VOL. 1 ISSUE 1 DECEMBER 2023

Chetas

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Chetas: A Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies is an online journal of the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala. It is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal published bi-annually. The journal publishes original contributions in the form of scholarly papers, literary and critical essays, interviews, book reviews, photo essays, commentaries, reports, etc.

Chetas is a Sanskrit word that can be tentatively translated as consciousness, intellect, reason, mind, or perception.

The Department of English was established, with the founding of the University, in 1962. The Department runs a wide range of courses for Masters and Doctoral degrees; it has recently started a Five Year Integrated Programme in Languages. The courses include beginning with Introduction to Poetry: Medieval and Renaissance, Classical and Elizabethan Drama, English Phonetics and Phonology, William Shakespeare: From Stage to Screen, Beginnings of the Novel Literary Criticism, Poetry from Neoclassical to Victorian Age, Contemporary Essay and others in M.A. Part I. In Part II, the core courses offered are Literature and Modernity, Literary and Cultural Theory, Modern Indian Literature in Translation, Literature and Politics, and Literature and Gender. The optional courses are Literature and Postcoloniality, Creative Writing, and Language and Linguistics. In Ph.D. Course Work, the courses offered are Research Methodology, Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Literature, Exile and Diaspora, Modern World Poetry, Film Studies, etc.

CHETAS: A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES
VOL. 1 ISSUE 1,
DECEMBER 2023
ISBN NO. 978-81-302-0552-6

COVER IMAGE
Cover Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

WRITE TO: DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, ARTS BLOCK NO. 4,
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA, PUNJAB, 147002
PHONE: +91 98725 16664, 0175-5136246

CHETAS@PBI.AC.IN
HEAD_ENGLISH@PBI.AC.IN
PUBLISHED BIANNUALLY BY DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

Contents

Editor's Note

Are the days of negative – pernickety, paranoid, politically correct – criticism over? Is criticism finally taking an aesthetic turn? Will the renascence of style reform a discourse that has been notoriously – or famously, depending on where your feelings are – angry, moralising and jargon-packed? In a recent issue, *The Point Magazine* says, with guarded optimism, yes.

But what does an aesthetic turn, or return, mean today? Of course, the free tribe never succumbed to the temptations of angry, opaque writing that mushroomed under cover of criticism for decades (I can any day revisit Rita Felski, Amit Chaudhuri, James Wood, Peter Brooks, Joseph Epstein, Lydia Davis, Martin Amis, indeed anyone of the tribe, for pleasure and insight). And there are others who frequently off-roaded to write luminous essays, which were not always about books. But whenever they did criticism, they were producing literature.

But the story is not simple nor linear. Neither politics nor ethics have become redundant: indeed the world is in greater need of repair than ever before. Bullying, bullshit and carbon are piling up. Injustice and inequity haven't gone away. Freedom is precarious. Fear comes on a microchip.

If the moralising, politically inspired, angry criticism doesn't any longer draw many readers (except some academics who have a misplaced ideal of academic parlance), one reason is it has stagnated. It has become repetitive, formulaic and uninspiring – in short, unoriginal and beautyless. Its practitioners, including many hostile to the corporate production models, wear their fingers to the bone strumming away on the publication bandwagon. But they don't please, they don't even entertain. A few are read, but very few. And not with pleasure. And not for insight.

Politics doesn't have to be cold to beauty. Even the best of political tracts and manifestos have been written with elegance and power. Literary and art criticism cannot *not* be literary and artistic and yet remain criticism. Anger can be tastefully expressed, whatever the class associations of taste for a sociologist. And if elegance is felt to be constraining, let anger have a searing charm. Who is stopping? Art and literature have never seen pain, grief, rage and squalor as unsuitable for, or unworthy of, aesthetic treatment. The suicidal error of most negative criticism is it dos not offer any enchantments except the consolations of self-righteous resentment. And a lot of that is programmed noise, which drowns, when it does not kill, innovation.

For criticism to be read, it has to mirror what it reads – literature. Literary criticism has to be literary: not merely as *pertaining to literature* but as *possessed of literariness.* Frank Kermode, Harold Bloom, Terry Eagleton, T.S. Eliot, Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, V.S. Pritchett, Toni Morrison, Christopher Hitchens, Franco Fortini, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, Stefan Zweig, Virginia Woolf, Oscar Wilde: the name-checking line – an achronological tangle of styles that resists evolutionary emplotment – would keep running on and on, sometimes in loops. You have there not one pole star but a constellation of them, if only you would set sail to navigate the seas for adventures not to be forgotten.

The end of negative criticism has been coming for quite some time. The second golden age of the essay, through which we are happily living, is a historical articulation of expressive possibilities not available in a geography of divided and excessively determined genres. Between literature and criticism also, the essay does not see, as Samuel Johnson's and Matthew Arnold's did not, any wall. The post-genre literature, such as Annie Ernaux's, Philippe Jaccottet's and Pascal Quignard's, recasts the writerly logic as a playful adventure. Aristotle's rhetorical trio of logic, pathos and ethos no longer sounds archaic. As do not *rasa* and *dhvani*. Literature exceeds, life refuses containment.

The sensitive critic tries living in the writer's skin, flowing in his bloodstream, and aims to be what he studies. He seeks to gather his gaze to the point where it will self-destruct to illuminate from inside the life of what it contemplates. What Keats called 'negative capability' is a subtle re-creative force necessary as much for the critic and reader as for the writer. The loud moralising speakers who preach care for the other need to wake up to their self-contradiction: they blow up their darling project when they work up an implacable hostility to literary works and crave to tear them apart in a ritual of emancipation. But literary works are not just the ideological worlds they inhabit; they are not even ideologically one-dimensional.

The refusal of a work's complex life, with its peculiar aesthetic physiology – of which politics and ethics are natural parts – probably conceals a displaced ideological hostility. Perhaps this hostility masks a

sublime dread – a dread of the work's overwhelming power. But literature does, it has to, overwhelm; after all, it works on the edge of language and consciousness. Which makes it inexhaustible – strangely able to never refuse another reading. It opens whirling abysses of light and music. But it takes courage and perseverance and a sort of secular reverence to descend into those abysses, to ascend those peaks. The easier way is to tag them and put them away, and bury oneself in chatter.

And so the smug critical gaze that judges and condemns the notoriously 'objectifying' gaze doesn't put itself in the frame, but stands apart, claiming some godly aloofness. It keeps things simple, manageable. But Aristotle too, who fancied God as the supreme contemplator (and so the poet's model), could not refrain from advising the aspiring poets to feel into the characters imagined and understand from inside how they lived and felt, suffered and celebrated. Yet the inclination among those who, knowingly or not, take their inspiration from Aristotle is to overlook this paradox – which he probably unpacked in his lectures – in which contemplation and participation, study and empathy meet.

A long Indian tradition, flowing through logic as well as poetics, emphasises the necessity of dialectical progression in which you move from the study of the object to that of the method to that of oneself, until the triangle of the three becomes a wheel. As for the objectifying gaze, Virginia Woolf knew better than most feminists that it sees only its owner (the subject of the gaze), turning the other into a mere mirror, so that the other is reduced to an instrument and extension. For Rajashekhara, the author of *Kāvya Mīmānsā* who lived more than ten centuries ago, a prerequisite for the writer is that he make his consciousness a mirror for the object of his attention, that he remove

himself to make space for it – for that way alone can the object live its life unhampered and uninvaded.

The aesthetic return cannot be just a return. The idea of beauty has evolved and become more complicated than it was a century or half ago. The aesthetic implies the political as well as the ethical. You cannot create beauty without freedom and love.

Criticism has to have, in our day, literature's inclusiveness and expansiveness. It has to have its deviousness, candour and clarity, its starkness and flamboyancy, its wandering ascetic freedom, its faith in freedom and in scepticism, in the inexhaustible abundance that is life, in its reality and truth, in seeing and understanding, in imagining, in dreaming.

Criticism has to dream literature's dream.

It has to be, if it is to be itself, literature.

Rajesh Sharma
September 14, 2023

Nature as Human Experience in Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Kamaldeep Kaur

Abstract

The present paper intends to analyse Annie Dillard's approach towards nature in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974). It will make an attempt to explore how Dillard, through her meditative essays, experiences nature and probe its mysteries. Since she writes on nature and the natural world, the paper shall try to comprehend her idea of nature in the book and how it contributes to the genre of nature writing. Philosophical lens is indispensable to any critical writing and Dillard's text is no exception. Keeping this in view, Dillard's philosophy of nature would also be studied. The relevance of the paper lies in its proposal to put forth a consistent connection between the author's understanding of nature and that of the celebrated authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who are considered classics in the American nature writing. The paper will foreground the significance of the natural phenomena and proposes how human beings can learn to lead their lives in a better way by staying connected with nature.

Keywords: Nature, Transcendentalism, Experience, Mystery, Religion

Annie Dillard is an American writer who has earned a popular acclaim for her contemplative essays on the natural world. She is famous for her poetic-prose style, subject matter and vivid description of episodes. In praise of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Mary Cantwell writes that Dillard has often been compared to: "Virginia Woolf, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, William Blake, John Donne" for her writing style (*The New York Times Magazine*). Her philosophical insights into nature make her a part of the tradition of thinkers like Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and the Romantic poets. Her writings, the way she prefers solitary walks, are similar to a Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782) in which he wrote about his solitary walks in the natural world. Like Rousseau, Dillard also uses the 'I' persona, recounts her journey in Virginia and reflects on how nature works.

Dillard's Pulitzer Prize winning non-fictional work *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is about her reflections on nature, science and religion. She writes about similar themes in her other works *Holy the Firm* (1977), *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (1982) and *For the Time Being* (1999) as well. These works deal with the meaning and nature of birth, suffering, death and God. Dillard's literary writings also include collections of poetry and novels. Her use of the literary techniques and figurative language help her convey thoughts on natural environment.

The word 'nature' has various meanings, including an essential character of a thing or person; it is in the context of the

physical universe or the natural world surrounding human beings that the word has been used by Dillard. Broadly, the word 'nature' is used to refer to all those forces that are present throughout the universe. It has been derived from the Latin word *natura* which is the translation of the Greek word *physis* indicating the intrinsic properties that plants, animals, and other creatures "develop of their own accord" (*New World Encyclopedia*).

Transcendentalism, a philosophical movement, developed in the 1820s in which the transcendentalists believed that there is an indispensable connection between spiritual unity and nature. In this movement, nature is represented as a repository of religious as well as spiritual ideas. In tracing the background of nature writing as a genre, it is important to reflect on the transcendentalist tradition in America which began with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Later, it also included Walt Whitman. The tradition has been carried forward by the authors like John Muir and Annie Dillard.

Dillard shares some of the characteristics with the transcendentalists who believed in pantheism, which means nature and humans along with other creatures are pervaded by the divine spirit. They viewed the physical world as a doorway to the spiritual world but kept the latter as superior. In the same way, Dillard also considers that there is a connection between the material world of the Tinker Creek and the transcendental world. She writes of what Cheryll Glotfelty has mentioned in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, "literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas interact" (xix). Dillard's experiences of the natural world

are full of bewilderment. She comes to terms with the "real world, not the world gilded and pearled" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 229). But what does Dillard mean by 'real'? Her views of both the 'real' and the 'spiritual' can be understood by considering Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of "double voiced discourse" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 330). Bakhtin proposed that the voices of one's predecessors are necessary to "create the background" so that the writer's voice can be heard (278). Dillard's emphasis on reality requires an understanding of two important voices to appreciate it: Emerson's romantic idealism in which he identifies spirit as the only reality and Dillard's insistence on the 'real' in which she believes that the material world is a part of reality where the presence of God can be felt.

Before turning to the study, it is important to know the meaning of the word 'Pilgrim' in the title of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. The word is often used for a religious traveller who goes on a journey to a holy site. For Dillard, travelling experience of the Tinker Creek is equivalent to a pilgrimage. Similar to Thoreau, who built a cabin in Walden, Dillard also lives near the Tinker Creek; but like a hermit, she does not develop a sense of belonging to her home.

'Mystery' is an appropriate word if we have to define what Dillard thinks nature is! She appreciates the mysteries of creation, "the uncertainty of vision, the horror of the fixed, the dissolution of the present, the intricacy of beauty, the pressure of fecundity, the elusiveness of the free, and the flawed nature of perfection" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 9). The quote unfolds her philosophical concerns. On the one hand, Dillard takes readers to experience the cosmos; to "see stars, deep stars giving way to deeper stars...at the crown

of an infinite cone" (25). On the other hand, they are invited to go "down to molecular structures...to atoms airy and balanced" (113). She provides a glimpse of nature which William James describes as "operative in the universe outside" of one's rational thinking (*The Varieties of Religious Experience* 385). Dillard's belief that the divine has created the universe never falters during the course of the book. For her, nature is very much like "now-you-don't-see-it, now-you-do" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 20), thus, presenting the unpredictable nature of the world.

The book begins as the narrator recounts an incident that happened while she was asleep in which an old tomcat leapt through an open window of her room. She wakes up and notices, he [tomcat] kneaded my bare chest with his front paws, powerfully, arching his back, as if sharpening his claws, or pummelling a mother for milk. And some mornings I'd wake in daylight to find my body covered with paw prints in blood; I looked as though I'd been painted with roses (8). During a year that she spent at Virginia's densely forested Roanoke Valley; blood emerges as an important symbol. The first half of the quote presents cruel nature of the cat; and the second half presents beauty of nature in which blood on paw prints of the cat is seen as roses. The narrator romanticises the idea of having been printed with the paw prints. Next morning, the incident of the cat reminds her of "something powerful playing" over her (9). She suggests that this *something powerful* is nature.

Dillard's dialectical vision can be witnessed in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* when she writes that the first half of the book is characterised by the Christian idea of *via positiva*, which means

"God is omnipotent, omniscient, etc; that God possesses all positive attributes" (241); and the second half of the book focuses on *via negativa*, which affirms the idea of "God's unknowability" (241). Dillard captures beauty of birds in the chapter "Winter" that is set in the month of February. She describes a historical event in which hundreds of starlings invaded the Virginia, US. The narrator does not reveal her sentimental attachment to the starlings but praises their beauty when they arrive at the sunset. For her, their lyrical tones weave the tales of life that are full of beauties. Similarly, the chapter "Spring" presents charms of nature in which the narrator tries to "look spring in the eye" and observes the actions of trees, insects and birds (109). She wishes to migrate like insects and birds. To specify one incident, Dillard describes the migration of the Monarch butterfly from the North U.S. and Canada to the South Western Mexico in the chapter titled "Northing". The narrator does not want to go on a journey towards the northern latitudes to see places, but wishes to take this expedition as a metaphor for "a shedding, a sloughing off" her older self (222).

After describing the beautiful side of nature in the aforementioned chapters, Dillard, in the following chapters, records her observations of the cruel side of it. In the chapter titled "Fecundity", the narrator describes violent creatures and dreams of a Luna moth mating with its partner and how moth eggs hatch on a bed. These dreams become a metaphor as they bring her face to face with the reality of birth and death. Dillard describes how creatures like wasps, termites and fish give birth to new lives in unimaginable profusion. To satisfy their hunger, they eat one another; parents eat

their offspring and the young ones devour their parents. The narrator recalls how once her science teacher kept a mantis' egg in a jar to observe its hatching. When it hatched, the newborn mantises began to kill one another because they had no one to attack. The mantis drags himself unsuccessfully to get out of a man-made jar. The incident shows humans' cruelty towards mantises where they are kept in a jar for experimentation. Dillard uses Mason jar as a metaphor to explain her idea of the cosmos. Humans are mantises here who have been trapped in the Mason jar that stands for the natural world. Humans harm nature for their benefits; and in turn, nature through calamities destroys their pride and reminds them that ultimate truth of life is to live and die. Somewhat similar theme is presented in Barry Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men.* It celebrates the interaction between humans and wolves. The book shatters the myths that wolves are demonic and makes readers understand their significance in the human civilisation. Representation of humankind's relationship with wolves is presented in the same way as Dillard has highlighted the relationship of humans with mantises. Both mantises and wolves are captivated by humans. Lopez believes that it is due to "lack of humility" that every animal dies at the hands of humans (30). The phrase suggests that humility is the sole survival in building a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.

In another chapter titled, "The Horns of the Altar", Dillard writes about snakes, particularly, the venomous copperhead snakes. She observes a mosquito which, at first, sits on her and when she brushes it away, it sits on a snake which is unable to shoo it off. The apparently miniature mosquito effortlessly sucks the dangerous

snake's blood. The incident reminds readers of the cycle of nature in which every creature is dependent on one another. Dillard uses a word 'parasitism', which suggests that all creatures are surviving on the consumption of one another and would go back when called by the Creator (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 207). While observing the struggles that creatures face on earth, Dillard writes, "the faster death goes, the faster evolution goes" (154). She observes grasshoppers without antennae and spiders without legs; proving that everything is incomplete, torn or pierced by some other thing. She views that a sight of "power and beauty" is always gracefully "tangled in a rapture with violence" which presents one of the central themes of the book that nature cannot exist free from the intricacies of birth, chaos and death (14). Reflecting on a quote by Wallace Stevens, "death is the mother of beauty" ("Sunday Morning"), Dillard writes that the world "has signed a pact with the devil; it had to" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 160). Further, she writes that the "terms are clear: if you want to live, you have to die" (160). The quotation refers to the irresolvable mystery of the world.

Dillard finds nature as both paralyzing as well as energizing force. After reflecting on her experiences of the Tinker Creek, she affirms, "[o]ur life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery" (14). She shares how nature demonstrates creation, preservation and destruction to be the cogs of the same wheel. She explores how nature acts as a creator, preserver and destroyer at the same time. It is an allusion to a famous line by P. B. Shelley, who describes the powerful West Wind as a "Destroyer and Preserver" ("Ode to the West Wind"). For Dillard, not only the West Wind but the entire nature possesses

powers to create, preserve and destroy.

After observing the hostile material world of the Tinker Creek, Dillard turns to religion to understand the mystery of the phenomena. She quotes Master Eckhart who writes, "God is at home. We are in the far country" (*Holy the Firm* 62). It indicates whatever happens in the world is not outside of God's purview. This is exactly what Dillard tries to explain in her book. Her religious faith is reflected as she searches for the creator in the material world: "come on out, I know you're there!" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 181). Since Dillard is a Christian; she believes in its fundamental tenet that God has created the world. She struggles to understand how a benevolent God could be responsible for so much misery in the world!

Dillard's experience at the Tinker Creek has made her observe that nature bears both the "spangling marks of a grace like beauty," and "the blotched assaults and quarryings of time" (211). Her views that it is with the help of the body that humans get connected to nature are in contrast to that of Emerson's, who sees body as an obstacle in communing with nature. Robert Detweiler writes in *Breaking the Fall* that Dillard has "learned to write with her body" and readers "read her as a text" (131). She portrays her body as a site where nature engraves her mysterious messages. The dark side of nature serves as a sign for Dillard and compels her to write, "we are all going to die" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 143). And further she writes,

> Evolution loves death more than it loves you or me. This is easy to write, easy to read, and hard to believe. The words are simple, the concept clear—but you don't believe it, do you? Nor do I. How could I,

> when we're both so lovable? Are my values then so diametrically opposed to those that nature preserves? (155)

The questions raised in the above quotation remain unanswered. A mystery is called mysterious because it is impossible to understand and decipher it. Nature and the presence of God in the natural world is mysterious for Dillard; she envisions God as someone who "comes and goes, mostly goes, but I [Dillard] live for it, for the moment when the mountains open and a new light roars in spate through the crack" (35). She embraces a Thoreauvian delight even in the disgusting and insists on lifting up the veil to see what squirming horrors she could find underneath. Dillard has been influenced by her predecessors like John Burroughs, John Muir, Rachel Carson and Peter Matthiessen, who wrote about the impact of human intervention on landscapes and ecosystems. But Dillard differs from these writers in her spiritual sensibility. Her book is a combination of religious meditations, natural history, science writing and intellectual insights that constitute to the non-linear episodes compiled in fifteen chapters.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek can also be read as a dialectic tension between the natural and the transcendent, but the dialectic between beauty and horror is equally at play in the book. All stereotyped meanings of Nature [with capital N; which is considered all good without anything negative about it] get shattered in the book. After reflecting on the natural world that she has experienced for a year at the Tinker Creek, Dillard realises that no one can know the secrets of the creation.

The image of God as someone monstrous encapsulates

one of the major tensions in Dillard's theology. In *Holy the Firm*, Dillard writes, "[t]his one God is a brute and traitor abandoning us to time, to necessity, and to the engines of matter unhinged" (23). Similarly, while grappling with the issues pertaining to the world full of uncertainties, Dillard writes, "if we describe a world...that is a long, brute game, then we bump against another mystery: the inrush of power and light" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 13). Dillard persistently talks about an unkind force in her writings and asks, "[w]hat kind of a world is this, anyway?....Are we dealing in life, or in death?" (154). She sees how beauty and horror result from the same mysterious power that created the world and is also running it.

There is always a trace of non-Thoreauvian fear in Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*; what lies underneath beauty and what forces parasites to eat on one another. To make her point clear, she quotes the German physicist Werner Heisenberg who believed, "there is a higher power, not influenced by our wishes, which finally decides and judges" (180). Broadly, the purpose of observing nature, life and universe is to gain wisdom. Dillard realises that as she cannot avoid the patterned beauty of nature, she can also not avoid participating in the mysterious and sacrificial rite which is at play within violence in the world.

The vistas of mountains at Roanoke Valley let Dillard appreciate the beauties of nature. Her views on sublime appear to be identical to the Kantian sublime. Her obsession with violence in nature owes much to the sense of sublime which in literature refers to the description of emotions and thoughts that take an individual beyond the usual experience. Dillard describes the workings of nature

at a smaller level and presents microscopic view of the phenomena where she could easily experience the presence of the divine. Her quest to find epistemological answers reminds readers of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which he wrote: "justify the ways of God to men" (18); the ways which cannot be justified because no one knows the mysteries of nature.

There are certain religious allusions in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, such as of flood during the summer solstice in the chapter titled "Flood", in which Dillard shares how Hurricane Agnes hit America in 1972 and affected the Tinker Creek. The chapter is less about beauty, but more about chaos; as it highlights the destructive side of nature. It is not a coincidence that Dillard recalls the great flood which swept the world once; it has a religious significance. She feels as if she has been baptized into a new world where she is both united and separated from it by acquiring transcendence over it. She writes, "[f]or if God is in one sense the igniter, a fireball that spins over the ground of continents, God is also in another sense the destroyer, lightning, blind power, impartial as the atmosphere" (81). It is where Dillard reminds readers of Thoreau who writes, "[t]alk of mysteries!–Think of our life in nature.... rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common* sense! *Contact! Contact!* Who are we? *where* are we?" (*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers; Walden, Or, Life in the Woods; The Maine Woods; Cape Cod* 646). Dillard seems to answer this by writing, "the Lord God of gods, he knoweth" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 129).

