here There Be Monsters*. 2008. in person.

---. *The White Mary*. 1st ed. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2008. Print.

Shewry, Teresa, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. 1st ed. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.

Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A. "Imaginary Journey Travel Writer Kira Salak Turns To Fiction in Her Debut Novel 'The White Mary'." *The Wall Street Jounal*. N.p., 2008. Web. 16 Dec. 2017.

Virgil et al. *The Eclogues*. New York: Heritage Press, 1960. Print.

# *The Next Milestone: A Mother's Journal:* A Trajectory of Fortitude and Forbearance

**Lily Want**

Manju Jaidka in The Next Milestone: A Mother's journal reflects on her personal journey with her first born and differently-abled son, Raju. The book unfolds a poignant account of a mother's long and sad journey that embroils the reader with an overwhelming sense of pain leading him/her to valiantly question the ways of God. However, Jaidka blends the poignant realism of handling difficult situations with the joy of raising a special child. One can but understand and appreciate the love and devotion, perseverance and determination it takes for Jaidka to get what Raju requires to reach his potential. Confronting an extremely stressful paradox, Jaidka is seen dealing with an incredibly challenging experience of raising a child with special needs and her inherent need to continue to live her own life that is 'complete', as 'whole' as possible.

Using multiple story-telling devices— narrative prose, poetry, memoir, first person narrative—Jaidka sums up her experience of powerful and often conflicting emotions during her journey of raising up a special child and reaches out to parents, particularly mothers, in the following words of her "Post Script":

> This book comes straight from my heart, without any frills and fancies. I would like it to reach out to parents—particularly mothers—all over the world who have the responsibility of looking after a special child. I wish to tell them that they are not alone, that there are others who have been there, done that, and survived! The journey is long and hard but not impossible (157).

"Afterword: a Lifetime of Lessons", the chapter that precedes the "Post Script" continues in the same vein as she shares with empathy and honesty the lessons she learnt 'almost all her adult life' in disability management. Her voice is fresh, perceptive, and sensitive with a touch of vulnerability: "Each day with a special child is a new day with new issues to handle, new hurdles to surmount." Although she brings home the level of emotional and physical exhaustion that necessarily comes with the weight of tending to the emotional/physical demands of a special child yet the chapter and the entire book reverberates with her lived experience of perceiving it as a blessing especially, when oblivious of the depths of victory and joy, she sees her child overcome some of the challenges through his endearing smile, his clucking and coo-ing, or else when he learns to eat:

> There, against the backdrop of the morning news hour, he reaches forward, gropes for his breakfast and feeds himself independently. He does not need supervision any more. Raju is a good boy and he can now have his morning breakfast on his own. Each breakfast session takes about an hour but he is in no hurry. He seems to savour each meal (144).

Jaidka debunks the rampant belief of blaming mothers for the disabilities of their children and its unfortunate corollary that women who give birth to a child with a disability caused it. One aspect common to parenting children with major differences is, according to Jaidka, self-blame and she admonishes all parents—moms in particular—not to do so.

> Invariably we, as parents have a huge guilt complex, as though we were responsible for the child's condition, illnesses or disability….Instead of whining and moaning, berating our misfortunes, blaming this, that or the other, why not take the challenge head-on and grapple with it? (151).

"Take the challenge head-on and grapple with it." This is exactly what Jaidka does while raising her special child. She relates how she learnt to accept Raju for who he is and identify what the child has rather than what he lacks. "We have accepted him as he is—severely retarded, practically untrainable—and we have learnt to enjoy his company. Raju is, after all, our child who even with his queer antics and his abnormality, is precious to us." (17)

She resolves to and succeeds in shifting her focus from hoping for unrealistic outcomes such as cure to hoping for more plausible outcomes such as hope in living longer than expected, being well cared for and supported, having good pain and symptom control and the hope of getting to certain milestones. Jaidka expresses her resolve to accept her unchangeable situation through these lines of T S Eliot in "Burnt Norton":

> "What might have been is an
> abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.
> What might have been and what
> has been
> Point to one end, which is always
> present…"

She goes one better and weaves her experiences as a mother of a special child in the form of specific stories, events in a heart-stirring book which she titles, The Next Milestone: A Mother's Journal. Beautifully designed with images, Jaidka's journal is brilliant in showing and telling her own lifetime of experiences in having and raising Raju. The title, to begin with, is ironical—with special needs children the developmental milestones don't happen on schedule and therefore the mother's elation knows no bounds when a milestone is reached after waiting for so long and likewise the mother's despair is abysmal when the milestone is not achieved within the age range of normal variability.

> Raju has recently learned to sit. We took him to an orthopaedic hospital where they made special shoes for him, callipers and a walker. But, unfortunately, they have not proved effective so far. His limbs show signs of atrophy and are long and spidery. When I pick him up he sometimes slumps against my shoulder, his long arms and legs dangling pitifully. Or sometimes he entwines his arms and legs around me and a bizarre picture appears in my mind. I imagine myself a tree and him a creeper curled about the tree. I imagine that one day his limbs will be no more than the tendrils of a creeper. And then I push the thought out of my mind forcibly (17).

Jaidka's concerns are addressed in her dreams. Prompted by the harsh reality of her life, her dreams occur frequently providing a potential resolution to her waking concerns. In these dreams, which she puts together in a section under the rubric of "Recurrent Dreams", she has Raju hitting his cognitive, social and physical milestones and progressing healthily.

> I walk down a crowded street, hanging on to Raju's arm. Raju is a head taller than I. He has Vickram's smile and dimpled cheeks. His jaw is Dadaji's. The wind blows the hair back from his high forehead. The sun glints in his eyes. He is wearing the blue blazer of his engineering college. He takes long, quick strides. So long and so quick that I have to run to keep pace with him (20).

The stark contrast between the two descriptions of Raju as he exists in reality and as he exists in the hopes and dreams of the mother illuminates the tragic undercurrent of Raju's, and by extension Jaidka's, unchangeable condition. However, as we read on, Jaidka skilfully intertwines her stressful ordeal with her joy of motherhood especially in her account of such moments where she felt an irresistible impulse to be free from her overwhelming grief by contemplating euthanasia but then the next moment she feels her heart melt with pure joy and love when Raju smiles.

> Raju smiled. He smiled although just minutes earlier he was almost swooning with pain. Although just moments earlier his blood-curdling screams had echoed across the house all through the evening. Raju was better. He was glad to be better. He was glad to be alive. His smile was a mute way of saying 'thank you for being with me'. This realization…made me think. Who am I to think of euthanasia? How can I judge, how can I decide whose life needs to be terminated. I am not the one suffering. The one who is suffering is not complaining….Then why should I complain? Who am I and what right do I have to decide enough is enough. I will not think of Monster Euthanasia again….Raju is strong and I, too, will be strong. I will stand by him and help him along in his fight

> against pain. His fight against a relentless superior power that will not be appeased. Despite everything he knows how to smile in his pain-free moments. And this lingering smile on his face is what keeps me going (76-77).

Getting the news that her child has a disability was the most devastating experiences of Jaidka's life. The overwhelming emotions of shock, disbelief, anxiety, fear and despair produced by this news have been recreated with such artistic ingenuity that the reader finds himself/herself on the same emotional plane as the mother-author:

> It was finally diagnosed that the baby was affected by congenital rubella—German measles which I had contracted in the fifth week of pregnancy. I remembered the slight rash that had erupted on my face, the visit to the doctor who had dismissed it as allergic skin condition. …The baby showed all the symptoms: cataract in both eyes, doubtful hearing, a hole in the heart, enlarged liver and spleen, and suspected damage to the nervous system. Would he be able to see, stand, walk, talk, hear or understand? The doctors were silent….Gently, very gently the doctor told us of possible mental retardation and referred us to the psychiatrist for guidance. This came as a bolt from the blue. I was prepared for physical handicap but not for mental retardation. Retarded! My child retarded! It just did not seem possible. Mental retardation was something remote, something that one read of only in books. It could happen to other people but certainly not to my child. My mind refused to accept it. There had to be some mistake. Perhaps he was just slightly backward; he might pick up slowly (14-15).

The difficulty to comprehend the disparity between the desire for and anticipation of a normal child and the disability that exists is succinctly encapsulated through these words of Omar Khayyam:

> "…could thou and I with Fate
> Conspire
> To grasp this sorry Scheme of
> Things entire,
> Would not we shatter it to bits
> --and then
> Re-mould it nearer to the
> Heart's Desire!"

Painfully shaken, Jaidka concludes these lines from Khayyam with words that manifest the magnitude of the grief that seems to be etched into her very being:

> I have in my heart the burning desire to overcome immediate challenges and reach for the sun, the moon, and the stars, in a world where children are not born with white eyes or missing limbs or damaged livers or perforated hearts, where nothing goes wrong, everything is perfect, just perfect (28).

Jaidka throughout her book alludes to literary works, mythology, TV serials and Bollywood cinema to reinforce her inconsolable grief, the abstruse scheme of divine providence, the irrepressible and indomitable spirit of human kind and a woman's unconditional love and acceptance of her child notwithstanding his imperfection.

The allusion to Parvati and her unconditional acceptance of her son, Ganesha in his grotesque form reinforces the unique place that Raju holds in Jaidka's life.

Jaidka too emerges as the epitome of unconditional love, acceptance and loyalty no longer troubled by her son's failure of achievements, accomplishments, competitiveness and pride in worldly terms but simply involved and immersed in his living and breathing, sharing life with him, in short protecting the vulnerable, frail and innocent Raju.

> Ganesha is not perfect. He is half mouse and half elephant, a grotesque body, rotund belly, enormous ears, tiny legs. But he is hers. For Parvati he is the perfect child and she gathers him into his arms. Raju cannot speak. He has never called me "Ma-a-a." But I imagine that if he could talk this is exactly how he would say it. The way he sometimes addresses me in my dreams. "Ma-a-a." Yes, baby. I am here for you. Always. My little mouse, my imperfect Ganesha (57).

At one point in the book, Jaidka refers to him as "The king of my world." This king, in a later section of the book, is compared with one of the greatest warriors in The Mahabharata and a legendary figure, Abhimanyu for his indomitable fighting spirit. Like Abhimanyu, Raju is trapped in the Charybdis of life with Lady Luck turning her back towards him. Like Abhimanyu, Raju withstands the piercing arrows, the broken chariot, the torn armaments and the killed horses in the form of cataract operations, his eventual loss of vision, his convulsions, his decaying and falling teeth, his brittle bones that keep on cracking and like Abhimanyu, Raju's indomitable will to survive is stronger than the treacherous scheme of destiny. "Raju is a true soldier, he does not run from the battlefield. Even today, on his thirty-first birthday, his indomitable spirit continues to fight." (73)

Raju is, throughout, portrayed as a paragon of an indomitable fighting spirit, a trait (the reader believes) he

seems to have inherited from his mother, Manju Jaidka. Jaidka's strength of mind and formidable will become evident not only because of her endurance which she displayed during her turbulent journey with Raju but also for sailing through the eternal dilemma of motherhood—balancing a career and mothering a special child. The book serves as an index to all that goes on in the mind of a mother when she takes a life- changing decision of either leaving a flourishing job or else juggling it with an ever-mounting guilt for the care of her child with special needs. In spite of the daunting challenges, Jaidka pursues her rewarding career and maintains a healthy work-life balance albeit with intermittent dozes of guilt for not being there with Raju.

> I have steeled myself these last five days but the thought of Raju sobbing uncontrollably hits me hard. I feel my props giving way, the ground beneath my feet slipping, my iron will shattering into a million pieces. Hang on, Raju. Mummy will be with you tomorrow (137).

*The Next Milestone: A Mother's Journal* is the story of Raju who remains a constant and never-ending source of strength and courage for his mother. Not impervious to the wearing vicissitudes of life, both Jaidka and Raju show fortitude in their undeniable state and unbearable trouble but at the same time display their share of noble and pleasant things. This mother's journal is, therefore, a story of triumph and a mother's tribute to her special child:

I dedicate it {this book} to Raju who has taught me countless lessons in courage, fortitude and patience. Who has made me what I am….My life, I would say, revolves around Raju,…He remains a constant presence in my universe. An indispensable part of my universe, my scheme

of things. With me while I am awake. With me in my dreams. Always, always a part of me (11).

Works Cited:

Jaidka, Manju. *The Next Milestone: A Mother's Journal* Graphit India: Chandigarh, 2017

## The Decolonization of Feminist Studies and Postcolonial Feminism: Intersections and Divergences

**Iffat Maqbool**

Postcolonial theory provided a much desired redressal in critical theory by providing an oppositional discourse to the claims of universalist representations of western cultural practices and knowledge systems. The value of postcolonial theory, in particular, is largely to do with the reimagining of the nation state. From Gandhi to Fanon and from Gugi to Cesaire, the nascent nation state was relocated from the perspective of the long colonized peoples, demanding a more authentic and native mode of self-definition. Nationalism therefore stemmed from the need for a self-image unmediated by colonial sanction. And here's the rub: Whose self-image would now provide the foundations of the post-national state? Was the nation-space as envisioned by nationalists a democratic space that would accommodate plurality? The nationalist narrative was inevitably marked by exclusions and omissions that included gender among other categories. For this reason, postcolonial studies is itself undergoing a revision in order to address race, class , caste as well as gender to its scope. Class and gender formations earlier ignored by post colonialism now find articulation in the subaltern project as well as postcolonial feminism- a branch of cultural inquiry that seeks to interrogate the nation space itself.

In many cases, the raising of national consciousness was itself fraught with an exclusionary agenda. Did not political independence lead to postcolonial subalternization? In most nation states, dominant cultural narratives refused others' representation or worse misrepresented them.

Postcolonial feminism posits the following questions: What is the space of the postcolonial female subject? Did nationalism result in betterment of women's condition or worse was a kind of neo-colonization perpetuated in the form of internal colonization? In the postcolonial nation state, were women therefore grappling with both colonization and patriarchy?

Historically, the relationship between nationalism and feminism has been an ambiguous one. Feminist theorists argue that in spite of the positive role played by women in Nationalist movements, women's agendas remain largely unfulfilledwithin male-dominated political systems in the post-independence stage. To the largely male dominated political imaginary, the 'image' of the woman is often used to create an 'idealized' nation. Commenting on the ways in which nationalist discourse is often an exclusionary project, Jaspal Kour writes:

> One of the most convenient ways to erase female agency and subjectivity is the notion of gendering the nation. Nationalist discourse elaborates a gendered theory of nationhood and writing, one that excludes women from the creative production of the national polity or identity and of literary texts. (4)

She further points out that when prominent negritude poets (including Gugi) wrote to counter the stereotypical representations of the inferiority or otherness of the black race, their re-visioning was contested by African women writers on grounds of a further exclusion from the nationalist writings:

> Stereotyping the nation as Mother Africa or India keeps her in a conventional role in the domestic sphere and denies her equal participation in a national vision….the discourse of patriarchy that romanticizes women as the Great Mother in control of traditional cultural practices in the domestic sphere effectively closed off the public spaces for their re-inscription. Therefore the representations of women, first in colonialists and then nationalist texts, reinforced power relationships that became characteristic of many patriarchal cultures in colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial spaces. Nationalism found in existing social patterns the models of hierarchical control, all with the blessings of earlier colonialists and indigenous patriarchy .Women who participated in anticolonial struggles expected to benefit from the social reconstruction that took place in the post-independent era, but found that they had to wage another struggle against men. Thus women found that Mother Africa may have been declared free but the mothers of Africa remained manifestly oppressed. (5)

As Rosemary Marangoly George points out in her essay, "Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial" "Postcolonial feminist theory's project can be described as one of interrupting the discourses of postcolonial theory and of liberal western feminism while simultaneously refusing the singular. 'Third World Woman' as the object of study" ( 211).

In his essay "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" Partha Chatterjee argues that the nationalist males "refused to make women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state and that is why nationalism could not resolve these issues" (249). In what could be termed as a collusion between patriarchy and the nationalist project, the woman's question in India was

entirely sidelined in favor of vindicating nationalist (patriarchal) thought, and women of the past were often valorized for their spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity etcresulting in the "adulation of woman as goddess or as mother"( 250).

In fact, one of the major issues of postcolonial feminist theory has been the interrogation of nationalism as another mode of subjugation of women. The close affiliation of nationalism with communal discourses and with hyper-masculinist attitudes has been the subject of scrutiny by postcolonial feminist critics. They have also paid great attention to the nature and the role played by popular culture in the dissemination of the discourses of the nation and how this has also been an oppressive category. One other issue to be understood is the criticality of location in postcolonial feminist criticism. This stance places itself in opposition to mainstream feminist theories emanating from the west. Postcolonial feminist theorists now pay scrupulous attention to the 'politics of location' and also to the proximity and relation to power. The focus on location becomes important because a clear awareness prevents assumptions on 'universality of one's position'.

The aim of Postcolonial feminism or Third World feminism begins with a critique of the construction of the Third World Woman as a monolithic, homogenous and a historical subject. Postcolonial feminism is critical of the fact that the western constructions of indigenous women do not reflect the real cultural situations of these women. Western feminism homogenizes and systematizes the oppression of women without situating them in their culture, ideology and socio-economic conditions which are different for different

groups. Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty et al expose the limitations of applying European or western theories of representation to the lives and histories of disempowered women in the Third World and instead draw attention to the specificities of lived experiences in non-western contexts. Indeed, one of the most important contributions that Spivak has made to contemporary feminist thought is her consistent demand that feminism seriously consider the material histories of Third World Women in its account of women's struggles against oppression. In her essay "Three Women's Text and a Critique of Imperialism"(1985) Spivak argues that "the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism. A basically isolationist administration for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo-America establishes the high feminist norm"(306).

In her groundbreaking essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Western Discourses", Mohanty critiques white western feminism's construction of the image of the 'third world woman' as 'a singular monolithic subject' living an essentially truncated life and universally oppressed. This, she points out, fosters their own self- image of 'first world' woman's autonomy- as someone who is more in control of her own life. She points out the power politics implicit in such a representation of the 'third world woman' by arguing that it almost "invariably implies a relation of structural domination and suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question"( 49 ).

Rejecting any notion of essential womanhood that applies to all women across cultures and nationalities, postcolonial

feminists like Mohanty challenge the credibility of western feminism to posit agency/voice from which to speak to/for other women. In this connection, Sara Mills comments:

> If the notion of 'woman' is questioned, then the fundamental base on which feminism is founded seems to be undermined. Post-colonial feminism, because of this concern to move away from a simplistic Western analysis of agency, which does not 'fit' models of indigenous female behavior, has tried to develop new ways of describing and theorizing agency. (104)

Mohanty goes on to argue that western feminist texts often represent the "Third World Woman" as a homogenous category. She argues against the type of arbitrary universalizing which some western feminists have advanced, assuming that women are an "already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or or contradictions…"(106) .

