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Writing Resistance

While the term "resistance" refers to a political or military or socio-cultural defense in general, it may, for a literate society, refer to all forms of writing. The Biblical commandments to any of the spiritual parables may be seen as resisting or evoking resistance. At the point of time we are in, it becomes impossible to speak of the origin of resistance writing; perhaps, it may be sobering to see that the futility of the question has long been realized by the dictum "the letter killeth". Resistance becomes natural where there is enforcement. The more we think of "writing resistance", the more we may get tempted to distinguish between writerly resistance and readerly resistance, or proceed further, on the lines of a Roland Barthes, to configure an implied resistance for both the writer and the reader! All the same, the good thing about writing resistance seems to be its inclusiveness; for writing resistance pulls down the traditional distinction between literary (imaginative/creative) writing and literary criticism or theory.

Literary works from Sir Philip Sidney's classical "Apology for Poetry" in answer to Plato's dictum against poetry, to Dryden's "Preface to the Fables" defending his translation of Chaucer into modern English, through to the present day feminist critique of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* by Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* or the *Surviving Women* by Jerry Pinto (though a bungled defense against the onslaught of feminism and the women's movement!) are defensive and may conveniently be termed resistance writing. Writing, being a form of expression, serves as a vehicle to take forward the ideological dialectics - perhaps a great deal unconsciously - for the short-sighted, participating individual. This fact has been reinforced through the

various theoretical stages from New Criticism to post-structuralist to -modernist to -colonialism.

Perhaps all that is written by Harold Bloom by way of explication of literary texts might be termed resistance writing. In the light of his all-pervading "anxiety of influence", the very succession of "ages" could be seen as a resistance to what is or what has preceded.

Carrying the idea of resistance further, into the realm of the mind, literary works function like dreams for their authors, dreams being a form of "wish fulfillment", a psychological means necessary for the preservation of the individual's sanity. The domain of resistance thus becomes complicated and becomes a battleground, a 'free for all'. Every piece of writing represents, then, a position for or against the status quo: civilizing as progress is often at logger heads with tradition and that which is 'handed down'.

While critical essays or other nonfictional writing can easily be identified for their polemical position or their defensive status, creative or imaginative writing has remained relatively free from explicit, political interventions. As literary achievement was invariably fueled by human aspiration for "immortality", the overtly political has never been an esteemed subject-matter in creative or imaginative literature. The appearance of a very small number of such works, at any given point in time, and their rapid decline on account of being "dated" would testify to the fact. The very contextualization of a motif or theme was perhaps presumed to endorse a satisfying political position for the writers.

With the ever-increasing momentum of human progress, as everything has been depleting, diminishing, and perhaps finally been obliterated to be re-formed and recast in no immediately perceivable fashion, the perception of literature has also undergone transformation. The limited number of disciplines that existed centuries ago when compared to the multiplying specializations and interdisciplinary milieu of today is in itself, an attestation of the fact. Thus, literature which was essentially "imaginative writing" has forfeited its role as the home for freedom of expression.

The values and standards encapsulated in literature have become too lukewarm to carry any impact today; the veiled narratives with their

tentative, non-assertive prevarications have not escaped politically-motivated witchhunts. The contest between right and might had never before been so obviously tilted to favour the latter, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that in present times, might has almost wholly replaced right. Personal conviction has been drastically corroded and the trend of rabble-rousing serves the purpose of literary fervor instead.

The revolt against D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* appear incredible, if not primitive, in the light of our knowledge of works like Boccaccio's *Daecameron* or Goethe's *Faust* or Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale" (of *The Canterbury Tales*) that preceded these. It is greatly ironic that humanity that could take the cuckolding of a husband or the swapping of spouses as a regular and invariable ingredient of comedies should take exception to a Lawrence or Hardy because they question with gravity the validity of a monogamous-yet-loveless bondage between spouses. Though the exile of a thought-adventuring novelist has not been uncommon, a death sentence for such thought-adventure—perhaps one that is too precarious and gone awry—is baffling and alarming.

A couple of decades ago in Tamilnadu, a murderer nabbed by the police revealed that the murders he committed were "inspired" by a sensational and popular movie about a serial killer showing at that time. If one were to sympathize with him, how far can the public at large (let alone the team of people who made the movie) be held responsible for those murders—extending the terms of a Marxist position that every piece of "art" is a product of its own times? Can this be condoned or explained away as Albert Camus' protagonist Meursault (of *The Outsider*) shooting and killing someone, "quite unpremeditated"? That Meursault had no personal reason or motive for killing the Arab—nothing other than the heatstroke that caused him to murder—can never liberate him from the public or societal accusation.

The forces at work in the production of a novel or a film are not wholly determined by an individual author or even a team (as in the case of a movie, 'the team' may include, reasonably speaking, the censor board of the state as well). The contribution of the social milieu that prevails at any given time is inherent in every such excess, though

there may not be an agreeable method to quantify its impact. Thus, the responsibility for the excesses in the production of a controversial work or the extremist, offensive reaction against it may not lie with an individual. The failure of the state machinery to prevent the issuing of such controversial work in the first place has absolved it of its position to punish the producer(s) in the wake of a public outcry. But should it then be argued that the same may apply for the extreme reaction to the work by the readers or movie-goers, and that they may be absolved of, or condoned, for the consequences? The line between the provocative content and the provoked outburst is blurred, and the reader/viewer has to prefer the position of restraint, to oppose extreme punishment meted out by self-styled arbiters of justice and defenders of culture.

Writing resistance being the theme of this issue, the journal has a range of focuses like history, narrative, gender, etc. wherein alternative readings are attempted. Though Francis Bacon might be right in saying that writing may help cultivate perfection, writing resistance can only wish for such complacent optimism. The purpose of the focus is, as that of any earnest venture in the field of knowledge, to release the mind ultimately from the confines of the material status of a text, to transport the subscribers and readers to that dynamic status of instability.

The author, the artist, the poet and the philosopher have over the ages and within different cultural contexts, been at the receiving end of creatively inimical thought patterns, handed down as polemical touchstones not to be overlooked or modified by the creator. This issue on "Writing Resistance" acknowledges creative forms of expression as equally, if not more, powerful than straightforward political argument. It hopes to bring to the fore expressions of reactions/resistance to established polemic, within works of literature, thereby articulating multiple social and political struggles. The issue works on the basic premise that the subaltern exists, has a voice and will speak. It is concerned with the subaltern identity and with the elucidation of this identity by breaking through the oppressive labyrinth of colonial/postcolonial, gender, racial, linguistic and social frameworks. How far does such expression succeed in bringing about desired change in the existing social patterns and what are the techniques used to articulate resistance in art and literature? Does one evaluate such resistance art/

writing using existing theoretical yardsticks, or is a critical framework which resists existing theory to be put in place to judge literary merit? The issue debates these matters while also incorporating more specific studies about resistance art and literature from around the world.

The history of the world has been chronicled, down the ages, by the artistic output of the civilizations as they developed. Being at times reconciliatory, and reactionary at others, art and literature have served effectively as a commentary of the times. Resistance has been integral to art and philosophy, serving to enrich culture by investing it with alternative narrative patterns. Therefore, to curb individual opinion is to lose forever this enriching dialectical dialogue between the oppressor and oppressed, between the different forces of a fundamentally unequal world. The voice of resistance has always ensured a dynamic method of discourse that seeks to persuade and inform and take the culture forward. To seek to gag it is to do so at our own peril.

Professor G.N. Devy's "Literature as Resistance" is reproduced here as it is still relevant; the drive to rehabilitate and humanize the denotified and scheduled tribes of Independent India is yet to be realized fully. However, as the objective of academic enlightenment can only be in reducing the gap between the ideal and the real, Professor Devy's social activism gains a rare immediacy.

"Writing as Resistance?" by Francis Jarman discloses the element of resistance that is inherent (and, hence inevitable) in writing. The dialectical swinging of resistance over the ages has been graphed with a breath-taking rapidity, indirectly sustaining and endorsing the other articles that appear in this issue.

"Alexis Wright: Aboriginal Art, Writing and History" discusses the significance of Carpentaria. The article gently discloses the chink in the armour of the imperialist presumption that the aborigines are of an inferior race and culture. Without much ado, the article unfolds how representing the Australian aborigines is in itself a necessary corrective and how any form of marginalization is invariably self-defeating and regressive.

The article on Tibetan poetry begins by exploring the possibility of confining writing resistance to immigrant writing or diasporic literature exclusively and addresses the problem of delimiting in the absence of

a corresponding structural identity for them. Alienation and exile are conditions that do not require a literal, geophysical displacement. The article effectively drives home this through the Tibetan situation: the displacement of the Tibetans in their own country by the aggression and occupation of the Chinese.

The article on the post-Mullivaikkal Srilankan poetry has a self-explanatory title with regard to writing as resistance – "Hieroglyphics of Trauma and Violence: Witnessing Terror in Post-Mullivaikkal Srilankan Tamil Poetry". The bleak and bizarre images in these poems attempt to push the limits of language and attain the quality of an arresting tableau, like any passionate and intense writing. In conveying the terror experienced by the Tamils, the post-Mullivaikkal Srilankan Tamil poetry has become the testimony of the displaced and the wronged.

"'I speak of Africa and golden joys': The search for the fabled city of gold in *The Obsession Book of Timbuktu*" studies Bruce Meyer's work as yet another text with the quest motif, simultaneously denuding the genre of its element of the exotic.

"Rohinton Mistry's Novels as Writing Resistance: Accent on Human Rights" focuses upon the immigrant writer's portrayal of the post-independence India with its emphasis on the subaltern.

"The Feminizing of History by Expatriate Women Novelists as Resistance: Reading Yasmine Gooneratne's *The Pleasures of Conquest* for Alternate Histories and Ideas of Nationhood" attempts an alternative reading of history based on the premise that history is essentially narrative and thus, in turn, is selective and exclusive. With the growing awareness of gender discrimination, the gaps in history as to the role of women appear too glaring to be overlooked any more. The article uncovers how Gooneratne's *The Pleasures of Conquest* cues in the reader as to the basic points from where reconstruction of history may be undertaken.

"Voices of Resistance in Subaltern Autogynographies: A Study of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*" reiterates the need to feminize history by undermining the hegemonic exclusiveness of the genre autobiography. The narrative of an individual's history has been the monopoly of the privileged. Thus,

autobiography of an ordinary person was unimaginable as if the life and experience of a celebrity alone was worth knowing. Autobiography of a subaltern, marginalized individual—more specifically speaking a woman's life-history—was mostly discounted or non-existent. The autogynographies decentre the genre of autobiography, rendering it more inclusive.

"Metafiction: Narrative Resisting Narrative" attempts to discover how the narrative has remained historically a space for continued dialogue. The changing narrative predilections keep the novel forever dynamic, in spite of the nearly-finished, at-the-end-of-its-tether impression created by the contemporary, academic hat-trick "metafiction". The history of the narrative can be seen almost interchangeable with the history of resistance. The theoretical desperation impinging upon the narrative today has resulted in the prevailing delusion that "metafiction" is the narrative *cul de sac*. "Metafiction" might be the latest in the academic stock market but certainly not the last word in the history of narrative discourse.

Unlike the conventional, imaginative writing that is passed on as "literature", the poems focused upon by the article "Resistance to Rape and Cruelty against Women: A Study of the Poems 'He Will Never Change' by Alicia Junkins and 'Not Yet' by Michelle F." are written against rape by Alicia and Michelle, being victims of rape themselves. These poems, posted by the victims themselves, not only defy the violation and the social stigmatization that entails, but also seem to defy through their terseness the romanticization of the self that is inherent in most autobiographical writing. The article emphasizes the fact that the authentic voice of resistance is louder than the rest.

"(Re)Appropriating the Womb: Nasreen's *Shodh* as a Narrative of Resistance" illustrates how resistance may begin primarily as a defense and may gradually grow reactionary and retaliating until a peaceable transformation is reached or within sight. The novel's protagonist, undermining the "body-snatching" patriarchy, shows the way to filch back the woman's body (body can be read as womb as well) from the subjugating male. Setting aside questions about the veracity and purposefulness of the subversive "reappropriation" offered in the novel, particularly in the light of artificial insemination and advancements

in genetic engineering, the feminist reading of the novel serves as an answer to patriarchal hegemony; and the line that divides the offensive strike and the defensive measure blurs, implying offense may also be a form of defense.

"Resisting Postcolonialism: Reading Rushdie's 'Magical Realism' from a Regional Perspective" discusses Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in relation to the pioneer of magical realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The article contends that the winner of the 'Booker of Bookers', *Midnight's Children*, endorses the colonial and geo-political conception of "nation" and remains oblivious of the cultural diversity of India. Unlike the Latin American Marquez for whom magical realism discovers the limitation of Postcolonialism as a theoretical framework, Rushdie's use of magical realism is reductive. Instead of rupturing the colonial assumptions that generated the "nation-state", magical realism becomes a mere structural device in *Midnight's Children*: the novel's effacement of the "vernacular" and/or the regional diversity of India indirectly endorse the hegemonic assumption of an easy generalization and unification inherent in nationhood. The cultural differences among the erstwhile colonies challenge the unifying attempts of postcolonialism, and it is needless to point out that India, in itself, is too multicultural to be contained. Rushdie's magical realism negates this.

"Demarginalising English Studies: Remarks on Caste and the Colonial Question" problematizes caste-orientation and divisions, pointing out the difficulties involved in subsuming Dalit history within national history and in locating Dalit literature within the scope of Postcolonial English studies as well.

This issue of ACJELL aims at presenting a broad overview of the types of resistance seen in literary presentations of different genres. It highlights voices of resistance and raises issues of dissent and protest from differing perspectives of gender, colonial and postcolonial histories originating from diverse regions of the globe.

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Literature as Resistance

G. N. Devy

Friends, I want to tell you a little story of something that happened here, in Gujarat. The beginning of that story is in the 19th century. Colonialism brought many terrible things. It brought some good things and it changed our social fabric very considerably. Old professions that were seen as useful during the course of the early phase of colonialism started being seen as menacing, harmful professions. For example, the soldiers of the princes who were defeated got disbanded and didn't know what to do. Those soldiers in their isolated existence came to be seen as dangerous to the state. Many such communities, many such groups were brought under a common law by the British. In 1871, the colonial government passed an act called The Criminal Tribes Act.

Coin making, traditionally was not a prerogative of the state. It was outsourced because kings changed very frequently. Currency stayed fairly stable in medieval and ancient India. The coin makers, who were now seen as doing something illegal, were brought under the purview of this Act. They were called 'counterfeiters'. The very first category in the Criminal Tribes Act (1871), several communities, several occupations are listed, is counterfeiters. The second is 'hijras' (eunuchs). They were communities trained specially to guard the princess' quarters. But they were fighters and they had certain kinds of knowledge in the sciences and arts. So many such communities were brought under the Criminal Tribes Act. Not all of them, most of them were not criminals by habit or by their past. Special cells were created for keeping these communities in jails. Those cells were called settlements; this became a part of the British city-town planning or architecture.

There was the 'sheher' (city), there was the cantonment with the civil lines and outside the cantonment was the settlement, so that these so called criminals do not come and bother the city dwellers. All these people were kept there. They were taken to work sites in the morning, in handcuffs or tied with ropes, brought back in the evening. They were unpaid labours in most cases or very low paid labour. A small village in Maharashtra where I come from had a small dam called Bhatgar and when I started looking at the records of the colonial history, I saw an officer's report, which said that there was settlement close by from where these workers were taken there and they weren't paid wages. The accounts for one whole year are given. One Mr. Stark wrote this report; later on he went to establish settlement near Gokak.

The life of these people to say the least was, to say the least, miserable, because they weren't allowed to hold any land. The children were given some education but all the grown-up men and women were made to report to the nearest police station in some cases, four times during a cycle of 24 hours or three times or twice, depending on the category of the prisoners. A certain police officer in the colonial regime came to the conclusion that if a Brahmin's son becomes a priest in India and a Vaniya, that is, a merchant's son necessarily becomes a merchant then a criminal's son is bound to become a criminal. So somewhere along the history of the settlements, the notion that an entire community is criminal, not any individuals in the community, but the entire community is criminal, crept in and that got settled.

There was of course the other part of the Indian society involved in the National freedom struggle and the project of modernization and learning English education and developing agriculture and acquiring upper caste and moving from villages to cities and some going abroad and bringing knowledge of a new kind of law. All those communities too started looking at these people as criminal and just criminals but as born criminals. From 1871-1924, where the last modification of this Act came about, something like 191 communities were brought under the purview of this Act, beginning with the North West Frontier and going up to the Nizam's state, Hyderabad. In 1952, some years after the rest of India got Independence, these communities were freed. Because the earlier notification had to be annulled, these people

came to be known as the de-notified communities. Most of them had been nomadic in habit in the past. They were wandering singers, entertainers, rope-walkers, snake-charmers, medicine men. Because they were nomadic in habit, they came to be known as the de-notified and nomadic communities or tribes, very different from the Adivasis. So for short I'll call them the DNTs.

In 1952, when they came out of the settlement, after about 70 years of imprisonment, several generations had passed. They were fully stigmatized. The communities outside had been looking at them as criminals and in the text books of the police academy, they were listed by caste, community names as these are criminal tribes and their habits of committing crime were coded very systematically. So a whole field of knowledge was built round this wrong notion that everyone in this community is a born criminal. After Independence, the public in general and police in particular contributed to the miseries of these communities. People felt that these stigmatized communities are really criminal- those are the people who run away with children/babies and sell them, those are the people who cause theft or hurt or danger. The police tried to engage them in crime deliberately because the old Criminal Tribes Act had been removed and was replaced by what is known as the Habitual Offenders' Act. The Habitual Offenders' Act was exactly the same, word to word except for saying that these were born criminals. The entire community was not criminal. This was an act made for individuals belonging to these communities. The police took advantage of this act and criminalized innocent people who wanted to come out and educate themselves, get into some profession. Not having land, they had to learn a variety of new professions. The total population of such people in India is 6 crores. In Gujarat, it is 30 lakhs. There had not been any organized efforts of doing anything for such people in Gujarat. Almost 40 years had passed since Independent and nothing had been done about this. In Maharashtra, a new awareness came up with good writing, by Lakshman Mane, Lakshman Gaekwad, Atmaram Rathod and a variety of people. Generally the people were aware there that these communities have problems.

In Gujarat no such awareness was seen. Some years back, Mahashweta Devi brought that awareness to Gujarat. In Bengal, near Purulia, in a

community called 'Khedia Sabar', there had been a custodial death of a young man called Budhan. Budhan was born on Wednesday (Budhwar) and was called Budhan. He was not a criminal, but was taken to the police custody, beaten up and then kept as under-trial prisoner for a few days, where he was further tortured. And he died in the prison cell there. The police and the jail officials tried to depict his death as a suicide. But the 'gamchha' with which he reportedly tried to hang himself didn't belong to him. Mahashweta Devi had filed a case in the Calcutta High Court, after his body was hidden; a post mortem was carried without the knowledge of the police. A report was produced. The Calcutta High Court gave a very positive judgment in this case. But in the meanwhile Mahashweta Devi had come to Baroda for a lecture. She spoke on de-notified tribes and she spoke with tears in her eyes.

Some of us felt very deeply moved by what she said and we decided to form a De-notified and Nomadic Tribes' Rights Action Group. A few months later the Calcutta High Court judgment came. Now in these intervening months, she and I, we had made a journey to Ahmedabad, Chhara-nagar. If you ever go to Ahmedabad and ask somebody to take you to Chharanagar, the first thing they'll say is, "Do not go there. Those people are very dangerous. They are thieves and you shouldn't go there." Nobody allowed us to go there. But somehow we did go there. We got a group of young people together. We set up a small library. Bhupen Kakkar, the painter joined us in this. He came and inaugurated the library. Kumar Sahani came and read out literary takes there.

So some artists, writers started going to Chharanagar. This group of youngsters started interacting with them. When the judgment came out, I decided to print the entire High Court judgment in a magazine which I had started with the title 'Budhan', on the influence of this particular case. That became a magazine of de-notified and nomadic tribes. That judgment was printed in 'Budhan' and young boys in Chharaanagar decided to make a play out of this judgment. They had not been actors. They didn't know what theatre means. But because this had been their life experience because most of their parents are in jail or have been killed by police or are forced to make liquor. In Chharanagar, every girl, by the time she is 14-15, is forced to sell liquor; every young man, even if he is educated, is forced to get into the liquor

business. They are not allowed any other profession. If he does that, then they put some bottles in his house, arrest him under the Habitual Offenders' Act. The police are free to call him any time, when there is law and order apprehension. Such people are taken to the police custody.

So these boys in Chharanagar decided to produce a play. They didn't know that it was a play. They just thought that they were presenting this story to the other Chharas who couldn't have read 'Budhan' magazine in English, in which it was printed. And out of that was born a certain kind of street theatre form. It became effective because it was the story about the audience itself. And everybody, when they saw it, was angry. They wanted to cry, they became very excited. When I saw it the first time, I felt so deeply moved that I decide to invite some others from Ahmedabad- writers and artists. Some of them did venture out and visited Chharanagar, though hesitantly and they felt very deeply moved. Mallika Sarabhai went there and she said that this must be performed in Sarabhai Theatre (Darpana Academy). So I suggested that she better invite some very senior police officers and everybody from the rank of the DG went there. These boys made the presentation, I spoke at that time and the police officers were interacting, much ashamed.

This play then started going out, to Bhopal, Delhi and Bombay. Somebody made a video show and it was taken to the United States. It was produced there by some Americans. And somebody in St. Xavier's College in Bombay decided to produce the English version of 'Budhan'.

When I put together an anthology of tribal literature and literature of the de-notified communities, I decided to include a written version of this play in English translation. That went out to a few other countries and it was produced. When all this was happening, we had been building committees of people among the 'chamthas'- who are the stone engravers or the stone crushers. They work with stone rock. The 'Vadis', the 'Vispadas', the 'Turis', the 'Dafers', the 'Bajanias', the 'Dauri Gosawis' and such other communities. In Baroda, about 4-5 kms from Chhani, one Bhikabhai Bajani was caught by people in the society, tied to a tree with a rope, beaten up to pulp and he died. When I saw the news, I asked the police if they were investigating the case and found out that they were not. So I had to go and sit on a 'dharna' outside the Police

Commissioner's office. Finally, after several days, the Commissioner agreed to visit the place incognito. He came in plain clothes with me. I said you must listen to their story because it is a Patel from the nearby community that has caused this. The killers were arrested. But in the process, the 'Bajania' wanted to celebrate their little victory and they called up one evening, with drums and singing 'bhajans'. Then I started taking other people to listen to what they are doing.

Some of them stabilized around that. These committees of different communities that we had made, I noticed, felt quickened by any artistic activity. They responded very spontaneously to dance, song or drama- a performance. So we decided that we should bring all of them together to watch each others' performances of this agony. We were looking for a suitable place in Gujarat. I didn't want everything transcribed and printed. Literature of nomadic communities has caused a certain deflection in the leadership pattern there. And so I wanted to go about it in a slightly different manner. We located a place called Kaleshwari in Panchmahals, which is an archeological site and because is called Kaleshwari- from 'kala'- the art element is there and because the place was not used by any other religion, we decided to congregate there. Because most of these people now engage in daily wages, they take a day off on 'amavasya' (new moon) day. We found that 'Shivratri' is one day they take a day off from wherever they are. Just as adivasis take a day off during holi, the de-notified communities normally take a day off around 'Shivratri'. So we decided to call them there and by word of mouth, many of them gathered there.

They were 40,000 and there were people walking on ropes, playing with drums, dancing, bringing all kinds of musical instruments. They came and performed throughout the day, in the Kaleshwari compound. Next year they went there again. So this began and this year we complete five years of this Kaleshwari Mela. I invite all of you to come there. It is quite a sight. It is a very empowering sight; it opens up one's imagination.

In this process, the mobilization of the DNT and nomadic communities became a little less difficult. Last year all of them decided to sign a memorandum to send to the government. Meanwhile, we had approached the National Human Rights Commission. The NHRC had

asked us to write a report on the status of the de-notified communities, which we did with the help of Rajiv Dhavan and Laxman Gaekwad and B D Sharma and others. That report was accepted by the NHRC, chief secretaries of eight states were called to Delhi for a meeting. These states included Gujarat. Those states were asked to annul the Habitual Offenders' Act which is still in existence. We were asked to do a follow up and go from state to state to meet the chief secretaries and ensure that this act goes and some social security provisions are made for them. We kept doing that work.

When this demand in the form of a charter went from Kaleshwari to Gandhinagar, the government felt a bit compelled to look at the issue. But whatever they think they can do, they have done. All this partly because of this art, drama, literature, song, music, coupled with a human rights campaign. Just a song and a play wouldn't have changed this as it happened in the days of the Sharda Act. But it doesn't happen again and again. But this does help mobilize the voiceless. Giving a platform for expression does help in our times. The state has lost its content; it exists only in the form. Its ability to deliver anything to the people is either not at all there or is minimum now. After the Independence, a promise, a guarantee was given in the Constitution that something will be done to make all of us equal- equality and social justice. But just as for a radio set there is a guarantee period of 4-5 years, I think that period of guarantee for us is over in the Constitution. Even if it is there in language, the state itself is passing through a very severe crisis now. And it has lost its ability to deliver much to the people. In our times, if a state does promise something to the DNTs or groups like them who are totally forgotten, who are beyond the margins of the margins, who have nobody to speak for them, who have no other weapons to fight for their rights, because most of them are not even recognized as citizens. Most of them have never voted, they don't have local addresses, they have no belongings. They do not know if they are Indians or not. For such people this giving them voice through art, literature or through human rights awareness, is very necessary.

We are moving slowly but definitely in the direction of a soft dictatorship in this country. Whether that will come through use of

armies, the military force which no longer shall be used for external wars because external wars may become impossibilities, those will be used against the people of this country, as in other countries, I am not speaking only of India. In order to liquidate, to effect the economic transition and to liquidate various organs of what has been state and what has made the state effective, the sell out process might require a concealed dictatorship in this country. The guarantee that was given to us in the Constitution, at least allowed us to think the guarantee justicable. That we could ask the power that be, in the court of law, to question as to why they are not delivered what they had promised to deliver.

But when a faceless, completely concealed agency starts governing our destinies, not through elections or parties, but through use of high age technology and very advanced, complicated legal structures which are beyond the understanding of common man's common sense, these people have only one fate, that is a silent genocide. There will be no forums left for them even to protest. In those days, if they keep their diversity of their expressive ability, if they keep these, what we think are art forms, but what for them are means of employment, if those forms are kept, that might be some help for us. We are heading to a world when through the mobile which will have in it the entire language stock of this country or any country for that matter. The mobile not only will connect us to the rest of the world but will also introduce, thought virus and speech virus into our brains. That day is not very far. It could be a year and a half or two years. There's a massive project on one of this kind. I think we have these 'irregular' people in the country that the artists are, they can help. Otherwise we have to face silence, aphasia, a complete loss of our ability to question and resistance will be a thing of the past to be found in some dictionary, in Hansa Mehta Library. Literature is a good means of resistance and through this very small experiment carried out in Gujarat, in the last few years, my faith in that power has increased, even if I had to desert the mainstream, mainline literary studies for that. Thank you.

Discussion

Q. You talk about annulling the Habitual Offenders' Act and changing these laws against these communities. That is all well and good. What about changing the conventional mindsets that the general population has about these people who are the marginal sections of society? What about that? How can we create awareness among people about these communities?