A close observation of Dillard's experiences suggests that she is a mystic who wishes to move from the particular to the

universal and wishes to leave self 'empty' in order to experience the divine. Although Dillard fits in the role of a mystic, yet her attention is focussed on the details of particular objects. She reflects on both the living and the higher world [the world of God] equally. Her observations range from the details of the physical, historical, scientific to the metaphysical speculations. She quotes Einstein who said: "nature conceals her mystery by means of her essential grandeur, not by her cunning" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 13). She understands "the mystery of the continuous creation" and writes, "[w]ho are we to demand explanations of God" (*Holy the Firm* 30)?

In the final chapter titled "The Waters of Separation", the narrator says, "today is the winter solstice" which indicates the pagan Yule holiday and Christmas; representing death and rebirth (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 230). Dillard finds it the appropriate moment to end her pilgrimage. Later, she exclaims, "my God what a world. There is no accounting for one second of it" (231). Her quest to know mystery of the creation leads Dillard to consider herself "a fugitive and a vagabond" (236).

Dillard admits that "[b]eauty itself is the fruit of the creator's exuberance that grew such a tangle, and the grotesques and horrors bloom from that same free growth" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 130). Dillard's view resonates what William Blake asks in the poem "The Tyger", "Did he who made Lamb make thee?" (*Poetry Foundation*). Nature must contain the reflection of the creator. The 'tyger' is beautiful, but horrific at the same time. Blake wonders how a 'tyger' and a lamb could have been created by the same God. Similarly, Dillard feels amazed by the inscrutability of the divine will.

In a nutshell, it can be said that *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* presents Dillard's experiences of the natural world. She explores the material world of the Tinker Creek and witnesses a struggle between the creatures on earth, including humans and tries to make a sense of this world. Although she takes refuge in the religion, yet she is unable to find answers pertaining to the existence of the natural world. Throughout the book, Dillard hopes to get answers from God but towards the end, she surrenders, "we know now for sure that there is no knowing" (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* 179). Meaning of existence of the natural and human world cannot be known. Dillard's experiences of Roanoke Valley in Virginia, make readers aware that acceptance of chaos in life is important to provide meaning to the human existence.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: For Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981.

Blake, William "The Tyger." *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43687/the-tyger.

Cantwell, Mary. "A Pilgrim's Progre**ss:**" *The New York Times Magazine*, April 26, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/26/magazine/a-pilgrim-s-progre**ss:**html.

Detweiler, Robert. *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*. The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989.

Dillard, Annie. *Holy the Firm*. Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1997.

---. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1974.

Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader*. The University of Georgia Press, 1996.

James, William *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. The University of Adelaide Library, 2009.

Lopez, Barry. *Of Wolves and Men*. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1978.

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Penguin Books, 2000.

"Nature." *New World Encyclopedia*. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nature.

Shelley, P. B. "Ode to the West Wind." *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45134/ode-to-the-west-wind.

Stevens, Wallace. "Sunday Morning." *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/13261/sunday-morning.

Thoreau, Henry David. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers; Walden, Or, Life in the Woods; The Maine Woods; Cape Cod*. Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1985.

About the Author

Kamaldeep Kaur, is a research scholar at the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala.

The Ontologies from Human to the Post-Human

Brahamjeet Singh

Abstract

This paper aims at undertaking a critical examination of the notion of 'human', the way it has been theorised, qualified and used, and the manner in which it has come under critical scrutiny after the second half of the twentieth century. It will investigate the transformations that have taken place in our understanding of the 'human subject' with the emergence of post-humanism. Further, it will discuss the philosophical and historical conditions that necessitate a shift in the way 'human subjectivity' and the notion of 'human' need to be thought. It will go on to highlight the inevitable inclusion of subject's structural others (technology, animal, and earth others) into the question concerning the 'human subjectivity'. Finally, it will address the issues of ethical accountability and sustainability when it comes to techno-mediated capitalist society that commodifies and profits from everything that lives.

Keywords: Humanism, Post-human, subjectivity, agency, ontology

In 4.5 billion years of history of Earth, humans appeared only about 200,000 years ago. It amounts to a mere blink of an eye if we equate it to a twenty-four-hour long day. Through science and

technology, we have managed to emerge as a force that has initiated unnatural and serious transformations at planetary levels, so much so, that our age is now being referred to as the age of the 'Anthropocene'[1]. It appears that human beings have in fact become the dictating agents of this planet's course in the sense that they virtually hold the key to life on it. But at the same time this alleged absolute agency is making us increasingly conscious of our inter-dependence with everything that is outside of us, be it biological, ecological, technological or otherwise. The radical technologies of our age, though empowering, have unfolded the possibilities of non-human rationality and knowledge production. It, at the same time, implies the possible existence of non-human subjectivities.

The question then rises thus: if non-human entities can produce knowledge, are they capable of producing thought as well? If so, then is there a possibility in A.I.[2] to develop consciousness? This seems highly unlikely for two reasons. Firstly, even the most advance A.I. that we currently have is only as good as the data and the algorithms it is provided with; which is to say, if we are to compare the brain of an A.I. with that of a human, the A.I. brain would be only as good as an earthworm's. Secondly, it is impossible if knowledge production and complex thought are understood to be separate processes altogether. Thought can only exist in a space where there is a possibility of its reciprocation: an essential non-linearity. Martin Heidegger in *What is Called Thinking?* (1968) claims: "[t]hought has

1 The term 'anthropocene' is used to refer to our present age, where humans have become a significant geological force affecting all life on the planet.

2 The abbreviation A.I. will be used for Artificial Intelligence throughout in this paper.

a gift of thinking back ... [o]nly when we are so inclined toward what in itself is to be thought about, only then are we capable of thinking" (4). Knowledge, on the other hand, can be produced by mere accumulation of data without requiring the former. Thought can arise out of knowledge only if the agent concerned is self-conscious. The question of machine consciousness, therefore, becomes a contested area amounting to a near impossibility in the practical domain. But the claims about rational machines remain intact as even with the brain as good as an earthworm's, which produces knowledge about its given surroundings through receptors, they too are capable of producing knowledge with the help of algorithms fed to them.

Technologies such as xenotransplantation, genetic engineering, germ-line editing, stem cell engineering, cloning and 3D bio printing have proven the manipulability of the human subject and its embodied form. Memory implantation, for example, has already become a real possibility. Elizabeth F. Loftus, known for her research on the nature and creation of false memories, claimed in an interview with the *Business Insider*, "it's pretty easy to distort memories for the details of what they actually saw, by supplying them with suggestive information" (Dodgson 2017). The National Centre for Scientific Research, France, conducted an experiment in March 2015 in which they stimulated the brains of five sleeping mice and managed to create a positive feeling for a certain location in their minds. The impression was so strong that they started searching for the location on waking up (Devlin 2015). These technological interventions problematize the conventionally understood notion of human subject by foregrounding the flexible and malleable character of human body.

Rosi Braidotti, a noted philosopher of posthumanism, in her book *The Posthuman* (2013), states that "there is an agreement that contemporary science and biotechnologies ... have altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as the basic frame of reference for the human today (40). The questions that then emerge are: What does it really mean to be human in our contemporary world? How are we to define what categorically counts as a human? What kind of ethical subjects will we emerge as?

Any critical engagement with posthumanism should necessarily begin with humanism as its historical and philosophical background. Humanism emerged in Europe as a response against the excesses of religious structures during fifteenth century. Divine agency stood questioned and the Enlightenment ideal was born. It went on to assert that 'human beings' must take hold of their thought and action, an idea that later resonated in Descartes' proclamation "*cogito ergo sum*" and Nietzsche declaring the god dead. The European philosophers started defining human beings as rational, autonomous, self-regulating, and unique. This definition was fortuitously consolidated in the sphere of science and technology as can be seen in the rise of the printing press, the steam engine, the telescope and modern medicine. These inventions, underpinned by the assumptions of Enlightenment, enabled humans to become masters of their spiritual world and finally of this physical world. Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, in his lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (1946) claimed that human existence precedes its essence. "Man simply is" and there is no 'other' cause of his actions (6). Man, he argued, "… is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills

to be after that leap towards existence" (6). Such approaches encouraged the growth of socio-cultural structures and politico-economic institutions that assumed the centrality of the human. The sense of subject thus formed, claimed: agency, transparency, an ability to make choices, and a sense of moral superiority. In the process, human beings came to see themselves as the supreme life form of this planet.

This allegedly self-proclaimed status of humans as transparent, rational and autonomous subjects, nonetheless, stood questioned in the middle of the twentieth century and was shattered by horrors of the two world wars. The generation of theorists that came after was completely disillusioned, with their minds trying to comprehend the state of rupture. The period resonated with the slogan: 'death of the subject'. Foucault, in his works, presented 'man' as an effect of discourses rather than a sovereign, self-regulating entity. In *The Order of Things* (1994), he famously argues that "[m]an is an invention of recent date … [and] one perhaps nearing its end" (387). The human subject now stood decentred. The postmodernists' claim that the subject is under constant erasure further placed it into a state of an ontological uncertainty. The outcome of this brief demise of the subject, however, was a realisation that the 'subject' simply cannot be done away with.

Posthumanism developed as a settling of the turmoil generated by nearly five centuries of exclusionary practices of European humanism that led to genocides, slavery, and eventually the two world wars. The upheaval caused by these events, coupled with the political and philosophical movements of late 20th century, opened up new vistas for re-thinking the 'human' in the light of contemporary political,

scientific and philosophical horizons. Posthumanism therefore, as a philosophical framework, attempts to radically re-define the ontological grounding of the human subject. N. Katherine Hayles, in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics Literature and Informatics* (1999), suggests that posthumanism has triggered a "significant shift in [the] underlying assumptions about subjectivity" (3). This shift, however, was initially in no way an absolute departure from humanistic notions of subjectivity. It's initial tendencies of preserving Humanism in some residual form could be seen in the wake of cybernetics which was closely aligned with Transhumanism. It envisioned an entire race of mechanically enhanced individuals which was named humanity plus (H+). It tended to re-inscribe the traditional assumptions while "articulat[ing] something new" (6).

Within the framework of Cybernetic theory, 'human beings' are situated in a constantly ongoing feedback loop of information. Like intelligent machines, the basic function of humans is to process information: "Indeed, the essential function of the universe," Hayles says "as a whole is processing information" (239). Subscribing to this view human subject can be understood as "an amalgam … of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (3). The human subject, thus, always exists and functions in a symbiotic relationship with the environment, receiving information from it and feeding back to it in processes. The humanist notion of an exclusive unitary agent, belonging to a distinct 'self', stands challenged in this scenario as the feedback loop involves application of "distributed cognition" which implies the involvement of a multitude of agents

interacting in order to facilitate information processing. N. Katherine Hayles defines her critical engagement with the posthuman in terms of studying:

> … how information lost its body … how the cyborg was created as a technological artifact and cultural icon … [and] how a historically specific construction called the human is giving way to a different construction called the posthuman. (2)

Cybernetic theorists including Hayles have at length talked about the erasure embodiment of the subject which is an indirect return to Cartesian mind body distinction. In this context, Hayles states, "posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it" (5). This continuation of the liberalist tradition is one of the limitations of Cybernetic theory. Such practice causes it to regress back into what it was initially trying to escape. The kind of Posthuman theory that is intended to be advocated here is based on Spinozist monistic ontology and therefore it rejects the Cartesian dualism as flawed because it theorizes the mind-body interactions as causal; taking place between two separate essences, one being the intellect and the other, an extension in physical space. Spinoza, in his *Ethics* (1996), demonstrates:

> [T]he object of the idea which constitutes the human mind is the body, and it (by P11)[3] actually exists. Next, if the object of the mind were something else also then since nothing exists from which there does

3 P11 (Proposition 11): "*The first thing that constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists"* (*Ethics* 38).

> not follow some effect there would necessarily (by P12)[4] be an idea in our mind of some effect of it. But (by A5)[5] there is no idea of it. Therefore, the object of our mind is the existing body and nothing else ... From these [propositions] we understand not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what should be understood by the union of mind and body. (40)

The central idea in Spinozist monism, therefore, focuses on overcoming the dialectical schemas and formulating a unitary understanding of matter. This active engagement with monism, allows matter to be defined as self-organizing and vital. Contemporary French philosophy terms this approach as "vital materialism." Monism, notes Rosi Braidotti, "results in relocating difference outside the dialectical scheme, as a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others" (56). The kind of Posthuman philosophy that is being advocated here is a method that inevitably rejects human centrality altogether. Bradiotti argues that human subject, in this thought, is envisioned as "freed from his delusions of grandeur … no longer allegedly in charge of historical progress" (23). It tries to move

4 P12 (Proposition 12): "*Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived by the human mind, or there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the mind; that is, if the object of the idea constituting a human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived by the mind"* (*Ethics* 39).

5 A5 (Axiom 5): "We neither nor perceive any singular things [NS: or anything of *Natura naturata*], except bodies and modes of thinking" (*Ethics* 32).

away from the postmodern crisis of reality escaping into an eternal postponement triggered by a supposed demise of the subject and calls for a firmly grounded subject that is both embodied and embedded.

Braidotti considers posthuman theory, "a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human" (5). She forms a case for re-conceptualizing the human subjectivity in a manner that has a grounded accountability towards its structural others and is inclusionary. It accounts for the post-war and postmodern critique of humanism, 'life' commodifying practices of advanced capitalism, bio-politics and necropolitical aspects of the post-human. Posthumanism lays stress on "an embodied and embedded … form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building" (49). Thus, moving away from the unitary humanist subject, it proposes a non-unitary "nomadic" subject. This posthumanist subject suggests "an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others" (49). The subject, therefore, is defined within a system of multiple belongings and inter-relations among human and non-human agents.

Braidotti envisions the 'becoming' of posthuman taking place through three processes: "becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine" (66). 'Becoming-animal' aspect of the transformation works on "the displacement of anthropocentrism and the recognition of trans-species solidarity on the basis of our being … embodied, embedded and in symbiosis with other species" (67). Becoming-earth, on the other hand, is geared towards questions of "environmental and social sustainability" (67). It addresses the issues

concerning 'earth-others' in the wake of technological mediation. Finally, the becoming-machine dimension explores "the division between humans and technological circuits, introducing bio technologically mediated relations as foundational for the constitution of the subject" (67). This triadic process shapes the embodiment of the posthuman subject, placed in a world that actively dilutes our understanding of the bodily boundaries.

This notion of the fluid embodiment is best exhibited in Cyborgs. The Cyborg operates in the realm of the imaginary and so holds immense potential for "contestation" of the bodily boundaries that have historically "marked class, ethnic, and cultural differences" (85). Posthumanism, according to Katherine Hayles, envisages body as an "original prosthesis" and turns it into an assemblage when we learn to manipulate it (3). She, nonetheless, is of the view that the problem of embodiment needs to be re-considered as an integral tool of lived experience. "There is a limit," she vehemently argues, "to how seamlessly humans can be articulated with intelligent machines, which remain distinctively different from humans in their embodiments" (284). Thought, in order to be enacted, necessarily needs an embodied form.

The problem concerning ethics becomes extremely complex when it comes to our technologically mediated advance capitalist society. What kind of ethics then, are we to affiliate with this new becoming of ours? If our 'becoming' is to occur amid a multitude of others, then we need to rethink and resituate the subject in a world that is entangled and interdependent at all levels of life. Braidotti, in her spring 2017 lecture at Yale, titled "Memoirs of a Posthumanist," says

that "… ethics is about interacting affirmatively in the world, together with a multitude of human and non-human others" (24). Commenting upon the nature of moral and ethical dilemma one faces when one confronts the non-human other, Derrida, while analysing D. H. Lawrence's poem "Snake" in *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009), writes:

> There is the first comer, the first comer is the snake and one has to say, naturally, that morality, ethics, the relation to the other, is not only coming after the other, helping oneself after the other, but after the other *whoever it be*, before even knowing who he is or what is his dignity, his price, his social standing, in other words, the first comer. I must respect the first comer. (239)

Derrida here refers to an 'other' that existed before the human. This already existing state of the 'other' presents a moral dilemma as to the reception of the "first comer." The 'other' that existed before the human subject holds a superior position in the planetary hierarchy. The existence of the human is indebted to the already existing condition of this non-human other. Should it then be respected as the "first comer" or is it a potential threat to the position of the human in ecological power relations? So, what really should be the nature of our moral judgements and actions? In *On the Origin of Species* (2008), Darwin demonstrated that the human species "… had not been independently created, but had descended, like varieties, from other species" (6). Moreover, the acknowledgment of numerous life-forms and entities as our non-human other broadens the spectrum of ethical exploration by involving matter, ecologies, and the technological into the picture.

It is not 'agency' and 'responsibility' per se that needs to be critically examined and re-thought; rather, it is the *nature* of 'agency' that we as human beings have and correspondingly the *kind* of 'responsibility' that we need to assume that requires urgent philosophical and political attention. In so doing, we may have to re-define the basic principles of right and wrong in a way that is in tune with our contemporary predicament.

Braidotti, in *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (2006), proposes a *zoe*[6] driven ethics of affirmation for the emergent nomadic subject and discusses the ethical implications of such 'nomadic subjectivity'. Contesting the popular belief that only a liberal humanist view of the subject can guarantee moral and ethical agency, she argues in her *Tanner Lectures at Yale University*:

> [The] traditional ethical formula of humanist subjects was the contemplation of their own mortality, balanced by the prospect of the eternity of their rational soul. The ethical formula of postmodern subjects, on the other hand, was deep skepticism about the foundational robustness of any category, including that of subjectivity itself. The post-nuclear subjects' ethical formula focused on extinction of their and other species as a distinct possibility… (Braidotti, 2017: 26)

In other words, the ethical formula for the posthuman subject should be based on recognizing the 'difference' and the possibility of the end of all life. It should be a framework that is geared towards the re-invention of connections between human and non-human others. The

6 The Greek word 'zoe' means life. In this case, every life form that constitutes the non-human 'other'.

posthuman condition, Braidotti suggests, is a state of collective existence. She sees 'nomadic ethics' as a force that assures the possibility of an affirmative becoming.

We are heading towards what Slavoj Žižek in his work, *Like a Thief in the Broad Daylight,* calls "the end of nature" (32). "Nature" he says, "is to be understood" as "the reliable background of human history, something which we can count on always being here" (32). As an already present point of reference to our existence on this planet, nature holds a mirror to both our 'sense of self' and the ethical universe.

With five hundred years of humanism coming to an end, it is no longer possible to continue using available frameworks of inquiry for they would arguably be incomplete and irrelevant in our contemporary scenario. The gradual disintegration of the humanist universe, however, should be seen as the unfolding of "unexpected possibilities for the recomposition of communities, for the very idea of humanity and for ethical forms of belonging" (Braidotti, 2013: 103). Consequently, it is not only our sense of self (i.e., subjectivity) that has to be rethought but our relationship with our structural others also needs to be re-defined. The resulting emergence thus will then certainly calls for a necessary restructuring of our ethical and moral universe. Hu(man)s, as a result, can no longer be considered to be the 'measure of all things'. Human-centric ontological systems therefore must die if we are to develop new thought systems that are sustainable, inclusionary, and align with the post-human subjects that we are in the process of becoming.

Works Cited

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity P, 2013.

---. "Posthuman, All too Human: The Memoirs and Aspirations of a Posthumanist." *The 2017 Tanner Lectures*. Yale U, 1-2 Mar. 2017, Yale U, New Heaven. Lecture.

---. *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Polity P, 2006.

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. U of Chicago P, 2009.

Devlin, Hannah. "Rodent Recall: False But Happy Memories Im planted in Sleeping Mice." *The Guardian,* 9 Mar. 2015, www.theguardian.com/science/2015/mar/09/rodent-recall-false-but-happy memories-implanted-in-sleeping-mice

Dodgson, Lindsay. "Our Brains Sometimes Create 'False Memories' - But Science Suggests We Could Be Better Off This Way." *Buisness Insider,* 19 Dec. 2017, 02:06:08 p.m., www.businessinsider.in/Our-brains-sometimes-create-false memories-but-science-suggests-we-could-be-better-off-this way/articleshow/62132822.cms

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Hu man Sciences*. Vintage Books, 1994.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. U of Chicago P Ltd., 1999.

Heidegger, Martin. *What is Called Thinking?*. Translated by J. Glenn Gray, Harper & Row, 1968.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Existentialism is a Humanism." *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*. Meridian Publishing Company, 1989.

Spinoza, Benedict De. *Ethics*. Penguin Books, 1996.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*. Penguin Random House, 2018.

About the Author

Brahamjeet Singh is a research scholar in the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala. The topic of his research is "Interrogating the (Post) Human: A Study of Subjectivity and Ethics in Select twentieth Science Fiction." He is undertaking his research through the study of two Post-humanist thinkers: Rosi Braidotti and N. Katherine Hayles.

Ecological Exploitation of Dalitsin Mahasweta Devi's Play *Water*: Crumbling Ecology and Postcolonial Dalit Identity

Vaibhav Pathak

Abstract

Mahasweta Devi's *Water* problematizes the issues of caste exploitation and ecological hegemony. The paper aims to critically engage with the intersection of issues of water scarcity, gender relations and postcolonial Dalit identity. The faultlines in the post-independence rural Bengali society, the landlord-tenant relationship, and the ecological injustice meted out at Dalits are the issues that Devi takes up. The paper analyses the caste oppression faced by Dalits as individuals as well as a community. Postcolonial representation of oppression, issues of ambiguous referentiality, and limitations of language are the issues that the paper takes up during the course of analysis. The paper explores the use of traditional ecological knowledge, the realisation of exploitation and awareness of trauma as a means of liberation.

Keywords: Ecology, Caste trauma, Postcolonial, Dalit Identity, Literature and Ecology

The dramatic integration of issues of water scarcity, caste oppression, ecological hegemony, and gender is portrayed in Mahasweta Devi's play *Water* (1976). This paper attempts to critically engage

with these issues and the intersectionality of postcolonialism, Dalit identity, and deprivation of natural resources. The faultlines in the post-independence rural Bengali society, the landlord-tenant relationship, and the ecological injustice meted out to Dalits are the issues that Devi takes up.

Mahasweta Devi can speak the unspeakable and play is the perfect genreto do so. She has written tales of oppression, conflict, and trauma of the most marginalised communities of India. Theatre and drama provide an excellent medium for representation of exploitation and Mahasweta Devi makes full use of it in her plays *Mother of 1084* (1973), *Aajir* (1976), *Urvashi and Johny* (1977), *Bayen* (1976), and *Water*. Devi's works focus on divisions within the Indian society and tell the tales of those searching endlessly for their identities along the faultlines of these divisions. Her work is committed to the dispossessed and the disadvantaged – the slum dwellers, the untouchables, and the tribal. Her work strives to portray the lives of those who continue to live in servitude in an independent India. She was a writer, a political and social activist, and a recipient of the Padma Shri, the Padma Vibhushan, and the Sahitya Akademi Award[7]. She received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1977 for "her compassionate crusade through art and activism to claim for tribal peoples a just and honourable place in India's national life" (Johri 150). Devi's work provides us with an opportunity to examine caste divisions and the ecological exploitation of Dalits critically.