> She further remarks: third world feminisms run the risk of marginalization or ghettoization from both mainstream and western feminist discourses. The relationship between woman - a cultural and ideological composite 'other' constructed through diverse representational discourses (scientific, literary, judicial, linguistic, cinematic) and women - real , material subjects of their material histories is one of the central questions the practice of feminist scholarship seeks to address. This connection between women as historical subjects and the representation of 'woman' produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity or a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultural and historical contexts to discursively

> colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing a composite, singular 'Third World Woman', an image that appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western hegemonic discourse. (50-51)

Talpade therefore provides the necessary corrective to white first world feminism by critiquing the arbitrary and generalizing nature of western feminist writings e.g. the wearing of the veil or the hijab are seen as markers of uncivilized nation states whose borders need to become porous in order to welcome the western ideal of 'liberty'. She remarks:

> Proof of universalism is provided through an arithmetic method. The argument goes like this: the higher the number of women wearing the veil, the more universal is the sexual segregation and control of women. They conclude that sexual control of women is a universal fact in those countries where women are veiled. To assume that the mere practice of veiling women in a number of Muslim countries indicates the universal suppression of women through sexual segregation is not only analytically reductive but also proves quite useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy. (62-63)

Indian feminist theorization has undergone a maturity and important interventions have been made by Radha Kumar, Kumkum Sangakari, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Sharmila Rege, Nivedita Menon, etc who have drawn attention to the praxis of the Indian social paradigm in order to recast Indian feminism in an indigenous mode of self-representation. In Indian literary criticism, Jasbir Jain, Malashri Lal, Radha

Chakravarty offer original and nuanced examinations of literary texts, independent of imported perspectives.

Tied up with issues of caste, class etc the feminist concerns in India are itself broadening to include voices from marginalized groups. One such important intervention in mainstream Indian feminism has been the Dalit feminist standpoint. Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste, Writing Gender* (2006) was instrumental in developing a Dalit standpoint within the academy. Exposing the caste bias of Brahminical feminism in India, she drew attention to questions of class, caste, religion and sexuality. Dalit feminism is the assertion of autonomous dalit women's organizations that aim to critique the Brahmanism of the mainstream feminist movement and the patriarchal practices of dalit politics. It is therefore understood as a discourse of discontent or as a politics of difference. In her essay, "Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of Difference and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position" Sharmila Rege points out the urgency that characterizes not only Dalit feminism but all feminisms that seek to speak from specificities:

> …Several factors have played a constitutive role in the processes that brought about the category of difference to the centre of feminist analyses. This has meant a focus on language, culture and discourse… a rejection of universalism in favour of difference, an insistence on fluid and fragmented human subject rather than collectivities, a celebration of the marginal….A Dalit feminist standpoint is seen as emancipatory since the subject of its knowledge is embodied and visible. (212-222)

Contemporary feminisms especially those originating from Asian countries, have set upon itself the task of

deconstructing the essentialisms and binaries posited by both western feminist theorists as well as mainstream ones. Feminisms are increasingly becoming context sensitive and suspicious of the universalizing tendencies within western feminist thought. The expansion of the critical field of feminism is summed up thus by Sara Mills:

> …feminist theory has moved from a rather parochial concern with white, middle-class English speaking women to a focus on women in different national and cultural contexts…prompting western feminists in particular to think about who they are speaking for when they speak of 'woman' or 'women'; and it has made them subject to scrutiny that very act of 'speaking for' someone else. (98-99)

**Works Cited:**


Chaterjee Partha. "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. Ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid. New Delhi: Kali for Women. 1998.(233-253).Print.

George, Roemary Marangoly. "Feminists theorize colonial/postcolonial". *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. Ed. Ellen Rooney. Cambridge University Press. 2006.( 211-231). Print.

Mills Sara."Post-colonial Feminist Theory".***Contemporary Feminist Theories***. Ed. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.1998.(98-112). Print.

Mohanty Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses". *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader*. Ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.( 49-74 ). Print.

Rege Sharmila."Dalit Women Talk Differently A Critique of 'Difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint". *Feminism in India*. Ed. Maitrayee Chauduri. New Delhi: Kali for Women. 2004. (211-225) Print.

Singh, Jaspal Kour. Representation and Resistance in Asian and African Women's Texts at Home and in the Diaspora. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.2008. Print.

Spivak Gayatri Chakravorty."Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism". *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader.* Ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.2003. (306-323) Print.

# David Mamet's *The Cryptogram*: Showcasing the Dysfunctional American Family

**Masooda Suhaila**

David Mamet has emerged as a significant playwright on the American theatrical scene. A versatile writer, his dramatic output consists of more than thirty plays through which he explores many social concerns. His plays are a product and reflection of the cultural conditions prevailing in America from the 1970s and emerge as a strong critique of the growing materialism and greed in American society especially in the corporate world. He exposes the corruption of the individual in a society that values the dollar more than the soul. In all his major plays, the thrust is on the competitiveness of urban life, the surrender of the individual to social pressures, the desensitizing influence of industrialization which has now become a global problem. He writes in response to an unsettling fragmentation of self and society, exhibiting nostalgia for past assurances and meanings. He especially laments the complete disconnection of postmodern America from its historical, cultural and mythical roots. He is mainly concerned with laying bare the hollow myths which have accumulated in the American cultural consciousness, particularly the myth of a happy American family created within America during the 1950s.

James Q Wilson in his preface to Richard Gill's book *Posterity Lost: Progress, Ideology, and the Decline of the American Family* (2009), offers his perspective on the decline of the United States and remarks that: "The American people believe that this nation is on the wrong track, not because it is constitutionally ill-founded or economically backward, but because its family life is deteriorating" (11). Thaddeus Wakefield too in his book *Family in Twentieth Century*

*American Drama* argues that family members are not valued in terms of their intrinsic worth, but rather as economic producers and consumers. The physical body of the home i.e. the family house becomes a market commodity. Christopher Lasch, historian and social critic in his book *A Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (1977) talks about the ideal function of the American family: "As business, politics, and diplomacy grow more savage and warlike, men seek a haven in private life, in personal relations, above all in the family – the last refuge of love and decency" (10). But he speaks of the invasion of outside forces that impact the family environment and raises questions like, "Does the family still provide a haven in a heartless world? Or do the very storms out of which the need for such a haven arises threaten to engulf the family as well?" (10) The private arenas, without any doubt, are invaded by public disruptions. Men struggle very hard to adapt to the public world but are unable to find a satisfying role in the society. Alienated, they are not at peace in the modern world. Their futile search to find a sense of belonging becomes the subject matter of almost all American family plays. Arthur Miller in his essay "The Family in Modern Drama" explores the issue of man's alienation in the modern world:

I should like to make the bold statement that all plays we call great, let alone those we call serious, are ultimately involved with some aspect of a single question. It is this: How may man make of the outside world a home? (73) … How may man make for himself a home in that vastness of strangers and how may he transform that vastness into a home? (85)

David Mamet too is concerned with the issue of 'home'. He explores the myth of 'happy family' and shows

the decline of the family which was considered a sacred institution in America. The home which was to be a place of refuge and security has now become a wasteland. He reveals the break-down, degeneration and degradation of the American family. The family no longer remains a protective institution in a competitive society and man is no longer left with any consoling refuge. Mamet's dramas draw heavily from his personal experience and are inspired by his own family relationships. Plays like *Reunion* and *The Cryptogram* may be regarded as autobiographical testimonies. Mamet was a child of divorced parents and this experience finds expression in *The Cryptogram*. Bigsby in his essay, "David Mamet" states that Mamet acknowledges that this play is an attempt "to decode the message of one's childhood" (*Cambridge Companion* 14). His parents separated in 1957-58 when he was ten. He confesses, "I didn't know anybody who'd been divorced … let alone have it happen to my family. So there was a lot of trauma in my childhood" (14). His plays also reflect the tumultuous times of the late 1960s and 1970s when American society was in great turmoil and national instability reached to the basic unit of society i.e. the family.

Mamet's world is a world of collapse. Relationships are devalued, characters are drawn together by some need but held apart by suspicion and fear. They are highly vulnerable and all the time struggling to conceal that vulnerability. He portrays a world that is bleak, where marriages collapse, families disintegrate, where traditional values and morals are no longer valued. He feels a strong sense of loss – a feeling that the values of America are no longer adequate for survival. For Mamet to be a member of group is a virtue. His characters form groups, but these communities lack intimacy and trust. He proposes the virtue of communality by demonstrating the effects of its absence.

Plays like *Reunion*, *The Cryptogram* are set in the private sphere and reveal the collapse of family relations. The family members act as strangers in their homes and the home, once considered a haven, has now become barren. Mamet highlights the inhumanity operating in the American family and exposes its disintegration. *The Cryptogram* first appeared at London's Ambassador Theatre in June 1994 and seven months later in America at C. Walsh Theatre in Boston. Mamet won an Obie award for the play. He uses only three characters in the play. The characters are Donny – a woman in her late thirties, Del – a man of the same age, John – Donny's son, around ten. The play is divided into three acts. Set in Chicago in the 1950s, the action of the play takes place in Donny's living room. The play seems to be autobiographical, as Mamet himself is a product of a broken home and portrays the painful effect of divorce on families. M. Renuga in an essay, "Postmodern Humanism in David Mamet's *The Cryptogram*" states that Mamet deals with the "dichotomies of human person's fundamental attitudes" and "victimization" (Dhanavel, *Critical Perspectives* 142). The play presents the shift in the fundamental attitude of parents, especially the mother, toward their child, highlighting the loss of credibility of parenthood. It also presents the victimization of John, a ten year old boy, who is the protagonist of the play. Mamet shows how the psyche of a child gets affected because of the selfish and authoritative nature of parents. He insists upon the need for love & sympathy in the family where the impact of an unexpected, sudden betrayal by loved ones on the minds of family members can prove to be disastrous. John's father, Robert has left his family because of an affair with another woman with whom he wants to live. His wife, Donny, is upset and makes no attempt to even understand the mental turmoil John is undergoing. At first she is unaware of the cause of

her husband's betrayal, but when she comes to know about it, she is all the more upset, because no man has ever been faithful in her life. She and Del constantly rebuke John which eventually leads to the child's psychological disorder. The play ends with a bewildered John hearing some fearful voices. The family is dysfunctional with a selfish father and an unsympathetic mother, resulting in the psychoneurosis of their boy. Mamet presents the irresponsible attitude of people like Robert and its effects on the family.

The play begins with John coming downstairs to tell Del about his upcoming trip with his dad. Donny is in the kitchen making tea. Soon they are all discussing the trip, also why John can't sleep, and why Donny's husband and John's father, Robert, is not yet home from work. On his way upstairs, John finds a note on the steps for Donny: Robert is leaving her. Donny finds solace with Del as they try to comfort John who can't sleep well. Donny in the mean time asks Del about her husband's Air Force knife which he possesses now. He says that Robert gave it to him on a camping trip, but then he realizes that Donny knows there was no trip. Del finally admits that he had allowed Robert to use his apartment for an affair, with the knife as a payoff. Thinking Donny will forgive him, Del is jolted when she throws him out of her house. John still can't sleep, he worries more and more about death and is now visited by voices. Realizing that Donny has thrown him out of her life, Del tries once more to set things right and he visits her. Donny further gets into a state of panic and anxiety. She has been betrayed by all the men in her life and is not willing to forgive anyone. All the while John keeps interrupting, telling his mother about the voices he hears and how he can't sleep. He continuously asks about his father's return but Donny doesn't give him any satisfactory answer. John is forced to comfort himself and accept the answers that he knows are

lies. John's repeated pleas are ignored and throughout the play he remains skeptical about Donny's and Del's attempts to try to convince him with empty promises.

In Modern American Drama, 1945-2000 Bigsby, referring to this play states that, "Things are coming to an end – a friendship, a marriage, a young boy's innocence" (234). Father and son have planned to go on a trip to the woods. The clothes are packed; everything is ready. But there is a tension in the room that seems to have no point of reference. The boy can't sleep because he hears voices. His mother is tense. Everyday objects seem to acquire new significance. The meanings related to the dropping of a teapot, a blanket torn either now or in the past and that of a knife is disproportionate and obscure. The efforts made to normalize the situation fail. Conversations are fragmented and everyone is obsessed with his or her own unexpressed fears. Del insists that "things unfold … independent of our fears of them" (*The Cryptogram* 21). Donny's replies – "Things occur. In our lives. And the meaning of them … is not clear" (45-46). Her response is in part a genuine expression of the gnomic nature of experience and in part a defensive ploy. She prepares to move on, unable to make sense of what has happened. The play ends with each character wrapped in his or her own private sphere unable to reach to the other or come out. Del is now sent back to the isolation of his hotel room. The boy edges closer to psychosis. He has witnessed without seeing and heard without understanding. The fixed points of his existence have been removed; thus he feels a sense of insecurity. He looks for consolation but that is not offered to him.

The indifference of the mother towards the little boy becomes evident when she along with Del medicates him so that he can fall asleep. She does not care about the side

effects of the medicine on the little child but wants to lull him into deep sleep in order to get rid of his disturbing questions. Donny and Del wish John gone and he feels disturbed by their cruel and unsympathetic treatment. He says, "No one understands. You think that I'm in something. You don't know what I'm feeling" (34). Though John is not able to explain what is bothering him, he tells them that he is frightened by some voices which he hears and sees before he goes to bed. He says that he soaks the bed with sweat out of fear:

> JOHN. I don't want to go to sleep.
> DEL. Alright, alright, I'm going to *promise* you … look at me,
> John. I'm going to *promise* you if you take this and … you take this and go upstairs then you won't be afraid. I promise. (Pause.) I promise you
> (Pause.)
>
> JOHN. I sweat through the sheets … (34)

Donny and Del insist that he take the medicine, completely mindless of his disturbed state. They do not notice his strange and unusual behavior. Donny's negligence and cold treatment results in his psychoneurosis. At one point she says: "I think that he has to learn the world does not revolve around him" (26). Not only does she not understand John's need for care and attention but she also victimizes him for his father's mistakes. She is annoyed at John's repeated questions about his father:

> DONNY. We'll find out when he comes home, John. Must we do this every night? … He always has a Reason (14).
> ---
> JOHN. When is Dad coming home?

DONNY. He'll be here when he gets here, I think. (25)

John is victimized by his own mother for being the son of an irresponsible father. John is not able to understand the reason for the strange situation at home, nor is he able to explain what is bothering him. When John talks about death, Donny's response is cold and emotionless:

JOHN. Do you ever wish you could die? (Pause). It's not such a bad feeling. is it?

DONNY. I know you're frightened. I know you are. But at some point, do you see …? (Pause. Donny Exits. Offstage.) John, everyone has a story. Did you know that? In their lives. This is yours. (Del enters.) And finally … finally …you are going to have to learn how you will deal with it. You understand? I'm going to speak to you as an adult: At Some point … At some point, we have to learn to face ourselves … (46)

Donny is helpless; a victim of her husband's indifference, she is not able to do anything regarding John's condition:

DONNY. At some point … there are things that have occurred I cannot help you with … that …

JOHN. I can't sleep.

---

DONNY. What do you want me to do? John? I am not God. I don't control the World. If you could think what it is I could do for you … If I could help you … (46) John is unable to understand his mother's situation and continues to ask for help:

JOHN. I'm cold … My *mind* is racing. I …

DONNY. You what? (Pause.)

JOHN. … I think …
---
*DONNY. What can I do about it, John?*
JOHN. I don't know.
---
DONNY. … What you think about there is your concern. No one can help you. Do you understand? *Finally, each* of us … *Each* of us … Is alone. (51)

Mamet projects her agony too when she shouts in an anguished state at an indifferent John, "Can't you see that I need comfort? Are you blind? For the love of God …" (56). All the characters cry out for comfort, showing how bleak and desolate American homes have become.

In the play, the characters mention three misfortunes: the broken tea pot, the torn blanket and Robert's leaving of Donny. The fourth one, which is not identified by them, is the loss of John's psyche. The annihilation of a young boy's innocence is the most pathetic of all the misfortunes. By delineating the suffering of a boy because of the parents' self-willed nature, authoritative attitude and unsympathetic treatment, Mamet seems to be insisting upon the need for nurturing families in American society.

**Works Cited**

Bigsby, Christopher. *Modern American Drama, 1945-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Print.

---, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.

Bloom, Harold. Foreword. *Long Day's Journey into Night*. By Eugene O'Neill. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987. v-xii. Print.

Gill, Richard. *Posterity Lost: Progress, Ideology, and the Decline of the American Family*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997. Print.

Lasch, Christopher. *A Heaven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*. New York: Basic Books, 1979. Print.

Mamet, David. *The Cryptogram*. New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1995. Print.

Miller, Arthur. "The Family in Modern Drama". *The Theatre Essays of Arthur, Miller*. Ed. Robert A. Martin and Steven R. Centola. New York: Da Copa Press, 1996. 69-85. Print.

Renuga, M. "Postmodern Humanism in David Mamet's *The Cryptogram*". *Critical Perspectives in American Literature*. ed. S.

P. Dhanaval. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2008. Print.

Wakefield, Thaddeus. *The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. Print.

# Diaspora: Displacement and Cultural Dichotomy

**Altaf Ahmad Ganaie**

Diaspora is a term often used today to describe practically any population which is considered 'de-territorialized' or 'transnational' that is which has originated in a land other than which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe. The term of course was initially associated with the Jewish historical experience, and hence the concept of a dispersed community sharing a common religious and cultural heritage.

Though many books and articles are churned out by scholars and academicians on Diaspora studies, this paper is not a mere presentation of facts but explores the psychological pain experienced by the immigrants after their dislocation. In this study of diasporic literature 'Displacement or dislocation' a value-oriented term, is not a mere word used to convey the physical movement of a person from one place to the other, rather it portrays how with the movement of a person, the entirety of a whole nation, to which he belonged, is carried with him. With that the cultural dislocation assumes tremendous significance in the life of the immigrant. In elaborating and connecting the theme of cultural displacement with the broader issues of cultural identity and national identity there is a tension between the national narrative that fixes people as objects with claims to historical origins, and the processual, which makes the people as subjects performing their own narratives in the day to day acts of living. In the creation of this split space, the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of writing the nation.

Culture- signifying a set of values, customs and traditions is an important social practice for sustaining and transmitting congruent existence in a society. Culture is believed to be a whole way of life of a society at a specific point of time. All academic studies broadly come under the rubric of culture; sociology, anthropology and literature being the major disciplines. Migration and cross-cultural encounters have always affected the lives of migrants and there is always the possibility of rejection, confusion and tension when people from different cultures interact. Traveling across continents and cultures is a phenomenon that depicts the immigrants caught in flight between borders caught in a miraculously intricate web of memories, relationships and images. The migrants in the alien culture live in a silken bond memory of the motherland. When one does not have a home, one has to live in reminiscence, a collective memory embodying a symbolic relationship between the past and the present.