A. I am very happy that you feel the urgency and the need to do that. Begin. Start. If you start, it will change. I don't have the answer. We must all begin ourselves. But I'll be very happy if there's anything I can do when you start work. I am not saying it is your responsibility or mine. All I am saying is there are large questions for which we don't have answers. Languages take birth and die, not because a grammarian comes and says let a new language be born. But small people, in small speech, in small commas and semi-colons keep changing them. And over a time, they change. Our mindsets need many changes. They need major surgeries. We have the colonial hangover, the Western bias; we have the traditional burdens on our minds. We are blind to the women's issues, the physically challenged issues and most of all the caste issue. During my 8-9 years of work with Adivasis , not one of the non-Adivasis had ever said to me, even those who admired them, that I wish I didn't have caste and I had been an Adivasi. I know it is impossible in this country but India has only two types of people, two social types- one is that which has caste and the other which doesn't have caste, which is tribe. A lot of cleaning is necessary, but it cannot be done in real time, in real life, at an ideological level it can be done. But in one's life it is possible. I have a solution. Encourage a few of your friends to go to Chani. Bhikabahi Bajania's widow is still alive. She has two sons and both of them are unemployed, spare the money you were going to spend on your next cup of tea. Give it to them. If my mindset changes then the mindset of the rest of the world will change. Mindset is my mind, not in other people's minds.

Q. Can I intervene? My name is Amit Basu. I disagree. Mindset is only in the mind and mindset is not there. In fact, what we understand as mindset, it can be discussed as collective conscious, collective

unconscious. So while particularizing our own mindset, how do we get access to our mindset? How do I know that my mindset is like that? There is always a larger reference and there has to be a negotiation whether in the form of struggle or in other kind of form. So I differ. That's a wonderful presentation and I appreciate it. But I differ on that point because any kind of marginalized communities existing in the world, there always has been this question of who creates the centre and the margin? I think that question has to be pushed somewhere or other. So in the sense, I do support this intervention.

A. I agree. I see that validity of these questions. In fact these questions I understand that many questions are important, one must devote time to understanding those questions, trying to tackle them. What you are trying to say is simplistic, that is while one is asking the question, the questions gain in depth. If they are asked in the middle of an action, say the Bahagwad Gita's questions, whether one likes the answers or not is significant because they are in the middle of an action. I have respect for philosophies. We need philosophers for Gujarat. We have five crore Gujaratis. We need at least 5-10 good philosophers and we need about 500-1000 good social workers. In the case of de-notified tribals, we need a few more because we have not crossed the three digit figure here.

C. There are no absolute solutions of course, but I must say information is accessible. Most of the time people are empathetic. I think it is important because there are so many things happening, there are so many issues in bits and pieces. There is no collective where if people want to do things, but there's no information available. The process to find that information is tedious, circuitous. If this information could be made available like you said, through literature- you did it and the police officers did get motivated. But there are such communities existing, there are these issues that are alive. I guess even perspectives would change, where they key thing is the perspective. If information is available, perspectives can be developed.

A. Outside Baroda University Arts Faculty campus, a man sits there with a parrot and a pack of cards, predicting the future. He belongs to the de-notified community. He has been there for the last 25 years but of late, he had disappeared. And I am worried about him. The man

who came to cut 'patra' for the 'dabbas', at one time, the tin makers, those who shine the pots with nickel, whose who come with that wheel sharpening the knives, they were at one time makers of arms. They are now reduced to this. Many such occupations which surround us everywhere, I am sure the boy or girl who keeps the cycle stands in the faculty, if you were to go and find out, you will find that they belong to the de-notified community. They try to conceal it. When you probe, you will find that somebody's father was killed by the police; somebody's mother is stigmatized as thief. The information is not available but it is accessible. We need to access it.

C. Perhaps make it more accessible.

A. Yes, my invitation to all of you to Kaleshwari. Come to Kaleshwari Mela for one day. You will enjoy the day and you will learn a lot about those communities. And they will feel that humanized. If the police have brutalized them, if the law has criminalized them, if the society has stigmatized them, you have the ability and the authority to humanize them.

This is the text of the lecture given at the seminar on "Literature as Resistance" hosted by the Department of English, M.S. University, Baroda in 2004. It was sent to us by the author for publication in ACJELL.

Writing as Resistance?

Francis Jarman

All fine writing is a form of resistance; or is it? Living as we do in an age that (as far as the arts are concerned) feverishly questions and challenges, constantly subverts and deconstructs, we easily forget that there was a time when great literature could be produced to eulogise kings or prelates, because they were powerful, or to praise a flower or a beautiful woman simply for being beautiful. Writers did not explicitly adopt critical poses or stances in their work—which is what in practice "resistance" is often all about—but got on with creating their poems or plays. All those attitudes that we have come to expect from writers, their self-dramatisation, their yearning for acknowledgement, their existential Angst, their alienation from society, or their scorn for its values: none of this was of particular interest to anyone, except maybe their families and their lovers and closest friends. Writers were not supposed to take themselves seriously; only their work.

We have also come to expect writing to be the mouthpiece of the oppressed and the downtrodden, and to be dedicated to revolution, liberation, or (at the very least) to radical social change. Writing is committed. Writing is "progressive". Writing is about, or for, the "little people", either because (occasionally) the writer comes from the little people, or because (more often, I suggest) taking their side offers a good opportunity to annoy the powers-that-be, all those forces that so irritate and frustrate the writer (a psychoanalyst might say that it's really just a way of thumbing your nose at Daddy). Since the nineteenth century, whole battalions of creative artists have dedicated themselves

to *épater le bourgeois,* i.e. to scandalising the middle classes (the social milieu from which they themselves usually came). Not surprisingly, much of what is then produced is what used to be called "agitprop", hardly qualifying as literature, assuming, that is, that we can agree on what it is that characterises worthwhile literature: that it is *distinctive* rather than predictable, *authentic* rather than derivative, *well-made* rather than hysterical, and *memorable* rather than banal. If we do not agree with that, and if we subscribe to the view that it is the *message* that is of over-riding importance, that is no great problem, but neither are we in the business of literature anymore, except by accident, and we may be in a different business altogether.

The above comments are not a plea to take politics out of literature, nor even an argument for an aesthetically-oriented literature in which content has been sidelined by form. The two can go hand-in-hand very effectively. William Blake's lines in *Auguries of Innocence* (c.1803)

> Every night and every morn
> Some to misery are born.
> Every morn and every night
> Some are born to sweet delight.
> Some are born to sweet delight,
> Some are born to endless night.

are both fine poetry and a valid perception about the human condition, then as now.

The message may not be a substitute for literature, but nor is the medium itself the message. Archibald MacLeish's late Imagist assertion that "A poem should not mean / But be" is a thing of impossibility, and does not even work within the poem by MacLeish (*Ars Poetica,* 1926) of which it forms the conclusion. Writers must continue to interact with the world, and great writing is a consolation and a guide to what is everywhere about us: Virgil's famous *lacrimae rerum*, "the tears of things" (*Aeneid*, I, 462). And if we broaden the use of the word, then "resistance" is also what writers do when they kick us awake out of complacency, out of dull thoughts expressed in hackneyed language, and out of our intellectual laziness. As Franz Kafka wrote to his friend Oskar Pollak in 1904:

> I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us.
> If the book we are reading does not shake us awake like a

> blow on the skull, why bother reading it in the first place? So that it can make us happy, as you put it? Good God, we'd be just as happy if we had no books at all; books that make us happy we could, at a pinch, also write ourselves. What we need are books that hit us like a most painful misfortune, like the death of someone we loved more than we love ourselves, that make us feel as though we had been banished to the woods, far from any human presence, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. That is what I believe (quoted in Manguel, 93).

Literary champions of the oppressed step up to the mark to speak for them; often they are themselves members of the oppressor class. Harriet Beecher Stowe (who was neither black nor a slave) publicised the plight of black slaves in America in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852); Abraham Lincoln is said to have greeted her in 1862 with the words "so you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war", though the story may be apocryphal. Charles Kingsley, an eminent social figure—he was a church minister, Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, chaplain to Queen Victoria, and a private tutor to the Prince of Wales—took up the cause of the British chimney sweeps in *The Water-Babies* (1863). Allan Octavian Hume (a Scotsman, and retired civil servant, not an Indian) played a central role in the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. For more than a hundred years the resistance to British rule in Ireland was led not by downtrodden Irish Catholic peasants but by members of the Protestant Anglo-Irish élite—Grattan, Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet, Smith O'Brien, Parnell—and the most ferocious condemnation of British misrule in Ireland, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), was the work of the Protestant Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin.

This is not to say that the oppressed and downtrodden have no right to inspire someone to speak for them, until the subaltern can speak for itself, which happens quickly enough, though usually in the language of the oppressor. As Shakespeare makes the "poisonous slave" Caliban in *The Tempest* tell his overweening master Prospero:

> You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
> For learning me your language! (I, ii, 365-7).

Many different critics (including the Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, the Algerian Frantz Fanon, the Barbadians George Lamming and E. K. Brathwaite and the Frenchman Octave Mannoni, see the discussion in Vaughan & Vaughan, (1991), have been fascinated by the interaction between Prospero and Caliban and the question to what extent it can be seen as a paradigm of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. This is almost before such colonies had even come into existence! It includes, moreover, the ambiguous, bittersweet feelings that many of the colonised later had towards the language of their masters, a language which both oppressed and empowered them. English (or French, for that matter) might be a symbol of their subjection and (claimed) inferiority, but it was also the repository of a marvellous literary tradition, and the gateway to the inspirational writings of great radical thinkers like Locke and Hume (or Voltaire and Rousseau).

How do you resist under an all-powerful regime? Jokes have long been the poor man's dissident literature. "When the white man came, we had the land and they had the Bibles; now they have the land and we have the Bibles" is a bitter joke that has been used in both North America and Africa.

In Nazi Germany, jokes against the regime could be punished with death, but the humorists were irrepressible. The initials of the state leisure programme *Kraft durch Freude* ("Strength through Joy"), for example, were explained as standing for *Kotz durch's Fenster*, or "Vomit through the window" (Grunberger, 424), and new standard units were invented, making fun of the leadership: a *Gör* (named after the vain, ridiculously be-medalled Hermann Göring) was the maximum amount of tin that someone could carry on his chest without falling flat on his face; a *Ley* (after Dr. Robert Ley, leader of the German Labour Front) was the maximum amount of time someone could speak without saying a single sensible thing; a *Goeb* (after Hitler's Propaganda Minister Dr. Joseph Goebbels) was the minimum unit of energy required to switch off 100,000 radio receivers simultaneously (423).

The oppression in the Soviet Union also produced a rich harvest of jokes, some of them remarkably perceptive:

> Under Lenin it was like being in a tunnel: darkness all around and light ahead. Under Stalin it was like riding the bus: one driver, half are "sitting", the rest are shaking. Under Khrushchev it was like being at the circus: one man speaks, everyone else laughs. Under Brezhnev it's like being at the movies: everyone is waiting for the show to end (quoted in Graham, 88).

But literature proper also flourished "underground" in the Soviet Union, where the *samizdat* ("self-published") network ensured that small numbers of copies of forbidden texts, including major works by the Nobel laureates Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky, were produced and circulated, at great personal risk to all involved. As the writer and activist Vladimir Bukovsky explained, "I write it myself, I edit it myself, I censor it myself, I publish it myself, I distribute it myself, I sit in jail for it myself" (Komaromi, website).

Dangerous works are like massive time-bombs, their authors persecuted, hounded across borders, imprisoned, murdered, or executed by those who feel threatened by their ideas.

Critics of the church once risked being burnt at the stake when they were caught. This happened to the reformer Jan Hus at the Council of Constance in 1415, despite the promise of safe conduct that he had been given by King (later Holy Roman Emperor) Sigismund. The man who had inspired Hus, John Wycliffe, whose translation of the Bible into English shook the foundations of the power system of late medieval England and sowed the seeds of the Reformation, only escaped burning by dying first, though his body was exhumed and burnt posthumously.

Thomas Paine, whose publications encouraged and supported first the American Revolution and then the French, was pursued by government agents, imprisoned (in France, where he escaped the guillotine by a fluke of chance), and died, execrated and scarcely mourned, in distant America.

Karl Marx was co-author (with Friedrich Engels) of one of the most influential texts in human history, *The Communist Manifesto*

of 1848, which begins: "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism", and ends:

> Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working Men of All Countries, Unite! (*Manifesto of the Communist Party*, website)

But Marx was harassed by the police, moved from country to country, frequently hid behind pseudonyms, and spent the last thirty years of his life in British exile.

Exile has been the fate of many creative writers. The Roman poet Ovid was banished from Rome to Tomis on the Black Sea, a cold, barbaric place on the fringes of the empire. What was his crime? He may have offended the emperor Augustus, who favoured conservative social policy and traditional family values, with his notorious poem *Ars Amatoria* ("The Art of Love"), although this had been published many years before the poet's banishment. Ovid himself contributed to the confusion by claiming that his exile was the result of "two charges" against him: "a song and a mistake" (*duo crimina, carmen et error*, in *Tristia*, II, 207). More likely, the poet had become embroiled in power struggles within the imperial inner circle (the "mistake"), and his immoral writings then provided a convenient excuse for his enemies to get rid of him.

The novelist James Joyce actually chose exile. Through Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of the semi-autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), he advised "silence, exile, and cunning" in the face of the overwhelming stranglehold that the Roman Catholic Church had over Irish society:

> You have asked me what I would do and what I would not do. I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning (184).

Joyce had already fled abroad. He couldn't write *in* Ireland, though in exile he didn't write substantially about anything *other* than Ireland.

The novelist E. M. Forster, throughout his life a homosexual, employed both silence and cunning to survive as a writer in a homophobic society. He employed cunning, in that he made several of his protagonists girls, since he could not write about the emotional lives of men, especially his own, in the way that he probably wished. This does not necessarily mean that, say, Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View* (1908), his most charming heroine, is just a boy *en travesti* (cf. Gramsden, 34).

> It is not so important that Lucy is Morgan [i.e. Edward Morgan Forster—he disliked the first of his given names] sexually, although she could be him in the guise of a girl; what matters is that her *situation* is his. [Trapped in a stifling relationship with his mother, he] had become coerced, imprisoned in a way of life which is usually the lot of women; yet, because it was an unusual one, if he had re-created it in a novel it would have seemed implausible. (And he would have been more recognisably autobiographical.) But the world is full of girls who live wretchedly at home until they can escape through marriage; the fact of Lucy's femaleness did not mean that her experiences were so very different from her creator's (Beauman, 102-3).

And Forster employed silence, in that his only explicitly homoerotic novel, *Maurice* (first drafted 1913-14) was locked away for many years until the changed social and political environment in Britain meant that it could at last be published—by which time it no longer seemed relevant. Around 1960 he wrote on the cover: "Publishable—but worth it?" (118). It was published posthumously, in 1971.

Writers may be carried away by their passion for a cause, but come to regret it later. Sometimes this is a part of the common process of becoming more conservative and cautious as one ages ("If you're not a liberal when you're young, you have no heart; if you're not a conservative when you're old, you have no brain"—the origins of the saying are obscure, however). Like many of the Romantics, the young William Wordsworth was bowled over by the French Revolution: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/But to be young was very heaven!" he

wrote in *The Prelude* (X. 692-93). Many writers and intellectuals, not only Wordsworth, gave a great deal of support to the cause of the Revolution. But the older Wordsworth became a crusty reactionary and an enemy of reform, accepting honours and a Civil List pension from the government, as well as declining into mediocrity as a poet: although Wordsworth didn't die until 1850, "poetry died in him in about 1815, only to return fitfully, almost painfully" (Evans, 47).

Sometimes it is possible to trace the process. For example, the Irish writer W. B. Yeats stirred the fires of Irish nationalism mightily with his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). His subject, he announced, was "Ireland and its struggle for independence" (quoted in Pierce, 142). But Yeats back-pedalled two years later during his application for Letters Patent for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, denying that the play had been written with political intent. "I simply took passionate human material," he argued somewhat speciously. "We have no propaganda except that of good art" (143). And by 1938 he was distinctly uneasy, asking himself, in the poem *The Man and the Echo*, "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?", picking up on a comment that had been made two years earlier by the critic Stephen Gwynn, who wrote:

> The effect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot (Gwynn, 158).

And there we have the dilemma. The writer lives between imagination, expressed in words, on the one hand and the real world on the other, connecting the two by writing about what seems important, and about what moves him or her. But once the work is published, it is more than words and thoughts—it is *out there* in the world. It may even influence events, and then the writer becomes a participant, who for better or worse must carry responsibility for what he or she has done.

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Metafiction: Narrative Resisting Narrative

N. Poovalingam

While the revolt against the tight metrical structure of traditional poetry giving way to new poetry and/or free verse has proved to be the undoing of poetry, and while drama that has essentially relied on visual representation was challenged and superannuated by the visual media (cinema and television), the novel has found a new leash of life with its metafictional propensity despite a widespread anxiety in the Anglo-American world about its imminent death.[1]

Either because the scope of the novel is really greater than that of poetry or drama, or simply because the prose narrative is the newest, the novel has survived far more successfully than any of its other literary counterparts. Terry Eagleton's view that the novel "is less a genre than an anti-genre" and that it "cannibalizes other literary modes and mixes the bits and pieces promiscuously together" is revealing (2). And the tenacity of the genre and its unlimited scope are reiterated by Eagleton when he is confronted with the question of the definition of the novel. He writes the following in his book, *The English Novel: An Introduction*:

> The novel is a mighty melting-pot, a mongrel among literary thoroughbreds. There seems to be nothing it cannot do… The novel is an anarchic genre, since its rule is not to have rules. An anarchist is not just someone who breaks rules, but someone who breaks rules as a rule, and this is what the novel does too. Myths are cyclical and repetitive, while the novel appears excitingly unpredictable. In fact, the novel has a finite repertoire of forms and motifs. But it is an extraordinarily capacious one even so. (2)

That which is baffling and exasperating about the novel for a literary critic like Eagleton has been enthralling for D.H. Lawrence the novelist several decades ago.2 Lawrence was prophetic in calling the novel "thought adventure" and "one bright book of life". Aware of the unlimited scope of the novel, he gave vent to his impatience at the monotonous preoccupation of the modern novel in his essay "The Novel":

> You can put anything you like in a novel. So why do people always go on putting the same thing? Why is the *vol au vent* always chicken! Chicken *vol au vents* may be the rage. But who sickens first shouts first for something else" (161).

The novel as an art-form has constantly (and perhaps more explicitly than any other) been impinged upon by theoretical trends. Since its birth, the novel has been enshrining a dialogue within itself concerning its own generic status. It has owed itself to history so much that the early novelists were overtly conscious of novel-writing as little more than historicizing an individual's life. The early novels were invariably aware of their being akin to biographies, if only fictional.3

The novelists' wistful detachment with the genre, resulting from their consciousness of the "borrowed outfit" and their semi-biographer position, gave way to a more intense subjectivism by the turn of the twentieth century with the appearance of Sigmund Freud. Perhaps, Freudian psychoanalysis helped these novelists to inject an aura of authenticity to their semi-biographies, or fictional biographies, through the forcefulness of the new-found subjectivism. The discovery of the unconscious and the interpretation of the dreams by Freud had doomed the modern novel into a hitherto unforeseen inwardness. Though D.H. Lawrence's pseudo-psychoanalytic diagnosis of the self-engrossed narrator as unhealthy did not help relieve and liberate novel-writing during his own time or immediately after, he did record his exasperation with such tiresome self-exploration as follows:

> … the 'serious' novel, dying in a very long-drawn-out fourteen-volume death-agony, and absorbedly, childishly interested in the phenomenon. 'Did I feel a twinge in my little toe, or didn't I?' asks every character of Mr. Joyce or of Miss Richardson or M. Proust. Is my aura a blend

> of frankincense and orange pekoe and boot-blacking, or is it myrrh and bacon-fat and Shetland tweed? The audience round the deathbed gapes for the answer. And when, in a sepulchral tone, the answer comes at length, after hundreds of pages: 'It is none of these, it is abysmal chloro-coryambasis,' the audience quivers all over, and murmurs: 'That's just how I feel myself.' … .
>
> It's awful. And it's childish. It really is childish, after a certain age, to be absorbedly self-conscious. One has to be self-conscious at seventeen: still a little self-conscious at twenty-seven; but if we are going it strong at thirty-seven, then it is a sign of arrested development, nothing else. And if it is still continuing at forty-seven, it is obvious senile precocity. (190)

However, the extreme subjectivism of the modern novel was repelled by the post-structuralist advancement in language studies. Much like the loss of faith that ushered in after the Second World War the existentialist angst, the poststructuralist finding of the permanently deferred status of meaning had resulted in depriving the world of whatever social and nonspiritual conviction it was left with. The perception that language is an end in itself—that there is no reality outside and independent of language—has disillusioned the petulant and self-engrossed novelists. The modernist speculations of the subjective "I" came to an abrupt end. The first-person "I" that stood for the narrator-protagonist was replaced by a sleight of hand with the text—the novel or narrative itself! Without an identifiable subject, can a dismembered voice speak—reducing the text to an unheard of subalternity?

The use of the term metafiction seems too broad to be used to refer to novels—the material, physical entity commonly identified as "novel". The use of the word "fiction" interchangeable with novel is in itself concessional. Though narratives can be in prose or verse, can be factual or fictional, the "novel" has implicitly been accepted as "imaginative writing"—fiction. And to qualify fiction or imagination with a prefix "meta" (meaning above or beyond) would presume a boundary for fiction or imagination. Though there is the informal usage "beyond imagination" (by now perhaps a cliché, referring to something

unthought of or unthinkable), the term "metafiction" (beyond fiction) be replaced with a more refined and limited "metanovel", upholding the norms of definitions and classifications?

The characteristics that differentiated fiction from nonfiction have become indistinct. Prose narratives, thus, have become a site of strife and defense since literary critical theory has come to influence and impinge upon creative writing more than ever. Though no specific, individual novelist or a particular text is focused upon here, an attempt has been made to show that metafiction is defensive like most other literary forms are.

The literary critical trend of discounting the author, which began with New Criticism (or Structuralism) and peaked in Reader Response theory, seem to have provoked the reactionary mode of narration—deliberately disjointed, subversive and introverted. Challenged by the advancements in literary theory, novelists have taken to hoodwink, with a vengeance, the "intelligent readers". Self-conscious narration, disjointed or nonlinear narration, blurring of generic borders are challenges thrown to the reader. And the more formidable and crafty the author/novelist, proportionate will be the satisfaction of outwitting and stymieing the reader. The ultimate goal of the novelist seems to be in successfully defying or camouflaging the naïve, singular narrative voice of, broadly speaking, traditional, "realistic" novel. The flouting of the unified narrative voice thus is at best an escape and is far short of the self-effacement desired by the narrator-author. Needless to say, only those novelists who have "a self" may want to escape it and perhaps may understand what it means to escape the self! In this respect, it might even be appropriate to see this phase in the history of the novel as "high modernism". Or, can there really be a collective or mass solipsism to explain the emergence of metafiction?

That the contemporary novel is a natural outcome of what preceded it and that the term "metafiction", used variously to refer to self-conscious fiction, self-begetting novel, anti-novel, introverted fiction or narcissistic fiction, is the manifestation of the inherent crisis faced by the novelists after the modern era. Patricia Waugh defines metafiction to be "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to

pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality", and further states that most metafictional narratives "explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (2).

In the light of the description of the novel in general, attempted by Terry Eagleton and quoted above (i.e., the "novel is an anarchic genre, since its rule is not to have rules…In fact, the novel has a finite repertoire of forms and motifs. But it is an extraordinarily capacious one even so"), Waugh's definition of metafiction seems to undercut itself. If the novel is constantly breaking all rules ("theories") and is "less a genre than an anti-genre" then defining metafiction to be "exploring a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction" is erroneous, if not presumptuous; for, there can be no stable theory in the first place to experiment with. Even a novel of anarchic experiment may not prove or reinforce the theory.

Perhaps the awareness struck Patricia Waugh to follow her book *Metafiction* with *Practising Postmodernism Reading Modernism*. However, as the latter volume focuses mainly on the philosophical and historical connection between Modernism and Postmodernism, "metafiction", a dubious literary manifestion of postmodernism, hardly finds any space.[4]

Mikhail Bakhtin's hypothesis on polyglossia—the intertextual autonomy of the novelistic discourse must have been a corrective for the novelists: much like the Jungian collective or archetypal unconscious, Bakhtin telescopes the language of the novel to be embedded with centuries of parodic layers, since the Greek civilization. Citing Erwin Rohde's book on the history of the Greek novel, Bakhtin writes that Rohde

> analyzes the dissolution of the Greek national myth on Hellenistic soil, and the concomitant decline and diminution of the epic and drama forms – forms that can be sustained only on the basis of a unitary national myth that perceives itself as a totality. Rohde does not have much to say on the role of polyglossia. For him, the Greek novel was solely a product of the decay of the major straightforward genres…The role of polyglossia in this slow death of the myth and the

> birth of novelistic matter-of-factness is extremely great. Where languages and cultures interanimated each other, language became something entirely different, its very nature changed: in place of a single, unitary sealed-off Ptolemaic world of language, there appeared the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other. (140)

While Bakhtin's proposition is convincing enough as a theory, the practical use of it, the applicability of it to a specific novel may not be, either diachronically or synchronically, feasible. While the long-presumed objectivity of history has become questionable and suspect, how can it ever be ascertained that a certain image or utterance in a novel is an embedded, parodic irony?[5]

> Closely connected with the problem of polyglossia and inseparable from it is the problem of heteroglossia within a language, that is, the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language. This problem is of primary importance for understanding the style and historical destinies of the modern European novel, that is, the novel since the seventeenth century. This latecomer reflects, in its stylistic structure, the struggle between two tendencies in the languages of the European peoples: one a centralizing (unifying) tendency, the other a decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages). (142)

Hence, Bakhtin's hypothesis of the polyglossia, and heteroglossia, may remain a truism at best. With the knowledge that culture is inextricably interwoven in a language, the sheer thought of attempting a polyglossic study of a text can make any researcher feel overwhelmed and frustrated.

The progresses made in language studies through the twentieth century have brought to fore that culture is inextricably embedded in language and that ideology is not a political position assumed by an individual's personal volition. The post-war world broke free from religious faith and plunged into existentialism. Post-structuralism and semiotics have disclosed the essential emptiness of language—the permanently deferred meaning.

Stuart Hall indicates the dichotomization that the advanced studies in language might result in as follows: "A Kantian or neo-Kantian position would say that, therefore, nothing exists except that which exists in and for language or discourse. Another reading is that, though the world does exist outside language, we can only make sense of it through its appropriation in discourse…" (1053). If language is an end in itself (that the neo-Kantian position that "nothing exists except in and for language or discourse" and that humanity is imprisoned within its inescapable arbitrariness), the conception of ideology as a system of structures, not an individual's consciously assumed political or intellectual position, would merely entail an abysmal despair for the intellectuals concerned. The whole quotation from E. Veron's "Ideology and the Social Sciences", as reproduced by Stuart Hall, might be of relevance here.

> If ideologies are structures … then they are not "images" nor "concepts" (we can say, they are not contents) but are sets of rules which determine an organization and the functioning of images and concepts… Ideology is a system of coding reality and not a determined set of coded messages … in this way, ideology becomes autonomous in relation to the consciousness or intention of its agents: these may be conscious of their points of view about social forms but not of the semantic conditions (rules and categories or codification) which make possible these points of view… From this point of view, then, an "ideology" may be defined as a system of semantic rules to generate messages … it is one of the many levels of organization of messages, from the viewpoint of their semantic properties … (1054)

Though the unlimited scope of the novel has been conducive for its new avatar as metafiction, the conviction of the novelist has been threatened. The post-modern condition seems to be simultaneously an organic development of the classical or high modernism as well as a revolt against it. The self-conscious narrator or protagonist is replaced by a self-conscious narrative: the various names like the self-begetting novel, introverted fiction, anti-novel, narcissistic narrative, all point to a single, common feature that the narrative or novel has turned on itself.