Accepting her Ramon Magsaysay Award, Devi said that much of our country still resides in a darkness that deprives a part

7 Mahasweta Devi was awarded the SahityaAkademi Award in 1979 for *AranyerAdhikar*(1979). She was awarded Padma Shri in 1986 and Padma Vibhushan in 2006. She won the Jnanpith Award in 1996 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1997. She was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 and was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012.

of our population. Throughout her five-decade-long career as a writer-activist, she strived to raise the curtain so that some light might peep inside the deep dark underbelly of the nation. Her works have put forth the struggle and trauma of the people that make up the most under-represented part of the country. Talking about her inspiration, she said,

> I have always believed that real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations. The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material elsewhere? (Bardhan 24)

As an activist, she worked for the Lodha and the Shabar tribes[8] of West Bengal. The trauma of having seen around sixty tribesmen of Lodha and Shabar communities put to death on charges of either theft or dacoity and the exploitation faced by these communities is penned down in works like *Hajar Churashir Ma* (1974), *Aranyer Adhikar* (1979), *Stanyadayani* (1980), and *Chotti Munda Ebong Tar Tir* (1980) among many others. Apart from novels and short stories, she also wrote a number of plays like *Aajir*, *Urvashi and Johny*, and *Water*in which she dramatised the trauma and exploitation of the subaltern. While *Hajar Churashir Ma* depicts the individual trauma of a mother and her family, *AranyerAdhikar, Stanyadayani,* and *Water*

8 Settled predominantly in West Medinipur district and parts of Orissa, the Lodhas are a scheduled tribe of West Bengal with a population of around 84966. Sabars are ethnically a Munda tribe with populations in west Bengal, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh.

depict the collective trauma of various groups and communities. In her short stories, she takes the aid of imagery to represent human suffering and in her plays , she employs folksongs, folktales and even mythology to tell various aspects of the different tales of suffering. In *AranyerAdhikar*and *Water* we see the portrayal of ecological exploitation of tribal communities and Dalits.

Devi is known predominantly as a storyteller than a playwright unlike her husband Bijon Bhattacharya, who was the founding member of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). Devi is adept at telling the tales of oppression and exploitation and wanted a more reaching medium to spread her word. Theatre provided her with an effective medium for the same. The latter half of the twentieth century saw the rise of people's theatre in India. Theatre established itself as a voice of conscience for the common masses. Devi adapted her short stories *Jal*, *Bayen*, *Aajir*, and *Urvashi and Johnny* in 1966-67. She not only converted these into plays but also added rituals, songs, and evocations of the tribal communities. Theatre has the unique ability to bring emotions to life. Pain, suffering, oppression, and the trauma thereof resonates intensely via the theatrical medium. Talking of the impact of depicting violence on stage, Antonin Artaud writes,"I propose then a theater in which violent physical images crush and hypnotise the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces" (83). Principles of Theatre of Cruelty[9] and Grotesque Theatre[10] shed some more light on the relationship between violent and brutal imagery on stage and its psychological impact on the audience. Devi portrays on stage the trauma and exploitation of the Dalits of Bengal and the Doms and Chandals in particular, in the play *Jal*. Along with theatrical tools, Devi makes use of mythology, folksongs and invocations. She directs her didactic thespian effort at highlighting the exploitation faced by landless labourers of a post-independence West-Bengal village.

Agriculture is the largest source of livelihood in India, with around 70 per cent of the rural households depending primarily on their small landholdings.[11] The plot of the play *Water* is set in a post-independence rural village of West Bengal by the river Charsa. The Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 recognised the Zamindars as the owners of the land in exchange for payment of land revenue. These Zamindars usually sold their proprietary rights to middlemen at various levels. With the increasing levels of intermediaries, there was a considerable increase in land revenue which was extracted from the tillers or the farmworkers. The Bengal Rent Act of 1859 sought to limit the power of landlords by placing limits on rent increment and land evictions but only the fixed-rent tenants, which were a minority, came under its purview. The majority "burgadars"or agricultural labourers were unabatedly exploited. The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 too protected only the settled labourers and therefore, was similarly futile. The Tebhaga Movement in the 1940s did see some positive results, but its impact was limited. Post-independence, the situation did not change much for the farm tillers. Even after Independence, not much changedfor farm workers under the Zamindari system. There were a large number of intermediaries who were a new class of zamindars. Sharecroppers used to cultivate small portions of land and were usually impoverished and were continuously indebted to the zamindars who doubled up as money lenders too. The journey from being a sharecropper to a landless labourer was a short but har-

9 Theatre of Cruelty advocates use of primitive life force and experience to set free our subconscious and to bring us closer to our self. Initially propounded by Antonin Artaud, it influenced many avant-garde playwrights.

10 Developing from the Grotesque Art movement in the eighteenth century, Grotesque Theatre aimed at taking down various conventional standards of aesthetics and decorum.

11 Data from the India at a Glance section of the Food and Agricultural Organisation. http://www.fao.org/india/fao-in-india/india-at-a-glance/en/

rowingly traumatic one. The efficiency of the West Bengal Bargadar Act (1950), the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1952), and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act (1955) was portrayed well on paper, and the inefficiency of the state machinery in implementing these acts was characterised well by the unfortunate fate of farmers like Maghai Dome and Dhura, the protagonists of Devi's play[12].

The postcolonial hangover of the administrationis well represented by Devi in the play. After independence, the district magistrates were the new "laat sahibs", a colloquial equivalent of the "lordship" of the erstwhile era. While the official titles were abolished by the Indian Constitution, the unofficial power of these titles remained. It is in this hangover of colonial power that the newly appointed magistrates ruled over their small fiefs. The condition of the landlords was quite similar too. Despite the abolishment of the Zamindari System, the Zamindars or the landlords ruled with impunity. As these landlords were in cohorts with the magistrates, no one could question their power. Devi portrays this power in *Water*, describing Santosh – the landlord's relationship with the SDO, "now he is all vicious, establishing in his very manner the power that the rural rich wielded in 1971 over the SDO and the police administration in several areas"(112). Talking about the landlord, Maghai's son Dhura says, "He goes to the town, collects money for relief, and wouldn't spend a paisa for the stricken village itself. Look at his house, rising from height to height. There are twenty villages bound to him in debt for ever. He'll leave nobody in peace" (107). This presents to us a case of "other within the other". While the colonisers colonised the native population, landlords like Santosh colonised the rural Dalit and tribal population. These communities at the margins of the society were

12 For a comprehensive understanding on the Land Reforms of West Bengal, do read "Land Reforms in West Bengal" by Ratan Ghosh and K Nagraj, published in the *Social Scientist*, 1978,vol. 6.

twice removed or doubly colonised. It is at these margins that the various chains of discourses break down, and the people are left without any social or political agency. Those at the margins are subjected to exploitation, and notwithstanding a lack of agency, they come together to seek a collective identity and face cultural trauma.

In such an exploitative administrative setup, access to various resources is also flawed. The deliberately faulty distribution of resources ensures the hegemony of the exploiters. The Suvarna landlord Santosh, along with the SDO create a false deficit of resources by not giving the villagers their rightful share. The villagers, mostly Doms, Chandals, Keots, and Tiors are not allowed to draw water from the public wells. Explaining the situation to a young man, Dhura says:

> DHURA. My father (*raises his hands to his head*), Maghai Dome, knows all about water. Every year he spots the place, and Santosh digs, and there's a new well.
>
> ONE. Then what's the problem?
>
> DHURA. They wouldn't allow us to touch it. Even at the government wells, we aren't allowed to draw water. That's why we have to go and dig at the sands of Charsa. (107-08)

Despite the abolishment of titles, despite the abolishment of untouchability, it seems that at the underbelly of the nation, exploitation is business is as usual,

> DHURA. When we go to distribute the prasad from the Dharam Puja, in the village, they wouldn't let us stand under the ledges of their huts – we're untouchables.

ONE. We've gone over all that, Dhura. The castes, upper and lower, don't mean a thing. They are labels designed by men. The Constitution's clear on that. But who cares to uphold the Constitution? (108)

It's not just the access to resources that is stolen from the villagers by Santosh. By colluding with the SDO and the police machinery, Santosh also steals the villager's access to Constitutional remedies and the justice system. Cycles after cycles of exploitation are faced by the villagers, because of their Dalit identity as the ones who are supposed to "uphold the constitution"are themselves involved in flagrantly violating it. It would be an injustice to say that it is their Dalit identity that creates trouble for them. The Dalit identity of the villagers is an ambivalent phenomenon, and it requires a more in-depth analysis.

Maghai is a water diviner and belongs to the Dom caste. The issue of caste and exploitation is central to Devi's play. Santosh Babu, the Suvarna landlord, acts as the sole source of all power in the village. He is the de-facto head of the village, the representative of the village to the authorities and the sole recipient of all aid and supplies meant for the whole village. Caste discrimination and untouchability are practised rampantly, and the Doms, Chandals, Keots, Tiors and other untouchables are not even allowed to draw water from the wells for drinking, even during the famine. Santosh and his family own all these wells, and they have made it their duty to ensure that not a single drop should come in contact with the untouchables. Whenever a new well is sanctioned for the village, it is dug in the fields of Santosh or his compound. Commenting on the role of water in the region of Bengal, Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt writes that water is,"subjectively constructed, or 'produced' like any other element of nature; a part of the cultural landscape, rooted in history, both the producer and product of the material culture through which human agency is enacted" (404).

In the case of Doms of Charsa, this agency is used to exploit them. Lamenting the fate of the Dalits, Dhura says, "What a shame for us to burn our hearts to cinder to divine water, then to raise it from the bowels of the Earth, and then they'd refuse us a drop of water, not a drop of water for the Domes and Chandals. I spit upon fate, if that's our fate" (Devi 124). The altercation between Dhura and Santosh reveals a lot about caste exploitation.

DHURA. You don't give us water, yet you ask, Don't you get water? That's good enough to shut him up. We never get water, you never give us water. Why talk rubbish, thakur?

SANTOSH. Whom have I refused water?

DHURA. The Domes, the Chamars, the Chandals go without water.

SANTOSH. The smallest insect needs water to survive. But it seems you can do without water, Dhura!

DHURA. No. We scrape holes in the sandy bed of the Charsa in the night, and by the early dawn it gathers a little water. At the slightest delay in collecting it, it evaporates. The Panchayat wells are supposed to be for the public, yet we're denied access to them. In the daytime, they're for washing your cattle, in the night we try to steal water, and you set your dogs loose on us. It's the government's well, yet stealing's the only way we can get water from it. It was my father who had located every one of them. (129)

Notwithstanding the exploitation and inhumane treatment meted out to Dalits of the village, Santosh cannot dig a well without their aid. The Dom community's Maghai is a gifted water diviner, and not even the babus from the hydrological department can do what he can. Aided by traditional knowledge, handed down from one generation to another in the form of folklore, rituals and songs, Maghai helps Santosh dig wells from which he and his brethren will not be allowed to drink as they are untouchables. Just being from the "lower caste"is enough for the administration and the police to view them as troublemakers just as being from the "upper caste" is enough for them to grant all the privileges to Santosh. During famines, Santosh Babu receives the aid for the entire village and seldom does anything reach the villagers as Suvarna owner of the village must have his share first. Violence meets the rebellious villagers who have the option either of starvation and thirst or rebel. The yoke of caste oppression and violence is passed on from one generation to the other, just like the folk songs of the Doms. Dalit women suffer the worst kind of exploitation. Their trauma is unspoken, perennial and collective. Women being twice subalternised, are twice removed from the mainstream and have to face the worst.Through the character of Phulamani, Maghai'swife, Devi, takes up the case of Dalit women.

> PHULMANI. For water. Evening's the time when women gather at the river and dig holes in the sand with their bare hands. In the night water trickles into the holes, and we have to fetch it before the sun rises, for then the hole will dry up.
>
> JITEN. But why? The Panchayati well belongs to you all.

> PHULMANI. All the wells were dug with money from the government for drought relief. If you go by the law, all the public wells belong to the public. But there's Santosh. The great Santosh-Babu. (135)

Discrimination, humiliation and penury are the everyday truth of their ugly existence. As individuals and as a community, on the whole, they are subjected to continual and incessant oppression. SurajYengde, in his recent critically acclaimed work, *Caste Matters* (2019) writes,

> Caste is understood through various prisms, thus making it the most misunderstood topic of dialogue on/in India. Caste is thought of as synonymous with reservations, Dalits, Adivasis, manual scavenging, poverty, Dalit capitalism, daily wage labourers, heinous violence, criminality, imprisonment, Rajputs, Brahmins, Baniyas, Kayasthas, OBCs, etc. These are some of the many variations that bear witness to the everyday nakedness of caste. However, what remains undiscussed and therefore invisible is the multiple forms in which the caste maintains its sanctity and pushes its agenda through every aspect of human life in India. (3)

Yengde'stake on the hidden sanctity of the caste system and its agency to exploit resonates in Devi's work. The comradery exhibited by the landlord Santosh Pujari, his contractor brother-in-law, and the SDO to exploit the Dalit villagers is remarkable. It serves as a telling example of Caste-capital ownership of resources in cohort with administrative corruption that leads to deprivation in the case of Dalits.

Santosh Pujari, the exploitative landlord, identifies himself as a saviour of the villagers. He presents to us a typical case of the Jehovah complex[13] according to Jungian analysis. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung laid down the principles of analytical psychology and Jehovah complex is one of its components which describes a condition of self inflation combined with neurotic egotism. While talking to Phulmani, he says, "The government knows that you do not know what's good for you. And that's why they entrust me with all the rations and relief."Santosh or "the devil eater"as Phulmani calls him, despite being the exploiter of the whole village, thinks of himself as their saviour. While Santosh identifies himself as the saviour, the Dalit villagers continually face acrisis of identity. Their identity is linked to Santosh's. As long as he is the saviour, the villagers have to be the exploited lot so that he can save them. The Dalits do not identify themselves as Santosh's fellow villagers but as landless labour who are bound to work at Santosh's farm, who are forced to beg Santosh for water, and who are dependent on alms from Santosh. Santosh exists to exploit the Dalit villagers – the Dalits exist to be exploited by Santosh – Santosh exists to play the role of their saviour. Such is the never-ending cycle of identity crisisand caste exploitation.

While the Dalits are the last beneficiaries of natural resources, they are the first victims of natural calamities. Due to their socio-economic position, they face starvation every year. Drought is the way of their miserable life and starvation due to food shortages is the order of the day. Phulmani'srant for Maghai is apt for illustration. She says,

> And I've never had the simple pleasure of feeling the water pouring down my body till it went cool. Will you tell me, for I've never known it myself, how it feels to be free to drink as much water as you'd like to, till your thirst is really quenched? When I lost the child I had after Dhura, you the great water-diviner had to pour sand on the burning pyre for you had no water to wash it down. (122-23)

13 According to Jungian Psychoanalysis, Jehovah Complex is a form of megalomania in with a delusional individual acts out a made-up reality of grandeur and feels oneself to be all powerful.

When the Charsa river floods every monsoon, it overflows its banks and floods the fields and houses of these Dalits living on the periphery. While the river cannot even provide the villagers with drinking water during the summer droughts, it does flood their homes every rainy season. The landlords and their ilk are comfortably safe in their palatial bungalows, but it is the Dalit on the banks of Charsa who face the river's might.The psychological burden faced by the Dalit villagers shapes their individual and cultural identity, and the same finds its voice in this thespian effort of Mahasweta Devi. Their traumatic experiences distort their everyday reality and rupture the narratives of the ruling classes. Devi provides the villagers with a narrative representation that is otherwise fragmented by the oppression faced by them as an individual as well as a cla**ss:**Prolonged exploitation due to exclusionforces them to reconcile with their everyday reality in different manners. While Maghai and Phulmani silently accept their fate, Dhura chooses to rebel against the oppression. Every now and then Maghai falls on mythology to rationalise his trauma.

The political machinery not only enables the antagonists to inflict trauma which is aggravated by the apathy and the inability of the system but also alienates the Dalits from the state machinery. Apart from using the administrative machinery to alienate the Dalits, Santosh also coerces the Dalit villagers economically, politically, and socially. Still, if some rebel soul like Dhuradares raise his voice against injustice, it will not be long before Santosh brands him as a Naxal. All Dalits are viewed as troublemakers, and those who ask for

what is theirs are quickly branded as Naxals[14]. Water becomes the medium to suppress dissent by denying ecological citizenship and by branding the dissenters as Naxals. In times of drought, these wells are used by the upper caste men to exploit the Dalits strategically and to force them to accept their diktats. At the slightest hint of disobedience, Santosh "will run to the town and the police that the lower castes of Charsa have all turned Naxals"(116-17). Keep them hungry, keep them thirsty, keep them frightened – seems to be the motto of the ruling class to make sure the Dalits live in continuous trauma. Santosh extorts labour from the helpless villages at the rates of his choosing as a refusal will mean being branded as a Naxal.

> MAGHAI. It's from 1971 that he raised the plea that all the Domes and low castes of Charsa are treacherous. This year it was we cast the first seeds. But he warned, no fifty paise per head for you people. Thirty paise would be more than enough for you. Take it or leave it. I'll bring in dawals to work in my fields.
>
> PHULMANI. Dawal!
>
> MAGHAI. Once the people penetrated into the inner villages in the Naxalitedays, people fled the villages in terror, and ever since then, like unwelcome pests they go about offering to work at a pittance. Can't you see how it happens, Dhura's mother? And this drought! There'll be swarms of labourers for fifteen paise a day and a snack. We had an argument with Santosh over the wages. And I had to pay for that, scorching in the sun. With the drought and the heat and an empty stomach, my head went reeling. (137)

14 *The Naxalite Movement*(1996) by former IPS officer Prakash Singh is suitable for understanding the history of the Naxal movement, its beginnings and the history of time period discussed in this paper. This book is however, not up-to-date with the current situation of the movement.

Maghai Dom tries to rationalise his oppression due to subjugation, by the administrative machinery, by falling back to mythology and by trying to link himself with the mythological figure of "Bhagirath" or the harbinger of water. He says,

> The work we were born to may not provide us with food, but was left to us by our ancestors, my grandfather, his father, his father, for ages it has been our work. When the King Bhagirath brought the holy Ganga down from the heavens, Basumati, the mother Earth, asked Ganga: Give me little bit of it, sister, to keep hidden in my bowels…So the nether ganga flowed into the secret depths of the mother Earth. My earliest ancestor had come all prepared to offer puja to the holy river at her advent. (124-25).

It is not just Maghai Dom who uses mythology to rationalise the situation. Santosh uses mythology to his benefit to ensure compliance from Maghai. More often than not he invokes Bhagirath and reminds Maghai that it is his duty to divine water for him without asking for anything in return and that the Dalits have themselves to blame for the natural calamities as they have given up the old religion and old rituals. The ancient rituals entail that the Doms and Chandals work gratis on the Thakurs land. While Maghai uses mythology and folklore to rationalise the psychological trauma inflicted upon him, Santosh uses them to justify his atrocities. It seems that mythology exists to aid the Suvarna exploitation of Dalits.

The economic exploitation of the farmers is magnified by ecological exploitation. A village serves as a perfect example of a socio-ecological unit with its various components and integrated hierarchies. Maghai Dom and his fellow villagers are entirely dependent on the wells of Santosh Babu, the landlord. River Charsa that passes through the village is not a perennial river. It floods during the rains and its banks run dry in the summer season. Overexploitation of natural resources and their unequal distribution causes frequent famines in the region. Tensions rise when this Socio-Ecological Unit is faced with a famine. The political ecology of this unit is worth studying for its violent ramifications in the play. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is a power wielded by the Dom community in general and Maghai Dom in particular but is hegemonically used against them. The idea of "native knowledge for native ecosystems" as used by Robin Wall Kimmerer states that the use of the age-old handed-down knowledge of the ecosystem and the surrounding is essential for not only sustainable use of resources but also for the survival of all species.[15] Defending Maghai's traditional knowledge of water diving, Jiten the school teacher says to the officer from the hydrological department, "You blast the Earth to divine water. He draws on the knowledge that he has inherited from his ancestors to divine water. Why should it be mumbo-jumbo in his case and knowledge in yours" (132)?

Traditional knowledge has been passed to Maghai Dom in the form of folk songs and folklores which romanticise the relation of the Dom with the river in songs like these:

The water won't be easy to get,

15 Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*(2020), talks about the use of traditional knowledge in tandem with scientific knowledge for a sustainable use of resources.

I've kept the water hidden deep under,

You've to scratch at my breasts

Before I let it loose,

Not to you,

But to your wife and daughters. (141)

Such romanticising provides the Doms with a coping mechanism to deal with ecological exploitation. They use these folk songs, along with mythology to rationalise the ecological trauma due to a fragile ecosystem of which they are at a periphery. While Dalits are the first ones to bear the brunt of natural calamity, at the same time, nature also acts as a liberator for them.

When the Dalits make up their mind to end their dependence on the wells controlled by Santosh, they decide to make a check dam to store some water from the flooding river. Motivated by the vision of Jiten, the school teacher, the villagers come together to pile up boulders to block the flow of water. Maghai Dom, the human repository of the traditional knowledge of water divining, finds a new way to honour the profession of his forefathers. Once the Dalits choose to end their problem using a native approach to the native ecosystem, the same river that unleashed natural calamities on them becomes their liberator. Liberation for the Dalits of Charsa comes from the conventional use of natural resources in tandem with native knowledge when the subaltern rise to the occasion, realising their role in their subjugation. Natural calamities have a long term impact on the human psyche. Senseless exploitation of the ecosystem inadvertently results in environmental calamities, natural or otherwise. Recurrent calamities like chronic drought and floods adversely affect the psyche of the victims. The long-term exploitation of the entire community

and its impact on their collective identity is visible on the Dalits of Charsa. Striving for liberation does come at a price for the Dalits. As soon as the dam is built, the villagers rejoice at the sight of abundant water as many of them had never seen so much water. Santosh and the SDO declare that the villagers are Naxals who are disrupting the peace of the region and are rebelling against the nation. The SDO orders the police to open fire at the unarmed villagers and to tear down the dam Maghai is killed, the dam breaks and the overflowing Charsa leaps and snatches his body and carries it away.

The subaltern's realisation of their role in their subjugation forms the pivotal point of this play. It is when the Dalits realise that they have "nothing to lose but their chains" that they rise against the oppression. The revolutionary ending of the play is characteristic of Mahasweta Devi and opens to analysis the treatment of exploitation and oppression by authors in their work. India, with its diverse problems, never-ending conflicts, crumbling ecology, and fragmented identities might be home to the largest exploitation-suffering population, and their tale needs to be told for there are many such tales in India. Just like Devi said, "My country, Torn, Tattered, Proud, Beautiful, Hot, Humid, Cold, Sandy, Shining India. My country."

Works Cited

Artaud, Antonin. *The Theater and Its Double*. Grove Press, 1958

Alexander,Jeffrey C, et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004.

Bardhan, Kalpana, editor. *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels: A Selection of Bengali Short Stories*. University of California Press, 1990.

Caruth, Cathy.*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. The Johns Hopkins University Press,1996.

Devi, Mahasweta. *Five Plays.* Translated by Samik Bandopadhyay,- Seagull Books, 1986.

Goloy, Angelina G, et al. *Great Men and Women of Asia: Ramon Magsaysay Awardees from South Asia*, *1987-2005*. Anvil Publishing, 2006.