"Diaspora" as a social category is concerned with the extent and nature of social, political and economic relationships, as types of consciousness involving aspects of collective memory, desire and an awareness of identities spanning "here-and-there", or as a mode of cultural reproduction relating to the global flow of cultural objects, images and meanings. The socio-cultural process behind every society is important for the understanding of Diaspora. Indeed every society is built upon a rich cultural tradition and this plays a vital role in the formation of the human psyche and its functioning. It is like the assimilation within the self, and between the self and the society. While an intergrated pattern represents harmony its absence symbolizes a fragmented and chaotic self. Since the existence of a Diaspora is so intimately connected to cultural memory, Diasporic writing articulates a real or imagined past of a

community in all its symbolic transformations. It provides a translation of the semiotic behavior of dislocation and resettlement.

The most common features of a Diaspora as accepted by critics are: dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements; an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate; troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

The decision behind migration is more difficult and serious in the case of the whole family than for an individual. Furthermore it is more difficult for a family to get a foothold in the country of immigration. There is no glamour in the suffering they endured in the far away alien lands. From such melting pots came new cultural castings. The tensions of a transplanted existence, the struggle for survival in a world of strangers and the schizophrenic experience cracked by multiple identities shatter the life of immigrants. Away from home, their self is fragmented and

fractured. The expatriates culturally displaced subjects- have to accept the provisional nature of all truths and certainties. Homesickness becomes an important factor in the emotional life of the emigrants.

Homesickness is generally described as a feeling of longing for one's familiar surroundings. It frequently occurs when one travels or, more rarely, when one experiences a sense of tumult within a familiar context. One may experience a sense of dread or helplessness, at the protracted stay away from their native land, parents, relatives and the familiar. Symptoms in homesickness may be purely psychological emotions or, in extreme cases, cause mild health problems. While there is no "universal symptom" of homesickness, most describe it as a want or longing to be back home. People may describe their feelings as a deep sadness, depression, frustration, anger, hopelessness, or even suicidal thoughts. All these are the consequences of "cultural displacements" the result of migration. In extreme cases, health problems may occur and this is similar to a stress reaction: one who is stressed may have cramps, ulcers, chronic headaches, nausea, etc. As asserted by the psychologists the best way to alleviate homesickness is to bring along "transitional objects" such as photographs or tape-recorded messages from family members.

Those mementos can alleviate the uncomfortable feelings when people are away from home.

In so far as culture is memory, it is embedded in the past and will have to be retrieved in symbolic action. Memory marks a loss, it is always a representation, representing that which once was and no longer is. Representation as re-memoration foregrounds the fact that experience is always other than it was: inevitably and

constitutively historical, such a construction situates memory as the most consistent agent of the transformations by which the referential world is made into a universe of signs. Similarly, culture, as a record of community memory, is intimately tied to past historical experience.

As culture experiences changes, memory is contested, repressed, or reconfigured. During times of turbulence, we witness a sharp increase in the degree of semiotic behavior expressed in the changing of names, regulative metaphors, or societal myths, and even in the fight against old rituals. One of the most devastating forms of social oppression is the obligatory demand to forget certain aspects of historical experience. Epochs of historical regression impose upon societies and communities highly mythologized schemes of history and demand that they forget anything that does not conform to the manufactured and manipulated fiction of the collective past.

The theory that characterizes immigrants and refugees as mentally fragile has propelled a host of studies comparing migrant rates of disorder with people from their home communities, as well as between immigrants and native-born members of the receiving society. Approximately half the studies produced results consistent with the prediction that immigrant mental health would be worse. In the present study, focus is on the problems faced by these individuals away from their motherland. The significant point to be explored is the impact, both on the native culture and the culture of adoption, which results from expatriation.

The culture of the homeland etched in the minds of the displaced immigrants makes them outsiders in the new

place of existence. Not able to or rather not willing to come out of that estranges them further. In addition there is a dimension of the émigré in the psychic space that is dwelt in by these writers. A culturally displaced being-the immigrant's life-becomes a metaphor for loneliness. Stranded between acceptance and rejection, they are tortured emotionally. Lack of belonging brings about a psychic deadlock and estrangement from the society of existence. Immigration triggers estrangement, it is this otherness that makes them quiver between self-alienation and self –identification. Thus in the process of accommodation they impersonate an assortment of self for lack of an identity of their own.

The displaced beings, away from familiar ties, oscillate between crisis and reconstruction. Relations between displaced immigrants and their ancestral homelands are complex and full of dialectical contradictions. Firstly, there is anger, bitterness, and remorse among exiles whether voluntary or involuntary. Secondly, there is conflict when the dominant hosts attempt to justify the subordinate status of the immigrants, and they in turn refuse to accept the status thrust on them.

Cultural travels have proved to be powerful tools for improving and strengthening the relationship between countries. Immigrants after their displacement assume the task of guardians, mapmakers and pathfinders- finding the valuable in our pasts, helping to bring the present into clearer focus and pointing us towards the future. They in due course have to face challenges of a different variety, ranging from personal to social- the challenges of equity and redress.

The conclusion that follows directly from this is that the culturally displaced immigrants as citizens of nations or as

members of larger, smaller, or dispersed units of agglomeration need to be conceptualized together. In the transnational public sphere, immigrants' identities as citizens of a nation are in a constant state of negotiation with multiple points of cultural origin and belonging.

Works Cited

De, Voretz D. *Diminishing Returns: The Economics of Immigration Policy*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995. Print

Gladstone, Malcohm. *Dislocations of Culture, Ethnicity as Identity. New Jersey:* Holmes & Meir, 2001. Print

Kirpal, Viney. *The Third World Novel of Expatriation.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1989. Print

McNiell, William H. *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963. Print

Safran, William. *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return.* Diasporas II Spring, 1991. Print

Tiwari, Sandhya. *Displacements and Alienation of Indian Diaspora*. New Delhi: Research India Press, 2013. Print

Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society*. London: Penguin Books, 1958. Print

# Crossing the Threshold: Women in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*

**Tuba Rashid**

Anita Nair (b.1966) is an acclaimed contemporary novelist with a wide literary range that includes novels, short stories, poetry and essays apart from a compilation of Indian mythology for children. Her novels include *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2003), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010) and *Idris: Keeper of the Light* (2014) *Alphabet Soup for Lovers (2015), Chain of Custody (2016).* A winner of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Nair continues to write profusely on issues like patriarchy, gender, notion of spaces, man-woman relationships, image of the New Woman. Besides, cultural issues peculiar to India like the South Indian family, caste system and class difference find a major place in her fiction. Her writing thus portrays variegated themes, from the fictional and mythological to the realistic and historical, but what she aims to portray in her writing is not centred around any single idea that she wants to propagate through her works. In one of her interviews, she says that she writes for herself and her sole attempt is to:

> …..understand what disturbs me, be it things in me or things and people around me. And by the time I finish writing a book I know there are some answers that I'll have. (Sinha 148)

Although not a consistent "feminist" writer, Nair's *Ladies Coupe* (2001) has been hailed as "the most important feminist novel to come out of South Asia" and is something of a tour-de-force in Nair's canon. It is an epic tale about six ordinary women who question the status of women in tradition-bound Indian society that sees a woman either as an obedient daughter, a submissive wife or a producer of

children. It deals with themes like man-woman relationship, marriage and widowhood and delineates the clash between tradition and modernity Modern themes like lesbianism, female-only spaces and sisterhood are also explored. But it is the feminist appeal of the novel that makes it popular among contemporary readership both in India and abroad. Though hailed as a feminist novel Nair in one of her interviews says:

> I am not a feminist. . . . I don't think this book is about feminism. It's about that inner strength which I see in so many women that overwhelms me. (Behal 2)

In Indian society, which is largely patriarchal, "the binary between home and the world is polarized and heirarchized," and women are confined to home and its peripheries (Vinai 94). Men and women are not seen as complementary, rather men are seen as the masters who in the words of Malashri Lal:

> . . . have, traditionally, passed over the threshold ['a real and symbolic bar'] unchallenged and partaken of both worlds, the one within and the other 'without'. Women have been expected to inhabit only the one world contained by the boundaries of home. (12)

This division on the basis of *Lakshmanrekha* -an archetype of the concept of the 'threshold' segregates the world of men from the world of women. Men belong to the public sphere that deals with trade, politics, administration and all that is related to intellect, reason and dominance whereas women remain confined to inner, private spaces of home dealing with the domestic and reproductive dimensions of life. *Ladies Coupe* situates women within the domain of

"threshold" and also depicts modern Indian women crossing the "threshold" in order to assert their identity.

*Ladies Coupe*, as is apparent from its title a is women-centred novel. It portrays women both traditional and modern, educated and uneducated, from high and middle class and lower class and from high caste and low caste. Praised for its realistic depiction, "it fleshes out the minutest details" of its women characters, bringing "alive their everyday dilemmas, desires and thoughts" (Sinha 150). In the novel, the main protagonist is Akhila who embarks on a journey in a ladies coupe where she meets five other women whose stories "form a kind of mirror in which Akhila may see her reflection" (Sinha 157) and realise her inner potential. The setting of the novel is in a ladies coupe- a compartment on a train reserved exclusively for women- that introduces to us a variety of female characters, all distinctive and apart in age, background, language, mannerisms, and beliefs. These women are:

> Janaki Prabhakar, the old woman in the coupe whose relationship with her husband is a "friendly love", Prabha Devi- the rich submissive wife who loves swimming because it metaphorically gives her a sense of achievement, Margaret Paulraj- the chemistry teacher who succeeds in "disciplining" her narcissistic husband, Sheela Vasudevan- the fourteen year old girl whose understanding of her dying grandmother paves the way for own future liberation and Marikolunthu, whose rape, literally and metaphorically, coupled with extreme poverty and class exploitation is the culmination of all the other stories. (Suganya 2)

The wide spectrum of women-Janaki, who symbolizes the need for love and security; Sheela, an image of the emerging New Woman who allows her instinct to rule instead of doing what was expected from her; Margaret, a courageous woman who re-discovers her body through courage and

reason; Prabha, a symbol of contentment in achieving self-fulfilment while highlighting gender-discrimination, and Mari, a rebel who crosses the 'threshold' to re-define and re-discover her identity-through their experiences project the emergence of women as independent and progressive.

In this connection, Malashri Lal states "The Law of Threshold may serve as a methodological resource for feminist literary criticism in India" (Lal 12). Fundamentally, by threshold we mean an entrance or the point of beginning, but it can be defined "as the deliberate border line that determines the limits between the so called worlds of men and women through various injunctions, imposed and justified through ages by the society" (Jagpal 19). Traditionally, men have been given this privilege to cross the threshold unhindered and enjoy both the worlds, the one within and the other 'without', whereas women have been permitted to inhabit only the world contained by the boundaries of home. It thus marks a strong segregation of 'inside' and 'outside' and points to a real and symbolic transition. If a woman crosses this threshold and steps outside, it is regarded as an act of transgression which does not permit her to re-enter her designated inner world and consequently make the outer world her permanent space. Sita's *lakshmanrekha* can be seen as an archetype of this concept. Also "the law of threshold not only defines the limits of physical space for women but it also extends its jurisdiction over her mental, psychological, emotional and metaphysical spaces" (Jagpal 20).

Within these operative principles of the law, Jagpal argues that women characters in Indian novels seem to inhabit a permutation of three possible spaces:

> First is the interior space. This is a real and a psychological location on this side of the threshold which is governed by the conventions, customs, heritage and age-old beliefs sanctioned by the orthodox rules of the patriarchal society that brings messages of conformity and inaction, offering and ensuring the allurement of security.
>
> The second operational space for them is the threshold itself. This is a contested space between two kinds of influences, one ensuring security and the other, the possibility of freedom, glory, risk and even death.
>
> The third conceptual space is of course, the world beyond the home, taking count of its real and metaphysical components. This space is operative for the woman who has made the irretrievable choice of her one-directional journey. (20-21).

Women in *Ladies Coupe* can be situated within these three available spaces- women who remain within the threshold, women on the threshold and women beyond the threshold. Characters like Akhila's mother, her sister Padma, Janaki, Sujata Akka and Jaya are women who remain within the domain of threshold. These women occupy a place which is mainly confined to the private space of home along with customs, conventions and beliefs propagated by the dictates of patriarchy. Nair proceeds from these traditional portrayals to depict the state of the characters like Prabha Devi and Sheela, who are not radical but great assimilators of both tradition and modernity. Thus, their position does not remain within, but on the threshold which is a contested space between two kinds of influence. Women who remain on the threshold recognize the exploitative role of

patriarchy, question its nature and strive to carve out a space without breaking the given socio-cultural structure.

However, with the changing patterns of life, more awareness and more avenues available to women facilitated not only women's growth but also provided them with a vision to seek a space where they can redefine their role, discover new meanings and achieve greater fulfilment. This is achieved by crossing thresholds of social and psychological barriers, by questioning and dismantling them on the basis of reason and by redefining their subjectivity. In the words of Jasbir Jain:

> As each struggle leads to a new one and another frontier is opened, women have changed their strategies and moved from reasoning to protest, from silence to articulation, from insanity and ostracism to self-assertion and confidence. In the process they have also had to explore their strengths and weaknesses, their sexualities and negotiate the barriers of patriarchy.
> (qtd. in Jagpal 147)

*Ladies Coupe* also portrays a few characters like Marikolanthu, Margaret, Karpagam and Akhila who, by crossing the threshold are redefining their selves. Such characters defy the security of the home, family and community and bring change in their lives by exploring least trodden paths. However, ". . . their choice is not always a pleasant experience as they undergo intolerable pain of segregation from the mainstream life and rejection by the society and sometimes by their families as well" (Jagpal 148). An instance of this rejection is seen in the life of Marikolanthu whose state is conveyed to us by the symbol of silkworm, that is, to be made use of through life and death. But what is unique about Marikolanthu is the

awareness about this reality and the power of endurance to move on in her life. Her resilient attitude towards life makes her say to Akhila:

> Women are strong. . . . Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vein of strength in herself. It does not show itself naturally. (Nair, *Ladies* 210)

Marikolanthu, a thirty-one year old uneducated low caste woman, brings with her story another aspect of the victim status of women in India. Trained since her childhood to sacrifice her life for the sake of family and household work, her childhood innocence is shattered with the physical brutality of rape by Murugesan. The brutality of rape leaves her an indelible scar on her mind and evokes the power of hate in her. Taking the course of her life in her own hands, she defines "herself as an independent woman" as "she does not consider it significant to have the presence of a man in her life" (Awatade 3). Mari transgresses the sexual norms of her society by having a sexual liaison with Sridhar and simultaneously having a lesbian relationship with Sridhar's wife, Sujata, and certainly she does not feel guilty about it. This attitude situates her in the category of women who in an attempt to redefine the patriarchal milieu emerge as non-conformists or 'deviants'. Malashri Lal observes in this regard:

> This space is operative for the woman who has made irretrievable choice in her one directional journey. . . . Remembering that she is alone and isolated in a situation which functions by male consensus and collectivity, she has to devise strategies for survival of the self and acceptance by the 'other,' almost simultaneously. (19)

Further, to assert her identity, she avenges Murugesan by mortgaging his own son to him. This act makes her 'unwomanly' and 'unsympathetic' according to society but her own belief in the rightness of her decision leads to a sense of contentment:

> A perverse satisfaction flared within me. . . . I had finally collected rent for nine months of housing the boy. (*Ladies* 265)

In doing this she "mocks the age old reverence attached to motherhood" (Kumar 43-4). Thus defying almost all the prescribed roles, of being an ideal woman, wife and mother, she asserts her identity and emerges as an empowered being.

Contrary to Mari's struggle, an educated woman like Margaret also becomes a victim of male domination. Her husband Ebe, being authoritative, interferes in everything she likes to do- he forces her not to eat on the roadside, or cut her hair short, and not to go to church every Sunday. He even convinces Margaret to abort her baby. Eventually Ebe becomes a stranger and a tyrant who "not only curtails her space but also tries to erase even the last traces of self-worth and confidence out of her life" (Jagpal 192). Margaret says to Akhila:

> Where was I in all this? . . . In Ebe's eyes, had I ceased to be? What did he see me as? A little girl he could rule and mould, make love and jolly around? (*Ladies* 111)

Margaret, a symbol of the modern New Woman, instead of succumbing to patriarchy, takes a subtle revenge "[t]o erode her husband's self-esteem and shake the very foundations of

his being" (*Ladies* 96). Classifying herself as water that moistens, heals, forgets, accepts but destroys as well, she chooses to show him the true nature of water and how magnificent its powers are. D. S. Flavia comments:

> She chose flattery as the weapon to bring down Ebe's self esteem. She flattered and flattered and fed him with fatty food since dawn till night, till fat found its home on him, and turned him into a fat man and an easy man who sought her for food and sex. . . . (4)

Through Margaret, Nair portrays the image of a 'new woman' who shatters the myth of a woman needing a man in order to be complete. Her success in making him dependent on her and afterwards giving birth to a baby girl "clearly reveal the strength of her character and determination in not yielding but outwitting him with her own tactics"(Khan 38). Instead of crossing the threshold by seeking divorce which carries a social stigma and alienating herself from family and society that would have made her a non-conformist, she combats the situation by reversing the roles in the "power politics of her married life" (38). Margaret is, however, certainly going against social conventions and norms, thus crossing the threshold in a different way.

Revealing the characteristics of a modern woman, Nair sets an example through her female characters who empower themselves without male mediation. Another streak of self-definition is seen in Akhila, the protagonist, when she defies social constraints and allows a stranger in a bus to explore her body. Contrary to the world of the 'threshold' where women never offered their bodies to men before their union was sanctified by marriage, Akhila

liberates herself by celebrating her womanhood. She rediscovers the pleasure of being a woman by having a physical relationship with Hari, a younger man whom she loves. Akhila's challenge to the constructs of the society is symbolic of her growth that ultimately takes the new avatar of the modern woman.

However, it is Karpagam, her childhood friend who plays an important role in prompting and guiding Akhila to move towards liberation. Karpagam is introduced as a woman of indomitable courage and wisdom. Although she is a widow, she breaks the social norm and wears kumkum and colourful clothes:

> I don't care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. (*Ladies* 202)

It is through her that Nair questions the shallow traditions of society that restrict women within the confines of several thresholds. Karpagam is a modern woman who refuses to sacrifice her life and questions societal laws:

> …it is natural for a woman to want to be feminine. It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who made these laws anyway? Some man who couldn't bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men. (*Ladies* 202)

Her words are really thought-provoking and she suggests to Akhila to "build a life for yourself where your needs come first" (*Ladies* 202). Like a 'new woman', she wants Akhila to

make her needs her priority and by rejecting laws set by society for women, she is no doubt redefining her identity. Karpagam's words, "We are strong Akhi. We are if we want to be" (202) inspire Akhila to decide that she will live alone and she pronounces:

> I will do exactly as I please and I don't give a damn about what you (Padma) or anyone else thinks... (*Ladies* 204)

Akhilandeswari, alias Akhila, is introduced to us as "a frustrated spinster in her forties" (Singh 1) who dreams of "escape and space" (*Ladies* 2). She becomes a representative of all those women in India who forgo their own self for the sake of family, traditions and other social constraints. Nevertheless, Nair, through Akhila, illustrates that women too are capable of being strong when they question the prejudices and conventions of society to discover their true potential. Nair shows how Akhila in order to satisfy her physical needs, goes beyond the threshold to fulfil them. She celebrates her womanhood by having a sexual relationship with the young man at Kanyakumari and enjoys the sexual liberation without any hesitation. She says:

> Akhila is lust. Akhila is Sakthi. Akhila is Akhilandeswari decimated into ten entities . . . . This is who Akhila is. Together and separate. (*Ladies* 274-75)

It may also be suggested that her sexual act with a stranger in the end of the journey marks her symbolic rebirth and transcendence through which she "is able to acquire a new self- a self which has suffered, experienced and finally learned the true essence of life" (Khan 38). Akhila turns out to be a woman who can make choices, take decisions and she

makes up her mind to start life anew with Hari from whom she can get what she longs for- love, care, affection, understanding and above all happiness, which she defines as:

> Happiness is . . . being allowed to choose one's own life; to live it the way one wants. . . . . (Nair, *Ladies* 200)

Therefore, Akhila becomes the 'new' woman who voices her protest through her actions. Also, women like Marikolanthu, Margaret, and Karpagam not only dismantle the various patriarchal boundaries that keep them confined but they re-define these by crossing the thresholds and strive for a solution by adopting new strategies in an attempt to redefine their lives.