It is an amusing delusion to attribute a consciousness, let alone self-consciousness, to a narrative; the self-conscious protagonist-narrator of high modernism to a self-conscious narrative is at best a Freudian transference or substitution, not very far from the antecedent of "distancing the author" from the narrator—or the Eliotian proposition of impersonalization, the author being a mere receptacle or a "catalyst" (the bifurcation of the man who suffers and the mind which creates!). If being self-conscious past middle-age is "senile precocity" according to Lawrence, one can be almost sure that he would not have been happy with the genre's evolution into metafiction: the refinement of the self-conscious, central protagonist into a self-conscious narrative in the postmodern era might have been for Lawrence a heightening of the decadence.

Interestingly, as D.H. Lawrence was critical of the modern novel Bertrand Russell was of the modern man. Russell writes of the modern man that he is "suffering not from the decay of theological belief but from the loss of solitude". And his keen observation that "Detachment and objectivity, both in thought and feeling, have been historically but not logically associated with certain traditional beliefs" and that "to preserve them [detachment and objectivity] without these beliefs is both possible and important" has become more significant and urgent today than ever (Russell 80-81).

Russell puts it quite perceptively, though nearly seven decades ago, how the modern man is contented to be slightly ahead of the others and is happy in every other sense to be one among the herd. Russell sums up the modern man as follows:

> His highest hope is to think first what is about to be thought, to say what is about to be said and to feel what is about to be felt; he has no wish to think better thoughts than his neighbours, to say things showing more insight, or to have emotions which are not those of some fashionable group, but only to be slightly ahead of others in point of time. (78)

From D.H. Lawrence to Bertrand Russell to the post-war milieu of creative or imaginative writing culminating in the prose narrative that has turned upon itself, the trajectory should have been predictable.

The self-conscious narrative, or what passes for metafiction, is exploited almost invariably as a means to defy the unified narrator's or authorial voice. By anticipating the reader's response at every turn, can a novelist hope to escape the subjective self? Isn't shying away from a subjective exposition a defensive strategy on the part of the novelist? Self-reflexivity coupled with a disjointed narration is just a ploy of the novelist to dissuade and thwart the reader from tracking the singular narrative voice. Self-reflexivity and parodic subversion may have revived the otherwise dying novel, as evidenced by the twin essays of certification by John Barth.6 However, is it really possible for a writer to camouflage effectively and successfully the self with multiple voices?

That Salman Rushdie had to defend himself by writing an allegorical narrative, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, upholding the freedom of expression, or that the Bangladeshi Taslima Nasreen should live in exile, in India, for the writing of a book, *Lajja*, is symptomatic of the present times. It appears as though all assaults on human sentiments and decency may go unchecked, excepting that which is to do with religion. Bakhtin's position about the medieval and contemporary forms of parody—he states that "In modern times the functions of parody are narrow and unproductive. Parody has grown sickly, its place in modern literature is insignificant" (144)—calls for a sober reconsideration of parody and travestying in contemporary writing. Perhaps our highstrung perspective is the very barrier that prevents us from distinguishing the dancer from the dance, the writer from the writing so to speak. And the status of the author as authority responsible for the content produced, and the fear of persecution such authority entails, are to blame. The "sickly narrowness" of contemporary parody that Bakhtin accuses it of is in fact the result of the State requiring the identification of an author or authors for a work.7 If copyrights and royalty are desired by a writer for his income and popularity, then the risk of persecution cannot be wished away, nor can the author dissolve into anonymity by the wave of any magic wand.

It is interesting to find Rushdie commenting on the limits of suppression with a quotation from Saul Bellow and concluding his essay "Is Nothing Sacred?":

> The reason for ensuring that that privileged arena is preserved is not that writers want the absolute freedom

> to say and do whatever they please. It is that we, all of us, readers and writers and citizens and generals and godmen, need that little, unimportant-looking room. We do not need to call it sacred, but we do need to remember that it is necessary.
>
> 'Everybody knows,' wrote Saul Bellow in *The Adventures of Augie March*, 'there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression. If you hold down one thing, you hold down the adjoining.'
>
> Wherever in the world the little room of literature has been closed, sooner or later the walls have come tumbling down. (*Imaginary Homelands* 429)

However, ideological conviction has been an undercurrent in every form of creative or imaginative writing, and it has had its independent existence until recently. The proliferation of theories after formalism and/or structuralism, and the advances in the study of language have culminated together in the stark disillusionment, depriving the writer and reader of the scanty remains of that "willing suspension of disbelief". Resistance writing is double-edged and it is inevitably so. However, the clever blurring of borders, between fiction and fact, political propaganda and fictionally contextualized persuasiveness, has multiplied the risk of the double-edgedness of resistance into a hopeless and deadly chaos.

The perplexity and impatience caused by the present may be given vent to by borrowing the conclusion provided by Rushdie to the titular essay in his volume *Imaginary Homelands* (with reference to Saul Bellow once again):

> There's a beautiful image in Saul Bellow's latest novel, *The Dean's December*. The central character, the Dean, Corde, hears a dog barking wildly somewhere. He imagines that the barking is the dog's protest against the limit of dog experience. 'For God's sake,' the dog is saying, 'open the universe a little more!' And because Bellow is, of course, not really talking about dogs, or not only about dogs, I have the feeling that the dog's rage, and its desire, is also mine, ours, everyone's. 'For God's sake, open the universe a little more!' (21)

Notes

[1]While the acceptability and appropriateness of the term "metafiction" have been questioned, the nomenclature has been used here, all the same, for want of an alternative and also because the term has already gained widespread currency and familiarity.

[2]Lawrence celebrates the novel for its ability to have an autonomous existence despite its creator. Again in "The Novel", Lawrence writes the following: Now in a novel there's always a tom-cat, a black tom-cat that pounces on the white dove / of the Word, if the dove doesn't watch it …(163)

Lawrence was capable of seeing the paradoxical quality of language—that language is essentially arbitrary and at the same time language alone generates absolutes to impose upon our lives.

[3]The repeated use of eponymous titles for novels, from Samuel Richardson (through Henry Fielding, Daniel Defoe) to the Victorian novelists George Eliot and Charles Dickens or Hardy, to the modern novelists D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, emphasize the preoccupation of the authors with the genre's affinities with and differences from history. The new genre is constantly seen as a cross between literature and history; *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, *Robinson Crusoe* to *Oliver Twist*, *Adam Bede* or *Tess* or *Jude* to *Ulysses*, or *Mrs. Dalloway* is perceived and executed as historicizing of an individual's life. The dubious origin of novel as, or as reminiscent of, history has culminated in the contemporary theoretical perception of history as narrative. The novel owed itself to history and, narratology has cancelled the debt by disclosing history is narrative.

[4]Patricia Waugh's book on metafiction does not explore its self-reflexivity in relation to the modern novel in detail. However, her book of 1992, on postmodernism and modernism does examine the link between the two; and her major premise about postmodernism is that it has collapsed the boundaries of literature and theory. That is, postmodern literature itself is part of the theory of postmodernism. Postmodernism subsumes all the varieties of discourse that the distinctions between discourses become meaningless.

[5]It is not that Bakhtin was totally unaware of the impossibility of revisiting the dynamic depth of the parodic irony and/or travestying.

> One of the more interesting stylistic problems during the Hellenistic period was the problem of quotation. The forms of direct, half-hidden and completely hidden quoting were endlessly varied, as were the forms for framing quotations by a context, forms of intonational quotation marks, varying degrees of alienation or assimilation of another's quoted word. And here the problem frequently arises: is the author quoting with reverence or on the contrary with irony, with a smirk? Double entendre as regards the other's word was often deliberate. (143)

[6]See the twin essays by John Barth "The Literature of Exhaustion" (*The Atlantic Monthly*. Aug 1967. 29-34) and "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, Jan 1980. 65-71).

[7]See Paul Cobley's *Narrative* (London: Routledge, 2000. Print), 118 & 162. Cobley discusses how the need for identifying an author for a work arose—the State's necessity to ensure its hegemony by pinning down writers of controversial and heretical material. Accountability became an issue, as it continues to be even now, when the order of the State was threatened. And later he also discusses the awkwardness in attributing an enacted play or a movie to an individual (namely, the script-writer) and the French theorists finding the director of a film equal to the author of a written work as the director controls everything.

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Resistance Writing: The Question Of Genre

Dorji Tsering

Resistance writing, though not a widespread field, has started gaining prominence and currency among the intellectuals as an extension of postcolonialism. While Resistance Writing has gained academic recognition and research interest, its generic status remains unnoticed. The limitation of Postcolonial Studies and the increasing critique of postcolonialism has given way to the inclusion of Dalit and Marginal writings, Diasporic Writing, and Translation. It is on these lines that Resistance Writing had entered into academic field of study, focusing on resistance movements from Tibet, Srilanka, Palestine and so on. It shares aspects of exile, diasporic writing and differs from these by focusing on the trauma and despair of the displaced. The crux of the matter is not just about the possible ways of highlighting the issue but also to let people know the sensibilities and emotions that these political issues provoke. Bhuchung D. Sonam, in his introduction to *Muses in Exile: An Anthology of Tibetan Poetry* writes:

> Exile is the shifting sands of hope mingled with the crippling sorrow of estrangement. When hope fades into the distant horizon, and only the pangs of displacement remain, exile becomes a hollow existence hanging upon a thin thread of moral courage. Exile is, in many ways, an opportunity and a severe test of communal fortitude. (XXI)

A child of barely nine or ten years of age, braving his life by jumping in front of the canon of an Israeli tank just to throw a stone on it, hundreds of Tibetans setting themselves ablaze one after another

just to express their disapproval of Chinese occupation, all these are only symbolic acts of resistance. Such resistances were not taken into account in exile and diasporic studies. In the works of such writers, we can find the eruption of these emotions which form the core of resistance writing. The power of these words is so significant that Israel's most famous military commander Moshe Dayan, once said of the Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan that one of her poems was enough to create ten Palestinian resistance fighters. "Every beautiful poem is an act of resistance," writes the iconic Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. This shows the uniqueness of experience represented in Resistance Writing.

Resistance Writing represents hope and hopelessness, anxiety, aloofness, sense of loss, commitment and frustration. It is my argument that many writings of both Palestinian and Tibetan writers could be encompassed within this framework of Resistance writing. "Art in all its forms can have an important role to play in humanizing people and conveying their story. Art can serve to inspire and instigate change," notes Samah Sabawi in an interview.

As one goes through this newly emerged category of writing, one also has to confront the fluid nature of this body of writing. This characteristic adversely poses challenges to our way of conceptualizing and theorizing Resistance Writing. However the generic status of Resistance Writing and its generic identification goes uncared for. There are two other aspects of Resistance Writing that pose difficulty for researching in this field. First, this resistance is context specific and not universal. Resistance Writing or an act of resistance in one community may not be seen as resistance in another context. So, the identification of Resistance Writing demands knowledge of the issue, and their modes of resistance. Second, Resistance Writing, owing to its political and cultural constraints, tends to be covert and subtle in nature. Thus, a close reading of the text alone can reveal the relation between the text and the context-specific modes of resistance.

Resistance Writing, unlike other literary works that are mainly categorized under a generic title based on its overtly unique form, is not confined to a rigid literary form. It is a supra-genre that may include poetry, prose, personal and political writings. It transcends

all literary forms and unites under a genre that is primarily based on theme. So, we can say that it is a theme-based genre contrary to our exposure to formally defined genres like epic, ode, lyric, short story and the like. It is also vital to bear in mind that our approach to Resistance Writing should also focus on its literary aspects. A literary perspective of Resistance Writing is also important, primarily to identify its unique literariness and its potential for resistance. This may resist the academic transformation of this field of study as mere object of study with an overemphasis on issues of politics.

Due to the subtlety and lack of clear generic constituents, Resistance Writing tends to be tricky in nature. The more one tries to be specific about the theme and form, the further s/he gets confused in concretizing the idea of Resistance Writing. This paper tries to focus on this complex nature of Resistance Writing with reference to the Tibetan poet Tenzin Tsundue. In his poem, "Desperate Age" Tsundue writes: "Kill my Dalai Lama / That I can believe no more" (12). In these lines the 'Dalai Lama' seems to be a symbolic representation of Tibetan identity and struggle than a direct reference to the leader, Dalai Lama. The word 'my' expresses the poet's strong commitment to his Tibetan identity and its struggle. The tone of the lines also makes it clear that there is a force behind him which is the will and spirit of the Tibetan people and their resistance to the systematic Chinosization of Tibetan culture. Despite the cognizance of the unfavourable situation, the vitality of the persona's resistance to China's policy on Tibet could be seen in this line. In the same poem, Tsundue says:

> Within the prison
> this body is yours.
> But within the body
> my belief is only mine.
>
> You want to do it?
> Kill me here – silently. (12)

Resistance is a principally a contradictory phenomenon taking place between two opposing forces, the powerful state and the powerless victim. The act of resistance is associated with the powerless against the powerful. This circumstantial vulnerability is more often than not represented in many of the resistance writings but expresses itself through melancholic and desperate poetic tones. The persona's act of

submitting his body to the oppressor, 'Chinese' and their mandate to kill him, is suggestive of his verbal resistance: "Make sure no breath remains / But don't let me free (12).

The above lines also warn the oppressor by foregrounding the persona's commitment in carrying on with the struggle that could be halted only by death. The expression reiterates the persona's steadfastness and activism. The increasing Chinese military and economic influence upon the rest of the world and the subsequent silence of other countries on the issue of Tibet's independence, makes the Tibetan struggle endless and futile. Thus, resistance for them remains a matter of principle and a way of life.

The word 'diaspora' is quite often applied to Tibetan refugees and to writing by Tibetan exiles. But the nature of resistance recorded in Tibetean writing makes such a view reductionist. This, I suspect, could be the reason to regard Tibetean writing within an already established or acknowledged fashionable framework. The unification of these contextually different situations under one term is erroneous. Though they have overlapping aspects, they are not outrightly symmetrical. The fundamental difference between Diaspora and Refugee is that the former is by choice and the latter by force. In most of the cases, a refugee is banned from going back to his home. Tsundue's poem 'Refugee' enunciates the overlapping aspect of both Diasporic and Refugee communities – the identity crisis that they both face. But towards the end of the poem, the poet also highlights the uniqueness of the refugee with a slight tone of resistance:

> I have three tongues.
> The one that sings
> is my mother tongue.
> The R on my forehead
> between my English and Hindi
> the Tibetan tongue reads:
> RANGZEN
> Freedom means Rangzen (14)

As cultural appropriation and assimilation is a common issue of both Diaspora and Refugee communities, only a refugee is overburdened with the responsibility to fight for his lost freedom. We must also note

that all refugee/exile writing may not carry the potential of resistance. Here lies the generic significance and uniqueness of Resistance Writing. While scholars are of the view that Diasporic and Marginal writings cannot represent the depth of pain, anger, desperation, hope and commitment of people living under foreign domination, Resistance Writing is a generically complex representation that foregrounds a uniqueness of experience, and consequently sensitizes the issue and provokes more discussion.

An in-depth identification and definition of Resistance Writing is difficult, primarily because of the confusion regarding resistance and the nature of resistance. Resistance Writing is not a fixed genre and its features cannot be pinned down like other genres of writing. The subtlety in its nature of expression often makes our attempts at concrete conceptualization slippery. Resistance Writing seems to be too inclusive to be an identifiable phenomenon, to be defined by generic boundaries.

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"I Speak of Africa and Golden Joys": The Search for The Fabled City of Gold in *The Obsession Book of Timbuktu*

Juan de Dios Torralbo Caballero

Bruce Meyer believes that literature serves to apply a paradigm and structure to human experience (2008: 329). He also thinks it serves to organize our dreams, our thoughts, our experiences and our emotional lives, and contextualize them in a way that generates connections. In the poet's own words "good poetry … contains that moment when what is being said is the intersection of unexpected elements, a fusion of heart and eye" (Meyer, 2013: 4). Meyer reflects that "a poem is more than a sentence…The sentence is often sonically bland, but it is a capsule of a universe that is waiting to be discovered and unfolded" (Birch-Bayley, 2014: 5).

The writer searches for the *arche* (ἀρχή) of things, because "I want to know what goes on inside a picture or an idea or sentence. I want to walk inside the language and, like Dr. Who's tardis, find it is much bigger on the inside and try to comprehend how it is built and marvel at its architecture" (Birch-Bayley, 2014: 5).

Bruce Meyer, as Laureate Poet, gives literary character to "moments when we are simply living our lives in the collective spirit of citizens who are sharing the delight of their lives together in the same time and place". Meyer affirms that "poems, by their very nature, should make the transitory permanent; they should record and, if called upon, celebrate what it is they have to express". In the book situated in Timbuktu the author does not celebrate an accidental moment, but rather an ancient

theme, and simultaneously, the future. Meyer ponders on an eternal topic, thus showing another one of his lyrical facets (2013b: 2-3).

The Obsession Book of Timbuktu (2013) is a poetic novel which traces the idea of obsession and even social ennui with numerous resonances from the contemporary world where poetry has lost part of its emotional and lyrical value. *The Obsession Book of Timbuktu* begins by claiming that "We live in an age when the lyric, if not dying, is under siege" (9). This statement at the very beginning demonstrates Bruce Meyer's perception of Timbuktu as a hidden and remote land.

The narrative thread of the book is based in the city of Barrie, and specifically, a street which emerges literarily oriented towards the north of Canada. The city centre has an intersection known as the Five Points, which provides a multiplier of the ramifications and branches of the city paths. This main road receives its name precisely due to the death of a war hero, who died catching a glimpse of Timbuktu as he was trying to reach the city of gold in the decade of 1820. Meyer himself confirms that:

> Metaphorically, what starts in my hometown ends in Timbuktu. I detail the process in the introductory essay. I think my major point in the book is that we are surrounded by the mechanisms – spiritual, intellectual, creative, and metaphorical – for pursuing great dreams, and that we've burnt ourselves out, squandered them on the trivialities of modern life. The question is "where do we go from here?" in the process not only of dreaming but of building the structures for future dreams and ultimately the structures of culture. That's a key question in a city that has had its arts budget slashed to nothing by City Council and its vision of a future dashed through the inability of city leaders to dream of something better than what they have in their brief moment here. (2013: 4)

The book is conceived as a "personal quest for Timbuktu" (11), and it is this theme that leads the argument on the surface of the text. Paradoxes and contrasts appear from the very beginning when the writer explains that "this book … began one snowy winter night in the

heart of my hometown, Barrie". A mixture of history and poetic fiction is introduced. It is a true fact that Clapperton set out on a military expedition to Tripoli and Libya, reaching Lake Chad. On his way, one of the soldiers abandoned him, accusing him of being homosexual (13), while the other soldier died. In the end, he got sick with fever and died himself "within the sight of the golden city".

The poet, who emerges as the lyrical subject speaking at the beginning of the book, finds himself at the crossroad called Five Points on a winter night, and it is in that moment when he ponders on the end of the city in Sankore Mosque of Timbuktu, after which he "suddenly realized that my city and the city of the legend were not unlike" (14). The similarities between the dream city and the midland city of Ontario are the market, the proximity of abundant bodies of water, the establishment of a university ("The University of Timbuktu", 25) and that both are known as cities of gold. In fact, Bayfield Street, situated in the north of Barrie, is known as "the golden mile". Meyer specifies more converging points (Id.): "All both share these moments when the environment make the landscape of urban existence invisible: Timbuktu with sand storms and Barrie with blizzards. The two cities were connected by the name and the path of an almost forgotten Scotsman".

Here begins the poet's dream, as he "walked the street in a sandstorm of a blizzard until the landscape literally disappeared around me. At that moment, I was in Africa" (Id.). Meyer puts forth multiple affirmations regarding the act of creating in general, applying them to the book he is inaugurating. In particular, he asserts that:

> That is the nature of the lyrical brain at work when it ceases to be aware of anything other than what it seeks to celebrate. And realizing I had just left a good pair of gloves in a restaurant just to see where a local street leads is also the nature of obsession. I breathed into my hands and clutched my chilled thumbs. That is how this book began. (Id.)

Thus, the book turns to the vast history of the search for Timbuktu and goes back as far as to Herodotus who showed great interest in the search for El Dorado. This work is a contemporary expression of the desire for El Dorado, a synonym of the desire for Timbuktu.

The created space, Timbuktu, is understood "as a literary symbol … is about our dreams, where they take us, what they take us out of, what they do to us, what we do to them, and how we try to live them in spite of reality" (14-15). Furthermore, Meyer defines the process of creating a legend as "my love for my city … drew me into a similitude with the exotic city of gold because that is the way legends are evolved: they grow through the increase that comes from similitude" (15).

The last part of "Finding Timbuktu" ends with a definition of the place, which is both revealing and explanatory, situating the reader before the prologue and the different sections of the book: "it is the challenge beckoning us toward a goal that we might never reach but that we have to indulge, even if it is to the obsessive exclusion of everything else except what we love and desire" (20).

The book contains multiple objectives and real references, pertaining to the cultural and historical heritage of both cities. Apart from the already mentioned references, diverse adventurers stand out in the book. Caillié is celebrated in the poem "The Metamorphosis of René Caillié, 1825", recreating the explorer's act of reading Daniel Dafoe's book, his journey to Senegal, as well as his arrival in Timbuktu (which took place around 1828): "but a book –*Robinson Crusoe* – in my head / became my Bible, and its ingenious truth" (54). At the end of the poem, the character is defined "… not as an explorer / but as a ghost …" (57), describing even the cause of his own death: "I dead of a disease I contracted on my journey - / the basiliae of a love so remote and absurd" (Id.). The poem ends with the declaration that "I, Caillié, will be remembered as the man / who lived to cheat both love and death / … whose last words and final breath / were of Timbuktu… ." (Id.). Thus, the protagonist reveals the depths of the themes that are in the heart of Meyer's discourse in this book.

Another historical trail can be traced in the poem "The Miracle of Time in Timbuktu: Heinrich Barth, 1853". In this case, the focus is on the scientist and explorer, sent on a mission in Africa by the British government, who had such fate that he became captain of the exploration upon the leaders' death. In fact, Barth explored Lake Chad and Timbuktu, and stands out as the first Westerner who lived in Timbuktu over a longer period of time, three years. He thus had the opportunity

to read texts. Upon his return, he settled in Germany, where he founded a university department in Arabic-African studies. In contrast to the previous poem, Meyer uses the third person in this case: "When close my eyes I see / Heinrich Barth, German adventurer" (53). The poem praises Barth's teachings upon his return ("He is on his way to bring us books!"), and even alludes to the creative process through the reference to Dante: "Dante / when the smoke cleared on Purgatory / and he found himself sorrounded / by artists wanting nothing more / than to sing of what their souls desired" (Id.). These examples corroborate the process of documentation that the writer undertook, and which expand from the living sources, as is the case with the historian Dr. Brad Rudachyk, to the library he used to consult; in Meyer's own words, "immersed in the history, the volumes and volumes of source texts" (Meyer, 2013: 4).

The population of the African city is also present in the poem. "Abu Bakr Almost Goes to America, 1312" demonstrates a character who explored the world beyond the African coast by leading an enormous fleet. The poem describes how Abu Bakr is sitting on the shore, contemplating his achievements, yet explaining that only three vessels returned: "Only three of his ships ever returned / Sailors spoke of beaches and a boy with shells" (33). The poem's zenith is reached when the explorer meets the lyrical subject ("Abu Bakr saw me on that distant shore") and both take pleasure in imagination: "where our minds worked endlessly to pluck / pears of knowledge from treasured skies / before they fell like a child in surf" (Id.).

The search for the fabled city of gold can be seen from the first poem entitled "Holy Land", which predicts the writer's desires: "and is itself a journey of love" (22). The fourth stanza also alludes to the territory of dreams, oneiric literature and sacred places ("Any place can be a holy place: / the world is a book of dreams to read / and so many words are waiting to be freed…" (Id.). The imperatives that conclude the poem are quite important, indicating the purpose of poetry and of the constant search that the writer undertakes and desires: "Go there when your mind is weary. / Go there when you cannot learn" (Id.).

The poet seeks the unattainable, the impossible, and in that sense, he seeks an "illusory/transitory goal" (Meyer, 2013: 4). The poem, however, is contemplated as a psychological state and its implications are diverse

"about the thing itself" and "about everything the goal touches or suggests" (Id.). The writer confirms that "writing lyrics about Timbuktu is like singing hymns in church. It feels good to praise something that seems distantly ideal and unattainable, if not unknowable" (18). This ensemble of narrative poems is, at the same time, an exploration of human nature and an inquiry into the relationship between man and the present and past environments. Meyer's book is a theological search because "finding Timbuktu is a bit like the intellectual quest to know God". The poet himself points out that:

> The more I study the story of European man's relationship with the ancient, mysterious African city, the more I realize that it is an allegory for the Western mind's struggle with its own sense of belief, the failure of what belief has accomplished, and the inexplicable credo that refuses to deny the power of spiritual endeavor. (18)

Another concept that is emphasized is the inherent self-destruction. The writer establishes that "it was a place of broken illusions worse than Edmund Spenser's House of Price in *The Fairie Queene*" (16), especially the first book. The poet's reflection becomes metaliterary when he writes that "this may be the cancer inside the lyric that will ultimately kill it as an artifice of both form and subject". Meyer is conscious of deception, loss and the infinite limits of poetry:

> The better one is at idealizing an object, person, or place, the more likely one is going to be disappointed in it when the shine wears off. Torquato Tasso created such a place, Armida's Garden, in his Italian Renaissance epic, *Jerusalem Delivered*. Lyricism, has its limits …What is killing lyricism is a fanatical drive toward literanism. (Id.).

The poem emphasizes the search for this city. This supposes a cognitive and literary process, and it is precisely this process, in and of itself, which is the source of the lyrical and poetic pleasure recreated by Meyer. The book is a twenty-first century development of the myth of El Dorado since its initiation by Diego de Ordás in 1531 (Porro, 2013: 2). A Renaissance example is the Armadas and Barlow expedition to Virginia, defrayed by Sir Walter Raleigh. The poet also heads for the Orinoco Delta, trying to find the mythical land of El Dorado. Meyer is perpetuating a tradition which, from another point

of view, Raleigh inaugurated with *Discoverie of the large, rich, and beautiful Empire of Guiana, with a relation of the Great and Golden Citie of Manoa*.

The imagery of the myth that underlies Meyer's story is the exotic land of Timbuktu, which emits "illusions, particularly when the illusions seem far better than reality, is not so much psychosis but the stuff of love" (15). Meyer describes that "Barrie belongs in the map of the mind as much as any place that is worth celebrating" (Id.). In effect, Meyer is advocating for dreams and the ability to dream when he declares that "have we lost our capacity to dream? […] It is better to dream and fail in the dreaming and the pursuit of the dream than not to dream at all. They [dreams] are the infant expression of critical thought" (16-17).

In this sense, Meyer recalls C. S. Lewis so as to assert that what killed the knights of Chapel Perilous was not their desire to search, but rather "the tiny shred of doubt that remains after one has come so far" (18). He also commemorates Matthew Arnold, particularly the 1867 poem "Dover Beach". Meyer focuses on the verses Arnold wrote to his wife on their wedding night (which also coincides with the date of the founding of Canada) and highlights that, as an antidote to the lack of imagination and faith, human beings must "be true to each other because the world is an empty, loveless place" (19). Meyer laments the death of imagination, of the "mythologizing process" (Id.) engendered in legendary cities. To sense the value that is missed, the narrative poetry which existed until the nineteenth century stands out, and medieval literature can be highlighted, exemplified by Dante's vision in *The Divine Comedy*, together with Chaucer and Langland as cultivators of the dream vision poetry.