Johri, Meera. *Greatness of Spirit: Profiles of Indian Magsaysay Award Winners*. Rajpal and Sons, 2010.

Lahiri-Dutt, K. "Women of the Rural Communities in the Bengal Delta". *Fluid bonds: Views on Gender and Water*. Stree, 2006, pp. 387-408.

Tal, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma.* Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Yengde, Suraj. *Caste Matters*. Penguin Random House India, 2019.

About the Author

Vaibhav Pathak is a Doctoral Researcher at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali. He is a scholar of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. He works in the multidisciplinary field of Literature and Science. He is currently looking at the representation of authority and dissent in science plays. He has been a member of numerous theatrical productions for the past seven years. He is presently undertaking multiple projects on performance studies and the philosophy of science.

The Mysterious in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*

Navjot Khosla

Abstract

The present paper attempts to explore the element of the mysterious as depicted in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943). The little prince's insights are an antidote to the scourge that afflicts humankind. Saint-Exupéry's stance against the growing materialistic mood of the twentieth century works as a counter-narrative to the pragmatic approach of grown-ups, obsessed as it is with facts and figures. The paper argues that in our rush to explain things in a clear, concise and transparent manner, we fail, at times, to realise that certain elemental features of life still remain mysterious. One must learn to celebrate the mysterious, inexplicable and unpredictable aspects of life also rather than attempting to demystify them every time.

Keywords: Mystery, Mysterious, Logic, Pragmatic.

Noted physicist Albert Einstein once called the "mysterious" as the "most beautiful experience" akin to "the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science" and "[w]hoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed" (11). Books meant for children are among the first to stir their imagination. This could be one of the reasons why mystery plays such an important role in

children's stories. Writers of children's books play with words and plot lines that create a certain aura of mystery. This paper attempts to explore the element of the mysterious as depicted in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943).

In literature, the genre of mystery has largely graduated from mystery plays in the late medieval period to detective mysteries, post-industrialisation. Edgar Allan Poe is usually considered among the first to bring mystery as a genre to readers followed by other celebrated writers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. For children, this genre opened up when Edward Stratemeyer created the *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* series around 1930s.

Adrienne Gavin and Christopher Routledge in the Introduction to their edited anthology, *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural* (2001), categorise mystery writing into two parts – the rational and the supernatural (2). The former is where mystery is solved as per "the satisfaction of a character's and/or reader's intellect, causing the mystery to disappear," whereas in the latter, "mysteries are generally resolved to the satisfaction of a character's or reader's instincts and in which the mystery remains" (2). 'Rational' mystery attempts to explain events that are beyond comprehension while 'supernatural' mystery prompts one to accept that mysteries are an incomprehensible part of our lives. The use of mystery in children's literature has seen an almost progressive shift from certainty to uncertainty. Earlier, the 'rational' mysteries in children's tales generally ended with a positive assurance and a sense of security as "clear boundaries and rational explanations in early fantasy for children were conscious or unconscious compromises with prevailing educational views. To leave a child reader in uncertainty was pedagogically wrong" (Nikolajeva 71). Mysteries in stories/novels such as the *Nancy Drew* series, the *Famous Five* series and books by writers like Frances Hodgson Burnett and Erich Kästner

were tidily packaged with solutions, though these works were regarded as detective fiction. The element of mystery in these stories was addressed using logic and rationality.

However, the present day mystery series like *Goosebumps* and the *Point Horror* books by R.L. Stine differ from the previous ones in the sense that these contemporary stories incorporate less of certainty and resolution of problems, thereby making the transition from 'rational' mysteries to 'supernatural' mysteries. Commenting on the significance of mystery to a plot, E.M. Forster writes: "[m]ystery is essential to a plot, and cannot be appreciated without intelligence. To the curious it is just another 'and then—'. To appreciate a mystery, part of the mind must be left behind, brooding, while the other part goes marching on" [*sic*] (87). It appears almost as if more iconic a children's book, more elements of mystery it would contain. According to Gavin and Routledge, "[a]lthough mystery appears most obviously in genres such as detective, horror, or supernatural fiction, it also finds a presence, in some form or another, in almost all children's literature" (3). Thus, the lure of 'what comes next' is what drives the reader to continue with the story.

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, children's literature was largely didactic in nature, leaving little room for mystery. However, the canon has since stayed away from blatant moralising. In fact, Gavin and Routledge opine that as the "loss of moral and religious certainties that characterised the twentieth century exposed the universe as inherently mysterious and inexplicable", truths began to be woven into the plots and made 'discoverable' independently by readers (Introduction 3). For authors to evoke a sense of mystery and awe in a story, they "must make readers aware of their incomprehension, while at the same time creating a sense that what is being conveyed is greater than the understanding of either the characters in the book or its readers" (Pinsent 15). Many times, Pinsent argues, the mystery

that is present in a children's story can be termed as religious when the "reader realizes that there is no natural explanation for the events which occur" [*sic*] (18). Here, an example would be the description of Aslan, the lion, in *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) by C.S. Lewis. Lewis introduces Aslan, one of the most important characters in the series, not 'in person' but rather through the reactions of other characters, giving rise to a feeling of mystery as well as awe among readers.

Another mode in which mystery unravels itself in a story is through coincidence as seen in *Black Beauty* (1877) by Anna Sewell. Towards the end of the book, after years of hardship, Black Beauty finally finds owners who are kind. The idea that hard work, trials and tribulations are rewarded in mysterious ways is integral to the plot in many children's tales. Such stories remind young readers that there exists a balance in the universe between forces of good and evil. Indeed, this aspect has attracted writers for long. Authors such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien have been known to tap into the huge reservoirs of Judaeo-Christian and Nordic beliefs. Using religious motifs and imagery from such beliefs, a large number of writers have crafted stories of good versus evil in a host of ways that illustrate that goodness not only wins but also produces a sense of awe. Thus, mystery is either shown as the unknown, inexplicable and indecipherable or it is represented in the form of a symbol.

Edward Stratemeyer, during the 1930s, gave young readers mystery series with characters such as Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys who were self-assured, adept, bold, daring and unafraid in their quest to uncover the truth. Things would always resolve themselves in the end with villains being punished for their dastardliness, and fortunes being restored to the innocent. Stratemeyer and his team framed the

stories around certain predictability with villains having character flaws such as avarice and conceit. This ability to 'know' what to expect next brings the reader back to the series: "[k]nowing already' precludes having to find out … and it is for this reason that knowingness is a defensive posture. We adopt this stance to protect ourselves from something we cannot know; in this case, what we cannot know is that human reason will not save us" (Coats 186-7). Contemporary writers of children's mystery stories such as R.L. Stine tend to have a different take on 'knowing' and being able to predict things. The mystery tales do not attempt to set things right or bring everything to an apple-pie order. As these stories come to a close, neither their characters nor the young readers are any wiser regarding either the mystery or about themselves than they did before the stories began.

Mystery, it can be said, is the apprehension of something beyond human logic, perception and reason. The existence of black holes, white holes, dark energy and dark matter in the field of physics would be a case in point. They might be considered a mystery because they can neither be seen by the naked eye nor felt. Yet, the fact remains that they do exist; just as something being invisible does not mean that it is a figment of one's imagination for "[e]mpty space isn't really empty – it holds a mysterious energy that can explain the cosmos. The problem … is that our brains might not be able to comprehend it" (Rees). Research in theoretical physics would certainly attest to the fact. Thus, mystery, arguably, is akin to the unknown.

The journey of mystery from Edgar Allan Poe to contemporary times appears heavily enmeshed with religious and supernatural imagery. However, with changing times and the growth of reason and rationality, mystery became the means to comprehend the unknown through the use of human reason and logic. The religious element of mystery seems to have waned in children's literature being produced in modern times. The reason for this has been the ability and willing-

ness of the human mind to comprehend the physical and the existential, with a particular emphasis on the moral universe; in the absence of religious and metaphysical certainties.

Children's literature in different parts of the world is marked by simplicity in language and content. However, children's literature in France distinctly stands out as well known French writers have had a history of penning fewer, but more meaningful, works of children's fiction that are either political or philosophical in nature, though the story itself remains appealing to children (Bell 1483). Among notable French writers writing for children is Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944) who wrote the children's classic, *The Little Prince*. He was a pilot whose plane mysteriously disappeared while on a reconnaissance mission for the Allied forces during the Second World War.

Saint-Exupéry wrote *Le Petit Prince* (*The Little Prince*) in 1943. It was published in the U.S. in the same year whereas in France, the book saw the light of day after World War II. The book begins with the narrator, a pilot, stranded in the middle of the Sahara Desert. He meets a golden-haired child-man whom he calls the little prince. The narrator learns that the little prince has travelled through six different asteroids before reaching the Earth. The friendship between the little prince and the pilot-narrator helps the narrator learn valuable lessons that transform his life. In the end, when it is time for the little prince to return to his planet, the pilot-narrator is unable to reconcile with the thought of his friend's departure. However, he eventually learns to live with the lo**ss.**

In *The Little Prince*, the first creature that the little prince comes across on Earth is a snake. The little prince is so innocent

that he pities the snake because it is "no thicker than a finger", it has no "feet" and it "cannot even travel" (56). The snake, however, remarks: "I am more powerful than the finger of a king…. I can carry you farther than any ship could take you…. Whomever I touch, I send back to the earth from whence he came…. But you are innocent and true, and you come from a star…. You move me to pity–you are so weak on this Earth made of granite…. I can help you, some day, if you grow too homesick for your own planet" (56). The little prince asks the snake if it always speaks "in riddles", to which the snake emphatically responds, "I solve them all" (58). To be rid of all anxieties would be akin to solving all problems one faces on the Earth.

Snakes have generally been associated with mystery and dark magic through the centuries. Myths and folktales are replete with instances where the serpent is often cast as the evildoer. In some tales, the serpent appears as a monster with many heads at the entrance of a sacred cave guarding a treasure. The hero must slay the serpent before he can move on to rescue whatever treasure it was guarding. James Frazer, in his book *The Golden Bough* (1890), refers to many interesting tribal rituals where snakes are either looked at with dread or are revered and regarded as guardians. Even Indian mythology is full of such serpent-characters from the *Sheshnag*, the *Ichchadhari Nag* to *Vasuki*, the serpent-god coiled around Lord Shiva's neck.

In this context, primate behavioural ecologist Lynne Isbell's Snake Detection theory also comes to mind. She is of the view that ophidiophobia, that is, the fear of snakes is the most commonly prevalent fear among people despite the fact that they have never

come in close contact with the reptile (Isbell Introduction 3). Further in her Introduction, Isbell writes that this fear is not a learned response as "this singular fear of snakes goes way back, even farther back than six million years when our hominin line first appeared" (4). The co-evolution of primates and venomous snakes, spanning millions of years, has had a "long antagonistic history" as primates have, over this period, fallen prey to snakes (Isbell Preface x-xi). In response, primates developed certain characteristics that aided their chances of survival including sharper vision for the detection of snakes and better developed brains for a quicker response. Thus, it would appear that the inherent fear of snakes has been hardwired into our brains and can be traced in most cultures across the globe.

In the classical Greco-Roman world, however, the serpent was looked upon more positively. It seems unlikely that a poisonous snake could also provide therapeutic relief. But that is the myth surrounding Asclepius, son of Apollo and Coronis, the Greek god of medicine. He is often depicted as carrying a staff upon which is entwined a serpent. According to this myth, Asclepius was tutored by Centaur Chiron, who was a master in different forms of medicine. Also, Goddess Athena taught Asclepius skills to heal as well as to harm people. With time, he became so skilled at healing that he could bring people back from the dead. Asclepius eventually also realised that snakes are often depicted as guards at the entrances of temples. Consequently, he came to the understanding that snakes must also be keepers of all mysterious knowledge of the gods, the temples, the priests as well as the laypeople. Asclepius, therefore, decided to rear a snake. Since then, the serpent has closely been associated

with Asclepius, with healing and with medicine (Tsoucalas and Androutsos 55). Moreover, as per serpent physiology, 'sloughing', a stage wherein the snake sheds its skin, has come to be associated with fertility, renewal and rebirth.

Even so, the fear of the serpent is a relatively recent phenomenon, one created by the Western mythos. The most famous serpent in the history of humankind is the one that tempted Eve with the forbidden fruit. The serpent has long been regarded as deceitful and evil, an agent of Satan, if not Satan himself. Even tales from *The Panchatantra* portray snakes in a similar manner. For instance, a story in Kākolūkīya, the third book, "Frogs Go For a Ride on the Back of a Snake", has an almost Machiavellian quality to it wherein a "[w]eak-venomed" wily cobra, Mandavisa, craftily devours all the frogs in a pond by offering them piggy-back rides (Olivelle 137).

In *The Little Prince*, the reader comes across a yellow-coloured poisonous snake whose poison is so potent that with one sting, it can send a being 'back to the earth from whence he came'. It is important to analyse why Saint-Exupéry depicted the snake positively whereas as per Christian doctrines, a serpent is construed as the devil incarnate. The answer to this conundrum partly lies in the fact that Saint-Exupéry stayed away from Christianity throughout his life. In fact, Dermot O'Donoghue observes that Saint-Exupéry was disinclined towards religion since "… his thought sheered away instinctively from the sharp edges of dogma" (416). Saint-Exupéry was much too independent-minded in his thoughts to surrender completely to the Church. Had he accepted the Church, he would ultimately not have heeded to its doctrines. His beliefs gravitated

more towards human camaraderie and fellow feeling rather than religious doctrines.

In fact, Saint-Exupéry was once stranded in the Sahara with ten of his pilot-comrades, exactly at the spot where a year prior, two of their fellow-pilots had been murdered by tribesmen of the desert. Apprehensive of the three hundred-odd armed Moors in the vicinity, the crew built a makeshift camp to pass the night. While keeping an overnight vigil, Saint-Exupéry recalls how the "handful of men who possessed nothing in the world but their memories were sharing invisible riches" by way of jokes and stories (*Wind* 32). About brotherhood amongst pilots, and by extension, all men, Saint-Exupéry further writes: "[m]en travel side by side for years, each locked up in his own silence or exchanging those words which carry no freight—till danger comes. Then they stand shoulder to shoulder. They discover that they belong to the same family. They wax and bloom in the recognition of fellow beings. They look at one another and smile" [*sic*] (32). These are sentiments that would best describe the French writer. His religion was doing one's duty, universal brotherhood and love for humanity. That is perhaps the reason the snake aids the little prince in sending him back to his planet, though it might appear otherwise.

Another element of mystery in *The Little Prince* is the appearance of the water-well. Since the stranded pilot-narrator runs out of water and the little prince too is thirsty, both begin to search for a well in the Sahara desert even though the pilot-narrator finds it "absurd to look for a well … in the immensity of the desert" (73). As they appreciate the splendour of the desert, the little prince remarks:

"[w]hat makes the desert beautiful … is that somewhere it hides a well" (73). He is delighted to hear the narrator's reply: "[y]es…. the stars, the desert – what gives them their beauty is something that is invisible!" (74). Eventually, the pilot-narrator does find a well. To his surprise, the well is not one of the general hole-like wells found in the Sahara, but a village well even though there is no village in sight. This prompts him to observe: "[i]t is strange…. Everything is ready for use: the pulley, the bucket, the rope" (76). The little prince is, of course, jubilant to see the well. As he sets the pulley in motion, he remarks: "[d]o you hear…. We have wakened the well, and it is singing" (76). When the narrator raises the bucket of water for the little prince to drink, he notes: "[i]t was as sweet as some special festival treat. This water was indeed a different thing from ordinary nourishment. Its sweetness was born of the walk under the stars, the song of the pulley, the effort of my arms. It was good for the heart, like a present" (76-77).

Water is regarded as one of the essential elements of Nature in most cultures. According to Patricia Curd, in ancient Greece, it was the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles who, around the fifth century, carried forward the idea of a "cosmos" comprising the four "roots" found in nature – earth, water, air and fire ("Presocratic Philosophy"). It was Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) who subsequently came up with the fifth element, "aether" [*sic*], which was "inaccessible to earthly beings", and thus, played "no part in the constitution of mundane matter" (Ball 10). In this context, the ancient Indian tradition also speaks of the Pancha Tatva or the Panchabhuta, that is, the five elements that the physical world is composed of. "The whole visible

world is composed of one or more of these five elements", or the "Pañcabhūtas", namely, "Pṛthvī (earth), Ap (water), Tejas (fire), Vāyu (air) and Ākāśa (ether)", observes Vettam Mani ("PAÑCABHŪTA" 547). This is further labelled as the "Pāñcabhautikasiddhānta" or the "doctrine of five elements" (547). Water is an essential source of nutrients and is therefore regarded as most vital for the well being of the body. It rejuvenates and revitalises life. Indeed, water drawn from the well by the narrator is termed 'sweet' because it not only quenches thirst but also provides sustenance to the soul. The water alchemises into an elixir, replenishing the soul previously parched of love, friendship, kindness and warmth. Thus, the inexplicable presence of a well in the middle of a desert is no less than a mysterious miracle.

The mystery of what happens to us after death has been a matter of much deliberation for centuries. Philosophers, scholars and writers have been grappling with this eternal question. The fear of life after death has been most aptly expressed by William Shakespeare in *Hamlet*: "Who would fardels bear/To grunt and sweat under a weary life/But that the dread of something after death/(The undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveller returns) puzzles the will/And makes us bear those ills we have/Than fly to others that we know not of" (3.1.75-81). Though death is the inevitable end of life, not many wish to dwell much upon it.

Death has been a part of many children's texts such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* (1911) by Frances Hodgson Burnett to name a few. However, life-after-death is seldom depicted in children's literature. For this reason, the manner in which death and life-after-

death have been explored in *The Little Prince* deserves special attention. Despite his own apprehensions, the little prince's approach towards preparing the narrator for his eventual death is rather unique. A short while prior to his death, the little prince shares with the narrator his need to return home that very night since: "[t]onight, it will be a year… My star, then, can be found right above the place where I came to the Earth, a year ago" (82). The little prince explains to the narrator of his impending death via the analogy of gazing at stars. He states that looking at the stars could mean different things to different people but they would have a unique meaning for the narrator because "[y]ou−you alone−will have the stars as no one else has them…. In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night … You−only you−will have stars that can laugh!" [*sic*] (83). Wisely, he consoles the narrator:

> And when your sorrow is comforted (time soothes all sorrows) you will be content that you have known me. You will always be my friend. You will want to laugh with me. And you will sometimes open your window, so, for that pleasure…And your friends will be properly astonished to see you laughing as you look up at the sky! (83)

Laughingly, the little prince continues: "[i]t will be as if, in place of the stars, I had given you a great number of little bells that knew how to laugh…" (83). To infuse the other's consciousness with such positive thoughts in the face of one's own imminent death is seldom

visible in life and very rarely evident in literary writings.

Stars have traditionally played an important role in many ancient cultures. Maritime history documents how sailors used the position of stars, especially the position of the Polaris or the Pole Star, to navigate the high seas. It was the North Star that guided the Magi to Baby Jesus. Centuries later, the same North Star helped Black slaves escape to freedom through the Underground Railroad. In this context, referring to the significance of stars in the ancient world, Toby Wilkinson observes in *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (2010) that the pyramids in Egypt were uniquely designed, each pointing to the north. Wilkinson cites the example of the Great Pyramid of Giza, also called the Pyramid of Khufu, constructed around circa 2550 B.C. The narrow passages above the burial chamber led "to the outer edge of the pyramid, stopping just short of the world beyond" (69). These openings "had a purpose that was altogether loftier and more transcendent, for they pointed to the stars—more specifically to the culminations of Sirius (the dog star), a star in the constellation Orion, and two of the circumpolar stars that rotate around the celestial north pole" (69). The expertise of the ancient Egyptians in astronomy is well established. "[S]tars played an important part in state religion, especially in beliefs about the king's afterlife", writes Wilkinson (69). Of special interest were the "circumpolar stars" as they "alone remained permanently visible in the night sky, never setting, and were thus the perfect metaphor for the king's eternal destiny—a place in the great cosmic order of the universe that would endure forever" (69). Therefore, the pyramid meant for Khufu "was nothing less than a way of uniting heaven and earth for the everlasting well-being of

the king" (69). The star in *The Little Prince* also holds a peculiar meaning for the narrator. It refers to a mysterious and specialised connection that the stranded pilot-narrator shall, henceforth, share with stars in the sky.

At the end, there is no air of despondency or of melancholy as the narrator recounts how the little prince died when bitten by the snake: "[t]here was nothing there but a flash of yellow close to his ankle. He remained motionless for an instant. He did not cry out. He fell as gently as a tree falls. There was not even any sound, because of the sand" (87). After his death, the narrator surmises that the little prince is finally able to return to his planet since he does not "find his body at daybreak…. [and] [i]t was not such a heavy body" (87). Painful memories of losing loved ones appear to have seeped into Saint-Exupéry's life as also into his writings. It is, therefore, with bittersweet nostalgia that the narrator remembers the now-departed little prince: "[a]nd at night I love to listen to the stars. It is like five hundred million little bells…" (87). And just as the little prince wished, the narrator learns to look past his bereavement even though he misses his friend very much.

In this context, Anne Dodd makes an interesting observation: "[d]eath here is not final as far as the narrator is concerned…. Perhaps there is a hint here of a life after death, for the little prince does return to his planet and his rose; would that not be heaven for him?" [*sic*] (774-775). After all, to be home and near his beloved 'rose' would indeed be a blessing, like being in heaven, for the little prince. This was the only way the little prince thought he could reach his planet. To say that the narrator finally gets over his grief would not be

correct. He still feels the loss of his friend dearly and considers an individual fortunate to have found a true friend. However, the manner in which he handles his friend's death and the resultant loss is truly commendable.

Saint-Exupéry's personal experiences regarding friendship are remarkably similar to those of the narrator in *The Little Prince*. The author writes that "hope of joy" can be found only in "human relations" for: "[i]f I draw up the balance sheet of the hours in my life that have truly counted, surely I find only those that no wealth could have procured me. True riches cannot be bought. One cannot buy…friendship…of a companion to whom one is bound forever by ordeals suffered in common" (*Wind* 30-31). Thus, to think that death is the end of life would not really be correct. Life and death are but two sides of the same coin – one beginning where the other ends and vice versa.