In Nair's fiction, women are the creators of their own destiny as is evident from *Ladies Coupe*. It shows how women in contemporary times take control of their lives and thus emerge as self-reliant and empowered beings. Nair's *Ladies Coupe* thus holds a unique position among contemporary women's writing in India.

**Works Cited**

Awatade, H. K. "Anita Nair: *Ladies Coupe*- A Voyage of Self Discovery." *Indian Streams Research Journal* 2.7 (2012): 1-5. Web. 8 July 2014.

Behal, Suchitra. "Writing for oneself." *thehindu.com*. The Hindu, 2 Dec. 2001. Web. 10 July 2016.

Flavia, D. Silvia. "The Concept of Patriarchy and Female Defiance in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*." *tjells.com*. N.p, n.d. Web. 8 July 2014.

Jagpal, Anju. *Female Identity: A Study of Seven Indian Women Novelists.* New Delhi: Prestige, 2012. Print.

Khan, Rohma. Rev. of *Ladies Coupe*, by Anita Nair. *South Asian Cultural Journal* 3.1 (n.d): 35-39. Web. 8 July 2014.

Kumar, P. Sateesh. "Cruelty and Conflict in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*." *iosrjournals.org*. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, n.d. Web. 8 July 2014.

Lal, Malashri. *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English.* Shimla: IIAS, 2000. Print.

Nair, Anita. *Ladies Coupe*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2001. Print.

Singh, Khushwant. "Travelling in a women's compartment." *tribuneindia.com*. *The Tribune,* 2 Mar. 2002. Web. 10 July 2015.

Sinha, Sunita. *Post-Colonial Women Writers: New Perspectives*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2012. Print.

Suganya, S. "Enslavement to Autonomy in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*." *The Criterion: An International Journal In English* 3.2 (June 2012): 1-5. Web. 6 Feb. 2015.

Vinai, Maya. *Interrogating Caste and Gender: Anita Nair's Fiction*. New Delhi: Prestige, 2014. Print.

# Poet of Multiple Consciousnesses: Agha Shahid Ali

**Aaliya Mushtaq**

> The point is you are a universe, you are the product of immense historical forces. There is the Muslim in me, there is the Hindu in me, there is the Western in me. It is there because I have grown up in three cultures and various permutations of those cultures.

Agha Shahid Ali is a poet with a kaleidoscopic consciousness which gets reflected in the entire oeuvre of his poetry. He embodies a point of intersection of various sensibilities and physical landscapes as he has grown up in a rich multicultural environment of parents and grandparents drawn from different cultures, temperaments and linguistic backgrounds. He was born into an elite and highly educated Kashmiri Shia Muslim family, to a mother with a Sufi lineage. Therefore, he inherited multiplicity as an individual, which is not superimposed on him as an artificial state of being. This multiplicity also characterized his educational and professional journey from Kashmir to Delhi and then to America. After graduating from the University of Kashmir he went to Delhi for his MA, from there he moved on to the US for a Ph d in English and a career as a professional poet and teacher. Ali learned Urdu and Persian poetry from his parents while they spoke or quoted from Urdu and Persian but he had proficiency in writing only in English. It is appropriate to call him a hybrid whose poetry is emblematic of his perpetual exile on linguistic, cultural and historical planes. Nonetheless the simultaneity of multiple consciousnesses does not lead to a state of anomie or disintegrated vision but enables him to create intense and multifaceted poetry which becomes a perfect objective co-

relative of the paradoxical consciousness of exile and belonging simultaneously.

As far as Shahid's diasporic subjectivity is concerned he doesn't depict himself in a state of powerlessness vis-a-vis his exile- his lyrics don't dissipate into mere sob stories regarding his longing about a geographical location where he felt at home. In fact, the world that he weaves through his poetry represents a unified culture that he arranges linguistically on the paper. His poetry thrives on a boundless range of images and allusions derived from varied sources. However, his sense of belonging to Kashmir in particular, and the pain he felt for the atrocities committed against its people, is too pronounced in his poetry. "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight" is indisputably a condensed form of historical record of the gruesome 1990's of Kashmir. The phrase 'curfewed night' in the very first stanza describes Kashmir in its moment of paralysis, "The city from where no news can come". [178]. The poem is a tour de force as far as Shahid's poetry- specifically about Kashmir- is concerned. On the one hand, there are landmark places from Srinagar mentioned in the poem ('Zero Bridge', 'Cantonment', 'Gupkar Road', 'Residency Road', 'Mir Pan House', 'Shah Hamdan') that brings the poem alive to its readers and defines its realistic setting; Words like '*chinar*' and '*phiren*' indigenous to Kashmir- add to the feel. On the other hand, Shahid maintains a hallucinatory atmosphere throughout the poem in spite of the historical references to events like Molvi Farooq's funeral and the exodus of Pundits. Nonetheless it is done with such dexterity that the factual references aren't overshadowed by the bizarre, eerie and the dramatic documentation of the events. In fact such portrayal captures the events in the spur of the moment. Rizwan's shadow hurls these words on the narrator: "Don't tell my

father I have died" [179], leaving the reader numb with horror and grief.

"Some Visions of the World Cashmere" is rendered in a similar fashion. Shahid creates a surreal atmosphere- at one moment he is talking about his phone ringing in Amherst, he is being informed about his dying grandmother. We are told that she couldn't be brought back home due to curfew everywhere in the village where she had gone to see her relatives. After disconnecting the phone in Srinagar imaginatively, Shahid walks towards his grandmother's cottage, that is situated in their garden. When he enters there he writes:

> ...Except for her dressing table mirror which/ Sikander, so long dead, is polishing, the army has occupied her house,/ made it their dingy office, dust everywhere, on old phones, on damp/ files, on broken desks. [188]

Shahid requests one of the army personnel for helping him with their jeep so that he could bring back his grandmother from that village. The poem reaches its climax when he writes:

> Just then through the back gate some villagers and her dead/ brother are bringing her slowly through the poplars, by the roses... [189]

She is telling her brother, *Be grateful you died/ before these atrocities*... [189]

The two voices ventriloquize the only possible states of being of the people subjected to such atrocities that Kashmir has faced or continues to face. In the poem "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight" Rizwan's is a

phantasmal imploration to the narrator about keeping his death a secret from his father. And the grandmother's outcry in the poem "Some Vision of the World Cashmere" when she is found conversing with her dead bother, only implies that she finds death a better state than the condition of life in Kashmir, the times of killings and curfews. She sounds like Sibyl, quite subtly making her death wish. This brings to mind the epigraph of "The Waste Land" that reverberates with the Sibyl's death-wish. Apart from employing the prototypical symbol of death-in-life, the overall style of both the poems too is Eliotic. These poems retain a poetic magnificence despite being reflective of a harsh reality. "His poems, exquisite in their use of language: the stunning metaphors, the miraculous juxtapositions and the blend of the real with the surreal, remain poems and don't degenerate into sloganeering." (Maqbool 3)

Apart from the exemplary artistry that Shahid's poetry manifests, it is one of its kind with regard to the productive bargain that it brought in the literary world between the east and the west. His introduction of Ghazal form into English poetry was revolutionary in the sense that apart from writing Ghazals in English, he translated some of the finest Ghazals and also made few prominent English poets write in the Ghazal form. However, his literary affinity with Ghalib and Faiz in no way overshadows his love for James Meryll, Lorca or Emily Dickenson. He creates a new tradition where all strands synthesize, giving rise to path-breaking poetry. In the ghazal "In Arabic" there are constant ruptures in the leaps of imagination that the poem takes, there is a reference in the fourth stanza to Maimonides (medieval Jewish philosopher), the next stanza mentions Majnoon (representative lover from the east) and later the poem alludes to Lorca. Nevertheless the ghazal defines its intent in the very first line:

A language of loss? I have some business in Arabic.
[372]

After orchestrating a mind boggling range of allusions throughout the ghazal, Shahid connects the last couplet with the first, bringing to attention self-referentiality of the poem to the poet himself:

They ask me to tell them what Shahid means:
Listen, listen:
It means "The Beloved" in Persian "witness" in Arabic. [373]

Not only his Ghazals but the rest of his poetry too has disjunctive and the non-linear narrative. In his poems he alludes to Hindu gods, Sufi tradition, Islamic culture, Shia rituals, Karbala and so on. Nonetheless Shahid isn't entirely submerged in the sacred, as we normally understand it. The poet's involvement with the sacred intensifies the impact of his poetry manifold, and delineates the poet's identity in its specificity. Nishat Zaidi in her article "Negotiating the Sacred Post/Secular Configurations of Faith in Cosmopolitan, Transnational Spaces in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali" argues:

"... Ali's insistence on his Muslim identity accompanied by his daring disavowal of its dogmatic orthodoxy, positions him alongside post-secularists, who do not shy away from critiquing secular and sacred alike." (55)

Nevertheless Shahid is a hardcore existentialist at heart who vents his angst in all possible moods throughout his poems. In the poem "Today, talk is cheap. Call somebody", Shahid writes:

I called Information Desk, Heaven,
And asked, "When is Doomsday?"
I was put on hold. [89]
...
But it was the Angel of Death.
I said, "Tell me, Tell me,
When is Doomsday?" [89]

He answered, "God is busy.
He never answers the living.
He has no answers for the dead.
Don't ever call again collect." [89]

The extract from the poem shows the poet employing dark humour, wit and a playful tone in dealing with the same subject, "…it's not surprising perhaps that Shahid, who prematurely lost a country and a mother, and indeed his own life, should be such a famous wit, his humor always leavened by grief, his coquettish charm deepened with spiritual ardor" (Shankar 46).

This is to say that Shahid's employment of wit and playful language is not reflective of a postmodern streak that rejoices in mocking the metaphysical. In fact at a later stage, we find his poetry surcharged with a Keatsian obsession and aesthetic treatment of the theme of death. Although the theme of the poem "The Country Without a Post Office" is markedly political therefore distinct, yet the concluding couplet:

I want to live forever. What else can I say?
It rains as I write this. Mad heart, be brave. [206]

These lines proffer a similar angst in the minds of the readers as is created by the Keatsian line "When I have fears that I may cease to be": Moreover, in Shahid's collection of

Ghazals *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*, there is a couplet in a ghazal titled "Tonight":

> I beg for haven: Prison, let open your gates-
> A refugee from Belief seeks a cell tonight. [374]

Here, the poet paints it dark, the night being an objective correlative for his sense of forlornness and exile from Belief. He pleads for acceptance and the wilful abandonment of his disconnect from Faith.

Shahid's highly autobiographical poetry too is an amalgamation of all the strands in him. "Lenox Hill" from his collection *Rooms are Never Finished* is an elegy, in which Shahid is lamenting the loss of his mother who died of brain tumor in the US. The poem is titled after the name of the hospital where Shahid's mother was operated and the opening of the poem is set in the hospital itself. But then the poem takes a glide and alludes to a brutal episode from Kashmir history, the tyrant ruler Mihiragula who while passing through the Pir Panjal's rock cliffs, drove sadistic pleasure from hearing an elephant's cry that accidently fell from the mountain. To let the ruler have the delight of hearing more such cries, his soldiers forcibly drove scores of elephants off the cliff. It is Shahid's ailing mother who broaches this thus:

> sirens wail through Manhattan like elephants
> forced off Pir Panjal's rock cliffs in Kashmir. [247]

Shahid builds the mood of the poem with the echoes of the desperate and helpless cries of these elephants who are falling into their death. This is a way of defamiliarizing the present situation of Kashmir where Indian forces are deriving the same kind of sadistic pleasure from killing and torturing Kashmiris. The reference also brings to attention

the acute historical sense that his mother possessed. From this point on, the poem gains momentum, this highly personal poem walks the reader through Shahid's childhood lived in Kashmir, he remembers how his mother had dressed him as Krishna on some festival:

> but to save you as you were, young, in song in Kashmir, and I, one festival, crowned Krishna by you, Kashmir listening to my flute. [247]

The image in the poem resonates at multiple levels. Towards the climax too Shahid pictures the personal past:

> ...I imagine her: a bride in Kashmir,
> she's watching, at the Regal, her first film with Father. [248]

Shahid evokes a terrible sense of nostalgia about his mother's youth, his own childhood and the home i.e., Kashmir. As the poem progresses, Shahid's despair regarding his mother's state of health merges with the irreparable loss experienced by the motherland at that time at numerous levels, which leads him to cry in desperation:

> O, Destroyer, let her return there, if just to die.
> Save the right she gave its earth to cover her,
> Kashmir has no rights. [248]

The former image of Kashmir of Shahid's childhood, a peaceful picture of Shahid as Krishna, and Kashmir listening to his flute, is undercut by the terrible reality of Kashmir at the time when the poem was composed. Shahid doesn't retract from making a statement about Kashmir in the elegy about his mother when he says, "... Kashmir/ has no rights." [248] Mother and motherland criss-cross each

other and converge into one. The point is drawn quite smoothly through the modernist technique of stream of consciousness without any sense of disconnect with the overall subject of the poem.

Kashmir by the end of the poem is established as the gigantic symbol of pain, when Shahid compares the loss of his mother with it:

> For compared to my grief for you, what are those of Kashmir,
> and what (I close the ledger) are the griefs of the universe
> when I remember you- beyond all accounting - O my mother? [249]

The agony that Shahid feels after having suffered the loss of his mother is inexpressible yet the symbol of Kashmir and the nightmarish feelings it evokes, seems to bring the poet some solace in having expressed himself by giving the reader an idea that his suffering is even beyond the ultimate object of loss and grief i.e., Kashmir. The universal relevance of the poet can be gauged from a single expression, from the same poem, which by now has become a cliché:

> Thus I swear, here and now, not to forgive the universe
> that would let me get used to a universe without you. [247]

Shahid's projection of his dread, of being bereft of his beloved (mother), onto the universe and warning it against becoming complicit in his depravity and evoking the sense of revenge in himself about matters beyond his control, testifies to any person's (who has loved deeply) emotions of

fear and utter helplessness regarding love's fate in the face of life's transience and uncertainties.

The poet has thus multifarious dimensions to his poetry arising particularly from the negotiation that occurs in the poetic space between the orient and the occident. As an artist, at a later stage, he blends personal pain and the pain of motherland into relatable poetic expressions. In his poetry thus, the literary, the historical, the political, the sacred, the personal co-exist simultaneously defying the neat categorization of his identity into one or the other as it transcends them to become a symbol of universal culture.

**Works Cited:**


Ali, Agha Shahid. *The Veiled Suite: The Collected Poems.* Haryana, India: Penguin Random House, 2010. Print.

Keats, John. *John Keats Complete Poems*. New York: Book of the Month Club, 1993. Print.

Maqbool, Iffat. "If There Is a Poet, It Is This, It Is This: Aga Shahid Ali – Chronicler of Pain", *The Criterion: An International Journal in English.* 3.1 (March 2012): 1-3 Web. 08 Jan 2018.

Shankar, Ravi. "The Veiled Sweets": Agha Shahid Ali's Surprising Use of Humor" ed. Mohammad Kazim Ali, *Mad Heart Be Brave: Essays on the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. *Project MUSE*

Zaidi, Nishat. "Negotiating the Sacred: Post/Secular Configurations of Faith in Cosmopolitan, Transnational Spaces in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali", *English Studies in India* 23 (Jan 2015): 48 – 55. Print.

..... "Center/ Margin Dialectics and the Poetic Form: The Ghazals of Agha Shahid Ali" *The Annual of Urdu Studies*. Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia, UW-Madison (2008) 55-66 Web. 11 Jan 2018< http://digital. library. wisc. edu/ 1793/30568>

# The Human Body and Mysticism; A Study of Lalla Ded's *Vaakhs*

**Jamiel Ahmad**

Lalla Ded was a saint-philosopher and essentially a revolutionary mystic, born in the middle of the 14th century of the Christian era, which was a period of political and religious turmoil in Kashmir. She was both a Sufi as well as a follower of the Kashmiri Shaivite tradition, and an ardent practitioner of yoga. Her parents lived near Pandrenthen Sempore, which is about 5 miles away from the capital city of Srinagar. She was married at an early age to a Brahmin boy in village Pampore, and was maltreated at her in-laws. Her mother-in-law always starved her, but she never raised a finger against her. She left home in her mid-twenties to take *sanyasa* (renunciation) and become a disciple of the Shaivite guru Siddha Srikantha (Sed Bayu).