Bernd Dietz (1985: 9) indicates in one of his works on Canadian literature that "nothing surprises those who explore the terra incognita of Canadian culture as much as the fact that almost everything that is to be found appears defined by means of a negative way". As it has been shown in this work, nowadays it is possible to talk about an own and well-rooted literature, which is constantly bearing fruit and marking the parameters of Canadian cultural identity. *The Obsession Book of Timbuktu* is a good example of it.

Bruce Meyer affirms in "Art and Illusion" that "there is a fine line between the lyric, lyricism, and obsession" (10). This affirmation follows Freud's hypotheses in relation to human behavior. This line of flotation and space of friction between the poetic and the obsessive are precisely the greater theme of this book. In effect, it can be deduced that the Canadian poet is exploring the dying art of the lyric—metaliterature—through a story raised upon precisely the fabled city of gold.

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Alexis Wright: Aboriginal Art, Writing and History

Samah Tawhid

In an attempt to identify what constitutes postcolonial literature, *The Empire Writes Back* states the following:

> [T]he literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures…. What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasising their differences [ancestry myths, histories and cultures] from the assumptions of the imperial centre (2).

Aboriginal Australian literature can also be included here. But the socio-historical reality of Aboriginal Australia is much more complicated and interesting than the binaries of "colonial oppressors vs. colonial victims" and "centre vs. periphery". Focusing overmuch on estrangement, violence and annihilation, the reader may not get much beyond monotonous readings that *victimize* the Aborigines (the "what" at the expense of the "how") and miss the construction of a dialogue that opens up Australian history to the wider world audience, an intercultural dialogue that can be perceived as a "two way process of

give-and- take, of cross-fertilization and mutual learning, often leading to more sophisticated and syncretic solutions" (Jarman, 228).

The English language was necessary as a means of setting up a dialogue with the white man's culture Ashcroft *et al.* describe the situation so:

> For those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the colonizing power. Some admixture of one or other of these models can describe the situation of all post-colonial societies. In each case a condition of [cultural] alienation [especially that of the Aboriginal tongue] is inevitable until the colonizing language has been replaced or appropriated as english [rather than English] (9-10).
>
> …a valid and active sense of self…may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model" (9).

Many White Australian writers have been fascinated by Australian indigenous culture, encouraging an ongoing intercultural dialogue. The Nobel laureate Patrick White; arguably the one truly great writer produced by Australia to date, includes a lot of Aboriginal material in novels like *Voss* (1957). And then there is David Malouf, who in his novels *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and *The Great World* (1990) exemplifies the regenerative culture of Australia, contrasting the underestimated culture of the colonized people with that of the colonizing authority, which has an intellectual inability to grasp the significance of the former.

> […] It is impossible to be an Australian writer without being aware of the traditional owners of the land, the war between the invaders and the indigenous people and the cruel and disastrous consequences. From my own work *you* [he advises] might choose *Oscar and*

> *Lucinda*. A careful reading will reveal a novel that, while not superficially concerned with the indigenous people, has its roots in the very territory that so interests you. I stress that this will not be clear at first (personal correspondence, March 2014)

A brief outline of Australian colonial and socio-cultural history is necessary to provide some basic background to the past and the present of the indigenous peoples of Australia. "Discovered" by the Dutch in 1606, and inhabited by *Aborigines* (a huge collection of tribes with different heritages and cultures and speaking different languages, where each tribe considered itself to be a more-or-less distinctive entity, with fixed land borders), Australia has two histories: one before the European settlers' arrival (that is, the pre-colonial era) and the other after their arrival (the colonial era, followed by national independence). Australia's history has been one of colonial violence. The British occupation had grievous consequences for the Aborigines, whereas for the settlers it opened up a fruitful new era, with opportunities for entrepreneurs to accumulate huge fortunes, although many convicts endured dreadful exploitation and maltreatment.

The initial contact between Aboriginal people and British settlers in Australia approximately 230 years ago was characterized by violence and dispossession. The settlers were contemptuous of people of different appearance or from non-English speaking backgrounds (see Yarwood & Knowling, 1982), and the "White doctrine of terra nullius, or empty land, denied the history, culture, humanity, and even the very existence of Aboriginal people" (Bretherton & Mellor, 82). The predicament of the Aborigines went by overlooked; they were expected to die quietly and quickly. The first Protector of Aborigines in New South Wales in 1881, the Mayor of Sydney, George Thornton, opined: "[….] I cannot conceal my knowledge of the painful fact that the black Aborigines are fast disappearing, destined to become extinct" (qtd. in Harris, 548). The Aboriginal population continued to decline until the mid 1920s, and the general assumption was that their demise was an inevitable destiny. But there is also the Aboriginal record of resistance represented by Aboriginal guerrilla fighters, who caused striking losses among the invaders. Aboriginal resistance is an epic of

a people who dared to defend their land, despite being overwhelmed by superior British military technology. Harris depicts European life in the Northern Territory:

> Strange, distant, harsh, adventurous, wild, untamed, romantic, mysterious… these are the words a century of writers have chosen to describe tropical Australia… Tropical Australia was a distant, unfamiliar, even alien environment, a place where crocodiles "lurked," mangrove swamps "festered," wild blacks danced their "frenzied" corroborees, and a tough breed of White frontiers men hunted buffalo, sought pearls or drove huge herds of cattle, battling the unpredictable elements of a "primitive" land (454).

According to Harris, the first permanent township in the Northern Territory was established in Darwin in 1870. It was a tiny colonial outpost with a population of less than 200 Europeans. With the discovery of gold it became a rough frontier town with a highly mobile population. By 1888 the population had increased to 6,000 Chinese and 1,500 Europeans (458f.). When the colonizing apparatus endeavored to enforce its authority, a series of confrontations between Whites and Aborigines ensued. One such example was the twelve-year battle for possession of the Hawkesbury, just north of Sydney.

The achievements of the first Australians were undoubtedly impressive. They sailed across the seas to discover an inhabitable continent. They found many edible plants, valuable mines which they worked, new medicines and drugs, manufacturing techniques, and a miscellany of resources ranging from the raw materials of their cosmetics to the hidden pools of water in deserts. They succeeded in adapting their way of life to harsh as well as kind environments. The Aboriginals had vital knowledge of how to survive in Australia which the Europeans, when they arrived, rarely tried to acquire. Parties of white men crossing dry plains died of thirst within a mile of hidden water which, with the aid of Aboriginal knowledge, they could have tapped. Lost, they wondered aimlessly through the countryside. Some died from starvation because they were unaware of the fact that many of the plants they were treading on were edible. Some became

desperately ill, not knowing that they could be healed by the herbal skills of the Aboriginals. They often concluded that the land was mean and hungry, not realizing that some regions in the course of the four seasons provided a wider variety of foodstuffs than a gourmet in Paris would eat in an extravagant year (*Blainey,* vi). The average Australian, adult and child, knew more about botany one thousand years ago than they know today. Their knowledge of botany supplied them not only with much of their food but also with drugs and cosmetics and—in a drought—with water (iii).

The last convict transport was in 1866. In 1901, Australia achieved its independence and within the same year the continent was declared a commonwealth when the six colonies (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania) merged as independent states. The two mainland federal territories, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory became self-governing in 1978 and 1988.

After the end of colonial rule, the Aboriginal Australians returned to their roots in an attempt to create their own literature, which attracted, as might have been expected, little attention from White cultural society. This was mainly because it was thought to be inferior. Nonetheless, there came a time when White Australia learned to appreciate it. In the reflective mirror of Australian native history—its customs, traditions and religious creeds—White Australians learn the untold stories of their country's past and also, increasingly, about themselves. The Aborigines have a remarkable bond with their land, and they feel a sense of belonging which the Whites have not properly developed yet. Although Aboriginal writing has attracted much interest in the last decade, critical analysis is still limited, especially with regard to the idea of cultural dialogue in an essentially colonial society. The Aborigines never developed writing, so their literature originally took the form of oral stories (now, of course, they have their own literature in English).

Carpentaria is about an imagined town called Desperance on the Gulf of Carpentaria in northwest Queensland, where there is a dispute between its native inhabitants and their white enemies caused by enforcing of laws that allow unfair and illegal mining operations

that target the Aborigines' holy property. Wright intriguingly uses language (english) not only to build up a full and absorbing portrait of a country/community; its colours and shapes, its rocks and deserts, but for "active cultural construction" of the Aborigine as well, to use Lisa Lowe's words (39), delineating resistance as a fundamental feature of a settler colonial society. In "On Writing Carpentaria" Wright explains: "I turned elsewhere to try to understand how to configure the history I know and what I understand of our realities" (82). To communicate this reality, she opens her novel's first chapter, entitled "From Time Immemorial", with a prologue in capitals declaring her cultural resistance to the authority of contemporary white Australia:

> A NATION CHANTS, BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY. THE BELLS PEAL EVERYWHERE CHURCHES BELLS CALLING THE FAITHFUL TO THE TABERNACLE WHERE THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL INNOCENT LITTLE BLACK GIRLS…WHO LOOK AROUND THEMSELVES AT THE HUMAN FALLOUT AND ANNOUNCE MATTER-OF-FACTLY, ARMAGEDDON BEGINS HERE (*Carpentaria,* 1).

This paves the way for the narrative, "The chant of the nation", which denotes an apathy that Wright seeks to communicate to the non-indigenous Australian world. The "bleak proclamation of 'Armageddon'" voiced through the "innocent little black girls" directly grants a privilege to the lower status perspective of Aboriginal Australia. Not only that, the writer stresses the importance of her ancestral creation as she has already declared in the lines that follow the prelude:

> The ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. It moved graciously-if you had been watching with the eyes of a bird hovering in the sky far above the ground. Looking down at the serpent's wet body, glistening from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly,

> all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria (*ibid.*).

This passage shows how greatly Wright has been inspired by oral storytelling traditions and her ancestral Aboriginal philosophy. Distinctively, with a central focus and awareness of the land—the emblem of the personal and social identity of indigenous Australians and the local ancestral spirits, Wright's prose successfully contributes to allowing a vast area of Aboriginal cultural expression to emerge: "A powerful spirit with grander goals" (*Carpentaria,* 205).

My argument is that an insightful exploration of this chosen Aboriginal novel will highlight the element of resistance, which the subjugated aboriginal community has evolved as a counter-hegemonic strategy. No due consideration has been given to these aspects, either in past or in recent critical literary analysis. However, several critics have noted the novel's narrative style as an example of a polyphonic voice, embracing both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, that leads to investigation of issues of land, identity and belonging.

Wright tackles other challenges facing indigenous peoples, which include the violence of the colonial and postcolonial regimes in Australia and the separation of parents from their children. She describes scenes involving family members who are separated forcibly from one another. As a result, the places they inhabit portray the violence that has been done to the protagonists or the isolation and *Angst* that accompanied their separation from their families. Missions, settlements, and boarding schools are such places, and they alienate Aboriginals and estrange them from their traditional cultures. That is why Wright's protagonists look for ways to reconnect with their family members and homelands or attempt to create safer places, in which they can voice their Aboriginal identity and perform their tradition rituals.

Geographically assimilated and stripped of their families, lands, and even languages, the Aborigines were expected to integrate fully into the realm of white society. This generated nothing but a sense of isolation and deprivation, hence, a cultural reawakening has become an absolute necessity. The structure that Wright has chosen—the setting, dialogue, language and characters as well as other relevant

narrative devices like storytelling, dreams, and myth—bring to life the Aborigines' unwavering sacred bond with the land and their intimate relation to nature.

Indispensable to the land is language. The White authorities forced the Aborigines not to use their native tongue—an attempt at cultural erasure, endangering their whole history, especially the oral. But the colonized subject has used English as a means by which a cultural dialogue has been made possible between colonized and colonizer. Without allowing the abuses of the colonial era to fade into oblivion, and in the face of internal and external forms of colonization, the Aborigines seek a decolonizing literary strategy designed to achieve a major or overall aim, which is to merge the Aboriginal voice in their narration, so that it becomes an indispensable part of that cultural dialogue—an "art of cultural resistance" to which White Australia has in turn responded.

What is reconciliation in post conflict settings? How does a transitioning nation like Australia get there? Emerging in the 1990s as a central term of political discourse in divided societies such as South Africa, Chile, and Australia, reconciliation implies bringing about friendly relations between binary opposites, in Australia between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, and eliminating racial injustice. It also means admitting the Aborigines to their basic rights. According to Quinn, "at its heart, reconciliation is about building relationships of trust and cohesion" (5). Works like Wright's *Carpentaria* are an important part of that process.

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Demarginalising English Studies: Remarks on Caste and The Colonial Question

R. Azhagarasan

History never effaces what it hides

--Jacques Derrida

English Studies responded to the questions raised in the Indian cultural sphere in the post-90s on affiliations of religion, region and caste through its inclusion of texts dealing with these issues. This has pushed English Studies towards issues concerning society and culture, leading to the emergence of Culture Studies. There were two significant changes which took place as a result of this – one was that the existing canon (of both English and Indian English writing) was located in its culture proper. The curriculum of English as well as the (teaching) orientation of English was identified as elitist, Hinduistic, upper-caste and metropolitan. The other was that scholars, who got encouraged by this change, began to question the politics of such inclusions, and challenge the framework of English Studies. Susie Tharu's *Subject to Change* located this 'paradigm shift' within the larger cultural change that took place in India in the post-USSR collapse.

As a response to this 'paradigm shift', scholars who worked on British and American Studies turned towards literatures of regional and marginal cultures, involving themselves in translation activities and talked of gender, region and caste as shaping forces of Indian literature. While focusing on the forms of marginality and subalternity, thanks to the rousing reception of critical theory in English Studies, they showed interest in a theory of marginality (vis-à-vis colonialism) which gave

them visibility. It is here that questions concerning authenticity and methodology become important. The 'politics of inclusion' is identified as a continuation of the nationalist and Gandhian project. Theory comes under suspicion, threatening to reveal the limitations of the theorizing subject. Translators are challenged for their assumptions of the role of mediator, scholars on marginal, native and Dalit literatures are questioned about the possibility of emancipation within the existing structure of society.

Dalit Studies, which gained academic recognition at the world level through its focus on the pan-Indian Dalit uprising in the post-Ambedkar centenary celebrations years, turned towards regional specificities, focusing on archival sources as a critique of this 'inclusive politics'. It is from this perspective that this paper attempts to read the archival material relating to the activities of the Depressed Class in colonial Tamil Nadu and tries to reflect upon the nature and function of English Studies. The paper argues that the archival sources cannot simply be studied as part of a Dalit history but must be studied for understanding the operations of power in colonial Tamil Nadu. A study of such a complex relation between the Depressed Class vis-à-vis colonial government on the one hand, and the nationalists and Dravidian movement on the other, may alter our assumptions about colonialism.

Six years after the first conference of the Bharatha Jana Sabha, (also known as Congress Maha Sabha), was held, the Depressed Class established the Dravida Maha Jana Sabha and conducted its first conference on 1st December 1891. Ten resolutions concerning the condition of the Depressed Classes were passed at the conference. Publishing the resolutions of the conference in his weekly magazine *Tamilan* dated 14.10.1908, Pundit Iyothee Thass remarked: "A copy of the resolutions were also sent to the National Congress to be included in their Swatandra claims on 21st December 1891. The then General Secretary Mr. M. Veera Raghavachary acknowledged the receipt of the same and intimated that the details would be sent in a later date, but no reply was received by the "Dravida Maha Jana Sabha" even after the lapse of 17 years … Instead of calling National Congress, they could be called as "Bengali's Caste Congress" or "Brahmin Congress".

The change of the name from 'Dravida Maha Jana Sabha' into 'Adi-Dravida Maha Jana Sabha' involves an interesting history of the tension between the untouchables and the non-brahmin dominant caste groups, who claimed to be 'Dravidians'. Following the debate on the terms, the Depressed Class decided to embrace the term 'Adi-Dravida' in a meeting held at Madras on 16 September 1920, as it helped them secure the concessions provided by the colonial government. It was then that the term 'Adi-Dravida' came to denote the people belonging to the depressed class in the G.O.817 of 1922. These details, recorded by Kamalanathan in his rejoinder to Dravidian ideologue K.Veeramani (1985), regarding the emergence of untouchables as an organized group and thereby situating the question of caste and Dalit within the tension that prevailed among the Depressed Class, the Nationalists and the Dravidianists in colonial Tamil Nadu. It is in this backdrop that we must look at the various conferences conducted by the Depressed Classes and 'Dravida' and 'Adi-Dravida' from 1891 through 1930s. The conferences recalled the services rendered by the British and urged for the amelioration of the problems of untouchables. They also referred to the petitions submitted in 1779 and 1810 by their ancestors to the colonial authority and hinted at the government's failure to respond to their demands for lands, healthcare and education. The "Pariah Petition" submitted in December 1779 states:

That your petitioners are but menial servants to the gentlemen and ladies of this settlement, such as butlers, butler mates, cooks, cook mates, coachmen, palanquin boys, horse keepers, grass cutters, dry and wet nurses, water wenches, scavengers, cart drivers, totys, women sweepers and lamp lighters and their pay is very small and insufficient to maintain themselves and family; and further, your petitioners are of the meanest cast, and in case of troubles from any country powers, your petitioners cast will be entirely exposed to the mercy of the enemy… (*Public Consultation* cxxii)

Again in the "Petition Submitted in 1810", it was stated:

> From ancient time not only your petitioners and also their generations have been employed and served Hon'ble Company since their Banners was flagging in the East Indies they and their descendants have served the Hon'ble Company in all the war and hostilities and etc.

Similar details regarding the services rendered by the untouchables to the British were referred in memorandums submitted to many colonial officers including the one submitted in 1924 to the Earl of Willington. The memorandum says, "Thanks to the benevolent attitude of Your Excellency's government, our condition is better than what it was before, but the progress has not been adequate or commensurate with our requirements and our legitimate claims". In a Farewell address presented to Lord Willington, it was stated: "…that the British government should on no account sacrifice the interests of the Depressed and Minority Communities, out of deference to the wishes and sentiments of a majority community; that the British character of administration through the agency of the British people must be maintained at any cost" (Quoted in M.C. Rajah: 79).

The pro-colonial nature of such archival sources poses serious problems for those of us who operate both in Postcolonial Studies and Dalit Studies. Ignoring such data, English Studies which embraces Dalit Studies, focusing on Dalit autobiographical narratives and identity politics chooses to continue with the existing anti-colonial framework and its debates on marginality. These petitions, resolutions and memorandums submitted to the colonial government cannot simply be read as pleas made by the untouchables. Instead there arises the need to study how the 'culture of petitioneering' of untouchables affected the nationalists who follow a similar strategy. In his book, *Bharatha Jana Sabha (Congress Jana Sabha's Caritiram),* the nationalist poet Subramania Bharathi writes:

Let me briefly tell the work done in the last Congress Maha Jana Sabha. Some good had taken place in the one year since we organized the Congress last year the same month. It comes to prove that if we place genuine demands, the government will fulfill them atleast slowly, if not immediately. So we need to work with complete trust on the benevolent heart of the British. At whatever cost, the English *jati* will have to fulfill our demands in order to prove their moral and ethical stature. (*Translation mine*: 18)

This shows that the strategy followed by the nationalists was in no way anti-colonial and was similar to that of the Depressed Classes. There was another important point that needs our attention here.

The nationalists and the Depressed Class closely watched each other's activities and devised their own strategies.

This becomes apparent in the famous *Dandi March* and in the demand for simultaneous examinations for civil services in India and London. When Gandhi conducted the famous *Dandi March* demanding abolition of tax on salt, the untouchables headed by Rettaimalai Srinivasan (who was the close associate of Dr. Ambedkar and who accompanied him to the Round Table Conference) demanded the continued imposition of salt tax. They suggested that the tax may be used for the welfare measures for the untouchables. The fourth resolution passed at the First Congress Maha Jana Sabha (1885) demanded that the civil service examination may be conducted both in London and in India to enable Indian natives to appear for the examination and join administrative services under colonial rule (Subramania Bharathi: 11). Continuous campaign for this demand was taken up by Dadabai Naoroji. In the magazine *Parayan*, Rettaimalai Srinivasan launched a counter campaign demanding that the examination should not be conducted in India. The December 8, 1894 issue of the magazine writes:

> O! Congress! Where is the appropriateness of the term 'national' as applied to thee? If Paraya boys are not allowed to read in ordinary schools at present when will they qualify themselves for the Indian civil service? Why not the Parayas study for and pass the civil service exam? O! Congress-wallas! Cast away your jealousy and ambition and do no unjust acts even though government may be blind to them (From the *Native News Paper Report* submitted to the colonial government).

The magazine further states that any attempt "on the part of the so-called high castemen to have the civil service exams held in India will be of no avail". Again when the nationalist paper *Swadesamitran* on 17th July 1897 campaigned against the appointment of Tremenheere as the District Collector, *Parayan* on 24th July 1897 cited the welfare measures taken up by him and made the government appoint him as the collector of Chengalpat. It was based on his "Note on the Pariahs" submitted to Queen Victoria, that the colonial government gave away lands to the untouchables. The Panchami Land Retrieval Movement fights for those

lands taken away by the 'highcastes' from the untouchables. Sources concerning the activities of the Depressed Class suggest that during the turn of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, the tension between the nationalists and the Depressed class was so strong that they challenged each others' activities.

The same kind of tension prevailed between the Depressed Class and the Justice party. M.C. Rajah, who participated in the joint campaign with the Justice Party in the 20's, parted with them in the late 20s demanding a separate electorate. He mooted the idea of a separate electorate in 1929 in the "Note submitted to the Central Committee". During the Pulianthope incident, in which the untouchables were attacked by high caste Hindu workers for not joining the mill strike, M.C. Rajah became disillusioned with the communists. A wide range of scholars including missionaries, magistrates, nationalists, non-brahmin ideologues, in the *Indian Review* between 1900 to 1909 establish caste question as the national question in India.

The postcolonial intellectuals and subaltern historians recently took up the Dalit question (not the caste question) as part of their debate on nationalism. Faced with such pro-colonial sources regarding Dalit history, they expressed the difficulty in handling the Dalit question within the existing nationalist framework. Asked about the impact of the celebration of Macaulay's bicentenary by Dalit intellectuals on postcolonialism, Gauri Viswanathan says:

> Nationhood can no longer be defined in terms of whether you are post-colonised or not. Nation should be defined in terms of how it deals with its own past and its indigenous communities … I understand that the Dalit question in India would surely complicate the anti-colonial rhetoric of some of the subaltern historians and postcolonialists like Spivak and myself. (27)

Partha Chatterjee also echoed a similar view regarding the impact of the Dalit question on Subaltern history:

> We (in the Subaltern Studies) were taking up debates within Marxist scholarship, where the caste question was at least at this point of time simply not considered at all. It becomes much more visible now perhaps but in

> the early 80s the caste question was never considered an important question. So I think those were the limitations of Subaltern Studies because of the specific conditions out of which the original movement or the scholarly attempts emerged. (2)

It is interesting to note that the subaltern historian Upendra Baxi, who felt that Ambedkar was completely ignored in the Indian intellectual history, also did not elaborate it in his critique of Indian society and culture. These views of scholars suggest that though caste has been viewed as a social evil during the pre- and post-independence time, caste as a political question posing methodological issues remains unaddressed. Unable to cope with such challenges, we who are caught up within the existing methodologies, reinvent the same problem within English Studies. It is high time that we demarginalise ourselves (instead of theorizing Dalit subjectivity) with a view to re-examining our own assumptions and methodological training.

Hence our move from the Dalit narratives towards a Dalit history must provide new ways of looking at the colonial/national question from an alternative perspective. This may open an enquiry into notions of governmentality and citizenship with the insights we have gained from Dalit history, which looks at the colonial government as just 'another authority' overcoming the binary of native vs colonial. Such an alternative perspective may insist on the need to read Dalit history as part of national history, focusing on (1) the affiliations of the colonial and native forms of government; and (2) the struggle for (and function of) citizenship under the colonial and native governments. This may raise a question regarding our own disciplinary practice: Are we, in English Studies, functioning as another authority assuming responsibility over Dalit narratives, and thereby reinventing the colonial authority's assumption of responsibility over the native subjects?

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Rohinton Mistry's Accent on Human Rights in Novels as Writing Resistance.

P. John Joseph Kennedy

In 1968 Roland Barthes, the famous post-structuralist announced the "Death of the Author" through an essay titled the same. Barthes, through the essay, attempted at advancing complete textual independence totally devoid of the writer's intention or context. While the death of the Author, on one hand signified to Barthes the birth of the Reader it also implied that the coexistence of the two was never a reality. Although Barthes' insistence on the disjointed nature of texts, the fissures, the incongruities, the interruptions and the breaks requires serious consideration, the notion of total exclusion of the writer from the product and the context is extremely unrealistic and untenable. Hence, Sean Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author* (2010) that places emphasis on the writer may be viewed as a justifiable rebuttal to Barthes.

An endorsement of this line of thinking is seen more pronouncedly in Camille Paglia's view that completely denounces Barthes: "Most pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything *more* affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe" (34). Although this debate about whether or not art is created for its own sake or for a people or a society is an age-old one, this paper seeks to locate its position on the latter view that all writings are an act of communication and behind every act there is a message that the author attempts to communicate. In that sense it also relates to the

Marxist tradition that the nature of literature is influenced by the social and political conditions in which it is produced. A major difficulty with the stance adopted by Barthes is that it categorically detaches the work from the writer from his/her involvement with the society along with their dreams, desires and hopes for it as if the two are not connected at all.

The liberal humanists, in the past, openly declared their authorial obligations and moral duties to their peoples as a result of their strongly founded belief in the creation of a just and humane world. But of late such open leanings are avoided by many writers, firstly, for fear of being labelled as propagandists and secondly, because it may be considered by many as being conservative and old fashioned. Despite this being a common trend among many, there are also writers who strongly believe in shaping a better society through literature in general and move towards achieving that end through what may be called Resistance Writing in Literature.

Writing is for the purpose of expression. The act of writing itself, in that sense, signifies the intent to change the status-quo which is an expression of resistance. For Marina Nemat, for instance, "Literature allows the victim to become a survivor and stand up to the past to ensure a better future. It is literature that carries the human experience, reaches our hearts, and makes us feel the pain of those who have been treated unjustly. Without literature and narrative, we would lose our identity as human beings and will dissolve in the darkness of time and our repeated mistakes that lead us from one preventable devastation to the next" (Wikipedia). Vered Cohen Barzilay in her essay "The Tremendous Power of Literature" asserts that literature can be as powerful as life itself. It has the potential to inspire change, provide comfort, instil hope, infuse passion and strength to create a better humanity (Wikipedia). Quite clearly the notion of literature playing the role of an active agent of change acquires significance here. A small minority among writers does expressly profess such sentiments although a large number may consider such views not only pedantic but canonical as well.

Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi writer, who may be said to belong to this category of the small minority who without mincing words attacks the

neo-colonial leaders for causing a dehumanizing effect on the society through his characters who constantly resist and protest. Mistry like Satre seems to believe that all writers must firmly be rooted in reality and as extrication from it is impossible no matter how hard one tries. Not being so would signify escapism. Hence, in all of Mistry's works issues and concerns relating to human dignity, their human rights and violations occupy the centre stage. Mistry may therefore be seen to be in the elite company of Immanuel Kant, John Rawles, and Lawrence Kholberg who strongly subscribed to the Universalist theory.

At this point it may be worthwhile to dwell briefly on understanding what human rights are and how inextricably they are connected to Resistance and Protest. Cranston defines Human Rights as "a universal moral right, something which all men, everywhere at all times ought to have, something of which no one may be deprived without a grave affront to justice, something which is owing to every human being simply because he is human" (36). Many regard this as a classic definition even if some may find it to be somewhat generic and even ambiguous.