The idea of the modern world rests upon man's ability to reason and to use logic in order to solve problems. However, in our rush to explain things in a clear, concise and transparent manner, we fail, at times, to realise that certain elemental features of life still remain mysterious. This aspect is evocatively highlighted in William Wordsworth's poem *The Prelude*, Book One: "There is a dark/Invisible Workmanship that reconciles/Discordant elements, and makes them move/In one society" (lines 340-345). It is this 'Invisible Workmanship', in addition to reason and rationality, which gives meaning to life. Harold Bloom, in reference to this poem, rightly observes that "[i]f the human heart, in its common, everyday condition, will love and trust the phenomenal world, then that world

will never betray it" (Introduction 4). Thus, acknowledgement, and acceptance, of such mysteries could certainly help enhance our understanding of life. It can be argued that the preponderance of reason has led to a distrust of things that are beyond the realm of logic, coherence and comprehension. While reflecting upon the task of thinking, Martin Heidegger, in his essay "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking", borrows Aristotle's line of thought from *Metaphysics*, Book IV (1006 a): "For it is uneducated not to have an eye for when it is necessary to look for a proof and when this is not necessary" (324). In other words, one needs to develop the discerning eye for knowing when to ask questions and when to trust the cosmic energies working in the universe. For instance, when it comes to nature, it is important to trust the flower and the way in which it reveals itself rather than getting caught up in discovering its scientific composition. Here, the use of logic and intellect would diminish the experience of appreciating the beauty of the flower in all its splendour. In *The Little Prince*, when the stranded pilot-narrator chances upon the little prince in the middle of Sahara, he remarks: "[w]hen a mystery is too overpowering, one dare not disobey" (8). Attempting to rationalise the mysterious appearance of the little prince in the middle of the desert, miles away from human habitation, would take away from the beauty of the tale. Further, in this context, Lama Anagarika Govinda, scholar and teacher of Tibetan Buddhism writes: "[a] mystery can be experienced and yet remain inexplicable. It is not a mystery because it is something hidden and unknowable, but because it is too great for words" (208). Therefore, one must also learn to celebrate the mysterious, inexplicable and unpredictable

aspects of life rather than attempting to demystify them every time.

In a way, Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* can be regarded as a clarion call for humankind to reconnect with the ongoing primordial elements of nature that form the continuum of life. Unless we develop a deeper connection with these primal elements that operate through the mystery of life, we will remain highly superficial creatures caught in the pragmatics of life. Although being practical is an important part of life, yet it should not be allowed to overpower or rationalise those elements that enrich human life. A pragmatic approach cannot ever access the kernel of life. The core, therefore, remains connected with the mysterious flow of life and everything in it that we seldom focus upon. Commenting on the ebbs and flows of life's experiences, John Harris states: "[f]or all of us, life has its deserts as well as its oases; and for most of us, the dry expanses must simply be endured, not necessarily without complaint, only without surrender. The blind, bare act of faith in something beyond the horizon sustains us" (141-142). However, "[f]or zealots of Saint-Exupéry's stamp", Harris writes, "such faith is not enough" as "[t]hey do not endure the ordeal but revel in it, and their vision of the beyond resounds with spring water and dances with houris" [*sic*] (142). Thus, as the book shows, it is imperative that we do not get dissociated from the eternal flux of life since there are bound to be junctures in life where reason and logic become insufficient instruments to deal with its vagaries. *The Little Prince* is a reminder that we tune ourselves with those mysterious elements of life that continue to remain an enigma.

Works Cited

Aristotle. *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* [from "Being and Time" (1927) to "The Task of Thinking" (1964]). By Martin Heidegger, edited by David Farrell Krell, Routledge, 2012.

Ball, Philip. *The Elements: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP, 2002.

Bell, Anthea. "Children's Books in Translation." *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, edited by D L Kirkpatrick, Macmillan Press, 1978, pp. 1481-1485.

Bloom, Harold. Introduction. *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Wordsworth's The Prelude*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, pp. 1-23.

Coats, Karen. "The Mysteries of Postmodern Epistemology: Stratemeyer, Stine, and Contemporary Mystery for Children." *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural,* edited by Adrienne E. Gavin and Christopher Routledge, Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001, pp. 184-201.

Curd, Patricia. "Presocratic Philosophy." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 22 June 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/presocratics/.

Dodd, Anne W. "The Little Prince: A Study for Seventh Grade in Interpretation of Literature." *Elementary English*, vol. 46, no. 6, 1969, pp. 772-776. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41386575.

Einstein, Albert. "The World As I See It." *Ideas and Opinions*, edited by Carl Seelig and translated by Sonja Bargmann, Crown Publishers Inc., 1960, pp. 8-11.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Harvest Books, 1955.

Gavin, Adrienne E, and Christopher Routledge, editors. "Mystery in Children's Literature from the Rational to the Supernatural." *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural*, Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001, pp. 1-13.

Govinda, Lama Anagarika. *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness*. Quest Books, 1976.

Harris, John R. "The Elusive Act of Faith: Saint-Exupéry's Sacrifice to an Unknown God." Christianity and Literature, vol. 39, no. 2, 1990, pp. 141-159. *JSTOR*, doi:10.1177/014833319003900203.

Isbell, Lynne A. Introduction. *The Fruit, the Tree and the Serpent: Why We See So Well*. Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 1-8.

---. Preface. *The Fruit, the Tree and the Serpent: Why We See So Well*. Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. ix-xi.

Mani, Vettam "PAÑCABHŪTA". *PURĀNIC ENCYCLOPAEDIA: A Comprehensive Dictionary with Special Reference to the Epic and Purānic Literature*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p. 547.

Nikolajeva, Maria. *Children's Literature Comes Of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic*. Routledge, 2016.

O'Donoghue, Dermot. "Antoine de Saint-Exupéry." *The Furrow*, vol. 3, no. 8, 1952, pp. 413-417. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27656028.

Olivelle, Patrick, translator. *Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom*, by Vishnu Sharma, OUP, 1999.

Pinsent, Pat. "so great and beautiful that I cannot write them': Religious Mystery and Children's Literature." *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural,* edited by Gavin and Routledge, Palgrave Publishers Ltd., 2001, pp. 14-31.

Rees, Martin. "We May Have to Wait for Post-Humans to Understand Universe, Says Astrophysicist Martin Rees." The Independent, Independent Digital News and Media, 22 Aug. 2018, www.independent.co.uk/news/science/universe-quantum-string-theory-dark-energy-galaxies-physics-human-brain-martin-rees-a8494881.html. Accessed 6 Jan. 2019.

Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de. *The Little Prince*. Translated by Katherine Woods. Mammoth, 1996. (Further quotations are from this edition and have been cited parenthetically in the text).

---. *Wind, Sand and Stars*. Translated by Lewis Galantière. Harbrace Paperbound Library, [1967].

Shakespeare, William *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2017.

Tsoucalas, Gregory, and George Androutsos. "Asclepius and the Snake as Toxicological Symbols in Ancient Greece and Rome." *History of Toxicology and Environmental Health: Toxicology in Antiquity*, edited by Philip Wexler, vol. 2, Academic Press, 2015, pp. 52-59.

Wilkinson, Toby. *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*. Random House, 2010.

Wordsworth, William "Book First - Introduction: Childhood and School Time." *The Prelude Or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, by William Wordsworth, OUP, 1953, pp. 1-19.

About the Author

Navjot Khosla is working as an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala. Having graduated from University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois in the U.S., she went on to complete her M. Phil. and PhD from the Department of English at Punjabi University. Khosla has authored a book, *A Song of Freedom: Journeying from Slavery to Love in Maya Angelou's Poetry* (2015). Her research interests range from African American literature to children's literature, with special focus on Indian children's literature. She has also been associated with the 1947 Partition Archive Project.

Thematic Threads in Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men* and *The Return*

Harpreet Kaur

Abstract

Freedom is one's ability to move freely and act independently, but a powerful dictator in a country limits this freedom. He has absolute control over the private and the public sector of life. The suppression of the voice of artists, poets and writers who make people aware of their rights results in the life of exile for these people. Consequently, the growth of the person in exile becomes incomplete as he hangs between his native land and the country of exile; people face mental trauma when they recall the memory of their country which always haunts them. They try to come to terms with this trauma by writing it down on the pages. Such person uses his writing for two purposes: to relieve himself from his trauma and to oppose the state that forced him to spend his life in exile. In this context, the paper will make an attempt to prove how Hisham Matar's novel *In the Country of Men* and memoir *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* construct interplay of variety of themes, such as exile and identity, loyalty and betrayal, justice and injustice, innocence and corruption, and the nature of truth. How Matar amalgamates the fictional and the factual, and the personal and the political in his works shall also be under scrutiny. Through the thematic study of both the works, this paper will bring out how the dictatorship ruined the childhood and the youth of innocent Suleiman and many other people like him. It will also delve into the questions: how the Libyans learnt to live without their family members who had been abducted by the regime and how the universal experience of suffering under torturous dictatorial regimes handicap people physically and mentally.

Keywords: Dictatorship, Torture, Suffering, Loyalty, Abduction

Dictatorship is one of the forms of government where only one person or a very small group has absolute control or power in state. The term has been derived from the Latin word *dictator* which in the "Roman Republic" was referred to a person or magistrate who was given absolute powers to deal with the crisis that the country was facing (*Britannica*). But the dictator in the works under study is the person who himself has put the country in crisis. Here the reference is being made to Muammar Qaddafi, the dictator of Libya. He had taken power in his hands in 1969 by overthrowing King Idris, but his dictatorship put people only in worse conditions. It took their freedom to speak and move freely. Qaddafi was not only the first person to suppress social and political opinions of the Libyans; the country was previously occupied by the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Ottomans, and the Italians. Qaddafi followed the footsteps of the Italians and executed people in public. It was for the fear of the state only that some people shifted their loyalties towards it. Consequently, they betrayed their friends and family members to save their own lives. But there were some people who remained loyal to their country and opposed the state and had spent their lives in the notorious places like El-Agheila and Abu Salim prison. The worse conditions of these places and of Libya under Muammar Qaddafi's regime has been efficiently depicted by Hisham Matar, a British-Libyan writer, in his novel *In the Country of Men* (2006) and in his memoir *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* (2016).

Mario Vargas Llosa writes that themes choose the novelist; he does not choose them. Like "*catoblepas*" which consumes its own self, a novelist "scavenges" his life experiences to get the rough ideas for his stories (*Letters to a Young Novelist* 17). Similarly, Hisham Matar has not chosen those themes deliberately; rather themes emerge from the stories presented in his works. He has used his life experiences as material for his novels.

A theme is an idea that usually recurs in a work of literature. Human relationships, love-hatred, hope-disappointment, faith-betrayal, suffering, suppression of women, surrender to the regime, power, memory, incomplete catharsis, exile, human rights violations and violence are some of the important themes that are prevalent in literature from the ancient to the present times. Many novels and memoirs present complex human relationships and sufferings that result from the political and social ambience of a country. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1990), Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men* (2006), and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011) and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) are epitome of such experiences. Memoirs like Wladyslaw Szpilman's *The Pianist* (1946), Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947) and Hisham Matar's *The Return* (2016) present the human suffering inflicted upon people by different dictators.

Dictatorship suppresses the opposition through tortures and by taking away its freedom. It is not only a state that is ruled by a dictator but at times some families are also ruled by dictatorial heads who make others suffer. The novel is full of incidents where torture is being inflicted upon the innocent people. First, there is a domestic

torture that Najwa faced in her childhood when she was seen with a boy. She was locked in a room and beaten badly. She was even refused education and was married at the age of fourteen. On the very first night of her marriage, she felt as if she had been raped by a stranger. In the novel, readers are introduced to the feminist perspective through Najwa's character. Although she was punished for her actions, yet she tries to resist her marriage by getting drunk and remaining away from her husband. The condition of women in Libya was quite different from the whole world. In other progressive countries like France and America, women became versatile in every profession. But women in Libya faced suppression only. Through the story of *A Thousand and One Nights*, different facets of Najwa's personality come out, who hates its protagonist Scheherazade. Najwa considers her a coward for choosing slavery over death. The irony here is that Najwa herself submits to the regime in order to save her husband. David Dabydeen's viewpoint is quite accurate here, who in the review of the novel says that Najwa's biography is intertwined with the allusions to Scheherazade's situation under the tyranny of King Shahryar. This classical tale puts light on the "modern Arab life" (*Independent*). It is not Najwa but her parents who win at the end and are successful in their efforts to prove her virgin. She feels betrayed by her husband when he is arrested by the regime, leaving Najwa and Suleiman directionle**ss** A woman's fate in a patriarchal society is manifested through the betrayals Najwa has faced. In public life, there is a torture that stems out from the opposition of the Qaddafi's regime. Ustath Rashid is a suitable example, who is taken from his house in front of his family by the members of the Revolutionary

Committee. His wife stands behind like "an invisible string" attached to her husband (*In the Country of Men* 186). Ustath is interrogated at the National Basketball Stadium and people cheer his interrogation with the words like "*Hang the traitor*" (86). He pleads like a guilty child before the committee for mercy but is not successful. Finally, he is hanged after a lot of torture and harassment. Faraj's deteriorated condition after he is captured by the Revolutionary Committee is another example of torture. He could not stand on his own and his appearance is so bad that Suleiman fails to recognize him.

The novel presents the life in Libya under Qaddafi's regime from the perspective of a nine-year old boy Suleiman. Unaware of the political ambience around him, he was entrapped by the agents of the dictator and thus, had to submit to the regime.

Love has various facets in the novel, i.e., children-parents' love, husband-wife's love, love in friendship, love for one's country and one's love for freedom in his homeland. Suleiman's love for his father Faraj and mother Najwa is pure. He always wanted to protect his parents and was the sole listener of his mother's problems that she faced before and after marriage. In his father's absence, only he was the responsible person and the head of the house as his mother usually got drunk. He was so devoted to his mother that as a child, he could hardly take his eyes off in order to save her from the perils that might approach her any time. Such responsibility of a child can be seen in Nadine Gordimer's novel *My Son's Story*. In this novel, Will remains at home with his mother until she gets arrested whereas his father was busy in his extramarital and political affairs. In both the novels [*My Son's Story* and *In the Country of Men*], the sons are

trusted with their parents' secrets. In Gordimer's novel, the son has kept his father's secret of having an extramarital affair and in Matar's novel; the son is trusted with mother's secret of being an alcoholic. Najwa manifests her love for Faraj when she approaches the agents of regime to save her husband. She swallows her pride for him. Ustath Rashid's love for Faraj can be seen when Ustath did not reveal his name as his accomplice to the men of the Revolutionary Committee. Faraj and Ustath's love for Libya is intense as they try to oppose the dictatorship by hiding their identity. They also make people aware of the regime's deeds through pamphlets. Najwa loves to be free but her freedom was taken away by her parents and husband. In this way, every character in the novel has the feeling of love, either for his country or for his family.

Some characters manifest their love for power which is also an important theme in the novel. Suleiman reflects his lust for power when he plays "My Land, Your Land" with Kareem and seizes Kareem's property (*In the Country of Men* 106). This incident presents the basic level of children's political knowledge. They try to imitate in their games the ways of state in which it organises the repression of citizens. The game also signifies the savage attitude of Qaddafi's regime. Like the "Big Brother" of George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty Four: A Novel*, Muammar Qaddafi, the dictator of Libya, wanted to control every aspect of citizens' lives (167). He could not bear his criticism, thus wanted to finish his opponents. Consequently, he created the Revolutionary Committees that abducted the dissidents and interrogated them. The dissidents were extremely tortured during the interrogation and it was telecasted on television as well. This

happens with Ustath Rashid in the novel.

There is no doubt if one loves his family, friends or country, he is also loyal towards them. To be loyal is quite difficult and Faraj rejected this title by submitting to Qaddafi's regime. Ustath Rashid, on the other hand, was loyal as he does not tell names of his accomplices to the men of the Revolutionary Committee. Suleiman is loyal to his father as he rescues his book *Democracy Now* from burning. He is loyal to his mother as well and does not tell her secret of being an alcoholic to anyone. Loyalty and betrayal are interconnected; it is because of the fear of the dictatorship that characters betray one another in the novel. Ustath Rashid is arrested because someone has betrayed him. Faraj betrays Ustath by surrendering to Qaddafi's regime. Najwa's act of saving her husband from the clutches of the regime is betrayal of the ideas for which Ustath and Nasser had sacrificed their lives. Suleiman betrays his friend Kareem when he tells his secrets to other boys. He is ashamed of his betrayal and does not even go to meet Kareem as he is leaving the country with his mother after his father Ustath Rashid's death. Suleiman betrays his family as well by telling some important secrets of his father to the man of the Revolutionary Committee. He thinks that this would help his family but the result is chaos. Suleiman is confused by the incidents that are happening around him. Towards the end of the novel, Suleiman feels betrayed by his parents when they send him away to Egypt without providing any reason. Throughout the story, his parents avoid telling him the truth about the political ambience of Libya and his father's involvement in it. Betrayal is witnessed throughout the study of the novel either for the selfish reasons or for the wellbeing of one's family.

The submission to the regime contributes to the progression of the novel. In the story, Faraj submits to the regime and his relationship with Najwa takes a new turn and they become a loving couple. But after Faraj's surrender, Sulieman's life changes. In order to save him from the clutches of regime, Suleiman's parents send him to Cairo. His family submits to the regime in order to save their lives. The state did not leave any difference between the public and the private life. It could easily enter in the households and the same happens in Suleiman's household when Faraj's photograph is replaced by a huge photograph of the dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who becomes the central figure in the house. Another way of keeping an eye on the activities of the natives was through eavesdropping on phone. Incomplete catharsis is another important theme in the novel. Suleiman's catharsis for his father's death is incomplete as he was not with him during his last time and for his last rites. His absence during the last rites of his father continues to haunt Suleiman and his life of exile has also impacted his psyche. Memory is another important theme of the novel. Suleiman's memory and his way of recounting the events through the medium of stream of consciousness make the novel memorable. He goes back into his memory to describe the important events that happened in his family and the country he was living in.

The novel deals at length with the violation of human rights. People were refused their basic human rights during Qaddafi's regime. The opposition was executed publicly and the dissidents' families were followed by the men of the Revolutionary Committee. This happens with Suleiman and Najwa. Students were hanged in

the public for opposing the dictator. People could not talk freely on phone and the practice of eavesdropping led to the arrests of many dissidents. In this way, the regime controlled the lives of Libyan people. Some of the above mentioned important themes in the novel bring out the mental and physical torture that characters go through.

After discussing the important themes in the novel *In the Country of Men*, now the paper shall make an attempt to discuss themes in the memoir *The Return*. These include: human rights violation, disappearance, exile, identity crisis, memory, incomplete catharsis, search for father, and consolation through art. It is mentioned earlier that Matar has amalgamated the personal and the political in his works and it becomes clearer through the reading of his memoir *The Return*. The communication of harrowing experiences into a personal narrative is a double torture and Matar has faced this torture by writing about his father's disappearance in his memoir. He falls under the category of such persons who grapples with the question what a person does when he cannot "leave and cannot return" (*The Return* 2). His father's abduction by Muammar Qaddafi's regime and the dictator's refusal to provide any information of his father's being alive made Matar write about dictator's atrocities in his books. The dictator tried to silence him by banning his books in Libya but the matter gained international attention. The publication of his memoir unveiled the misdeeds of the dictator. The memoir represents the history and politics of Libya as experienced by those who have been the testimonies to his father's disappearance and the human rights violation in Libya.

Disappearances, kidnappings, massacres, arrests,

blindfolding, public executions, handcuffing and censorship on art, literature, media and judiciary form the discussion on human rights in the memoir. The dissidents were targeted and were abducted from their houses. The same happened with Hisham Matar's father Jaballa Matar who was a prominent leader of the opposition. The Egyptian police arrested him to deliver to Qaddafi in 1990. There was no news from his side except two letters that he managed to send out of the infamous Abu Salim. The savage treatment in the prison caused physical and mental disabilities to the prisoners. The instances of the inhuman practices include the handcuffs with the plastic wire that caused pain in the head and loud speakers in each cell that played Qaddafi's speeches from the morning to the midnight. The captives were tortured physically and mentally for unlimited times. They were even refused medical care and were brutally treated when found with a book or letter. This happened with Jaballa who fell into a "bottomless abyss" when the regime found about the letters he had sent to his family (*The Return* 175). The prisoners suffered to this extent that they did not get proper food and water. Their suffering does not end here. On 29th June, 1996, a massacre took place in Abu Salim. This massacre reminds one of the Holocausts during the Second World War. There was a loud explosion and 1270 prisoners were shot dead with pistols and machine guns. The dead were not even provided a respectable funeral. The poets and writers were also not tolerated and had been arrested by the regime. The Italians, during their seizure of Libya, hanged people in public and a half century later, Qaddafi did the same by hanging the students in public. The memoir is a witness to how the prisoners became unrecognizable for their families when

they came out of the abyss and extreme suffering.

Jaballa Matar, Hisham's father, was an important leader of the opposition and thus, was abducted. The subject of his disappearance plays a major role in the formation of the memoir. He was kidnapped from Egypt in 1990 and it was only through his letters that the family came to know about his abduction. He was kept in the infamous Abu Salim that was called "The Last Stop", a metaphor for a place from where no one had come alive (*The Return* 10). Unsure about her husband's fate, Matar's mother addressed him as "Absent-Present" (39). The dissidents including Jaballa were threat to the regime. Consequently, they were abducted under mysterious circumstances.

Disappearance of the dissidents further lead to the life of exile for their families. The political conditions of Libya were responsible for Matar's life of exile. He, along with his family had spent their exile in the cities like Manhattan, Nairobi, Cairo, Rome, London and Paris. During these years, he faced identity crisis and felt that a part of him had stopped developing since the family left Libya. Joseph Brodsky in his essay "The Condition We Call Exile" talks about "*Gastarbeiter*" and a writer in exile. The common thing between both of them is that they both run towards a better condition from the worse (1). Matar also ran away from the political ambience of Libya that had taken his father's life. The family had left Libya in 1979 and exile changed their whole life.

Identity crisis that Matar and his family face results from exile. Matar and his brother developed this sense of crisis when they joined schools in Europe under false identities. Their father could not travel with his real passport as the regime always had its eyes

on him. Matar's growth is incomplete as he was distanced from his family's name, home, music and language. The confiscation of identity and the things of "personal value" was a traumatic thing for Matar (*The Return* 21). Changez of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, who was from Pakistan, also faced the identity crisis in America, especially after the 9/11 attacks.

A person in exile tries to assert his identity by writing about the atrocities and the experiences he has gone through. He revisits his memory for this purpose. Writing personal narratives for the author as a survivor is a kind of emotional struggle. Geography, history and politics constitute a major part of Matar's writings. In the memoir, he revisits his memory to tell about his childhood and his parents. He describes his father Jaballa Matar as someone who helped everyone and was an author as well. Matar recalls the time when his father told Ziad and him about the period when Qaddafi had taken control of Libya. Further, Matar recalls his father's abduction and the time afterwards when each friend from the family refused to help them. He looks back on the day of massacre in Abu Salim prison in 1996 when he could not get out of his bed. He shivered on the thought that his father might have been among those prisoners who lost their lives in the massacre. Matar used to visit the National Gallery to see the paintings. Unintentionally, on the day of massacre he shifted to Édouard Manet's *The Execution of Maximilian*, a painting of political execution. Uncle Mahmoud, even after spending twenty-one years in the notorious Abu Salim, still has a sharp memory. He tells Matar about the day he was kidnapped and how the dissidents were treated in the prison. Matar recalls the day when he met Seif el-Islam, son

of the man who had kidnapped his father. That time was torturous for Matar but Seif did not tell him anything about his father. Matar successfully describes the time from his memory when he visited Libya and had met his uncles and their families.

Although Matar tries to compensate his loss by meeting his uncles but he suffers from incomplete catharsis. Aristotle writes that the incidents in a tragedy give birth to the feelings of "pity and fear" (*Poetics* 8). The catharsis and purification of these emotions is necessary to relieve the author and audience from the burden of tragedy. Many authors achieve the cathartic effect of the tragedies of their lives by writing them down on the pages in the form of a story or memoir. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith in their book *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* consider writing of memoir as author's effort to gain some audience who helped him to unburden himself from his past. Matar relieves himself from his grief by writing memoir. His catharsis is incomplete as he does not know what actually has happened to his father. But he has found solace in writing like his father who created and recited poems at night in Abu Salim.