Resisting the cultural silencing of a woman, she rebelled against the political and the religious structures of her times and put a question mark on the muteness of women folk. She spoke in the Kashmiri language to spread her message of mysticism and humanity. It is through her life-narratives and verses which are rooted in the folklore of Kashmir that she has become a prominent cultural icon. To her the cause of all our troubles is Ego, which must be renounced. She emphasizes that if one cannot realize God in this life, how can one realize Him after death. She fills her teachings with many truths that are common to all religious philosophies. All religions were to her merely paths leading to the same goal. She never differentiated between a Hindu and a *Musalmaan*. She serves as a historical link between the pre-Islamic and the Islamic Kashmir. Many myths, legends and miracles are woven round her name, which indicate the

reverence in which she was held by Hindus and Muslims alike. The famous patron saint-poet of Kashmir, Nund Rishi of Chrar-e-Sharief held her in high esteem and reverence.
Lalla Ded wrote in the form of *vaakhs* and there is a large number of these which have been transmitted from one generation to the next orally. *Lalvaakh* is not primarily poetry, nor is it mere learned discourse, for her it is the mantra and worship of the Lord. These are much more than mere 'words' or 'sayings' because a vaakh captures the complex moment of a mystic and is loaded with spiritual thoughts. Lalla's Vaakhs are quite powerful in nature, and there are scholars who take her more as a great mystic saint than a poet. Dr. M.H. Zaffar in, "Lal-Ded: The Mystic of Kashmir", argues:

> To my mind to describe Lal-Ded as a poet is a misnomer, notwithstanding the fact that her vaks are the specimen of best poetry. In no way can she be called a poet in the modern sense of the term. Lala-vak is not primarily poetry nor is it mere learned discourse. It is a discourse for the practical purpose of sanctifying and divinizing human nature. (Zaffar 1)

Her *vaakhs* (sayings or words) lay more stress on recognizing one's own self, which is the true knowledge of God. Defining the style of Lalla Ded J.L.Kachru writes:

> It is easiest to meet Lalla Ded by hearing her own voice, and encountering her words, styled in Kashmiri as vaakh, which is not word or saying alone, but an utterance—a creature of a speaker's voice when the speaker is no fiction, but a person. A vākh consists mostly in four feet, with each foot receiving four stresses. (Kachru 1)

*Vaakh* is not only a literal term for 'word' or 'saying', but has some technical notions associated to it. It is a short self-contained poem which captures the spark of a mystic experience of the poet. Regarding the *vaakh* form of Lalla Ded, Sir Richard Temple in his book *The Word of Lalla* writes:

> In 1917 Sir Aurel Stein ascertained definitely that in Kashmiri songs the metre depended solely on the stress-accent. In Lalla's verses four stresses go to each *pada* or line. Lalla's metre is infact very loose indeed. Her verses would make the hair of an orthodox Indian poet stand on end. She starts really with an Indian *doha* as her basis, which is purely quantitative verse and then abandons quantity altogether and depends on stress-accent alone—in this she does exactly what the early Christian monkish writers did with their Latin hymns. (13)

On their popular side, Lalla's *Vaakhs* put the human being at their centre and represent their bodily and the spiritual dealings. One of her mystic experiences arguing the central position of the human body in the cultivation of soul is put into words:

> Whatever work I did became worship of the Lord
> Whatever word I uttered became mantra
> What this body of mine experienced became the sadhna of Saivatantra
> Illumining my path to param Shiva. (Zaffar 1, Tr. Jayalal Kaul)

This centrality of human body insisted upon by Lalla Ded is experiencing a revival in the contemporary cultural and anthropological studies, though the themes are different and diverse. So, by employing insights from contemporary cultural/anthropological theories, we can revisit the past

cultural and literary heritage. There are theorists and researchers who are working on the concept of human body and cultural rituals. For example, in an interview with Fredrik Lindstrand, Christoph Wulf responds to his question, "So you work to bring the body back into culture?":

Yeah, and in very different ways. Also the question "what is life" is of great interest for us. What does life mean today? How do we figure it out? Related to anthropology of the body is also the soul and its role in European history. Psychology is no longer interested in the soul; but during 2000 years the soul was of central concern in Europe. We worked on an historical reconstruction of the soul in Europe. We organized a project on the love discourse in Europe. How it developed. This discourse is quite unique. In China for example they have a very different conception of love. (Wulf 68)

To elucidate his concept and to make a firm grounding in the field of anthropological studies, Wulf defines human body as a "medium" through which various cultural performances are being held. He argues, "A number of consequences ensure from the fact that the human body is the medium of intangible cultural heritage. Its bodily practices are determined by the passage of time and the temporality of the human body. They depend on the dynamics of time and space" ("The Performativity and Dynamics of Intangible Cultural Heritage" 2).

Folk narratives tell us that Lalla used to roam around and dance in a nude state. This very nude-statement of her body is an inkling that points towards the performance/resistance of a body. Not only this, to be more specific, Ms. Shalini Rana in her article "Kashmir Saivism

and Lalla Ded: A Study of Lal's *Vaakhs* as a Source of Yogic Knowledge for the Common People" writes, "She tore her clothes and transcended the limits of the flesh. She spent her lifetime in *sadhna* (Rana 1). Being a female practitioner of Yogic philosophy, her life and verses are full of "allusions to Yoga Doctrine" (Temple 159). In the Yogic philosophy, human body serves as the microcosm, Sir Temple writes:

In the Yogic theory the human body is conceived as a miniature or replica of the world without it. The forces by which this microcosm is controlled at the same time operate upon the macrocosm outside and thus by certain physical and mental processes the Yogi can win for himself [herself], not only supernatural powers over his own body and mind, but also a miraculous control over the Universe, culminating in the complete translation of his [her] soul into the highest phase of Being, the absolute, conceived by Shaivas as the supreme Shiva, forever and ever. (Temple 161)

This very crucial position of human body in the mystic philosophy of Lalla Ded is represented through her philosophic capsules. In one of her *vaaks*, Lalla Ded says:

> When the Body-exercise is done
> And the last effort of thought employed,
> Then nor the End nor the Bourne is won
> Brahman, this is Doctrine unalloyed. (Temple 181)

This does not end here, bringing in the metaphor of a female body to unravel the mysteries of life, Lalla Ded puts forth one of her life episodes as a mystic teaching. She says:
Lady, rise and offer to the Name

> Bearing in thy hand the flesh and wine,
> Such shall never bring thee loss and shame
> Be it of no custom that is thine. (Temple 181)

The imagery she employs to illustrate her intersections with Divinity is full of words which are related to the human body. She tosses many such metaphors through her verses to make her mystic messages lucid, simple, and most importantly, popular in outlook. Speaking of her mystic longings she says:

> Passionate, with longing in mine eyes
> Searching wide and seeking nights and days,
> Lo! I beheld the Truthful One, the Wise
> Here in mine own House to fill my gaze
> That was the day of my lucky star
> Breathless, I held him my Guide to be,
> So, my Lamp of Knowledge blazed afar
> Fanned by slow breath from the throat of me.
> (Temple 179-180)

Starting the above mentioned verse with the word "eyes", she goes on to mention the "breath" and the "throat". This exercise of breath control is pivotal for all types of mystic meditations, and is also an important link in the Yogic philosophy. Representing the search of the Divine through the yogic meditation associated with a human body, and specifically her own body, Lalla says:

> Lord, myself not always have I known
> Nay, nor any other self than mine,
> Care for this vile body have I shown
> Mortified by me to make me Thine. (Temple 184)

This philosophy becomes clearer when she symbolically represents a cyclical relationship and a flux which takes place between the soul and the body, the thought and the eye. Putting this sort of a process into words, Lalla Ded speaks:

Steed of my thought, speed thou through the sky
Urged by the mystery of my art,
Pass thou in the twinkling of an eye
Through the empyrean of my heart.
Yet by the rein of my breath-control
Breathless I'll guide thee by ways I know,
So shall my chariot of knowledge roll
Down the paths of my own self that go.
(Temple 203)

In another mystic precept, she draws an analogy between the human body and its associated needs. Within this she prescribes a sort of limited, rather judicious, relationship between the two categories. She represents it thus:

Keep a little raiment for the cold
And a little food for stomach's sake,
Pickings for the crows they body hold
But thy mind a house of Knowledge make.
(Temple 204)

Complicating this mystic aesthetics dealing with the intersection between human life and divine energy, Lalla Ded employs an imagery that points towards the symbolic annihilation of the body of a mystic. In this way, the body-aesthetic in the mystic philosophy/poetry of Lalla Ded attains a sort of fluidity, flux, and cyclicity. This whole process is poetically summed up by Lalla:

Even though thy body melt in thought
Like as salt doth melt into the sea,
Yet if mind be not in nature taught
Knowledge of thy self there may not be.
(Temple 205)

There are many such insights in the mystic philosophy of Lalla Ded which depict the pivotal role that is assigned to the anatomical existence of the body in various yogic and mystic processes. This posits the human body as an aesthetic component in the mystic philosophy of this great Kashmiri Saivite saint.

**Works Cited:**


Rana, Shalini. "Kashmir Saivism and Lalla Ded: A Study of Lal's *Vaakhs* as a Source of Yogic Knowledge for the Common People". Jammu: Conference at CUJ, 2017.

Temple, R.C. *The Word of Lalla*. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2015. Print.

Wulf, Christoph. "The Performativity and Dynamics of Intangible Cultural Heritage". Lifelong Learning. Education and Culture DG, MEIA-EUC, Erasmus IP. Print

Wulf, Christoph. Interview with Fredrik Lindstrand. *Designs for Learning,* Volume 1Number 1, March 2008. Print

# *Time's Arrow*: A Study in Historiographic Metafiction

**Insha Mattoo**

The postmodern historical novel, adheres to the relativism of contemporary historiography and problematizes the distinction between fiction and history. This kind of postmodern historical novel, Linda Hutcheon terms as Historiographic Metafiction and underscores the intense self-consciousness of these novels while highlighting the paradox created by their merging of metafictional self-reflexivity and historical reality. In the course of her detailed analysis, she insists that historiographic metafiction is not only concerned with the question of the truth-value of objective historical representation but with the issue: 'who controls history?' Thus in historiographic metafiction, the concept that historical "facts" are constructed ideologically is emphasised while bringing to light historical personages and past events which history excludes. Linda Hutcheon points to the silenced histories of marginalized groups which are then given voice by subverting the already accepted interpretation that is forced out of the "centre" to reveal the decentralized histories of the ex-centric "others".

There have been two generations of British historiographic metafictionists. Those novelists whose literary career started in the 60's and 70's include Jim Crace, Maureen Duffy, and John Banville. The other generation belongs to the 80's with writers like Graham Swift, Julian Barnes, Peter Ackroyd and Martin Amis. Martin Amis's postmodernistic assumptions go beyond stylistic and formal characterizations to embody his larger social outlook. The holocaust which Amis presents in his novel *Time's Arrow* depicts one of the faces of Enlightenment, labelled by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a

"reductive form of reason, a discourse that is in itself enslaving" (Quoted in Diedrick 17). Jean Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), pointed to the holocaust as an outcome of the cult of reason and advocated the abandonment of the grand narratives of the enlightenment in favour of postmodern micro-narratives, each of which constructs its own rules as it invents itself.

Recent historical developments have played a pivotal role in shaping the concerns of many postmodern writers like Amis. It is pertinent to talk about three historical conditions that have played a significant role in shaping Amis's postmodern concerns--the possibility of human annihilation that has dominated power relations and political agendas since World War II; the existence of "actual and psychological" fact of nuclear age, the cumulative effects of the Western world's shift from "industrial mechanization to information processing"; and the saturation of Western societies by electronic media, particularly television.

World War II was a global conflict that involved almost every part of the world (including all the great powers) during the years 1939-45. It eventually culminated into two opposite military alliances: the Axis power (that included countries like Japan, Germany and Italy) and the Allies (that included the United States, France, Soviet Union, the Great Britain, and to a lesser extent, China). Germany led by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party was responsible for the holocaust. With the rise of Adolf Hitler to power in 1933, the government passed laws to exclude Jews from civil society. Under the coordination of SS (Schutzstaffel), with directions from the highest leadership of the Nazi party, killings were carried within Germany as well as throughout German

occupied Europe. The killings were also carried across all territories that were controlled by the Axis power.

Amis is a self-consciously postmodern writer and *Time's Arrow* is his boldest novel. It is set within the framework of two major historical events: the holocaust that happened and the nuclear holocaust that looks likely to occur. Amis reverses the chronological time entirely, partially to evoke the progress-denying catastrophe that was the Nazi Holocaust. *Time's Arrow* or *The Nature of the Offence* written in 1991 is an account of the life of the German Holocaust doctor in reverse chronology. The novel relates the story of the Nazi doctor, Odilo Unverdorben, (his actual name) working backwards, and the successive aliases like Hamiliton de Souza in Portugal, John Young in New York and finally, Tod Friendly which he assumes in the course of his escape after the war. Born in 1916 as Odilo Unverdorben, he was raised by his mother, a nurse- who aroused his interest in medicine. After graduating from medical school, he went to Schloss Hartheim. Here the Nazi doctors experimented with various means of medical killings, and it was here Unverdorben helped Schutzstaffel (a major paramilitary organization under Hitler) force Jews into ghettos. In 1942, he moved to Auschwitz, to work under Josef Mengele, also called Uncle Pepi in the book. Here Unverdorben indulged in a number of horrendous experiments like killing inmates with injections of phenol. In 1944, he assisted in mass exterminations by inserting pellets of Zyklon B. Here he indulged in the murder of the Hungarian Jews after which he was forced to play the fugitive to escape prosecution with the advent of the Russian troops. Thus Unverdorben first flew to Vatican, then to Portugal in 1946 where he lived for a short time and took the first of his pseudonyms, Hamiliton de Souza. In 1948, he sailed for America, New York and assumed the

name of John Young and worked in a Manhattan hospital. He works there as a surgeon for some ten years and then again he is forced to flee to New York because of certain allegations against him. He finally works at a Health Maintenance Organization in New England, in a prototypical American suburb exemplifying "America's pretty pluralism." Here he assumes the last of his aliases, Tod Friendly and dies in a car accident, old and remorseful, which is the beginning of book.

The novel deals with the apocalypse, the Holocaust and World War II. Laura Taylor in her article "*Time's Arrow* as a Postmodern Apocalypse: Temporal Ruptures, Perpetual Crisis and the Cultural Imagination" writes: "*Time's Arrow,* set within this historical framework, suggests these holocausts jointly destabilized the directionality and flow of time, trapping post World War Two generations in a perpetual postmodern apocalyptic condition (1)."

Amis in the *Afterword* of his novel acknowledges his debt to Robert. J Lifton whose book *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (1986), chronicled a historical analysis of the crucial role that German doctors played in the Nazi Genocide in the following words:

> Two summers ago I found myself considering the idea of telling the story of a man's life backwards in time. Then, one afternoon, after a typical emotional encounter on the tennis court, Lifton gave me the copy of *The Nazi Doctors*. My novel would not and could not have been written without it (175).

Further Amis in his interview with Eleanor Wachtel, published first in 1996, remarks:

> I was thinking of writing a story of a man's life backwards in time and then I read a book by a friend of mine, Robert J [ay] Li[f]ton's *The Nazi Doctors* (1986)… after a couple of days of reading Li[f]ton's book, I saw in fact I was going to write about [the Holocaust]. I thought if you did this world backwards, there would be a real point- the inversion is so complete. And the inversion Li[f]ton talks about is 'healing- killing paradox. I felt I was in a forest of taboos throughout writing the book. This is the most difficult and sensitive subject ever, I think, but I do believe, as a writer, that there are No Entry signs. People say, legitimately in a way, what am I as an Aryan doing with this subject? But I'm not writing about Jews, I'm writing about perpetrators, and they are my brothers if you like. I feel a kind of responsibility in my Aryaness for what happened. That is my racial link with these events, not with the sufferers but with the perpetrators (Watchel. Personal Interview. 1996).

The novel opens with Tod Friendly on his deathbed, oblivious of what is happening around him while the readers are provided details by someone who lives inside Tod's body-termed as "secondary consciousness" by critics. Through this "secondary consciousness", the readers come to know that Tod is in hospital surrounded by doctors who are discussing Tod's case along with other miscellaneous things. The readers are also made aware of his aversion to doctors through his description and opinion. While Tod appears in the opening of the novel as emerging from death, the narration travels back to his professional life as a Nazi doctor. Tod Friendly has become so alienated from his identity and body that this "secondary consciousness", who is also the first person narrator, partially recognizes himself in the body he occupies. While Lifton's book *The Nazi*

*Doctor's: Medical Killing and Psychology of Genocide* provides the main thematic and formal focus of *Time's Arrow*, one can easily identify the influence of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse- Five*- a fictional representation of the real historical event--the firebombing of Dresden by allied forces. This combination of the historical (Nazi and Holocaust) and literary (*Slaughterhouse-Five*) aligns *Time's Arrow* with historiographic metafiction. This is well substantiated by Hutcheon in the following words:

> Historiographic metafiction is particularly doubled, like this, in its inscribing of both historical and literary intertexts. Its specific and general recollections of the forms and contents of history writing work to familiarize the unfamiliar through (very familiar) narrative structures (as Hayden White has argued ["The Historical Text," 49-50]), but its metafictional self reflexivity works to render problematic any such familiarization. And the reason for the sameness is that both real and imagined worlds come to us through their accounts of them, that is, through their traces, their texts (10).

Commenting on the secondary consciousness who reveals the entire action to the reader from Tod's present situation along with Tod's and his own apprehensions and aversions, Tredall writes:

> A nameless narrator…puzzles over both the movement and nature of time as well as his own nature and identity. Knowing only duration and mistakenly assuming that he has just commenced rather than re-commenced life, the narrator continually misreads signs and misinterprets events including decisive ones as death and birth and essential distinctions such as forwards and backwards (115).

The use of an unreliable narrator to revisit the past as the novel moves backwards, reveals the protagonist's participation in the horror of Auschwitz. The text unites historical material with metafictional parodies and rewrites history. Parodying the historical narrative, the novel attempts to deconstruct the historical discourse with the help of an unreliable narrator and the reader is incited to give his/ her own interpretation of the story. The narrator's mind is depicted as unreliable, his memory is shown as fragmentary making the novel disjunctive. The narrator's account resembles the way memory operates which adds to the fragmentary style of the novel. Amis thus presents a chaotic world; the text remains interspersed with lacunae and there is a sense of alienation which complements the fears of the protagonist.

Confronted with two selves, each of which is in its own form of self- denial, the implied reader is time and again required to supply the truth about the historical events that the protagonist in *Time's Arrow* wants to repress and the narrator misinterprets. The reader in *Time's Arrow* becomes an active participant as s/he tries to trace the various threads of the protagonist's past, making the text metafictional rather than 'realistic'. The unreliable narrator thus serves as a threat against historical objectivity and helps to show history as a construct. To further reject the realistic representation of events, Amis uses the techniques of temporal reverse, backward narration and reverse chronology. These formal characteristics help Amis subvert history. Amis also presents flashbacks to past events, foreshadows events to come, narrates other stories and uses digressions within digressions. Nick Bentley points out:

> One of the effects of the backward narrative is to heighten the tension, as the narrative moves on 'a terrible journey towards a terrible secret'. (TA 12). This can only work because of the adoption of a split between the central character and the narrative voice that seems to be simultaneously inside the character and observing from above (64).

As the novel tracks down Tod Friendly's life backwards, the reader is made to understand the reversed logic of the text even while taking part in the narrator's reconstruction of the protagonist's past. Amis's novel requires its reader to be an active co- creator of meaning rather than a passive consumer. For example, the reader tries creating meaning when the narrator says:

> Watch. We're getting younger. We are. We're getting stronger. We're even getting *taller.* I don't quite recognize this world we're in. Everything is familiar but not all reassuring. Far from it. This is a world of mistakes, of diametrical mistakes. All other people are getting young too, but they don't seem to mind any more than Tod minds (15).