Sambuddha Ghatak asks: what does it entail to be treated as an individual? Are all persons—imply because they are human beings—equal and thus must inherently enjoy equal rights in a society? In theory, for moralists and liberal humanists this is what is required because in such a state, in their view, stability and equality of opportunity could be advanced. On the contrary realists do insist that such a state is simply utopian which can exist as mere philosophy. To them, the notion of human equality itself is illusory. They further strengthen their argument quoting examples of categorization based on superior-inferior, in-group, out-group labels which, in their view, can be dated back to the classical Greek Period. However, ironically though, they fail to understand that something can be justified merely due to its existence or practice. In fact, it has been proved that such practices exist primarily to purport discrimination based on hierarchical notions which are nothing but conscious attempts at what Weber calls "social closure". To Weber social closure is a tactic that some groups employ for their survival in order to establish monopoly over society. Once that is achieved such groups may resort to different means to maintain or safeguard that position of advantage. Through such manipulative

moves the powerful groups manage to effect what Rene Lenoir calls "Social exclusion" which systematically keeps the marginalized constrained to the periphery not only socially but economically, legally and politically as well. Bauvinic, for instance, observes quite remarkably the ill effects of social exclusion. He states that it is the inability of individuals to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of society and goes on to add that it involves "the denial of equal access of opportunities imposed by certain groups in society upon others"(176). Thus when Human rights are violated resistance and protest are born. They are two sides of the same coin but manifested differently. While Resistance to a large extent is internal, Protest is the external manifestation of the same.

Human rights concerns, one may note here, have become global in the twenty first century with almost all countries strongly condemning human rights infringements and violations. At the same time writers' reluctance to handle them directly in their works, one must admit, partly stems from their misguided notion that it is not their job but that of the activists and policy makers. Worse still, many may even doubt the author's ability to understand the complexities involved in substantive issues. What needs to be remembered, however, is that a writer, in order to make the reader think or become aware of issues need not be an expert in that area of study. He/She can do the same through other creative means. Although pushing the reader into concrete action may not be the explicit intention of the writer, the writing offers an impetus for further prodding in that direction. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an excellent example of how the local was transcended and how the issue of racism and discrimination became universal. For many of these writers the core of literature is resisting and protesting human rights violations and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Kafka's *The Trial* are a few more examples of works that have had a deep impact on public opinion creating an awareness leading to social change. Such writers believe that writing is not simply an aesthetic or artistic exercise but an act of social commitment that must therefore effect social change.

Rohinton Mistry, through his novels demonstrates his concern for social welfare by raising his voice against violations of human rights. He poignantly depicts the sufferings of the marginalized at the callous

and cruel hands of the neo-colonizers. Although Mistry migrated to Canada in 1975, he returns to India through his writings. His concern for the weaker sections of the society is amply evident in all of his works starting from *Such a Long Journey* his first novel, *A Fine Balance* the second one and the third one *Family Matters.* The difference, in each of these works, however, is the mode of victimization and the reasons for it.

In *A Fine Balance,* for instance, Mistry delineates the atrocities of the political regime during the despotic period of India's Emergency which is the backdrop to this novel. Human rights violations during such times especially by those committed the police are sadly and inevitably common. Many scholars and intellectuals have therefore condemned the police brutality of the Emergency period: the midnight swoop as common strategy employed by the government. In fact, Mrs Gandhi is portrayed in the novel as a fascist leader whose policies affect the everyday life of ordinary people, sometimes driving them to extremes. For instance, in the name of beautification schemes even shacks were razed to the ground and thousands were displaced. Freedom of expression, one of the most important tenets of democracy, was the biggest casualty with the Press being gagged and all who protested, including top political leaders, being thrown into jails. In the name of controlling the surging population growth, the government victimized the young by subjecting them forcible family planning operations. For example, Omprakash, the young nephew of Ishwar is brutally avenged by a ruthless politician so much so he is unable to live a dignified life thereafter.

India, as a matter of fact, has the rare distinction of being the largest democratic nation-state in the world with also the tag of a powerful developing nation. Besides, it is a nuclear power and also considered as a major economic player. Despite these positive attributes, it falls short of expected results when it comes to protection of human rights. The Indian social system, it is believed, is based on the principle of purity and pollution which according to many scholars, is the result of the system of inequality. In India, social exclusion is mainly based on ethnicity, gender, religion, caste and patriarchal systems. Mistry depicts some of these issues in his works quite convincingly. The marginalized are denied of cultural rights, the right to education and

employment opportunities. Article 23(1) of the Universal declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. But, ironically every one of these norms is seen to be violated in *A Fine Balance.* The *chamars* are destined to continue their ancestral occupation in the village and any attempt to subvert the established social order will result in serious and fatal consequences.

Yet another gross violation of human rights as depicted in the novel is the denial of the right to learn. The cruel punishment meted out to Dukhi's two children for entering the school in their avid earnestness to learn is a case in point. The teacher calls them rascals for 'daring to enter school' (110) and gives corporeal punishments for 'defiling the tools of learning and knowledge' (110). Pandit Lalluram, the 'revered and learned Brahmin' to whom everyone goes to settle disputes as he was known to be 'fair in his judgment' even when it comes to cases involving untouchables gives an interesting final touch to the sordid practices. When Dukhi complains to the Pandit of the ill-treatment of his sons by the teacher, the Pandit in a tone of solemn finality says:

> You do not have the knowledge to help you appreciate these matters. Your children entered the classroom. They polluted the place. They touched instruments of learning. They defiled slates and chalks, which upper class children would touch. You are lucky there wasn't a holy book like the Bhagavad Gita in that cupboard, no sacred texts. Or the punishment would have been more final (113-114).

Residential segregation and denial or restrictions to enter temple premises are other common practices seen in the novel that are basic violations of human rights.

In his third novel *Family Matters,* Mistry highlights, how the elderly are shabbily treated by their children, humiliated and even abandoned by them. The feeling of not being wanted is clearly sensed in Nariman's words accusing his children of torture. He tells Coomy, his step-daughter: "In my youth, my parents controlled me and destroyed those years. Thanks to them, I married your mother and wrecked my middle years. Now you want to torment my old age. I won't allow it" (7). Coomy's retort quite

clearly reveals her utterly callous attitude towards her father. "I don't owe Pappa anything. He didn't change my diaper or wash my bum, and I don't have to clean his shit either" (85). And Coomy's wily designs to keep her father with the Chenoys reek of selfishness. Not only Coomy and Jal but Yezad, too is guilty of the same attitude as he also refuses to go anywhere near the bedpan and even decrees a ban on his children to that effect. At one point when Jehangir, his younger son rushes to get the bottle to help his grandfather relieve himself, Yezad stands in the way glaring at him. Through all this Mistry captures how the elderly are uncared for, treated like untouchables by their own children, left to fend for themselves in this advanced globalized world where human rights exist only on paper.

The other type of human rights violations depicted by Mistry in the novel is in the realm of religion. In the background of the violence that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Mistry delineates the fear psychosis that was distinctly seen among the minorities. Neither Yezad, a Parsi, nor Hussain, a Muslim can feel safe in Mumbai and their marginalized discourse as the religious other requires attention. In fact, Boehmer's analysis that "when national histories are revealed as stochastic, divided and painful, the body is too exposed as fissured and reduced" (33) is quite true. The impact of the Bombay riots on its citizens particularly on Hussain is a case in point. He is a living example of how the remnants of the riots can ravage the people both physically and emotionally.

Mistry is deeply concerned about the rising parochialism, linguistic and regional chauvinism and religious fundamentalism in India which have seriously undermined secure, peaceful living. It is a violation of one's right to dignified living. Bilimoria's plight in *Such a Long Journey* is a classic example of how individuals can be trapped by greedy political establishments for their selfish gain resulting in untold misery and violation of basic human rights. Dina Dalal in *A Fine Balance* is constricted by her dominating, patriarchal surroundings that she is unable to free herself from the gender-imposed framework. So constrained is she that her longing for individual freedom remains elusive till the end. It is here that Hume's notion that human rights codify moral behaviour and Weber's view that they are a sociological pattern of role setting assume importance. Theories such as Interest

Theory which argues for human rights as a tool to protect, promote and sustain human interests or Will Theory that attempts to validate human rights based on freedom have emerged as a result of the existence of continued oppressive systems world over.

In conclusion, one may safely assert that Mistry has indeed voiced his support for the weak and the marginalized in all of his works. One may add that the whole gamut of Resistance Writing revolves around the weak and the marginalized. Wherever human rights violations are witnessed and freedom of expression is suppressed, Mistry protests through his writing on behalf of the educated civil society. Even documenting, sharing and expressing form part of survival which is in fact a form of Resistance. And in a society where the weak and the poor have no voice of their own and not ready to be heard, "on-behalfism" is the tool to be used and Mistry has used the same quite adroitly in his works. The return of the author in Mistry fighting for restoration of peaceful community living as the crusader of human rights is therefore wholly justifiable.

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The Feminizing of History by Expatriate Women Novelists as Resistance: Reading Yasmine Gooneratne's *The Pleasures Of Conquest* for Alternate Histories and Ideas of Nationhood

Latha Rangachari

History, both personal and national, forms the backdrop of the expatriate novel from the Indian Subcontinent. The expatriate novel is read as either a national allegory giving form to the subcontinental nation states and their histories, or as cosmopolitan texts that expose the false consciousness of nationalism and which celebrate the transcendence of the nation state. Often, the novels expose the fictionality of the nation and its history and indicate that the nation can have more than one identity and more than one history. The expatriate novel by women often presents the nation state from the feminine perspective, subverting therein accepted patriarchal notions of nationalism and history. Historical narrative has been described by Hayden White as a "fiction of factual representation". History is then, according to him, represented as facts which cannot speak for themselves and therefore need the historian to speak on their behalf. The historian 'fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is- in its representation-a purely discursive one" (White as qtd. in Smith 145). Historical events therefore take on as many forms as there are interpreters and the validity of the interpretation should be tested in the context of the historian's own interests, circumstances.

History is a very important constituent of the postcolonial novel of expatriation.

One of the principal characteristics of diasporic communities is that they do not return. This is not to be confused with the symbols of return or the invocations of the homeland or home idea. Diasporas cannot conceptualize the point towards which the community, the nation within a nation, is heading. While the reference point is in the past, and is unreal, there is no future, no sense of a teleological end. Vijay Mishra writes:

> The absence of teleologies in the diaspora is also linked to Walter Benjamin's understanding of the ever present time of historical (messianic) redemption. In this lateral argument, an eventual homecoming is not projected into the future but introjected into the present, thereby·both interrupting it and multiplying it. In these readings, time is turned back against itself in order that alternative readings, alternative histories, may be released. In this "diverse scansion of temporality, " in this active re-membering (as opposed to the mere recalling) of traces and fragments, a new space in language and time is opened up, and historical moments are sundered to reveal heterotopic paths not taken. The absence of teleologies, this intense meditation on synchronicity, thus opposes the tyranny of linear time and blasts open the continuum of history to reveal moments, fragments, traces that can be re-captured and transformed into another history.(9)

Diasporic writing thus generates multiple histories instead of a single view of events, and past and present interweave to form a new pace. Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Sara Suleri, Meena Alexander, Yasmine Gooneratne and several other diasporic writers present history in such fragments, woven into the narrative of the present. Personal and national history is thus very important to the expatriates and their voices construct South Asian history in their fiction.

> The question of representing history is significant in the context of the Subcontinent's colonial past and in the context of contemporary global politics in the era

> of multinationalism. These writers use Third World historical material, narrativizing it for their fictional purposes. Postcolonialism being the definition of one's position in relation to the colonial past, it is not merely a question of the aftermath of colonialism, but one of attitude which goes beyond the attempt to confront colonialism, to become an attempt to transcend it, to step outside the influence and the framework, to reclaim an autonomous and free identity. (Jain 161)

The writing of history as a part of this effort is important as the historical narrative is in itself a statement of the self, and an expression of the conceptualization of the historical process. It goes over the past to understand the present and seeks to explain. And even when it fails to explain, it still raises certain questions. When women turn to writing history, a third element appears on the scene- the traditionally ahistoric, the conventionally marginal is placed centre-stage. This study will examine expatriate Srilankan novelist Yasmine Gooneratne' s second novel, *The Pleasures of Conquest*, for its historicization of the past and for the depiction of the current political process in the once colonized, independent nations of the subcontinent. The postcolonial women writers' work often reflects a feminization of history. To feminize cultural information means to detach it from its active role within a historical field and to ground its meaning in a private sphere of gendered consciousness (Nancy Armstrong as qtd. in Jain 161).

Feminization here refers to the attempt to free history from "purely masculine pursuits, from hegemonic structures, from an ideological thrust, and to bring it closer to the actual happenings which work in several diverse directions and cannot easily be accounted for by a cause-and-effect explanation" (Jain 162). It is not a passive reproduction of knowledge and implies a hitherto unrealized sensitivity towards social relationships and their dislocation, and a widening of the historical imagination. It is less ideologically directed and more an attempt to show the increased blurring of the demarcations between male and female, and nature and culture. The women writers see history not only as structured by wars and conquests and the actions of men, but as identified in the interaction of women and in the cultural traditions of

society. They reject nostalgia as the main constituent of their concern with the past and do not aim at revival of the past. Instead they analyze and interpret history and politics and free it from any form of stereotyping. Women writers like Gooneratne, Alexander, Suleri, Sidhwa deal with history-past and present and seek to feminize it in the above fashion, with an active interrogation of the woman's position in that historical/political situation.

Gooneratne's second novel *The Pleasures of Conquest* is a multilayered novel wherein the past and present are woven together with the past being an imperialistic tale and the present being the story of neo-colonial expansionism. Each thread of the story acts as a foil for the other and the two are dove- tailed together to form a vivid commentary on the ways of imperialism and the adaptability of Third World cultures. The pleasures of conquest are infinite and the novel indicates several conquests. All the strands of the tale are set in the land of Amnesia which is symbolic at once of every lotus eating, culturally rich Asian nation, ripe for the marauding imperialists, and any developing postcolonial Asian nation which is eager for the munificence of the western dollar, and therefore fertile ground for western commercial interests.

The ironic tone of the entire novel makes it highly political, a critique of all types of colonial practices. John D'Esterey is the colonial civil servant sent out from the mother country Britain to civilize and regulate life in the 'backward' land of Amnesia. He falls victim to the charms of the island nation. He, through his administrative acumen annexes major portions of the Amnesian nation to Britain and is granted a baronetcy for his efforts. What the mother nation chooses to keep under secrecy is the fact that D'Esterey adopts Amnesia as home and its Buddhist religion. He is ordained as a monk and dies there. In yet another ironic narrative coup, Gooneratne makes D'Esterey, like her earlier protagonist Bharat, in *A Change of Skies*, a symbol of resistance to colonial hegemony. Just as the anglicized colonial product, Bharat, gives up teaching of English literature to university students in Australia and takes up teaching Asian immigrants English for the purposes of survival and assimilation in white Australia, John D'Esterey, the colonizer leaves the imperial service and adopts the native religion and way of life. He thus repudiates both the colonial

interest and the English missionary activities so closely linked to the colonial enterprise. Gooneratne asserts, through these characters, the cultural superiority of the Asian nations and uses them to reject western values-literary and social that were enforced by the colonizers.

The novel raises various political issues: Why is the West best? Why is there in the literature of the colonizers and the neocolonisers the perpetuation of the belief that the greatest period in the history of mankind were the days of the empire?

John D'Esterey is a poet and learns to write poetry in the classical Amnesian tradition and praises his adopted land in verse, thus subverting the imperial tradition of glorifying the motherland in literature. D'Esterey and his colonial interests are paralleled by the stories of the American academician Philip Destry and his Asia research. Also paralleling these two strands of the story is that of Stella Mallinson the best-selling novelist and her publicity gimmick to promote her books. The conquering colonial D'Esterey is an Oriental at heart despite his commitments to the Crown while the Asia literate neo-colonials Destry and Mallinson are insensitive and petty. The envoy of this imperium who was to expand British commercial interests in Asia turns out to be the poet and artist while the labelled literary experts are crassly commercial in their outlook. The novel constantly juxtaposes colonialism and neo-colonialism and underlines the fact that Britain still lives in her colonies not through her military achievements but in the indelible mark that sensitive and humane administrators like D' Esterey have made in the colonies through their understanding and appreciation of native cultures and lifestyles. The novel talks of D'Esterey's career in the East, in detail. Philip Destry, researching the Journal of the civil servant finds that the young Englishman is filled with praise for Amnesia. The text chronicles the lives, attitudes of the Englishmen on imperial duty in the East, and the attitudes of people back in England about the colonial enterprise. John D'Esterey falls in love with the Orient, masters the local language and turns out poetry in that language. We see that D'Esterey, who went into the imperial service with the genuine feeling that he was aiding a great cause, is progressively disillusioned by the imperial enterprise. He is naively shocked by the slave trade practiced by the colonials. He writes in his *Journal*:

> I questioned George Strachey on this matter, and I put it to him that maintenance of such an immoral, and indeed unchristian, custom as slavery was hardly commensurate with the honour and dignity of the British Crown (130).

He is a colonial with a sense of justice. Young, idealistic and intelligent, he earnestly sees the colonial expansionist policies as the enriching of Western culture, only to be progressively disillusioned. He writes in his journal while he is still Chief Translator, about the colonial plan to annexe the Inner Kingdom of Amnesia:

> What an honourable and splendid enterprise with which to be connected, the conquest for my country of this perfect jewel, this gem of a medieval world now forever lost in Europe! If I should be the one to win the Inner Kingdom, God send me the firmness to protect it, to strengthen and preserve its virtues against the corruptions of the outside world (122).

Truly naive, he is seen to be a total misfit for the imperial cause. He is more a social historian than the ruthless plunderer that the Empire sought, to further its interests. He talks sympathetically of the domestication of the grand Asiatic elephant which now shows none of the grandeur that it is born with and is a mere shadow of its earlier glorious appearance. This then is symbolic of his changing attitudes towards colonization, wherein the traditionally rich colonies are ravaged by the marauding British, who leave them depleted of any dignity or grace. He takes lessons in the local language from a noted Buddhist monk and through the monk comes to hear of the poetic and literary talents of Dona Isabella Cornelia the renowned beauty whose verse charms him.

Fact and fiction are mixed as the author acknowledges the fact that she has based the characters of Dona Isabella on Dona Isabella Cornelia Perumal, a well-known nineteenth century writer who was also known as 'Gajaman Nona' (1759-1814). The character of the British Resident D'Esterey is based on Sir John D'Oyly, Baronet (1774-1824) who was Imperial Resident in the Kingdom of Kandy, to whom King Vikrama Rajasinha entrusted the Royal Regalia, in 1815. The novel goes on to

tell how D'Esterey never returned to England, how Dona Isabella died a mysterious death; and how D'Esterey, now granted a baronetcy, died of malaria while still Resident and was buried with military honours in Amnesia.

The basic doubt raised by the text is whether D'Esterey was a genuine lover of Asia or if he was a true imperialist, who by pretending to have love for the locals had wrought the British annexation of the nation. The novel constantly raises the important question, "How true is history?" History, Gooneratne seems to agree with Hayden White, largely depends on the historians and interpreters of facts. Historians and biographers like Philip Destry, through insensitive and faulty interpretations create totally wrong versions of the truth. The novel talks of how people and events can be erased from public memory and how convenient versions of the truth can be re-introduced for public circulation by manipulative rulers. Philip Destry can only see D'Esterey as a trusted colonial man doing his duty to the Crown, pretending to be enamoured by the nation, its people and culture. He sees the Resident as a cunning operator who was carrying on the best policies of the Foreign Office which was to win the trust of the native kings before toppling them from power. Leila Tan, Destry's Asian research student believes that the Resident was genuinely drawn to Amnesia and its people. though he was unable to do anything when the British army marauded the land he had hoped and promised to protect and preserve. Of Dona Isabella's existence they find no trace. Official records, despite recording the official exchanges between the Resident and the lady, do not mention her at all.

> It was almost, Leila said, as if she were nothing but a ghost, or a shadow cast by the illuminated figure of Sir John D'Esterey, Baronet. Was this accidental? Leila was certain that it was a cover-up job. Dona Isabella's very existence had been erased, she said, by deliberate policy. The British Crown didn't want one of its most distinguished civil servants compromised. (151)

Gooneratne gives further examples of the distortion of history by the powers that were. The truth of the D'Esterey matter is revealed in the last section of the novel. She writes:

> Mr. D'Esterey was not like other Englishmen, said her lady.
>
> Maybe he started out like all the rest, but this country changed him. And can you wonder?
>
> One by one, the supports he had built into the constitution to hold the kingdom steady and keep our society unified were dismantled by order of the Crown in the interests of efficient government.' And he, as British Resident, had to preside over that process! I have often tried to imagine what he must have felt as he watched his masters and his colleagues undoing all he had tried to preserve. He must have been so very lonely! I think in the end he must have become so different from the rest of his kind that they turned against him. You couldn't take an individual line and remain a part of the civil service. (307)

The lady goes on to reveal how D'Esterey's masters at the end distrusted and disliked him for his closeness and attachment to the Amnesian nation. She reveals that the Resident had been about to be ordained a monk in what Gooneratne undoubtedly means to be the ultimate betrayal of the imperial process. In a telling comment on how the powerful can distort and refashion history to suit their needs, the lady tells how the fact of D'Esterey' s death was falsified by the British:-

> You can see why such a thing could never be made public. Ordination of a British civil servant (if the news of it had been allowed to get about) would have scandalized the British community. It could have destroyed the Government. The Crown officers were debating with the Colonial Office as to how best to discreetly dismiss Mr. D'Esterey from the Civil Service, when he obliged them by falling seriously ill. His health had always been delicate, he was in pain even on the day of his greatest achievement-the day on which, as a result of his efforts, the British troops walked unopposed into the Great City and took command of the Inner Kingdom. His body was

> carried secretly, by night, from the temple in which he had died to Military Headquarters. It was buried with full military honours, and a long, elaborate obituary appeared in the Government Gazette. The Resident had outlived his usefulness, and they were glad to have done with him. (308)

This then reveals the truth of the D'Esterey affair and we find it glaringly different from the historical interpretation carried out by Philip Destry.

Gooneratne seeks to tell the reader that academic research may prove faulty as researchers like Destry see only what they seek to see in the evidence available. He sees his biography of D'Esterey as complete, researching only the biased historical evidence that a powerful colonial nation has deemed fit to leave behind. To him D'Esterey is a true colonial subject who did his job well without any sentiments being involved.

It is Leila Tan who disagrees and differs from his viewpoint. She gives a different perspective to the historical details available and suspect's distortion of the truth in the matter. She then goes to infallible sources - to the ballad singers and the ballads of Amnesia which tell the tale of the Resident in their old songs which have been handed down over the ages. Gooneratne highlights here how oral traditions are important in Asia, and how storytelling and ballad singing are often good historical evidence, supplementing the dry bones of possibly distorted documentary, history.

It is significant to note that it is the women - Leila Tan and the unnamed lady of the last section of the novel who through their feminine perspectives reach the truth of the matter. They 'feminize' history whereby, true to Nancy Armstrong's description, "free history from the purely masculine pursuits", which are Destry's preoccupations, and release it from the hegemonic beliefs that he holds of colonial administrators who to him were soulless imperialists impelled only by the imperialistic ideology. These two women bring the history closer to the actual happening and do so without indulging in nostalgia or sentiment. They apply their feminine consciousness to the events and acknowledge what Destry does not - that actual happenings work in several diverse directions and cannot easily be accounted for by a cause

and effect explanation. Using a historical imagination that Destry is incapable of, they re-create the Resident as he really was - a European who fell in love with the land and people he came out to subdue - a sensitive man who appreciated the culture, arts and traditions, and who idealistically sought to preserve all this forever, only to watch the imperial power which he served and which he naively believed to be just, ravage and destroy. They realize the loneliness and the disillusionment about the empire that he has experienced, and understand his need to be ordained a monk in a faith that underlined the impermanence of all things, the Empire included. The novel suggests that the feminization of history is essential in order to redeem it from hegemonic fallacies.

The novel is a major critique of neo-colonialism. A deceptive irony which characterizes most of her writing is used by Gooneratne to expose the neo- imperialistic traditions that Asian countries reel under today. Stella Mallinson is the best-selling novelist who comes to Amnesia, on a mission of mercy to the beleaguered nations of Asia. She arrives with great fanfare, to do publicity films to save the Asian elephant. The Stella Mallinson episodes-the first section of the novel- are devastating criticisms of the crass commercialism that has overtaken literary activity, publishing and life in the First World.

She scathingly attacks the paternalism that marks all the interaction between the First and Third World nations. The author is merciless in her critique of the neo-imperialistic West which makes its money out of Third World tragedies. The novel tears down the hypocrisy and the patronizing that underlies all western aid to Asia.

Gooneratne describes how the Third World prostitutes its traditions in order to attract western commercial interests in the region. The increasing failure of democratic ideals, corrupt politics, parochial nationalism, fake religious cults, civil unrest in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, all these find a place in Gooneratne's socio-political critique.

The Pleasures of Conquest succeeds very well as a comment on the position of women in Asia in the earlier times and now. It studies the freedom of speech and expression granted to the woman down the ages. The novel is filled with references to women finding voices to speak out. In a traditionally patriarchal land, Dona Isabella is a famed poet. In a

society that does not encourage education for women, her father and elders encourage her to learn to read and also write poetry. Descended from a long line of poets and art lovers, she is a misfit in a nation where even the religion proscribed such interests in women. The Buddhist monk describing her to D'Esterey talks of her in a manner revelatory of both the restless spirit of the woman and the intolerance of society towards academic interests in women.

> No, she is governed entirely by an interest rare in women, a love of literature. Her attempts to pursue her ambition have caused her to break many rules… .As a girl, Your Excellency, she scandalized this district by venturing out in public dressed in her brother's clothes….Young women of good family should not do such things. But, as you will hear, she did it with good reason. She wished, she said, to pursue her studies in poetry here, in this place, under my guidance... She is today among my most brilliant students. (137)

The monk goes on to quote the Buddha in a passage revelatory of religious attitudes to women in society:

> "How are we to conduct ourselves, Lord, with regard to womankind?" So asked the Bhikku Ananda one day of his teacher, the Buddha. And the Lord replied: 'As not seeing them, Ananda." "But if we should see them, Lord," Ananda asked, "what are we to do?" "By not speaking to them, Ananda," said the Lord. 'But if they should speak to us, Lord, what are we to do then?" And the Lord replied: "Keep wide awake, Ananda." (138)

This goes to prove that Amnesia like other Asian nations was traditionally patriarchal. Dona Isabella refuses to conform and breaks free to follow her love for literature. She pays for this, as we see that her interaction with the Resident is frowned upon by the Crown which cannot have its officers compromised and she dies a mysterious death, unexplained, and unrecorded except in the songs of the ballad singers.

Paralleling Amnesian attitudes towards women and learning is the attitude of Destry towards women in research and teaching. He is disparaging in his views on women in teaching, suspicious of feminism

and women's studies and feels threatened like several other men, by accomplished women like Leila Tan. He uses women unscrupulously and cannot credit them with having the perception or understanding that academic research demands.

The last section of the novel talks of yet another woman, Mallika, a descendant of Dona Isabella, who comes to be called the storyteller of the district. She tells stories from the fund of tales she has heard and composes songs based on the experiences of several years. Like Dona Isabella, she burns with a need to learn, but is denied formal education as a girl by a family which does not think it safe to teach women to read and write as that would lead them astray. Mallika says: It is hard to practice patience and resignation, hard to feel filial obedience, when one knows that there is within oneself a seed that, properly nurtured, could grow into a tree. (301)

In her old age, Mallika leaves her husband and family and goes to work for a young lady writer who translates and records her tales. Gooneratne reinforces the fact that much South Asian writing by women is drawn from oral literature - stories, tales, and even gossip, thus carrying the personal into the realm of the public. All the women in the novel are strong women who fight for freedom of thought and expression. They are typical of several other talented Asian women who are stifled by patriarchal societies. Mallika talks of the relationship between Asian women and poetry, when she says:

> To put words together in a song is not a rare skill, not among women. We are always in the midst of poetry, are we not? Looking after husbands, soothing children, tending our gardens, sewing and cooking, what are such things but poetry?
>
> Some people might call it drudgery, Mallika," she (the lady) said.
>
> Writing seems to me to be harder work, Mallika told her... "What can be harder for the spirit than a task that separates it from life? (305)

This then firmly reinstates literature in the midst of life, both being inseparably entwined, and negates the Western methods of scholarship

and the creative writing schools which are symbolized by Mallinson.