Matar has actually taken the help of writing to search his father and to bring into the notice of international high authorities the matter of his father's abduction by the dictator of Libya. To know the facts behind his father's disappearance, Matar started a campaign in which he appealed various diplomats, poets, writers, journalists, and human rights activists to help him to find his father's whereabouts. The Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu addressed a statement to Muammar Qaddafi about Jaballa Matar. Kamila Shamsie wrote

an article to help Matar. Matar and Ziad met Qaddafi's son to know about their father's fate. Instead of helping them, he tried to buy them off but was not successful. Matar gave interviews to many channels and his campaign to find his father gained international attention but the results were not fruitful.

Matar did not leave any stone unturned to search his father, but findings were not positive. Then he had turned to art and achieved the consolation for his father's death through it. The year he lost his father, his fascination for the pictures changed. Spending time before the paintings overwhelmed him. He felt himself surrounded by the sounds and images of his father's final moments when he was looking at Titian's *The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*. He shifted to Édouard Manet's painting *The Execution of Maximilian* on the day of massacre in Abu Salim prison. For Matar, this picture of political execution evokes the indeterminate fate of his father and other prisoners who lost their lives in Abu Salim. He was disheartened about the fact that he was unknowingly guided to this painting on the same day on which the massacre happened. This had changed his relationship with all works of Manet. Titian and Manet's paintings give insight into Matar's grief and quest for his father.

The above written study of the themes of Hisham Matar's novel *In the Country of Men* and memoir *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* has proved that the dictatorship in Libya ruined the childhood and youth of many children like Suleiman. The most important incident of Matar's life is his father's abduction and uncertainty of his fate. So, he has dealt with this incident directly in his memoir and indirectly in his novel through his persona Suleiman.

The themes that came out of his works clearly highlight what it means to be a human under the savage and torturous rule of the dictator like Muammar Qaddafi. Further, the study of both the works suggests that *In the Country of Men* is an autobiographical novel. Though Matar has clearly refused this fact, yet the novel clearly presents some important aspects of his life through Suleiman's character and political ambience of Libya. There is difference between Suleiman's grief of his father's death and Matar's grief of his father's disappearance. The former knows that his father is no more but the latter does not know whether to count his father among the living or the dead. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus had found the truth about his father's death towards the end but Matar fails to get any information regarding his father's disappearance and death. As compared to Sophocles' work, there is deferral of closure in Matar's *The Return*. Oedipus found the closure but it became impossible for Matar. In fact, his *The Return* is a search for this closure. Consequently, literature has helped Hisham Matar to give a way to his pent up feelings.

Works Cited

Brodsky, Joseph. "The Condition We Call Exile." https://www.bisla.sk/ english/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Joseph-Brodsky-The-Condition-We-Call-Exile.pdf.

Butcher, S. H., trans. *Poetics.* By Aristotle, Gutenberg, 2008, https://www.amherst.edu /system/files/media/1812/The%252520Poetics%252520of%252520Aristotle%25252C%252520by%252520Aristotle.pdf.

Dabydeen, David. "In the Country of Men by Hisham Matar." *Independent*, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/in-the-country-of-men-by-hisham-matar-6095437.html.

"Dictatorship." *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/dictatorship.

"Freedom." *Merriam Webster*, https://www.merriam webster.com/dictionary/freedom#:~:text=freedom%2C%20liberty%2C%20license%20mean%20the,being%20unduly%20hampered%20or%20frustrated.

"Hisham Matar." *Barnard*, https://barnard.edu/profiles/hisham-matar.

Matar, Hisham. *In the Country of Men*. Penguin Books, 2006.

---. *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between*. Penguin Books, 2016.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty Four*. William Collins, 2021.

"Review of Anatomy of a Disappearance by Hisham Matar." *Waterstones*, https://www.waterstones.com/book/anatomy-of-a-disappearance/hisham-matar/9780141027500.

Wimmer, Natasha, trans. *Letters to a Young Novelist*. By Mario Vargas Llosa, Picador, 2002.

Worth, Robert F. "A Libyan Author Writes of Exile and a Vanished Father." *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/11/books/review/anatomy-of-a-disappearance-by-hisham-matar-book-review.html.

About the Author

Harpreet Kaur is a research scholar at the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala.

Some 'Apples' for Analysts: Micheline Aharonian Marcom's *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*

Harvir Singh

Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine the treatment of the Armenian genocide in Micheline Aharonian Marcom's novel *Three Apples Fell from the Heaven* (2001). The Armenian genocide is now viewed as the first genocide of the twentieth century. It took place from 1915 to 1917, during World War I. Ottoman Turkey accused the Christian Armenian population of supporting the enemies who were monolithically identified Turkey as "Christians". As a result, around 1.5 million Armenian people were slaughtered by the Ottoman militia. The paper focuses on the way the novel under study faces up to and lays bare in its peculiar way the reality of genocide. For this purpose, it relies substantially on the insights given by Wallace stevens in his theory of imagination. Steven argues that imagination is not a counterpoint to reality; he rejects the binary polarization of reality and imagination as vulgar, proposing that the two be seen as existing on a continuum. In fact, imagination is indispensable to grasp the multidimensionality of reality. The paper argues that the novel employs literary imagination as a mode of representation to understand and represent genocide in a way that depicts the multidimensional reality of the genocide. With the detached sense of an outsider, Marcom unveils the gruesome reality of the Armenian genocide through a fictional account. The aesthetic and literary treatment adheres to history, but exceeds it with the aid of imagination. The novelist thus offers some 'apples' to the readers who have the courage to immerse themselves in Three Apples Fell from Heaven.

Keywords : Genocide, History, Literary Imagination, Novels.

Micheline Aharonian Marcom, an American citizen, is of Armenian-Lebanese origin. She was born in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in 1968. During her childhood she lived in Los Angeles, and now lives in northern California. She has written seven novels, including *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* (2001), adjudged the best book of the year by the *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*. The prominent subjects of her novels are history, genocide and war.

Marcom's *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* uses imagination to lay bare the reality of the Armenian genocide. The novel employs literary imagination as a mode of representation to understand and represent genocide in a way that depicts its terrifying experiential reality in many nuances and dimensions. As Imre Kertesz states in support of this novelistic strategy, "We may form a realistic view of the Holocaust, this incomprehensible and confused reality, with the help of our aesthetic imagination" ("Who Owns" 268).

The Armenian genocide is seen as the first genocide of the twentieth century. It took place from 1915 to 1917, during World War I. Ottoman Turkey accused the Armenian population of supporting the Christian enemies (Fisk 393). As a result, around 1.5 million Armenian people were killed by the Ottoman militia. Robert Fisk, in "The First Holocaust," vividly presents the catastrophic picture. He writes:

> There were no men of between sixteen and sixty among them, they had all been massacred on leaving their homes, and these the remainder, old men, women and children were dying like flies from starvation and disease, having been on the road from their villages to this, the bare desert, with no means of subsistence, for anything from three to six months. (Fisk 402)

The Syrian desert, where some Turkish Armenian villages were situated, thus became "the Auschwitz of the Armenian people" (390). A witness to the Armenian genocide, Grigoris Balakian tells us how the event started with killing of reputed leaders and ended with the massacre of ordinary people. He depicts the arrest and deportation of two hundred and fifty Armenian cultural leaders on April 24 with such vivid detail and texture that

> we see how well planned and orchestrated the whole scheme was. We also recognize the importance that the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress Party) placed on killing off the intellectuals, first in Constantinople and then throughout the country (thousands of cultural leaders were killed), so as to mute the potential outcry and to silence the voice of the culture. (*Armenian* xv)

Balakian gives a list of prominent names, including Daniel Varoujan, the poet and Krikor Zohrab, the novelist and Ottoman parliament member, who were killed by the Ottoman militia. The only objective of the Turkish reign of terror was to destroy the Armenian race, while everything was presented as an attempt to "resettle" the Armenian

population. The genocide remained unknown for a long time: it is often referred to as "the forgotten genocide," the "unremembered genocide," "the hidden-holocaust," or "the secret genocide" (Balakian, The Burning xvii). Ellie Wiesel considers denying genocide, in particular the Armenian genocide, a "double killing," because it kills also the memory of the event (xxiii). Deborah Lipstadt argues, "Denial of the genocide strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators" (Balakian, Armenian xx).

Literary imagination has a significant role to play in representing a lived/historical reality so as to deepen and enhance our understanding of it in terms of experience. Alan R. White, in *Language of Imagination* (1990), remarks that imagination is not only an articulation of memory but also a discovery. A writer discovers those possibilities through imagination which might not be available in other narratives. Imagination is an act of concretely bringing out, of bodying forth, often through invention, aspects of reality that have been overlooked or not sufficiently heeded. White says:

> Imagination is linked to discovery, invention and originality because it is a thought of the possible rather than of the actual, of what might or could be so rather than of what is or must be so, even when what is possible happens, unknown to the thinker, to be actual. (186)

Employing his imagination, a writer searches for possibilities that would lead the reader to vividly and tangibly enter other lives and events. In terms of Aristotle's idea of probability and possibility, a writer, dealing with the brutal reality of genocide, may create a cohesive whole that embodies a poetic truth which is of a higher order

than a historical truth. Fiction, thus, is more than fact, not l**ess:** The poet, as Aristotle says, aims "not only to say what has happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e., what is possible in accordance with probability and necessity" (Aristotle 16). Continuing the argument, White further writes:

> The imaginative writer not only himself thinks of possibilities unthought of by his inferior colleagues, he also by mentioning them, leads us to imagine the scene, characters and the events more vividly; to think like him, of these possibilities. The very imaginative child not only thinks of and treats the chair as a fortress, but fills it, in word and deed, with a wealth of possible details. (186)

Thus, imagination helps the writer to free himself or herself from the dull and unproductive cycle of the actual and leads him on the path of new possibilities. White links imagination to discovery, invention and originality because it gives space to the possible and the unknown.

Imagination often works retrospectively also, in the sense that it imbues memory with some detail that might not have been there, or removes some detail, or changes it. In this way there is vital link between imagination and memory. Imagination, in other words, not only builds; it also transforms. Samuel Taylor Coleridge has explained the nature and power of imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. He argues that imagination is the "synthetic" power that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create." He does not consider imagination as a mechanical process; rather, distinguishing imagination from fancy, he emphasizes that it is an organic faculty of the mind.

The faculty of imagination synthesizes discordant elements into an organic whole and harmonizes "sameness with difference; the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative" (*Biographia* 67). Coleridge's conception of imagination goes a long way in indicating the usefulness of imagination for representing something as unimaginable as a genocide.

Three Apples Fell from Heaven narrates the fate of several Armenians who suffered persecution and extermination at the hands of the Turkish regime during the World War I. The novel covers a period of two years from 1915 to 1917 during which the Armenian genocide happened. Marcom shows "how past might be reconstituted by the imagination into a form of elegiac empathy" (Terry). The two epigraphs of the novel "Not to have seen it yet inheriting it" (Myung Mi Kim) and "At the edge of love, there we stand" (Clarice Lispector) suggest that though Marcom has not directly experienced the genocide, she re-enacts the event through imagination, yet not slackening her grasp on reality. The novel is drawn from the life of her maternal grandmother, a survivor of the Armenian genocide. This is an instance of bearing witness but indirectly. As Mane Khachibabyan writes, "Armenian-American writers showcase, retell and transfer the history of their nation without seeing it, yet the saved documents and eyewitnesses are a firm foundation for depiction" (17).

The title of the novel calls to mind ending of many Armenian folk tales. These tales end with the sentence: "And three Apples fell from Heaven, one for the storyteller, one for the listener, and one for the eavesdropper" (Morcom 97). In these tales, "the apple is associated with love, fertility, and immortality" (Avakian 95). The storyteller,

the listener and the eavesdropper each deserves an apple because they would share the tales with the world that has still not heard them. In the same vein, the novelist uses the metaphor of an "apple" as the reward received by those who are trying to unravel the story of "the hidden genocide" before those who are still ignorant of it. This is the reason the novelist ends three significant chapters ("Mardiros," "The History of Bozmashen as Iterated by the Local Dogs" and "As to Where are the Bootmakers and the Town of Kharphert") in the same manner: "And three Apples fell from Heaven, one for the storyteller, one for the listener, and one for the eavesdropper" (97, 145,184 respectively). Explaining the novelist's chosen strategy, Elena Lucine LeFevre observes, "Aharonian Marcom manipulates the phrasing and placing of folkloric conventions throughout her narrative. Ultimately, the author employs the terms of traditional Armenian storytelling in order to tell a non-traditional, subversive set of Armenian stories" (39). Marcom's is an attempt to give to the genocide a lasting home in folk memory. This is part of her personal battle against the suppression and erasure of the horrifying events. Janice Dzovinar Okoomian has aptly captured Marcom's motivation: "The Armenian Genocide raises for us not only the matter of the genocide itself, which was as horrific as genocide always is, but the problem of the ongoing active denial by Turkey, and by some of its allies" (n.p).

Marcom departs from the traditional form of narrative when she decides to begin *Three Apples fell from Heaven* with a sentence in which, the writer and the reader are both present: "She writes it late at night, while you are dozing" (1). The omniscient narrator's voice goes on to offer not only the horrific accounts of the Armenian people

but also delineates the situation of the writer who takes the risk of confronting the "unremembered genocide" (Balakian, xvii). Hence, the narrator points out, right at the beginning, that whosoever tried to reveal the event has been considered a liar. Marcom herself has also not been spared. The narrator says:

> Rumor tells stories, this is the story she writes. Don't believe her. She's a liar of the first order. A mendacious tatterdemalion. A middle of the night whisperer. She follows you and circle your head like stinging bees in the late summer. She is disjointed, disorderly, malapropos. She begins in the middle, she stops and starts; she is a wanderer. (1)

The metaliterary element in the novel works to uncover the historical events in a non-linear mode. The chapters are titled, but not numbered, to emphasize each particularity. Divergent accounts of events by characters belonging to different age groups, genders and callings, follow; however, genocide is the common thread connecting them. The novel thus looks like a collection of many thematically connected Armenian folk tales. The phrases "there was and there was not" and "and so, and so on" invoke "the traditional orality and structure of Armenian storytelling practices" (LeFevre 42). The story does not remain bound to a single, particular and restricted narrative frame; it uses multiple and heterogeneous but intersecting frames. These frames become independent entities which break the traditional model of the beginning, the middle and the end of a conventional narrative. Patricia Waugh writes about the function of this device in metafiction:

> Contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames, and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins. Erving Goffman in "Frame Analysis" has suggested that there is no simple dichotomy 'reality/fiction. (29)

The different frames used by Marcom facilitate action and also enhance reader's involvement. It not only helps to variedly represent the events of the genocide, but also illuminates how they are reinterpreted from generation to generation.

The plot of the novel neither begins nor ends with any particular event. On the contrary, the novelist shows the events through two types of frame: a) historical b) fictional and imaginative. These two frames cannot, however, be dissociated from each other. The former provides authenticity and legitimacy to the latter; the latter adds concreteness and experiential richness The presence of Leslie Davis (an American diplomat) as a wartime consul to Harput and the Ottoman Empire from 1914-1917, Henry Morgenthau, an American lawyer, (businessman and prominent American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire during the genocide) occupies a pivotal position in the narrative. The personal letters and official reports they send to America broaden the scope of the narrative. Eight chapters namely, "Mamouret-ul-Aziz (Harput)" "Turkey" "File no. 820" "Page 3" "American Consulate" "Offical Proclamation" "11 February" and "My Final Report", contain factual reporting about the genocide as a historical event. The novelist corroborates the imaginative account with a testimonial exchange between Davis and Henry Morgenthau. She writes in one of her dispatches:

> Mamouret-ul-Aziz (Harput), Turkey
> July 11, 1915
> Honorable Henry H. Morgenthau,
> American Ambassador
> Constantinople.
>
> Sir,
> I have the honor to supplement my report of June 30th (File No. 840.1) in regard to the expulsion of the Armenians from this region, as follows:
> On July 1st a great many people left and on July 3rd several thousand more started from here…. If it were simply a matter of being obliged to leave here to go somewhere else it would not be so bad, but everyone knows it is a case of going to one's death…. Women and children were also killed. Many died, of course, from sickness and exhaustion on the way and there have been here. (82)

Wherever Marcom depicts the genocidal events, she prefers giving a deadpan account in the form of reports couched in officialese; yet she ends the narrative with her fictional characters. This produces a productive juxtaposition of historical and imaginative characters. The coming together of the two modes of narration gives a peculiarly revealing to the imaginatively enriched accounts, which enable the novelist to explore what remains unexplored. No doubt, historical facts seem to present the definitive view of an event. But an event as terrible as the genocide has to be also lived through the

imagination. This is where fiction as a mode of truth-telling steps in. Fiction can deeply disclose and dwell on a trauma undergone by a person or group, whereas history may offer general though essential accounts supplemented with fragments of testimonial narrative. As Richard Slotkin notes, "The novel imaginatively recovers the indeterminacy of past time; the form allows the writer and the reader to explore those alternatives, possibilities for belief, action and political change, unrealized by history, which existed in the past" (221).

Furthermore, Henry Morgenthau and Mr. Davis, two characters from history, do not appear out of the blue. They send reports of the atrocities being perpetrated on the Armenian people. The novelist obviously understands that the overwhelming presence of historical documents may distort and even ruin a literary narrative; consequently, she brings in an imaginative character to accompany the historical figures. There is evidently no substantial role for this character named Lucy except than her conversation with Mr. Davis brings in the reality as imagined. Beyond the rigmarole of historical reports, data and figures, the conversation captures a personal response to the genocide. Similarly, the presence of Cavass Garabed forges a link between the historical characters and the plot of the novel. In fact, every history-based chapter concludes with the personal reactions of fictional characters. For instance, after sending his report to Henry Morgenthau, Davis tries to get rid of his melancholic situation by spending some time with his young assistant, Lucy. Marcom writes:

> Davis places his hand on the nape of her neck.
>
> You're a good girl…
>
> Lucine counts the rosettes on the white field of knoted wool.

> I'm melancholic today. A man has his melancholy moments.
>
> Lucine is reminded of Miss Robertson, the first American lady she knew at the missionary-run elementary school where she studied as a girl. She recalls the young Miss saying, Good morning, girls, today is a glorious day for God's work. The class repeating dutifully and in unison: Good morning, Miss Robertson, yes indeed! She never understood this word indeed and she does not know his word: melancholy. She waits, and David laughs. (58)

Whenever Davis feels despondent on confronting the killing of innocent people, he chooses to share his grief with Lucy. English is the language they share; however, they try to understand the situation through silence.

At first sight, such historical references do not subtract from the literary merit and power of the novel. The novelist enhances historical characters and reports with literary imagination. Thus, fictional and non-fictional accounts become complementary to each other. Marcom presents the geography of the Turkish land, the accounts of the genocide, the brutal killing of the people through the letters written by Davis, the American Consul. Davis feels lonely and wants to call his wife Catherine to the town. Davis's letters give an account of how Harput, an ancient Turkish town inhabited by Turks, Kurds and Armenians, during the reign of the Ottoman Empire, fell under Mammuret-ul-Aziz Vilayet, "The landscape of Asiatic Turkey is often desolate, and the road traversing the mountains is steep and narrow and sometimes treacherous" (41).

Marcom unravels the range of suffering of the victims through the use of fictional accounts and characters. She thus emotionally maps the contours of the Armenian genocide onto the reader's consciousne**ss** The reader does not remain a passive witness to the suffering; rather, he/she is able to empathize with the characters. In this context, Terry observes, "Through the poetic re-imagining of the lives of a few individuals, Marcom suggests the inconceivable scale of the estimated two and a half million Armenians killed or deported" (n.p.). It is significant that Orhan Pamuk, in *The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist,* makes out a case for reading novels as "second lives." For him, fiction is a mode of reality:

> Novels are second lives. Like the dreams that the French poet Gerard de Nerval speaks of, novels reveal the colors and complexities of our lives and are full of people, faces, and objects we feel we recognize. Just as in dreams, when we read novels we are sometimes so powerfully struck by the extraordinary nature of the things we encounter that we forget where we are and envision ourselves in the midst of the imaginary events and people we are witnessing. At such times, we feel that the fictional world we encounter and enjoy is more real than the real world itself. That these second lives can appear more real to us than reality often means that we substitute novels for reality, or at least that we confuse them with real life. (3)

Terzian Sargis, another character in the novel, wishes to be a writer but his life takes a turn in an entirely different direction when he notices that Armenian teachers, doctors, businessmen, priests and others

are being arrested by the Turkish gendarmes. His mother locks him up in an attic and makes him dress like a woman to conceal his identity. A brilliant, creative man's life thus takes a tragic turn. Sitting in the attic, he often muses remorsefully, "Dressed like a woman, can you imagine it? And sitting here in the pitch-black darkness like some mewling schoolgirl" (11). He cannot go out; a crack in the room's window allows him to see the outside world. His neighbor, Najarian, is a professor of History and Philology in Euphrates College and is living a peaceful life with his family. All of a sudden, Turkish soldiers come and drag him away for interrogation. Najarian and his friend Mussig Agha are later released. They are out of the group of detained intellectuals and prominent leaders arrested in March. Late nights become unbearable for all the inhabitants of the town the day after the professor is released. Najarian has lost his mind under the pressure of interrogation and wanders naked in the streets. Sargis looks at him through the window, "I saw him; I always heard his screeching cries as he ran through the dark night yelling at the top of his lungs. Mairig said the neighbors listened in the fear but did nothing as the Professor ran naked up and down the street" (15). His daughters and wife run after him carrying a big coverlet. However, the scene keeps repeating for eleven days. The sight frightens Sargis, and he cannot sleep. Finally, Sargis's mother comes with the news that the Professor has died. Everyone is thankful that the suffering man has been released from the excruciating pain and that peace will prevail in the streets. However, this peace now becomes unbearable for Sargis. Trapped in the void of silence, he too goes insane.

When adolescent Turkish boys start spitting on Armenian women, Sargis is forced to think what compels a person to become a fanatic. He wonders how "those nine and ten-year-olds believed wholeheartedly in their ideas?" (46). How does a monomaniac pre-

occupation with an ideology make a man blind so that he starts killing fellow human beings? He recalls the old peaceful days when he was trying to learn a new language, English. However, the memories of the horrific wailing of professor Najarian force him back to the unresolved questions about human nature. He ponders on his likely fate:

> It has been seventeen weeks, three days, five hours, and a certain amount of minutes and seconds and seconds and measures smaller than seconds. I've lived here in this attic where the heat melts the hairs off my arms, and constant perspiration on my skin has brought on mutiny of red-pus sores. I am like a dog, like the bitches who live behind the hamam who burn to nothing and who die but still go again and again to the hamam in search of comfort. My death will be like a dog's, like a hamam-dog's dying day in the heat of the ashes. (137)

Overwhelmed by grief, Sargis begins writing verses in which he tries to see his plight face to face. This is his only hope.