It is evident that Amis in his novel destabilizes the received notions of both history and fiction. He presents a world that is illogically rational and irrationally chronological. Commenting on the narrative world of *Times Arrow*, Maria Alfaro says "The narrative world of *Time's Arrow* breaks the most basic rules of mimesis and constantly calls attention to its own fictionality" (133). *Time's Arrow* turns the theory of mimesis totally upside down. It neither portrays the historical events nor the narrative in a chronological order. The beginning is the end where the protagonist has already died. There is utter chaos as the story follows no logical order and the last part of the novel is

actually the beginning. There is actually no end as the story will begin again with the birth of the narrator. Hence by breaking the world of mimesis, *Time's Arrow* calls attention to its own fictionality. Here, history does not proceed forward but moves backward. For example, the story of the Nazi doctor's life starts from his death and old age and then returns to wartime work in Auschwitz and finally to his birth in Germany. Amis transgresses the very nature of history and enables one to perceive and understand the many layered reality of the past where history writing requires a chronological sequence of events. The narration that Amis presents is far from linear. By allowing for different voices and alternative, plural histories, Amis subverts the historical documents and events that they refer to. *Time's Arrow* shows that historiography not only presents past events but also gives meaning to them and thereby it turns historical events into historical facts. *Time's Arrow* comes across as a double voiced discourse where the dominant voice of history is refracted through subversion and paves the way for other voices that have been suppressed. Through this process, one easily identifies metafictional elements of the text stressing self- reflexivity, non- linear narrative and parodic intention to underscore the refraction and the co- existence of plural voices. Amis is seen using both postmodernist and metafictional elements subversively to challenge the boundaries between story and history and to bring untold stories to the fore.

In Amis's use of history in *Time's Arrow,* the sequence of past, present and future does not make any sense for most part of the novel. As a result one is able to grasp events from different perspectives and in a fragmented way, which poses the postmodernistic distrust of the validity of historical knowledge. Amis's dialogism and fragmentation bring different interpretation to the

events, exposing the limits of history. His narrative disrupts the flow of the historical events. Amis creates new ways of conceptualizing the past and generates alternative forms of writing.

Since Lifton's The *Nazi Doctors* has been a major influence for Amis's *Time Arrow*, therefore the novel presents a world in accordance with what Lifton identifies as the "healing claim" of Nazi regime. Lifton in *The Nazi Doctors* writes about Nazi doctors' practice of *doubling*- which he describes as "the formation of a second, relatively autonomous self, which enables one to participate in evil" (6). This second self, Lifton terms as "Auschwitz self" and says that this in a sense replaces the original self thereby allowing the doctor to convince himself of his own innocence. The chapter, where the protagonist assumes the name of John Young begins with "Because I am a healer, everything I do heals", is paradoxical, because no healing takes place. Amis here applies and fictionalises Lifton's concept of *doubling* and uses this concept, so that John Young convinces himself to be a healer. In this context, Baker makes an apt comment: "the 'healing claim' of the Nazi regime: the 'reversal of healing and killing,' he writes, 'became an organizing principle' of the Nazi doctors. The same reversal is so similarly central to *Time's Arrow* that some of Lifton's descriptions look as though they could be summaries of passages from Amis's novel" (143).

Tod Friendly causes a number of injuries to his patients. Amis reverses the role of doctors as well by showing them inflicting injuries on their patients instead of curing them. For example, the name Tod in German means "Death" and when read in reverse, it means "Friendly Death" and that is what he actually gives to his patients. He, in the name of healing people who are suffering from some

sought of ailment, gives them death and justifies his action by claiming that he is liberating people from pain. This is how he sums up his approach:

> The mothers pay him in antibiotics, which often seem to be the cause of the babies' pain. You have to be cruel to be kind. The babies are no better when they leave, patiently raising hell all the way to door. And the moms crack up completely: they go out of here *wailing*. It's understandable. I understand. I know how people disappear (Amis 41).

Amis does what has been aptly pointed out by Trueheart "the entire medical profession in Germany [went] from healing to killing in the name of healing" (2).

Lifton explains the role of Nazi doctors in his book in the following words:

> [The Nazi doctor] is a recognized healer with special powers; his killing is legitimated by, and at the same time further legitimates, the regimes overall healing-killing reversal. Thus it became quite natural to use a vehicle marked with a red cross transport gas, gassing personnel, and sometimes victims to gas chambers (431).

While Amis in *Time's Arrow* displays the Nazi doctor's lust of wealth, he subverts Lifton's account of history as the latter does not either implicitly or explicitly state any such trait in the doctors. This blurring of fact and fiction through self- reflexivity complicates the veracity of the historical accounts that the novel refers to. Linda Hutcheon states that works which blur the distinction between history and fiction are simultaneously Historiographic (meaning they look critically at the way

histories have been and are written) and metafictional (meaning they openly call attention to their own status as constructed works of fiction). His novel conforms to what Charles Renovier refers to as "Uchronie"- an utopia in the form of alternate versions of the past. Alternate histories can be unfolded from different perspectives within the context of a novel and such type of "Uchronian" fiction may either be set in the past or in the present allowing for different voices and alternative, plural histories. Martin Amis while narrating the holocaust places his novel in the American tabloid culture by associating Nazi Germany with the trash culture of contemporary America making references to "America's pretty pluralism". The narrator in *Time's Arrow* makes the following remarks about Tod: "I'm delighted with the place, because what I'm after, I suppose, is human variety, and America's pretty pluralism and there's even more of that. But Tod is in two minds about it. He's confused. I can tell" (Amis 25).

*Time's Arrow* also conforms with Fredric Jameson's analysis of late modern society's pathological relationship with time and history. The novel corresponds to Jameson's parallel loss of "sense of history" and "the sense of a viable future." Jameson points at the weakening of history "both in our relation to public history" and "in the new forms of our private temporality." In *Time's Arrow* there are many allusions to the weakening and erasing of history. The words of the narrator substantiate this viewpoint:

> And I suppose, in our case, John and I should exchange high-fives in squalid thanks to this human talent for forgetting: forgetting, not as a process of erosion and waste, but as an activity. John forgets. Nurse Davis forgets. The husband,

Dennis, shuddering in the cold on his way to work,
on his way to watch the night, forgets (89).

Again for the first long part of the novel, the story is told in the third person. The narrator who is also labelled by critics as the "alter ego", an "inner voice" or "secondary consciousness," refers to himself as *me* and to the protagonist as *him*. However once the narration reaches Auschwitz the two personas are united and the third person narration changes into the first- person narration, 'I' is now the narrator. The third person narrative with overt first-person intrusion allows for metafictional dislocation. And since one of the assumptions of historiographic metafiction is to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, Amis's narrative technique enables this both thematically and formally.

The Auschwitz section of the novel begins with these words "The world is going to start making sense" (116). These lines are meaningful as it is in this section that readers come to know about the protagonists real identity--that he is a Nazi doctor and his real name is Odilo Unverdorben. Odilo Unverdorben joins Kat-Zet-an abbreviation for Konzentrationlager-the camp where Odilo Unverdorben is working and he becomes an assistant to Dr. Joseph Mengele, known as "Uncle Pepi" at Auschwitz. Uncle Pepi is described by Odilo, as someone with a charismatic personality. He seems to bear some uncanny resemblance to Adolf Hitler. It is pertinent to mention here that in World War II Josef Mengele was a German Schutzstaffel (SS) officer and physician in the Auschwitz concentration camp. He was a member of the team of doctors responsible for performing deadly human experiments on prisoners and for the selection of victims to be killed in the "Gas Chambers." Amis takes the character of Josef Mengele from the dominant

history and incorporates it into *Time's Arrow*. Odilo Unverdorben helps this notorious "Uncle Pepi" in the killing of Jews. Brian Finney argues, "In inverted time this becomes creations of Jews" (55). The Auschwitz section is one of the most important sections of the novel despite the fact that it takes up just twenty pages of the novel. The repercussions of what Odilo Unverdorben did during that time has a radical impact on the rest of the text.

Amis brings back the horrors of the holocaust without surrendering the autonomy of his text as fiction. While working under 'Uncle Pepi', Odilo Unverdorben inflicts unbearable torture on Jews, killing them with injections of phenol. Here *Time's Arrow* comes across as double voiced discourse. The dominant voice of the holocaust history is refracted through subversion to pave way for the voices of Jews that have been suppressed. Amis's rewriting of the past here serves the purpose of Revisionist History that contributes to empowering social minorities. Hence *Time's Arrow* conforms to the postmodern philosophy of history, where history is no longer regarded as monologic, representing the dominant discourse.

The novel ends with the narrator's death and the doctor's birth, suggesting the course of history will start again and unfortunately the other way round. Keulks suggests that Martin Amis rejects a closure because the "narrative of holocaust should never be forgotten but endlessly retold" (online). And this becomes evident when the narrator of *Time's Arrow* talks about the expected rebirth of the protagonist. Amis seems to be suggesting the vicious cycle of history. He does not want his readers to forget history even when the text closes; the reader is caught in the labyrinth of history. Stephen Baker, while commenting on the ending of the novel remarks:

The end of *Time's Arrow* is signalled as a boundary point, a point of disorientation as we move out of the novel's textual world. Keats' final line in 'ode to a Nightingale' - Fled is that music- Do I wake or sleep?- conveys the giddy uncertainty of the speaker's consciousness as poem is bought to a close,. Amis's narrator too is confused as the novel finishes, but his certainty is temporal the arrow of time reverses again as the text slips away and the new form of reality rushes to greet us. (249)

**Works Cited:**


Amis, Martin. *Time's Arrow* or *The Nature of the Offence.* London: Vintage Books, 2003. Print.

Baker, Stephen. *The Fiction of Postmodernity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. Print.

Bentley, Nick. *Martin Amis.* United Kingdom: Northcote House Publishers, 2015. Print.

Diedrick, James. *Understanding Martin Amis* (second edition). U.S.A: University of South Carolina, 2004. Print.

Finney, Brian. *Martin Amis.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008. Print

Horkheimer Max and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* G.C Noerr. Ed. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. California: Stanford University Press, 2002. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism History, Theory Fiction.* London: Routledge, 1988. Print.

_____ "Historiographic Metafiction Parody and the Intertextuality of History." Accessed on November 11, 2017 from http://yunus. hacettepe. edu.tr/~ jason. ward/ ied485britnovel4/LindHutchHistiographicMetafiction.pdf. web

_____. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.

_____. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Canada: Wilfird Laurier University Press, 1980. Print.

Jenkins, Keith. *Rethinking History*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Keulks, Ed. *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Print.

Lifton, J. Robert. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide.* London: Papermac, 1987. Print.

Lyotard, Jean- Francois. *The Postmodern Condition*. Trans. Bennington Geoff and Brain Massumi. United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1984. Print.

M. M. Bakhtin. *The Dialogical Imagination*. Trans. Emerson Caryl and Michael Holquist. U.S.A: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Onega Susan and Jean- Michel Ganteau, ed. *Ethics and Trauma in Contemporary British Fiction*. New York: Rodopi, 2011. Print.

Onega, Susan, ed. *Telling Histories: Narrativizing History, Historicizing Literature*. Netherlands : Atlanta, 1995. Print.

Taylor, Laura. "*Time's Arrow* As a Postmodern Apocalypse: Temporal Ruptures, Perpetual crisis and the cultural imagination." Accessed on November 12, 2017 from http:// www.yorku.ca/etopia/docs/Intersections2009/L_M_ Taylor.pdf. Web

Tredell, Nicolas. *The Fiction of Martin Amis.* United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000. Print.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse- Five.* London: Vintage Books, 1991. Print.

Interview. "Eleanor Wachtel with Martin Amis." The Malahat Review, 114 (1996) : 43-58 http://web.uvic.ca/malahat/issues/featured/issue114.htmlhttps://www.google.co.in/search?q=as+an+empirical+search+for+external+truths.

# Questioning the Archetypes: Exploring Atwood's *Good Bones*

**Shaheena Akhter**

Margaret Eleanor Atwood (b.1939), a pioneer feminist, attempts to focus on the new woman as self-aware and independent, seeking to evolve an identity of her own. In her writings, she systematically the matizes a woman's personal quest for fulfilment as inextricably involved in an individual's collective quest for socio-cultural identity. Atwood developed as a writer during the same time when a growing cultural nationalism developed in Canada and the women's movement expanded in North America. She has often told the story of how her nationalist and feminist consciousness was raised while attending graduate school in the United States in the early 1960's. Thus, years after such an accumulation of experience, she emerged as a fully evolved writer who could represent the Canadian Nationalist experience as well as the Canadian feminist experience. Atwood was well aware of the effort to become a writer and the resistance was similar to many of her contemporaries. With the changing socio-political paradigm, she recalls the advances being made at the time she began her literary career:

> Looking back on … the early and mid-seventies I remember a grand fermentation of ideas, an exuberance in writing, a joy in uncovering taboos and in breaking them, a willingness to explore new channels of thought and feeling. Doon was being opened. Language was being changed. Territory was being claimed. The unsaid was being said. (If You Can't Say Something Nice 20)

Such was the ambience that influenced the development of Atwood as a writer, author of more than thirty books which include novels, poetry and critical essays. In addition to her famous critical works like *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) and *Second Words* (1982), she has written innumerable short stories gathered in various collections. Her short story collection *Dancing Girls* (1997) attracted a positive response, winning The City of Toronto Book Award, The Canadian Booksellers Association Award and The Periodical Distributors of Canada Short Fiction Award. Her collection *Bluebeard's Egg* (1993) explores the question of women's marginal position within the hegemonic discourse. *Wilderness Tips* (1991) is a collection of stories with gothic overtones about women facing middle age mixed with narratives about confrontations with wilderness followed by *Good Bones* (1992) which is about female body parts and social constraints written with a devastating wit. *Moral Disorder* (2006) presents interlinked stories acutely observed, with a sharp wit and a confusing personal arena of respective lives. *Stone Mattress* (2014) are dark and witty tales with characters close to death or dead already or unwittingly doomed. Her short stories expose not only the stereotypical perceptions of women and traditional society's expectations from them but also reveal shifting man-woman relationships. She tries to show how women are trying to redefine themselves; in the process, she tries to establishe the fact that the two sexes are complementary and neither is complete without the other.

As a short story writer Atwood exhibits a tendency to challenge certain traditions while working within them. Her attraction to the oral traditions of fairy tales, legends and folk tales as well as her fascination with such literary traditions as romance includes an acute awareness of the seductive power that these past traditions wield in identity

formation. Her characters' identity is indeterminate and in process, as the mystery of the beginning and end of their being is often the subject matter of these stories. Her stories deal with the themes of self discovery as well as alienation from the self. Just as Nadine Gordimer sees women's identity formation as a fluid and relational process, so are Atwood's stories about women's lives constructed through their conscious awareness of the changing relationships between the writer and readers. This innovative storytelling harks back to and expands on the oral traditions of legend and gossip as ways to make sense of our world.

The primary focus of attention in Atwood's stories is woman- in her all shades- her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of a common run of the middle class woman. In order to defy social conventions, tradition and morality, they somehow transcend these conventions and moral codes and find themselves enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, marital discord and male chauvinism.

*Good Bones* (1992) is a collection of Atwood's short prose pieces. It's packed with a variety of tiny fictions that are funny and verbose by degrees, containing everything from almost- essays to full-on written fairy tales. These stories cover a little bit of everything- fantasy, mystery, science fiction, speculative fiction, feminism, rape-culture, gender wars, dating, death etc. There are strange metaphorical creatures, punch-in-your face narrators, characters from Shakespeare, a smattering of science fiction, aliens and surreal hobbies such as long-hunting. *Good Bones* is like an artist's sketch book of caricature, cartoons,

introductory pieces, trail pieces and quick little exercises attempting to catch the essence of a subject and presenting it in an unusual light. In keeping with these themes her style also fluctuates between frivolous amusement and high seriousness. Here, her short pieces occupy the vague intersection between prose and poetry. They appear like tiny stories, but like poems, they dive quickly into the heart of the things for smuggling subversive messages beyond the limits of conventional thought. Free from the structural demands of novels, short stories and poetry, Atwood infuses these bracing little narratives with the full force of her sass and humor.

The collection explores the sinister side of classical myths, traditional Anglo-European folklore and literary archetypes. Through the stories, Atwood gives voice to the "bad girls": the stupid, ugly or wicked stepmothers and stepsisters who feature as antagonists in the archetypes she explores. For example, 'The Little Red Hen', the stepsisters from 'Cinderella', and Gertrude from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* have their say. Ultimately, these stories explore the danger of life (which inevitably ends in death) and the power of telling one's own story. Atwood has never forgotten the lessons of girlhood and she continues to question the assumptions about gender roles, listing our shaking sense of progress towards equality. Her fascination with women's role in life and literature leads her to muse on the necessity of 'stupid women' in stories, to compare men's novels with women's novels, and to revisit old tales as "Bluebeard" and "The Little Red Hen". In "Making a Man" and "Simmering" men take quite a beating; at one point, she declares,

> …men are made of dust, women are made of ribs…men made this way are apt to take off down the road, on motorcycles or off them, robbing convenience stores, getting themselves tattooed, and hoping up and down and singing, 'Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man!' attaching a string to his leg before the oven procedure may help- alas- in our experience, not for long.
> (*Good Bones* 48-49)

Again she says, 'men's bodies are the most dangerous things on earth. After further reflections on sex, gender-war and relationship and a satire about applying politically correct standards to literature, Atwood moves on to devastating views of our species and our future. These marvelously incendiary creations are like sparks thrown off from Atwood's longer works, crackly and popping brightly against the night sky, making us laugh and shiver.