The Pleasures of Conquest, then talks of history—colonial and postcolonial—(and politics—colonial, postcolonial and gender politics—and describes how these undergo varied interpretations and modifications depending on the perception of the social historian. Examining the colonial and neo-colonial enterprise from various angles serves to make the novel a keen sociopolitical critique of the once colonized nations of the Indian subcontinent. Gooneratne has thus re-narrated the subcontinental nation through the presenting and representing of history, memory and politics in *The Pleasures of Conquest*.

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Resistance to Rape and Cruelty Against Women: A Study of the Poems "He Will Never Change" by Alicia Junkins and "Not Yet" by Michelle, F.

Christopher Ramesh

> "… there is a Literature of Rape. But there is no Poetry of Rape. There can never be. Because there is no poetry in rape".
>
> — Sumana Roy

As you read this, a baby, girl, woman, nun, student, nanny or woman tourist may have been raped or gang raped by strangers, neighbors, cops, soldiers, priests, terrorists, teachers, relatives, friends, lover, husband or even father somewhere in India, or near your home. If this statement shocks you, the intention is to draw your attention to the recent rise and report of rape incidents in India to an alarming level. Writing resistance as a literary movement involves this type of shock to draw readers' attention to the crime against women. In particular "poets break silence, disrupt narratives, and use strategic anger to resist for change. Poetry of resistance distinguishes itself by a persuasive rhetoric that asks readers to act" (Wiseman, qtd in Stone Highway Review, n. pag. Web).

Writing resistance as a persuasive rhetoric has been in existence for long and many writers have produced various genres of literature to draw the people's attention to the existence of various social problems like war, child labour, human rights violation and so on. However,

literary works by women writers highlighting women specific problems have gained prominence since the early twentieth century. These writers represent women's problems empathically rather than being sympathetic onlookers because they believe that "… the cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality" (Barry 122) could be challenged by "… exploring the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience" (Barry 122).

Kamala Das' "My Story" and "The Old Play House" are examples of writing resistance in which she registers her protest against the society for being hypocritical and patriarchal in its treatment of women. In "The Old Play House" she looks upon her husband of an arranged Indian married life as a representative of male attitude who is

> "… pleased
> With my body's response … ."

She thus sees beyond her husband and looks at the male "… monstrous ego …" in his lust and wonders why her love should be

> "… haunted
> By its own lonely face …" (19-20)

Kamala Das accuses the society that denies equal rights of sexual pleasure to men and women. In particular, in a sexually conservative society like India, where arranged marriages involve search for brides through matrimonial columns in news papers that ask for brides who are 'good looking, slim, fair, wheatish' (*The Hindu*, September 28th, 2014), women are expected to be sexually less expressive and expectant; their primary motive should be to satisfy the sexual needs of the man than being satisfied themselves.

If the writings of Kamala Das shocked the Indian society it was because this is how she wanted to get the society's attention towards a serious problem. She wanted to prick the conscience of the society by unabashedly sharing her sex life with the public because "… female exclusion is inevitable within a male-oriented word-view, and so women should instead exploit their disruptive, anarchistic position on the margins. By refusing to be assimilated into the mainstream (male) ideology, women become subversives and saboteurs" (Tolan 336). In this sense, Kamala Das' writings have the characteristics of writing resistance.

If the institution of marriage offered Kamala Das and many other women a loveless sex life on the one side, there is a growing number of women who suffer sexual assaults on streets or at homes, on the other side. Reports of such events in news papers pass as mere statistics in course of time. The points of view or emotions of the victims are seldom reported in the papers. There are unreported sexual abuses too. Recently, however, thanks to the internet and social media networks, a small number of victims dare to write about their experiences using poetry as a platform. The poems of this paper's discussion have been written by a victim of rape-attempt and a victim of rape. Both the victims are very young women. Though these women are not Indians the problem they represent is universal as well as fast becoming an epidemic in India. Hence, their emotional reactions after the sexual violence they experienced stand as representative voices of the silent victims of sexual violence in India.

Rape is a different type of crime. It does not rob an individual of money or jewels; it does not, generally, inflict open wounds or deep cuts. Yet, the loss is irreparable and the trauma is long term. It invades the body and mind of the victim so deeply as to leave indelible negative impressions. It is used as war weapon; it is used as a revenge tool; it is used a terror tactic; it is used as a punishment in some conservative societies; it is used an adventure; it is used as gratification; it is used as displacement of lust on a weak and vulnerable subject. It is not random either. Most of the time, it targets only one gender, the female gender. A very conscientious question one may ask is "how do the victims feel after the crime?" From the lines of Alicia and Michelle's poems we can deduce the following as the feelings of victims of sexual assault:

Trauma: Psychology explains that the victims experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that refers to a mental state after accidents or violence or rape, experienced or witnessed by individuals (Lockhurst 497-506). The victims of rape or sexual abuse undergo long periods of mental trauma that includes shame, disgust, helplessness, loss of self esteem, withdrawal, suicidal tendency and even a desire for silence and forgetfulness:

> "And when he begins I think to myself it's time to meet your maker

It seems like eternity even though it was mere hour
I race to the bathroom and try to wash away the pain in the shower… ." (Michelle)

"I hid my face and closed my eyes
I sat still in panic and wondered why
Why were these things happening
Why was this doing this to me …
Whose innocence was taken in a blink of an eye
At that moment I just wanted to die… ." (Alicia)

Disbelief and shock: Sometimes the extreme stress created by the trauma may lead to a psychological condition called 'psychogenic amnesia', a motivation to forget the traumatic event (Baron 537) or a refusal to speak of the traumatic event,

"I want to scream but I cannot shout" (Michelle)

Helplessness and fear: The victims feel vulnerable and powerless after they are physically and mentally overcome by the assailants,

"Every face I saw was in his disguise
Would he come back
And attack again … ." (Alicia)

"My mom doesn't notice what he has done she doesn't even fret" (Michelle)

Double victimization: Victims are often offered lectures by various sections of the society how and how not to behave or how or how not to dress-up, while the rapists walk away with little or no punishment,

"Made me believe I was in the wrong
Made me ashamed
When he was the blame all along" (Alicia)

"I sit there feeling alone and ashamed
Knowing there's no one else to blame" (Michelle)

Loss of hope: When the loopholes of law fail to punish the rapist or when the institutions of the society and government agencies fail to protect the rape victims before and after the rape the victims lose their hope,

"He is free man that will never change." (Alicia)

"I know he will be back in a week
And to him he must feel like he is on a winning streak"
(Michelle)

The word 'rape' means the "act of forcing esp. woman or girl to have sexual intercourse unwillingly" (*Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus III* 620-621). Portrayal of rape and rape victims in Indian cinema has been frequent all these years. The victims are generally shown as committing suicide or marrying the rapist. Sense of shame and loss of chastity are reinforced in movies that portray rape. In fact, the English word 'rape' has had a Tamil equivalent as 'karpazhippu' (Oxford English-English-Tamil Dictionary 1156), meaning 'spoiling of chastity'. In recent times, however, thanks to a new consciousness, the term 'vann punarchi', meaning 'unwilling and violent intercourse', is used in all the popular discourses to mean rape. The loss of 'chastity' of a modest woman is treated in movies as shameful because the victim's body has been defiled and becomes a stigma to her family. The victim in the film is offered only two solutions: marry the rapist at any cost to save her chastity and family honour or commit suicide.

In European literature too, discussion of rape has found a place occasionally. A well known example is the classical myth about Philomela, in which she is raped by her brother in law. He also cuts her tongue so that she cannot discuss this incident with anyone. Later Philomela turns into a nightingale that sings melancholically of her plight (Birch 778). In this myth the rape victim's silence or the inability to speak of the traumatic experience is an allegorical example of the condition of many of the real life rape victims.

Literary works often deal with trauma experienced by the protagonists. Such literary works consist of "reading materials that can include Romantic poetry, psychiatric case histories, accounts of sexual abuse … ." (Lockhurst 503). Kamala Das' autobiography and her poems shocked the readers of her time because the fact that a woman could describe her sexual experiences and expectations in an unabashed manner was new to the sexually conservative India. A review of her poetry describes her style as "… confrontational style" with a "penchant for a shocking profusion of normally forbidden details as a potent new voice" (Nagarajan n.pag. Web). Kamala Das, Alicia and Michelle have

the boldness to break the silence, unlike Philomela, and expose their experiences and their tormentors' attitude to create public awareness.

Sexual violence is a global phenomenon and has gained critical attention from various stake holders across the globe. "Fight for our girls," the American First Lady Michelle Obama advises the African First Ladies in the wake of an escalation of sexual assault on girls as a political weapon in the civil war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo (*The Hindu*, August 8, 2014). In Afghanistan, rape victims are strangulated and killed by family members for safe guarding their 'honour', a common practice, than punishing the rapist (*The Hindu*, July 21, 2014).

However, the recent increase in rape incidents in India in particular not only rings alarm bells seeking the attention of the Indian society but also begs analysis of probable socio-psychological causes behind the crime. *The Times of India* reports of "I rape every 30 minutes in India" (July 26, 2014). The problem has become too serious that the Prime Minister of India acknowledged during Independence Day speech with pain that "Rapes are a big shame…" and advised people to "discipline … sons …" (*Times of India*, August 16, 2014).

The reasons for an increase in rape cases could be attributed to three important reasons: 1. The patriarchic outlook of the society where women are looked upon as subordinate to men and have the license to exploit vulnerable women 2. Unlimited exposure to Information Communication Technology (ICT), cinema and advertisements on TV where women are objectified 3. Weak and obsolete laws that are more favourable to the criminals than the victims.

Firstly, Kamala Das exposes the patriarchic attitude of the society that maintains an erotic disparity within the institution of Indian marriages which deprives many women of enjoying the status of being a beloved sex partner. Rather it reduces them to being service providers to the sexual needs of men. In her work "An Introduction", Kamala Das laments that "When I asked for love … he drew a youth of sixteen into his bedroom….He did not beat me but my sad woman-body felt so beaten" (235). Columnist Rukmini cites the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and declares that "Husbands commit a majority of acts of sexual violence in India …" (*The Hindu*, 22 October, 2014). This

disparity is a culmination of a carefully reinforced male supremacy in the Indian society that has remained indifferent towards the silent victims all through the centuries.

Secondly, looking at a woman as an object is a phenomenon that is explained by the 'Theories of Gaze', a new literary theory. Gaze or look, according to Jeremy Hawthorn is,

> "… the exchange of looks between two individuals in an interactive, two–way process…reveal things about ourselves, including things we may not wish to reveal or of which we are unaware … is informed by–and displays-the fruits of previous look … saturated with the residues of our social and cultural existence… relating to class, sexuality, economics" (508).

Gaze or look need not be literal always. There are more metaphorical ways we 'see' each others in our social life. Observing characters in novels, cinema, or TV sitcoms are not interactive but it is a cultural practice in which we play the "traditional role" of legitimate "voyeur" looking at their "fictional privacy" (Hawthorn 509). Similarly Hawthorn reminds us that the phrase "point of view" is a traditional metaphor that illustrates "our visual engagement with the world" (Hawthorn 509).

A novel or film that deals with sex as a part of the narrative may involve description or visual representation of erotic moments. These descriptions or visuals may offer "…sexual pleasure from watching a woman secretly…" to the male spectators, according to Hawthorn (511). In a sense, the male spectator becomes a "peeping Tom" (Hawthorn 511).

In particular, in movies, the cinematographer captures the body features of the heroine as 'seen' by the hero of the movie. A United Nations sponsored global study by the 'Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media' observes that "An alarming 35 per cent of female characters in Indian films are shown with some nudity" (Hindu, 30th September, 2014). The heroine's body contours and their movements are erotically manipulated as "hypersexual" (Hindu, 30th September 2014) dance movements by the choreographer. The hero, an embodiment of masculinity, dexterously handles the heroine's body in the song sequences giving a visual satisfaction to his fans who consider

him as their alter-ego. Cinema presents the adolescent and adult males opportunities to 'gaze at' beautiful women as physical forms or, in the youth lingo, a sight or figure, "… constructed as the gaze of a male subject at a female object …" (Hawthorn 513). Hawthorn also relates from Laura Mulvey's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that,

> "… pleasure in a world ordered by sexual imbalance is split between active male and the passive female; the male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure, while in the traditional exhibitionist role women are both displayed and, as it were, coded to connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness'" (qtd. 510).

Thus, the traditional practice of objectifying women dominates the male consciousness and makes them major consumers of erotic literature and movies.

Writing resistance in general and the rape poems written by Alicia and Michelle in particular are not just concerned about the objectification of women; they are worried about the serious consequences of the objectification of women. Rape is a consequence. Females, irrespective of age and relationship, become victims of rape. In Michelle's poem the rapist is none other than her step-father would be,

> "… I want to scream but I cannot shout …
> Knowing there's no one else to blame
> I know he will be back in a week….
> My mom doesn't notice what he has done she doesn't even fret.
> And when she asks if it's okay if she marries him I beg her, Not Yet."

In Tamil Nadu state in India, a father sexually assaulted his sixteen year old daughter, who was born through his first wife, repeatedly, and killed her when she became pregnant (*The Hindu*, August 8, 2014). Anthropologist Raymond Scupin says that "1 in 20 women may be victims of father-daughter sexual abuse … in contemporary societies, as the family unit has become more fragile with weaker kinship attachments, incest is likely to occur more frequently" (258). Times of India quotes the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB) and reports

that there has been a "45% rise in cases of sexual abuse of children" (July 21, 2014). Thus, these incidents reinforce the truth that "… there are no girls anymore…Everyone is a woman" (Sumana Roy, n.pag. Web). In other words, females, irrespective of age and relationship, are 'gazed upon' as sexual objects.

In India a new technological opportunity enables a large number of Indian youth to access unlimited explicit sexual content through the internet. India is home to a large number of cell phone users. India has also made use of the Information Communication Technology (ICT) too well. According to Press Information Bureau of Government of India, India is the second largest mobile phone users in the world with 900 million users who are 10 per cent of the World population (n.pag.Web). In fast urbanizing India, use of internet and cheap smart mobile phones is increasing rapidly. An article in the Hindu News paper reports that forty million smart phones sold in India last year and this could increase to 85 million this year (Choudhury, *The Hindu*, October 5th, 2014). Along with the ICT empowerment comes the easy access to pornographic videos. If the movie offers only implicit sex actions by well known actors where spectators' imagination plays a role, pornography offers a huge variety of explicit sex actions by a number of unknown actors. Unlike cinema theatres, internet cafes or personal computers or smart phones offer greater privacy for porn watching. According to statistics shared by the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Indian Parliament " There has been a 100 per cent increase in cases of publication or transmission of obscene material, including child pornography, using electronic means in just one year - 2012 to 2013" (*The Hindu*, August 7, 2014). Even government based mobile phone serve providers such as BSNL are used (not to mention the private service providers) as platform by erotic websites to entice young smart phone users with attractive captions like "Hi… 5 Hott Videos for u!!!" (n.pag. smart phone commercial short message service) to watch erotic movies.

Psychologist Baron is of the opinion that there is "a relationship between sexual arousal and aggression" (379). He also says that frequent exposure to pornography leads to "Intense arousal–especially with no prospect of immediate sexual gratification—may be irritating, and may therefore increase aggressive motivation" (380).

Pornography is defined as "…verbal or pictorial representation of sexual behavior that have a distinguishing characteristic (of)… portrayal of the role and status of the human female … as a mere sexual object to be exploited and manipulated sexually (Longino 313). In addition the actors in the pornography are mostly unknown and the "…anonymity of these characters makes each one 'Every woman', thus suggesting not only that all women are appropriate subjects for the enactment of the most bizarre and demeaning male sexual fantasies but also that this is their primary purpose" (Longino 316).

In addition to abundant availability of pornographic materials there is a "…considerable proportion of X-rated materials currently available contain scenes that mix sex with violence. In such materials, women are generally the victims and are shown being raped, tortured, or brutalized in various ways" (Baron 380). Such materials may increase aggressive sexual behaviour. More seriously, those who watch such "violent pornography", according to Baron, "…perceive crimes such as rape as being less serious, report less sympathy toward rape victims, and indicate greater acceptance of false beliefs about rape…that many women really want to be attacked" (380). This is the kind of attitude that makes Alicia a victim of rape attempt by an unknown man, of whom she is afraid,

> "Would he come back
> And attack again
> Would he wait from a distance at my every move
> Waiting for me to be alone
> Waiting for me to show him my home."

The third reason for sexual offences is the existence of weak and obsolete laws that are favourable to the criminals and unfavourable to the victims. Citing the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for 2010-2012, the former Chief Justice of India, Sethuraman has observed that "Conviction rate for all crimes against women have declined: rape, from 26.6% in 2010 to 24.2 % in 2012; molestation, from 29.7% in 2010 to 24% in 2012; eve-teasing, from 52.8% in 2010 to 36.9% in 2012" (n.pag. Web). The loopholes in the system embolden the perpetrators to take lightly of probable punishment for their crime. This situation makes women more vulnerable and easy prey.

Yet, Alicia and Michelle do not wish to remain a Philomela, as silent victims of rape. Instead they use the same information technology and poetry to place on record the perspectives of rape victims unknown to the readers. Michelle introduces herself like this,

> "Hi, I'm Michelle (it's not my real name; I don't feel safe using it). I am 13 and my mom has a boyfriend, my future step-dad. Everything was great and then he started hurting me sexually a year ago. I don't know why I posted this, I guess so I wouldn't feel so alone". (n.pag.Web)

This is a new freedom from the gender colonization through centuries, and a new step in a different direction from traditional feminism. These writers use literature as a platform and "… have used literary discourse to expose, challenge, and radically undermine cultural assumptions about gender" (Tolan 337). These new feminists also challenge the "one-way" "imperial gaze" of the male oppressors and gender colonists to insist "…how the oppressed are to be seen…" (Hawthorn 513-514). Instead they are "Returning the gaze of the oppressors…as a challenge to oppression, a claim of equality….a symbolic claim for that shared humanity denied by colonialist attitude" (Hawthorn 315).

Poems of Alicia and Michelle accuse the society of indifference to the crimes against women. Rapists are free and still gazing at the hapless women for an opportunity to attack:

> "Would he wait from a distance at my every move
> Waiting for me to be alone
> Waiting for me to show him my home" (Alicia).

Alicia returns the rapist's gaze and accuses him that she is the one,

> "Whose innocence was taken in a blink of an eye"

by him. Writers share their harrowing experiences as a return gaze against the male-dominant society to make them feel ashamed of their behaviour.

Finally, they use writing resistance like the "AIDA principle" employed in "modern marketing and advertising" (n.pag. Web) as an attempt to persuade the society at large for better behaviour towards women. AIDA is an acronym standing for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. These writers draw the 'attention' of the readers first by

thought provoking and controversial theme and style; they try to create 'interest' in the readers' mind to know more about the problem; they expect a 'desire' for positive action in the readers' mind; finally, they hope for 'action', a change of attitude or effort to stop the crime against women in the form of rape and other offences like domestic violence, honour killing, acid attack, eve-teasing and much more. Thus, these writers have set a bold precedent to other women – both victims of crimes against women and supporters of victims – by writing about sexual assault on women as a form of resistance against such crime and victimization.

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(Re)Appropriating The Womb: Nasreen's *Shodh* as a Narrative of Resistance

Samuel Missal

According to Carole Pateman (1988), Patriarchy derives its power through a hidden sexual contract that privileges male access to a woman's body. She calls this privilege the "male sex-right". This, for her, is the root of women's subordination (qtd in Tomm 212). Similarly Currie and Raoul (2010) trace the subordination of woman to the binaries of woman-body/man-mind that has its origins in Aristotle who held the view that while the function of men is to govern, that of women is to bear children. Endorsed later by Christian thinkers, Augustine in the fifth century and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth, this view was maintained even by the thinkers of the Enlightenment like Rousseau and Hegel (2- 4). Therefore Currie and Raoul opine that, "… sex was not viewed simply as a matter of differentiation between men and women: through a corresponding gender system, it became an elaborately constructed rationalization of male subordination of women, maintained in part by the claim that women lacked the capacity to reason" (4-5). Men's control of women's body especially over its reproductive capacity can hence be seen as the exercise of primal patriarchal power. Spivak's contention that the paternal order depends on the appropriation of the womb and the "effacement of the clitoris" in her analysis of "clitoridectomy" is indeed pertinent in this context (151). Feminists have therefore attempted to regain control over the female body in order to subvert patriarchy. Thus, while Shulamith Firestone decries the problems of menstruation, menopause,

pregnancy, child-birth, child-rearing etc., and links the oppression of women to the female body and suggests that women's liberation lies in gaining control over the female body through reproductive technology, Adrienne Rich celebrates the physicality of the body, which she thinks must be viewed as "a resource rather than a destiny" and proposes that women must not only control their bodies but also "touch the unity and resonance of their physicality so that they can experience a "fully human life" (see Currie & Raoul 9-12).

In this context, 'control over the body', is the key idea for liberation from male domination. One way in which this is attempted is through the development of reproductive technology as suggested by Firestone. But many feminists have pointed out that technology, especially reproductive technology has been used to reinforce male dominance (Currie and Raoul 10). For example, the use of ultrasound scans has been, more often than not, used in India for sex determination of the foetus and has a direct relation to female foeticide. Besides, as Zalewski (2000) has shown the development of reproductive technology has also raised other complex issues that further aggravate the difficulty for women in gaining control over their own body. For instance, rather than ameliorating a woman's barrenness, one may indeed have to document how much suffering a woman undergoes in order to conceive a baby through in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Similarly, she writes that while the ultrasound may have created new knowledge about the inside of a pregnant woman's body, it also reveals new knowledge about the foetus: "This has opened up new ways for those with particular authority in society (such as the medical profession and the judiciary) both to give the foetus rights and balance those rights against the rights of the mother" (135-136). The agenda for gaining control over one's body and thereby undermining and debasing patriarchy is therefore an ongoing task for feminists.

The advocacy, by the Bangladeshi feminist writer and activist, Taslima Nasreen (1962), of the idea of the "freedom of the womb", *jarayur swadhinata* (Murshid,130), that is the right of women to determine the size of their families is to be seen in this light. A predominately Muslim nation, the subordination of women in the post independent and postcolonial Bangladesh state, has been rendered acute by the Islamization of the polity, though some critics like Hashmi(1999)

argue that the blame for the subjugation of women in Bangladesh cannot be totally put at the door of Islam. Formed as a secular state in 1971, Bangladesh saw the resurgence of the religious right in 1988 when Islam was declared as the state religion. The cultural, social and political ethos of the nation was consequently influenced by the tenets of Islam which derived from the (mis) interpretation of the Koran. Though the constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women, the reality is rather different. As Rajeshwari Sunderajan has aptly noted, that in all postcolonial nations, the state which ought to safeguard the rights of its citizens has instead turned out to be the major perpetrator of injustices against them (6). In a survey of the status of women in Bangladesh, Ahmed, Sirwar and Idris (2011), quoting the World Bank report of 1990, attribute the socio-economic inequity and gender disparity in Bangladesh to the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal character of society and to the fact that throughout their lives, women are under the authority of men- under the father in childhood, the husband in youth and the son, in old age. They, therefore conclude that in a scenario where women do not have access to education and employment opportunities, there is a reduction in fertility of women and diffusion of family planning (805-806). The conflict of interests between the development initiatives for women, undertaken in Bangladesh at the behest of aid agencies and obstacles to these by the religious right for example, in the area of population control, which is supposedly not sanctioned by Islam, is a case in point (Murshid, 122; Rashiduzzaman, 1994). Hence men's control over women's body especially, in the context of their reproductive rights is a significant issue in Bangladesh. It is in this background that this paper attempts to read Taslima Nasreen's novel *Shodh* (1992 trans. 2003) and thereby to delineate how in the context of her advocacy of the "freedom of the womb", she subtly subverts and undermines the authority of patriarchy and patrilineality, consequently (re)appropriating the womb from the control of men.

Shodh (Getting Even), is Taslima's second novel. It tells the journey of Jhumur's submission/subjugation and self-effacement of identity in marriage to Haroon, the violation of her reproductive rights by her husband in her unwilling abortion and finally the re- appropriation of her womb vis-à-vis her reproductive rights by an act of covert

defiance/resistance (See Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). Marriage to Haroon, entails the transformation of Jhumur into the characteristic 'Other" and the effacement of her identity. After marriage Haroon tells her: "Your Life has changed Jhumur ...You are now Mrs Haroon Rashid. You are Hasan, Habib and Dolon's bhabi …you are the bou of the house". (*Shodh* 9). As 'bou' of the house her freedom is completely curtailed and her immediate concern is only to please her husband and his family (*Shodh* 4). This meant unquestioning obedience to the prescribed norms of behaviour expected by family and society. Her movement too is restricted. She is refused permission to take up a job or go home to her parents because they might "'… think you're not happy here'" (*Shodh*54). She realises that she is no different from Rosuni the maidservant. She was educated but both of them ultimately did the same menial tasks. In fact she imagined that Rosuni was "… the luckier one. She could lift her veil whenever she pleased. I had to keep my head covered whether I liked it or not" (*Shodh*12).) Her own analysis of her status in the household, her complete self effacement and annihilation of her identity dawns on her. Repeating Haroon's first homily, she now acknowledges its truth:

> I was no longer Jhumur, but Haroon's wife,
> Habib, Hasan and Dolon's Bhabi: a 'bou'
> to Ma and Baba. And I wondered desperately
> how I could keep some space for myself, to
> live the way I wanted, while I immersed myself
> in their happiness and sorrow and submerged
> my personality into theirs (*Shodh* 55)

In fact, Jhumur had become the characteristic "other", who was now defined in relation to her husband as wife, bhabi or bou. She lived like a "clinging vine" (*Shodh*109), a parasite who had her existence authenticated only by her husband. Besides, to protect the reputation of the house she must prove to be a good 'bou'. As her mother-in- law says, "'It's notenough to be a bou, you have to deserve the nomenclature." (*Shodh* 45). The concept of ideal 'bouhood' is of course, fraught with the subordination, subjugation and servility. Thus Haroon remarks, "The bous of the house remain unobtrusive; the more they keep themselves hidden, the better their reputation" (ibid). The veil is not enough; it is further supplemented by the women of the house being cloistered. It

is this that creates the identity of a good 'bou', their absent presence, as it were in the house. They must live unseen and unheard. They do not have a voice or a presence. They exist only as a trace in their displaced identities as daughters, wives and "bous", as gendered subalterns. Even with a university education, she undergoes the transformation from a woman of substance to one of subordination because "a docile female was what society endorsed" (*Shodh*109). Besides, while prior to marriage, she is courted by Haroon because of her beauty and brains now that she has been won over, she is merely a sexual object meant to cater to her husband's sexual drive. This is amply clearly to her after the abortion of their first child: "There was no rainbow in the sky. I had become a two-legged creature meant to keep Haroon physically satisfied. I was nothing more." (*Shodh* 96)

In the novel, the degradation of Jhumur's womanhood continues on a different front. In the first instance while her identity as an individual is effaced, in the second instance her chastity/virginity is questioned by none other than her husband. When the novel opens, Jhumur has morning sickness and is beyond a doubt, pregnant. But to her utter dismay, Haroon does not notice the tell-tale signs and hands over tablets for her to stop vomiting. However, when the doctor congratulates him for having become a proud father, Haroon refuses to accept the child as his son. After several days, Haroon takes Jhumur to another doctor to abort the baby. Numb, in an emotionless vacuum, Jhumur asks why he wants to abort and is told that he believes it is not his child in her womb since no one can conceive within six weeks of marriage. Nasreen gives us this conversation between them:

> 'You mean to say that you don't know that who has fathered this child and that I do?'
>
> 'How would I know…how can I tell whose baby you had in your womb when you stepped into our house. You were in such a hurry to get married. You gave me no time to think. Now everything has become clear'. (*Shodh*74)

In other words, Haroon believes that she had tricked him into marriage because she was already pregnant. In effect, Haroon was accusing her of being a whore and a charlatan. Therefore, he has her abort but does not divorce her because of family 'ijjat'. Jhumur now realises that through marriage, she has lost the ownership of her body

completely and finally. Her world turns upside down. Not only does she lose her dignity and self-respect in being charged with infidelity, her motherhood is also violated with an abortion without her consent.