Praise the doo!
You deliver the weak
From their hoary pit.
But as for me, when I was sick
I wore a woman's dress,
I afflicted myself with books.
And looked on the glee,
They gathered against me;
How long will you look on?

Give praise to your excrement,
Madden droppings —
They open wide their mouths to me.
Ala! Ala! They say
We shall rescue you.
Praise the doo! (169)

Gradually, Sargis loses the ability to read and write. Words do not make any sense to him; rather, meaningless signs keep crowding his mind. The attic appears to him as an infinite hole from where he feels he can never go out. Loneliness starts haunting him and he keeps lying on the floor like a corpse. "I'm stuck here, in this lonely place, with these black marks. Is there any man lonelier than me, Sargis, writer of the Caca poems?" (169) He starts losing his mind as the horrific last moments of professor Najarian come back to harrow him. He begins talking to himself, "Professor Najarian, you saw the dark in your last tortured days, you showed me the horrible truth; you uncovered the lunatic place with your nakedness, its Chaos and Hate." (171) He puts his index finger into his nostrils and then sucks the mucus. He dresses like a girl for months and begins forgetting his gender identity. He remembers his childhood Turkish friend, Hakan and addresses him in his absence, "A man-woman in an attic writing a letter to his lover who never was his lover. We stood there together at the edge of love – Turk and Armenian. For centuries. We stood by that terrible, black place. Hakan, my dear, are you killing? Are you being killed?" (211). Marcom does not make it clear whether Sargis dies or lives, though there is a hint. He says, "I sign this letter fitfully in the darkness Goodbye, darling…Insallah" (213), which suggests that Sargis probably drew his last breath in his tiny dark attic. Sargis does not appear again in the novel except once when his voice is heard in a letter written by him. This kind of ending suggests that

the novelist is extending the meaning of death. Sargis's death cannot be limited to his last breath. His letter is captioned: "I HAVE SEEN GOD IN THE FACES OF MEN." He complains that God is violent as obviously seen in the faces of people. Alone in the claustrophobic attic, he screams repeatedly, "Fuck you, cur." Turkish soldiers come to his house, suspecting that there is a male person inside the house. Marcom "reports":

> *When the soldiers pushed the trapdoor to the attic open? I sing Fuck you cur! Was there any poetry then? Were his agonies a word or vibration, a change of garment, were they language at all? they pull his arms behind his back, they beat him around the head and shoulders, blood spills from his ears like water from a cupped rose, what is Reason? He asks them. And what is Love? And what is Life.*
>
> *And to die is different from what anyone supposed.*
>
> (243, Italics in Original)

The words in italics reveal the brutality of life and death with equal force. Sargis's corpse also discloses his suffering during the period he was locked in the attic. Sargis is not just a dead Armenian; his death raises fundamental questions about the human nature and about the conflict between cultures as also about the significance of life against the flight of time.

Anaguil, a fourteen-year old girl, is another important character in the novel. Her father, Hagop Demirdjian, is arrested by the Turkish gendarmes. Out of shock, Yughaper, her mother falls ill and is bedridden. She is desperate to see her husband. In order to meet him, mother and daughter go to the town jail where a crowd of Armenian women is already waiting. Anaguil emerges as a representative

of the terrible situation of Armenian women who suffer doubly. On the one hand, the Turkish gendarmes hurl abuses at them, "Armenian infidel whores, you'll soon feel the glory of our nation between your legs" (110). On the other hand, these women are deprived of food and shelter in the absence of any male breadwinner. Moreover, Marcom does not offer a romantic picture of the pre-genocidal period, but looks at it critically. When Anaguil recalls her childhood, certain bizarre incidents come to her mind. She realizes that life of a woman is in itself a curse. Marcom traces her journey to sexual maturity and the pressure of patriarchal norms restricting her freedom:

> Anaguil remembers how hard it was to lose freedoms; every year as she got older more things were taken away, until finally eleven descended with her menses and she could never again climb the trees and make ugly faces at her brothers. Her brothers played on without her: in the garden, in the attic, and in the cellar. Boys' games for boys only. Anaguil learned to embroider, and to spin wool in the winter, to make baklava and to bring her baba his slippers and empty his ashtrays. (133)

There is another Turkish character, Martisa, but her situation is also not in any way different from the Armenian women's. She is thirteen years old when her parents arrange her wedding with a thirty-five years old man, named Mustafa, who looks the age of her father. She is obliged to do domestic chores and the early years of marriage pass as she gives birth to children. Taking care of them, cooking meals for the family and fulfilling Mustafa's desires is her only destiny. Marcom suggests that common fate awaits most women, irrespective of the

differences of community, race or culture. Whether a woman is Turkish or Kurdish or Armenian, her social status is the same. And then a gruesome event like the genocide takes its toll. The Armenian women have to flee the country, and in their long and arduous journeys many die while others survive. Without food, water and shelter, obliged to spend nights under the open sky. Young girls are often beaten and raped by Turkish soldiers. Anaguil tries to change her identity by changing her name. Marcom considers it as a subtle form of violence when a woman has to live under a new name. The wound remains unhealed all her life, as in Anaguil's case. Though she chooses a new identity, yet whenever she is addressed by her new name she feels her wound is bleeding again. She says, "I look and look for the girl I was and I can no longer find her. I cannot bear her name." (256) She has become a stranger to herself. The memory of who she was torments her the more for this reason.

The question of language is an important aspect of the novel. Taylor Davis-Van Atta considers Marcom's novels to be an experiment. About her books, Marcom says in one of the interviews, "They are seeking often to make space for the unsaid and the silences of language and history" (Marcom, "A Conversation"). This becomes possible through the use of imagination and the extensive use of the historical reports and witness statements in the novel. It is to be noted that while the novel gives voice to the silences of history, it also acknowledges the limitations of the language. There are many instances where language fails the victims. Anaguil expresses the pain of this silence in these words: "There are days I cannot speak. Each word is a weight, and there are pounds of flesh, the heft of diction. I say good morning and I am wearied. Good morning pulled from the body, from my mouth, like opaque stones" (237). Similarly, Sargis,

who wishes to express himself through writing, finds himself unable to make sense of language, "I have lost the ability to read. It's as if the words no longer make sense in my mind, no longer take me with them to the places that they travel. They're signs without meaning, black slashes and crosses and curled up slants" (169). Marcom thus tries to include both the objective and the subjective view of the genocide by examining the possibilities and limitations of language in the face of extreme dehumanization.

With the detached sense of an outsider, Micheline Aharonian Marcom unveils the gruesome reality of the Armenian genocide through a fictional account. The aesthetic and literary treatment adheres to history, but exceeds it with the aid of imagination. The novelist thus offers some 'apples' to the readers who have the courage to immerse themselves in *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*.

Works Cited

Akcam, Taner. *Akcam: Talat Pasha Has Been Avenged.* The Armenian Weekly. 8 February 2012.

Aristotle. *Poetics.* Edited by, Amlan Das Gupta. Pearson Longman, 2007.

Avakian Anne M. "Three Apples Fell from Heaven." *Folklore, 1987, Vol. 98, No. 1 (1987), pp. 95-98.* JSTOR, www.jstor.com/stable/1259405.

Balakian, Peter. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response.* Harper

Perennial, 2003.

Balakian, Grigoris. *Armenian Golgotha: A Memoir of the Armenian*

Genocide 1915-1918.

Translated by Peter Balakian and Aris Sevag.Vintage Books, 2009.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria.* Okitoks Press, 2017.

Fisk, Robert. *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East.* Harper Perennial, 2006.

Kertész, Imre. "Who Owns Auschwitz?" *The Yale Journal of Criticism.* Vol.14, no. 1, Spring 2001, Pp. 267-272. www.muse.jhu.edu/article/36875/pdf

Khachibabyan, Mane. "Non-Verbal Communication and Cues in Armenian-American Literary Discourse." American University of Armenia, 2016. https://baec.aua.am/files/2017/09/Mane_Khachibabyan_Nonverbal-Communication-and-Cues-in-Armenian-American-Literary-Discourse_Presentation.pdf

LeFevre, Elena Lucine. *Speaking the Unspeakable: Armenian Women's Fiction After Genocide.* 2018. Senior Projects Spring https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2018/332.

Marcom Ahronian Micheline. *Three Apples Fell from Heaven.* Riverhead Books, 2001.

---. "A Conversation with Marcom Ahronian Micheline." Interview by Taylor Davis-Van Atta. *Music & Literature,* 21 Aug. 2012, https://www.musicandliterature.org/excerpts/2013/10/19/a-conversation-with-micheline-aharonian-marcom

---. *The Day Dreaming Boy*. Riverhead Books, April 2014.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* First Vintage Books Edition, 1992.

Okoomian, Janice Dzovinar. "*Three Apples Fell From Heaven:* A Meditation on the Centenary of the Armenian Genocide." *Patheos*, 27 Apr. 2015, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/2015/04/three-apples-fell-from-heaven-a-meditation-on-the-centenary-of-the-armenian-genocide.html

Pamuk, Orhan. *The Naïve and The Sentimental Novelist.* Translated by Dibkas Nazim, Penguin Books, 2009.

Sandra Dijkstra *"A middle-aged survivor of Turkey's Armenian."* https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-57322-264-8. 04/19/2004.

Slotkin, Richard. "Fiction for the Purpose of History". *Rethinking* History, Vol. 9, No. 2/3. June/September 2005, Pp. 221-236.

Terry. "Eavesdropping on history: Micheline Aharonian Marcom." Vertigo,September 13,2013.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Routledge New York and London, 1984.

White, Alan R. *The Language of Imagination.* Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1990.

About the Author

Harvir Singh, is doing his PhD at the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala. His research topic is titled as "Armenian and German Genocides in the Literary Imagination:A Critical Study of Selected Fiction."

Allen Ginsberg's Poetry: A Zizekian Psychoanalysis

Deepinder Kaur

Abstract:

The present paper aims to understand the psychoanalytic framework of Slavoj Zizek. Further, it will investigate how linguistic dimension of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Lacan's model of subjectivity helps Zizek to study the cultural criticism and political theory. Finally, Zizek's ideas will be applied on Ginsberg's poetry to see the practical implications of his theory. Here Zizek's ideas are pertinent, since they theorize human life, its nature and culture. Thus Zizekian insights help in the comprehension of psychoanalytic aspects of Ginsberg's poems. This revisiting of Ginsberg's poetry through Zizekian framework will unravel the efficacy and versatility of Zizek's concepts as it will help elucidate plethora of issues and concerns that Ginsberg is dealing with.

Keywords: Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Popular Culture, Politics, Jouissance, Ideology

Discussing Slavoj Zizek's idea on psychoanalysis we can say he is one of the prominent exponents of Lacanian Psychoanalysis16

16 Lacanian Psychoanalysis – Lacan introduced the innovative method of reading Freud under the light of structuralism which was sometimes accompanied by Hegelian, Marxian or Heideggerian twists. He saw it essential to "return to Freud". He advise to all the psychoanalysists that "we can do no better than to return to Freud's work" (2006, 228). This return to Freud was a linguistic return. He started to read between the lines and restructured the edifice Freud had built in a unique way in order to make it fit his own understanding.

He opines that Jacques Lacan's return to Sigmund Freud marks a paradigm shift in the domain of psychoanalysis. It is noteworthy that Lacan had revisited the writings of Freud to comprehend the workings of the unconscious through an analysis of the structure and functioning of language. So he tried to introduce the study of language into psychoanalytic theory. Zizek in *How to Read Lacan* (2006) has asserted that "the unconscious is structured as language" (2). One of the main themes of Zizek's project has been the problem of subjectivity. What Lacan offers Zizek is the model of subjectivity in which primary organising force is desire. For Lacan desire is what links the subject to an object. The medium of this is language, it is through language that the subject captures the object in a network of meanings. This linguistic intervention allows Zizek to study the popular culture and politics through the lens of psychoanalytic approach.

Out of the triad of 'the real', 'the symbolic' and 'the imaginary', for Lacan language is of the symbolic order and it is this symbolic order vis- à-vis language that shapes our subjectivity and aids in providing meaning to the world around us. Lacan opined the real is inexpressible since we cannot make sense of the real without it being mediated through the symbolic order of language.

Zizek uses such insights from Lacanian psychoanalysis to expatriate upon current events in the domains of art, politics and culture. He also explains how people navigate through this fast-paced world and the manner in which ideology helps people to cope- up with reality. Thus, Zizek has re-established the relevance of psychoanalytic criticism for comprehending the complex networks of events in the era of Global Capitalism. This is explained by Mathew Sharpe in *Zizek and*

Politics, (2010):

> Zizek revived psychoanalytic criticism by making it more political, more philosophical and ultimately more popular: and he achieved all this by shifting the emphasis from analysis of imaginary and symbolic representations to an engagement with that which resists representation: the real. (12)

Therefore, Zizek's combining psychoanalysis with Marxism helped to make Lacan more palatable to contemporary critical issues by demonstrating how it offers less an account of the individual than of society. Jouissance[17] is an important concept in Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Zizek elaborates upon this idea to comprehend the functioning of ideology vis-à-vis the people affected by it. He goes on to redefine the theories of subjectivity and ideology to deploy them for his grand project of political emancipation. Notably, such psychoanalytic understanding of language, subjectivity and Jouissance will be applied on Ginsberg's poetry further in this paper.

Ginsberg transmutes his personal experiences to be used as the subject matter for his poems. These first hand experiences provide authenticity to his poems, widen his mental horizon, since the compositions emerge out of his personal endeavours. Here Zizek's ideas are pertinent, since they theorize human life, its nature and culture. Zizekian insights will be of immense help in the comprehension of psychoanalytic aspects of Ginsberg's poems.

17 According to Lacan there is a Jouissance beyond "pleasure principle" that compels transgress prohibitions imposed on enjoyment. Thus, transgressing pleasure principle is not morepleasure but pain. There is certain amount of pleasure that a subject can bear beyond that it is pain and that 'painful principle' is called *Jouissance.* Zizek tends to alternate between 'jouissance' and 'enjoyment' but the connotations of the French word should still be understood even if it is translated in English.

Zizek's understanding of political framework is based on his Lacanian reading of psychoanalysis. He asserts, prior political philosophy has placed too little emphasis, on communities' cultural practices that involve what he calls "inherent transgression". These are practices sanctioned by a culture that nevertheless allow subjects some experience of what is usually exceptional to or prohibited in their everyday lives as civilized political subjects—things like sex, death, defecation, drugs or violence. Such experiences involve what Žižek calls *jouissance*, term he takes from Lacanian psychoanalysis. *Jouissance* is usually translated from the French as "enjoyment." As opposed to what we talk of in English as "pleasure", though, *jouissance* is an always sexualized, always transgressive enjoyment, at the limits of what subjects can experience or talk about in public. Žižek argues that subjects' experiences of the events and practices wherein their political culture organizes its specific relations to *jouissance* (in first world nations, for example, specific sports, types of alcohol or drugs, music, festivals, films) are as close as they will get to knowing the deeper truth intimated for them by their regime's master signifiers: "nation", "God", "our way of life," and so forth.

Zizek explains that political orientation of subject is determined by the master signifiers like freedom and democracy. These signifiers align subjects with a particular ideology. A change in them

can lead to the altering of the political orientation of subjects of particular political community. Thus, ideology is an important category in Zizek's political theories. But he does not subscribe to traditional Marxist understanding of ideology as 'false consciousness'. Sharpe explains this fact in his work *Zizek and Politics*:

> As a Marxist thinker, Zizek approaches human condition with the concept of 'ideology.' He has not used this in the sense of 'false consciousness' that supposedly distorts the truth of material conditions. The Zizekian use of ideology stresses that ideology is always a spectral support to human life and there is nothing like post-ideological human existence. Here, reality is not contrasted with illusion, whether illusion is perceived as a necessary support to reality. (12)

Though Zizek argues that a shift in master signifiers can lead to a shift in the ideology which can further lead to a shift in political orientation, he asserts that there is sometimes an inertia that does not allow a subject to change its ideology even if subject is disenchanted with adopted ideology. Even if he changes it, it will not become a part of his political inertia of inaction. According to Zizek this is because of *jouissance* or enjoyment.

So Zizek's claim to have theorized 'enjoyment as a political factor' is not just a claim to have noticed something interesting about political ideologies. It is claim about how the most basic element in human nature affects political communities. It is this psychoanalytic understanding of the subject that shapes Zizek's understanding of

the working of ideology and then politics. This will help analyse the political angle in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg. Which means the political scenario of 1950's in his poems.

Zizek is also a famous cultural critic and theorist. He has made Lacan indispensable to cultural studies just like Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose who a decade earlier made Lacan's idea important for a rigorous understanding of feminist theory. Zizek is able to explain sundry manifestations of cultural phenomena with his understanding of Lacan. He himself has explained that his blending of Hegelian Marxism, with Lacanian Psychoanalysis provides a critical perspective for cultural matters which makes aesthetic an important part of the schema. Beat generation, for instance, affected popular culture by combining literature, lifestyle, music and the freedom of the press Thus, popular culture transformed through the radical views and bold approach of the Beats. Zizek's cultural theory will help in understanding the influence on popular culture by the beat generation and Ginsberg's poems.

Zizekian insights helps to study the poems of Irwin Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg belonged to the 'Beat Generation', which was a literary, social, and political movement that flourished in US after the World War II. Its objectives were liberation of sex, rejection of materialism and experimenting with drugs. John Clellon Holmes in his article "This is the Beat" states:

> More than mere weariness, it implies the feeling of having been used, of being raw. It involves a sort of nakedness of mind, and, ultimately of soul; a feeling of being reduced to the bedrock of consciousne**ss** In short it means being ungrammatically pushed up against the wall of oneself. (New York Times, 1952).

We can better understand the above discussed ideas of Zizek by taking few instances from Ginsberg's poems and applying Zizekian frame work on it.Ginsberg's first notable poem "Howl" discusses drugs and the associated hallucinations:

> Peyote solidities of hall, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, Wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan ratings and kind king light of mind. (13)

In the above-mentioned poem, poet has named the places visited in connection with the consumption of drugs. Beat poets used to be high on drugs almost everywhere whether it is a street, a cemetery or a rooftop. Peyote mentioned in the above lines was a hallucinogenic drug, originally used in Native American religious rituals. Its consumption produced strange visions and hallucinations which the Beat Generation poets explained as a spiritual state. Even Ginsberg once said that consumption of drugs enhanced his concentration. Zizek analyses such experiences, calling them a state of *Jouissance* (enjoyment). This concept of enjoyment is explained by Zizek as playing a key role in thinking about the subject and his relation to society and ideology. Thus, Zizek's explanation is particularly suited to our comprehension of drug addiction and consumption. He elaborates upon the concept in *Parallax View* (2006). He says:

> What drugs promise is a purely autistic jouissance, a jouissance accessible without a detour through the Other (of the symbolic order) – jouissance generated not by fantasmic representations but by directly attacking our neuronal pleasure centers. It is in this precise sense that drugs involve the suspension of symbolic castration, whose most elementary meaning is precisely that "jouissance is accessible only through the medium of… symbolic representation. This brutal Real of jouissance is the obverse of infinite plasticity of imagining, no longer constrained the by rules of reality. (190)

Since drug reduces the feeling of alienation felt earlier by the subject, removing the feeling of lack and the person feels complete and experiences a sensation as if floating in the air. The demoralizing feeling of 'castrated subject of desire' is momentarily removed from the consciousness of the drugged person and he is possessed by the feeling as if he is a 'de – subjectivised body of desire'. Thus, Ginsberg's personal experiences the Zizekian jouissance.

This feeling of being ecstatic was further lengthened by the poet's persona by using LSD, marijuana, benzedrine, mescaline, philocybin, morphins, nitrous oxide, ether and laughing gas. In fact, Ginsberg wrote a number of poems in drugged state that Zizek in *Parallax View* (2006) explained as the subject's entry in an "autistic masturbatory and 'asocial' jouissance" (311). He even explained that it is this state of mind in which the real manifests itself at the level of individual subject.

Ginsberg in his poem 'America' discusses the life of American individuals. He writes: "when can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?" (15) .The phrase "good looks"

used here underlines racial austerecism and apartheid between the American whites and blacks. Ginsberg criticizes the former as he was the spokesperson of the latter. It also reveals his sensitivity and comprehensive sympathy towards the other. The American dream envisaged that any American can succeed and gain a good job through hard work and risk, irrespective of the colour of his skin. Ginsberg repudiates racism that exists in America. The dream had begun to turn awry as opportunities and jobs were much more easily available for the whites than blacks. Zizek explains that, in reality, racism always existed and the subject of racism is a fantasy figure as it merely envisions that such a harmonious society is possible because in reality, according to Zizek, the society is always already divided. The fantasy racist figure merely attempts to cover up the impossibility of a whole society or an organic symbolic order that is self-sufficient. Zizek explains these ideas in *Tarrying With the Negative* (1993). He says:

> What is the cause for our hatred of him, for our hatred of him in his very being? It is hatred of the enjoyment in the other. This would be the most general formula of the modern racism we are witnessing today: a hatred of the particular way the other enjoys... (109)

Zizek also elaborates upon the concept of racist fantasy. First type of racist fantasy revolves around the fear that the other desires our enjoyment and he want to loot us of the specific of our fantasy. The second racist fantasy that Zizek explains is that the ethnic 'other' has entry in same strange jouissance that we are having. Thus, by transversing the fantasy, we come to know that the figure of racism em-

bodies the truth of the failure of our society to constitute itself as a complete. Zizek enjoins people to come together in the solidarity of a common struggle and writes in *The Ticklish Subject* (1999) "[when we] discover that the deadlock which hampers [us] is also the deadlock which hampers other" (220).

Ginsberg, a little further in the poem America says, "America I am the Scottsboro boys." The incident alluded to carried feelings of deep antipathy in the minds of American blacks, since it reminded them of a terrible event that took place in Scottsboro. Nine black boys were subjected to coercion and harassment since they were indicted of dishonouring (raping) white women. The boys were not listened to and they received scant sympathy because the whites believed that those dark-skinned boys could indulge in such horrendous acts. Much later it came to light that there was no truth in the story and the boys were prosecuted because of their coloured skin. It is in *Tarrying With the Negative* that Zizek explained the phenomena of racism. He said: "To the racist, the 'other' is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labour, and it is quite amusing to notice the haste with which one passes from reproaching the other with a refusal to work to reproaching him for the theft of work" (109).

Herein Zizek finds political correctness problematic. He considers it inadequate since it is not helping in diminishing inequality and racism. He advocates a number of methods to fight racism. First, we must not try not to intrude on the fantasy space of other individuals whenever possible. Second Zizek proposes that we continue to use the state as a buffer against the fantasies of civil society. Third he talks about the practice of traversing or going through the fantasy, to

show that, on the other side of fantasy, there is nothing here.