Atwood is very critical of "the typical female image of nourishment and generosity"(Nischik 64) as seen in her short satirical piece "The Little Red Hen Tells All". It is a funny version of the old folktale, narrated by the hen where Atwood parodies the capitalist ethos of production and individual hard work together with its implicit expectations of feminine altruism. The little red hen tells us about her decision to behave like a good hen, "not a rooster" and offer her loaf of bread-the product of her own hard work-to all the other animals: "Have some more. Have mine" (Good Bones 8), criticizing women's traditional role of baking and serving leading to oppressive gendered assumptions and its effects on the subordination of women:

> Here, I said . I apologize for having the idea in the first place, I apologize for luck. I apologize for self-denial. I apologize for being a good cook. I apologize for that crack about nuns. I apologize for that crack about roosters. I apologize for smiling, in my smug hen apron, with my smug hen beak. I apologize for being a hen. (Good Bones 8)

Thus, the twenty five entries in the disguise of short stories offer a whimsical, sometimes sardonic view of the injustices of life and the battle of the sexes. Such updated fairy tales as "The Little Red Hen" (she is the victim of male chauvinism) and "Making a Man" (The Gingerbread Man is a prototype) are seen with a cynical eye and told in a pungent vernacular. "Gertrude Talks Back" is a monologue by Hamlet's mother, "a randy woman ready to roll in the hay, who is exasperated with her whiny, censorious teenage son" (*Publishers Weekly* 2001). Several stories attempt to characterize women with demoniac intentions- witches, wicked goddesses etc. Commenting on such representations of women, Sharon Rose Wilson remarks:

> The depth of her engagement with the questions of survival concerning women, oppressed peoples, and their stories is clearly foregrounded by the essays; critical limning of her textual assassinations in the name of the social empowerment and justice. The meta-narrative cleverness of the engagement is assuming a different value in Atwood's work and potentially bringing about another transformation, an emotionally enriching exploration of *Good Bones* and their tricks. (27)

Thus, this collection becomes an important site of inquiry into the Atwoodian shifting but continuous reliance on the figure of the trickster in her writing. Wilson further

argues that "despite the (survival themes) subversions, in *Good Bones* Atwood's tricksters are often ironic cultural heroes in tales that together, are about saving, transforming global human culture" (27)

Hence, this collection attempts assassinations of traditional genres, plots, narrative voices, structure, technique and reader expectations. One such assassination is in the form of "The Female Body" where Atwood explores how both women and men perceive the female body. She starts off by describing how her own body looks and feels, but does this in an indirect way by referring to her body as a topic, "…it's a hot topic. But only one?" (*Good Bones* 33). She describes what type of accessories can come along with the female body:

> The basic Female Body comes with the following accessories: garter-belt, panty-girdle, crinoline, camisole, bustle, brassiere, stomacher, virgin zone, spike heels, nose-ring, veil, kid gloves, fishnet stockings, fichu, bandeau, Merry widow, weepers, chokers, barrettes, bangles, beads, lorgnette, feather boa, basic black, compact, lycra stretch one-piece with modesty panel, designer peignoir, flannel nightie, lace teddy, bed, head. (*Good Bones* 34)

It is usually a body constructed for the others and is forever watched, gazed and ravaged by others. In the process of trying to know and conceptualize the 'woman' she becomes reduced to an object which entails a loss of identity and individuality. In the third section, she refers to the female body as a toy which includes a variety of parts that are color coded and "The Reproductive System is optional and can be removed. It comes with or without embryo. Parental judgment can thereby be exercised. We do not wish to frighten or offend" (*Good Bones*: 35) Atwood goes

on to illustrate that female dolls have a negative influence on children. Dolls bodies are portrayed an ideal image for every women. These dolls with large plastic breasts and tiny waists are far from the real norm of female body shape, "if a real woman was built like that she'd fall on her face" (*Good Bones* 36). This psychological angle, Kathy Myres regards as 'Freud's concept of sexual fetishism'- the idea the objects or the parts of the anatomy are used as symbols for and replacements of the socially valued phalluses. Due to this problem "men have difficulty in coping with men's sexuality because of its castrating potential and because of its lack of phallus." She further points out that men in order to overcome this handicap, "fetish aspects of female sexuality- for example the legs or breasts- as symbols of acceptable power." (273)

Thus, the underlying objective here seems to make people realize how they view the female body and what it actually represents. She confronts this bias by presenting different points of view of members of a family. The family has a daughter and we hear opinions of mother and father with regard to their daughter and her learning about the female body. The husband states the uses of the female body:

> It sells cars, beer, shaving lotion, cigarettes, hard liquor; it sells diet plans and diamonds, and desire in tiny crystal bottles. Is this the face that launched a thousand products?... It does not sell, it is sold. Money flows into this country or that country, flies in, practically crawls in, suitful after suitful, lured by all those hairless pre-teen legs. (*Good Bones* 37)

The example also illustrates how the female figure helps to sell products and in the process is sold as a product.

Atwood further says, "Each female body contains a female brain. Handy. Makes things work." (*Good Bones* 38) This perception sarcastically describes women as being simple, and slow, air heads: the final example wraps up with, "then it comes to him: he's lost the Female Body! Look, it shines in the gloom, far ahead, a vision of wholeness, ripeness, like a giant melon, like an apple, like a metaphor for breast in a bad sex novel" (*Good Bones* 40). This example boldly illustrates the female body perceived like a ripe piece of fruit or a piece of meat. Throughout, the female body is referred to as a symbol of sex and how this is often viewed as 'normal' in the society. It is imperative to underscore how Atwood offers parodic images of a seductive plot and the feminine principle. As a woman writer, Atwood has always been intensely aware of the significance of representations of the female body both in terms of a woman's self definition and as a fantasy object. In *Conversations* she argues:

> The body as a concept has always been a concern of mine… I think that people very much experience themselves as through their bodies and through concepts of the body which get applied to their own bodies, which they pick up from their culture and apply to their own. (Conversations 187)

Thus, the female body represents servitude and victimization and imprisonment- 'otherness' as defined by men. The body becomes a battlefield of violence and it is made 'dazzling' for females themselves so that they will accept violence unquestioningly.

Margaret Atwood's 1994 sketch "Unpopular Gals" is another example of her artistic dimension which is narrated by a type (an ugly stepsister). In this story, three marginalized women-stereotypical characters reveal their

true thoughts and feelings: the ugly stepsister, the witch in the woods, the wicked girl is a fairy tale villain, albeit one who speaks in a late twentieth century idiom, "I haven't even been given a name; I was always just *the ugly sister*, put the stress on *ugly*" (*Good Bones* 19-20) In the fairy tale world, we know she's an archetype, the bad news. But Atwood whistling a Blakein tune shows that even scaly villains are born innocent. Her narrator is not a nasty girl who happens to be ugly; she is nasty because she has been declared ugly. Society has treated her as badly as it often treats those with a different complexion, "Not like her (the cute-half sisters), the one who merely had to sit there to be adored." (*Good Bones* 20), the step sisters' eventual response is to do mean things: "You wonder why I stabbed the blue eyes of my dolls with pins and pulled their hair out until they were bald? Life isn't fair. Why should I be?" (*Good Bones* 20). Sometimes people are made victims, which is great for fairy tales plots and action. "I stir things up," writes Atwood, "I get things moving. Go play in the traffic, I say to them. 'Put on this paper dress and look for strawberries in the snow'. It's perverse, but it works. All they have to do is smile" (*Good Bones* 23). Again she contends the social standards for the 'beautiful' girls and the resultant expectations from them:

> The thing about those good daughters is they're so good. Obedient and passive. Sniveling, I might add. No-get-up-and-go. What would become of them if it weren't for me? Nothing, that's what. All they'd ever do is the housework, which seems to feature largely in these stories. They'd marry some peasant. Have seventeen kids, and get 'A dutiful wife' engraved on their tombstones, if any. Big deal. (*Good Bones* 20)

As against this type of socially constricted mentality, the agony of the ugly sister not only spells her inner trauma

but also paradigmatically indicates the larger predicament of women. As a result of conspiring circumstances and behavior of mothers, she stops to dream of a happy life for herself;

> I haven't even been given a name; I was always just *the ugly sister*, put the stress on *ugly*. The one the other mothers looked at, then looked away from and shook their head gently. Their voices lowered or ceased altogether when I came into the room, in my pretty dresses, my face leaden and scowling. They tried to think of something to say that would redeem the situation- *Well, she's certainly strong*- but they knew it was useless. So did I. (*Good Bones* 19-20)

She suffers even at the referential dictums, "I hardly know how to say I, or *mine*; I've been *she, her, that one*, for so long" (*Good Bones* 19). "Life isn't fair." (*Good Bones* 20) and the result of such humiliation is:

> I didn't hate their pity, their forced kindness? And knowing that no matter what I did, how virtuous I was, or hardworking. I would never be beautiful. Not like her, the one who merely had to sit there to be adored. You wonder why I stabbed the blue eyes of my dolls with pins and pulled their hair out until they were bald? Life isn't fair. Why should I be? (*Good Bones* 20)

Even her destined fretful fate is furthered by the submissive and alienated feelings and cravings that she shares with other girls. One is wonderstruck by the representation of such feelings:

> As for the prince, you think I didn't love him? I loved him more than she did; I loved him more

> than anything. Enough to cut off my foot. Enough to murder. Of course I disguised myself in heavy veils, to take her place at the altar. Of course I threw her out the window and pulled the sheets up over my head and pretended to be her. Who wouldn't, in my position? (*Good Bones* 20)

It is a delightful monologue that presents an enchanting twist in the story by presenting the inner thought processes of the socially other whose otherness is a curse. Finally, the ugly sister gets her turn to speak in the first person rather than being side-lined in the third person as an anonymous plot device.

> You can wipe your feet on me, twist my motives around all you like, you can dump millstones on my head and drown me in the river, but you can't get me out of the story. I'm the plot, babe, and don't ever forget it. (*Good Bones* 24)

Thus, in *Good Bones* "Atwood exposes with penetrating insight the often gender-linked conventions and psychological, linguistic and mythological structures embedded in daily reality" (Nischik 92). Another story from the same collection, "Making a Man" presents a different idea of giving vent to women's hurt as Atwood here suggests different methods of making one's man according to one's demands along with various methods:

> This month we'll take a break from crocheted string bikinis and leftovers Rechaufees to give our readers some tips on how to create, in their very own kitchens and rumpus rooms, an item that is both practical and decorative. (*Good Bones* 47)

The story is Atwood's imaginative response cast as comic social satire in vividly metaphorical language. Atwood effectively makes use of fantasy while delineating the predicament of a young woman who attempts to rebel against her womanly destiny and expect an exchange of roles with her partner. Under a comic mask, Atwood explores the relation between consumerism and the feminine mystique where one young woman's resistance to consuming and being consumed hints at a wider condition of a social malaise which the new feminist movement was beginning to address.

In "Making a Man", Atwood uses parody to make it complex, as she suggests some five methods to make a man: "it's nice to have one of these around the house, either out in the lawn looking busy, or propped in a chair, prone or erect" (Good Bones 47) In one of these methods called 'Gingerbread Method' Atwood suggests, "Any good rolled cookie recipe will do " (Good Bones 20). and,

> Once your man has come out of your oven, you may have trouble hanging on to him. Men made this way are apt to take off down the road, on motorcycles or off them, robbing convenience stores, getting themselves tattooed, hopping up and down and singing, 'Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man!' Attaching a string to his leg before the oven procedure may help, but-alas- in our experience, not for long. (*Good Bones* 20)

In this story Atwood:

…facetiously mimics the style of women's magazine: taking the anti-essentialist constructedness of gender images at face value. Atwood inverts the traditional commodification of women and

applies a hilarious "recipe" of "making a man"- which in turn makes the reader laugh and question biased constrictions of gender images. (Nischik 8)

**Works Cited**


Atwood, Margaret. *Good Bones*. Great Britain: Virago Press, 1993. Print.

..... *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.

..... Conversation. ed. Earl G Ingersoll. London: Virago, 1992. Print.

..... "if You Can't Say Something Nice, Don't Say Anything At All." *Language in Her Eyes: Writing and Gender*. Ed Libby Scheier, Sarah Sheard, and Eleanor Watchel. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990. Print

Deshpande, Shahi. *Collected Stories*. Voume 2. India: Penguin, 1982. Print

Myres, Kathy. "Towards a Feminist Eroticaa", *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Text Reader*. eds. Gail Dines and Jean M. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995. Print.

Nischik, Reigard M. *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood*. University of Ottawa: Ottawa Press, 2009. Print.

Sharon Rose Wilson, *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations: Recent Poetry and Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003. Print.

# Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: Hybrid and in-between Spaces

Sayantina Dutta

White racial superiority over non-white nations has conceived a sense of division and alienation in the self-identity of the non-white colonized people. The history, culture, language, customs and beliefs of the white colonizers are inflicted on the colonized; they hereafter all consider themselves as universal and superior to indigenous cultures. This creates a strong sense of inferiority in the colonized subject and leads to an imitation of the language, culture and customs of the colonizers by the colonized as a way of compensating for these feelings of inferiority in their self-identity. This creates a divided sense of self in the subject formation of the colonized. This article explores how the novel *The God of Small Things* delineates a sense of cultural inferiority, trauma and the confusion of identity experienced by the people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations.

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy tells the story of a Syrian Christian family in the southern province of Kerala in India. Roy constructs her narration moving backwards from present-day India to the fateful drowning of the little girl Sophie Mol that occurred twenty three years earlier, in 1969. With flashbacks from the present to the past, Roy weaves her plot with an increasing suspense till the end of the novel. The narrative is told mainly from the point of view of the two fraternal twin protagonists, Rahel and Estha. It begins with Rahel returning to her childhood home in Ayemenem, India, to see her twin brother Estha, who has been sent to Ayemenem by their father. The twins portrayed in the novel are often found speaking Malayalam and English. Their world itself is plotted by a whole range of

western references. Rahel expresses her love for her mother Ammu by quoting Kipling's *Jungle Book*:

> "We be of one blood, ye and I" ( *The God of Small Things* 329).

Estha is also an ardent fan of Elvis Presley. The siblings Rahel and Estha suffer due to the great admiration of their family for English language and culture; as children they are forced to neglect their own language and "had to sing in English in obedient voices" (*The God* 154). Baby Kochamma, the twins' aunt, corrects Estha when he makes a mistake in pronouncing an expression where he says 'Thang God'. For Rahel and Estha speaking in English is a kind of obligation. They have been deprived of their own history, culture, values and language for many years by the colonizers from which they cannot totally escape. They identify themselves with things and people, which are alien to them. It is like forging a new identity; a new English identity. The twins aunt always forces them to talk in English. Roy narrates this situation:

> That whole week Baby Kochamma eavesdropped relentlessly on the twins' private conversations, and whenever she caught them speaking in Malayam, she levied a small fine which was deducted at source. From their pocket money. She made them write lines –'impositions' she called them - I will always speak in English, I will always speak in English. A hundred times each. When they were done, she scored them with her pen to make sure that old lines were not recycled for new punishments.
>
> She had made them practice an English car song for the way back. They had to form the words properly, and be particularly careful about their production. (*The God* 36)

The important fact here is that the contamination of the colonized is not their admiration for the English or their

efforts to imitate them, but their inability to belong to neither the culture of the colonized nor that of the colonizer. By imitating the culture of the colonizer, the colonized is alienated from their own culture and at the same time the skin colour and national origin of the colonized estranges them from the English culture. They, therefore, gain a hybrid identity, a mix between native and colonial identity, neither fully one nor the other. Bill Ashcroft observes: [...] the cross-breeding of the two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species (96). This ambivalent cultural identity does not belong definitely to the world of either the colonizer or the colonized. It is considered as an 'other' from both the cultural identities. This mixed identity of hybridity, has been recently associated with the work of Homi Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer or colonized stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivity. Bhabha is if the opinion that all the cultural statements and systems are structured in a space that he 'names, the third space of the enunciation' (37).

The author presents the twin protagonists Rahel and Estha as two hybrid characters. However hard the twins try not to imitate English values and language, they cannot escape from feeling inferior when they compare themselves to their half English cousin, Sophie Mol. When Sophie Mol, comes down from London, Mammachi is extremely apprehensive about her grandchildren's ability to speak English fluently. Sophie is presented to them as an ideal. She is constantly compared to Rahel and Estha, leaving them depressed and embittered.

Sophie Mol is loved from the beginning even before she arrives and when she died the loss of Sophie Mol became more important than her memory (*The God* 186).

Hybridity occurs in postcolonial societies as a result of conscious movements of cultural suppression. Frantz Fanon talks about such a divided sense of the self in his *Black Skin, White Masks*. He says:

> As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro. There are two ways out of this conflict. Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it. (197)

Skin colour and race are seen to create a very different sort of power structure. White skin is an ideal of beauty which leaves anyone with dark skin in a lower bracket. Sophie Mol is described as one of the "little angles" who "were peach-colored and wore bell bottoms", while Rahel and Estha are depicted as evil. The narrator writes:

> Littledemons were mudbrown in Airport fairy frocks with forehead bumps that might turn into horns with fountains in love-in-Tokyos. And backword-reading habits. And if you cared to look, you could see Satan in their eyes. (*The God* 179)

This exaggerated glorification of the west is peculiar of the entire family's behaviour especially in Baby Kochamma. The sense of inferiority at being Indian makes her speak with an artificial accent and ask Sophie Mol questions on Shakespeare's *Tempest*. This she does in order to establish her credentials to Margaret Kochamma, Chacko's English wife. This reveals that the colonized people even after independence, could not acknowledge the importance of their identity and felt embarrassed about their culture and past. Having been neglected for a long time, and tolerating suffering for decades, they began to imitate the colonizer. In *The God of Small Things*, Chacko Kochamma, the uncle of the twins, describes the colonized people as "prisoners of war", as a result of which their "dreams have

been doctored" and they "belong nowhere". According to him, it is a kind of war that has occupied their minds that they "have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made them adore their captures and despise themselves" (53).

In his book *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon argues that:

> [...]the challenging of the very principle of foreign domination brings about essential mutations in the consciousness of the colonized, in the manner in which he perceives the colonizer, in his human status in the world (69).

Seeing themselves inferior, the colonized people recognize that the only way to make their situation better is to become similar to the colonizer, and thus, they try to imitate the colonizers' ideas, values and practices. They appreciate and value the colonizers' way of living and try to imitate their culture in view of not having one of their own. The novelist narrates Chacko's thoughts:

> Chacko told the twins though he hated to admit it, they were all anglophile. They were a family of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away. He explained to them that history was like an old house at night. With all the lamps lit. And ancestors whispering inside. 'To understand history, Chacko said, 'we have to go inside and listen to what they're saying. And look at the books and the pictures on the wall. And smell the smells' (*The God* 52).

The author clearly illustrates how the colonized people appreciate English culture and their considerable effort to become like them by way of imitation. In the novel, their behaviour is entirely different towards the half English

Chacko's daughter, Sophie Mol and her Indian twin cousins, Rahel and Estha. When Chacko's half English daughter Sophie and her mother Margaret come to India, everybody in the family impatiently wait for their arrival. Sophie Mol's half English identity is important both for the members of the family and for the people outside. The importance of a British cousin can be detected in the conversation of a man from the neighbourhood:

The twins squatted on their haunches, like professional adults gossip in the Ayemenem market. They sat in silence for a while. Kuttappen mortified, the twins preoccupied with boat thought.

> 'Has Chacko Saar's Mol come?' Kuttappen asked.
> 'Must have', Rahel said laconically. 'Where is she?'
> 'Who knows? Must be around somewhere. We don't know.' 'Will you bring her here for me to see?'
> 'Can't', 'Rahel said. 'Why not?'
> 'She has to stay indoors. She's very delicate. If she gets dirty she'll die.' (The God, 209 210)

The power structure is carefully delineated in the novel. Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, the policemen stand aloof within their realms of power and they see to it that the transgressors- Ammu, Velutha, Rahel and Estha, who hold no power in the social hierarchies, remain vulnerable and therefore, overruled. It can be noted that the characters in the novel, although they have adopted the Western ways to suit their needs, remain stubbornly centred onto the power structures their tradition had bestowed upon them. Pappachi, Estha and Rahel's grandfather, is the British entomologist who is hailed as a British gentleman in the whole of Ayemenem. Even after his retirement, he refuses to

go around in Indian clothes and follows Western suiting. Pappachi always tries to imitate the English way of clothing:

> [...] until the day he died, even in the stifling Ayemenem heat, every single day, Pappachi wore a well prepared three-piece suit and his gold pocket watch
> (*The God* 49)

He drives a Plymouth and smoke a cigar. Although Pappachi tries to appear as a representative of a civilized nation, he cannot overcome his other identity which makes him beat his wife, "with a brass flower vase" every night; he also "broke the bow of her violin and threw it in the river" (48). Despite Pappachi's adulation towards English culture and his endeavour to be similar to them, he does it just in appearance, not in his manner or in his way of thinking and attitudes. He also refuses to let Ammu continue with a college education. He "insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl" (38). Ammu was forced to return home to Ayemenem.