It is this assault on her motherhood that incenses Jhumur who now plans intentionally to subvert the hegemony of her husband and his family by an act of covert resistance that also undoes the ideals of traditional womanhood as defined by the unwritten codes of Bangladeshi patriarchal society. Her desire for revenge is aided by the quirk of circumstances. A couple rents the ground floor of their house. The wife, a doctor, soon becomes their family doctor ex-gratis and a friendship grows between her and Jhumur. But Jhumur finds her brother-in-law Afzal, a painter, more interesting. In fact, she becomes sexually attracted to him and has sexual relations with him clandestinely (*Shodh*116). Just as Haroon has had her aborted in secret and exercised control over her body, she now uses her body to derail his exclusive lordship over it. Advised by Sebati that the most fertile days for pregnancy were the tenth to the sixteenth day after menstruation, she decides to "to be pregnant with Afzal" and "stay aloof from Haroon during those days" (*Shodh*147). She further adds: "I didn't want to offer Haroon a body ready to receive his sperm. I wanted him to sow his seed in fallow land and wait foolishly, day after day, to see it sprout. I didn't have any sense of guilt about it … I was merely paying him back … I had the right, hadn't I to claim something for myself in return? (Shodh 147-148) (emphasis added). In her mind thus, Jhumur plans out the complete recovery of the rights over her own body. Her determination to claim her motherhood in return and manipulate the birth of her child through a person other than her husband subverts patriarchal hegemony over the womb, undermines man's proprietary rights over woman, and undoes the concept of patrilineality.

Meanwhile, pressured by his family to have a child Haroon has intercourse with Jhumur four times a night so that he can impregnate her. In this context, Jhumur contemplates "Yes, Haroon, flood me with your ultimate sap … let your sperm run riot in my womb in its mad search for my empty, fertile ovum. It won't find them, Haroon, and you'll not know about it, you'll never find out" (emphasis in original) (*Shodh*158). Jhumur of course conceives, albeit through Afzal as she

controls Haroon's days of intercourse with her. Her pregnancy becomes her salvation. She is now pampered and treated with care and respect because her womb held the "precious scion" (*Shodh*186) of the house. Haroon is excited that he is becoming a father. When a son is born, his joy knows no bounds and he celebrates extravagantly. Jhumur, however, has her desire fulfilled. She gets even with Haroon for having accused her of infidelity. For her the child was "my way of registering a protest, of taking revenge" (*Shodh*193). Besides, the birth of the child heralds a new era in Jhumur's life. She regains the authority over her life which she had lost after marriage. She invites her college friends over and resurrects her old self and even applies for a job as a teacher without Haroon's consent. Thus Haroon's authority over her erodes. As Jhumur puts it: "It is clear to Haroon I am living life on my own terms." (*Shodh*225). Jhumur finally has the last laugh. She outwits her husband without his knowledge and frees herself of his oppressive authority. She creates a new order and lives life on her own terms. The novel ends with a characteristic feminist speak that would have come from the mouth of Taslima. Jhumur claims:

> I'm Zeenat Sultana, Jhumur, a teacher. I am not something to be flung away. I'm not a thing, something, anything to add grace to a house, to embellish a family. I am a human being who has the inner power to give to civic society…I am standing on my own feet at long last." (*Shodh* 227)

Shodh, is thus a narrative of resistance and subversion that undoes the hegemony of the patriarchal society over Jhumur and in a strategic turning around of events brings her back to the centre from her utter marginality. In addition, Jhumur's assumption of control over her body and giving birth to a child outside of marriage, contests both patriarchal and patrilineal privileges. Moreover, in having Jhumur exult in sexual desire and engage in post–marital sex, Taslima inaugurates a new episteme that has been hitherto unknown in Bangladeshi society. She takes the expression of female sexual desire beyond the silence that patriarchy prescribes. The novel is illustrative of Taslima's deconstruction of the traditions of Islamic society and the restrictions it places on its women. While Jhumur uses her womb to undermine patrilineality, she also accomplishes economic independence that

further debases the authority of Haroon, thereby redeeming herself. The (re)appropriation of the womb through the strategies of opposition, resistance and revenge as enacted by Jhumur introduces a novel and radical feminist discourse in Bangladesh. It is with reference to such a strategy adopted by Taslima that Katrak writes in her *Politics of the Female Body:*

> Women writers portray how their protagonists resist patriarchy or colonial oppression covertly from within the system rather than overt political resistance or imprisonment depicted more commonly by male postcolonial writers. Female covert resistances are undertaken with selfconsciousness and remarkable creativity that decides to take risks and confront domination selectively and strategically in the interest of self-preservation (3).

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Resisting Postcolonialism: Reading Rushdie's 'Magical Realism' from a Regional Perspective

M. Anandharaj

English studies faced a deep crisis in the 1990s due to the rise of questions relating to region, caste and gender. This paradigm shift affected the simplistic understanding of nationalism vis-à-vis colonialism or a territorial nationalism. This kind of a nationalist thrust dominated the Indian English writing and defined the anti-colonial rhetoric of our postcolonialism. The turn towards 'region' is definitely not placed in opposition to the 'nation'. However, it manages to hint at the political nationalism that foregrounds a unified political geography. Questions concerning 'region' and its specificities refuse to share such assumptions of nationalism but demand an understanding and recognition of 'cultural difference'. It is from this perspective, this paper tries to study the nature of reception of Magical Realism in the much praised postcolonialist text *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie.

Postcolonialism, though challenging the hegemony of colonizing cultures, recognizes the plurality of contacts between the colonizing and the colonized. Particularly important has been the growth of literatures produced in bilingual or multilingual mixed-race societies since the 1950s that necessitated a re-drawing and furthering of postcolonial theory. It is only from this point of view, Ganesh Devy argues that comparative literature in India is directly linked to the rise of modern Indian nationalism. In the Indian context, comparative

literature has been generally used to establish Indian nationalism. Of the various schools of comparative literature, the method of studying influence would play a significant role in the Indian context as our modern literature has undoubtedly been the outcome of colonial and Western influence.

Magical realism is an artistic genre in which realistic elements appear in an otherwise magical setting. The term was initially used by German art critic Franz Roh to describe painting which demonstrated an altered reality. Later it was used by the Venezuelan Arturo Uslar–Pietri to describe the work of certain Latin American writers. Magical realism is associated with incorporating magical or supernatural events into realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of these events. This fusion of fact and fantasy is meant to question the nature of reality as well as draw attention to the act of creation. By making the lived experience appear extra-ordinary, magical realist writers contribute to a re-envisioning of culture as vibrant and complex. According to Roh, magical realism is a form in which our real world re-emerges before our eyes, bathed in the clarity of a new day.

During the 1940s, Latin American countries sought to construct and express a consciousness distinct from that of Europe. As an important exponent of magical realism, the Latin American novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez shows an awareness for the need of a new mode of writing to reflect the new reality and, at the same time, to acknowledge the inseparability of Latin American history with that of Europe and the rest of the world. He is of the opinion that the realities of Latin America are different from those of Europe, lived and experienced differently and represented differently by its writers. As Catherine Belsey notes, the way in which the narrative is constructed is a key element to the construction of 20th century realism. This new approach to literary realism is central to magical realism as it represents the real and imagined together (or magical elements) as the real. The key to understanding magical realist texts is to understand the way in which the narrative is constructed in order to provide a realistic context for the magical events of the fiction.

Though one cannot say that magical realism is specifically Latin American, the fame of Latin American magical realism has encouraged adoption of this form of writing globally. Generally, a historical context

is either direct or hidden in a magical realist text. Magical realist writers came to be recognized in India, Canada, Africa, and the US for their aesthetic-political overtones. In Indian writing in English, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh have tried to write magical realism by interpreting its essence for a postcolonial view of reality. It is true that certain locations and countries have become associated with producing magical realist writing. In general it has been noted that magical realist fictions are often set in rural areas. The Colombian novelist Marquez sets the majority of his novels in a fictional town called Macondo on the isolated Caribbean coast of Colombia. The African American novelist Toni Morrison also sets the magical realist events in rural areas and small townships. But some politically motivated writers have set their magical realist fictions in large cities that are under political and social tensions. Knowing this, Salman Rushdie sets his fictions in some of the world's largest urban areas such as London, Bombay or New York. We can also see that much magical realism has originated in many of the postcolonial countries that are battling against the influence of their previous colonial rulers. This kind of postcolonial frame work in writing magical realist fiction is applicable both to Latin America and India.

This paper attempts a re-reading of Salman Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children* in the light of the reception of magical realism. This reading is located within the specific context of the debate raised regarding Rushdie's dismissive remarks about Indian regional literatures in 2002. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is known for its brilliant use of magical realism, through the use of which it has attained the status of a perfect postcolonial text. But, Rushdie's use of magical realism, seen from a postcolonial point of view, appears mechanical; for, the *Midnight's Children* seems to promote only a territory-bound political nationalism, ignoring the cultural diversity of India. This kind of a political nationalism is alien to the magical realist writing of Latin America that gives importance to a cultural nationalism. A reading of *Midnight's Children* from this perspective is taken up in this paper to reveal the colonial assumptions of Salman Rushdie.

Salman Rushdie, the British Indian novelist and essayist, became famous after his second novel *The Midnight's Children* which won the Booker Prize when published in 1981. His early writings provide a serious critique of Indian political culture. His style is popularly

identified with 'magical realism' and his writings deal with the issue of split identity and the conflict of the displaced immigrant or exile. As a novelist from a country with a colonial legacy, the idea of 'nation' has always been the central concern in his fictional and non-fictional writing. The postcolonial conception of a 'nation' differs from the general notion of nation referring to 'same people living in the same place'. Since Indians are different people living in the same place, India remains pluralistic in its languages and cultures with different histories of communities. With magical realism, postcolonial writers are able to challenge realistic narrative and present an alternative reality. According to Linda Hutcheon, the postmodern technique of magical realism is linked to postcolonialism in that they both deal with the oppressive force of colonial history in relation to the past.

Midnight's Children recounts the history of India's transition from British colonialism to independence. The story is expressed through various characters endowed with magical powers and is located within history. The novel is an allegory of India before and after the independence and partition which took place at midnight of August 15, 1947. The narrator of the story is Saleem Sinai with an enormous nose and strange magical powers like telepathy. The novel is divided into three books. The novel tells the story of Saleem's family and the events that lead up to India's independence and partition. The narrator Saleem Sinai is born at midnight on August 15, 1947. He discovers that all the children born in India between 12 A.M and 1 A.M on the same day are having special powers. Saleem tries to use these powers to convene those others born at about the same time as he himself was. The convention, or midnight children's conference, is reflective of the issues India faced in its early statehood regarding the cultural, religious, linguistic and political differences faced by such a vastly diverse nation. With his special powers of telepathy, Saleem tries to bring hundreds of geographically disparate children into contact and in this attempt he also explores the meaning of their gifts. Saleem discovers that those children born closest to the stroke of midnight are more gifted and wield greater power than the others. Shiva and Parvati (the latter is called 'Parvati-the-witch') are two of these children with notable gifts and roles in Saleem's story. Meanwhile, his family ventures into a number of migrations and endures the numerous wars which plague

the subcontinent. During this period, he also suffers amnesia until he enters a quasi-mythological exile in the jungle of Sundarban, where he is re-endowed with his memory. In doing so, he manages to connect with his childhood friends. Saleem then gets involved with the Indira Gandhi-proclaimed emergency and her son Sanjay Gandhi's 'cleansing' of the Jama Masjid slum. For a time, Saleem is imprisoned. The Emergency signals the end of the potency of the midnight's children. After that, he can only pick up the few pieces of life he may still find and write the chronicle that encompasses both his personal history and that of his young nation. It is a chronicle written for his son who is both chained and supernaturally endowed by history much like himself.

Seen from the postcolonial/regional point of view, the novel seems to foreground a territory-bound political nationalism by its thrust on the Indian political history, and through its use of canonical cultural texts like *Arabian Nights*. Thus, in *Midnight's Children*, magical realism remains only a device, used to try to bind the Indian political past and political present. Rushdie's principal use of magical realism in the text involves the telepathic abilities of Saleem and the other 1001 children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947—the abilities that enable them to read the minds of those around them. In a magical realist text, we can see a conflict between two oppositional systems taking place and each of them works toward the creation of a fictional world from the other. These two are the world of fantasy and the world of reality and they can be seen to exist simultaneously and compete for the reader's attention. In this novel, the voice of the realistic is heard through the fantastic. The 1001 children point not only towards the fantasy of the similarly numbered *Arabian Nights*, but also to Rushdie's calculation of the Indian birth rate. Further, Rushdie's comments enable the gift of telepathy to be perceived as a magical signifier of the objective reality of contemporary Indian society which makes its impression on the individual psyche. Rushdie uses the magical realist elements like the merging of the real and fantastic, the distortion of time, and the incorporation of myth (or legends and folklore), only to invoke a political nationalism. Since the characters are not located within any region, they carry only a national identity, endorsing and questioning the binaries East-West or Indian-Pakistani. Hence Rushdie's use of magical realism merely remains a literary tool.

In this novel, the mingling of the fantastic and ordinary, which is an aspect of magical realism, seems Indian as the characters involved in contemporary political and social upheavals also possess the power of mythic heroes. In the beginning of the novel, there is a fine passage as an example for this mingling of the real and fantastic:

> One Kashmiri morning in the early spring of 1915, my grandfather Adam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray. Three drops of blood plopped out of his left nostril, hardened instantly in the brittle air and lay before his eyes on the prayer-mat, transformed into rubies. (4)

We see another character Mian Abdullah, a political figure before independence resisting partition along religious lines, has the strange trait of humming without a pause. The modulations of his humming cause certain corresponding effects upon those near him. This strangely colours the incidents that are connected with him. In an attempt on his life once, one of the killers got his eyes crack and fall out. Earlier the glass windows of the room had fallen due to the humming of Mian Abdullah (58). Later in the novel, Saleem's mother Amina is seen to dread delivering a child with a cauliflower in its head instead of brain (461). We also come across another strange washerwoman Durga whose breasts are colossal and inexhaustible with a torrent of milk (622). Such incidents in the novel give a kind of dream-like quality.

Identity – national and personal – is Rushdie's subject. Saleem and the new state of India are symbolic counterparts. Both are born at midnight on August 15, 1947 along with other 1001 children. After the loss of one power, Saleem gains another, for his gigantic and remarkable nose becomes capable of scent distinction far beyond normal. He gains the ability to smell emotions and intentions. From these ideas origin a fantasy which is so complex that a summary is difficult to make. The novel remains a continuous and subtle investigation of the relations between order, reality and fantasy. The narrator Saleem constantly relates his life to India's. His birth, growth, development and destruction are India's and importantly, his central character-trait has been a failure to realise what direction things are happening. The characters seem to wander through the pages of history, colliding with important moments

in the development of India seemingly by accident. Thus, Saleem's grandfather is on his knees after a mighty sneeze when Brigadier Dyer's fifty machine-gunners open fire in the Amritsar massacre of 1919; it is Saleem's father who buys one of Methwold's villas; Saleem is born at the moment India is; and almost all of the major events of his life, leading finally to the destruction of the children of midnight and India at the moment of declaration of Emergency are coincidental to developments in the new country. Saleem and India must deal with genealogical confusion as they struggle to construct their identities.

The loss of reference to the identity of the characters in the novel is clearly understood when Saleem's grandfather finds it difficult in identifying himself after 1947 due to the fight between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. The 'crack' in the body politic corresponds to all the 'cracks' in Saleem, as he feels himself going to pieces. This conversion of metaphors into events is another type of magic in the novel. When Saleem informs his family of his special gift of hearing voices, his father hits him in the ear. His 'stupid cracks' are literally reduced into physical cracks. The referentiality of the empirical is subtly confounded by mixing up that which is non-empirical. Thus, in this novel, magical realism is a way of showing 'reality' more truly with the aid of various magic of metaphor. Quite naturally, this novel significantly shaped the course of Indian writing in English after its publication.

Rushdie looks like a story-teller who tries to return the English language to the tradition of magical realism which has a history from Cervantes through Sterne to Milan Kundera and Marquez. But the environment that Rushdie constructs looks more like a territory-bound nationalism and not a culture-bound nationalism. This is the failure of Rushdie in his novel when he tries to write a magical realist text. Due to the switching of babies, a Hindu child Saleem happens to be raised by a wealthy Muslim family. The impact of the Hindi films is another important factor that comes to establish Rushdie's interest in the political nationalism. Throughout the story, fabulous incidents are presented and Rushdie tries to establish an authoritative understanding of a wildly heterogeneous Indian reality by allowing Saleem to converse with other 'midnight's children'. The very focus on

the political independence is another important factor by which the novel assumes political nationalism, thereby remains a challenge to the colonial dominance. Although autobiographical in mode, the novel makes use of the fantastic too. It may be because Rushdie thinks that the (*political*) history of India cannot be seen in realistic terms.

Since *Midnight's Children* is unquestionably regarded as a perfect postcolonial text, we need to see whether postcolonialism itself operates within this territory-bound political nationalism. If postcolonial literature is understood in terms of the binary, the colonizer versus colonized, then Rushdie's narrative fits in that model. But the recent developments in the idea of nation – both theoretical and literary – question this idea of nation citing the rise of regional identities and marginal communities. Translation plays a major role in it. If Rushdie could not see the sense of aesthetic in the regional literature, then he merely discloses his own limited vision of the political nationalism. This vision involves issues of decolonization and the independence of people who were put under colonial rule. Since postcolonialism remains part of English Studies, critics who focus on colonialism also unquestionably endorse the view of Rushdie as a perfect postcolonial writer. Protagonists or narrators in postcolonial writings are often found to be pressed with the questions of identity, conflicts of living between two worlds and the forces of new cultures. Postcolonial writings take place through the process of re-writing and re-reading the past. Now the questions that emerge here are 'whose nation' and 'whose past' in the postcolonial era. The translation revolution initiated in the 90's raised such questions. It is within these ideas of nation that Rushdie also operates and *Midnight's Children* presents the narrative within the colonial/national landscape.

In this context, it is important to see Benedict Anderson's brilliant study of nation in his *Imaginary Communities* to show how postcolonial critics theoretically appropriate his idea but endorse the same colonial notion of a territory-bound nation. However, to claim to be representative of that entire identity is a huge undertaking for an author trying to convey a postcolonial message. Each nation, province, island, state, neighborhood and individual is its own unique amalgamation of history, culture, language and tradition. Only by understanding and embracing the idea of cultural hybridity, when attempting to explore

the concept of national identity, can any one individual, or nation, truly hope to understand or communicate the lasting effects of the colonial process. Postcolonialism is the continual shedding of the old skin of Western thought and discourse and the emergence of new self-awareness, critique, and celebration. With this self-awareness comes self-expression. But how should the inhabitants of an erstwhile colony see themselves, once they have achieved their independence? With whom will they identify? In a country like India, prior to 1947, most people identified themselves as Indians, against the identity of their British oppressors. Theirs was a strong feeling of communal, national identity, developed by a shared resentment of the British colonial powers. However, after 1947, after being granted autonomy, India's populace slowly disintegrated into more and more divided factions and the 'national' identity began to shrink. People tried to find other closer groups to identify with. The ambiguous and shifting nature of national identity is thus integral to a discussion of postcolonial theory because identification with one group inevitably leads to differentiation with others. We can compare this with Anderson's views on 'nation'. In his definitive book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson says, "In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (?).

Such an understanding of 'nation' (essentially a colonial construct) will help us identify the nature of political nationalism and its power to exclude regional identities. It is because Rushdie shares this political nationalism that his narrative remains with the issues of partition and so on. This shows that he merely appropriates magical realism for achieving this narrow anti-colonial rhetoric. This raises the following questions: How does a postcolonial author, playwright or poet provide a reader with a true representation of a particular postcolonial condition? Who does the author claim to represent? If an author is Indian in origin, does his writing represent the state of affairs for all Indians living in postcolonial India? It may not be possible. The quality of life and historical circumstances vary too widely from region to region, town to town, and, ultimately, from individual to individual. The question remains then: is there a way for postcolonial authors to convey their respective messages about the colonial condition without

assuming a definitive 'voice', without presuming that they speak for all members of their respective 'nation'?

The same question if posed to Salman Rushdie, we get his limited vision of political nationalism through his remarks on Indian regional literature. Rushdie wants his *Midnight's Children* to question the colonial paradigms so that the constructed 'other' may give India and some such colonized countries a decolonized identity. But the nation/nationalism created by Rushdie in the novel stands within the limits of the maps drawn by the colonizers while narrating the happenings in the novel. The opening sentence in the novel reads like this: Saleem tells, "I was born in the city of Bombay … once upon a time" (3). The initial part of the statement gives a picture of social realism during the time of 19th century and the later part reflects the traditional fairy tale to indicate the forthcoming fantasy. Saleem is in need of these two techniques to achieve his purpose of creating a significant identity in an anarchic world. Rushdie's view of the "unchanging two-ness of things, the duality of up against down, good against evil" finds itself echoed in duality obvious in 'magical realism' (?). The search for the whole in Saleem can be acknowledged as finding what will make up his identity which is the central concern in postcolonialism. We are able to understand that the author is trying to make us understand that his subject is identity, both national and personal. Saleem's magical realist physical fracturing is also a critique of the colonial predicament of identity fragmentation which results from the contamination of foreign culture in the native's corpus. As we have already seen, Saleem continuously links his life to that of the country. Saleem tries to understand his country's colonial past, makes sense out of its independent present and also tries to come to terms with his (and India's) postcolonial identity. But till the end of the novel, Saleem is not shown any way by Rushdie to discover his identity either on the basis of his religion or land area.

Here we have to note that Rushdie, like Saleem, is also a product of postcolonial India. He was born in Bombay in 1947 just two months before India's independence and he spent his youth in India. His teenage years were spent between England and India. This shift between his homeland and England may be the reason for his heavily Anglicized tone of his literature. Yet his literature is trying to discuss the themes of identity that break down colonial constructs of Western

dominance over Eastern culture. With this, he tries to establish himself as a prominent Anglo-Indian postcolonial writer without answering any above said issues in connection with postcolonialism.

The chance to stand against the colonial models lies beyond the novel's magical realist strategy to upturn the usual realism. As a political position, postcoloniality provides the needed space for resisting the Western realism. The metaphors and allegories in which the novel is steeped facilitate a politicized resistance against western paradigmatic inconsistencies like its historical discourse of orders which is not only false but also derogatory from a postcolonial perspective. For example, the strange connection between Saleem and India not only metaphorizes Saleem's life as a microcosm of the nation but also sees it as an alternative to the grand narrative in which the history of India is written by its Western conquerors.

If postcolonial literature can be identified by its discussion of cultural identity, then there comes the question: what kind of identity does Salman Rushdie present in his novel *Midnight's Children*? In other words, whether *Midnight's Children* discusses the change that has taken place, or questions the current change? His magical realism looks like an adopted technique as it does not represent the regional aspects and it operates only in the territory bound European notion of 'nation'. As a result, the novel seems to preserve the colonial assumptions when we look at it from the context of regional identities.

Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo felt that every language has a separate history and special link to the world; language only carries the ethical and aesthetic values regarding the culture of people. If writers try to see the world through the mirrors of colonization, such writers will stand away from the consciousness of their community. We have to note that, after 1980, Ngugi started writing in his mother tongue 'Gikiyu', which is really a bold decision. But in an interview with Dave Weich what Rushdie says about regional writing is different. In the following piece of his conversation with Dave Weich, he voices against regional literature:

> Dave: In an essay written on the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence you argued that the bulk of good Indian literature since Partition has been written in

> English. Has your opinion about that changed in the last five years? Do you see signs of change? Or do you think the vernacular literature is necessarily more parochial than Indian literature written in English?
> Rushdie: I got really beaten up for writing that article because it's not supposed to be true. It's one of those things: one's not allowed to admit that it's true in India. It's politically incorrect. Particularly in that there's quite a lot of envy aimed at writers in English because they make more money, they get published around the world, et cetera. Even leaving aside the Indian writers living in the rest of the world, the fact is that the novel-reading class in India has all been educated in English and they all speak English well. It means that Indian writers in English escape the trap of regionalism inside India. Whereas a Bengali writer has difficulty being read in South India unless the work has been translated, and not so [sic] well probably, an English language writer from Bengal can be read everywhere.

Further, Rushdie has accepted English as the best creative medium against local languages. On his use of English he says, "I don't think it is always necessary to take up the anti-colonial – or is it postcolonial – cudgels against English." From such sweeping statements of Rushdie it is evident that he is not interested in the issues related to the diversity of the nation in terms of language and culture.

There is a general tendency of considering Indian writing in English as superior to the literary production in the various other languages of India. Rushdie shares this view of the superiority of English language over the regional languages of India. Contrary to many regional writers in India like Asokamitran, Dilip Chitre, Rajendra Yadav and Gurdayal Sigh, Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul have very big claims about their role in decolonizing Indian literature by writing in English language. This raises the question regarding how can writing in English help decolonize Indian literature?

Rushdie tries to subvert Western colonial constructs of identity and culture by merely employing specific postcolonial literary techniques

such as fragmentation, plurality and language along with magical realism. *Midnight's Children* can be considered such an attempt of Rushdie to recapture India. But that is not achieved in the novel. From this perspective, we can come to the conclusion that Salman Rushdie has used magical realism in *Midnight's Children* merely for literary excellence and his postcolonial discourse appears to be unrewarding from the regional point of view.

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Voices of Resistance in Subaltern Autogynographies: A Study of Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs.*

P. Gandhimathi

Autobiography has emerged as a prominent genre of literature which has been highly contested from different areas of studies. Upsurge of autobiography along with modernism, post modernism, deconstruction, feminism, humanism, psychoanalysis, post colonialism, etc. has become a perfect cocktail which has intoxicated our conscious as well as our unconscious selves. When post modernism and deconstruction problematized every aspect of the world order, the problematization proved beneficial for autobiography. The highly masculine and bigoted genre of autobiography had to yield itself to the pressure and open up its doors to the under privileged, marginalized, weak and feminine sections of the society. Different varieties of autobiography with a multitude of specialties emerged. Jacques Derrida in his famous *On Grammatology* has problematized the concept of a unified autobiographical 'I'/subject. Derrida proved that it is impossible to have a unified autobiographical 'I' because, when the life and the autobiography of that life become identical, and when the status of the empirical facts of the author's life are questioned, naturally the autobiography is also 'restructured' and 'redistributed'. These problematizations of the genre resulted in the ramification of our hegemonic comprehension of the autobiographical space. Hence the autobiographical 'I' from a political perspective has an extended reality as it transgresses the small realm of personal 'I' and enters the public

space. The renewed enquiry into the problem resulted with an outcome of a much more substantial replacement of the word 'universal' with 'difference'. Identification and celebration of the difference has become the prime motive of the present world generations in every possible way. Difference is not just confined to sexual difference alone but there is 'pluralization of difference' across race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Hence, autobiography befitted itself as the best suited genre to project, beseech and celebrate the differences of the marginalized identities. Post-modernism and deconstruction should be accredited for the upsurge of autobiographies of the marginalized.