Ginsberg in the poem "Howl" also says: "Who balled in the morning in the evenings in rose gardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may go" (38). Thus, Ginsberg asserts that printed text (his poem 'Howl') will not permit his country to deny what everybody knew was natural. We humans are divers in our desires. Even Zizek asserts that he agrees with everyone that all talk about toilets, sado- masochism and erections is utterly obscene, nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to theorize all aspects of life . These lines exhibit that poet is at odds with prevailing American norms. Such outpourings were considered inappropriate and he was accused of dealing with titles in obscene. Zizek talks about obscene which is influenced by psychoanalytic theory of Jaques Lacan. Lacan says tension arises because the moral ideals are often different from practical actions taken by government. Lacan thinks that contradictions arise when they place demands upon us, abetted to the Freudian id. Such tensions lead to repressed urges that are considered by society as taboo. Zizek says for every moral behaviour in the society or any law there exists an offence or transgression in the society that is deemed immoral. This suggests that Beats didn't want to keep it hidden but rather howl it out in the world i.e. to articulate at the top of their voice. By effacing the line between Id and superego Zizek implies in the darkest desire.

Work Cited

Ginsberg, Allen. *Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems*. Penguin Books Limited, 1961.

Holmes, John Clellon. "This is the Beat". *New York Times*, 16 Nov. 1952.

Merrill, Thomas F. *Allen Ginsberg*. Twayne Publishers, 1969.

Parker, Ian. *Slavoj Zizek: A Critical Introduction*. Pluto P, 2004.

Sharpe, Matthew, and Geoff Boucher. *Zizek and Politics*. Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Nauayana,1989.

---. *Tarrying With the Negative*. Duke U P, 1993.

---. *The Plague of Fantasis*. Verso, 1997.

---. *The Ticklish Subject*. Verso, 1999.

---. *The Parallax View*. MIT P, 2006.

---.*How to Read Lacan*. Granta Books. 2006.

About the Author

Deepinder Kaur is pursuing her PhD from the Department of English, Punjabi University, Patiala. Her doctoral research revolves around the exploration of "Poetry of Allen Ginsberg: A Zizekian Study" as the central theme of her thesis.

Heer's Peerless Beauty: A Translation from Waris Shah's Heer

Sakoon Singh

A Note on Translated Passage

These verses (59-60) from *Heer Waris Shah* describe Heer's beauty. The description, which is for the most part, about her physical traits- her eyes, cheeks, breasts, teeth, nose, forehead, eyebrows etc at, borders on the mildly erotic. This is further characterised by leaps of imagination used to draw several oblique comparisons. The extensive description of physical beauty is skilfully conjoined with the political and architectural space of Medieval Punjab that was fraught with battles and unrest. The use of hyperbole accentuated by fantastic metaphors and similies, is reminiscent of Metaphysical poets like Donne and Marvel. This passage attests to the poet's highly sophisticated idiom, underlining why this *qissa* is accorded a place in the pantheon of World Literature. It being a commemorative year of Waris Shah (1722-99), this is a nudge for readers to engage more comprehensively with his sterling poetry, whether through music (renderings by, *inter alia*, Pathanay Khan, Abida Parveen, Ghulam Ali, Gurdas Maan, Madan Gopal Singh) translation, performance or private/community readings.

Keywords: Waris Shah, Heer, Translation.

What fitting praise can the poet possibly sing for Heer,
On her youthful forehead gleams the splendour of the moon.
And the luminous moon, surrounded by the night skies of her tresses,
Flaming, like the scarlet of the red wine.
She prances around with her friends,
Flapping about, like the wings of a swallow.
Delicate eyes, innocent like the fawn's,
And on her cheeks, full roses quiver.
Her eyebrows, arched like the vaults of city Lahore,
Is there, really, an end to her beauty?
Dark kohl gleams in the rims of her eyes and gliding off the edges,
Rising, like the battalions of Punjab taking on Hind.
She walks with abandon,
swaying on sides, like the aristocrat's unhinged elephant.
Those who wish to catch a glimpse of her,
Must brace themselves for the sight.
On her exquisite face, fine expressions glide,
Like flourishes of calligraphy in a master's book.
A glimpse of her is to witness the celestial *Lailatul Qadar*,* the night of revelation,
It indeed, is a noble deed.

Red, luscious lips, like crimson rubies
Chin, like apple, from far off lands
Pearly whites of her teeth,

Set like rows of smooth pomegranate beads.
Nose, aquiline, like the sharp edge of a heritage sword,
Tresses, like serpents guarding treasures.
Neck slender like a crane's, fingers tapering like bean pods,
hands are smooth like budding leaves of Chinar.
Her lips stained with twigs slay many,
The men then go combing through the bazaar, looking for the notorious murderer.
Her arms, like buttery dough,
her fair chest like marble, peeping from under the Ganges.
She's the fairy Queen's sister, she stands out in thousands
She dallies with her friends, the conceited one,
and runs amuck, like an impish fawn.
She seems sculpted to perfection, having stolen the beams from the moon.
She ambles in and out, slaying many,
And then flies away, like the crane, that dithers out of the line
Separating from her flying companions.
Is she a Princess from Lanka or one from the court of Indra,
A fairy emerging out of moonlight?
Love oozes out of her every pore,
Like a raga from vibrating strings of an instrument.
She walks with a renewed zest, Like advancing bands from Kandhar.
The suitors who come like moths, crash at the sword's razor edge
And dressed to the nines, this undertaker saunters through the bazaar,

Whose turn is it today?
Waris Shah, the one who comes with beseeching eyes, falls down in this game of dice.

About the Author

Sakoon Singh teaches Indian Writing and Cultural Studies in Chandigarh. Her research interests include Translation Studies, Sufi literature and Indian Writing. In the Land of the Lovers (Rupa 2020) is her debut novel.

Sukhvinder Amrit's Poems in Translation

Harpreet Kathuria

Flower, flame and flesh

There dies a worm
imprisoned in the warm scent
of the flower

and burns there
a moth
that throws itself
into the flames of light

so I spend myself
in your embrace
o dear
to dissolve thus
with your soul

flower, flame and flesh
isn't the destiny
but journey oh!
that brings
me to you,

to fragrance, light and
soul.

Salvation

I have yet to discover
If I am
submerged
in your eyes
or
crumbled in your hands
though I perceive
a strange sense
of liberation
from
the self.

Mirage

the banks dried away
lingering
pining
for an even ardent
thirst of lips

and the streams wore
after perennial wait
their sandy shrouds

often on those
deserts now
an amorous mirage
haunts
the travellers.

Dust

Love
is free
from the entrails
of ceremonies
nor does it seek
a grammar
of
relationships

Look here
I have come
shaking the dust
of impious bonds

with my pious soul

sans rituals
sans intrusions

oh, my beloved!

Famished

I might have had
troubled a tear
deep down
or
stolen some warmth
from your trance

forgive me
my friend
I may have
blanched your life

…….

oh Lord!
let there be

none so famished

none so thirsty
as this soul in me.

Oyster

To embrace
the pearl
of your drop
I became
an oyster

I too was
once
an expanse
spread across
the horizons afar.

Flight

he was
troubled
to see me
fly

so high

and tasted danger
in letting
his paper kite
touch the sky

he cut the thread, therefore

I tumbled down
midway through the azure
to his grasp

he is happy
now
to find me
safe
in his arms.

Kiss of Light

this is the ray of the sun
the kiss of light
it will not die
with your windy breath
nor with your fiery shots

this is the shaft of
the sun
it will become rubble in
the eyes of dark fears
and it will butcher
the darkest of the nights

ask dark fears
that they forget their vain desire
to kill the light
and warn those fiery guns
to stop shooting the rays
this is the ray of the sun
the kiss of light
and it will never die.

You too can

I too was once
a slave
of those moments
when suicide
seemed the only solution

but I rose
against my fears

and a cowardly stance

tore down those walls
that encased my soul
smashed the boundaries
that restricted the flow of my dreams

I strove against petty scheming
which rocked me to my grave
against those that would butcher
my smiles
and laugh at my tears
I gushed
on the ambers which
took my piece of earth
from me
I trampled helplessness
which drew in whispers
to my ear
the vagaries of death

my courage challenged death
and he fled
I lived thereon
my heart breathed
I frolicked

as I walked
the shackles in my feet melted
vulnerability shook away
hard walls dampened
ambers went cold
and sprung
from the sterile soils

waters of life
the nectars for me
and for my poetry

I did not commit suicide

I did not commit suicide
I vied with death
you too can choose
as I did
between life and death
whenever it is hard on you
when you think randomly
that death redresses all wrongs
and life is a mere play.

That night

That night

I saw him
in a dream

in the recesses
of loneliness
he had shone

like a flaming tree –
as Gautama
in a trance

the thought of Gautama
stirred the Sujata in me

founts of
love
of tenderness
and mercy
sprung within me

I rose
pining for him
and walked towards
the solitary wilderness
where he sat

I the daughter of
a milk man
I do not know
the wares of wisdom
meditation
light
and
salvation

the Vedas
scriptures
and
philosophy
are as unfamiliar to me

I just filled
a bowl with milk
and placed that in obeisance
before him, the suffering
Gautama

oh! he seemed to me
a baby longing for his mother
a heated desert
a lover sick in separation

but the moment
he touched his lips
to the bowl
there sprouted
from his burning body
soft petals of green
and he became
a green fulsome tree

whose leaves were as soft
as the leaves of the shrub
growing in the veranda
and its shade
was the shade of
the Gaya tree.

About the Author

Harpreet Kathuria is serving as Assistant. Professor in the Department of English, Govt. College for Girls, Patiala. Her poetry has appeared in South Asian Ensemble and various other platforms

Alison Moore in an Online Conversation

Sukhpal Sharma

An English novelist and short story writer Alison Moore (hereafter AM) was born in 1971 at Manchester, England. Presently, Moore lives with her husband Dan and her son Arthur in a village named Wymesworld which is situated on the border of Leicestershire-Nottinghamshire in England. She, so far, has written five novels and one book of short stories, which are published by Salt Publications. Her novels are *The Lighthouse* (2012), *He Wants* (2014), *Death and the Seaside* (2016), *Missing* (2018) and *Sunny and the Ghosts* (2018). Her short story collection is titled *The Pre-War and Other Stories* (2013). Her first novel won McKitterick Prize of 2013 and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2012, the National Book Awards 2012, the Sydney J. Bounds Award 2013, the East Midlands Book Award 2013 and the Athens Prize for Literature 2014. Moore's short story collection was shortlisted for East Midlands Book Award 2014 and the title story had won the New Writer Novella Prize 2009. *He Wants* was the Observer book of the year 2014. In Moore's writings, past has a significant role. Her characters wander in their past events. Not surprisingly, in her novels and stories, there are a number of themes such as isolation, grief, loneliness and disconnection. Moore delves into these aspects in very well-knit structures.

This conversation was collected during the research work which has been done with her two novels titled *The Lighthouse* and *He Wants.*

Alison Moore (abbreviated as AM)

Sukhpal Sharma (abbreviated as SS)

SS: You wrote *The Lighthouse* after the demise of your mother in 1995. In this novel, characters Futh and Ester both remember their mothers. Is there any impact of your personal life on this writing?

AM: Not intentionally, but I certainly did begin writing more after my mum died – writing is no doubt a way for me to process and handle things. It was only after the publication of *The Lighthouse* and my collection *The Pre-War House and Other Stories* that I realised the extent to which my work deals with absent mother figures.

SS: Do your surroundings affect your writing? Are your settings, characters and situations affected by your immediate surroundings or by British milieu?

AM. The landscape of the Midlands (the broad area in which I grew up and live now) does appear in my writing, and I'm equally inspired by travelling, e.g. *The Lighthouse* was greatly influenced by a circular Rhineland walk I'd done, and key elements of my third novel *Death and the Seaside* were inspired by a seaside town I happened to be visiting.

SS. How would you describe your writing process?

AM: I only start writing when I have certain ideas/characters/themes/situations I want to explore, and I don't know the full story when I begin. I write fairly chronologically but I edit a lot as I go along, so I go back to the beginning quite a lot to comb through again as I get to know the story.

SS: Is writing deliberate or spontaneous for you?

AM: A mixture of the two – I'm aware of trying to build something, and making conscious decisions, but at the same time I'm very much 'in the zone', trying to follow the story, discovering it by writing it.

SS: Do you think someone could be a writer if he/she does not respond to emotions?

AM: Writers generally need to be open to the world, observant, responsive, but there's a balance between responding emotionally to the world and being able to process and translate that into fiction.

SS: What kind of research did you carry out before writing the novels *The Lighthouse* and *He Wants*?

AM: I did the circular Rhineland walk that Futh does, but not as research – at that point I hadn't conceived of *The Lighthouse*. I did keep a diary though, which was very helpful in writing the novel. After writing the first draft, I made a further journey by ferry, paying close attention to the details of the ferry and the crossing. *He Wants* has a fictional setting, but the nursing home element draws on a period in my life – before and during my time at university – when I worked in a nursing home.

SS: Do you see writing as a kind of spiritual practice or some kind of a solace to a bruised heart?

AM: I am aware that writing is something that helps me mentally and emotionally. I also think it's just the way my brain is wired; it's to do with the way I see and translate the world and is just something I need to do.

SS: In *The Lighthouse* Futh remembers his wife who left him and in *He Wants* Lewis remembers his wife Edie who died. Why are the

roles of protagonists' wives not elaborated in these writings?

AM: Only because in these novels the protagonists are male, and they're male because of the nature of the stories: in *The Lighthouse*, I'm exploring a fairly Freudian son to mother obsession, and *He Wants* explores a man's homosexual desire – so they both had to be male and the story is largely about them. In my most recent novel, *Missing*, the protagonist is female, and the figure of her husband is minor.

SS: Are your characters real or imaginary?

AM: They are imaginary – I never deliberately write about real people – but my fictional characters will have traits or occupations I'm familiar with or have observed, e.g. the rather quiet, private male figure in both of these novels.

SS: In the concluding lines of *He Wants* "They speed down the long, dark country lane with their headlights on full beam and it makes Lewis think of flying, of what flying might be like, and of how you would be fine, you would be safe, up there in the air." Do you not feel that it is a kind of compromise of Lewis' with his life, because in the entire novel he wants so many things that he was not able to get. What do you think of these lines? Should we compromise with our lives and make do with what we have and continue our life as it is?

AM: I think Lewis had to make choices, and we all do. It's important to me that he does not regret his choice as such: he had a good marriage, a good companion; it's more that there was an alternative possible life and he wonders about that, and wonders if he can still make that choice now. These lines echo an earlier line: 'You're safest of all in the air,' which is followed by, 'although at some point you

would have to come down.' At the end of the novel, I can leave Lewis having got, to some extent, what he wanted, but, beyond the novel, he would have to make a decision about the life he wants, or Sydney might not want what Lewis wants. We do have to make choices and compromises in life.

SS: Why are your characters emotionally weak, always need sympathy, and always in search of something? Where do your characters get inspiration from?

AM: Futh was emotionally damaged in childhood by his mother rejecting and abandoning him, but although the way a reader sees a character is always true in its own way, I personally don't see my characters in general as being emotionally weak. Lewis was becoming aware of his homosexual feelings for Sydney at a time when homosexuality was illegal in Britain, a criminal act, and many homosexual men hid their homosexuality, even from themselves. These two characters might be considered lonely figures but they're not seeking sympathy. The fact that they are seeking *something* is an essential element in storytelling – the classic quest, the journey into the woods to find what has been lost or taken. And read your secondary question about inspiration, I would say that I do like writing about a fairly quiet, steady character into whose life comes what I call a disrupter, someone who is going to shake things up, press their buttons: in *The Lighthouse* it's Ester, in *He Wants* it's Sydney.

SS: What do you think about creative writing?

AM: I wouldn't really try to define it – people write creatively in so many different ways. I enjoy shaping stories, but plenty of writers enjoy describing e.g. the view from the window, just capturing that.

It's all creative and it's all writing.

SS: In *He Wants* why did you choose a topic of homosexuality?

AM: The themes and stories suggest themselves to me – I don't feel that I choose them as such. I never really know where these ideas come from, only that something has struck me that I would like to explore. With *He Wants*, homosexuality was a way of exploring the idea of the path not taken.

SS: In the recent years there is on-going debate regarding the objectification of women's writings. Where the works of women writers are often claimed to be confessional, what are your views over this debate?

AM: I'm aware of a number of women writers who have been pressured to rework their novels in order that they can be marketed as 'women's writing', which I think is terribly damaging. I see no need for such a category. Being with an independent publisher, I'm free to write what I like and not feel shoehorned into such a corner. It has been said that women often write about the domestic sphere, and that is true of me, because the area of relationship dynamics interests me, whether I'm writing 'literary fiction' or horror, so again, I feel free to write what interests me. I think that freedom is key.

SS: According to you what is the connection between frustration, desire and past?

AM: In *The Lighthouse* and *He Wants*, and *Missing* too, the protagonist experiences a loss either in childhood or during the transition from childhood to adulthood. They are in a sense trying to recover that loss, but rather than the classic quest, I'm interested in situations in which what (who) has been lost perhaps cannot be

recovered: Futh seeks substitute mother figures, Lewis wants to undo time and explore the option that was on the table when he was young, and Jessie (in *Missing*) is seeking a lost child, but none of them can truly reclaim what has been lost to the past: people leave; time passes. In *Missing*, I use imagery comparing this loss with ejection from the Garden of Eden, and being unable to get back in.

About the Author

Sukhpal Sharma is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in the Department of English at Punjabi University, Patiala. His research focuses on diverse areas such as fiction, science fiction, music, folklore, and philosophy. With an M.Phil. in English, his dissertation titled "Memory and Desire Loop: Analyzing Alison Moore's The Lighthouse and He Wants" reflects his academic expertise and interests.

A Report on the 5-Day International Capacity Building Program on Poetry, Pedagogy, and Profession Organized by Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab: August 20-25, 2022

Navleen Multani

Public Relations and Department of English, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab (RGNUL), Punjab in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College (MIC), University of Limerick, Ireland, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library (IPPL), Kolkata, State Bank of India, Patiala and Manipal University, Jaipur organised 5-day International Capacity Building Program (CBP) on "Poetry, Pedagogy and Profession: Understanding Rhyme and Reason across Cultures" from 20th - 25th August, 2022. This unique program was organized with the objective to promote reading, writing and teaching of poetry. The 5-day program advanced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandate regarding building of competencies. Mr Sudeep Sen, an internationally acclaimed poet and contemporary voice of Indian Poetry, was Chief Guest for the inaugural session.

Prof. G.S. Bajpai, Vice-Chancellor, RGNUL welcomed the guests. Citing Dylan Thomas, Prof. Bajpai remarked, "A good poem is a contribution to reality. It helps to change the shape of universe." While addressing academicians, researchers, students and professionals, he observed that poetry immensely maximized talent and critical abilities. Voicing concern regarding artificial intelligence and impact of new technologies, Prof. Bajpai said that the knack of interpreting

poetry and understanding complex issues can fortify competencies.

Mr. Sudeep Sen read poems from his books, *Anthropocene: Climate Change, Contagion and Consolation* and *Fractals* (2021). In a conversation with Dr Navleen Multani, Assistant Professor in English and Public Relation Officer, RGNUL and Dr Jhilam Chattaraj, Assistant Professor, RBVRR Women's College Hyderabad, poet Sudeep Sen spoke about creative process, artistic defamiliarization and language usage in poetry. Sen also referred to his recently edited anthology *Converse (2022)* and contemplated on Indian writings. While responding to question regarding challenges in writing poems on social and cultural issues, Mr Sudeep Sen alluded to poet's subtle blurring of semiotic boundaries that explore promises, perils and create an alternative discourse. He also delved into the kind of poetry prominently figuring on Facebook in the present times.

Prof Eugene O' Brien, Director, Mary Immaculate Institute of Irish Studies; Prof. Sanjukta Dasgupta, Convenor, Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi; Dr Anjana Neira Dev, Gargi College, Delhi and Dr Basudhara Roy, Karim City College, Jamshedpur; Dr Jaydeep Sarangi, Vice-President IPPL; Dr Nishi Pulugurtha, Secretary, IPPL; Dr Nabanita Sengupta, University of Calcutta; Prof Desmond L Kharmawphlang, NEHU, Shillong; Dr Manju, CU; Dr Sunaina Jain, MCM Chandigarh; Prof Prasannanshu, NLU Delhi, Prof Pramod Kumar, IGNOU and Prof Bootheina Majoul, University of Carthage were resource persons for the technical sessions.

Prof. Eugene O' Brien delivered a discourse on "Poetic Thinking: Towards an Understanding of Language of the Unconscious" during the first technical session. "Poetic thinking is all about

knowledge and truth. Poetry accesses the realm of repressed emotions, unconscious desires and prejudices," observed Prof. Brien. Elucidating the conceptualizations of Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Prof. Eugene O' Brien said, "Poetry deconstructs binaries, allows interaction of rational/irrational and makes space for philosophy." Prof. Brien focused on the poetry of Seamus Heaney. Prof. Sanjukta Dasgupta deliberated on poetry as a learning experience. Dr. Anjana Neira Dev, Dr. Navleen Multani and Dr. Basudhara Roy responded to the presentations.

Dr Jaydeep Sarangi expanded on new poets in Indian English poetry. Dr Nishi Pulugurtha delved into poetry and activism. She also raised a concern for dementia and recited her poems on this issue. Dr Nabanita Sengupta responded to the presentations on the second day of the program**.** Dr Anjana Neira Dev elaborated on the geometry of poetry. Prof Desmond read a few of his compositions on folklore and alluded to poetry as identity. Distinguished Poet, Dinesh Devghariya, presented poems on freedom fighters and epics during the RGNUL and SBI Poetry session on the third day. RGNUL students, faculty members and members of teaching staff presented self-composed poems.

Dr Sunaina Jain delineated pathway of holistic growth through reading and understanding of poetry. Poetry workshop was conducted by Prof Prasannanshu. Multilingual poetry session in collaboration with P3 group was also held on the fourth day of the program**.**

Prof Parmod Kumar dwelled on poetry as world literature. Prof Majoul talked about the paramount importance of poetry in the

digital era. Prof Eugene O' Brien made observations on bog bodies and The Northern Irish Troubles with reference to the poetry of Seamus Heaney. Dr S Chitra, Assistant Professor, Sherubtse College, Royal University of Bhutan, presented concluding remarks during the last session of the event. She eulogised the significant academic endeavour of RGNUL to promote study of poetry for the holistic development of teachers and learners.

Prof. Anand Pawar, Registrar, RGNUL, faculty members, research scholars, research associates, students and academicians from various institutes, India and abroad, were also present during the deliberations. Dr Navleen Multani, Coordinator, extended a vote of thanks.

A total of 60 participants from Adamas University; Hansraj College, University of Delhi; Hislop College Nagpur; B.N.P.G.College, Udaipur; Panjab University, Chandigarh; Delhi University; MCM DAV College for Women, Chandigarh; IASE, Pune, Maharashtra; Department of English, University of Delhi; Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning; National Law University, Delhi; Govt. Degree College for Women, Pulwama ; Symbiosis Law School, Pune; Xavier Business School Sxuk, Kolkata; IGNOU; Sherubtse College, Bhutan; St. Stephens' College, DU and RGNUL, Punjab attended the 5 day program**.**

About the Author

Navleen Multani is the Head of the School of Languages and Director of the Public Relations Cell at Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala. Additionally, she holds the position of Area Editor at Oxford Online Bibliographies.

ISBN 813020552-1