The situation is the same for Chacko, Pappachi's son, because he also suffers from the hybridization process in terms of not belonging to either the culture of the colonized or that of the colonizer. Chacko, like his father's admiration for the English way of clothing, appreciates the manners and attitudes an English woman possesses. The narrator portrays Chacko's approbation of his English wife:

> As for Chacko, Margaret Kochamma was the first female friend he had ever had. Not just the first woman that he had slept with, but his first real companion. What Chacko loved most about her was her self-sufficiency. Perhaps it wasn't remarkable in the average English women, but it was remarkable to Chacko.
>
> He loved the fact that Margaret Kochamma didn't cling to him that she was uncertain about her feeling for him. That he

never know till the last day whether or not she would marry him. 'He loved the way she wobbled to work every morning on her bicycle [...] He encouraged their differences in opinion, and inwardly rejoiced at her occasional outburst of exasperation at his decadence.

He was grateful to his wife for not wanting to look after him. For not offering to tidy his room. For not being cloying mother. He grew to depend on Margaret Kochamma for not depending on him. He adored her for not adoring him (*The God* 245-246).

This is a kind of marvelling at the enigma of something superior and alien while looking down on Indian women.

Although Chacko and Pappachi do their best to look like the colonizer both in manner and attitudes, they become victims of interaction with the colonizers' culture that is regarded as superior. Despite their endeavour to imitate the colonizer, considering their behaviour throughout the novel, it is impossible for them to escape their own identity, being Indian in blood, not English.

Europeans because of colonialism made their way to non-European countries and came in contact with the non-European landscape and nation. Their Eurocentrism made them see themselves as superior and the colonized and their land as inferior and uncivilized. To conquer, to subjugate, to occupy and to dominate are all intrinsic to the imperialist project. In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the English figure as typical colonizer in the form of Mr. Hollick and as liberated de-colonizers in Father Mulligan who is a spiritually elevated man. Ammu's husband, Babu, almost lost his job due to excessive alcoholism and he requests his "superior" Mr. Hollick (Babu's boss at the Assam tea estate)

not to sack him. To which Hollick says "well actually there may be an option… perhaps we could work something out…you are a very lucky man-wonderful family, beautiful children, an extremely attractive wife" (41). He shamefully suggests that Ammu should to be sent to his Bungalow to be "looked after" (42). The British act as instruments of imperial oppression trying to crush down the colonized. Characters like Hollick symbolize the cruelty and carnality of the superior planter class. They offer a glaring contrast to the impoverished labour class. In the novel Father Mulligan is a liberated soul. He is not a dark figure of villainy and crime. He is a priest in Ayemenem and later he relinquishes Christianity and converts to Hinduism and becomes an ardent follower of Lord Vishnu. Despite the knowledge of Baby Kochamma's (Ammu's aunt) staunch affection for him, he never takes advantage of her and remains on friendly terms with her until his death.

Roy's story revolves around the events surrounding the visit by Sophie Mol, Chacko's daughter and his ex-wife Margaret and the drowning of Sophie two weeks after their arrival, leaving behind a disintegrated family. As Sophie's mothers friend's have estimated, the most horrifying incident she might experience in her life happens, and "green weed and river grime were woven into …beautiful redbrown hair" of her daughter, and her child's eyelids were "nibbled at by fish" (*The God* 251). Margaret never forgives herself for not listening to her friends, and taking Sophie to India but she understands her mistake much later after losing her daughter in India. Sophie Mole's drowning is a metaphoric sign of the hegemony of the East over the European, which has the power to swallow up the colonizers easily. This is also the power of the wilderness and primitiveness of the East that the colonial elements always fear.

Thus we see that the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized people begets not only the suffering of the colonizer but also that of the colonized. They, even after attaining their sovereignty, feel upset and anxious about the inferiority of their own culture when compared to that of the colonizer.

**Works Cited**


Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Falmingo: London, 1997. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *Post-Colonial Studies*: The Key Concepts, Routledge: New York, 2000. Print.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Frantz, Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks.* Charles Lam Markmann (trans.). Pluto Press: United Kingdom, 1986. Print.

…….. *A Dying Colonialism* Haakon Chevalier (trans.) Grove Press: New York, 1967. Print.

# Creative Pieces

# Poems

## "Invisible Mercy"

**Aaliya Mushtaq Baba**

An evening dim and pale,
Impatient to meet the morn,
Rushes into the dark night.

Solitude nourishes wisdom in a cell,
Oblivious to compassion and hatred,
Bring this line here
That has imprisoned it.

Prayer rugs are scattered on the streets
Perhaps we have nothing to ask of God.

For He shouldn't have given us eyes
Knowing our obstinacy not to believe
What we can't see.

## "A Tale"

To write one fictional tale,
How many gorges did you cross in your mind's eye?
In enacting now what has been written...
I imagine you writing me
And I wonder if you felt eerie
When writing a life that feels too much!

## “Infinite Soul”

Scattered within lie the splinters
Of my unsealed, broken heart.
Each set of frozen desires
Has formed constellations,
Making this
Into one galaxy!

Memory leaves intense footprints,
In deftly carved patterns
That shine brighter than fire.

I crave for the thunder
And the dark
And some rain
To pierce the hard shields of pain,
To calm the madness
Of my infinite soul.

**Abid Ahmad**

**"For a Stranger"**

I shrink from you
as much as from myself
not out of fear
but out of that eternal craving for complement
that draws me
to you.

The echo of your silence
rings in my heart
resonates in my soul
I feel my heart
throbbing fast
as my breath ebbs down.

After you are gone
in lonesome wilderness
I paint your sketch
On the firmament of void
with colours of love
drawn from a
hazy horizon
a foggy mind
and the mischief of your eyes.

**"Loss"**

Those who lost
have found
an eternal pain
of estrangement.

**“A Poem”**

Unheeded I lie
Neglect is my mate
to console me
in my loneliest solitude
while I have a multitude around.

**Consummation**

I hold myself forth
In total abandon
To seek something from you.

To find your self shut
I retreat
and whirl around my self
Within the secret chamber of desire.

Again I hold my self forth
In total abandon
To seek something from you.
But before I withdraw now
I open my eyes to realise
That it was but a dream.

# Translations

# “The Shadow of Silence”

Shabir Magami

When the day kisses and caresses the dark
And Time takes flight to the world of stars,
Exactly at that moment a thought is born
And perception begins to take shape.
The candle lights up behind the closed vaults of eyes,
A flame flickers, and adorns its fire,
The shadow of silence circles round each moment of Time
Circumambulating it,
The darkness of the night spreads thick
Like a serpent coiled around itself.
But the first smile of dawn
Sees the flame part from the lamp,
Someone tugs at the hem of the wind, waking the whirls up
The sky changes hue.
Returning from some unknown country
The sun again lights its hearth,
And stokes the fire.
Flocks of birds chirp and sing,
Revealing things untold and unknown.
Would that our faculties go up the ladder of their secrets
And resolve the mystery
Whether the day is born of night
Or the night mothers the day.

**Translated from the Kashmiri by Ishrat Bashir**

# “Our Love”

Shabir Magami

Our love is a tale of yore.
The vagrant Moon
Alone in the silence of the dark night
Hangs quietly from the sky.
Our bodies and souls like broken stars,
Fallen off some celestial sphere,
Are scattered over the sands of the Earth.
No longer do the birds of dream and desire
Stay put in the wetlands of our eyes.
The pigeon that was sent with the message
Never returned.
Our love is like two streams, flowing along different routes
And losing themselves in one river.
Unmindful of the banks the river flows
Into the ocean and is lost forever.
Two hearts apart in separate bosoms
Simmer in their pain.
Two broken boats, anxious and restless
Sailing across the same shore, return
Run-down and burnt out
To sleep on their own banks.

**Translated from the Kashmiri by Ishrat Bashir**

# “A Whistle”

**Dr Ali Shariti**

I wonder, what happens after my death?
What shape the potter moulds
the clay of my bones?
I urge not.
But I wish
That he moulds the clay of my throat into a whistle.
My throat be a whistle,
In the hands of a brazen and wanton boy,
Who
Every now and then, over and over
Blows the whistle,
To wake people from deep slumber:
And thus breaks the hush,
The silence induced by Death . . .

**Translated from the Persian by Master Showkat Ali**

# "Education"

**Shahzoor Kashmiri**

The counsel of the eye, ear and the impatient heart,
In the language of colorful Nature- this is education.
Under its decree is the hexa-dimensional cosmos,
Under its eternal power are the seven continents.
And its constructs are the mind, thought and conscience
By its fire kindles the lamp of sound intellect.
With this key the door of Nature's mysteries
Opens for all
The intellect's supremacy is its clear grace,
And its want is the wont of submission in you.
For your knowledge is mere information,
For the primordial condition is – effort and vision.
Your garden is no different from a desert,
It has neither green, nor dew, nor bud nor morning breeze.
One knowledge bends double the back of slaves,
And another makes serve the crowns and counsels.
On the shore you are engaged in futile fathoming.
For the priceless pearl falls in the hands of the diver.
By God, bereft of the light of wisdom,
Is this monastery, this school and this academy of the sage.

**Translated from the Urdu by Master Showkat Ali**

## Snippets from Akhter Mohiuddin

### Jalli's Teeth

Jalli, the eldest daughter of Rasul the donkey-wallah, had passed the examination for the degree of law after her graduation. From the door of their dilapidated house hung a board "*Jaleela Rasool: BA LLB*". For Rasul, the donkey-wallah, this board was like a glittering star on his forehead.

Curfew had been imposed that day. There were soldiers everywhere. Jalli stepped out of the door and said to a soldier,

> "Brother, my father has to go across the road. Can he go? He will come back soon."

The army officer sized up Rasul the donkey-wallah from head to toe. Partly touched by Jalli's beauty and partly by Rasul the donkey-wallah's age, he said, "Yes, Uncle…. you may go." Rasul the donkey-wallah went across the road while Jalli headed back, her face beaming. She glanced at the board hanging at the entrance. Almost an hour by someone shouted, "You, old man, come here." Then there were painful cries. Jalli instantly came out and saw a soldier ruthlessly beating Rasul the donkey-wallah. She rushed forth and held her father by the arm.

"Why do you beat my father? Your officer had allowed him to go across", she said to the soldier angrily.

"Hey, you… Shut up and get lost." The soldier barked scornfully.

Jalli was enraged. She stamped her foot on the ground with force and said, "You shut up…. don't you have parents of your own?" It was as if the heavens had fallen. Jalli staggered and fell down. The bones of her chest, shoulder and chin.

Next day when the curfew was lifted, Rasul the donkey-wallah was looking for something on the road. He was muttering to himself: "Jalli's teeth, pearly teeth…. They must have fallen somewhere here."

**Atank Vaadi**

A patrol party came from the opposite direction, Mother walked down the alley; Shafiq, her young son, suddenly started crying. He clutched at his mother's hem, crying relentlessly. His mother sometimes beat him and sometimes cajoled him into silence.

The army officer, thinking that the child was scared of the soldiers, said to him in a soft tone, "Don't be scared, child."

"Oh, no… he is not scared… he is asking for a gun. He asks for one whenever he sees the military men," the mother replied in broken, clumsy urdu.

"Terrorist!" the officer muttered, grinding his teeth.

**The New Disease**

I said, "He has gone mad… whenever he reaches home, he never goes in … but stands outside the door for hours as if waiting for something… finally he returns instead of entering".

"But he has improved now… since the time he was shown to the doctor, he has improved a lot," he replied.

"What did the doctor say?" I asked.

He recommended frisking him at the door of his house…. We were to see his reaction…. They did the same and the trick worked. "The doctor further said that ever since we began to be frisked at our doorsteps, a lot of people have been afflicted by this disease.. . . in fact some people frisk themselves before entering".

**Election (Kashmir style)**

It was already decided who would win and who would lose but to orchestrate the drama was mandatory. That is why on the voting day, a procession of green flag holders came out from our locality. They included a dozen young kids, half a dozen teens and a few adults, one of whom sported a grey beard. When they got near our house, they hurled stones at the *Kachers*_the neighbours facing us. The *Kachers* closed the doors and windows of their house and did not even let out a sigh.

The next day, the red flag holders were declared winners. Fire crackers were burst the whole night and, by morning Haji Saheb had hoisted three red flags on his house, all well-decorated.

In the evening, the red flag holders too brought out a procession which was welcomed by Haji Saheb near our house. The processionists were the same kids, a dozen teens and a few adults, one of them with a grey beard. Gesturing to his left, he said, "And these *Dars*…. They may be rich … but just yesterday they were misguiding the kids, making them throw stone at the *Kachers*." Hearing this, the enraged crowd bayed and threw stones at the *Dars* the way they had thrown at the *Kachers* earlier. All their window panes were

broken into pieces. After that Haji Saheb sent sweets to the *Kachers* and the following day the *Kachers* sent sweets to Haji Saheb's house.

Haji Saheb no more hauled the seized timber to the official depot but to his own courtyard. He would not distribute it among the people against their ration cards but sell it for a hefty sum after sawing it. The *Katchers* would send word around for purchase of cement, iron and such like from them in case anyone needed these. They were contractors undertaking official projects.

The *Dars* would complain to all: "They have lost all sense of propriety…. Throwing stones at each other was pre-decided but now they are eating into our business." They sold stuff like shawls, etc, but it is said that they would also carry some opium under cover. God knows better!

**Translated from the Kashmiri by Abid Ahmad**

**"Shadow Beside the Self"**

**Anees Hamdani**

Before I could say anything, he pointed to a stool and said, "From today onwards this is your place." He left the room without my saying anything. Why had I hesitated ? Maybe I was unable to say anything or maybe I did not think it right. After all he was the Master. I went near the stool, in front of it was a table on which a writing tablet had been placed. Letters from A to Z were written on it but in a haphazard manner. Before seating myself I looked around the room. My eyes fell on a chair on which a girl was seated, who was constantly staring at me, perhaps she had been doing so from the moment I entered the room or since the Master explained the rules of the place to me.

Placed before the chair was a table on which a broken typewriter was kept. Every letter which one wanted to print on the paper announced its presence on it. But to tell the truth there was no slot in which to place the paper. The fate of these letters, I felt , was similar to that of a writer who kept his creation to himself or who only wrote for himself.

She kept sitting on the chair but was no longer looking at me. Her attention was fixed on the keys over which she was

running her fingertips, caressing the letters. The teacher had deliberately kept the machine there, so that a novice could practice and face no difficulty in typing later on.

I said nothing to her. Why should I have? Where was the necessity? I deliberately avoided any exchange and fixed my attention on the writing tablet, trying to familiarize myself with the letters on it. But I was not able to make anything out. The letters were new to me, I had not come across them before. Or was it that my mind was still immature? It seemed to me that she thought the same . Looking at me she said, "You are not happy about coming here?"

Happy ? I hesitated. I felt that she had been gathering courage to ask me this question since the time I came here. I felt strange ,unable to laugh or cry .

"No," I replied..

"Why not?" she asked.

"Here I have to identify letters which I have not come across before," I said.

"So what ? You will learn them with time. No one is born an expert ." She tried to reassure me.

"Did you also not know them initially?" I asked.

"No," she answered.

"How come then you have progressed to the typewriter?"I asked in surprise.

"I have mastered these letters. Everyone who comes here has, first of all, to learn these letters. You too will have to do the same. Only then will you be able get a hold over the keys. You have to be perfect. You do want to be perfect ,don't you ?" She asked me.

"Has someone taught you ?" I was curious .

"Yes," she replied.

"Who was that ?" I persisted.

"It was someone like you. Just like you. He did not pay heed to anything I said. Finally I had to do his bidding."

"So now you can train me. And you will have to do as I say,"

"Why?" she asked in surprise.

"After all I am like him. All humans are the same," I retorted.

Silence filled the room. She was thinking about something. May be she realized that she had failed. I tried to make out

the letters on the tablet, all the time aware of the Master's presence. I thought it best to remain quiet. At my continued silence, she asked:

"Why aren't you saying anything?"

"Talking is forbidden; it's a sin," I said.

"A sin !"she exclaimed and broke into a laugh.

I thought she must be right. After all I was still a novice, trying to figure the letters out while she was already adept with her fingers.

"What if I tell you that it is not?" she went on even when I said nothing.

"I do not agree," I replied

"Why not?" she asked in surprise.

"What will the Master think ?" I said.

"Why?" she asked again.

"Isn't he God here?" I muttered.

"So what? At best he can throw us out. What else can he do? How does that matter? As it is whoever comes here has to leave one day,"she remarked.

"That is true. But I am a little sensitive."

"To what?" she enquired.

"My relationship with the Master," I elaborated.

"You are a fool . Forget it. Come close to me and decide who is right , you or I ?"

I hesitated. The thought of all the books that the Master had gathered here struck me. I was at a loss for words and kept staring at the letters engraved on the tablet. Maybe she is waiting for my reply, I thought to myself. That is why she is playing with the letters with her fingertips.

Silence enveloped the room once again . It was only broken by the sound of her fingers on the keys. I was acutely aware of the silence and could not decide anything. The thought of the presence of the Master bothered me. She seemed unmindful of this though I knew she too had come here only with the Master's permission. God knows whether she was aware of this. She should be , for no one can come here without his consent.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"Nothing ," I replied.

"I know something is bothering you. Didn't I say forget it and come close? See for yourself who is right," she remarked.

"I know the Master has put you here to lead me astray. I am not the one to be tempted." I retorted.

Before she could say anything the peon came into the room and said to me, "The Master says it is late and you must leave."

On hearing this I got up and left. She too got up and left with me.

The room was now empty.

Translated from the Kashmiri by Nusrat Jan

# List of Contributors

| | |
|---|---|
| **Aaliya Mushtaq Baba** | Research Scholar,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Abid Ahmad** | Editor in English<br>J & K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages |
| **Altaf Ahmad Ganaie** | Research Scholar,<br>School of Studies in Languages, Jiwaji University, Gwalior |
| **Arnab Chatterjee** | Senior Research Fellow,<br>Department of English and Culture Studies, University of Burdwan, West Bengal |
| **Bibek Adhikary** | Assistant Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Gour Banga Malda, West Bengal |
| **Iffat Maqbool** | Senior Assistant Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Insha Mattoo** | Research Scholar,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Ishrat Bashir** | Assistant Professor<br>Department of English,<br>Central University of Kashmir |
| **Jamiel Ahmad** | Research Scholar,<br>Department of English & Comparative Literature<br>Central University of Jammu |
| **Krishnan Unni. P** | Associate Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Delhi,<br>Deshbandhu College |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Lily Want** | Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Masooda Suhaila** | Research Scholar,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Master Showkat Ali** | Assistant Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>Govt. Degree College, Khanabal |
| **Nusrat Jan** | Associate Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Sayantina Dutta** | Assistant Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya,<br>Kolkata |
| **Shaheena Akhter** | Research Scholar,<br>Department of English,<br>University of Kashmir |
| **Tuba Rashid** | Assistant Professor,<br>Department of English,<br>Govt. College for Women, M. A. Road<br>Srinagar |