Autobiography has become a soft political weapon of the marginalized subjects. The sovereignty of autobiography has spread to incredible proportions. It has become a magnum opus of vital issues. The trajectory of women's autobiographies along these lines of change is very significant. The women autobiographers command their narratives as rhetoric of resistance that can induce some sort of a socio-political struggle and change. These autobiographies are also emancipation narratives that bear witness to reality. It also used to negotiate gender-role expectations, parenthood, interpersonal relationships and interactions with the dominant class, caste and gender. Resistance autobiography is negotiated as a tool for political intervention in order to educate the reading public and thereby initiate a positive change. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith in their book *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (2004) have claimed that,

> The stories they tell can intervene in the public sphere, contesting social norms, exposing the fictions of official history, and prompting resistance beyond the provenance of the story written and beyond the borders of the nation-in relation to the communities affected as well as the institution and discourses of history, religion, ethics, aesthetics, politics, and the law. (4)

India is a country deeply and widely divided on several planes of religion, language, community, caste and creed. With the emergence of post-colonialism, the genre of autobiography in India underwent a tornado of conversions. Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" promulgated the theory of subalternity. The subaltern is one who has neither position nor sovereignty outside the discourse that constructs

him/her as a subject. Previously, there was somebody else who was speaking for the subaltern. The problematizations of the present century made it imperative that only a subaltern could speak about his/her bitter experiences in full measure. Proxy representations were precluded as irrelevant. Subaltern Autobiography became the most popular medium for reflecting their subalternity. The emergence of Dalit Autobiography ignited much anxiety, sympathy and shock in the Indian literary scenario.

> Within Dalit literature, Autobiography as a literary and cultural expression has created a praxis, which has challenged existing literary structures through their articulation of cultural and caste discrimination, it focuses on the question of otherness, difference, marginality, canon and the categories of aesthetics." (Sathe, 26)

Dalit autobiography queries the hegemonic structure of the caste system. These autobiographies are canvases that agonizingly depict the humiliation suffered by the dalits which Cornel calls 'ontological wounding'. Dalit autobiographies are called testimonial autobiographies as they testify the appalling and humiliating human rights abuses, violence, war and social oppression. It is an inexorable doom for every Dalit in the country. Dalit autobiographies should be esteemed and recognized for expressing the excruciating pain the marginalized subjects endure in recreating their lives.

Dalit women's autobiographies are even more sensitive and complex as they undergo double subalternity, primarily for being a Dalit and secondarily, for being a woman. A Dalit woman autobiographer has to crusade against the hegemony of caste as well as gender which manifests itself as Dalit patriarchal norms in addition to several other patriarchies. Dalit women epitomize the comprehensive meaning of the word 'margin'. The present century has started validating the marginalized voices as the premier ones that could expound the truth about our reality and the hypocrisies associated with our structured realities. Dalit women's autobiographies have become defining epistemological stand points of our reinterpretation of our old world order. Dalit women's autobiographies have become a weapon of resistance to reimburse the deep delved agony, violence and humiliation endured by the women during these centuries.

Urmila Pawar was born in 1945 in a small Konkan fishing village in Maharashtra where the menfolk went out fishing and the womenfolk resorted to weaving bamboo baskets. Marriage in 1976 to Mr. Harishchandra avalanched the turn of events in her life. She moved to Bombay and became acquainted with traces of feminist activism. She pursued education which catalyzed the process of her self-realization. She started her literary career as a short story writer and the English translation of her autobiography *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* was published in 2009. In an interview, she reflected that she resorted to the autobiographical mode to express herself and reach out of her mind. It was her basic instinct.

She has strongly emerged as the voice of the Dalits and in particular, Dalit women. It is a very tough identity which Urmila carries but she dons it as her responsibility and also as her activistic agenda. Her autobiography is an expression of her subalternity and her resistance against ongoing class, caste and gender oppression in India. India is a country that trains its daughters to be silent. 'Silence' is celebrated as a feminine virtue. When women, especially subaltern women make an attempt to voice their minds, they are categorized as 'controversial', the first step in systematically silencing their narratives. India is still alarmed by its women writing their lives. Hence more and more women are resorting to autobiographical writing as a sign of resistance against patriarchal dogmas. Such autobiographies are categorized as resistance autobiographies. This movement falls in line with the civil disobedience movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. At present, the subaltern women's voices have become an ever prevalent and inevitable force to reckon with through their autobiographies. Urmila's autobiography not only gave her a voice but also the coveted LaxmiBai award. Urmila strongly felt that her autobiography should not just be a testimony of Dalit life but should also be a weapon of resistance. She authentically weaves together the cultural, social and familial life of Dalits. Her autobiography is a document of their food styles, games, music, songs, marriages and the aberrations in her family and community. She also exposes the prevalence of the caste system and its gruesome impact on the marginalized society.

Urmila's voice of resistance is very powerful. She is a strong and a fiery woman who uses a candid and a witty tone to make her narrative

interesting. She does not cry, plead or beg for recognition instead she humorously writes about the multiple subalternities that she has to endure. She has the courage to laugh aside the long evolved patriarchal caste and gender dogmas. In the process, she breaks many of the chauvinistic and hypocritical rules of autobiographical writing as well.

Urmila through her autobiography tries to express her resistance against the oppression of the society and on the other hand, as a responsible citizen of the state, she attempts to reiterate the need for a new society with great ideals. She stresses the need to educate girl children because she identifies education as a remedy for the many suppressions suffered. She narrates the life of three generation of women in her family with focus on the problem of dowry, marriage system, women's reproduction system, sanitation needs of women in villages, etc. Urmila pursued her education, profession and her writing after marriage. Inspite of all her work, she had to fulfill her traditional role as an Indian housewife. Often the Indian marriage system is a deterrent to the development of women by forcing an interminable stress on its women folk and according to Urmila, several Indians do not understand and credit the fact that women have a life beyond their homes. Urmila's siblings, husband and her children turn antagonists towards her for trying to establish her identity outside the family. She declares that she was able to pen her autobiography only after the death of her husband.

Urmila also writes about the utter poverty that their family had to undergo. Her widowed mother made ends meet by weaving baskets. Urmila experienced poverty in all its facets: food, clothes, house, respect, recognition, representation, voice and even identity. A poor Dalit is a nobody in caste-driven India: We were aware, without anybody telling us, that we were born in a particular caste and in poverty, and that we had to live accordingly (Pawar, 93).

Urmila uses weaving as the main metaphor of her autobiography. She feels that the act of her mother weaving the basket is similar to her weaving the autobiography. Weaving is also the profession of the marginalized who are in dire economic need. It also reflects the manner in which class, caste and gender are entangled in India. Bamboo which has a very hard stem is chiefly used for weaving. But it can be manipulated into different shapes only when cut young and tender. Similarly Indian

women are also caught young and manipulated into different roles right from their tender age. In the process of domestication, they lose their originality and all that is expressed is only the shapes into which they have been modeled accordingly. Urmila believes that words have an impact on the reader's mind and resistance autobiography can help in social reformation by encouraging humanism and by establishing a progressive set of values.

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Hieroglyphics of Trauma and Violence: Witnessing Terror in Post-Mullivaikkal Srilankan Tamil Poetry

M. Kamalakkannan

I sing with a griever's voice,
my people, for all your heroes,
….
To me this life is like
a rampart in front of emptiness. (Hernandez 322)

"No event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest" (Freud). Though written in 1915 about the First World War, the above statement has relevance even today. History has repeatedly proved that man is capable of committing unspeakable atrocities against fellow men in the name of race, religion, caste and language: the Jewish Holocaust, the Vietnam War and the Bosnian war are some of the prominent historical events attesting to this. Apart from these, the American Civil war, and the case of Apartheid Africa also need to be mentioned. Tragic stories of Indian Partition are another instance for terror instigated by fanaticism of mankind on fellow man. The massacre of Tamils in Srilanka in the name of war is the most recent occurrence which has proved the inhumanity of mankind. Whatever may be the causes of war and whatever may be its political results, it affects the common man the most. A few scenes from war-torn zone of Srilanka would make it clear:

Scene 1: A mother devastated by a shell, having lost one of her breasts and gravely wounded and bleeding, tries to feed her infant child with her remaining breast and slowly, life departs from her.

Scene 2: A large tree with a very huge trunk. Men and women aged between 20 and 50 are tied to the trunk of the tree with a barbed wire. Uniformed soldiers with guns are aiming at these helpless creatures. A little away little children with terror in their eyes wait for the disaster.

Scene 3: A young and beautiful girl who was an anchor for many Television programs was found dead and her body was mutilated and in a decomposed condition.

Scene 4: An old man repeatedly denies that the dead body shown to him, by the soldiers, is his son's. He suppresses his agony and anger and later breaks down in front of his family members.

These heartrending scenes are found in the literary representations[1] of the Tamils during and after the war for separate Eelam in Srilanka; and it is needless to state that the victims are Srilankan Tamils. The pathetic aspect of these incidents is that though the above scenes are from short stories all of them are based on real life incidents. Further, when one sees the photographs uploaded in the sites such as *warwithoutwitness.com* and *channel4*, one is inclined to conclude that all these literary representations are not mere exaggerations but testimonies from the witnesses and victims. On 18 May 2009, the Srilankan government declared that the war has come to an end after the brutal murder of Velupillai Prabakaran, the leader of LTTE. Though war has ended, the atrocities of the army continue in rooting out the Tamils of Srilanka. In the name of hunting down the members of LTTE, the army commits unspeakable war related crimes that have left the Tamils of Srilanka in a state of trauma.

Though it is simple to state that trauma is a kind of emotional shock caused by sudden unpleasant events, Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith and Jeanne Seagal explain trauma and its causes in detail in the article "Emotional and Psychological Trauma: Symptoms, Treatment, and Recovery":

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world. Traumatic experiences

often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm. It's not the objective facts that determine whether an event is traumatic, but your *subjective emotional experience* of the event. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized.[3] (Robinson et al.)

In the same article while explaining the causes of emotional and psychological trauma, they list down a few points of which the three are crucially important: "someone is intentionally cruel; it[the traumatic event] happened repeatedly; you felt powerless to prevent it" (Robinson et al).It is apparent that the brutalities committed to the Tamils are intentional; and these brutalities are committed repeatedly to them; and very obviously the Tamils are not in the condition to prevent them. The present conditions that prevail in Srilanka, especially for the Tamils, makes one conclude that trauma is not just a pathological condition which can be cured by medical treatment. Instead, "Trauma… presents a unique set of challenges to understanding. Further, because traumatic events often happen *due to* social forces as well as *in* the social world, trauma has an inherently political, historical, and ethical dimension" (Marder 1).

It is apparent that the traumatic condition of life of Tamils after the Mullivaikkal massacre has a deep historical, political, social and ethical dimension. The misery of Tamils in Srilanka has made the Tamils from Srilanka and Srilankan Tamil Diaspora to react in various ways. One such reaction is the anthology of poems entitled *Mullivaikkalukkup Pin.* This anthology has poems by twenty nine poets who have witnessed the trauma and terror in Srilanka after the declaration of the end of the war. Their poems have realistic pictures of powerful images which illustrate the cruelty perpetrated on the Tamils by the Srilankan army. Though all these poems talk about the agony of the common man amidst the present precarious conditions of life in Srilanka, almost all the poems talk about the physical violence perpetrated on Tamils in a cruel manner by the Srilankan army. These are not mere artistic literary pieces. They are written either by the victims or friends or relatives of the victims or the witnesses who endured such traumatic visuals. Therefore, these poems should be treated as testimonies of political violence.

While introducing his book *Testimonies after Catastrophe: Narrating the Traumas of Political Violence* Stevan Weine states that the testimonies his book deals with are

> personal, truthful, and ethical. Personal: each testimony is a survivor's account of the events of political violence that they themselves have endured or witnessed. Truthful: the testimony consists of what the survivor believes is true; if they know that they are lying, then it is not testimony. Ethical: the testimony is linked with an obligation to redress the injustices of political violence. (xiii)

These poems in the book *Mullivaikkalukkup Pin* also are of same nature: they are also personal, truthful, and ethical. Rather than reading these poems as literary pieces, if one approaches these poems as one would approach testimonies of witnesses or survivors of political violence, these poems would be more meaningful and these poems' real purpose would be fulfilled.

Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* argues:

> To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered. (9)

Herman's argument is just a wishful thinking when it comes to the case of the Srilankan Tamils because there are no political movements which are helping to take their issue to larger social contexts and get the justice they deserve. In the absence of any such political movements, literature to some extent attempts to fulfill the lacuna by representing their woes to the wider public. The poetry collection *Mullivaikkalukkup Pin* is one such small attempt to reveal the trauma of the Srilankan Tamils to a wider public. In these poems one can find hieroglyphics of violence and terror which represent the traumatic state of their lives. Though hieroglyphics primarily denote the visual imagery, the most powerful images in this anthology intersect with the imagery of tactile kind to convey the trauma induced by terror, fear and violence.

The following poem by Kavitha entitled "Our Poetry" not only encompasses the agony and pain of the Tamils in Srilanka but also gives the hint of the essence of the poems in the collection *Mullivaikkalukkup Pin:*

> This is not a poem that wears
> Flowers and dew drops
> It comes from a hell where walking straight
> Is forgotten days ago
> Having becoming deaf due to bomb blasts
> It does not know music and rhythm
> It comes to you
> As a scream of a speech-impaired who has lost his language

This poem has escaped from the killing field that has blinded, maimed a society

> …
> It comes drenched with the blood that was shed in the war field
> …(MP[2] 37-38)

This poem simply but powerfully summarizes the traumatic state of the victims as well as witnesses. The line "it comes from a hell where walking straight is forgotten days ago" indicates the inhuman treatment perpetrated on the Tamils who are not just bodily injured but they are mentally terribly hurt due to the loss of their self-esteem and their identities. The poem "drenched with the blood that was shed in the war field" indicates the cruelty and it is needless to say that it is the blood of the Tamils. This is the traumatic state in which the Tamils live in Srilanka after 18 May 2009. While war has taken the lives of people, the post war condition is much worse because every common man who is a Tamil has to live in everlasting fear and anxiety. This state is more traumatic, cruel and horrible than death itself.

Ilaya Abdullah's poem entitled "Living with Corpses" is a poem which depicts the series of deaths and the cruel acts of the army men. He writes:

> After repeated intercourse with
> The crushed out woman's body

> He plants a bomb, into her vagina, that explodes
> Another man hangs in a rope the body of a child he cut in to pieces (MP 17).

In these lines one has to notice that the speaker is not talking about rape and murder. The poem very clearly states that the "intercourse" has taken place with the "woman's body". This violent image has the implication of necrophilia which gives a hint of innumerable inhuman perversions that are committed on the Tamils by the Srilankan army. The next line tells how a child's body is cut in to pieces and hung in a rope. This line implies that it is a kind of torture to the parents of the child because the child is cannot and does not pose any apparent danger to the army. More than perversion, it is mainly to torture the parents who are suspected as LTTE members. This reminds the reader of the novel *The Feast of the Goat* by Mario Vargas Llosa where one of the assassins of the dictator Trujillo was tortured and at last served with flesh of his own son. The assassin dies of heart attack after seeing the dismembered head of his son (Llosa 399). The poem ends with a caveat, from the speaker, to the Srilankan Tamil women: "Let the Tamil girls secure their Yohnis; Or let them keep a knife while sleeping to sever their organs" (MP 18)

The U.N. convention held in Geneva in 1984 (popularly known as the Geneva Convention) has brought in a few amendments with regard to war related crimes. This convention aims primarily at eradicating torture of the captives and fellow humans. The article 1 of the Convention Against Torture (CAT) defines torture as

> any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. (qtd. in Garcia 2)

It has to be noted that both physical as well as mental suffering are considered as torture. While the victims experience the torture directly, the witnesses experience the traumatic effects indirectly and live in everlasting fear of torture and death. Tamilnathi's poem, "The Secret Statements of the Released Ones" captures the images of torture and sexual violence perpetrated on women. She uses powerful images to convey the idea of torture which transcends the visuals and lets the reader imagine the horrendous sexual torture which is also tactile in nature: "The women who were fighters before the release were found, in the corners of the camps, with marks of nail and teeth on their bodies" (MP 70). In the same poem she writes: "The dark rooms secretly keep the sobbing naked women for the perversions that are going to rise from within the uniforms" (MP 70). The nail and teeth marks on these women's bodies confirm the sexual torture they underwent before getting brutally murdered. The next line makes it clear that the perpetrators of such torture are not criminals or rapists but uniformed officials. Though everybody knows who the murderers are, nobody could take any action against them because even the "erstwhile fighters are singing the song of their new life with plucked out teeth and swollen lips" (MP 71). All that these helpless people could do is to remember and mourn quietly amongst themselves because forgetting is not easy after witnessing the cruelty perpetrated on their fellow beings. For the survivors "the memories of the dead are like the shell pieces that stay in the body. They disturb [them] during night times (MP 71). Missing people are mostly reported as released. Everyone knows what has happened to them. The survivors cannot do anything else apart from mourning silently because if there any word of protest, the reward is death:

> They reiterate that we are "released".
> We never uttered a word of protest.
> I don't think you'd like a bullet
> To travel through your mouth and make its exit
> Through the back of your head, right? (MP 72)

The following lines from the poem "Poem" by Ilaya Abdullah clearly states the nature of fear that every common man who is a Tamil experiences in Srilanka," fear is burdensome, but wherefrom

courage would come when guns write the judgment" (MP 19). Ilaya Abdullah's another poem "Life" gives an account of the struggle for survival amidst the fearful circumstances. The speaker in this poem cannot even enjoy conjugal relationship with his wife because he has to be alert each and every moment in his life. Fear and suspicion torments him every moment:

> You don't believe. I suspect everything:
> My bed sheet, a small stone throw, the stare of my neighbor,
> The knock at the door, everything…
> Who is arriving in the white sky, are they?
> Even while getting kissed by my wife, my ears are protruding outside. (MP 21)

Life, for this speaker has become extremely traumatic and fearful even during his intimate moments with his wife, he is unable to lead a normal conjugal life. He needs to be attentive to every sound and noise to escape from the attack.

Anar's "Sleeping Pills" is an agonizing poem in which the speaker suffers from insomnia as he is tormented by the present traumatic conditions of life. This poem opens with a very vague statement that "After that I started taking a Brittan every night". The expression "after that" is a powerful phrase which suggests a number of things: It is possible to say that he is afflicted with insomnia after the cruel death of someone who was his near and dear, and started consuming sleeping pills. Another possible interpretation is the speaker himself was responsible for somebody's death. Perhaps, he has betrayed his friend or a fellow activist who died a cruel death in the hands of the Srilankan army. He wants to escape either from the traumatic life or the guilt complex and the suffering caused by his betrayal. Whatever may be the cause of his trauma, the violent imagery of blood conveys it vigorously: the speaker wants to avoid "his feet from the stickiness of the blood that rises in his dream" (MP 16). To him sleep (pills induced) is like the "undestroyed part of a reward which escaped a huge storm" (MP 16).

Another poem "Here We Liked Darkness" by Jayanthi Thalayasingham carries cruel tactile images. The poet states that they

were naked but they felt neither cold nor heat because they had no life. The speaker picks up a small piece of char to brush her teeth but when she bites it she finds that it is human flesh burnt out in bomb blast (MP 113). She further continues: when she gathers the water in the pond it is blood. It is a world where they have no meaning for colours because "blood has become our colour" (MP 113). These people desire to live in darkness because darkness lets them escape the realities: "It is human nature to seek light to remove darkness. Here we liked darkness."(MP113). The cruel image in this poem is tactile in nature where the speaker realizes that the piece of char she has picked up, to brush her teeth, is actually a piece of human flesh.

Cheran's "Post-Apocalyptic Poem" is a series of small poems with subtitles. In a poem subtitled "Scenes of Murder" Cheran writes, Words became delirious, images broke and life lost its blood" (MP 64). In the same poem he writes,

> At this moment, the surgeon who amputates,
> The artillery attacked, arms of a two and half year kid,
> Without anesthesia, is a God,
> The screaming mother with tearless eyes is a demon.
> (MP 64)

These lines capture the reality that the Srilankan government has not provided proper medical assistance to the civilian victims just because they are Tamils. The U.N. report on the war related crimes in Srilanka highlights a few major points of which the following are very crucial:

1. Attacking hospital regions
2. Prevention of supply of medicines, medical implements and food to civil regions

The open letter from the Regional Directors of Health Services of Mullaithivu and Killinochchi to the Secretary of the Ministry of Health has been recorded in the Report *of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nation's Action in Srilanka* in which it has been stated that "Most of the hospital deaths could have been prevented if basic infrastructure facilities and essential medicines were made available … We have been supplied with no antibiotics, no anesthetics and not a single bottle of IV fluid…"(75)

Kanakalatha's poem "Scenes from Second Colonialism" speaks about the removal of Tamil identities from Eelam. The speaker has nothing but ineffective vengeance. The most powerful image in this poem is about the refugee camps: "the people are accustomed to stand for hours together holding the barbed wires discreetly" (MP 23). The "barbed wire" is a cruel image which has almost became a motif by its recurrence in these poems. It carries several meanings: domination, violence, vengeance, helplessness, isolation and also hope.

While most of the poets in this collection choose to write in a very serious and grave tone, C. Sivasekaram writes in a satiric tone which highlights the misery of the Srilankan Tamils and mocks at the custom of official visits by authorities to the refugee camps:

> Massacres have occurred in front of eyes
> The witnesses' mouths are tied with barbed wires
> Those who open their mouths are behind the barbed fences
> They are allowed to open their mouths to eat, and yawn before sleeping
> They are extremely grateful to the Big Gods for this little mercy…
> They came from somewhere
> Visited the refugee camps
> Submitted their reports:
> Boarding, lodging and toilet – nothing is substandard!
> Was their report relates to the refugee camps,
> Or the five star hotels they stayed in, is not sure because
> Their reports said nothing about the swimming pools and air-conditioned suites. (MP 52-53)

While C.Sivasekaram is using a satiric tone to represent the misery of the people incarcerated behind the barbed wires in the name of refugee camps, Sulpika narrates how the army steals material possessions from the Tamils in the poem "Lives, Toilet Door and Diamond Ring." This poem tells a love story behind the diamond ring of the speaker's grandmother. The speaker describes all kinds of losses including the losses of relatives and friends. It is a time even the toilet door was stolen by the perpetrators of riot and not even the clothes on the dead bodies are left out. It is apparent that the diamond ring also might have got

stolen by the perpetrators of violence. The poet/speaker uses violent olfactory images in this poem to evoke the terror and trauma she has experienced in Wanni. The speaker says:

Living amidst death is filled with pain
I started running holding my breath
My soil is scattered with human flesh
Burnt and decomposed formless humans
Devastated buildings
Unprecedented stench of bog of blood
When reached a dead-end
Everything is lost except life. (MP 55)

This poem has to be viewed very seriously in connection with realistic conditions of Srilankan Tamils after the war. Siva. Muthukumaran states that destroying the identities of Tamils from Srilanka is happening at present in an organized and systematic manner and the task of this destruction is carried out by the Srilankan army. They carry out this very methodically in a step by step process. Land grabbing is one of the primary tasks carried out by the Srilankan army followed by economic domination and finally denying job opportunities to the Tamils of Srilanka. Muthukumaran ferociously argues that genocide is not only the killing of one particular ethnic community; denying the basic rights of livelihood to them is also a form of genocide *[translation mine]* (32-40). Denied with the basic rights of life without any other option, when they settle in foreign lands for survival, the new land poses another major problem to these people. They get settled in foreign lands with refugee status but their next generation is unable to speak their mother tongue because of the alien land they live in has entirely a different language and culture from their own. Cheran writes the significance of the loss of mother tongue in a foreign land in the poem subtitled "Generation":

Before a generation they are exiled.
When the next generation slowly loses their language,
An endless pain rises to unite us. (MP 67)

This "endless pain" is the pain of losing one's mother tongue. These Tamils are forced to leave their mother land and reside in various foreign lands with the status of refugees. Though they might lead a comfortable life in due course of time, they experience an agony of

seeing their next generation is no longer able to speak their mother tongue.

Almost all the poets in this anthology speak of the atrocities committed by the Srilankan army in destroying the Tamils. But Thirumavalavan's "Apocalyptic Fire" is a unique poem because it takes a neutral tone and views from a common man's point of view. In this poem the speaker compares the flags of Srilankan Government and the Flag of the LTTE group. The Srilankan flag is saffron in colour and has the image of a Lion holding a sword. The LTTE has had the flag with the image of a tiger in red with guns in the background. He claims that these animals devoured humans without any discrepancy in language, caste or creed. He concludes the poem by stating: "there is nowhere to go and nothing to say"(MP 76). This is the mentality of the common man who cares for his livelihood rather than any form of ideology. But war leaves none. It affects every strata of society and the losses of lives and resources make one think as Karunakaran Vasanthi writes in her poem "Aaikinai":

> Somebody is reading the list of martyrs in the radio.
> This respect accepted by no one has no color.
> Oozing the helplessness of vengeance,
> It is getting crushed under everybody's feet
> I throw dog's shit in front of the fate of history. (MP 34)

The above analysis shows that though all kinds of images are used by these poets, the most powerful images are intersecting the tactile with the visual. They can be classified into three major kinds: first is the imagery of blood. "Blood drenched poem" (MP 37), "the stickiness of blood" (MP 16), and others. The second kind of imagery is of sexual violence and perversions perpetrated on women: "women with nail and teeth mark on their bodies" (MP 70). The third kind of imagery is attack by the weapons such as guns, bombs and artilleries: "piece of shell residing in your body" (MP 71), "bullets entering your mouth" (MP 72).

Using such violent visual/tactile images, the Tamil poets of Srilanka and Srilankan Diaspora have very powerfully captured the traumatic conditions of life that prevail in Srilanka after the declaration of the end of war. Torture and death has become a part and parcel of the lives of

the Srilankan Tamils which leaves the survivors in trauma and terror. But still they have the courage to hang on with life and in the face of danger they might advise one another:

> Don't let them stab you in the back;
> live face-to-face and die
> with your chest open to the bullets
> and wide as the walls. (Hernandez 321)

Readers may view these poems in three different ways: first, as mentioned earlier in this article, to reach a wider social context and create a consciousness about the trauma and terror that are experienced by the Srilankan Tamils. Second, these poems can be viewed as a tool of resistance following the historical examples of poets such as Miguel Hernandez, Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda. Third, these poems can also be viewed as the last asylum of the desperate mind which after losing all its hopes finds a bit of solace in literary expression. Because life has sucked out all their energy and now they lead a life of the living dead. To use the words of Miguel Hernandez, a fighter-poet of Latin America, for the Srilankan Tamils too "Life is a lot of hard gulps, but death is only one" (322).

Notes

1. See *Porum Valium* (War and Pain) by Savithri Athuvanandhan. It is a collection of short stories based on real life incidents of terror and violence in Srilanka on the Tamils by the Srilankan army.
2. MP refers to the anthology of poems *Mullivaikkalukkup Pin* (After Mullivaikkal) by various poets composed by Kutty Revathy. It is a Tamil book and the poems are translated by the author of this paper.
3. See the article "Emotional and Psychological Trauma: Symptoms, Treatment, and Recovery" by Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith and Jeanne Seagal available at http://www.helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm

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